

The world is the everlasting caricature of what it should be.

—Marcel Achard

It is God's nature to make something out of nothing. This is why God cannot make anything out of him who is not yet nothing.

—Martin Luther

The past in its pastness is not what concerns me, but the past as something present. . . . I am delving into Adam in order to unriddle him and myself.

—Gerhard Nebel

How The World Began

Man in the First Chapters of the Bible

By Helmut Thielicke, 1908-

Translated with an Introduction

by John W. Doberstein

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Man—the Risk of God

THE CREATION OF MAN—PART ONE

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." And God said, "Behold I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day.

—*Genesis 1:26-31*

I cannot believe that it is merely imagination to think that at this point in the story of creation where the subject of man appears for the first time there is something like a stoppage in the flow of the narrative. Up to this point the words came forth in monumental monotony: God said, God created, God made. But now the composition of the story shifts over, as it were, into another key. In other words, God halts and soliloquizes. He says, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."

One can almost detect something like a hesitation or even a recoil. In any case, it is the kind of bated breath with which we ourselves are familiar when we approach a decisive point in some piece of work on the success of which everything depends. We stop and stand off for a while. It may be the experience of a roofer who has covered a church steeple with shingles and then in one final, risky effort must set the cock upon the peak, or of a dramatist who sets out to compose the main and key scene in his play.

So when God pauses before he composes man into his creation, we sense that there is a risk connected with it: will the creation of man mean the coronation of creation or its crucifixion? Will creation reach its pinnacle when there is added to its creatures a being who rises above the dull level of reflex and instinct, who is endowed with mind and will, and is capable of living as a partner and co-worker of God his Creator? Or is the creation of this being called "man" the first stage in a tremendous descent that starts in the Garden of Eden and leads to a disturbed and desolated earth, that transforms the child and image of God into a robber and a rebel, and through him carries war and rumors of war to the farthest planets?

Coronation or crucifixion of creation—that is the question here. And we understand why God pauses and hesitates, for he is facing a risk. What a breath-taking thought! Is it not almost blasphemous even to think of such a thing?

And this is the way it was. In setting over against himself a being to whom he gave freedom and power he risked the possibilities that the child would become a competitor, that the child would become a megalomaniacal rival of the Creator. Then perhaps would come the moment, described in *Faust*, when man would no longer be gratefully conscious that he was privileged to be the image of his Creator but would rather rise up and cry, "I am the image of divinity," or, like Prometheus, even revel in his equality with God.

This venture of God in which he bound himself to man—and

exposed himself to the possibility of being reviled, despised, denied, and ignored by man—this venture was the first flash of his love. God ventured, as it were, his own self. He declared himself ready to suffer the pain the father endured when he let the prodigal son go into the far country, when he allowed deep wounds to be inflicted upon his heart, and still would not give up his child of sorrows. This line reaches its end in Jesus Christ. There God exposed himself to his rebellious children, put himself at their mercy, and let his most beloved die by their hand but for them.

So already we see how wrong it would be to talk too smugly about man being the crown of creation. Our text suggests backgrounds that will not allow us to use such a simple formula. And perhaps it is well for us at this point to take very seriously Gottfried Benn's disclaimer: "Man is not a higher being . . . What we have achieved has been to a large extent the presumptuous, hubris, the stupid." Hence a "certain reduction of this arrogance" would certainly be more important than indulging in fanciful lofty goals.

Nevertheless, to me it seems wrong for us to chime in with the general and intellectually respectable decrying of man's failure. I think we must strike out in an entirely different direction, and I am convinced that here our text can become an important means of orientation.

If there is *one* rule that is given to us by the command to love our neighbor, it is that we must always judge a person by his optimum and not by his failures. I should like to illustrate this with an example.

Here is a woman who pours out the story of her broken marriage in tears. For her husband she simply does not exist, except as a lightning-rod for his temper and uncontrolled emotions. Everything she says indicates quite clearly that her husband is a brutal fellow, and one can understand why her love is almost extinguished under the constant pressure of his mental cruelty. What should one say to her? That divorce would be best?

Naturally, this thought is bound to occur. But must I not say to her that then she might put him in a worse hole, that she might rob him of his last foothold? Or what else might be said in a situation like this? Perhaps that she should try to make herself love him? This would surely be rather foolish advice, for, after all, we cannot force ourselves to love anybody. This only results in forced, hypocritical tension. And sometimes we can see this in legalistic Christians.

But perhaps this is what I should say to her: "You loved your husband when you first knew him; isn't that true?" "Yes," she replies, "but then he was different." "True; naturally he was different," I allow her, "otherwise you would never have married him." "Yes," she interrupts, "you can depend on that." "But you did love him once," I continue, "and now I ask you who your husband *really* is? Is his real self what you loved *then* or is his real self the horrible being who makes you suffer *so now*?"

I shall not go any further with this conversation here, but simply say this: In Jesus Christ we learn that the love that once was there but has long since died had laid hold upon the real, the intrinsic nature of this husband. The way he appeared to his wife back there was the way God intended him to be. And his present state was a deviation and a fall from that former state.

When we stop to consider where Jesus gained the power to love harlots, bullies, and ruffians, we find only one answer and that is that he was able to do this only because he saw through the filth and the crust of degeneration, because his eye caught the divine original which is hidden in every man—in *every* man!

Jesus renews everything in us: he not only gives us a more sensitive conscience and mobilizes our will, but first and foremost he gives us new eyes. Then we see and recognize something else in our neighbor.

Now I think that we see that this account of the creation of man points in the same direction. For here is described the moment in which God "designed" man, and thus the moment when he tells us what he has in mind for him, what he thinks of him as being. He intends him to be his image, his friend, one to whom

he wants to be faithful and to whom he wants to give a meaningful life. And if that is true, then all this is still there in every human being today, even in the wicked gossip-monger in my neighborhood, even in the young mugger and purse-snatcher, even in Khrushchev and Mao Tse-tung.

But if it is present in every human being, then I must take it into account, then I dare not simply react in fear or in hatred to such threatening figures, but rather learn to see them in the light of their optimum, in the light of what they were created to be.

I believe that a great sense of peace and serenity would result from this way of seeing. We would get away from our panic jitters, our everlasting anxiety, or even from our sterile contempt for human beings. "Is man no more than this?" asks King Lear. Yes, he is more, far more than that. He is the potential bearer of a crown, even though he may gamble it away a hundred times.

So, for a moment at least, let us wipe away from our eyes the vision of human folly, the vision of the Promethean, atomic rebel, and refresh ourselves with the vision of what God *meant* us men to be, that which even now belongs to every one of us—the captain and the lowliest stoker on our planetary ship—and belongs to us so truly that we can count upon it. I believe it would be something like a breath of oxygen, an undreamed-of refreshment, if we were to expose ourselves to this breath of the Spirit in our history.

This original design within us, on which I can count in myself and also in my neighbors, my colleagues, and my competitors, is described in our text from three points of view.

First, we are created to have dominion over the earth. Second, we are made to live in the relationship of man and woman and thus are not designed to be soloists, but rather to live together with our fellow men. And third, we are images and likenesses of the divine being.

I should like to speak about these features at some length in this sermon and the next one, for they represent something like a plan, a survey map of our whole human existence. When we have studied this map we shall know something about the mean-

ing of our life. Then we shall know what the play is about and what role we ourselves have to fill. And this is not something one can make short work of; we must take some time for it.

Today I want to discuss the first of the three characteristics mentioned, namely, that man has been called to have *dominion over nature*: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

It would be wrong to see in these words any suggestion that here man is conceived as a spiritual being who is elevated above nature, above the brute, and that he somehow hovers above all that is creaturely. The animal and man, the whales, the sparrows, and *Homo sapiens* are all created together on the same sixth day of creation and thus included in a whole. And I believe that it is not only true to life but also a great comfort that the Bible does not pretend that we are paragons of virtue, painted saints, and ideal figures of humanity. The Bible is well aware that the struggle of nature also determines our human life, that we too are controlled by instincts and urges, needs and desires, just as are the birds and the beasts of the field. Often our dreams, which we cannot control by our will, are an appalling reminder that we have our roots in the animal kingdom.

Isn't it really a comfort that the Bible sees us quite realistically as being higher animals? That God by no means thinks of us only as dwellers in the top storey of creation, as occupants of the penthouse reserved for the possessors of conscience and reason, but that he also knows the cellars, the dark and subhuman abysses of our being into which we allow no man to look? What would the gospel be if Jesus paid no attention to the cupidity of harlots, to our bodies with their urges and also their illnesses, if he were not near to us at our dying, where, after all, we are "like the beasts that perish" (Ps. 49:12).

I find it cheering beyond all measure that the Lord's Prayer does not pretend that we are only religious people, that is, people

who occupy themselves wholly with high things and are completely absorbed in the wish that God's kingdom may come and his will be done. Oh, no, the Lord's Prayer knows that we have the urge to eat—again like the animals—that we must have our daily ration of bread, that we are indifferent to the most beautiful of picture galleries when we are coming down with the grippe, and that all sense of devotion trickles away when our feet are cold.

I find it simply wonderful that God does not treat us men as aristocrats of creation who are constantly living beyond their means and having to go to great pious expense in order to measure up to their certificate of humanity, but rather that we can come before him as people who are related to the fishes, the dogs, and the cats, in whom hormones and glandular secretions circulate just as they do in our fellow creatures; that we can appear before him as people who are lashed by the same libido as they are, and in whom—different from and worse than with animals—all these things are capable of condensing into inextricable complexes. We are acceptable to him just as we are, with all these characteristics, and this is precisely what Jesus took upon himself. And the Lord God is far less alien to nature and creatureliness than we are in our pious delusions.

So it is not beneath his dignity if we pray for a good digestion after an operation, or if a prisoner says grace over his watered soup. I believe that he even takes more pleasure in this than he does when we sit down with stomachs well filled by the "economic miracle," grunting a fatuous "Enjoy your meal," smugly enjoying our heavy silverware and gold-rimmed china, and gloating over how successful we have been. In any case, we stand before God as men of flesh and blood, and what is more, of frail flesh and unruly blood and with animality in our nature, and something of the effluvium of the earth blows upon us when the psalmist prays: "Man and beast thou savest, O Lord" (Ps. 36:6).

Is it then merely an ornamental flourish when ox and ass ap-

pear in the stable of Bethlehem and they all stand beneath the same Light? Is there no significance in the fact that the Son of God was born in an animal's manger?

It is not well when Christianity leads one to have contempt for the body and tries to be more spiritual than God.

It is a mistake for us to consider it pious to break out of the solidarity of the sixth day and behave idealistically and spiritually, as if we were only spiritual beings. The Utopians who dreamed of advancing into the superhuman and making the earth a heaven have always ended up by making a hell on earth. Jesus Christ keeps us close to the earth; otherwise he would never have come to this earth, but would have developed a method to lift us to superhumanity. But, no, he appeared in a stable and he was not estranged even by the beast within us. He saves man and beast. He encompasses both loft and cellar. He loves the *Arietta*, that utterly ethereal passage in Beethoven's Opus 111, and he lays his hand upon the wild and animal dreams of adolescents.

And again, when man is enjoined to be fruitful and multiply, this command appears in the same context with the multiplication of plants and animals. Here there is a very quiet allusion to the fact that we human beings generate progeny and are creative in a way that is different from God the Creator, that we are *only* men and therefore sharply distinguished from him. For God creates from nothing. We men, however, are everywhere bound to our creaturely condition and cannot lift ourselves above it. We are enclosed within limits we cannot break asunder.

Can we, for example, produce any kind of children we desire? After all, we have our genes within us and we must transmit them. As young parents, perhaps, we may tremble at the thought that this or that peculiarity imbedded in our being may be hereditary—yet we find it present in our children. The truth is that we cannot "create" children; we can only "propagate" ourselves with all our dubious characteristics. We do not, like God, create from nothing, but merely blunder about with the given conditions.

And so it is always in life. Even if we are educators, whether as parents or teachers or leaders of youth, we can only develop further what has been given, and where there is nothing we can create nothing. We cannot take an unmusical clod and make a Mozart out of him, even if we expose him all day long to the music of the spheres and stuff him full of the theory of music.

Or take the area of statesmanship. Even a statesman of genius cannot launch and "create" the world that exists in his dreams; he must rather practice the "art of the possible." He can move only in the narrow orbit of the given constellations. He cannot "create" situations as God creates them; he can only "exploit" the situations that are given.

So before we take due note of the fact that we are the crown of creation, we must first recognize that we are *only* men and by no means gods. Above these verses there hovers the dreadful majesty of the Lord, before whom we must perish and before whom we are as nothing.

And yet, despite all the questionableness of our nature, here is this word being proclaimed to us: "Fill the earth and subdue it." Now I do not believe that we can any longer interpret this to mean a tremendous glorification of man. For, after all, we are not to rule and subdue the earth because we stand *above* the other creatures, but only because we stand *under* God and are privileged to be his viceroys. But being a viceroy of the Creator is something different from being a creature who makes of himself a god or at least a superman.

If I am not mistaken, this also gives us the clue to the meaning of all *culture*. For, after all, culture is the conquest, the management, the cultivation of the world. When fruitful farm land is made out of a desert and when human settlements arise in the primeval forests, this means that the seal of man is stamped upon the world. Every sheltering home and every garden is a victory won by man over the surging elements.

We therefore dare not think that culture always arises only from strife and separation from God, that *hubris* and human

autonomy are inherent in it by nature. No, on the contrary, it exists under the blessing and justification of a divine command. When culture becomes godless and finally produces its appalling symbol in the tower of Babel, then an *alien* element has been smuggled into the plan of God. I merely mention this here. We shall come back to this point in the coming addresses. At this point we are only registering the thought that one of the goals of God's creation is contained within culture and all that is great and aspiring.

We Christians, therefore, have not only to sing hymns; we must also pay attention to culture. God wants this too. But we cannot pay attention to culture if we are narrow-minded, stupid Christian philistines. Then we hand over the theater, music, literature, and politics to the so-called children of the world, and our somewhat belated agitation and concern that they may play hob with it, that they may make a cult of Eros or an atomic witches' sabbath of it, is completely out of place. "Is the plot of history to turn out in such a way," asked Schleiermacher in another connection, "that Christianity will go with barbarism, but science—and art—with unbelief?"

I believe that the church of Jesus Christ has not yet really grasped just *what* has been entrusted to us and the wealth that has been given to us. Often it seems to me that we Christians flounder about between heaven and earth, as if, down underneath, we had lost both, and therefore present a rather lamentable figure to the children of this world. We keep thinking about all the things "we can no longer do" as Christians, instead of enjoying the riches of creation and then accepting with open hands what God wants to give to us. Is God, then, a mistrustful miser who locks everything away from us so that we cannot get at it? Is he not rather the Father who is always giving with full hands and unparalleled generosity, always pouring out his gifts? I am afraid that the germs of a neopagan culture are being cultivated in our musty Christian incubators.

Today we are beginning our entrance into space and we are

about to subdue not only the good old earth but the cosmos itself. Is this *too* covered by the blessing of that command given at the creation? This is a question that may well get under our skin. Is God our Lord even in space and on Venus, or when we go there are we breaking away from the created home which God has assigned to us? Does this mean that we are reaching for forbidden fruit?

I can imagine what a thoughtful space-traveler might think on his first journey to Venus. Perhaps it would be something like this:

After the torture of the enormous acceleration was over, he might be overwhelmed for a moment with the triumph of this human conquest of space. But then as he looked back from his spaceship to his native planet, which was growing smaller and smaller, another thought would overtake him: "There you are, you tiny provincial earth"—he thinks—"far below me. Really? Have I actually left you behind me? Is the past, which I spent down there, really wiped out?"

But then that tiny thing, so small that it is no longer visible through the strongest telescope, suddenly grows near and great and oppressive: that stairway—so far away that it is hardly true and yet it *is* true!—where he bore false witness against his neighbor; that night on earth when he tossed and chafed with ambition and anxiety; his marriage in which he foundered and transgressed; and also the great triumphs and happinesses in his life. If there is a God, then all this is very near to him and pursues him with a swiftness compared with which his rocket moves at a snail's pace.

So he cannot strip off his past, no matter how swiftly he flies through space. And because he cannot do this, he cannot shake off identity with himself by flying into space. He must remain himself. For there are no wings of the morning that would carry him to some distant sea of stars and set him free from himself. He is bracketed by the day of creation on the one hand and the day of the Last Judgment on the other. Even in cosmic space

his life remains within that discourse in which he is enclosed by the breath of God. And so he remains judged and secure at the same time. He cannot get away from himself and he cannot get away from Him who holds him to Himself.

This, I believe, would be the terrible thing for the space traveler: that his humanity is never left behind him and that he never gets away from his creatureliness and his sin.

No matter where he goes, whether it be Mars or Venus, immediately the same old story will begin all over again, the same old story that took place when the forbidden fruit was plucked in some mythical garden. Then Cain's fratricide will occur on Venus too, and the tower of Babel will rise on Mars. His chief, the commander of the space ship, perhaps already has in his portfolio secret plans concerning strategic measures on Venus.

Wherever man goes he takes with him his crepuscular light, the light of his reason, which his Creator gave him, and also the phosphorescent putrefaction of his anxiety and his greed for power. Dürrenmatt has evoked this vision in his *Unternehmen Wega*.

But perhaps still another thought comes to our space traveler. It may be that in his thinking the ant heap of so-called humanity was divided into two "races." The one "race" was composed of those who were fascinated by the possibility of man's seizure of space. Their imagination was directed toward the inconceivable remoteness of the cosmic horizon and they deified this fabulous being called man in his unlimited technological power.

But there was another "race," much smaller in number, and they were the ones whose thoughts remained on earth and upon men. They never tired of pointing out that the cosmic development of space was not the primary problem but rather that the problem was man himself, you and me. With dismay they saw this being, man, dreaming that knowledge is power and overlooking the fact that this knowledge had long since become a power above man and ceased to be something that his knowledge could cope with. They saw that everything must

depend upon setting man straight and teaching him how to love and what we are here for. Otherwise he would forfeit his life, even if he gained the whole cosmos.

On this little earth way back there—this may be the last thought of our space traveler, as the earth has already become merely one planet among others in the immeasurable vault of the sky—there lived in the last decades a man who was a great scholar and artist. But the masses knew him, not as a great intellect—which he was—but only as someone who wanted to help other people, who went into the primeval forest and became a neighbor to those who were farthest away. The very presence of such a man created a tremendous sensation. When he came to Europe the people gathered in crowds. The Nobel Prize and many honors were bestowed upon him.

What a strange judgment on the earth that it should be considered an extreme sensation when someone turns out to be nothing else but—"a man," and that this phenomenon of a "man" is stared at like a wonder that outshines all the world champion boxers, football heroes, and film stars!

To be "a man," this is unique. But then what is "ordinary"? And yet it is a comfort that it is so, the space traveler may say to himself as he shivers with cold despite the controlled temperature of his ship. Yes, all the same it is a comfort, for it reveals in the language of signs what God designed us to be, that God is holding fast to his intention. We go stumbling or flying along by the grace of God. We must realize what is prepared for us.

So now Venus is very near and already its mountains and seas can be described. "Down there on earth," concludes the space traveler's meditation, "down there we say:

'Orient and occident
Rest in the peace of his hands.'

And Venus and Mars too are enclosed by those hands.

We cannot escape those hands, but we can be safe in them.

Creation and Evolution, Faith and Science

THE CREATION OF MAN—PART TWO

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground—then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

—*Genesis 2:4-9, 16-17*

In his essay "In Praise of Mortality," Thomas Mann said, "In the depths of my soul I cherish the surmise that with those words, 'Let there be,' which summoned the cosmos from the night, when life was generated out of inorganic being, it was *man* who was foreseen...."

And the fact is that when we read the creation story we do sense that everything said about the plants and animals, the sun and the moon is only an overture and that the curtain does not rise, that the dramas and tragedies on this earth do not begin until that moment when man enters and begins to play his role.

But now, who is this man? Or perhaps we had better speak in the first person: What am I to think of myself and what role has been assigned to me, now that the curtain has risen?

It is a very strange thing: when a person goes to a movie of an evening—if he is not too hopeless a blockhead—he finds out beforehand what is playing, who has the chief role, who directed it. If I am not mistaken, however, there are only a few people who ask themselves the question: What is really being played out in my life? Who has the chief role? Who is the director?

But does not everything depend upon knowing these things? Can I tread the stage of my life without facing the question: What am I really going to play? Or do I propose to go blindly on stage and begin to babble away, depending upon the prompting of the moment to tell me what to say? If that is so, then when the curtain of our life finally falls at our last hour we can only make our exit with the vapid feeling that it was all a mistake: we have indulged in a lot of foolish talk, we have turned somersaults, lounged on sofas, rummaged in filing cabinets, we have engaged in quarrelsome dialogues, and even played a variety of love scenes, but it was all a disconnected tutti-frutti and had no direction and no style.

So in distress we ask ourselves: What is the meaning of it all? Is life just a journey into the wild blue yonder that never gets you anywhere—at best only to the station named Desire?

That's why it seems important to me to study more carefully this text concerning the creation of man. For these words of the creation story present something like a script for the role I have to play.

If we ask ourselves what man is, or better still, what *I* am, we shall be able to find an answer only if we adopt the method

of defining man by the way he relates to other entities. I mention just a few of these entities which provide a point of orientation.

We can define man, for example, by determining how he relates to his *origin*. Then we say, "Man derives from the animal kingdom." If we make the assertion this way we tend to draw from it the conclusion that man himself is therefore a higher animal. Do not the same laws of the struggle for existence obtain in our human life as are observable in nature? We reproduce ourselves like all mammals and we finally die in the same way, either from old age and the desiccation of our cells or from violence.

But it is also possible to define the sustaining relationship of our life in quite a different way. We can say that our human life is determined by the way we respond to the *tasks* which life and vocation set for us. If we thus interpret man and ourselves on the basis of our task, we quite logically define him as a productive being. Then the meaning and purpose of our life would consist in producing something and filling our quota. Then inevitably Stakhanov or the high-powered executive become the model image of man. Then when the day comes that we can no longer produce, because we are in an old folks' home or have a coronary and can do nothing but walk around a bit, then our life becomes meaningless. Indeed we see often enough how sad and empty the lives of aging people become when they have chosen the productive principle as their god and then one day this god deserts them and casts them into emptiness.

I mention one last relationship by which we can interpret our life. We can also relate man to the *stars* which allegedly determine his life. If I do this, then I think of myself as merely an organ that carries out the will of the cosmic powers of destiny; then I am exempt from any decision and responsibility for my actions, because here it is astral fate that controls me and makes me a will-less functionary of the universal. How many people who reach for their daily horoscope find in it a kind of

reassurance—not primarily because they find out something about their future (I do not believe that this curiosity is the primary motive at all!), but rather because they want to be led by the leading-strings of the stars and thus cease to be responsible for their own faults; and this is, of course, very comforting! We may borrow Edmund's words in Shakespeare's *King Lear*:

"This is the excellent foppery of the world! that, when we are sick in fortune, (often the surfeit of our own behavior,) we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and stars; as if we were villains on necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion; knaves, thieves, and traitors, by spherical predominance; drunkards, liars, and adulterers by an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on: An admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish disposition on the charge of a star!"

And now our text also defines man by setting him into relationship to another entity. But this entity is neither his animal origin, nor his productivity, nor his environment, nor his astrological destiny—but rather, God.

Now the thing that must strike one in this story is the fact that man, despite all his kinship with plants and animals, rain and sunshine, despite all his earthiness (which we spoke of in the last sermon) remains remarkably unique and solitary in his world.

Elsewhere the words always appear in the third person: "Let there be!" So the stars, the flowers, and the whales are summoned into life. All of these are without consciousness and they live out their existence under a Creator they do not know. But man is different and he is also created in a different way: he is addressed as a person, as "you." The squirrels and the lions receive no commandments concerning what they should do and become. They live, so to speak, by the automatism of their instincts. But to man a "Thou shalt" is spoken. "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat." "You shall fill the earth and subdue it."

And this is precisely what constitutes the uniqueness of man

over against the animal world. This is what lifts him above his fellow creatures.

Schiller may have had this text of the Bible in mind when he said that animals and plants receive their destiny from nature, but not only this; they also fulfil their destiny without incident, for the way to their destiny is, as it were, "provided" for them by the Creator. Man, however, is only given his destiny; the way he fulfils it, however, he must find for himself. And therefore there is always the possibility that he may fail.

This can be expressed in another way. The embryo of a dog will always become a dog. This process cannot go wrong. But is it equally certain that a human embryo will become a man? May it not become "inhuman"? May it not become someone whom God intended to be totally different, someone who is constantly sabotaging these plans of God for his life, wasting his talent, and throwing away his destiny, until finally he ends in the pigpen with the prodigal son? May not this *too* be possible? And are we not burdened by the fact that sometimes this is precisely what does happen to us?

In our last address we said that man is a risk of God. And this is exactly what we meant. An animal cannot fail to fulfil its destiny; but man, you and I, can. We can play the wrong role. And at the Last Judgment there may be written on the margin of our life in red ink: "You missed the point." Fritz Reuter once expressed it in these words:

The beginning and the end, O Lord, are thine.
The span in between, this life of ours, was mine.
Though I strayed in the dark and found no way out,
With thee there is brightness and light is thy house.

But this terrifying possibility that I may fail in this in-between part, which is mine and for which I bear responsibility, and stake it all on the wrong card, that I may be straying in the dark and not safely lodged in that house—this is at the same time our chance, for it is, so to speak, the dignity of being human.

In other words, it tells us that we can have direct contact with our Lord and that when we have this contact *nothing else* can lay hold upon us and bring us under its power, that hence we do not need to make excuses by talking about the dictatorship of the stars or the compulsion of our heredity or our particular environment, but that we are directly responsible to him, the Lord *himself*, that we receive from him our orders and at the same time our royal freedom as children of God.

How many of us may have realized the truth of these things—namely, that everything depends upon the *relationship* to which we commit our lives—while we were prisoners of war, in a situation therefore in which hunger and creaturely fear and the struggle for the favor of the kitchen-bulls frequently enough turned the so-called crown of creation into a miserable bundle of nerves that responded only to its instinct of self-preservation, groveled before the guards, and servilely angled for a cigarette butt.

But again and again we have observed the other side of the picture, namely, how true it is that man does not live by bread alone and that he must have access to totally different sources of sustenance if he is not to perish.

For there were always some who even in such a boundary situation were not reduced merely to a relationship to their empty stomachs or their tortured nerves or their unrestrained animal instincts, but rather were sure of the nearness of their Lord in all these scuffles and in the hopeless darkness of their cells and were mysteriously lifted above the pandemonium. This support provided by the security of God really did hold, whereas the artificial supports of civilization and even culture broke down. Whoever heard the eternal Word and knew that He—who Himself became a prisoner and died for his sake—was with him, whoever lived in the dialogue of prayer with Him, was beyond the reach of the law of bestiality. He was lifted above it all and placed under another protection. In a word, he was able to remain a man, a child of God, and in that experience was pre-

served that moment of creation when God called him into life and said "you" to him.

Therefore in this uniqueness of man, which distinguishes him from the animal kingdom, there lies not only our peril (namely, that we may miss the point of our life) but also our royal dignity. When God calls us to be his children, when he speaks to us as he spoke to Adam and as he never speaks to an animal, then in this dialogue, in this relationship, we are safe and secure under a protection from which nothing, neither hunger nor fear nor atom bomb, can snatch us away.

Recently I came across a very comforting anecdote that speaks of this faithfulness of God.

In the conversations of Frederick the Great with De Catt there is an account of a gathering in which a famous Tory leader was telling about the shortest prayer he had ever heard. It was uttered by a simple soldier at the Battle of Blenheim and went as follows: "O God, if there is a God, save my soul, if I have a soul." The company at table took this as a joke and burst into laughter. Then the Bishop of Rochester who was present said earnestly: "Your prayer, Sir William, is indeed very brief, but I remember one which is equally brief, but much better, and likewise uttered by a poor soldier. In the excess of toils and exertions of his service his faith threatened to break down; he had neither strength nor time to pray more than this, but finally he said: "O God, if on this day of battle I forget thee, do not thou forget me."

And so it is in fact; we live in constant forgetfulness of God and often enough our faith is a guttering candle. But there is One who faithfully remembers us, even when we stand in our presumption upon the tower of Babel or when we sink away into the far country or when we descend to dull indifference.

Now perhaps some of you may be thinking: "All this is very kind and soothing. And I would give a lot if I too could base the role of my life on this script as the man in the pulpit seems to be doing so much as a matter of course. But can I really say

in all seriousness: 'The beginning and the end, O Lord, are thine,' can I really talk this way about the faithfulness of God without doing violence to my intellectual conscience? For, after all, it says that man is made of a clod of earth. But can I believe that God created me, that he wants to be my Lord, and that I can be secure in his protection, if it is communicated to me in the form of such myths? After all, I know that man arose in a different way. I know that life on earth is millions of years old and that man developed from animality over unimaginably long periods of time. Isn't faith, with its mythical, unreal conceptions, starting with a great disadvantage compared with science, which has long since replaced these old and superannuated conceptions of creation with biological evolution (and done so with exact proofs too)?"

Even though this is a question discussed more in the lecture room than the pulpit, I know that many people are troubled by it and I intend therefore to weave some comment upon it at some point in this series.

The scientific doubt of our faith in creation, as we have just described it, is based, it seems to me, upon a wrong way of putting the question.

That is to say, I can ask where man comes from biologically, and receive the answer that he sprang from animal forms. Or I can ask why he is here, what is his destiny, what is the "role" assigned to him. If I put the question in this way, the answer I get from the Bible is that he was designed to be a child of God, he was intended for fellowship with God in Jesus Christ.

I must not mix up these two questions. Once one sees this, then the ill-famed question of "Faith and Science"¹ will look quite different.

I do not sin against faith when I say that man developed from the animal kingdom over a period of seven milleniums.

¹ The author has dealt more fully and in academic form with the relationship between faith and science in his book, *Theologische Ethik*, Vol. II¹, 2nd ed. (Tübingen, 1959). Compare the chapter "Man and Animal," sections 1182-1275.

How could one truth (the truth of science) possibly contradict another truth (the truth of faith)? I sin against faith only when I dare to assert that I can "derive" the *essence* of man, his *destiny*, and the *meaning* of his life from this prehuman source. If I do this, the answer I get is that man is "only" a higher mammal, perhaps a predatory animal, but in any case he is determined by the instinct to devour, to breed, and to plunder. Then the history of the world becomes a special chapter in general zoology. So we see where that would lead us.

Nevertheless, I must express myself more precisely. Naturally, I do not deny that from the biological point of view man is only a mammal, but—only from the *biological* point of view! In his essential being he is something else. Or would we be so bold as to say that the love of a mother for her child is no more than a monkey's care for her young and that man's death is the same as the perishing of an animal? Is not human sexuality also something totally different from that of our fellow animal creatures? Naturally, human sexual life *also* has its biological side. But it is still something more, and something different. For in man this biological receptacle which is the instinctual process, the process of procreation and birth, is set in a totally different context. After all, here my relationship to the person who is closest to me becomes a reality. I love him and serve him in a sexual way. In a sexual way I do him wrong, come to grief, experience fulfillment and defeat; in short, I am acting in a completely *human* way in all my loving and hating, in all my deficiencies and all my faults.

The biological is, as it were, only a receptacle that harbors a completely human I-thou relationship, and which therefore is full of love and devotion, but also full of guilt and rejection, exactly—though here we are stressing the biological—as everywhere else in my life where I have to do with my neighbor, no matter whether it be my boss, my employee, my colleague, or the person next door.

When I stop treating this receptacle, this *bios*, as a mere con-

tainer and proceed to make it a content in itself; in other words, when I say that this biological, this instinctual thing is the end itself, then sexuality becomes unhuman; it becomes a blind urge. Then sexual intercourse becomes nothing more than the attempt to quench one's sexual thirst in animal fashion. Then my partner is no more to me than a glass of water which I pour down my throat and then put away or shatter against the wall. Then, strictly speaking, this my partner would no longer be a "person" and certainly not a "neighbor," but only a thing, a mere instrument.

These are the consequences which accrue if I do not use science merely as an information bureau to find out how man came into being biologically but make it instead a substitute for faith and expect it to tell me the meaning of my life and my destiny. This is precisely what it *cannot* tell me.

This is the reason why the Bible, even when it speaks of the creation of man, speaks in its parabolic images less of man's origin than of his goal, his destiny. Psalm 139 makes this clear in words of monumental simplicity:

Thou didst form my inward parts,
thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise thee, for thou art fearful and wonderful.
Wonderful are thy works!
Thou knowest me right well;
my frame was not hidden from thee,
when I was being made in secret . . .
Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance;
in thy book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.

One thing is very clear here. The psalmist is speaking about the biological formation of man in the womb. One might say therefore that here he is pointing to the mammal aspect of man and extolling the mystery of the meeting of sperm and ovum. And yet all this is only the biological receptacle within which something altogether different is going on, in which God is

actually speaking his creative "Let there be"; and behold: there it is—there I am! In his heart I lived as a completed image when I was still a microscopically small, unformed seed; already he had called me by my name; already he had anticipated my coming days, my life history, my talents, my role. Already he had called me to himself. *That* is the point of the psalm—in spite of all its parabolic biological imagery!

And fundamentally, isn't this very simple to understand? After all, what are young parents doing when they send out a birth notice: "God has given us our first child"? When they say this, they do not mean that God let this child fall directly from heaven. They know very well the processes of generation and birth, the ecstasies of love and the biological processes which brought this child into being. No, when they send out such a notice they mean to express something altogether different. What they are saying is: "God in his goodness has given us this child by way of 'biological' processes." Indeed he has given the *bios* itself! "It went through our hands, but comes from God," sang Matthias Claudius. God's gifts also come through our bodies, through the endocrine glands and physiological laws. There is Someone there who bestows gifts upon us through the medium of nature—just as he signals the signs of his grace to us through the sunshine and the dew, the rainbow and the wind.

And now I should think that on this basis (insofar as it has been understood) it ought not to be difficult to see that faith and science do not contradict each other at all—simply because the assertions they make lie upon completely different levels.

Now, can we not take what we have just said about the birth of one child, one exemplar of "man," and apply it to all mankind? Can we not paraphrase the words of Psalm 139 and say: "Thou didst know man when he was still an unformed seed, or perhaps primeval slime or *eubominen* or the ancestral form of *Homo sapiens*." For at a specific point in these millions of years of development thou didst call him by name, make thy-

self known to him, summon him before thy majestic face, and bestow upon him that unique dignity of personhood which thou didst not give to any animal.

It is this one point at which God caused man to rise above the ranks of the other creatures and made him something special that our text describes when it says: "The Lord God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."

This is the decisive point in man's becoming man. Here is an earthy creature, still bound to ordinary creatureliness—which the Bible refers to by the symbol of "dust from the ground"—here this prehuman, still unformed germ is suddenly breathed upon by the breath of another world and transferred to that realm which we call specifically human existence.

I have always felt that Michelangelo's depiction of the creation of man on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel is a profound interpretation of how man became man. Adam the man is already present, but, so to speak, not as man in the real sense. He is still a candidate, a mere claimant of humanity. He lies half raised up, with a dull and dreamy expression, though his face is turned in inquiring expectation to God the Father, who hovers over him, clothed in a great mantle and sheltering coming creatures. Adam's leg is already drawn up to rise; all is in readiness that in the next moment he may rise and meet God. But between these two instants a miracle must occur—the miracle of the spark of the Spirit leaping from the outstretched finger of the Creator to the man. Without that spark he would remain a creature of the soil, an earthbound clod. He might be a *higher* kind of creature—for this man is beautiful even before he becomes a man!—but he would still be something other than a "man," who can be God's child and partner. Michelangelo portrays as it were the last moment of the "pre-man," the *eubominen*. Not until the next moment does he become man and child, brother and neighbor—an image of God and at the same time one to whom it does not yet appear what he shall be (I John

3:2). For God's dealings with man continue on to the Last Day and beyond it to eternity.

Thomas Carlyle once cried out at a congress of biologists who were discussing the theory of descent or evolution: "Gentlemen, make man a little higher than a tadpole. I hold with the ancient psalmist who said, 'Thou hast made him little less than God'" (Ps. 8:5).

This statement of Carlyle expresses in fine and pregnant form all that we have been saying. For what Carlyle was saying was this: "I have no objection, even as a Christian, to your deriving man from previous animal forms and declaring that the monkey is his grandfather and the tadpole his great-great-grandfather. Why should I? This is something for science to inquire into.

"But I have objections to something else. I object to your saying that therefore the nature of man, that your nature and my nature is like that of a tadpole. No, if you are going to define the mystery of man, if you are going to define what God has in mind for man and what he breathed into him, then you *cannot* say: 'He is only a little more than a tadpole.' *Then* you must say: 'He is little less than God.' In other words, you cannot define man on the basis of his biological origin; you must define him in the light of his destiny, his goal.

"Actually, you must enter upon another level. The mystery of man can be understood only if you put him into relation to Him who gives him his life, calls him by his name, sacrifices His most beloved for him on Calvary, and never rests until He has drubbed him out of his alienation, his madness, his fear, and his guilt and brought him back home to His peace."

When Luther spoke of this deepest and most comforting determination of our life, he was fond of calling it the "alien dignity" of man. This dignity does not rest upon his "own" human qualities, but rather upon the relationship with which God dignifies him. He makes him His partner, He addresses him, He allows him to deal with Him. This dignity is not an attribute of man, something he has *inside* him, but rather something that comes to him from the *outside*.

In closing, I should like to try and set forth in even simpler terms what Luther meant when he spoke of man's alien dignity.

We are all familiar with those Gothic pictures in which we see a face painted against a background of gold. The background represents heaven, the glory of God; and a reflection of this glory suffuses the human face. The painters therefore do not express the uniqueness of man by means of a portrait with strong character, something that a better photograph can give even to a wheyface with the help of a few lighting effects. No, here the greatness and the mystery of man is portrayed through the *relationship* of his life: this life is related to the glory of God.

We are also familiar with the ancient symbol in which the world is represented as a golden orb in the hand of the Lord. And here again the intention was not to say that the world is golden and we must think of it optimistically. It was not meant to express anything in the nature of an "attribute of the world." For these men were well aware of the miseries and the seas of blood and tears upon this earth. Rather they were saying: "No matter how hard life may and how cruel the world, it nevertheless rests in the hand of the Lord; it is related to the providence and the gracious goals of God. Therefore, with all its dubious elements, it shimmers with the glow of gold."

And finally, I am reminded of what Gorch Fock, that seaman in the First World War, wrote in a letter to his family: "If you should hear that I have fallen, do not weep! Remember that even the deepest ocean in which my body sinks in death is only a pool in the hand of my Savior." Gorch Fock knew what a cruel thing it is to drown and be strangled in the dark, cold vortex of the sea. But he also knew where he was going as he sank. He knew the ever-present loving hand that would catch him. Even that which is dark and murderous cannot be outside the jurisdiction of that hand.

So everywhere we are determined and defined by Him who breathed into us his breath and called us by our name. And when all grows silent and empty about us, when we are restless

and lost in a gloomy maze, when we cry out in the dark and none seems to answer, let us remember that saying of Pascal: "I would not seek thee, O God, if thou hadst not already found me. Even my restlessness and my longing show me that thou art at work upon me." Or we can pray: "If in the madness of my passion and the wild commotion of my life I forget thee, do not thou forget me."

God is always greater than our faith, because the breath of his Spirit is stronger than the dust of the earth. And with this certitude one can live. Truly this is something you *can* live by. If I know this, then I know the theme, the point of my life; then my life can succeed.

7

The Meaning and Order of the Sexes

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." So out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man."

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.

G

—Genesis 1:26-28, 2:18-24

A concern for man has become something fashionable. At every anniversary celebration observed by a business organization it is definitely stated at the climax of the main address that in the last analysis the only thing that counts is not volume of production or profits but rather human beings. Even the technologists and atomic physicists tell us that man and not technological progress must be the chief concern of our time. Atomic power should serve man, instead of dominating and delivering him over to fear. Always we talk about "man." Who is this "man" anyway?

It is noteworthy that in the Bible this term "man" hardly occurs at all. Perhaps because it is far too general and weak. It is a distillate which is extracted in philosophical retorts. In the Bible, however, man almost always occurs as a special case.

Here there are rich and poor men, frightened and self-assertive men, masters and servants, old and young, men and women. And each of them has his special talents with which he must face life. But each one also has his special sins which rob him of peace with God in his particular situation. The poor man threatens to collapse because social injustice and the superabundance of his cares alienate him from God. Job, the afflicted, pours out his woe before God and cannot understand why he is so unfair to the devout, why he deceives and cheats them while the godless scoffers whose bodies are "sound and sleek" are given a place in the sun (cf. Ps. 73:3 ff.). But the rich and powerful too have their special peril: Mammon threatens to become their god; great lords easily forget that they too have a Lord and that he will not be mocked.

So the Bible presents only a vivid abundance of highly diverse, individual men, each of them with his own individual destiny with God; therefore each one of them also dies his own individual death. One who is old and full of days dies his death differently from one who is young and is summoned away in the midst of his hunger for life. Herod, who was eaten by worms, dies differently from Moses, who was still permitted to see the Promised Land from afar as he died upon Mount Horeb.

Now I find it tremendously comforting that the Bible does not speak of "man" and "sin" and "death" in general, abstract terms, but deals with them always as special cases which are taut and pulsing with life. And I find it comforting and fine and significant because this makes it clear that everywhere in our life, even in the remotest corners (the place where we work, our bedroom, our business trips, the night club, at a concert, or watching television), we are confronted with the presence of God. There is no corner or curve on our journey through life, no stage in our life story, in which God is not there, confronting us with the question whether we belong to him here and now, whether we are willing to obey him and grant him our trust here and now.

It is therefore certainly important that right at the beginning, when man is spoken of for the first time, the Bible does not speak of "man" but of a man, a particular, special man. God created him male and female, or more precisely, as man and woman. There is no such thing as a human being apart from a man or a woman.

This is far more than a matter of mere biological difference. Obviously, the polarity of the sexes affects all of the ultimate mysteries of life. It cannot be ignored in either the spiritual or the secular realm. We must realize, therefore, how far-reaching and consequential is the fact that here the Bible does not speak first of the creation of man in general and then *afterwards* of the difference between the sexes, but rather from the very outset speaks of man only in the framework of the polarity of the sexes.

Today let us do some thinking together on this mystery of the sexes. Besides hunger and the lust for power there is nothing that so fills our life and impels, torments, and delights us as does the mystery of our sexuality.

I should like to start out with a way of approaching the question which I believe affects every one of us, but naturally *young* people above all.

Every one of us, if he is not utterly dull and stupid, has at some time or other asked himself the question: "How can I gain

the greatest satisfaction in my life? How can I achieve my greatest development and get the maximum from my potentialities?"

This question by no means applies only to our vocation in which we want to get as far as possible. It also applies to what we may generally call "human happiness." Then we would put the question this way: "How can I attain the greatest wealth of experience, the greatest happiness in sex and love, the greatest fulfilment of body and mind in my life?" "How can I," asks Françoise Sagan (the young French novelist who has in many respects become the spokesman of our skeptical youth), "how can I find freedom from satiety and boredom? How can I become deeply 'engaged' to the fullest? How can I participate in something with every fiber of my being, be filled and brought to ecstasy by something?"

Now, for me it is of utmost importance to make it absolutely clear that it is gravely wrong to put the question in this way. The basic question which we all address to life: "How can I be happy and find fulfilment?" is really a question put the wrong way around. Why?

This question emanates from the assumption that I am alone in the world. I conceive of myself, so to speak, as an organism or—to speak in Goethean terms—"as a molded form" which is supposed to develop in a living way and be brought to the fullest possible development. Naturally, I am generally not conscious of this. But even unconscious presuppositions are capable of exercising power over my life. Now, over against this view of things, which is inherent in us all, our text presents this word of the Creator: "It is not good that the man should be alone." It is not good, therefore, that he should be a self-contained organism which proceeds to develop itself; he must rather have a *vis-à-vis*, a partner, a companion, a thou.

And here the text touches upon one of the fundamental mysteries of our life.

That is to say, it is a remarkable fact—and this has become

my personal conviction, confirmed at every step of the way by life itself—that I do *not* attain the greatest possible development of my personality when I consciously try to develop myself, when I am constantly considering: "where will I have the best chance to live to the fullest? How can I gain prestige in society? Where can I reach the maximum of accomplishment and where can I experience the greatest pleasure?" On the contrary, I arrive at this fulfilment of my personality and my life as a whole only when I do not think about it at all, but rather when I forget myself and devote myself to something else, to another person or to a task, in short, when I serve and love and in both do not think about myself at all.

I have often asked myself what actually happens when two people love each other. When another person enters into my life am I, as it were, thrown off the track—like a billiard ball which collides with another and thus must change its course? Am I *remolded*? Or is it my real nature which is brought out?

I once knew two elderly ladies who were sisters. One of them was the mother of a family who seemed to have 'within her all the fulness of life. She had poured out her life in service to her family and sacrificed herself for them, but in the process she had become a vivid, vital person who had developed all that was in her to an amazing extent. Her sister, on the other hand, was a highly cultivated old spinster, who all her life had thought of nothing but the development of her personality and had absorbed all the benefits of culture she could obtain. And it was she, the very person who wanted to develop herself and made her personality an end in itself, who seemed dried up and one-sided compared with the other who had forgotten herself and lived for others.

Now, I do not mean at all to say, and I want to emphasize this expressly, that this formation of my own personality is possible only within marriage. Life presents such a wealth of possibilities to love, serve, and suffer with other people that even the person who lives his life without a married partner is given

the same opportunity to find and fulfil himself in devotion to others. Marriage, to which the text refers, constitutes only a kind of model for the fulfilment of love in our life. So even the person who lives a single life can find his orientation in this text.

The point is that there are things in life—and one of them is the fulfilment of one's personality—which cannot be attained by going after them directly, but which come to us, as it were, incidentally, really as "byproducts." Only the person who loves and does not think of himself actually finds himself; and inversely, the person who seeks himself is always cheated.

Jesus was pointing to this remarkable secret of our life when he said: "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well." This means, surely, that one who is really, seriously, and basically concerned about God is given everything else besides. To him God gives bread and friends, opens doors in his vocation, and showers upon him the abundance of life. The man who pursues his task in self-forgetfulness, who, disregarding loss, serves and is lovingly close to those whom God has given him to be his neighbors, that man receives joys, merriments, and riches which he never would have found if he had sought for them directly and with egotistic desire. Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever gives it away and does not seek himself and his life is precisely the one who finds himself—and along with it the beautiful in life, indeed, the interesting and attractive in life. God always bestows the greatest things incidentally. This we must bear in mind.

I should say that this is meant to show itself in the very way in which we live our lives. The person who gets up in the morning with the thought in his mind: "How can I make as much money as possible today; what can I do to promote my career, my security, my vitality?"—and then, incidentally, says to himself: "Later when I have achieved it all, I'll take time to be religious (and donate a large contribution to charity)"—I say that the person who thinks in this way has set up a false calcu-

lation from the very outset. He is the very person who will *not* find the fulfilment of his life. And even in the prospective happy ending of his life, the planned rendezvous with God in the green pastures of satiety he will be the one who is fooled. When God is not the first, the primary thing in our life he vanishes altogether—"Dieu se retire, God withdraws," said Leon Bloy—or we are aware of him only as a kind of spectral restlessness that keeps invading our life from its margins.

That's why I think that we must begin the day with him (simply because the most important things, the scheduled things belong at the top), that we must commit to him everything we have to deal with today: our marriage, our children, the people we have to associate with and work with, and our sick and lonely neighbor who needs our help.

In any case, we hold on to this: only those who do not seek themselves find themselves. Only those who love quite simply and do not think of themselves also attain the fullness of their own lives. God gives the best things with his left hand; "he gives to his beloved in sleep."

This fact that the best things in life cannot be sought for but are given also becomes clear in the command that is given to *marriage*. That command says: "Be fruitful and multiply." And that at once warns us away from the cult of our own personality and also the cult of seeking happiness just for two.

How many marriages are begun with both parties saying to each other: "We want to live out our love for each other. We want to arrange our life for work and vacations, for being at home and going on trips. We love nature and music and we are going to build a love nest. And children would only be a burden to us. If we had them, as far as time is concerned and financially too, there would be too many things we could not do that would enrich our life."

There are also not a few who say—and this they call rational marriage—"We are going to have a community of interests. We believe in marrying for money and keeping it in the family; we

hope to make the most profit from this financial and business alliance."

And now the Bible tells us that both—the people who cherish this idyl of love *and* those who make a shrewd business proposition of marriage—are simply satisfying themselves and are therefore not entering into marriage but sidestepping it. In other words, marriage does not exist only for its own sake; it also exists for the sake of children. And here again the same thing applies in marriage as applies to the individual.

The love of two persons who live their lives together never reaches its fulfillment when the two make their companionship an end in itself and are completely taken up with each other, whether it be erotically or economically. It fulfils itself and is filled with pulsing life only as it is faithful to the command of creation and pours itself out in the service of children.

Naturally, there are situations—brought about by shortage of living quarters, illness, or financial stringencies—in which one must wait to have children. There are also not a few cases in which this blessing is denied to us altogether, and then God sends other fulfillments to his own. (For he is always the Giver, the one who pours himself out, and we need only to find packages addressed specifically to us and meant for our situation.)

But when young people, to whom the talent of possible parenthood is entrusted, assert their self-will contrary to the purpose of creation and heedlessly or even on principle renounce the blessing of procreation, then in time even their inner relationship to each other will be injured. Even this inner relationship to one's life partner cannot be desired as an end in itself. It too is bestowed upon us only incidentally; it is "added unto us." All parents know this who have accepted their children as "dew from the dawn," as Luther's translation so beautifully puts it. This dew has also refreshed their own relationship and matured it to fulfillments they never anticipated in their youthful dreams of love.

Our story touches upon still another mystery. The parabolic

reference to Eve's being created from the rib of the man points to the fact that they belong together, that one is a part of the other and both are a unity. "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh," Adam cries out. Between the lines one senses something like the wonder of recognition: "Here is my *alter ego*, my other self." And the fact that it really is a wonder, a mystery, is indicated by the text in its reference to the fact that God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep. How it comes about that two persons are created for each other—that such a thing should even occur!—is concealed by the wings of mystery, this cannot be seen by human eyes and can be spoken of only in a parable.

In any case, the biblical text here gives us to understand that in our life we are not only joined to our particular neighbor as such, the associate who needs a good word from me, the woman beside me in the trolley who is tired of standing, and the youngster in my class who is having trouble with something—but that he quite specifically gives to me *one* person who is good for me and for whom I likewise have a purpose to fulfil, and therefore a person who is in fact something like my other half and whom he has appointed precisely for *me*.

And here we must listen very carefully; otherwise we shall not get the point. God has given me a *human being*, not merely someone who performs the *function* of a human being. So in marriage it is not merely a matter of another person's performing certain functions for me, perhaps the function of erotic satisfaction or physical intercourse, or perhaps also merely the function of providing for me as a money-earner, or of acting as a contributing honorary member of my family or—from the husband's point of view—of furnishing a cheap housekeeper. If the other person is only good for performing such functions for me, then I really have no fellowship with him of the kind that God wants. And then too, he is "finished" as far as I am concerned as soon as he can no longer perform his functions.

How many marriages there are which end in divorce for this

very reason, because the other person has become unattractive to me and his erotic "function" no longer clicks. Then I look for a younger partner who can better perform the function.

God does not will that this should be so and he binds me to the *person*, not merely to his functions. This is clearly expressed in the ancient order for marriage, for in the vows it employs the words: "till death us do part."

Now, I can be willing to belong to another person till death—and therefore not allow myself to be separated from him by any period of separation, any stroke of illness no matter how severe, any other infatuation or even deeper engagement of the heart—*only* if I accept him as *himself* and not merely something *in* him. God has committed to me another *person*; he has lent to me something that belongs to him. "God gave you to me," said Matthias Claudius, "no other hand pours out such blessings."

But perhaps for us moderns, particularly when we are relentlessly honest with ourselves, this message sounds like something from the remote past. Isn't it true that we think that life is far more complicated than it appears to be in these simple lines of an ancient but perhaps naïve story?

Is there any certainty at all that this particular man or this particular woman is the only possible choice given to me by God? Is this so sure after all? If man must not put asunder what God has joined together—yes, but *was* it God who joined them together or was it not all too often just two deluded persons, who for a moment were filled with a lot of airy dreams and thought they were Romeo and Juliet, but after a short time simply choked with boredom and disgust whenever they looked at each other? "Marriage reminds me of a sugarplum," said Matthias Claudius in one of his letters to Andy. "At first it tastes sweet, and people think it will go on that way for ever. But the bit of sugar is soon licked off and then inside, for most of them, there comes a piece of rhubarb—then they pull a long face."

But even if there are not such rude disillusionments, are there

not in almost every fateful relationship between two people moments when the question arises whether I should not have made a different choice, and thus whether the other person is really the hundred-per-cent complement for me, the flesh of my flesh of which this simile of the rib speaks.

In my lifetime I have learned to know many troubled marriages. Perhaps the crisis arose only because—and this is definitely not the most trivial situation!—the mildew of boredom and jaded monotony has settled down upon a relationship which began with gushing protestations like, "Every thought I have is of you, dear." For now they know each other, there is nothing new to say, and the enchantment ends in banality.

Or perhaps the crisis may come because another fascinating person crosses our path and sets to ringing sides of our personality which we never knew were in us. And then the question always arises: "Was it really true in my case—what according to this ancient story ought to be true—that I was assigned by a higher hand to the one person who really is suited for me? Or when I chose him back there did I make a wrong turn and am I now doomed to travel for the rest of my life in a direction which is alien to me and which leads me farther and farther away from my real self and all the fulfillments I dreamed I would have?"

Now, this question cannot be dismissed with a wave of the hand or with a cheap pious consolation. The preacher who has nothing more to say on this subject than the fact that he is "against sin" is undoubtedly taking the easy way out. Nevertheless, when I make two brief comments on this human difficulty and allow myself to be guided by the healing power of what Jesus Christ has taught us about love, I do so because I am convinced of one thing, and that is that nobody who is caught in this difficulty and does not know whether he should find his way back or be divorced, dares to ignore these two thoughts. One way or another he will get it all wrong if he does not face them.

The first thought is this: It is in any case utterly foolish to brood over the question whether the other person is the one conceivable partner for me. Perhaps I *really* could have married another man or another woman! That this particular person is the only person for me is not the thing which creates the foundation of marriage. It is the other way around: it is marriage that makes him or her the only one for me. Let me give the reason for this briefly.

Now that God has brought me together with this other person I have a life and a history with him. The other person has revealed to me his secret in his psycho-physical wholeness. We have gone through many trials and vicissitudes together. Perhaps we have been refugees together. Perhaps we have been hungry together, been homesick for each other in long years of military service, built up an existence for ourselves together, seen our very being reproduced anew in our children—and so put our stamp upon each other, each has become a part of the other. Has *become!* We no longer are what we were in the beginning; we each bear the mark of the other.

This is what I meant when I said: That the other person is the only person for me is not the thing which creates the foundation of marriage; it is rather the other way around. For this uniqueness of the other person, this unrepeatable belonging together, this business of your being cut out for me is not all something that is there beforehand. Rather we *become* unique and irreplaceable for each other only when God brings us together, gives us a life and a history together, and blesses us, if we will only trust him and watch for his directions. Anybody who does not trust that in everything God works for good with those who love him, and that his life partner is also included in this plan for his good is a poor wight indeed. For then there is nothing left but to try to puzzle out with his reason whether or not he has caught the right man or the right woman. (I say "caught" intentionally, because he is delivered over to chance or his own dubious calculations and now he must constantly compare his partner with

others, incessantly comparing and never getting away from his uncertainty and his everlasting testing.)

And then the second thought. It is the more important and serious of the two.

In order to determine whether my life partner is really the right one for me, I would have to be able to ascertain objectively—in a clinical diagnosis as it were—who or what this other person is, and besides this, who or what I am, in order to compute by exact calculation whether we best complement each other.

I should think that one would need to go through this experiment of thought only once to find out how absurd it is. And if we stop and think why it is so absurd, and why it will not work, we shall discover a profound spiritual secret.

I once knew a very old married couple who radiated a tremendous happiness. The wife especially, who was almost unable to move because of old age and illness and in whose kind old face the joys and sufferings of many years had etched a hundred runes, was filled with such gratitude for life that I was touched to the quick. Involuntarily I asked myself what could possibly be the source of this kindly old person's radiance. Otherwise they were very common people and their room indicated only the most modest comfort. But suddenly I knew where it all came from, for I saw these two speaking to each other and their eyes hanging upon each other. All at once it became clear to me that this woman was dearly loved. And it was as if she were like a stone that has been lying in the sun for years and years, absorbing all its radiant warmth, and now was reflecting back cheerfulness and warmth and serenity.

Let me express it this way. It was not because she was this kind of a cheerful and pleasant person that she was loved by her husband all those years. It was probably the other way around. Because she was so loved, she became the person I now saw before me.

This thought continued to pursue me and the more it pursued me the more it lost all its merely edifying and sentimental fea-

tures, until finally they were gone altogether. For if this is true, then I surely must come to the following conclusion. If my life partner or my friend or just people generally often seem to be so strange and I ask myself: "Have I made the right marriage, the right friendship; is this particular person really the one who is suited to me?"—then I cannot answer this question in the style of a neutral diagnosis which would list the reasons for and against. For what happens then is that the question turns back upon myself, and then it reads: "Have I perhaps bestowed too little love upon this other person, that he has become so cold and empty? Have I perhaps caused him to become what perhaps he really has become? The other person, whom God has joined to me, is never what he is apart from me. *He is not only bone of my bone; he is also boredom of my boredom and lovelessness of my lovelessness.*"

And it is exactly the same with our relation to God. If a person is steeped in emptiness and boredom and is tired of life, the reason for it is that he has not allowed himself to be loved by God and has not put himself in his hands. One who does not love makes the other person wither and dry up. And one who does not allow himself to be loved dries up too. For love is a creative thing.

Perhaps it may really be hard to love another person because we have become estranged and an oppressive coolness has settled down upon our relationship. But then we should remember that love never waits until the other person has *become* worthy of love, but that love which is ventured (expressed perhaps through some little, diffident sign, a flower, or a look) is creative and awakens the other person to something that we have long since failed to perceive with our appraising minds and no longer counted upon at all.

After all, God did not wait until we were worthy of his love. He loved us long *before*; he ventured his love upon us (Eph. 2:11-13). Did Jesus love the publicans, the harlots, the beggars, and the lepers because they were so attractive? No, they were in

great darkness, withering and dying in their utter inadequacy. But then the glance of the Lord fell upon them and they were touched by a ray of his love. That's how they became new persons. It was the creative, the resurrective power of love that wrenched them out of nothingness and for the first time in their lives made something of them.

The other person is waiting for my love, for the creative breath which God has entrusted to me too. And only as I love with that creative breath will I learn what the other person is at all. Otherwise he remains an undeveloped negative and I have no idea what image lurks within him. Perhaps I have never yet realized who it is that walks beside me. The other person is what my love makes of him. For we too are what God's love makes of *us*.

How Evil Came into the World

THE STORY OF THE FALL: PART ONE

Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; But God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.

—*Genesis 3:1-7*

I still have a vivid memory of one night during the war. On a height near Stuttgart there were some twenty boys from a Latin school manning an antiaircraft battery. They were anxious to have me come and give them religious instruction. But since this was prohibited and their request was not granted, they went on to a higher commanding officer and finally, by their spirit and persistence, secured his permission. So I walked out

to visit them regularly and we sat down among the guns and talked about the "last things."

But on this occasion they had called me for another reason. Their position had been hit by a low-level attack and the father of one of the boys, who happened to be visiting, was killed while his boy was manning the gun.

The boy carried his dead father away in a wheeled stretcher. The youngsters—for that's all they were—crowded around me deeply shocked, almost like chicks around a hen. They were completely broken up and they looked to someone older for protection from a world whose dark enigma had suddenly leaped upon them for the first time. I spoke some words of comfort to them, though I myself felt utterly helpless.

But then the thing happened that accounts for my relating this incident at all. On my way home the moonlight lay upon the quiet valley, the white flowers of the trees shimmered in this soft light, and an unspeakable peace and stillness rested upon the landscape. The world was "like some quiet room, where wrapt in still soft gloom, we sleep away the daylight's sorrow."¹

I mention this, not to be romantic or to gain a sentimental effect, but rather because for me this hour was a parable of the dark threshold which, the account of the Fall says, man has crossed. Before me lay the seemingly whole and healthy world of a springtime night. But in that moment its very peace was like a stab of pain. For I knew that the peace of nature is delusive, and that I had just spoken, encompassed by a sea of blossoms, with boys whose eyes were filled with dread even though they bravely swallowed their tears.

No, this world was not sound and whole, because man had invaded it with his murderous instruments and despoiled it of its peace. And will it not grow even worse? How long will men be able to refresh themselves by looking at the starry heavens and their majestic calm? Will man disturb even *this* peace with his space ships and cosmic spies?

¹ The lines are from Matthias Claudius' poem, "The moon hath risen on high," translated by Catherine Winkworth. (Trans.)

The story we shall discuss today shows us how from this *one* point in the world—where man stands—evil streams out like an icy breath into the world, into a world that once was sound and whole, a world over which there rang the joy of the Creator: "Behold, it was very good; behold, it is very good."

That wonderful serenity of the first man under God that rings out in Joseph Haydn's radiant duets between Adam and Eve is suddenly ended. Their frank and open candor is shattered. Now they have something to hide, and they hastily make themselves aprons. And when they hear the voice of God as he walks through the garden, they go into hiding like culprits caught by surprise and with palpitating hearts watch to see what will happen.

We can only stand in amazement at this age-old story, for it summarizes in exemplary fashion what we see happening all around us and especially within ourselves. Surely all of us feel as I must confess I do when I hear these words. At first, as an intellectual living in the atomic age, one is inclined to take offense at many of the *mythical* features of this story—for example, the idea of a serpent that can speak. *But* scarcely has this skepticism begun to stir than we are so compelled to listen to *what* the serpent says that the feeble protest of our intellect is simply thrust aside.

Do not all of us know certain scenes in our lives that recur in this story of a temptation? Is it not something like a concentrate of the whole art of temptation? How can one capture in a few pages the great profusion of shapes conveyed in this story?

So I can do nothing else but deal with it several times, in order that in this way we may slowly work our way to the arch-question of all mankind—the question that even fourteen-year-olds ask and that still pursues people in their old age: the question of how evil came into the world.²

And the first thing that strikes us is this. The drama of temptation, which now begins and puts a sudden end to the vision of a

² The theme of this chapter is resumed in Chapter 11, "Guilt and Destiny."

sound and healthy world, begins not with the crash of the kettle drum but rather with the sound of oboes. One might even say that it has in it hymn-like motifs.

The overture of this dialogue is thoroughly pious, and the serpent introduces himself as a completely serious and religious beast. He does not say: "I am an atheistic monster and now I am going to take your paradise, your innocence and loyalty, and turn it all upside down." Instead he says: "Children, today we're going to talk about religion, we're going to discuss the ultimate things."

Well, something like that immediately inspires confidence. After all, blackguards and rascals do not dabble in such topics. When you talk about pious things you immediately secure for yourself the alibi of serious-mindedness and sincerity.

So he begins by asking, "Did God—this God whom we all revere; even I, the serpent, honor him dearly—did our revered God say that you should not eat of any tree of the garden?"

In other words, the serpent is trying to start a discussion, something like a theological discussion about the "Word of God." So there is not a trace of doubt—oh, no! The devil himself believes in God. He takes his stand on the fact of "God."

In any case, he seems always to plan his tactics from this quarter. The Tempter in the wilderness too did not say to Jesus Christ: "You are a fool to obey your heavenly Father." He too cited nothing but Scripture passages and pious sayings when he urged Him to make bread of stones, leap from the pinnacle of the temple, and accept the kingdoms of this world from his, the devil's, hand. The devil acts more pious than a nun and knows his Bible better than a professor of the Old Testament or a Jehovah's Witness. This reptile would even lift his eyes devoutly to heaven, if he had the eyelids to do it with.

So this is the first point that we must note here: the Tempter always operates in disguise. He hides behind a mask of harmless, indeed, pious benevolence. All temptations in life begin in

sugared form. "The people never know the devil's there, even though he has them by the throat," says Mephistopheles in *Faust*.

Recently, I made an interesting experiment in this respect. My students performed volunteer service for several weeks in a camp for refugees from the East, and almost every day they put on a Punch-and-Judy show for the children. It was the greatest attraction in the camp. The hall would have had to have rubber walls to accommodate the crowds of eager children who came. It was my job to play the devil. I wielded a horrible, fiery red puppet in one hand and mustered up a menacing and horrible voice to represent all the terrible discords of hell. Then in tones brimming with sulphur I advised the children to indulge in every conceivable naughtiness: You never need to wash your feet at night; you can stick your tongue out at anybody you want to; and be sure to drop banana skins on the street so people will slip on them.

Now perhaps some worthy parents will be horrified by the fact that I relate this so openly. They may wonder privately how this man can act so unpedagogically and even talk about it publicly. But this is the remarkable thing—and this observation really does have a bearing on the exposition of our story!—the pedagogical results which I achieved in this role of the devil were enormous and generally recognized in the camp. The children suddenly stopped sticking out their tongues and they also washed their feet at night. They actually shouted me down with ear-splitting protests when I handed out my wicked suggestions. They would have absolutely no truck with the devil. If they had had anything to say about it, the Fall would never have happened. But then, too, the serpent in paradise could not have been the kind of devil that I was. For then he would have had to play the game openly, as I did. For in our Punch-and-Judy show there was *one* decisive point at which I was actually different from the serpent that spoke in paradise: right from the start I let it be known by my mask and my voice that I was the devil

Hence my seductions could never succeed; on the contrary they turned out to be positively productive as a pedagogical device.

The fact is that man wants no truck with the devil, any more than did the children in the refugee camp. Adam and Eve, you and I, undoubtedly plump for the good. In other words, no man really *wants* to be evil. I have often talked with hardened criminals in prison cells, but I have yet to find a single one who *wanted* to be bad. But many of them did say something like this: "When I committed that robbery or theft, or murder, I didn't think it was wrong at all. In any case, it never entered my mind. The old man I struck down wasn't an old 'man' to me at all; he was merely the anonymous possessor of a fat pocketbook. He was a guy living off the fat of the land and I was hungry. He may have seemed to me to be an abscess on the body of society, a profiteer enjoying his plunder, while I had strength and vitality that never had a chance to develop on the shady side of life." Dostoevski's Raskolnikov had the same kind of thoughts when he murdered the old moneylender. He, too, had no desire to be "evil."

Therefore it is really true that the decisive point in this story is the fact that the devil does not declare himself. He presents himself as a representative of the good, even as the advocate of God. The serpent in paradise is a good and faithful beast, an accepted member of the divine household.

So here we have made plain for us the first law of all temptation. And as I now proceed briefly to characterize this law, I ask one of us to visualize certain situations in his life in which this law operated in his own personal history.

The Tempter never whispers to us, "Come on, I'll teach you a sin." If he tempted us in this way, we would immediately recoil and feel that we had to declare ourselves. For, as we have said, we are not so depraved that we *want* to do evil!

Instead he says to us (if he is out to tempt us in the area of sex, for example), "Come on, I want to give you a fascinating

experience. You have no idea of what life has to offer. Do you want to miss the best, the most exciting things in life?"

Here again we note this effort to strike a pious, soulful pose. And the Tempter adds perhaps, "Surely God doesn't want you to miss anything in your life. He wants you to avail yourself of all the potentialities with which the great Creator endowed your body. After all, wasn't it God who put this passion into your veins?"

Well, after all this is something that can be discussed! Actually, we *must* discuss it. And talk and discussion is the first point in the serpent's program. The Tempter is a spirit of discussion.

When he sets out to alienate young people from confirmation over there in the East Zone and tempt them to participate in *Jugendweibe*,³ he does *not* say, "My whole satanic heart yearns to make you renounce the faith of your fathers, to soften you up, and make you a disloyal turncoat." Oh, no, the devil does not put on this red, satanic mask. He turns on the soft soap and warbles with a gentle voice, "My child, *Jugendweibe* is a purely political act; it has nothing to do with religion. We'll discuss it sometime and you'll see how tolerant I am; you'll see that I have no intention of taking away your faith and that I mean well with you. I am so eager—just because I love humanity!—to see you get ahead in your profession, to see that you get some higher education or some good trade. And, after all, you *can't* have all this, if you belong to the church. I only have your best welfare at heart...."

So, with the most friendly and ingenuous words in the world, he invites us to step on a trap door that looks like a parqueted floor. And not until much later do we realize that we have stepped into a trap that pitches us into a bottomless pit.

Just so harmlessly does temptation begin. It starts with the fact of "God." "Did God really say, 'You shall love your neigh-

³ *Jugendweibe* is a ceremony instituted by the German Democratic Republic in which fourteen-year-olds pledge their loyalty to communist socialism, a measure obviously adopted to break down the church's practice of confirmation. (Trans.)

bor? But tell me, who really *is* your neighbor?" You can discuss that question for a long time, and the Tempter knows that as long as you keep making a problem of it and talk it to pieces, you will never lift a finger for your neighbor.⁴

"Did God really say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'" "My dear people," says the serpent, "I certainly do not want you to start doubting God. Oh, no! Just stop and reflect for a moment—not by way of *opposition* to God, but in the *Name* of God—whether he *could* have said anything like that at all! After all, it would certainly be 'undivine' of him to forbid you to eat of these trees! Do you think that God is so narrow-minded and wrongheaded that he would not let you get near these unusually wonderful products of his creation in the midst of the garden? Is he the kind of God who does nothing but set up barriers, put on bridles, and post prohibitory signs? Does it take me, the serpent, to explain to you that God is a God of the unlimited abundance of life? Why should anything that he himself made be bad and forbidden?"

And he goes on to say, "Did God forbid you to live your life to the full and use all your instincts? Do you really think God would be so prim and pedantic? After all he created you and your vitality the way it is. So everything *you* do is covered by the Creator!"

The serpent goes on talking, with all kinds of variations:

"Perhaps you are a man who has machines, bank accounts, and influence at your disposal. It tickles you to make a regular cult of your social prestige, to have people bowing and scraping before you, and to make a big splurge. Don't worry, as a serpent I have a few soothing words to say to you too." Then, not without a few guttural heart tones in his voice, he goes on to say, "Did God forbid you to think about yourself once in a while instead of your neighbor? Do you think he really demands that you limit your opulent banquets and possibly even lose a

⁴ Compare the exposition of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) in Thielicke, *The Waiting Father*, pp. 158-69.

little weight just to contribute your hard-earned pennies to the hungry children in far-off India or the refugee camps in Europe? Nonsense, my good man, don't burden your conscience with such moral crotchets! After all, who gave you what you have? Wasn't it providence that blessed you with business opportunities and economic miracles? Didn't you hump yourself and work hard for it too?" And then another oily quotation from the Bible comes from the lips of this old serpent: "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain." So in the name of the Bible, stuff all you can in your own mouth first. The ox comes first, says God, and you can be the ox!

So this is the *first* idea that the serpent insinuates into our hearts with all the arts of suggestion. God is different from what you think. He is not at all a narrow-minded, moralistic God who is always getting in your way. Rather he is the God of life, the God of abundance. Take everything you can get, for God is handing it out to you. Act according to the laws of life, even when they are cruel, for God made life. Take advantage of the rights of the stronger, for God is always on the side that has the heaviest artillery. Keep shoving down and climbing up; that's the way to get ahead. After all, that's what this life God created looks like! Take away the hidden irony of that famous song of Bert Brecht's and make it the principle of your life: "If anybody does the trampling, it's me; and if anybody gets trampled, it's going to be you." *C'est la vie*—life is like that—and that's probably what he who made it is like too.

It is quite apparent that the serpent has well-reasoned arguments. He is far too subtle to appeal only to the baser instincts. His ambition is not to persuade but to convince.

And yet we have not even touched upon the shrewdest point in this temptation. The serpent not only does not suggest to Eve that she rebel against God; he actually gives her the chance to champion God and break a lance for him, as it were, to become religiously active. The serpent actually fires Eve's piety; he activates her belief in God.

"Did God say, 'You shall not eat of the trees of the garden?'" So runs the question with which the serpent introduces this pious exercise.

"No," says Eve, thus becoming God's defender, "he did not forbid that at all. He even permitted a great deal and gave us a lot of choice. We are allowed—most generously!—to eat of all the trees in the garden. God excepted only the *one* tree in the midst of the garden; we're not even supposed to touch that one."

Now, this is really a pious conversation. One must be capable of distinguishing precisely between spirits in order to catch here certain undertones and see certain traps being laid.

Now, let us pause for a moment in our endeavor to recognize the strategic principles of temptation, and try to understand what God means by forbidding men even to touch the tree in the midst of the garden.

When God forbids men even to come in contact with this tree, he obviously means: "Don't even come close to it! Keep your distance from it!" In other words: "Don't even put yourself in this tempting *situation*!"

Significantly, the Lord's Prayer teaches us the petition: "Lead us not into temptation; do not even allow us to get into the critical situation in the first place." Significantly, the petition does not read: "Lead us *out* of temptation" (once we are in it); but rather, "Lead us not *into* temptation." Once we are near the tree, our pulse begins to stir, curiosity flares up, and passions are aroused. In such a situation our ability to make decisions is paralyzed.

That's why so much depends upon our not beginning to pray after temptation has already come, when rebellion is already raging within us. Nowhere are we promised that we can pray at all in that situation. Therefore everything depends upon our beginning to pray when we are still sober and prudent, at the beginning of the day therefore, before we are caught in the toils of our own passions and the day's transactions, when the day still

lies ahead of us and our wishes and desires have not yet become the father of our thoughts.

Many of us who do not know how to pray and yet yearn to know ought to try this sometime. They should not wait until they have gotten into the high-tension zone of the perilous tree—and how often we are in the range of its radiation every day!—but rather pray in the first and last hours of the day.

In other words, you cannot take everything that has to do with God and squeeze it in just anywhere, accomplishing it by the way and if you happen to be in the mood. We must set aside in a planned way a few minutes for God each day, in which he is our *whole* concern. The person who reads the newspaper and listens to a radio service at the same time, or the person for whom God can be reduced to any old prayer that happens to come out in a bad situation, has heard nothing and said nothing and therefore dare not be surprised if he falls victim to the enchantment of the perilous tree.

I would even go further and say that we should not even touch that tree in our prayers. Let me indicate briefly what I mean.

Generally, we feel an urge to pray at the very time we are troubled by some concern or other: mothers worry about their children, businessmen worry about a slump in the market, politicians about the next election, students about their examinations. Every one of us carries about his burden of worries and cares. And this care can thus become a tree that we should not touch. When Jesus Christ says to us, "Do not be anxious," he is thoroughly aware that he is touching a dark spot in our life. For every care is a vote of no-confidence in God. Every anxiety tends with a serpentine cunning to prevent us from saying confidently: "Who points the clouds their course, Whom winds and seas obey, He shall direct thy wandering feet, He shall prepare thy way."

Now, my point is that even in our prayers this tree of care must be viewed only from a distance. We dare not touch it or handle it. I have repeatedly observed in myself and also in others

that when we come too close to the tree of care it grows overlarge and dominates even our prayers. Then even our prayers become a means by which we get pinned down in our cares.

During the war I saw this illustrated repeatedly in the panicky prayers uttered in the air-raid shelters. Not infrequently, while the bombs were crashing down, even those who otherwise were never accustomed to pray would suddenly send up ejaculations of prayer to heaven. But basically, these prayers were not addressed to God at all. These people were seeing in their imagination only the deadly specter of falling bombs. And after it was all over, the praying stopped. Fundamentally, they were not talking to God at all; they were talking to the bombs.

And this means that we can set down this very important conclusion. In exactly the same way that the Tempter insinuates himself into Eve's pious and edifying thoughts he also sends his partisans—in the form of our cares—into the intimacy of our prayer life. Prayer alone proves nothing. One can pray in a way that is all wrong. As praying persons we can make the same mistake that an unskilled bicycle rider makes when he tries to avoid a collision with a tree. He is so transfixed by fear and care that he runs into it full force.

We learn how we are to pray from Dürer's engraving, "Knight, Death, and the Devil," a picture that I must repeatedly recall to your remembrance. Specters and hideous monsters lurk on the path of this gallant rider. But the knight looks above and beyond them all. Indeed, he cannot see them, for his gaze is fixed upon the castle in the distance which is his home. He is riding toward the castle. And just because he keeps his *goal* in view, he escapes the onslaught of the specters and their temptations. He does not even need to concern himself with them.

I should like to cite as an example a very special case that illustrates how we can get the Tempter out of our prayers.

When a young man is assailed by his unruly passions and if he is really in earnest about winning this battle, it would be a great mistake for him to keep staring at the tempting images in his

imagination and then fight against or even to pray against them. The Tempter is all too willing to get us into wrestling match with our lusts and desires, for then we shall very probably turn out to be the ones who are defeated. And finally, the abhorred fantasies thrust themselves even into our prayer and fill it to the brim. The more we concentrate upon the images of our imagination, even as enemies to be fought, the more they gain power over us.

We must rather combat the temptations in our path in a *positive* way. We must not stare at them with hostility and suspicion. We must rather keep our eyes fixed upon the positive goal, the castle, the home place on the horizon. For the young man this means that he does not pray: "Lord, preserve me from this thing which is almost overwhelming me and tearing me to pieces; thou knowest my accursed passions!" Rather he should pray the other way around, positively: "Lord, I thank thee for the powers thou hast given to me; grant that I may use them in thine honor and for thine ends!"

God is always positive. He gives us nothing that we cannot accept from him with gratitude. As long as we accept it from God's hand, nothing can hurt us.

So now the woman in her conversation with the serpent has mentioned the critical point on which her destiny with God will be decided. It is really only "one point," namely, a single tree, and on that tree, only one apple. God put at man's disposal the whole breadth of his creation: the multitude of plants and animals are at his service, the laws of nature are there to be explored and technologically utilized, and the whole cosmos is offered as his dominion. Only one single spot in all this infinite expanse must remain tabu, inviolable, and reserved to God himself, namely, this one tree. And at this one point the serpent now begins to fire away.

Thus he is actually very careful not to try to tempt Eve with an atheistic suggestion. He does not say: God is an illusion; the only things that are true are what you can see and taste and

touch. He makes only one modest, almost hesitant objection to Eve: After all, this *one* paltry point cannot matter that much! What is this one apple compared with the peaches and melons and strawberries and apricots, to which God has no objections! If you conform to God in 999 points in a thousand and more in the area he has assigned to you, surely, Eve, this one point in a thousand isn't going to upset your peace with God!

But that's the way it is; that's the way it really is—in your life and in mine. The fact is that all of us have sectors in the territory of our life which we are quite content to leave to God. But each of us also has a point which we will by no means let God approach. This point may be my ambition whereby I am determined to beat my way to success in my career at any price. It may be my sexuality to which I am determined to give rein no matter what happens and no matter what it costs. It may be a bottomless hatred toward one of my fellow men which I literally nurse and which gives me a kind of sensual pleasure which then comes between me and God and robs me of my peace. God can have everything, *but not this one thing!*

God can have my unselfish devotion and service. After all, I am an idealist! I will devote myself to a task unreservedly and without regard for loss. I am industrious and active. He can have it all—*except this one thing.*

God can even have my neighborly love. I am good-hearted, I like people, and I wouldn't hurt a fly. He can have my love for my neighbors, that isn't hard for me. He can have everything—*except this one thing.*

Now, the curious thing is that God lets me find him only when I offer to him this one, hardest thing in my life. In other words, God never comes through the door that I hold open for him, but always knocks at the one place which I have walled up with concrete, because I want it for myself alone. But if I do not let him in there, he turns away altogether.

Innumerable uncertainties, doubts, and difficulties, with which we torment ourselves, which rob us of our peace with God and

hopelessly block our ability to pray, do not lie in intellectual difficulties at all. This we only imagine to be true. Has any one of us been bothered during this chapter by the fact that he is unable to imagine a serpent that can speak and think? No, the reason why we can find no peace, the reason why we cannot find God lies at this *one* point in our life, this *one* tree in the midst of the garden, which we refuse to allow to be forbidden.

What is this point in your life and my life?

We ought sometimes to read the story of the temptation of Jesus (Matthew 4) in order to find out. Everything, absolutely everything depends upon finding out what stands between me and God. Something is certainly there. And it is probably only one point, one single tree, one single apple, one single person, one single passion.

But there is something else that stands between us and God. Between him and us stands Jesus Christ. And he stands on *God's* side. It is not we, after all, who are the seekers for God. It is rather God who is seeking us men. And Jesus is the lamp, the "light of the world" by which he seeks for us.

But Jesus Christ also stands on *our* side. He knows what temptation is, for he endured it himself. He knows what death is, for he tasted it himself. He knows all about us. And therefore he is with us, even when the darkness falls all around us.

This is the miracle of the gospel—that we can seek and find God, not in the heights, but in the depths. "I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you," he says.

Between me and every dark and evil temptation stands Jesus Christ.

tions about what comes from the hand of God." (So far God's approval still prevailed above this bright and wholesome world; there were still no dark, disreputable areas in it.) "There is only one point at which God is not to be trifled with," said Eve to the serpent. "We dare not touch the tree in the midst of the garden. There is *one* place where God wants us to realize that we are only men, that though we are like God, we are not equal with God, and that we must be content to remain within these limits, the limits of humanity! He has permitted us everything and given us free choice; except that if we violate this *one* point, if we invade this *one* place that is reserved to God, we shall die."

And hardly has Eve said this when the Tempter abandons his reserve, throws off his disguise, and lays his cards on the table: "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Here the dialogue between the Tempter and man reaches its climax. What has happened?

In these words of the serpent there are two concealed charges which are exploded, as it were, by a time-fuse, at just the right moment.

① The first explosive charge lies in the Tempter's effort to bring Eve to the point where she will not take God seriously. Up to this time she had taken him seriously. She knew that when we are dealing with God we are dealing with life and death, that one can die if one crosses him; then our destiny in time and eternity is at stake.

But now the serpent says to her: "Surely it is sheer nonsense to think that God would let you die and perish utterly just because you don't take him so terribly in earnest, but rather just partly seriously. You will not die. The question of God is not that serious, my dear lady! All honor to your respect for him. I take my hat off to your display of piety, but really now, he's not *that* serious about it!"

This sounds like sympathetic kindness: "Child, you take

10 The Bridgehead of the Tempter

THE STORY OF THE FALL: PART TWO

Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was also given to her husband, and she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.

—Genesis 3:1-7

We remember that the Tempter asked Eve a catch question: "So you dare not eat of any of the beautiful trees here in the garden—God keeps a pretty tight hand upon you, doesn't he?" And Eve, we remember, was quite eager to be God's defender and she answered: "Oh no, God is very generous; we can eat of all the trees in the garden. We can freely enjoy everything that life has to offer. No, my good serpent, we need have no inhibi-

things too hard." Who doesn't like to be told things like this and who isn't receptive when somebody tells him to take it easy!

Sometimes I think there must be countless people who have carried on just such a conversation with the serpent at some time in their lives. They have no intention whatsoever of abolishing belief in God. By no means do they want to go that far. After all, we need something like religion. You can say to the children: "God is watching you!"—so in God you get a free babysitter, a religious form of coercion and support in the raising of children. Besides, there are moments—perhaps when I look up at the star-spangled sky at the end of a beautiful day, or when a wedding procession moves up the aisle of the church amid the sound of organ music—moments when I feel a real religious thrill and I wouldn't want to miss the emotional value of it.

Naturally, I know that I cannot live by these emotional values. At most they are a kind of low-calorie dessert with a slight tonic effect. The main dish on which I really live is my monthly income, my weekly wages, or my bank account, or my professional success. If that were taken away from me there would be the devil to pay. This would really be an awful threat; this would really be a matter of life and death.

But what would happen if religion were taken away from me? Well, it certainly wouldn't be nice; but after all a man can live without dessert if he has to. Life would be a little poorer; but even the functionaries of godlessness seem to have a good time and do not feel that they are going to ruin. That a man can destroy himself by what he does about God, as Eve says here, is surely nothing but a bare assertion. Jesus' saying, "one thing is needful," is definitely a propagandistic exaggeration.

With a certain shudder, of course, one remembers something that seems to contradict this idea that religion is only a kind of dessert. One remembers that after all there were people who in the name of this God remained steadfast and refused to deny him in the cellars of the GPU and the Gestapo, that, like the nuns in Gertrud von le Fort's famous novel, they went to the scaffold

singing and poured out songs of praise to God at the stake until the smoke choked off their voices.

Is it really possible to suffer like that for the dessert of life? Can one accept physical and mental torture, can one thus triumphantly conquer the burning desire to live, if one does not know with an utter certainty that the everlasting death I could incur from God is incomparably more terrible than the little bit of misery and fear which I must endure in the next few hours if I fall into the hands of men?

Just *because* God is such an elemental fact—this is the other side of the coin—I therefore possess in his peace a sovereign superiority over all dread of atomic destruction, over the apprehension of growing old and the horror of loneliness. When I am in the peace of this Lord, safe in the boat where Jesus Christ is sleeping, then indeed the sharks of life are no more than little fishes. Then suddenly there is a great regrouping of all life's values.

It is really a marvelous thing. When God is all in all to me, the valley through which I must walk may be ever so dark and yet there will be light. I may languish in a camp for war prisoners or as a confessing Christian in prison, and this will be the very time I can *live* by him, even without bread. Then his faithfulness builds a wall around me. Then the rod and staff of the Good Shepherd are there ready at hand, and mysterious bridges are flung over all the abysses I dread.

But the opposite is also true. If for me God is only a term for a bit of religion which I use as padding against the hard knocks of life, then this religious comfort will evaporate in my hands when the first real crisis comes. Then I shall not be able to pray; and no answer will I hear. I'll stand there utterly helpless, and the great silence will only be a refutation of God. "From him who has not, even what he has will be taken away." This is the sad end of the sad story of being only a little religious and wanting God only for a pious dessert.

And this is precisely the point to which the Tempter wants to

bring Eve. First she must swallow this fact: "You will not die; nobody ever perishes because of God; don't be so stiff about this religious point of view; take it easy." Once this initial sparking of temptation comes off, the rest of the chain reaction goes off of itself, and the last phase, which is nihilism, is child's play.

But there is still a second explosive charge in this remark of the serpent. He says, "God has forbidden you to eat this fruit only because he knows very well that your eating it will endow you with a secret knowledge. But knowledge is power. And God is afraid of it. He wants to keep you on a short leash so you men will not get beyond his control. He is afraid that you will compete with him and that his little divine throne may totter if you discover the tremendous potential that lies in your human reason and the enormous leverage you could bring to bear if you call a general strike like Prometheus."

In other words, here the Tempter is engaging in a little well-poisoning. His action can be reduced to this simple formula: He is sowing doubt of God's goodness in Eve's heart. He is saying: God doesn't mean well by you when he forbids you to eat of this tree. His motives are rather jealousy and malevolence.

The serpent knows very well that, if this seed of distrust falls on receptive soil, it is only a short step from doubt of God's goodness to doubt of his existence.

We see this happening in ourselves. When we meet with a severe misfortune—an incurable disease perhaps, which slowly saps our strength, which is completely meaningless and does nobody any good and is only a torment and a burden for us and those around us—then a secret but highly penetrative suspicion creeps into us. We begin to think that a God who permits something like this to happen cannot be a good God. Perhaps this so-called God is only blind fate, possibly even a sadist. But does such a God really exist? Might it not in that case be better and more honest to speak of a personification of chance and get along as best we can alone—alone beneath a heaven that doesn't exist and in the face of an eternity which is nothingness?

Such is the course of the chain reaction of our thought. That's how doubts come over us. And what can be done to stop it?

When we doubt the goodness of God the fatal switch is set for just such a precipitous slide. And the Tempter ensconces himself in the switch-tower and proceeds to manipulate the controls. His trick is to inculcate distrust.

This procedure has its very human parallels. Here is a boss who has a subordinate for whom he has a high regard. This man is devoted to his boss and untringly available whenever the boss wants something of him. Somebody comes and suggests to the boss that the man is only doing this to curry favor and take advantage of him. From that time on a blight has fallen upon this relationship and a secret suspicion is always lurking. The boss no longer trusts his subordinate.

Or here is an employer who is concerned about the welfare of his employees and worries about each one of them like a father. But there is one man who starts a whispering campaign during the coffee break: "The old man is really smart. He treats you this way just to soften you up. He wants to get the last ounce of production out of you. He doesn't care about you at all; what he wants is to play on your good nature to increase his volume of production. Love your neighbor—it's a trick! Believe me, the old man knows what he's doing."

In a case like this confidence is shattered in an instant and suspicion, once awakened, soon discovers many symptoms that confirm it. The Bible knows why it regards slander and murder as being the same thing. The serpent is slandering God.

Faith, too, is destroyed by distrust. And therefore the Tempter begins to work on this most important strategic spot. Once I believe that God is not good, that he does not deserve my trust, then everything is poisoned, then everything argues against him.

This is the source of the myths about distrust of the gods. The myth of the ring of Polycrates has its origin here. And when this spirit prevails, life becomes a weird and sinister thing.

We have all had this experience. When I achieve something

fine in my life I can no longer enjoy it properly. For now I cannot look upon it as a blessing for which I may be grateful; instead I grow afraid that the gods may become jealous, that their distrust will devise some revenge. When I say in the company of friends that my business or my health is good, I immediately knock on wood to frighten off the jealous spirits. Any number of superstitious acts and sayings are simply expressions of this kind of fear—precisely this fear which is basically nothing else but the poisonous flower planted in my heart as a seed of distrust.

It is worth while to throw a bit more light on these remarkable processes that go on in our hearts. How do we come to be afraid of the jealousy of the gods and allow this fear to blight every lover's happiness we experience, all our joy in our children, and every success in our work? Why it is that this secret anxiety creeps in precisely at the point when we are happy and prevents us from cheerfully enjoying the blessing? Why is it that we are denied the happiness of gratitude? Is it because we have a sick and self-tormenting imagination? Is it just because we are melancholics?

No, the fact is that it is something altogether different. Again it becomes clear that there is no such thing as a religious sphere that can be isolated from the rest of life, but that everything we experience with God is closely interwoven with our relationship to our neighbor and with our life as a whole.

Let me illustrate what I mean with an experience of my own. I once knew a man who was exceedingly talented; even when he was in school everything seemed to come his way. He was a handsome fellow and popular with the girls. Later he achieved rapid advance in his profession, and he was constantly concerned with comparing his life with others. His house had to be more elaborately furnished than those of his associates; his name had to appear in the newspaper more frequently than those of his fellow inhabitants in the small city where he lived. When one got to know him better one soon became aware of a definite trait

in his character. Strictly speaking, he did not enjoy his success and his fine home; he enjoyed all this only because people envied him. He even went out of his way to stimulate artificially this feeling of inferiority and envy in others, because he relished it. He ostentatiously displayed his success, he assumed a pose in order to make others wild with jealousy. (This, by the way, also occurs in less exaggerated forms. How many of us try to have a more exclusive type of automobile than our neighbor, and in many an apartment house a television aerial or a comfortable, streamlined, chromium-plated baby carriage is the mark of being better off for which people want to be envied!)

Everything I have just said could look like a bit of social criticism or moral criticism. But this is not at all what I mean. I am concerned only with one particular aspect of these manifestations.

My wrong attitude toward my neighbor, whom I may thus maneuver into the role of envy, must inevitably poison my relationship to God; indeed, when I do this I literally draw down the judgment of God upon myself.

In other words, it is my view that anybody who needs the envy of his fellow men in order to live, by this very token cannot imagine God either except as an envier, of whom one must be careful and whom one can by no means trust.

So even the successful man whom we mentioned above became a worrier. His heart's desire that he should become the most envied man in his town was amply fulfilled, it is true; but he also feared the envy of God, whose image was just as distorted in his imagination as the envious grimaces of his neighbors. That is to say, he became the victim of the compulsive idea. One day my life will come to an end, he kept thinking. Somewhere the ravens are already fluttering. Perhaps a disease is already brewing in my body. I have queer pains and sometimes my heart misses a beat. Or a war may come, the market may collapse. . . . So he kept running to the astrologers to avoid the misfortunes that lurked all around him. There was nothing in his life which he had not insured. He was in constant flight from the fiends that

lay in wait in secret hiding places. He was hemmed in by visions of dread.

When we are thus hard pressed by the anxiety of life—and who ever escapes it!—we should realize what the real reason for it is, namely, that we no longer trust God and that we are victims of the compulsive notion that God is jealous of us. Then we should carry this painful diagnosis of ourselves a step further and realize that our relationship to our *neighbor* is disturbed. God is not mocked—nor does he allow himself to be mocked by our mocking our neighbor. For how dare we make an envier of *him* for whom Christ died and thus ruin the soul of *him* in whom Christ meets us every day?

At this point it again becomes obvious that I must never grow weary of emphasizing that, if we do not get into the clear with God and if for us faith remains a book with seven seals, the reason for this is not that we are unreligious by nature or that our intellect is tripping us up, but probably because there is something in our *life* that is not in order.

The point is that God is no pale product of the imagination; he is a real fact. Therefore God also has to do with the realities of our life. If there is something wrong here and if we are living in downright sin, this affects our faith, and we are blocked at the decisive point of our life. The chain of doubt to which we are shackled does not as a rule consist of intellectual difficulties but rather of sins. That we can depend upon.

That's why John the Baptist does not say: "Let me explain things to you; I will discuss your doubts away." No, he says: "Turn around, repent! Lay the ax to your roots; get the weeds out and set your life to rights. If you want to believe, you dare not start with the problems of religion; you must begin with your neighbor."

Anybody who looks for Jesus Christ in heaven will never find him, for heaven is the very place he left in order to come to us. But anybody who is close to his neighbor suddenly discovers that he is meeting the hidden Savior and that He is sending *him*, for

whose sake He suffered, across our path to greet us. The neighbor is the "third sacrament." In, with, and under the form of the neighbor, Christ is seeking to meet us.

So the Tempter sowed two poisonous seeds in Eve's heart. First, he persuaded her that one must not take God too seriously, because what he says is by no means a matter of life and death; and second, he made her distrustful of the goodness of God.

It may surprise us—but it is typical of the course of every temptation—that at this point the conversation *breaks off*. We do not hear that Eve immediately reacted to these insinuations by saying, "Yes, you are right, I have been taking God too seriously. I have been relying all too naively and simple-mindedly upon his goodness." No, the conversation breaks off; the poison must be given time to take effect. Besides, the Tempter is never fond of a static war of position; he prefers elastic tactics and a war of movement. So now like a fencer he suddenly changes his position.

Up to this time he has been playing with ideas, entangling Eve in a religious, philosophical discussion of the severity and goodness of God. Now he turns to a completely different area of the self, namely, to the senses and sensuality. But he knows that he has made a considerable dent in Eve's intellectual resistance by the preceding arguments and that in this state she can be completely upset by a small sensual titillation.

So he simply proceeds—as we have said, *before* the discussion about God is finished—to dangle the forbidden fruit before her. There it hangs in all its luscious fulness and Eve's eyes are sucked fast to it. Her mouth begins to water. "The woman saw," the text says, which is to say: she meditated on the fruit, she turned it over in her thoughts.

But it was not only the sensual tickling of her palate that enticed her. It was also the secret with which this fruit was laden: the eating of it would make one wise. So the fruit exerted a sensual and an intellectual fascination.

What happens here can be illustrated by comparison with

sexual desire. This too is much more than mere sensual stimulation. It also seeks to penetrate the *secret* of the other person. At the bottom of all sexual desire there is a yearning to know. "Let me know your secret," says a love song, and in the Hebrew text the word for sexual desire is exactly the same as the word "desiring to know" (*jadab*).

So, under the pressure of this twofold curiosity, the fascination of the senses and the mind, Eve reached out for the fruit. And only as she did this, as she performed this practical act of disobedience, did she actually answer the serpent's question whether she was really going to take God so dreadfully seriously and whether she was really going to trust his goodness so utterly—answering it almost without being conscious of answering it. Now she is going to do "*neither* of these things any more. And therefore she commits the forbidden act. So now she has given notice that she is quitting—not officially, not formally, and not by flinging an emotionally charged and defiant No toward heaven—like Prometheus—but through one very small gesture, through one very harmless snatch of a tidbit.

I believe that the biblical story is far more true than the legend of Prometheus. I have never yet met anyone who raised his fist against heaven as Prometheus did and defiantly severed friendly relations with God. What I have experienced and observed has always been what is described for us here in this text, namely, that a person removes himself from God through nothing but little nonessential things and that even today the serpent operates with simple little suggestions. Unfaithfulness to God always begins at the periphery, just as here it begins at the extreme ends of the gustatory nerves.

I should say that this is generally what happens in our lives. I may have a good friend perhaps, with whom I have been closely associated for decades. But now he has a dreadful disease; he is confined to a wheelchair and is suffering from depression. He yearns to have me come and visit him and he clings to his friendship with me. But I myself no longer get anything out

of these visits; they are only a burden to me. On the other hand, however, there are so many nice and healthy people who stimulate and uplift me and I would much rather be with them. As I picture to myself that somewhat depressing sickroom—I can, of course, allow my thoughts to revolve about what is repulsive quite as well as about the attractiveness of the apple of paradise!—I find all kinds of reasons why I should *not* visit my friend. I have no time today, and tomorrow Marlene Dietrich is singing on television. Thus the image of my sick friend grows paler and paler, and finally the visits stop altogether.

Now, if somebody were to ask me: "Tell me quite frankly, do you really mean by your conduct to sabotage the Christian concept of loving one's neighbor? Have you decided against the biblical principle that Jesus Christ desires to meet you in your sick friend?" I would blow straight up and reply: "What do you think you're saying! Of course I hold the 'Christian point of view' just as I always have; I consider the commandment of neighborly love to be the Magna Charta of all Christian ethics!"

And Eve would have answered in exactly the same way, if the serpent had asked her: "Do you want to become an active atheist? Would you submit a notarized statement, calling it quits with God?" Eve would have thrown up her hands in horror and given the serpent a proper rebuff. She was not prepared to draw any such far-reaching religious conclusions or make such a decision of faith. She allowed herself to be inveigled into doing a very small, unimportant thing, namely, to look at the apple a bit and finally to grasp at the succulent bait. After all, it couldn't be *that* bad. Why should it be?—God himself was not at all as serious as she had formerly thought.

And it is exactly the same with me when I fail to visit my sick friend. I have no intention of rising up against God when I neglect this, not a bit! But still I have my reasons: I'm a little short of time; it's a long way to go; there are always too many traffic lights on the road, and most of them are red.

And yet—I am denying God at the periphery, at the point of

a small, incidental kindness. But this sore eats its way irresistibly to the center. And one day I suddenly can no longer believe.

But then when I can no longer believe, I also seek other reasons for it. "Good heavens, that old Book!" I say to myself. "No modern person who has any respect for himself can swallow all that stuff." I almost always look for the sore spot in my life at the wrong place, and the idea never occurs to me that my faith and my peace of heart began to disintegrate when I eyed that *one* apple and when I kept away from that *one* doorstep of my sick friend.

So it always is; I don't like to get up five minutes earlier to read a Bible verse and pray. It's hard for me to get out of bed. And naturally, this is because I did more than my duty yesterday. So, you see, I have a respectable reason. Besides, on my bedside table is not the Bible, but my appointment book, which I look at the first thing in the morning, and believe me, there's plenty there to keep me busy. Naturally, I take my stand "on the basis of Christianity." I'll take second place to no one on that. But the strange thing is this: the first thing we reach for in the morning, our appointment book—and, dear me, what a harmless act that is—is something very like reaching for the forbidden fruit. In just such small things decisions are made of which we never dreamed. My formal assertions that I take my stand upon the Christian position are of scant interest to God, because they do not commit me to anything. The oaken beams of my alleged Christianity quickly collapse when they are eaten away on the inside by the little woodworms.

So the message of our text is this: Watch your periphery! For God is always to be found in the details of things. I have to do with him—and also with the Tempter!—at every point in my everyday life. God is in a harmless apple, on my bedside table, and the doorstep of my sick friend. The serpent always wriggles about the periphery first, but finally he will choke off the center of the breath of life.

But now it would be quite wrong—I must say something

about this yet in closing—if we were to conclude that therefore the devil has his seat in sensuality. In the New Testament we find, not only harlots and sadists, and thus sensual sinners, but also mental sinners: cultured intellectuals and scribes whose thoughts are entangled in vanity and delusions of greatness. But the senses are the point of entrance. Eve's mouth watered. And that was the beginning. But the Tempter would not have found entrance into the oral cavity, if he had not already held a bridgehead within her, if she in her heart had not already been halfway doubtful about the severity and the goodness of God.

In Eve's *heart* too there hung by a very thin thread an overripe apple of doubt. Even before, when she was still in contact with God, she may often have admired the apple. Then it did not matter to her, however. But now that she was at odds with God in the depths of her being, now that she no longer took him in dead earnest, one little glance was enough to seduce her. When the substance of our faith has been corroded, a breath of air or a covetous glance overthrows us.

This observation leads us to the profoundest secret of the gospel. That is to say, the gospel does not practice what the physicians call symptom-therapy. It does not subject us to moral cures and it does not enjoin us to be nicer, friendlier, more responsive to human needs, more hard-working, and more upright. True, it does point us to all these things *also*. But before it speaks of this, it tells us something completely different. It says that every cure must begin at the innermost center. Then the moral improvements follow of themselves; they are only an incidental effect.

But what is it that should happen in our innermost center? And again it is basically only one thing, and this really is the central thing: I must be willing to be told that God loves me and that he grieves over me when I go other ways.

To understand this I need only to look to Jesus Christ, who pursues those for whom nobody else cares and who also sees the misery behind the facade of human greatness. But this my

misery does not annoy him but instead attracts him. He did not come to the well and healthy, but to the sick. He knows what is wrong with me. And this is precisely why he seeks me out. He seeks me so single-mindedly that he gives his life in the search. Even when he was dying he was thinking with solicitude and kindness of the tough customers beneath his cross. While they were bawling and brawling in an alcoholic haze, with no conception of what was happening right next to them, he was grieving for their souls: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

Is there any discovery greater than the discovery that someone cares for me? And that he does not reject me, even though he has seen through me utterly?

Once this miracle has dawned upon me, once I have grasped that such a thing is true, then the ice encrusted about my heart begins to melt and something like love begins to stir within *me*. As I begin thus to cling to Jesus Christ, I can no longer find it in my heart to hurt him. For I know that I cannot play fast and loose with my body and my thoughts, because this hurts him just as if I were to lay violent hands upon him himself. For I am his, and it grieves him as if it were a part of his own self.

When I am made new at this point, when I take my stand on the ground of this unheard-of new fact, then the Tempter has lost his bridgehead and everything is changed. How rich is the earth and how the trees in the Garden of Eden beckon to me, what joys, what merriment and mirth are given to me! I don't need to be a Puritan. I don't need to be a timid, anxious worrier. "All are yours," says the New Testament—really all, everything!—"and you are Christ's."

And when a person has a new heart he also sees things differently. When I discover the secret of being a Christian it is like a revolution of joy that sweeps over me. And—it is a thing that goes to the roots, not merely a passing breeze that fans the treetop. The ax goes to the roots, but the joy also sets in at the roots. Pain and bliss are woven together. Becoming a disciple

is a whole thing and a fully rounded thing. It is simply great and thrilling and glad some that there should be someone in this world who wants us, wants the *whole* of us and also makes us *wholly* new.

Cheap things can never do anything like that. The gospel is not cheap merchandise which you can take or not, or take along with something else. God really begins to move in my life only when I venture myself *wholly* upon him. A divided heart can only kill me. Faith divided by two equals fear and anxiety.

by this—namely, that God doesn't want you to know anything. God wants to keep you ignorant. In other words, God is afraid of your knowledge. For knowledge is power. If you become powerful, God will fear your competition. He knows very well: "Once men wake up to the potentialities of their reason and once they explore these potentialities, it is all up with my being God. Then my time is up as Lord of creation. Then man will use what I have given him *against* me. He will burst all boundaries and set himself up as the dictator of the universe. But me he will relegate to retirement. He will make of me a fairy character of the world of childhood, he will make me the opium of the people or turn me into a religious ideology. He may turn me into a pathetic old man whose helplessness is so extreme that it is a macabre, as in Wolfgang Borchert's *Outside the Door*."

All this the serpent implied by way of every possible innuendo. And I think that when he did this he touched upon a problem which nobody who thinks about the problems of faith with any intellectual alertness can ignore.

If I were to state the decisive problem without beating about the bush, it would run something like this: Is God really afraid of man's knowledge? Does faith in this God mean that I must forgo knowledge, that I must suppress knowledge? Can one then have faith—I am expressing this somewhat drastically—only if one is a bit dim, only if one is somewhat short on intellect? Is there something right about Marxism's thesis that religion has been dethroned by science and therefore the enlightenment of knowledge, once it has dawned, must necessarily banish the dimness and darkness of faith? *Either* faith *or* knowledge—is that the alternative?

But this is putting it much too generally and simply, since obviously there are two completely different kinds of knowledge.

There is a way of knowing which remains *under* God; and there is also a knowledge which is actually loaded with danger, a rebellious knowledge which is directed *against* God. The builders of the Gothic cathedrals had a knowledge of the laws of

11

Guilt and Destiny

THE STORY OF THE FALL: PART THREE

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of thee in the garden and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate." The Lord God said to the serpent,

"Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all cattle,
and above all wild animals;
upon your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your seed and her seed;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."

—Genesis 3:8-15

Still there lingers in our ears from the preceding chapter the sound of the serpent's voice saying: "You will be like God, knowing good and evil." And we recall what he meant to imply

statics and the secrets of stress and tensions in their soaring arches. They allowed their architectural knowledge to "serve." For them it was the technical prerequisite for the fact that they were able to point symbolically—that is, by means of the glory of their cathedrals—to the ground and the goal of the whole world order, to that which is "above."

The builders of the tower of Babel also had the same knowledge. But *they* used it to build a this-worldly bastion, to secure man with a Maginot Line, and thus to keep God outside and far away.

There is also a medical knowledge of the health and diseases of the human organism. The physician who serves the Creator uses this knowledge in order to heal. The medical robots, however, of the kind enlisted by totalitarian systems, employ this knowledge to exterminate the enemies of their system or to devise subtle, psychiatric methods of torture.

Are we not aware of this ambiguity, this duplicity of knowledge everywhere today?

Is there any one of us who is so stupid that he has not yet remarked how true it is that there also exists in this world a rebellious, a plundered knowledge, a knowledge which is aggressively hostile to God? It is true that in times past—but how long ago that was and how naive it seems to us now—it was thought that knowledge is power. The idea was that he who knows the laws of nature and understands how to utilize them can rule the world, that he is mightier than others who are ignorant. It was possible to hold entire colonial peoples in check with a few rifles and cannon. After all, the white man "knew" more than the colored peoples. Therefore he had power over them.

In the meantime it has become clear to us that this dogma "knowledge is power" is not *that* true. For our knowledge can become more powerful than we ourselves; it can actually make us impotent.

We see this in atomic science. Do we not know more about the atom than we are able to harness? Knowledge of the laws of

nature enables man to bring down the energies of the sun to the earth and to build atom bombs. We have become so powerful that we can blow up our planet and deflect the moon from its cosmic orbit. We are afraid of what we can do.

So one can no longer simply say that man has gained power through his knowledge. On the contrary, one must say that our knowledge has become mightier than ourselves. Today we are even afraid that this knowledge of ours will kill us.

Why then do men build atom bombs when they do not really want them and are afraid of them? They do so because their fear of *one another* is still greater. And this fear of one another increases in proportion as they know that the other, the potential enemy, is powerful. That enemy can exterminate my country by pushing a single button. Therefore I too must have such terrible weapons as a counterbalance. So each keeps outbidding the other. This is what is called the arms race. Nobody knows where it will end. Nobody wants it, but everybody thinks they have to do it.

I have mentioned this because it makes clear a very important insight, namely, that the statement "Knowledge is power" is obsolete. Knowledge itself is no longer a problem to us. It keeps on advancing constantly—almost automatically—and we know how to secure it: by seeking and learning.

Nor is power a problem to us. We know the way to gain it, how to make nature subservient through technical means, how to change society, how to gain erotic power or social precedence. All this is no longer a problem, at least not a fundamental one.

But in its place a different and totally new problem has arisen. And this is the problem of the knower, the knowing man *himself*. He is afraid of his knowledge because he feels he is not equal to it, because he is too fragile and brittle to carry such a weight. And he is also afraid of his own kind. He has the uneasy feeling that all his knowledge and power is leading him into the unknown and that there will be no stopping there, no turning back, and no certain direction.

Formerly, men had dreams and visions of the future development of humanity. They envisioned a coming kingdom of peace and justice in which there would be no more need to work and in which technology would eliminate the drudgery of toil. These visions were called utopias and they constituted a foundation for optimism.

Today our writers are devising horrible nightmares: destruction of the world through atomic technology, dictatorships—as in George Orwell's *1984*—in which the wielders of power control the lives of their subjects by television, a world of artificially generated test-tube children and robots—as in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*.

Knowledge and power are no longer a problem. But the knowing man is an enigma *himself*. He is afraid of his own potentialities. We might even say that we live in an age of complete knowledge, but at bottom we no longer know *what* we know.

For, ultimately, what do we know—even though we know enough sociology to erect a welfare state and co-ordinate man into a system in which he is completely provided for—if we do not know why man exists, to what end he lives, the *meaning* of his life, and where his temporal and eternal fulfillments lie? Without such a commitment will not the end result be like a perfect machine, idling endlessly and producing nothing, a perfect emptiness that betrays itself in boredom and anxiety?

What good does it do us to have the medical knowledge of how to decrease infant mortality, prolong life expectancy, or even produce human beings artificially, if we have forgotten—in other words, if we have lost the knowledge of—the *theme* of this life which has thus been snatched from death or nonexistence? Without this knowledge, must it not inevitably become dead and empty again, must it not become purposeless and peaceless? Knowledge without faith creates anxiety; it is graceless. We have really lost the ground and goal of knowledge. Why is this?

Quite certainly because we are no longer bound to God and therefore have gotten ourselves into an incalculable adventure

from which there is no exit. Quite certainly because we no longer know the One to whom we can entrust ourselves, the One who desires our good and thinks his higher thoughts concerning us. And this means that we have lost the theme whose variations our life was meant to contain and carry out.

The alternative "faith or knowledge" is therefore false to the very core. It would be nonsense to say that knowledge is evil. No, only *perverted* knowledge is evil. It all depends upon in whose name I want to know. Do I want to know in order to stage something like an eighth day of creation by launching Sputnik and thus quite literally supersede the Creator? Do I want to know in order to secure life at every point—against death, against care, against every eventuality? In other words, do I want to know in order to take charge of my own life and no longer have any need to trust God? Do we no longer want to sing:

We plow the fields and scatter
The good seed on the land,
But it is fed and watered
By God's almighty hand.

Do we want instead to produce also the growth of the seed ourselves, in order to boast: "All this we have accomplished, and this hypothetical 'God' has become obsolete"?

Do we want to know the laws of nature only because we want television sets, refrigerators, and automatic washers, indulging in the treacherous illusion that then life is complete? Take your rest, O my soul, now you are provided with comfort and diversion for weekdays and Sundays; the goal of your life has been achieved! Have we overlooked the ghostly hand, writing upon the wall of our life: "Weighed, weighed, and found wanting; missed the point—knowledge without grace"?

Have we failed to hear the voice saying, "This night your soul will be required of you. Who are you and where do you stand?"

That's the way it is with knowledge.

And our story describes exactly the same thing. The serpent insinuates to Eve: "I offer you more than God does, if you will only reach for the forbidden fruit of knowledge. I offer a knowledge that will make you independent and autonomous. Then you will no longer be dependent on God's patronage. Then nobody need tell you to 'commit your ways to him.' Nor will you need to say 'Thanks' when you partake of the fruits of the Garden of Eden on your table. You don't need to be obedient any more; nobody can put a curb upon you. Your knowledge will make you free and you will learn the tricks of this old Lord of creation. You will learn to concoct his recipes, and then you will run things the way *you* want them to go."

The serpent therefore did not simply offer Eve knowledge as such, but rather a particular kind of knowledge, namely, the knowledge that one can live without God. It was *this* poisonous fruit that Eve ate.

So the history of man's fall from grace began with something very small and quiet. The first acts of the drama are enacted only between God and man. The question at issue is whether man will remain within the limits set for him or whether he will be rebellious, whether he will commit himself trustingly to the hand of God or whether he will be suspicious and want to run his affairs by himself.

But now we see how the stage of events is widened, as it were, in the next chapters of this tale of the beginnings. We see that it is divided into two storeys, one above the other.

Whereas at first the action takes place in the upper storey and concerns what happened between God and man, in the intimate sphere of the religious life, in the next moment a dramatic episode begins to unfold on the lower stage where men are dealing with men.

And yet the play on the human level is precisely synchronized with the drama on the upper stage. When things go wrong between God and me, they also go wrong between me and my neighbor. (We have encountered this interrelationship before

and we shall do so again.) These people in paradise lost their lack of embarrassment not only before God, but also before each other. They made themselves aprons and were ashamed. And soon Cain will slay his brother, soon the world order will be shattered and the Flood will come.

The first thing that happened on this lower stage of the theater was that Eve also proceeded to give her husband to eat of the wicked fruit.

And this again is the primal pattern of the sinful act which is constantly being repeated among us today. For the adulterer cannot do otherwise; he must seek to seduce others also to take this step or at least be intent upon certain manly conversations in certain companies. The thief secures accomplices. A human swine procures the magic wand of Circe in order to transform others into swine. A secret necessity inheres in sin: it must seduce, it must spread its evil seeds to the soil of other hearts.

Why is this so? Why does the compulsion to seduce belong as much to sin as contagion does to diphtheria or stench to filth?

My answer would be that it is because sin and separation from God always make us lonely and isolate us. We cannot endure this depressing loneliness with our conscience. And therefore we seek out the perverse companionship of others who are like us. And we strive for this companionship either by seeking out the company of dubious companions—and with the instinct of vice we are dead sure to find it—or we seek it by "seducing" others and thus making them too what we already are.

There is a very simple explanation for this. When I, as an individual with a blot on my escutcheon, live in a clean company, I feel that I am constantly being called in question; then this constitutes a steady attack upon my conscience. Naturally, I want to put an end to this state of affairs as quickly as possible or preferably keep it from occurring at all. On the other hand, if I live among my own kind and the others are just like me, then I feel I have some support. The dictum, "Others are no

better than I am," is the consolation of all scoundrels. That's why I am compelled to drag the others around me down to my level; in other words, I must seduce them.

In this perverse way I hope to escape from my tormenting isolation, for in one way or another I *must* live in fellowship with others. If I have lost real and clean fellowship, I am compelled to make a pact with the devil or look for accomplices. If I am corrupt, then others must be corrupt too. For only so can they confirm me in the position I occupy, instead of calling me into question.

This is exactly what happened here in our story. Eve sought in Adam an accomplice.

It was frightening to walk about with the forbidden fruit in the garden all alone. Every branch of every tree whispered its question: You no longer belong to us, you have excluded yourself from the rest of creation. The accusation sprang at her even from the eyes of the beasts. "But if I have an accomplice, it will be easier; then my situation will be relaxed. Then I can say to God, 'Why do you reproach me? To err is human, all too human, God. Look, Adam fell into it too, he is no better than I am.'" Then the Father—so Eve probably imagined—would knit his brows thoughtfully and reply: "Yes, if such a breakdown occurs twice, then there must be some defect of construction in my creation. And if this is really so, well—I surely can't sell these two people down the river; I must be liable myself for this fault in construction."

This is precisely the calculation which Eve set up here. And fundamentally, this is the way we all figure. For example, if more than 5 per cent of a class fail an assignment, it is the teacher's fault. It can be reduced to a simple formula: "Sin is a 'breakdown.'" And the cause of the breakdown is a defect in the construction of creation which has gotten into it through no fault of my own. I personally am only an innocent victim of this breakdown. At bottom—but, of course, one dare not say it out loud—God is mainly at fault.

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,

says the aged harper in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*.

This is the theme of the scene that now begins to be enacted.

At first, of course, it commences somewhat shamefacedly. As God walks in the garden in the cool of the day and calls out, "Man, where are you?" the pair hide themselves. At first they are by no means in such an arrogant mood as to dare to say: "Dear divine Father, there has been a breakdown, there is an error in your apparatus of creation. You've gone and let a beast like the serpent, like the impulse to evil, get into paradise. Besides, you've made another slip in putting into our hearts, not only good thoughts, but also little flaws like curiosity, distrust, and doubt. And now look at the mess: the apple is gone and here is the stem of it! We disclaim all responsibility. After all, *you* created the laws by which we must live our lives, you alone. So there you are!"

This is just what the pair do *not* say at first, though one might not put it past Eve, holding the philosophy she did. (I myself have slipped quite unconsciously into the slang of our everyday speech, because we are so dubiously familiar with this business of talking ourselves into and out of things.) Oh, no, at first they know very well that what they should really say was: "Before thee alone have we sinned; we cannot answer thee once in a thousand times; Lord, have mercy upon us." And they also know very well *why* they are slouching along and taking cover.

But, instead of confessing their sin and thus gaining a chance to experience in this way the mystery of grace, they set out on the age-old path of self-vindication; they settle down to play the classical game of passing the buck.

Adam comes up for examination first and he answers glibly; "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me—understand, the woman *thou* gavest to be with me—so it's quite clear who really

pulled the trigger and who is the chief culprit—this woman who sprang from thy source, she gave me the fruit. What part in it did I play? I simply drew the consequences; all I did was to put the dot on the 'i' and bite into it—*c'est tout*—that's all!"

So the great game of passing the buck begins. Adam—you and I—we keep shifting the blame upon others, our neighbors, the conditions in which we grew up, or the opportunity which, as you know, makes the thief.

Eve does the same thing, she makes the next move in this game. "I didn't start this either, dear heavenly Father," says she. "It was the serpent whom thou didst put into paradise, he started the ball rolling and set off the chain reaction."

If God had pursued the questioning further, I have no doubt that the serpent too would not have been at a loss for an answer. He certainly would have replied: "Why should you call *me*, of all people, to account? Why talk to me at all? Weren't you, the Almighty, the one who made the devil and set him loose on earth? Wasn't it in your name that I became a devil? Wasn't I just carrying out your orders? After all, *you* are the one who is later going to have me harry Job and Dr. Faustus and make me play the role of Mephistopheles. But, if that's the case, *you* are the one who is responsible. Then you can't call either me or my victims to account. You, God, and you alone are the cause of the mischief. You're the one who pulls the strings in this wicked game."

It is rather illuminating, is it not, that here the serpent, of all people, should become the defender of man? Doesn't this in itself show that there must be something wrong with this game of passing the buck?

Well, we ourselves have made every move in this game. Every one of us at some time has said: "This *one* cursed passion, this *one* appetite that I can't control, this *one* blemish in my character—the fact that I am 'by nature' envious, jealous, sexy, or furiously ambitious—this *one* thing lies in my heredity or in the environment in which I grew up or in the constitutional

character given to me, it lies in my erotic disposition. This *one* cursed, faulty power that is constantly getting me down lies in all these things, not in my own self. Certainly, in the last analysis I didn't make myself what I am. I didn't choose my parents, my genes, my blood. I complain against the unknown; and *if* there is a God, then he is this Unknown One, who is responsible. But as for me, I wash my hands of it."

And then come the tragic poets and the environmental theorists and the sociologists and the students of heredity and even some jurists, and they all blow the same horn: God sits in the dock, and man, this poor victim of a bungled creation, is the chief witness for the prosecution. The Garden of Eden becomes a tribunal. God has played out the role of accuser; now he must defend himself.

How, then, did evil come into the world, if it is God who made the world and if he made it rightly? This is the question that keeps troubling us.

We have already observed earlier how the myths solve this question. They say—we call to mind the story of the giant Ymir—that God made the world of curse-ridden matter. Even before the curtain rose upon the history of the world, prehistoric dramas were enacted. Murder and homicide went on between gods and men. These prenatal fatalities, these myths say, are actually inherent in the world as such. And these mischievous forces which are inherent in the very matter of the world—and thus not God's failures in construction, but rather the basic defects in the raw material of creation—are now constantly emerging and creating new faults and new mischief.

But we said, it may be remembered, that from the beginning Christian theology radically rejected the attempt of the myths to explain the fault in this way. Christian theology declares that God created the world from nothing and therefore that it was not created from curse-ridden matter.

But this only makes the problem of evil more enormous. For if evil is not to be traced back to the matter from which creation

was made, what other conclusion can be drawn except that God himself, the Creator, is the cause of evil? For, after all, it cannot very well be charged to the nothingness from which the world was made. So God is the accused in Christian theology itself. What else?

One certainly cannot get out of this difficulty by saying that the devil, the serpent is there *too*, existing alongside God. In philosophical terms, this is to say that the ground of the world is dualistic. The evil in the world does not go back to God but rather to this underived principle of evil *alongside* of God.

But even this way out is barred to us, for the biblical text expressly says that the serpent was "more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God has made." So, according to the biblical view, the serpent is not the devil at all; the serpent simply turns up among the creatures, and thus within what God had "made."

But isn't this a dangerous conception? Doesn't this mean that evil came into the world through the act of creation itself? Did not the biblical writer get himself into a terrible corner here? Did he not cut off every possibility of going back and arriving at a mythical explanation of evil or of explaining evil by means of the idea of the devil, the Satanic principle?

Consequently, do not all the ways lead back to the dock where God is the accused? Do not all fingers point at him, is he not surrounded by a serried chorus of revilers who keep repeating this one refrain over and over again: "To guilt you let us heedless go, you, and you alone. You, not man, should hide yourself in the woods of Eden. You are the one who should be accused by the mothers who lost their children in flight, the widows whose husbands molder in mass graves, the orphans who are growing up unprotected; you and you alone should be accused. You would do better to call yourself a bungler or just blind fate. Then at least we could play out our lives as a tragedy which we can do nothing about. Then at least we could drop this convulsive lying gesture of having to beat our breasts and keep crying

out: 'Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?' You are the one who made death and evil, you alone!"

I believe that we must pursue this line of reasoning to its bitter end and that we must not allow ourselves to be stopped by any pseudo-Christian dodges or pious stop-signs. Only when we drink of doubt to the last dregs will we be able to perceive the real message of our text.

The very point of this ancient story is that it shows us that we put the question wrongly when we ask how evil came into the world. That is to say, when anybody asks the question in this way he is diverting attention away from himself.

We had an impressive illustration of this after the collapse in 1945. Then the question was: Who was responsible for the millions of exterminated Jews, who was responsible for the brutalities of National Socialism in our own country and in occupied countries, who was responsible for Anne Frank, for the concentration camps, for Theresienstadt? Was not a people who would allow this bestial government to gain ascendancy among them dreadfully compromised? Was it not the fault of all of us that these hideous things could happen among us?

But then we began the game of passing the buck again and we asked the question: How did this evil come into our people? And we replied: It was the dictated treaty of Versailles that gave us the unemployed and the economic depression, that's what did it. . . . But back of that was the Wilhelmian militaristic big talk that evoked concern and finally the will to destroy in the Entente. And back of *that* again was the envy that others had of our German efficiency and back of *that* was the alleged or real national imperialism of the Bismarck era which drove others to feel that they were threatened. Back of *that* was the Prussian tradition and back of *that* was the Reformation with its submissiveness to authority. Luther, Frederick the Great, Bismarck, Hitler—this was the line of the game of passing the buck which was popular at that time.

So one might trace the game farther and farther back to Adam and Eve in paradise. Everybody else was guilty, everybody else had brewed the mischief except us, and certainly except me. So everybody set out to catch the original culprit, because nobody wanted to be the villain.

The historians combed the terrain of history with whole troops of scouts in order to discover earlier and earlier causes of the development of evil and to show that we are merely victims and not the principal culprits—in other words, in order to transform guilt into fate.

This is the crucial point: here "guilt is transformed into fate." In other words, anybody who raises the question of how evil came into the world is turning the question away from himself. He wants to find the *original cause* of evil. But an evil that is

caused is no longer an evil; it is only a fate, an inevitable process. So in the last analysis I am *not* looking for the cause of evil at all, though I may pretend to do so. I am rather trying to do away with evil by asking a question; I am saying that it just "happened." But if it just happened, then I am no longer the cause, but merely an effect of this fatal process, a victim of a tragic concatenation of events. I want to justify myself and divert attention away from myself.

There is only one condition under which I shall take seriously my own guilt—and therefore all evil—and that is when I am willing to say: "I and I alone am the original cause of it. I am the one who vented his spleen upon his neighbor. I am the one who lies and kills. I am the one who gives free rein to his wild passions and is ready to sacrifice his neighbor for a bit of advantage. I and I alone am the one."

In other words, when I face my heredity, when I contend with the bundle of nerves which I may be, I must be able to say: "This is I." This is the *mystery of our humanity*.

So there can be no answer to the question of how evil came into the world, because the question itself is wrongly put, and even more, because it is a shrewdly biassed question by which I

hope to get myself off the hook. I want to "derive" evil from something else, and thus turn it into fate. I want to be a victim and not the accused. I want to shout "Stop, thief" and meanwhile go on stealing in happy innocence.

Therefore the most genuine moment in our story is not that scene in which Adam and Eve seek to "derive" their guilt, in which they keep fishing for causes and manipulating causality. By trying to derive their guilt in this way they are only searching for a lightning rod to deflect the judgment of God.

No, the most genuine moment in our story is that moment when the pair are hidden behind the trees, covering their shame and suffering the pangs of bad conscience, and knowing down in their hearts that they, and they alone, are the ones who are meant when God calls, "Adam, man, where are you?" We, and we alone, are worthy of the judgment. The great game of passing the buck which we try as a final act of despair is lost from the very outset.

But there is still one last important question. Was it not asking too much of them to expect them to give up this game of passing the buck and instead come to God in all frankness and confess: "Yes, it was I, and against thee only have I sinned"? Would it not have been foolhardy of them to abandon all self-defense from the start and simply come out from behind the bushes in the cool of evening and surrender unconditionally to God: "Do with us as thou wilt"?

The fact is that none of us could do this. We would have to resort to this trick of passing the buck just as our first parents did, we would have to go on lulling ourselves with dishonest, "tragic" illusions—if these words, "Man, where are you?" had not been spoken *again*, and this time in a totally different way.

For Jesus Christ too is calling to us, saying the same words. He too is searching for us behind the bushes and calling, "Man—my brother and my sister—where are you?" And at the same time he says, "I seek you, not to condemn you, but to save you."

And there they stand before us, the figures of men and women

in the New Testament who simply fling aside this chessboard of the game of passing the buck and dare to say: "*I, poor and unhappy man, I have caused thee pain and sorrow. I wrought the nails for thy cross. I fashioned the beams of that cross. I denied thee thrice. I did not visit thee when thou wast in prison. I did not give thee a cup of water when thou wast thirsty.*" There they are, all of them, standing before us, saying this—or something like this—to us: the publican, the woman who was a sinner, Peter after the miraculous draft of fishes, and Paul, who dared to confess: "*I persecuted and killed thy disciples.*" And even as they said it they were already wonderfully free, for now they no longer needed to cherish any illusions, now there was no more need to pretend.

For they knew to *whom* it was they could say this and to whose hands they could entrust themselves; they knew it was the Savior. They could be honest with him, for they knew that he would never despise or reject them, no matter what they might be.

He who loves can heal, and this Man loved us. I can confidently put myself into hands that are kind and good. In the Garden of Eden were two people who defended themselves because God was their accuser.

But wherever Jesus Christ appears, everything is changed. Then it is my own conscience that accuses me, and Jesus Christ is my defender (Luther). And because he is my defender I no longer need to defend myself and make excuses. I no longer need to have any illusions about myself and I can give up the game of passing the buck. He protects me from my own conscience, for he says to me: "All that lies behind you and all the charges laid against you I have torn to pieces. I have nailed the tattered shreds of your life to my cross. Your past simply does not interest me any more. I am interested only in what I want to make of you. Accuse yourself, but trust that I will stick to you *even* when you despise yourself. When one dies for another, one will never give him up."

Here is where the game of passing the buck in our life *really* stops. And here too the question of how evil came into the world ceases to be asked. Not that the question is "solved." There can never be a solution to a question which is wrongly put. But I am delivered from having to ask the question.

Now all I can ask is: "Who is this mysterious Figure, who tears up the bill of indictment against me, who beats down the accusations of my conscience, who grants me a new, unburdened future, and lets me breathe freely again? Who is this Figure, who gives me courage to come out from behind the bushes and be honest with myself, who makes it possible for me to get along without tragic illusions?" "Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is he."

"For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

"Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,
and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,
'You shall not eat of it,'
cursed is the ground because of you;
in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
In the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
you are dust,
and to dust you shall return."

—Genesis 3:8-19

There is probably not one among us who has not now and then had the experience of being suddenly confronted by the dark enigma of life.

For long stretches, of course, we go on living our lives fairly innocuously, with no particular problems. Life simply pursues its course. We observe that evil does not pay, that success comes to the diligent, and that idlers finally come to grief.

But suddenly something happens that sounds like a broken axle in this smoothly rotating machine of life. We are confronted with a contradiction which we simply cannot explain. We read in the newspapers that an airplane has crashed with ninety persons aboard, fathers, mothers, and children. Among them is a great musician, an irreplaceable scholar. Some ridiculous little bolt or screw that came loose—it may perhaps have cost only a dime—was capable of silencing beautiful music, annihilating the promise of increased knowledge, destroying human happiness, and shattering the ties of love.

Are we not surrounded on every side with these dark enigmas, which are so hard to shake off, once they are discovered? Why is it that just when life reaches its supreme moments we should suddenly be overtaken by the dread of mortality and the fragility of life? Why do folk songs always link love and death? Why

12

The Mystery of Death

THE STORY OF THE FALL: PART FOUR

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate." The Lord God said to the serpent,

"Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all cattle,
and above all wild animals;
upon your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your seed and her seed;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."

To the woman he said,
"I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children,
yet your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you."
And to Adam he said,

must the tragic poet always repeat this one refrain, that greatness in the world must go down to defeat and that glory must be crushed between the millstones of guilt and fate and end in sullen gloom?

Are you proud of blooming cheeks,
Aglow with milk and crimson?
Ah, the roses die and fade away.

Why is this?

Is nature an exception to this rule? A lovely, wooded valley with a stream running through it may strike us as idyllic, but we have only to look a little closer or fetch a microscope to see that here too there is devouring and being devoured, the dread of death, and the groaning of creation. Ecclesiastes and Job, Sophocles and Heinrich von Kleist, Wilhelm Raabe and Gottfried Benn, and you and I too, each in our own way, have wrestled with this enigma. Everyone of us bears wounds and scars inflicted by the claws of this enigma.

Our text for today, which concludes the story of the Fall, paces the whole area of this enigma: *Why should toil and the drudgery of labor exist at all?* (On my trip to the Far East where I saw thousands of Egyptians on the Suez Canal and later Chinese coolies toiling in the scorching sun, I suddenly realized how immediate and real this question remains and how very superficially it is covered up by certain technological and social facilities.) *Why should death exist?* *Why should the fate of men be like that of the beasts* (cf. Eccles. 3:19)? *Why cannot even the strongest love hold on to another when his hour has come?* *Why is the birth of new life accompanied by pain and dread and peril of death?* *Why do thorns and thistles encumber the fields?* *Why does frost fall upon the springtime blossom?* *Why should we be at enmity with nature, which, after all, was once the Garden of Eden?* *Why should the horror of infantile paralysis exist alongside of the miracle of new life?* Always, always the question: *Why? Why?*

And this text of ours deals with these hard, harassing ques-

tions of life. It points to the background of it all, to the rift in the framework of the world and the contradictions we cannot reconcile. Many of us, perhaps, may say that it is useless to think about *why* life is as it is. They may advise us not to bore too long in the depths but rather get busy and stick to what is given to us to do each day. Goethe repeatedly counseled himself in this way and summoned himself to "action" whenever he was appalled by the fathomless depths of life.

But would not this be escape? After all, it is possible not only to be a coward physically—when a person fails, for example, to jump in to save a drowning man—but also a coward about certain thoughts and, as Goethe once expressed it, to "blink" them. But it will not be so simple to evade our text by blinking it, once it catches us and has us in its clutches.

To begin with, these primordial words of the Bible do something that is really tremendous. They take all these riddles of existence—from the mystery of death to the throes of a young mother and the misery of toil—and set them down within one mighty key signature, and then interpret them according to this one signature, which declares that all the contradictions and absurdities of life are manifestations of the creature's disobedience to the Creator. They reveal that the world is no longer whole and sound and that it has lost its peace because it has lost its peace with God.

In other words, the Bible does not simply say: "Well, that's the way life is!" Nor does it say: "Nature is cruel and that's all there is to it." Nor does it simply fall back upon the natural law of mortality, polarity, or the struggle for existence. Nor does it belabor the tragedy of contradiction. It says very simply and with an almost shocking straightforwardness that back of the suffering and back of the death in the world lies human *guilt*, and that therefore the only way I can come to terms with my lot is to come to terms with this *guilt* or else learn to know a court of judgment that will relieve me of it.

All this is, of course, a tremendous, breath-taking assertion.

It is a good thing that the Bible does not express this assertion in philosophical propositions. This would only result in endless discussion. It simply sets before us a few monumental facts of life and says, "Just look at these for a moment. Don't withdraw from the affair by saying that they are just myths. No, look at them for once!"

The greatest of these facts is *death*. And by speaking of it this primordial story confronts us with nothing less than the thesis that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

Let us recall certain details of the story of the Fall.

God said to Adam and Eve, "You shall die if you eat of the forbidden fruit." And when they wickedly ate of it nevertheless, God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever," God sent him out of the Garden of Eden.

So the curse of mortality settled down upon man.

This may strike us as nothing more than crude, embarrassing mythology. Perhaps all this leaves us quite at a loss. But before we interject and declare our doubt, let us force ourselves to listen for a moment longer and try to understand what is being said here.

The disobedience of man consists—we are given to understand—in the fact that he wants to be *superman*. He wants to "be like God." He is the notoriously Unbound One, and by no means only in certain peak examples and high fliers, like Prometheus or Napoleon or Hitler. No, he is *always* the Unbound. He establishes the welfare state and abolishes—or at least thinks he abolishes—the misery of human existence. He undertakes to provide for every life situation and plays the role of the divine father of all.

But is it not utter folly that he should imagine that he can really burst the bounds of afflicted humanity? Does he not merely shift the misery from outward poverty to inward poverty? Does he not cause men to be debauched inwardly with excessive pros-

perity, comfort, and boredom by inculcating the illusion that the peace of his soul is to be found in cars, television sets, freezers, and other miracles of civilization?

Man also desires to be unbound in his technology. He breaks the bounds of this ancient earth and reaches for the stars. And as he launches cosmic expeditions and grasps at realms which earlier generations considered reserved to God, he takes with him into the universe his peacelessness, his anxiety, and his hunger for power; perhaps he may still upset the stars.

So, since that dark hour in the Garden of Eden, this has been the story of us all. We want to be untrammelled. We want *more* than God the Lord has allowed to us. We want *more* success, *more* power, *more* money. If we are workers, we want higher wages. If we are employers, we want higher profits, if we are publishers, we want larger printings. Expansion must never cease. The first limit we encounter—it may be the limit of our physical strength, the limit our heart trouble allows us, the limit of some sudden disillusionment with people we trusted—stagger us. For we no longer take any limits into account, simply *because* we are unlimited. "If gods exist," said Nietzsche, "how could I bear not to be a god?"

Therefore I must also prolong my life; I believe all the humbug that any magazine blathers about some new hormone or cosmetic product which will make me live to a hundred and preserve the appearance of youth.

And then what happens—and this is the dramatic point in our story—is that this arrogant man who wanted no limitations put upon him, this man who wanted to snatch God's eternity for himself, who wanted to be immortal and like God, *has his limitations cast into his teeth*. "The man has become like one of us," the story says, "knowing good and evil." After he has nibbled at the tree of knowledge, he will also reach out for the tree of life and plunder the fruit of immortality. He will want to be unlimited in time, he will want to be eternal.

And therefore he is driven out of paradise and the burden of

mortality is placed upon his back. In other words, the unlimited one is shown his limits, and the chains of time come clanking down upon this man who wanted to snatch eternity. He is hurled back into the realm of the finite, where there is such a thing as "finis," where one day my last hour comes and it's all up with me.

The fact that we must depart and that our life has a terminus is therefore a reminder that we are *only* men and not God. The fact that we must die and leave everything behind that we have made and loved and perhaps also idolized is a part of judgment. In this judgment there flames the reflection of a divine flash of lightning that says: "Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed!"

In Japan one can always see from tremendous distances the majestic, snow-capped pyramid of Fujiyama. And so it is with us: the death we are approaching stands like the landmark of Fujiyama above the landscape of our life and makes life a "being unto death."

This "being unto death" is far more and also something different from our last hour, which we Christians talk about perhaps far too much. For death is present not only at the end of our life but is there long before, in every moment of our life.

Why do we keep hastening at our work? Why do we say: I must make the most of my youth? Why do we think: Now we are in our best years, now is the time to get it done? Why do we use calendars and clocks? Behind such very ordinary phrases and facts stands the appalling circumstances that hour by hour we realize that we must die, that we have only a limited time. Today will never return again. "Everything passes, everything passes away," says a popular song, and for once it is right. "'Tis but the time and drawing days out, that men stand upon," says Shakespeare. Even the physician who struggles to preserve life fights this battle in the shadow of death. He may fight a delaying action but he cannot conquer death, and in the end he himself will be snatched away.

So it is indeed, we see the Fujiyama of our death wherever we stand. This flaming barrier, at which the cherub stands with his flashing sword, cannot be overlooked. Arrogant, unlimited man, who would seize eternity, is hurled back behind the barrier of time.

Only now that we have spelled out the text to this extent dare we come forward with our doubts and objections. Let me repeat these doubts once more quite boldly and revert once more to the questions we asked before. Is what we have just said sheer mythology or perhaps even very sinister mythology? Is not death, instead of being a judgment, a purely biological process? Is it not caused by the dehydration of our cells and the natural wear and tear of the organism? Are not birth and death expressions of exactly the same rhythm of life which we observe in spring, summer, autumn, and winter? And is not death merely the final beat in this rhythm of life?

At first sight this looks very plausible. And yet it must strike us as significant that a physician hardly ever dares to tell a dying man that he is now facing a very natural process. If these things are really so terribly "natural," why not call a spade a spade? Why must one stage these camouflage and diversionary maneuvers? Is there perhaps something more than—and something quite different from—this natural process behind the act of dying?

Not long ago I read again the following account in the diary of a young flier who fell in the war.

He was gathering a bouquet of lilacs. As he parted the branches he saw beneath the flowering bush the half-decayed body of a soldier. He drew back in horror—but not because he had never seen a dead body before. On the contrary, in his young life he had seen far too many. He recoiled because of the screaming contradiction between this dead man and the flowering bush. If he had only come upon a withered lilac bush he would not have been horrified. After all, a blooming lilac bush sooner or later will become a withered lilac bush—this is really an expression of

the rhythm of life. But that a *man* was lying there in a decayed state, was something that would not harmonize with blooming nature. That's why he recoiled. He sensed that this dead comrade was something contrary to the Creator's plan of life. He felt that this dead man was a foreign body in God's flowering world. There came over him the feeling that the death of man is an unnatural thing. And this young flier with his shock of horror was certainly nearer to the world of the New Testament and its message than the people who are always driveling about the "naturalness" of human death.

When Jesus Christ heals the sick and raises the dead the fundamental thesis behind these acts is that sickness and death should *not* exist. These things are physically unnatural—in a deeper sense than the purely biological sense; they are contrary to the intention, the conception of creation; they are not order but *disorder*.

So for the Bible death is not simply a part of nature. Rather the natural processes—which, of course, the Bible does not deny—are only the vehicle in which the "last enemy" drives about. Therefore all this unnaturalness, this disorder, this "wrongness" in the world must give way when Jesus Christ comes and lays our hand again in the hand of the Father.

Then, of course, the biological processes of death still go on. But the judgment is gone. Then death acquires, so to speak, a different quality; it ceases to be a hostile barrier let down between time and eternity which violently hurls us back into our finitude. Now death becomes a bridge, a transition.

To understand this one must sit down and read the funeral hymns of our church:

Through sin and death he strides,
Through this world's grief he rides,
He strides through hell's dark tide;
Where'er he goes,
I too abide.
He keeps me by his side.

So sang Paul Gerhardt. This is what is meant by the statement that death has lost its sting. Then death is no longer a judgment that compels us to leave all; then it becomes the joy of going back home. For now my Lord awaits me on the other side of the dark grave and he leads me from faith to sight, from this world where we see in a dim mirror to the table of the Father.

Could the Head

Rise and leave his members dead?

That's the way it is with death now.

When I say "I have to depart," then the values and the things of my life—my house, my garden, my stamp collection, my vocation—are the standard by which I measure the departure. But when I can say, "I am going home," then there is a point in my life where even the greatest things become an insubstantial shadow and I see only the shore of home where I am awaited.

True, this presents many questions and here I cannot even attempt to make the roads of thought any easier to follow. The power of this truth is so great that there is no way to approach it except by bowing in reverence before the mystery of it.

And yet I might ask: even when we look upon death as being primarily a natural event which we can reduce to biological formulas, do we not perceive that this leaves an insoluble remainder, a mysterious unknown factor? Must we not agree with what Alfred E. Hoche, the psychiatrist, says in his well-known autobiography¹—and he certainly is not saying this in defense of any biblical texts: "Man cannot understand his death. To him the thought is intolerable that this whole world of love and friendship, this world of work and devotion should be simply wiped out, intolerable simply to fall by the wayside, while others go on, chatting as if nothing had happened. . . . This mocks all logic."

As a matter of fact, it cannot be reconciled with any biological categories either, for here we encounter the unknown factor of which the Bible speaks when it points to the judgment which constitutes the background of our finitude.

¹ *Jabresringe*.

Always, when I stand at the grave of a person whose life was filled with meaning, who loved and was loved in return, a rebellious feeling descends upon me. Here is a person who was bound to human fellowship with every fiber of his being, he may also have been at peace with God, and here he must depart hence "like a beast." Must death be? *Must* this limit, *must* this abyss continue to exist, if one is in the hands of a living God? This is the protest against death that rises up within us, if we have any conception of what man was *really* destined to be. We can understand Holderlin's complaint in *Hyperion*: "May God pardon me, but I cannot understand death existing in his world."

None of us can understand the exultation that rings in the New Testament accounts of raisings from the dead and of the resurrection, none of us can comprehend the splendor that hovers over the fifteenth chapter of I Corinthians, if he has not seen this dark foil in the background.

To be sure, even here in this story of the beginnings we can already perceive the first flickering of the promise, which the message of the resurrection will later make explicit, and we find it in a very discreet, almost hidden thought. God had forbidden man to eat of the tree in the midst of the garden with the threat: "In the day that you eat of it you shall die." And now man *had* eaten of it, and the lightning bolt of judgment struck beside him in the ground which would henceforth bear thorns and thistles, and it also struck the serpent. Thus the sentence of death did *not* overtake man on the spot. Instead of dying at once, the fate of mortality was imposed upon him. He is thus allowed to go on living, though in the *shadow* of death. He was granted a reprieve. So in the midst of judgment the hidden mystery of grace is at work.

And again the promise arches over to the New Testament, where all this is enlarged and where it becomes more graphic and vivid. The barren fig tree is not immediately hewn down, but is given another year of probation. The clock of our life is turned back once more, in order that even today we may

"know the things that make for peace." "This night your soul is required of you," says the Lord in the story of the Rich Fool. Who am I, where do I stand? The point is: In the *coming* night will my soul be required of me. Today I am still allowed to live. Today I can still answer the question whether I am content with my filled barns, my success, my comfort, my reputation and prestige—until suddenly it all forsakes me!—*or* whether I shall make my peace with God and set the whole course of my life toward homecoming. Today I can still watch for him to whom one day, when I shall have to depart and yet will be going home, I shall be permitted to say: "If one day I must depart, depart thou not from me." Thou art he who came in to this passing world of mine and endured for me the powers of sin and suffering and death. Thou wilt be my comrade and brother now that my time is up and I must go through the gate, alone and without any baggage, where not even my most beloved can pass, except thee, who art the Lord of both time *and* eternity."

So Adam must leave paradise. For every one of us it's in the past. And only fools think that it can be re-established on this earth. As a rule, those who have promised men a heaven on earth have made of life a hell. No, the cherub stands behind us and there is no road back. We were never promised that the burden of mortality would be removed from us.

But Adam, all of us, you and I are permitted to go on living for a space. In the midst of the darkness of suffering and death, which we ourselves have conjured up, God will let his sign of grace shine, to proclaim to us: "Behold, I have not forgotten you; I have loved you with an everlasting love, and I will be the star for you to gaze at, the spring from which you may drink, and the peace that will cover you like a protecting mantle in all the strife of earth." So he made the rainbow of reconciliation to shine above the storms. So he gives to us the laughter of a child, the encouraging word of a friend, the healing of an illness, the return from prisoner-of-war camp. Again and again the towers of the Father's house suddenly light up as we tread the dust of the

far country. The Savior walks beside us on the refugee's road, for he himself was homeless and had nowhere to lay his head. He lies beside us in the hospital ward, for he too was stricken and smitten. And yet at the same time he is the Physician who heals us.

That's the way God's judgments always are when they bring hardship and darkness into our lives and we "have to depart." Even in the deepest darkness the kindly, beckoning hand that is calling us home can be seen.

The other judgments of which our text speaks point to the same mystery, for the question of death slumbers in every experience of life. When a child is born this is accompanied by pain; these are sore moments and death is not too far away. What was once wrapped in the Creator's blessing of fruitfulness and a symphony of joy, this too has become an ambiguous thing, shifted to the boundary of darkness. Whenever new life comes into being there is pain and dread and the beating of the wings of death is heard. Thus Eve is told: "In pain you shall bring forth children." And in the symbol of the subjection of the woman there is also a reference to the servitude and slavery which will prevail in our world.

But here too there slumbers a hidden blessing wrapped in darkness. The pangs and oppressions of our life keep reminding us that "this poor earth is not our home" and that we are waiting for a new heaven and a new earth in which there shall be neither mourning nor crying nor pain any more, and every tear shall be wiped from our eyes and the last enemy has been robbed of its power. How many of us would give up the darkest hours of suffering in our lives, now that we look back upon them; the hours of utter hopelessness as prisoners of war, the hours of failure in our work, the hours of painful farewell? Would we ever have learned how God can comfort, how faithfully he remembers us, and how punctually he fulfils his promise? ("When comes the hour, comes help with power.") Would we ever have learned this, if we had not sat in darkness and the shadow of

death? God's stars are seen only from the deepest wells, and we learn that he hears us only when we cry to him from the depths.

So we are surrounded on every side by signals and beacons. They keep flashing the message that there is One who is determining the course of our life, that he is guiding us home, and that we shall never be left alone in the fog that veils the coming day and in the storms we dread.

Often we do not know the meaning, but we believe in Him who does know the meaning. This is the secret of our Christian life. And with it we walk straight through the enigmas of life.

Never can we say: "*Because* certain conditions are such and such, certain things happen to me." We'll never get by with that answer. It sticks in our throat, doesn't it, when we think of the millions who died in the last war, the subterranean terror in the cellars and bomb shelters, the stricken women and children? The fact is that we do *not* know why this had to be; but now we can say: "I will abide with Thee."

For just as our own death is not merely a biological process, so the great mass deaths are not mere historical processes which mechanically unfold according to pitiless, eternal laws. No, there is a heart that watches and cares, and everything must pass in review before that heart before it comes to me. There is a secret censor and no stroke of fortune which would strike us can get past without being examined to see whether it will be for our good.

Therefore *what* we meet with in our life is not so terribly important; the *only* important thing is whether we accept it as coming from God's hand and whether we dare to trust that it was made to measure—your measure and mine—and therefore is exactly right.

Lord, send what'e'er thou wilt,
Joy or sorrow, either one;
I dare to trust that both
Come from thy loving hand.

Is it not strange that the Christians on the sinking "Titanic"

sang, "Nearer, my God, to thee," and so lost their fear of drowning in the icy Atlantic? The point is that they did *not* sing, "Farther away are now the golden jewelry in my cabin, the precious documents in the ship's safe; farther away are my loved ones at home, farther than thousands of geographical miles—for now I must leave you for ever." No, this is not what they sang or thought. It was not sad leave-taking and passing farther away; it was a coming nearer: "Nearer, my God, to thee."

It is not necessary to go down with a ship or to be mortally sick or to find ourselves in a "boundary situation" or to be on our last legs in order to make this avowal, "Nearer, my God, to thee." We still live in the light; perhaps life still lies before us. We rejoice in our home, the splendor of autumn leaves, a beautiful picture, the sound of music. It would simply be pride and pious snobbery to want to brush all this aside as "worldly pomp." This would be not to honor the Giver of all good gifts but rather to offend him.

But we must not cling to these things and get caught in them. Instead we must find our way through the things which can be so fascinating and delightful in life—but *also* through the burdens and trials we have to bear—to Him who gives us all things, both good and 'hard, and in both is saying: "I know you. You no longer need to depart hence 'like a beast'; you can come home 'like a child.'"

So he blesses the flush and flower of youth and comforts the loneliness of age. He lays his hand upon the little ones, and upon us too when the end draws near. He sends us the happy, starry hours of life, but he is *also* beside us in the dark valleys with his rod and staff and the marvel of his consolations. He always blesses. He is always near; and he changes everything—everything.

THE STORY OF CAIN AND ABEL