

**MAN IN GOD'S WORLD**

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first many of his maneuvers appear to be meaningless. In other words, I cannot explain for the very simple reason that I do not know what he has in mind, what he is thinking. And often he may even try to conceal his thoughts, so that at first we cannot discern any congruence between his strategic plan and the externally visible realization of it.

All examples, all comparisons are imperfect, especially when we come to illustrate the problems of God's governance by reducing it to earthly proportions.

Nevertheless, the situation is roughly what this example shows: There is no such thing as providence as a "system" of world order any more than there is a battle plan which is set down on paper and intended to be followed in *purely* mechanical fashion. Providence is rather contained within the "higher thoughts" of God that determine his personal decisions. The world and our destiny lie in a "hand"; they are laid upon a "heart" that is concerned about us. So there is profound significance in the fact that here the Bible and the church always have to resort to very "personal" words.

From this there follow two consequences to which we must give further consideration. In concluding this chapter we merely indicate what they are.

1. Providence cannot be reduced to an *objective* formula which would simply solve the mystery of what happens in the world. It rests upon the *personal* decisions of him who "provides" (in the literal sense of that word, which means "to foresee").
2. But then, logically, the only way I can get at the mystery of providence is to enter into a personal relationship with him who "provides." And because I learn to know his heart in Christ and because I trust him, I am no longer irritated by the dark and impenetrable parts of his providence. So we understand the attitude of the author of Psalm 73, who does not get at these dark passages by seeking and finally discovering *reasons* behind the mysterious leadings of God, so that he can then say, "Because of such and such, God did this or that." Rather he confesses and declares (and does so in the face of impenetrable *darkness*): "Nevertheless, I am continually with thee"; in thee the darkness is made light, and therefore, if only I have thee, "there is nothing upon earth that I desire besides thee."

## X

# FAITH IN PROVIDENCE— CHRISTIAN AND SECULAR

WE MAY SUMMARIZE THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE PRECEDING chapter as follows:

No unambiguous clue for the existence of a providence can be found in experience.

Providence lies in God's "personal thoughts." We have access to his providential hand only as we become his *children*.

*Christian faith in providence therefore is always faith in spite of appearances to the contrary.* It is armed with that defiant "Nevertheless," and stands shaken before the fact that there is no discernible plan and thus no perceptible hand that governs the events of history, but notwithstanding lives in the name of that hand and in the name of that plan, because it knows the Father of Jesus Christ.

Paul Gerhardt's hymn "Commit thy way, confiding" is a classic precept showing how one can understand and withstand this hellish trial of temptation. This hymn is by no means a mere simple "Christian optimism"; it expresses all the hells of tension and distress that come from faith impugned. It speaks of Satan's forces that resist God's plans and every conceivable demon, even of the terrible silence of God:

Should Satan league his forces,  
God's purpose to withstand;  
Think not their rage and curses  
Could stay his lifted hand.  
When he makes known his pleasure,  
The counsel of his will—  
That, in its utmost measure,

Will be at last fulfill.

'Tis true, that for a season  
He may his gifts restrain,  
And leave these room to reason  
If all thy trust be vain;  
Or, while thy hopes shall waver,  
And fears and griefs prevail,  
To ask, "Must then God's favor  
And all his mercies fail?"

Faith in divine providence has to go through all these fiery furnaces of satanic challenge. And the hymn then rises to a mighty crescendo in the words: "Blessed be thou, thou child of faithfulness!"

And that already indicates how the Christian overcomes the onslaughts upon his faith. It does not say: Blessed be thou, thou thinker, thou philosopher who with thine ingenious mind hast found the cosmic formula that resolves the enigmatic and torturing mysteries of the world. Paul Gerhardt knew that worldly wisdom never catches sight of this formula and therefore never finds the comfort of providence. Instead he addresses man as the "child of God," the "child of faithfulness" who clings fast to his father. Only in this personal, childlike fellowship with the Father will he get through the dark forest with its frightening specters, its threatening gullies and pitfalls, and its pathlessness. To become a child of God is the only solution of the world's enigma.

So faith is never something "finished," which one "has" once and for all and could smugly boast of possessing. No, faith is always traveling a definite way, a particular road. We can characterize the starting point and the terminus of that road by saying that it is a way that leads from the trial of doubt and despair to the praise of God. It is the faith of the church militant which, like that of the writer of Psalm 73, is always in danger of foundering on the dreadful incongruities of this world, the undeserved fortune of the wicked and the equally undeserved misfortune of the good. It is the faith of that company of people who, like Job, want to curse the day of their birth, because the meaninglessness of life

<sup>1</sup> Stanzas 5 and 9 of "Befiehl du deine Wege," translated by Henry Mills (Trans.)

—especially in times of catastrophe—overwhelms them and forces them to fight their way through to the "Nevertheless" of faith.

But this road to faith goes farther still. For this *Nevertheless* is topped by something that happens on still a higher level: by the songs of praise of the church in glory which has passed from faith to sight and now surveys the depths and wonder of the impenetrable mystery of God's governance of the world.

So faith is really a pilgrimage, a journey on a road from "trial" to "praise" and from "faith" to "sight." Faith is not a self-assured possession (so that one need only to have swallowed a dogma once and for all) but rather the *hope* that praises the day in the midst of might; it is a *waiting* that looks for the coming of the Lord in the midst of the crumbling of all human hopes. Faith in providence is not something you sit on, but rather something you reach out for.

I have already suggested that the popular idea of providence as it is frequently expressed by many people, great and small, wears an essentially different face. It is usually defined by two characteristics.

First, the people believe in a hidden scheme of things that gives order to the world: "God will not allow the wicked to enslave the good," or "The good cause will win out in the end." Schiller expressed the problem in a brief formula when he said, "The world's history is the world's judgment." That is to say, the cosmic economy, by virtue of its inherent autonomy, constantly restores the balance; it eliminates disturbing elements and recognizes the good by giving it abiding value.

But we have already shown that this scheme of world order breaks down, that the good are constantly being "enslaved" by the wicked, and that the heavenly "chamber of audits," of which Bismarck spoke, seems not to function very well (at least within the limited time of a human life, which is all that we are able to survey). Thus the popular notion of providence is constantly leading us into absurdity and ends in meaninglessness.

The second characteristic of the popular belief in providence is this. Man has a way—especially one who reaches the pinnacle of human affairs—of imagining that providence is on his side, or even of thinking that he himself is the chosen instrument of

providence. Julius Caesar, and perhaps more impressively Napoleon, believed in their "stars." This was an expression of their conviction that their individual destiny was interwoven with the operation of higher cosmic laws. This was why they believed that no power on earth could topple them or stop them from accomplishing their task. As long as they were dependent upon their own will and their personal initiative, one could still conceive that a combination of other hostile forces of will might rise against them and finally overpower them. In other words, one could then imagine a revolutionary force triumphing over them. But such a triumph becomes *inconceivable* the moment Napoleon or any of his modern successors persuade people that they are the executors of a God-given, providential world plan. For naturally, no human arm can be raised against the law of providence and its human instrument.

Hegel gave expression to this view of things in his doctrine of "world-historical individuals." He said that the world-historical individual, as distinguished from the ordinary individual, does not live by his own strength but is rather the instrument of the world-spirit and therefore describes his life-curve with all the mathematical certainty of a constellation (hence, too, the recurrent imagery of a star!), and no human arm can prevent it. In other words, that which in the last analysis does not depend upon an individual but is rather accomplished in the name of providence also cannot be hindered by any human individual. Thus when Hegel looked out of the window of his study in Jena and saw the Emperor Napoleon on his horse (which doubtless caused metaphysical thrills to run down his spine), he said, "I have seen the world-spirit riding by."

*Why did Napoleon and his "world-historical" fellows of yesterday and today believe in their stars? They did so because they were convinced that their star would be serviceable to them. So thoroughly were they convinced of themselves and their mission that they believed that the stars were looking at them and that the heavenly constellation must serve their ends. This perhaps explains the tendency of many of these world-historical individuals in the past and today—we need only think of Wallenstein and Hitler—to occupy themselves with astrology. For astrology seems*

to be particularly adapted to strengthen them in their belief that their individual life is not limited to the circle of their individuality but is rather a part of the sublime and immutable laws of the macrocosm.

*So what we have here is basically a faith in oneself, a piece of self-worship which employs belief in one's star in order to surround oneself with a cosmic aureole; even the stars must serve the great man.*

Immanuel Kant, that very prudent man, said with reference to this attitude of world-historical individuals: "The intention of all of them is to manage to their own advantage the invisible Power which presides over the destiny of men."<sup>2</sup>

Here we must pay very close attention. The attitude of these "world-historical individuals" toward providence and the laws of the cosmos is by no means that of obedience and humble subordination, but rather that of arrogant endeavor to make these laws serve their purpose. At its greatest heights (these highest representatives of mankind have shown) humanity betrays its most secret tendencies, namely, rebelliousness, the desire to be at the center of the world and to degrade God to a mere function of its own desires—even when all this is disguised in sham humility, as if they were acting in accord with a "higher mandate." Nietzsche saw most deeply through this fundamental attitude of man when he suggested that every one of us wants to be more than everybody else, but most of all, to be God himself.

In view, then, of this attitude toward providence, a very definite law of history seems to come into operation, for the boundless assurance which the world-historical individual receives from the certainty that he is the instrument of providence and that his life has been given a metaphysical planetary orbit leads him, in accord with the primal law of all tragedies, to that *hubris*, that pride, which "goeth before destruction." According to Goethe's poem, Napoleon had to return to the abyss from which he rose, and this path of Napoleon is only one of many that have been followed in the world's history—and are still being followed today.

But then with this inevitable downfall of the world-historical

<sup>2</sup> *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), p. 164.



individual there comes the *collapse of faith in the star and in providence*. The last act of such interpretations of history is resignation and a *plunge into meaninglessness*: the journals of the lonely man on St. Helena furnish eloquent testimony of that, and Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* does so, too.

So for this human, autarchic faith in providence there comes with deadly certainty the moment when the cosmic order, which one thought one could discern and to which one gave the name of providence, collapses before one's eyes and its place is taken by blind, meaningless, cruel *fate*—the moment when nihilism celebrates its triumph. The end of *this* kind of faith in providence is always belief in fate.

Thus we can draw a sharp line between the Christian and the secular faith in providence:

The *Christian* faith, grounded upon personal trust in the Father of Jesus Christ, leads from doubt and despair to praise. The *secular* belief leads from self-security to resignation.

The *Christian* belief in providence leads from despair over the invisibility and imperceptibility of God to the "Nevertheless" of faith. The *secular* leads from belief in providence to the darkness of fate.

This brings us, then, to the point where we can tackle the question of *providence and history*.

One thing at any rate we have discovered, and that is that providence is not simply the *cause* of everything that happens in the world. If it were, then logically it would be possible to derive all events in history from this cause. In other words, everything that happens (from the birth of an infant to a bomb attack, from a lost war to an examination successfully passed) would be logically explained and clearly discernible as to cause, meaning, and purpose, at least theoretically and for an intelligence which brought to it the necessary prerequisites (Laplace).

But the fact that divine providence in this sense is by no means the cause of everything becomes immediately clear when we keep in view the following two points:

1. In the face of certain events in history we are simply inhibited from regarding God as the author and doer of these acts (for example, the bombing attacks in the war). We know only

too well that here it is not God but rather *man* who is at work. It is not God who rains down phosphorus and dynamite; it is man who has drunk from the intoxicating cup of mad destruction and vengeance and is thus destroying himself. With the aid of technology, one of the peak achievements of humanity, the gigantic work of self-destruction goes on. God allows all this to happen, manifestly in order to let mankind find out for itself where it gets to when it ceases to be a family of children bound to God, and when nations and individuals insist upon living their own autonomous lives in separation from God and in distrust of each other.

But the very fact that we express it in this way, the very fact that we say that God "allows" all this to happen means that here God has, so to speak, withdrawn into a state of silent and almost passive permissiveness, of just letting things happen. From the Bible we know that when God leaves man to himself and the destructive instincts with which he has broken away from his child-relationship, this can be the most dreadful judgment of all and therefore the most hidden kind of activity of God. In any case we know only too well (and this is expressed in our use of the term "allow"), that there are other forces at work and that God had permitted them a certain latitude of action.

We would completely misunderstand the mystery of divine judgment if we tried to explain the terrors of the world simply in terms of God as being the "cause." Psalm 104 gives vivid expression to the mystery of God's allowing things to happen in the verse that says: "When thou takest away their breath, they die."

2. When we allow the biblical story of salvation to pass before our eyes we repeatedly meet with events and figures shadowed by a dark enigma. I mention only two examples: "Adam's fall" and that somber figure "Judas Iscariot." It is impossible for us simply to attribute Adam's fall to divine providence. This we are taught by the story of the Fall itself, in which Adam attempts to fix upon God the blame for being the cause of his fall; for there he says, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree." In other words, "You yourself, God, are the real seducer; you used the woman as your instrument." We know how far God was from agreeing with that and how Adam was

compelled to accept his own responsibility. And in the same way Judas Iscariot was not exonerated by the fact that God had included the betrayal of Jesus in his plan of salvation. Judas himself, who hanged himself and thus pronounced judgment upon himself, knew only too well that he had acted, not in the name of God, but rather in the name of dreadful opposition to him.

In these two examples, which could be multiplied indefinitely from the Bible and from life, we perceive not only how impossible but also how impermissible it is to attribute all this to providence. For such a monstrous attempt would make us guilty of assigning to God the responsibility for all the evil that has ever happened. We would be accusing God of what the aged harper says of the gods in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*:

To earth, this weary earth, ye bring us,

To guilt ye let us heedless go,

Then leave repentance fierce to wring us;

A moment's guilt, an age of woe.

In other words, even when we say that this or that has been "allowed" to happen, we are admitting that there is a sector of life in which we simply cannot apply the concept of providence as a cause, not only in the sense that we do not recognize it as the cause, but also in the sense that it would be blasphemy to designate it as such. We are admitting that there is a sector in which we must rather speak of our *opposition* to the Father, or at least of a certain autonomy of human life.

*This sector of life we call "history."* History is the place where the divine, the human, and the demonic are at work in a mysterious intermixture.

But when we go on to ask precisely what history is, we cannot be so bold as to define it in a few words. We still have some long thinking to do about it.

Let me begin with a fact with which we are all familiar: history is usually set in contrast with *nature*. There is a certain justification in this, even though—from the biblical point of view—it does not bring out the central thing in history at all. Nevertheless, from the point of view of method this distinction may be helpful to us; for *nature* is the realm of law, of "natural law," and

therefore the realm in which the predictable sequence of cause and effect prevails.

*History*, on the other hand, is the realm of *man*. But man is in some way distinguished by the fact that he is free, or that he was originally free, but paradoxically, by the very use of this freedom, finally lost it again and prescribed for himself the fate of an enslaved will. In earlier chapters in which we discussed the image of God in man we have already considered the deep creative purpose of God which is expressed in man's original freedom. God did not desire impersonal marionettes which would dance at the flick of his hand; he wanted the "man" who stands over against him in free responsibility. But in doing so, he takes the risk that man may break away from his fatherly dominion. And this precisely is part and parcel of what it means to be a man, namely, that he can break away and that therefore his fellowship with God is an expression of his free child-relationship to God. We have coined the phrase: man, the risk of God. And this risk and this freedom also characterize the human realm of life which we call history.

So history is the place where God's providence rules and at the same time the place where (in a mysterious way and within the framework of this providence) man is given a certain independence. And because of this independence which is an inseparable part of the concept of man and his history, the Bible again and again speaks in terms of a *history of rebellion*.

The history of rebellion actually begins with the Fall, with the fact that man did not remain *under* God, but wants to be *as* God and thus play his own role. This is the reason why we feel when we read the first two chapters of the Bible that the paradisaical state is something "without history," or better, something "beyond history." It was on the same ground that Schiller came to utter his blasphemous saying that the Fall was "the most fortunate deed in the history of the world," because it was only by this act that freedom was realized and history came into being. In any case, however, there is one thing that is right in that statement: history exists only where there is guilt. This is clearly expressed in literature. One can, for example, look upon a drama or a tragedy as "concentrated history" in which all the features of life

are gathered and concentrated as it were in a concave mirror. But it is precisely this concentrated life that is characterized by the fact that it always revolves around guilt and thus always has behind it man's urge toward rebellion. We understand, then, what is meant by the statement that in the biblical view history is always rebellious movement and that therefore, as Erwin Reiser says, it moves "from the Fall to the Judgment."

From the *individual* separation from God that occurred through our first parents, history then went on to *collective* guilt in the building of the tower of Babel, where mankind sought to disengage the whole foundation of its life from God and to build an autarchic, independent construction *without* God.

In this attempt an elemental law of life again manifests itself: man does not find the independence he seeks, but rather falls into the slavery of a terrible bondage. Jesus sketched the outlines of this process in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). The son wanted to get away from dependence on the father and the parental home in order to stand on his own feet in the world and fashion his life autonomously. But instead of gaining the freedom he expected, he fell into the toils of his sexual urges, into dependence upon men, his vanity, his hunger, his homesickness; and finally ended in the pigsty, a dreadful symbol of this servitude into which the formerly free child fell. Whenever men throw off the bond that links them to God, they fall into the bondage of idols and demons. There is no such thing as a free and neutral state of suspension between the two, of the kind man looks for, and Geibel's proverbial saying is confirmed: When God is driven out of the door the specters come in through the window. It is always the ancient choice, which cannot be evaded by any neutrality, the choice which Paul said was that of being either a "child" or a "slave." There is no third choice. And hence there is profound meaning in the fact that the last book of the Bible shows mankind's history of rebellion ending, not in the sought-for freedom from God, but in a hideous servitude to demonic powers that goes to the depths of horrible excess.

How different is this biblical picture of history from that, for example, of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, the philosopher and dramatist of the Enlightenment! In his *Education of the Human*

Race he observes that mankind does need dependence upon God and his guiding hand for a time. And he sees the justification for the biblical revelation in the fact that it was needed "for a time" in order to control and guide men. But the purpose of all education is to make itself unnecessary and the pupil gives poor thanks to his teacher if he always remains a pupil. So at the end of mankind's journey Lessing envisions a conscious and God-approved liberation from divine tutelage. At the end he sees the eternal, pure gospel of reason, the autonomy of man, and therefore freedom from the divine educator.

So different are these two ways of viewing history: on one side the movement of separation from God ends in freedom, on the other the movement of rebellion ends among the demons. Only one of the two can be true? Which is it?

In any case, for biblical thought history is an event between God and Satan. It lies in the dark twilight between these two, and even Goethe had some inkling of this when he called history a struggle between "faith" and "unbelief."

But however great may be the leeway that the satanic power possesses in history (and who is not conscious of this today!), however strong may be the rebellion and the opposition, the fact still remains that in the ultimate reckoning even this opposition is included in God's plan for the world and is being guided by God to a goal which the demons themselves never sought. Luther summed up this experience in the rather startling phrase that even the devil is still "God's devil" and must be subservient to his higher goals because God is *his* Lord, too. When the apocalyptic horsemen storm across the earth and the world shakes beneath their hoofbeats, when war, pestilence, famine, and terror lay waste mankind, then we must remember that it is *God* who allows even these powers of destruction to ride, that it is he who waves them on and he who can check them with a flick of his sovereign hand.

This is the hidden structure of providence and God's governance of the world, and it is there even when God has abandoned men to their own self-destruction and seems to be doing nothing but "letting things happen." This is the ultimate comfort of the Christian faith in providence when God is silent and history grows murky and dark.



# XII

## FREEDOM AND BONDAGE IN HISTORY

*IF IT BE TRUE, AS I ATTEMPTED TO SHOW IN THE PRECED-*ing chapter, that history is the realm in which man has freedom, and often enough even the freedom to rebel against God, then we must also point out on the other hand that he is by no means left to do entirely what he pleases. On the contrary, we have seen that, according to the biblical view, the man who has "freed" himself from God is always subservient. Jesus made this clear in the parable of the Prodigal Son, who likewise was eager to slip off the bonds of the father's house and have his freedom. We see how dependent he is upon his urges and his ambitions, and how he ends up in the pigsty as a slave. The man who separates himself from God is always in bondage. Man belongs *either* to God or to the devil, and according to the Bible and according to Luther he is far less a rider than a horse that is being ridden. And in this sense we also see two dimensions in history: one in which man is bound and another in which he is free. I propose to discuss these two forms of life in the light of the Bible.

First the dimension in which man is bound.

Every one of us is set down in a very definite place in history which we cannot avoid or escape. For example, we are all contemporaries in a very definite epoch. As Oswald Spengler put it, we are all living in the century of wars, Caesars, and dictators. We live in the age of world power politics and power struggles. It is no use for a person to think he would rather be living in an idyl of Biedermeier or rococo; it would no longer suit his type anyhow. He has to stick it out *here*, in *this* age, and no matter how "artistic" and sensitive he may be, no matter how distasteful it

may be for him to have to live in these crude times, there is nothing he can do about it. He has to go on sailing in the same boat with these rude companions; he cannot step out of it. When we say a person is "old-fashioned" or "behind the times" there may be at least a spark of justification in our irony when a person's "old-fashionedness" in appearance, behavior, or views is a sign that he is unwilling to let go of the "good old times," that he is trying to hang on to them artificially, when this is impossible anyhow and every new age puts us in a new situation which we cannot evade but must rather accept. If he is trying to retreat into the age of his youthful habits and customs because he does not like the fact that time moves on, we sense in all this a false attitude toward life.

Jesus once pointed out in a very significant context how infinitely important is the *place* in history where we stand. He was speaking of the people "before" and "after" himself. Thus he once said to the bystanders, "I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it" (Luke 10:24). What Jesus is saying is that the people before Christ and after Christ are bound into an entirely different situation. And in this condition of being bound is expressed not merely a *gift* (the fact that it is a blessing to live after Christ), but also a *task* or responsibility.<sup>1</sup> For now all who are born after Christ must come to terms with him. Anybody who lives after Christ and knows of him is simply confronted with the question: What am I going to do about the sin in my life? Hitherto he was not confronted with this question in the same unconditional way. Now that he knows something about peace and reconciliation with God he must ask: What about *my* relationship to God? Everybody must come to terms with him; he can become the hidden torment of men and the rock on which their lives are shipwrecked if they deny him. Even Pilate had to take a position with regard to him, though he was a Roman, and suddenly he found himself, of all places, in the Creed. Herod the king likewise had to take a stand—with all the consequences that this had for the course of history and his per-

<sup>1</sup>The original German here has the familiar play on the words *Gabe* ("gift") and *Aufgabe* ("task"). (Trans.)

sonal life. Some are broken upon that rock (and this army of the wrecked and ruined is headed by Judas Iscariot); others gain all things, and, like Stephen, even in the torments of stoning they look up and see the heavens opening: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." But take a stand all of them must—because they live "after Christ." He has fallen like a boulder into the water of their lives and now they must see for themselves how they are going to contend with the waves he causes. He has kindled a fire on earth and they all have to go through it. That's how important the fact is that they are all bound to this situation "after Christ" and cannot get away from it.

Today we are all beginning to realize that it is actually true that we shall never get away from this bond we have with the unrepeatable historical fact of Christ. There are many people who would like to break away from this *post Christum* bond; who would like to revise history. There are neopagans who are trying to get back to a position "before Christ" because they consider the whole history of Christianity in the West a mistake. In other words, they would like to undo these millennia, turn time backward, and step out of history. And in the attempt they make a recommendation that one would have to call downright silly if it were not so tragic. They recommend that, instead of saying "a.d." and "a.d." we should say "before and after the era." As if simply ignoring a fact changed anything; as if the suppression of this shocking Name were not in itself an utterance of it; as if this foolish avoidance did not actually emphasize and proclaim the Name. The fact is that he is the watershed between "before" and "after;" he is the "center of history." No, we cannot step out of this chronology "after Christ," for this Christ has fatefully divided the line of time and there is no getting around that fact. We cannot begin a chronology wherever we please, and we can never reverse a line of history. For one thing is sure: the line from Ragnarok and Olympus to Christ cannot be reversed—the old gods are dead.

This road can only lead to nihilism, to an attitude of complete emptiness, beyond which not only Christ but also all the gods have vanished—whether this nihilism be openly acknowledged or whether it be carefully disguised with the paper flowers of a

synthetic mythology in order to make it philosophically palatable. Here we have a basic example of how we are bound up with our history and therefore cannot divest ourselves of the Christian West as one would discard an old dress. We cannot break away from our history. This is what we call the dimension of bondage. We are bound to our history and thus to our historical hour.

Take a *second* example of this bondage. I can never undo or reverse anything that has once happened, a sin, for example, or even a missed opportunity. Every period of my life—and the same applies to the larger history of nations—possesses as it were a door which I can open as I please. Every day, for example, I go through the door of my morning awakening. But once I have entered, it slams shut behind me. This is the mystery of time, which a person who is growing older is more aware of than the young person. I cannot undo anything; time is irreversible. The symbolism of the circular dial of my watch deceives me, for as the hands revolve they give me the illusion that time recurs in a circle; it acts as if time were constantly beginning anew. It begins at one and ends at twelve, only to begin again at one. And this is a lie. For the fact is that my life runs in a *line* and not in a *renewing circle*. On New Year's Eve, a birthday, or other milestones in our life we note that the period of time that lies behind us is *past*. Even when the clock strikes twelve on New Year's Eve the year does not begin afresh; it has gone on and passed away, and inevitably we find ourselves drawn closer to eternity. Time is a one-way street on which one never returns. In the parish hostel in Kornthal there is an inscription: "Time never says 'Until we meet again.'" It compels me to go on and forces me to leave it behind.

And therefore this also means that I must assume all the guilt of my past. It is not as if with time my sins grow old and pass away, as if the weeds grow over them or are eaten away by the "tooth of time"—or whatever other stock phrases we may use to take the sting out of the fate of time. No, they stand before me as an everlasting accusation; I must assume responsibility for them. I cannot undo the past, for this would mean that I could open the closed door again. And that's why the Psalmist prays, "Remember not the sins of my youth!" (Ps. 25:7). And he goes

on to say, as it were between the lines, that these sins are *not* subject to revision, but rather, since they are points on the continuing line of time, they continue to have the force of something that is permanently present.<sup>2</sup>

Not until we realize this fact that the tyranny of the time victor compels us to go on do we begin to appreciate the significance of the doctrine of justification taught by the Apostle Paul and also by Luther. For here is where the background and also the deepest meaning of this doctrine comes out. This doctrine of justification tells me that God, by forgiving me and making me his child, opens up a new future for me, a future in which I no longer need to drag along with me the mortgages of my past, because they have been taken away from me: "He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" (Isa. 53:4). Christ cancels our *past* and gives us a new *future*. The whole doctrine of justification can be expressed in this one sentence: God cancels our hopelessly stranded history and in its place puts *his* history. Now the history of sonship begins and the history of slavery is ended. And now we can really say (but only here!) what would be a lie anywhere else: "The old has passed away, behold the new has come" (II Cor. 5:17). "The old has passed away"—this means that now the sins of our youth are gone, now the mortgages of the past cannot rise up to accuse us. No more can they torment and mock me; they are wiped away; they are cast into the depths. Or better, they have been laid upon the shoulders of a Lord who accepted them—as a stronger brother helps a weaker—and who was content to die beneath this load. All things have been made new, I have a new future. The Christian always lives by the *future*; more precisely, by the last hour, the last day, the coming again of his Lord. The past is strangely unimportant, and the mystery of life and history lies only in the Coming One. So enormous is the role that time plays in biblical thinking.

In any case, however—and this is what concerns us here—apart from

<sup>2</sup> Not until I was reading the proofs of the first printing of these chapters did I come upon the outstanding book by Oscar Callmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, Floyd Filson, trans. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950). Here the Christian concept of time, which I have only indicated, is discussed fully in terms which the non-theologian will find very readable.

from Jesus Christ we are bound in the bondage of history. And history is irreversible; time runs on in the one-way street that is allotted to it.

But we are bound in still another way. This becomes evident, not so much when we think of history in longitudinal section, as we have been doing so far, but rather in cross section. We find ourselves, for example in a definite state or position in life. And when I say "we find ourselves in," this does not mean that we have "entered into" it. We *are* in it. We are the children of very definite parents, whom we did not select ourselves. We are also either men or women, again something which we did not choose ourselves, and this binds us to the destiny of our sex. (At certain times this can take on a tremendous significance, especially when there is a disproportion in the number of one or the other sex, as in the case of the surplus of women after times of war.) Or we belong to a particular nation. This, too, we did not choose for ourselves. Or we belong to a particular race. And precisely in an age of racial struggle and tension we begin to realize what a fateful significance membership in a race can have.

All these are things that bind me, bondages into which I have been "thrown" and in which I find myself existing. They also repeat themselves in human *society*: in social position we are either "high" or "low," or to mention a particular form of bondage in the environment and language of the New Testament, we are born slave or free.<sup>3</sup>

Naturally, I cannot think of these various forms of natural and historical bondage in any other way except that it was God who set me down in them. And then from this point of view Luther's statement "I believe that God has created me" acquires a profound and graphic acuity. For when I say, "God created me," this means that he created me as a man or a woman, a Greek or a Jew or an Aryan—just as I am with all the multifariousness of my natural and historical relationships. He caused me to be the child of these particular parents. I receive these bonds and ties, which I did not myself choose, from his hands.

And so because I know that I am bound to my own historical

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the Letter to Philemon.



place and time, I also know where this hour and where I myself come from: from God the Creator. All these bonds we have mentioned pose the question: *Whence?* *Whence* did I come into this particular place—into this historical hour in the twentieth century, into my biological structure, into my position in life?

So this is the *first* of the two historical dimensions, the dimension of "bondage"; and it confronts us with the question, *Whence?* The *second* dimension of history is the dimension of the *freedom* required of me.<sup>4</sup> That is to say, on this level which is fatefully determined by my historical situation and my historical hour I now have imposed upon me a certain room for freedom, a certain radius of action.

Let me illustrate this at once. As one who is thus a man or a woman, "slave or free," a child of this or that time, I am now asked what I am going to do about this, what I am going to make of it, and what purpose I will let it serve. In other words, now this is my affair, my concern. How am I going to come to terms, for example, with this time of troubles into which all of us have been born? Am I going to take this time of troubles as an excuse to lapse into a paralyzing pessimism or futile fatalism? Or will it serve to make me a gambler, rashly teetering for a while longer on the rafters of a collapsing age and trying to work my way through in order to be among the survivors? Or will I settle with it by accepting it from the hands of God?

What am I going to do with it?—this is the question my *freedom* addresses to me. That I am the child of particular parents, over this I have no control; but what I do with this fact, how I behave myself toward my parents, this is the realm of my freedom and my responsibility, and this is therefore also the realm that is claimed by God's command: "Honor thy father and thy mother . . ." Or to take another biblical example, I have received some definite talents, for example, a very definite gift, of a mechanical or intellectual, secular or spiritual kind. But here again I am asked what I am going to do with this my talent, my gift, my skill; whether I

<sup>4</sup> In what follows we do not go into the theological problem of freedom *in extenso*, but rather view it only from one very special point of view; nor do I relate this point of view to the various concepts and cases connected with the idea of freedom.

am going to invest my talent (Luke 19:11 ff.; Matt. 25:14 ff.) or play fast and loose with it, in other words, how I propose to deal with it "in freedom." Freedom has been assigned to me.

Here we see the two dimensions, that of bondage and that of freedom, expressed in clear, sharp contours. We can also express this in another way which brings us to the really central question of this chapter.

The dimension of *bondage* addresses to me the question *Whence?*—whence came my historical time and place, my whole "being as it is"; whence came the totality of those factors over which I have no control, yet which determine me in the profoundest way? The fact that I am bound addresses to me the question *Whence?*

In the second dimension, the dimension of freedom, however, I am asked "to what end" am I here, what do I intend to do with my gifts, my hour, my manhood or womanhood, what am I going to use them *for*.

Thus we see how very really our actual life is determined by these two questions: *Whence* am I what I am, and *for what purpose* am I here, what I am going to do with myself and my "being as it is"? My life, my history, swings between these two poles.

We can put this in another way. God the Creator is by no means merely the "original beginning of life"; he is by no means merely that entity to which only the question *Whence?* pertains, even though it is true that ultimately this question is aimed at the "original beginning." Rather God is at the same time the one who has a definite *plan* and a goal for my life, to which he desires to lead me; he therefore tells me *why* I am here, *to what end* I exist.

It is therefore very characteristic, after that tremendous review of history developed in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh chapters of Romans, that Paul should break out in the hymn: "From him and through him and to him are all things." There really is no other way to describe history except to allow oneself to be led by the question *Whence?* (from God) and the question *Whither?* (to God) to the two poles between which all historical life is enacted. Only he understands his life history aright who considers both: whence he comes and why he is here.

These same key questions apply also to the larger history of the



nations: they were "called" into life by the Lord of history and at the same time they were "called" to perform a historical task, to fulfill a mission. Anybody who does not see these two questions really sees no history at all. In the realm where history should occur and be seen, he sees only a miserable, meaningless, boring conglomeration of facts and dates: that a man was born, vaccinated, sent to school, arrived at puberty when his voice changed; that he may have written an important book, and after a long series of significant and insignificant events died of a heart attack, and was buried on such and such a day with so-and-so many wreaths on his grave. This is a pretty insignificant series of accidents and processes of biological laws (which later could be studied more practically and adequately outside in nature). This can be illustrated by a police record. The police official would never claim that he is writing a bit of "history" when he records a series of events. What he does has only the rank of a chronicle, a report of facts. "History" comes into being only when I know the *Whence* and the *Whither*, the incorporation of an event in an ultimate context of meaning. Friedrich Rückert expressed this with reference to each man's individual history (though it could apply equally to the striving of nations toward the realization of their destiny and their mission) in these well-known words:

In every man there lives an image  
Of what he ought to be.  
As long as he is not that image,  
He ne'er at rest will be.

In other words, even from an altogether non-Christian point of view, Rückert is aware of this goal.

In our own time this has perhaps been most beautifully expressed by Joseph Wittig in his small book "On Waiting and Coming."<sup>5</sup> He says that if one wants to write the story of a man's life, one must not begin with his *birth*, but rather with his *death*. Only when the finished life lies before me, only when I can contemplate it as it were from its *goal* (from its goal achieved or unachieved), do I see that each individual stage of that life was not merely "accidental" but rather purposeful and therefore meaningful. Everything moves toward this finished state of a fully rounded

<sup>5</sup> *Vom Warten und Kommen.*

and completed life. Therefore, says Wittig, a life story is not there until death comes, that is, when I can survey it all the way to the end. The objection, which can be raised immediately, that for human eyes even the life which is "completed" in death still remains largely incomplete—because only God sees a man's real life history in its shipwreck or its fulfillment, or in both at once—need not confuse us here. Here we are concerned with the fundamental recognition of the point of view which looks to the *Whither* of a man's life and which Wittig has vividly described in this example, this inadequate example, of the death of a man.

This looking at life from the point of view of its end is a thoroughly biblical idea, for the Bible turns our thoughts not only to the individual human life, but also and above all to the total history of mankind. The Revelation of John is basically nothing else but a prodigious survey of human history in tremendous pictures. And it is altogether characteristic that this survey of world history begins, not with the primordial age or the primitive cell or with Adam and Eve, but with the image of the end of history, the moment when Christ is about to come again. Then this overarching light falls upon the whole of history, including its "worldly" and secularized areas, which—despite their own self-understanding—are all ordered in relation to him, even though his name has here been erased and he himself is hardly an open secret any more. Only as we see this, namely, that all lives end in him and that he stands at the vanishing point of the whole world perspective, do we understand history, understand it in faith. This is the way we understand our own history with its troubles and catastrophes—again, of course, only in faith in that end at which the coming Lord stands. This also explains why it is that in times of great historical distress the church of Jesus Christ has always gone back to this Book of the Revelation of John, often very ineptly but yet always with a right instinct. It does so because all human explanations fail in the face of such epochs of decline when the times are "out of joint" (Hamlet) and the world is in upheaval, and because it knows that we must look to the end in order to lay hold of the directional constants of this seemingly directionless time that is lost in nothingness. This example makes it clear that history can be known only from the point of view of its *goal*.

If I were to translate into Christian words what Rückert says

about the image that is to come into being within us, and the rest and peace of destiny fulfilled, I would say: In every man there lives a thought of God, a thought of what God intends him to be, and this he must now make an actuality within himself, and as long as he does not do so he lives in dissension and discord.

Now it is characteristic that, on the one hand in Rückert (and incidentally also in Goethe), and in the Bible on the other hand, we should find a completely different concept of history. In Goethe, for example, his view was such that he said that man is by nature a seed, an entelechy, a "minted form" which "develops as it lives,"—which, as it were, must develop. Our life then is nothing but a development of this "minted form," this seed which is implanted in us. And therefore the goal of my life history is "to become what I am," that is, to bring out of myself and allow to mature that which has been put in me in germinal, minted form. Only when I "become" what I "should become" will I be at rest, at peace. And here "peace" means that I find myself in accord with myself, that there is no longer any contradiction between what I am and what I ought to be. This is Goethe's view, and Rückert's is similar.<sup>6</sup>

The biblical view of history is completely different in that the Bible sees man only in relation to God and therefore says that only when man comes to God does he also come to himself. According to this it would be simply absurd (in what follows I am purposely exaggerating and drawing a one-sided conclusion from Goethe's ideas) for me to begin "becoming myself" by asking what are my innate characteristics, in which direction do my intellectual talents lie, and so on, in order then to develop them in living. This is not the way it goes. Rather, the biblical view says that when I come to God, I come to myself. I am a child of God and precisely for this reason I can realize my destiny as a child only by being with my Father. Only when I come to God, therefore, do I come to myself.

In the view of the Bible, man is not to be seen at all as an indi-

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Goethe's "Urwort: Orphisch." (A prose translation of the "Words of Ancient Wisdom: Orphic" may be found in *The Penguin Book of German Verse*, Leonard Forster, ed. (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1959). pp. 259 ff. (Trans.)

vidual in isolation, but only as a child in relationship to his Father. And therefore he attains his image, his appointed goal, only when living contact is re-established with the Father, when he is again enclosed in the divine circuit.

The difference between the two views is characteristically expressed in the way in which each interprets the word "peace." Goethe and Rückert interpret peace to mean harmony with oneself, my being what I ought to be. An artist, for example, gains "peace," according to this view, only when he is able to live out his artistic self and thus achieve his appointed destiny, and he remains in conflict and discord with himself when for economic reasons he is obliged to become, say, a truck driver. "Peace" means harmony with oneself.

In the Bible, however, "peace" really means "peace with God"; it means that real peace has been concluded between two entities, between God and me. "The awful feud is ended." And now that objective peace has been concluded between these two entities, all the tension and rebellion ceases and is brought to peace in sonship. Thus the subjective peace of a man's heart is related to an objective "treaty of peace"; it is dependent upon his finding his proper order under God. Hence this peace of heart cannot be attained by direct attack; I cannot find it, for example, by directly striving for it, by autosuggestion or some other "self-deceiving" training which I undergo in order to find peace of mind. No, the prerequisite of real peace is that I put my own personality right with God, instead of trying to harmonize it with itself; then this harmony results as a by-product of this new relationship.

These two examples show that Goethe's concept of history and that of the Bible must necessarily develop differently.

We insist, then, that according to the biblical view man comes to himself and finds peace only when he is called by God and when he responds to this call.

This could be shown in many examples, for instance in the story of the calling of an Isaiah or a Jeremiah or an Ezekiel. In that these men were called to God they also came to themselves. This is where the real "Isaiah," the real "Jeremiah," actually came into being. It is not that I become someone else when I make God my Lord; on the contrary, I really become "myself"; then the orig-

inal image of what God intended me to be emerges. We see this in the encounters of men and women with Jesus: when the woman "who was a sinner," when the publican, when other disreputable characters met him, something entirely new was kindled within them and they were mysteriously changed. And yet when we look more closely, this was not really a transformation in the sense that they "developed away" from themselves; rather they were going back home in the deepest sense to their real selves by becoming once more the "children of their Father in heaven."

We can round off the course of our thinking in this chapter by saying that *all history is in the last analysis history of meeting and being called*. It takes place between two entities (God and man) and is therefore anything but a mere "development" of innate abilities (the Goethean "minted form"), which could take place, at least theoretically, within the solitary individual. Only in meeting with the divine Thou, and thus indirectly, do I also come to "myself." I never come to myself by seeking and aiming at myself directly. Jesus's saying, "Whoever would save his life will lose it," is applicable here too. For this "self" which I want to attain and realize lies in my becoming a child. And how could I become a child again without the Father?

But all meeting with God has two aspects. First, I accept as from the hands of God the realm in which I am bound (my place in history, my sex, my talents and abilities, etc.) and here the question is *whence* I came. And second, I accept from him the realm of my freedom in order that I may be assigned my task, my destiny in life, and here the question is *whither*, to what *end* am I here.

Only by starting with these two questions can the mystery of all human history be fathomed.

## THE REALITY OF THE DEMONIC

# XIII

*HISTORY, AS LUTHER PUT IT IN MANY A STRONG ILLUSION*, is a contest between God and antigod, or—as Goethe once expressed it—a battlefield between faith and unbelief. And this confronts us with the question of the demonic powers.

It is not easy to speak about the reality of the demonic. For this cannot be dealt with merely by stringing together a number of Bible passages. As long as we proceed merely in this statistical fashion we are not facing the *reality* of the demonic. For then it may still be "mythology," the universal idea of evil dressed up in the ancient costume of myth, an idea of evil of which we are conscious but which does not confront us as a *power*. It is, after all, quite possible calmly to philosophize about good and evil. The demonic, however, is that which is utterly menacing.

How simple it is to talk about "evil"! One can think of it as a part of that power which "always desires the evil and always produces the good." One can laud the outbreak of evil in the Fall (as Schiller did) and call it a fortunate event because it created the possibility of freedom. One can (as the philosophy of idealism does) extol evil as the productive counterpart of the good, the only means by which life is given creative tension and generative power. And finally one can even (as Nietzsche did) make it the "highest good."

But this harmless way of looking at evil from an objective bird's-eye point of view ceases the moment we begin to talk about the demonic. Here the armchair philosophizing ceases; here we are personally affected and touched.

It is the same with talk about God. Paul says in I Corinthians