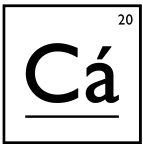


*The Riddle of Life*



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# THE RIDDLE OF LIFE

by

J. H. BAVINCK

PROFESSOR OF MISSIONS

AT THE FREE UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

THE NETHERLANDS

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WM. B. EERDMANS PUBLISHING COMPANY

GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

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*L. C. catalog card number: 58-7567  
Printed in the United States of America  
First printing, June, 1958*

*Translated by  
J. J. LAMBERTS,  
Assistant Professor of English,  
Northwestern University,  
from the Dutch edition,  
Het Raadsel van Ons Leven,  
published by J. H. Kok N. V.,  
Kampen, The Netherlands.*

## CONTENTS

<i>One: The Great Awakening</i>	7
<i>Two: Our Knowledge</i>	13
<i>Three: Faith</i>	19
<i>Four: World Order</i>	27
<i>Five: Where Do We Come From?</i>	33
<i>Six: Who Are We?</i>	40
<i>Seven: The Meaning of Life</i>	45
<i>Eight: God's Plan: The Great Chess Game</i>	51
<i>Nine: Our Idols: Money</i>	58
<i>Ten: Our Idols: Honor</i>	66
<i>Eleven: Our Idols: Pleasure</i>	74
<i>Twelve: Sin</i>	82
<i>Thirteen: Salvation</i>	87
<i>Fourteen: The Savior</i>	93
<i>Fifteen: Jesus, the Savior</i>	99
<i>Sixteen: The Salvation That He Grants</i>	109
<i>Seventeen: The Meaning of the World</i>	114
<i>Eighteen: The End of Life</i>	122



## *I. THE GREAT AWAKENING*

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WHEN a person looks at the world round about him for the first time, a multitude of questions throng in upon him from all sides. For the questions that we are concerned with in our lives are innumerable and most of them are so insoluble that, after once having come to grips with them, we seem to feel unable to withdraw from the contest. Indeed, it is not strange that all the peoples of history have voiced their vexation at being confronted by the very questions which at the moment confront us and which we cannot shake off.

Among the vast throng of such questions are a few which particularly occupy our attention and which come back with a monotonous regularity.

There is, for example, the profound and difficult question regarding our origin and our destiny. What actually is the origin of man? Where does he come from? And where does he go when his physical life comes to its end? Is death the end? Is there no further life beyond death? Or is death simply a curtain which separates two phases of existence? How is one to go about determining his place on earth?

We scarcely embark on pondering such questions before we find ourselves confronted with new problems equally insistent on solution. What is after all the object

of human life upon earth? Has one a purpose in the world, or is life of no more consequence than the flowering of a plant which merely blooms and presently withers away? Is there something for man to accomplish, to carry out a charge that has been placed upon him from above? And when he comes to the close of life, may he lay his head down serenely, trusting that his work will be blessed, that he has accomplished something whose value will not be lost? In asking this, one ventures among the great questions which have to do with the existence of the earth itself. Is the earth everlasting? Must everything that the successive generations of men have constructed — their palaces and their cities — must all this crumble because the world itself has been doomed? But to what effect is all this struggle and this energy if everything after all must come to an end?

Something strange occurs in the human spirit when these questions begin to arise. It is a tremendous awakening. One is shocked out of the stupor of humdrum living and he begins to see life with all its wonderful riddles. We forget the kaleidoscopic swarming in the world all about us and suddenly it occurs to us that our entire existence is grounded in fearful mysteries. Then man exclaims: How strange it is that I am living! Where do I come from? What is the purpose of my life? And so as he considers these bewildering questions, a great and wonderful surprise comes into his spirit and he smiles in the giddiness of these new experiences.

It may be that the first time he senses all of this arising within him he is reclining somewhere in a field of grass. The gnats are buzzing around him and perhaps on all sides are white flowers and blue flowers and yellow flowers



on the fragrant meadow. It may be that there are clouds drifting overhead — dazzling white against a lofty blue sky. Or he may be sitting quietly out of doors in the evening. He has just looked upwards at the glimmering little points of light — the twinkling stars — and has listened to the song of the grandeur of night. And then at once there arises within him the emotion about life itself and all of its bewildering questions. How is one to say where this disquiet comes from, through what gates it has stolen into the chambers of his soul? Or has it always been present, having merely been sleeping until this very moment? But now it is aroused, now it captures him — this excitement about the mystery that is me, and I do not know whence, nor how, nor why I am.

At the moment that the soul comes face to face with these questions it is almost as though everything that has gone before were something dreamed. Dreamed, like the dreams of the white dazzling clouds, sailing off and never knowing where. Dreamed, like the dreams of the buzzing gnats that dart and drone, never knowing why. Dreamed, like the dreams of the bright stars, cascading rivers of light into the abysses of the universe, never knowing to what purpose. This is how the soul has been dreaming all these years. It has thought, and desired, and loathed, and loved, and sought, and hoped, and mourned, and feared. And now in a moment all of this drops away just as though it were standing for the first time before the overwhelming question: the depth of things, the reason for things, the purpose for things. Why is everything? Why is everything as it is? Where does everything begin and where is it going? What is the purpose for every-

thing? And what is the tiny spark of my own frail life within all of this?

When the soul realizes this, and asks this, then it shudders to its foundations. Then it stands like a beggar, shoeless, in the miserable tatters of ignorance at the everlasting gates of Truth. And it knocks . . . ! O God! If indeed You exist — O God! Tell me what and why I am and why everything is. I do not want to be dreaming, my God, but I want to be living. And to live is to perceive. Show me Your truth, Your eternal truth, so that my soul may live! How does it happen that I exist and that I do not see You? What veils and curtains hang between You and my soul, between my soul and the Truth? Before the infinitesimal spark of my life is consumed in the conflagration of all that is perishable, let me first see out of what I was born and to what I am to go.

Once we begin to look inquiringly at the universe, we find it impossible to escape the compulsion of its constantly arising problems.

If indeed there is a God, how does He exist? Is it possible for us to know Him? And what is His relationship to us? Are we ourselves divine, or is God the great enemy of all of us — our ultimate destroyer?

And what are we ourselves? Do we actually exist, or is this simply a colossal fantasy in which we have merely the illusion of living? Do we possess both body and soul, or simply a soul, as some people have fancied, or simply a body, as others have maintained? And what is this world about us? Is it in existence, or am I producing it within my restless imagination, just as in dreams I assemble strange and colorful images?

Is there a power surging in this world in the direction of progress, or development? Or, on the contrary, is everything gradually tending toward destruction? How does the universe exist? How is it put together and what concepts are expressed in it? Is it a majestic, logically constructed totality, or is it a strange confusion, full of contradictions?

Are we in our lives obliged to obey laws that are higher than ourselves? Is there a moral law which governs all lives? And is it possible to be obedient? Do we have wills capable of making free choices? Or am I a captive of my environment, a product of circumstances? And if we do not obey, are there penalties which can compel us to obedience?

It is obvious that once we have started on this train of inquiry, there is no end to it. The questions leap at us; they do not let us go; they cry for answers. All we can do is push them back now and then and hurl ourselves into the rush of living. But presently we discern that they are lying in wait, ready to pounce on us.

There are many people who never attempt to reflect on these questions. They go on living in calm and in tranquillity, never realizing that they inhabit a world full of marvels. They enjoy and they hate, they are happy and they suffer, they struggle and they rest, they live and they die. Perhaps it is only on their deathbed that the question arises in their souls: To exactly what purpose have I been living? Has it had any significance? Does it all go anywhere? What is it, really?

There is a small group of people who have been so earnestly occupied with all these questions that they can no longer evade them. They must know! They must know

whether they are living and why they are living! These people have applied all the energy of their wills to pondering these problems and they have exclaimed: We must first know, before we will be able to live!

Our purpose in this book is no more than to touch rather lightly on a few of these problems of life. We do not want to frighten anyone, nor are we seeking to arouse skepticism. We wish only to learn to observe and to inquire.

In fact, we are not searching as though we were desperate. Our search is not an inquiry to which there never comes an answer. There is a cynosure for our groping and imploring. God has spoken. The eternal mystery of the deepest foundation of all existence has been made known. In Jesus Christ the light has dawned to banish all darkness from our hearts, quieting us in the joy of having found and of having been found.

Then this profound word of His comes into our thoughts: I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.

Jesus Christ is the answer to all of the questions of life.

## II. OUR KNOWLEDGE

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ABOVE the entrance of the gate to knowledge appears this question: What are you able to know? And everything ultimately depends upon this question. We might embark on weighty discussions about the most difficult problems while it could be demonstrated, quite easily perhaps, that the questions lay utterly beyond the reach of our capacity to understand. We then should be like a youngster who, having been given a bow and some arrows, keeps aiming at the moon in order to shoot it to death. Similarly we might be asking about God and the destiny of the world in spite of being unable to provide a solution to even the simplest question.

What are we able to know? We should say it differently: What are we able to know with *certainty*? Where does the stable point of our knowledge lie? Where do we find it possible to say: At this place no more doubt is possible; here you may trust implicitly. When we have found this place we shall be at the start of a difficult journey. For then the question arises: How are we to pass to other questions from this fixed point? We will be like soldiers starting out from a bivouac, spreading out in all directions into a forest, but returning from time to time to their fixed encampment.

In the course of the centuries a number of answers have been put forward to the question: What certainties may we accept, and where do the limits of doubt lie?

The simplest, most childish answer is: We know what we see. It is in observation that we find the certainty we need. Once we have seen something, all doubt about it ends.

There are some people who go so far as to turn this proposition around and then to declare: Whatever I cannot see, I refuse to believe. If I could see God, all my doubt would vanish. But it is impossible for me to believe in a Supreme Being who cannot even be seen. Seeing is the strongest basis for knowledge.

We have spoken of this response as being childish and we have done so intentionally. It is perfectly obvious that one should have to make it as a beginning, but it is incredible that anyone should be satisfied with it for more than a moment. Brief reflection will demonstrate that this point of view is impossible to maintain.

So you know what you observe? When you look at the moon shortly after it has risen, it is much larger than when it is high in the sky. What do you really know in this case? In which instance do you see the moon as it is?

Hills viewed from far off appear to be blue. Are they that color? When you approach nearer you see a variety of different colors.

There is a deep well into which you are peering, and it seems to become narrower far down. But it has not been constructed that way at all. Is what you see, or what you appear to see, true?

The blue sky seems to be a massive dome which rests on the ground like a tent. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to show that there is in reality no tent like this.

You see the stars, like small shining points at the zenith. Do you believe what you see, or do you believe what the books tell you, that the stars are larger than this world of ours?

You see the trees as green, and blood as red, the fields of ripe wheat as yellow and the sky as blue. Do you realize that there are other people who see all this quite differently, who are, for instance, entirely unable to distinguish red from green? Would you call such persons color-blind? But why should they not say that in actuality there is something wrong with your vision? Who assures you that you are seeing everything as it is?

You observe the world all about you. Suppose we imagine that it is as you see it. In dreams you also imagine that you see, that you see strange figures and remarkable animals. Is there any way of showing that you are not dreaming at this instance but that everything you see is actually true? Is it not just as possible that you are dreaming right now and that when you seem to be dreaming you are in fact awake? How can we tell that it is otherwise?

The most conclusive point, perhaps, in the entire discussion is the thought that the most important things are those we cannot see. You cannot see your mother's love, and you cannot watch thoughts rising up within your soul. You cannot see that concepts, desires and images are alive in your brain, nor can you see the life that throbs through your blood and heart and nerves. Do you want to declare that all these things do not exist? Of all things,

are these not just the ones that are most important? These invisible things — life, mind, love — are not these precisely the ones that build and reshape the world? How can we accept the proposition that only visible things are certain for us?

And so we must come to a different conclusion. We still do not know what we see. It is quite possible that something that I regard to be entirely certain turns out to be utterly untrue. Simply seeing something does not immediately remove all doubt because there is still a question whether we have seen *well*, or whether we have *imagined* what we have seen, and whether it is *actually* true. This is not the fixed point from which our patrols may sortie. We are not yet released from this consuming uncertainty.

Perhaps there are some already armed with the answer, namely, there is indeed a way around our problem, for we know what we know — what we think. Thought provides the absolute guarantee that we need. If something is logical, if it cannot be contradicted, then we have attained the fixed point.

Nobody will deny that two times two equals four, that seven and eight make fifteen. Nobody will doubt that the area of a triangle is equal to one-half the altitude multiplied by the base, or that the sum of the three angles of a triangle equals 180 degrees. Whatever we think, whatever we can prove is incontrovertibly stable, and from this we can go forward with assurance.

At first glance this suggestion does not seem unacceptable. When seeing no longer serves, thinking can perhaps carry us across the gulf and give us the desired certainty.



And yet it is not difficult to show that this is impossible. Our thinking always has to begin somewhere. We cannot simply think without any attachment. Thought has to have a starting point from which it can proceed. Precisely here the difficulty lies. How do we arrive at such a starting point from where we can initiate our forays?

Science begins its inquiry with certain postulates — certain unproved propositions — which are regarded as certain. If these are true, then the other is also true. But who can tell us positively *that* they are true, that we can make no error here?

Some people have said: There is indeed one fixed point, namely, the fact that we ourselves exist. I exist, and I know that with certainty. From that starting point I am able to reflect with freedom, because in this no error is possible. Other people, on the other hand, have sought their starting point in the existence of God. God exists, and from this one can proceed in his thinking. How is it then? Where are we to begin, and where are we to finish? Is there not always the gnawing uncertainty that precisely the starting point may be a lie? And if this is false, then the entire structure is false. And so reflection cannot be of conclusive assistance whenever we have to do with certainty.

What are we able to know? We have to return to this from time to time. Do we have a fixed point at which we can begin? If we have, perhaps we shall be prepared, since from this single point we may possibly reach everything. But the great difficulty lies in reaching just that point, and this is what we find so arduous.

Over the entrance to the gate of knowledge appears the question: What do you know? What are we to answer? Must we perhaps acknowledge: One thing I know, that I know nothing? But then all further inquiry is denied us. How then should we be able to search further for answers to questions which burn within us?

Where does the fixed point in our knowledge lie? Where is it possible for us to declare: Here I stand with assurance; here no more doubt is possible?

### *III. FAITH*

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THE period in which we are living is a period of spectacular advancement in human knowledge. It is remarkable how vigorously and in how many various directions our knowledge is expanding. This holds true not only for areas of knowledge from which we are able to benefit daily as, for instance, engineering or medicine, but also others, like history or biology or astronomy, all of which are increasing with bewildering rapidity. It is undeniably true that we are advancing by immense strides in all fields. Our telescopes peer deep into the universe; in the laboratories experiments go on that people of another time would never have dreamed of. Our insight becomes deeper and broader in every direction. All of this we may state with profound thankfulness. It is not difficult to understand that contemporary man should be proud of his science, or that he should note with deep satisfaction that this noble work conducted day by day by thousands of researchers all over the world is rapidly increasing. How great we are becoming! How our knowledge is growing daily!

Nevertheless, there is not the slightest occasion for pride or exultation. There are still those, as there have been in every century, who look at all of this development with a kind of anxiety. Their disillusioning

conclusion is this: Our knowledge is still actually pitifully small!

You may ask, How is this possible? How can these two conclusions stand side by side? Do we really know so much and at the same time so little? Do we have an occasion for joy, but also for humility? Indeed, this seems more and more to be the situation.

It is possible to demonstrate this in two ways. In the first place we realize immediately that in spite of all of our science we still do not comprehend the things in themselves, that we constantly find ourselves confronted with mystery. This is at once apparent when one begins to ponder the most recent questions.

Now, you have a consciousness: you know the things about you, and you know yourself. Only you must not ask what this consciousness is, or how it arises, or where it is situated. What actually is this self-awareness? How does it happen to escape us at night during sleep, but return in the morning? What is it? Or what is will, what is character, what is your ego? As you spend time thinking about these things you often become exhausted. What a puzzle in every respect each one of us is to himself!

I am not yet discussing that incredible puzzle, namely, how it is possible that material phenomena, functions of the nervous system, become converted into psychical manifestations. The optic nerve receives a stimulus; at once I am aware that there is a light somewhere outside of myself. The most remarkable of all transformations, the leap from the physical to the psychical, is so unutterably obscure that we have no hope whatever of obtaining any insight into it. It is a great pity that we people of such vast learning cannot even begin to comprehend a com-

pletely ordinary activity which takes place within us at every instant.

Or consider further some other matters. Do you know what life is? I do not mean simply classifying and describing various phenomena, but are you able to perceive some of the enigma comprehended in a living being which distinguishes it from the non-living? Or do you understand what happens within a person, within an animal, or within a plant at the precise instant of death? What is life itself? Where does it come from? How is it able to manifest itself in these phenomena?

What is electricity? What is substance? We have split the atom and within its structure we have encountered new worlds. Do we now know what it is? Have we now comprehended from what building materials this universe has been constructed, and where they come from? Do we now know the secret of the astounding attraction by which proton and electron, positive and negative electricity are linked, the force that binds the atom together and which supports the universe? What are the natural laws that enforce order upon world chaos? In what do they reside? What are they actually?

It is not necessary to be a hopeless pessimist in order to realize that we have understood only precious little of this vast cosmic edifice and that perhaps we shall come to understand only little more. We know the phenomena; we are able to trace the laws governing these phenomena. But to go beyond this, to penetrate to the essence of the things themselves, this we cannot do. We do not understand ourselves nor others, life nor death, spirit nor substance, plant nor animal. We grope about among mysteries. This is not at all wrong and we do not need

to be embarrassed about it, provided we are modest and humble and that we acknowledge our ignorance.

Side by side with the first is still another consideration which impels us to greater modesty. There is much that we human beings know, but there is one thing that we do not know, namely, the way toward the profound and real joy of living. With each step forward that learning has taken, we have become the more aware of this gap. Within recent decades there have been unleashed a tension and an inquietude such as have never been known before this. Every nation on earth trembles with apprehensions of the future. The prospect of a hideous war and the calamity which may possibly engulf all of us — these are enough to render the stoutest heart fearful! And even though such a war should come to an end within a short while, the fact that we understand one another so imperfectly and think so little of one another that there is nowhere any real mention of peace, gives us a feeling of fear and apprehension. Our tremendous scientific capabilities appear to be far less of a blessing than of a curse because we are not strong enough morally to dispose of such powers. Every new discovery is presently adapted to destructive uses and to extermination. In many respects the human race is like a youngster who has gotten control at an inauspicious moment of a weapon that is much too powerful for him to use in the right way.

I am convinced that we are standing here before the poignant aspect of our helplessness and our failure to understand. We do not know how we are to go about changing ourselves and our fellow man. We do not know how we can become different people. All of us sense that this world is on the way to becoming a horrible chaos

and that not a single one of us is able to show how we are to rescue ourselves from this fate. We know much and we can do much. But the ability to alter ourselves and our world so that there can be real peace: this we lack. It seems as though we are being compelled by powerful, invisible hands to advance farther along the road to increasing knowledge and to increasing capability even though it becomes more and more clear that this way can lead only to nameless misery as long as we human beings remain what we are. Egotism linked hand in hand with helplessness is evil, it is true, but yet it does not seem dangerous. The same egotism, however, becomes an erupting volcano the moment it has the strength of weapons at its command. Hate minus a machine gun is evil, but still not dangerous. Hate plus a machine gun is capable of turning the world into a hell. Every step that we progress in the direction of scientific knowledge can lead to illimitable disaster as long as we remain unchanged within.

Thus in two respects we human beings are brought face to face with limitations that we cannot cross. Our knowledge is bordered by the vast ocean of mystery. Our capability finds itself limited because we cannot find the road to a true changing of human nature.

It is possible for these two discoveries to produce within us a great despair if we do not believe that there is a higher Power directing our lives. Faith is all that can actually keep us safe and serene and that can open to us attitudes which give a new strength to our lives.

One of the most noteworthy characteristics of our existence is an inborn and ineluctable conviction that the world in which we live is a meaningful world. The

moment a newborn infant begins to draw breath it does so in the instinctive trust that the ambient atmosphere is constituted with the correct proportions of oxygen and of other elements that are necessary for our lungs. The first act of life that the human being performs is based on the belief that we are not being tricked by a game but that we exist in a world that has meaning. When I open my eyes and look at the things outside of myself I do so in the implicit conviction that my eyes will not betray me, that they are adapted to the light so as to give me a picture of what is outside me. When I ponder the questions of the world about me, I do it in the implied belief that my pondering parallels the great Thinking, of which the world is the representation. The small boy who at every step asks his father or mother why everything is as it is, is proceeding on the instinctive assumption that for everything in this world a "wherefore" is to be found. The apple tree does not just blossom; the butterfly does not just find its way to the flowers. There is sense and meaning in all existence. This belief is most deeply rooted in the hearts of all of us. When one is older, questions sometimes arise which bring him to the brink of skepticism regarding the rationality of existence. It is possible that all of existence begins to seem to him empty of substantiality or purpose; but in spite of this, deep within him his trust remains undisturbed. Every beat of my heart and every draught of air is an indication of the belief that an invisible rational Power has ordered my life in context with the world about me.

When we inquire about the sources of our knowledge, can we not argue along the lines of this belief? Why should I put my confidence in my eyes and ears if I did



not believe that One greater than myself had fashioned the eye and ear and made them correspond to the world which surrounds me? Why should I trust my own thinking if I did not suppose that One, wiser than myself, had so ordered my thinking that it might correspond with the reason which He Himself had built into this world? How should I dare to live — how, in fact, should I be able to live — if I did not each instant believe that there has to be an invisible Power who carries and leads my insignificant life into the great relationship of all things on earth? I must believe that I am not the victim of a game, that I am not being hoaxed. Only on the basis of that belief is life possible.

Presently we shall have to say a great deal more about faith. When we consider the questions regarding salvation, we will naturally meet faith once again, but then with an entirely different meaning. Then our attention will be directed to the statement from the Bible: Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. Then again we shall be concerned with faith. But we are not at that point yet. Right now we are engaged in thinking over the bases of all knowledge. Yet even here we are brought up against the demands of faith. We can readily accept what our eye or ear, what our understanding and reason, what all of these do to enable us to know the truth, provided that . . . yes, provided that we start from this, namely, that we are created on earth and that we correspond to it. If this is so then we may proceed without anxiety.

We can state it in still other terms. We may trust our knowledge, we may apply ourselves to our work with joy as long as we begin believing that we are a part of a

meaningful universe, that the world is a meaningful world in which every part corresponds to the other — in which the eye matches the visible, the ear the audible. If everything fits together in this manner, then we are secure. But this foundation we are able actually to maintain only if we confess that an Almighty and All-wise God at one time made the world and man for each other and fitted them to each other. Believe in God, and you believe in the world. Without God you have no assurance any longer that life is not a gigantic swindle or a monstrous delusion.

Here is where faith lies. All knowledge is ultimately founded on faith. The little ship of our human knowledge lies calm and secure against the storms of skepticism only when it has been anchored in a logical, meaningful world, conceived by One who in His illimitable wisdom formed everything in relationship to other things. Believe and you will live!

## IV. WORLD ORDER

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A PERSON who makes a study of the world is overwhelmed at the very first glance by the endless variety that he encounters on all sides. What unbelievable riches there are in the world! How lavishly everything has been distributed. There is a great abundance of varieties of beings, of creatures differing among themselves. From time to time one observes new forms; nearly every day one encounters still different but hitherto unfamiliar phenomena.

But when in the course of things one has observed more meticulously, then astonishment at this variety is supplanted by surprise at the unity, the order that prevails in spite of all the differences. For everything in this world is dependent on other things in one way or another. One being influences the other; one creature, as it were, supports the other. Plants cannot live without the soil that feeds them. Animals in turn cannot continue to live without the plants from which they get their nourishment.

The phenomena of day and night, of rain and drouth, of warmth and cold, exist in nature about us side by side with complexes of other phenomena — with the position of the sun and the direction of the wind. One influences the other; one cannot exist apart from the other.

Upon closer inspection it becomes evident that the order which one finds is a purposeful order. This vast interdependence of all these various things at one and the same time serves the totality. One needs to go only a little way into all of this before he stands astonished to find that everything appears to be driven by an invisible law — that one thing seems to serve for the purpose of bringing the other to perfection. The butterflies render a service to the flowers, just as much as the flowers serve the butterflies. The great and mighty sun which blazes in splendor at inestimable distances from the earth cannot realize that it is bringing light and heat thousands of miles from itself. Nevertheless, it is the sun that maintains life on the earth, that draws the plants upward out of the moist soil, that brings joy to the troubled spirit. If indeed the sun could think, it would perhaps say to itself: "I'm shining because I want to shine, because it is my desire and joy." And it does not realize that by a Hand more powerful than itself it has been incorporated into this glorious law of service. Even though it does not realize this, the mighty sun serves that tiny plant which bravely raises its head so full of expectancy of life.

And this plant does not think any farther than it knows. It glances at the light and it dreams of the joy of sun and life. It is absorbed in itself and in the wealth of existence. But it does not sense that it is serving just as much as it is being served by others. It serves the little seeds it bears which will develop into new plants by and by. It serves the animal foraging after food, or another plant climbing upwards along its stalk. In all sorts of ways it serves other things that are in search of support or shadow or nourishment or moisture.

Look at the world and there will be one consideration that will keep on amazing you – this tremendous act of serving. The law of service is like an arm underneath every creature, supporting the mighty world in its existence. Each being supposes that it is alone within itself, but it is actually nothing but the servant of others. *To exist is to serve*. Outside this law of service there can be no existence.

Now the law of service is noteworthy in more than one respect. The first is that no creature serves in order to serve, at least not as a rule, but every creature merely intends to help itself. All of this serving is done unconsciously and passes unobserved. It is as though a strong hand were propelling these things and moving them in spite of themselves to the great service. This service is, moreover, no sacrifice, no compulsion, but an automatic act performed without coercion or reflection. Everything exists in accordance with its proper nature, but each of these things is so constituted that the existence of the one supports that of the other.

The second consideration is readily apparent, that the service changes to the degree that the creature represents a higher order of being. There appear to be especially three classes of beings, three great orders in creation which in this respect differ from each other.

The first such order is that of ordinary inanimate substance. Here is also a service, but apparently it is so purely by chance. The rich loam serves the seeds that sprout in it, but it does not know nor care about them. The white snow renders a service because with its compact garment it protects the land from the bitter cold of winter. And the mountains also serve as they accumu-

late the snow during the winter, carrying it through spring, and in the summertime filling the rivers from the cool water springs. But none of these things know this. Even the rotation of the earth upon its axis is a service of priceless significance because it maintains the alternation of day and night, which really makes life possible. All of these serve unawares. If circumstances happen to direct it, they can also cause injury. Then the fierce rainstorms can occasion floods and disasters, or then the pleasant sun with its burning rays can scorch the rolling meadows. In the great inanimate world restraint prevails upon natural forces which on the whole are linked to the law of service. But in some circumstances this may be completely reversed and the result is annihilation.

Within the broader circle one finds in the second place the order of smaller living things, plants and animals. In many respects service here has become quite different. One encounters more structure, more unity; one might almost say, more plan. The plant serves itself with all of its delicate organs but also manages to take care of itself when its environment is unfavorable. Actually it does not serve itself as much as it serves its species. The mother dies for the sake of its child; the full ear decays as the seeds are put into the ground. For the species each individual is prepared to make the greatest sacrifices. The mother shelters her offspring from danger and would rather perish than neglect her young. There is also a peculiar kind of species-egotism. One species frequently lives at the expense of the other by destroying it. However this may be, at this level of existence service is more strictly circumscribed: the particular serves the group, the individual serves the species, the mother serves the child. All

destructive forces are repulsed and if they cannot be conquered, life simply adapts itself to them. The most favorable conditions are sought out, especially for the sake of the young, who must still be guarded with much care. Service becomes more a service toward an end. In all the world of living things there is a single aim, which is unconsciously apparent in all functions.

At the apex of this broad circle rises the final step, that of conscious, volitional beings — the level of humanity.

When we come to man, the service is different, infinitely more varied, but hence also more difficult. It is obvious that the primal natural instincts should recur also in mankind. Here is care for the child and something of this species-egotism. But these powerful instinctive drives are more on the conscious level here. Man knows what he is doing and he is also able to perceive why he is doing it.

Furthermore, in the case of a human being this service takes on a richer form. Every class in human society serves the other. A world cannot get along without physicians but it cannot get along without tailors or farmers either. Service becomes particularized and each one assumes a segment of the larger social assignment.

With man there is a more powerful and more dangerous inclination toward serving self, rather than others. Man by himself is a more conscious totality. He can be receptive to the sorrows of others, but can also in effect withdraw himself from concern for others. He puts himself in the middle; often he seeks to crowd out other people because in this manner he is able to augment his own importance. In brief, in the case of man this service is often distorted and often withheld as the result of the

pressure of egotism, of the "I"-instinct. This instinct often overgrows all others, chokes out the others, and eventually triumphs. With man there is conflict and warfare. Service is obstructed because he lets himself be served.

For this reason service comes as a mandate to man. Serve each other! What the entire universe unconsciously brings to perfection, man must perform consciously, with knowledge and desire. It is at this third level that the command is given: Love your neighbor as you love yourself.

There has been one, the man Jesus Christ, who expressed His life's mission in this: The Son of Man has not come to be served, but to serve.



## V. *WHERE DO WE COME FROM?*

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NOW for the first time we are able to explore a little more deeply the important and age-old question about the origin of all things — the “whence.” In our discussions up until now two concepts have become increasingly obvious. First, all our knowledge is a relative knowledge, with the result that we have felt its inadequacy, the fact that it rests on belief. Second, we have noted that we can comprehend the world only as a totality in which every member serves the other. The law of service is the basis of human existence, and broader still, of universal existence.

Suppose we turn to the question, Where does everything come from? Here we must make the greatest possible use of what has been considered up to this point. We must guard ourselves especially against speaking boldly when we are in fact but groping at the door of knowledge. We must seek, on the other hand, for a principle that will give us a decisive answer regarding the law of service. Any view that holds that everything is as it is purely as the result of chance we must dispose of at once.

Where do we come from? How many generations of people have fretted and pondered over this problem. The dazzling sun, the power of effervescent life, the prodigal

variety of people and of animals — where are all these from? We can say that we have no concern with this question in a special sense. We exist and that ought to be enough. Nevertheless it is clear that the answer we give to this question is of overwhelming importance for many other questions which we shall presently raise.

Where do you come from? Is it the hand of God that made you? Do you carry the marks of His divine wisdom and His omnipotence? Or is it the vast power of chance which in the course of millions of years has been leading up to your being formed? If it is the first, then you are subjected to a divine law, but then you are also the object of a divine concern. Then you are not a link in a chain to a still higher evolution, but you are the apex, the perfection of the glorious work of creation. If it is the latter, then you stand on a pathway with darkness behind and darkness ahead. And there is no real standard, no real concern, no real purpose, no real direction.

The question of origins is indeed a difficult one.

Our understanding can really observe nothing except the manner in which the world is constituted at this moment, although it reconstructs with probability the long period of its history. Thus from the nature of this assignment it is often necessary to posit a number of implicit data in such a manner that at each particular moment an alternative explanation will appear equally acceptable.

If anywhere, this is the place where probability must suffice us. It could have been that it was this way, but it could just as well have been quite otherwise. Here we shall have to be content with this undistinguished answer.

And yet there are various indications which suggest an origin as the result of divine creation. First, there is this tremendous variety which compels our astonishment. How does it come about that everything in the world is comprehended in this law of service? How does it happen that everything matches everything else and that they fit together? Every being exists according to its own nature and supposes that it is merely serving and enriching itself, although by its own function it contributes to the support of the totality. As you contemplate the order of the world you cannot dismiss the idea that a Supreme Being has applied thought to making everything. The deeper you penetrate the world, the more you are impressed by this. During the last century the literature of science has recorded conquest upon conquest, starting all its reflections with the thought that everything is meaningful, that it has been thought through. And this conviction finds verification in every discovery. The majesty of thought, of rationality, is spread over the entire noble creation. And especially it is revealed in this, the image of the only wise God.

A second consideration is this: the world cannot be regarded as having originated of itself. This may be expressed by saying that the world exists in a highly "improbable" condition. Incredibly vast reservoirs of energy are concentrated at various places. The sun has been sending forth tremendous quantities of energy for an inestimably long time and there never seems to be an end to it. Such accumulations are nevertheless not to be explained on the basis of mere chance. The trend in nature is always exactly the reverse, the reservoirs of energy level themselves out and all accumulations are avoided. Simply

for this reason a chance origin of the universe becomes difficult to accept.

It ultimately comes around to this, that our knowledge keeps on running into unexplainable residues. Granted the substance and the natural laws that are now in operation we can figure out a great deal. But the substance and the natural laws themselves always remain the inexplicable constituents. And although we succeed in analyzing the substance down to its final elements, we still face the question: Just what is this now? As far as natural laws are concerned, the last few decades of scientific exploration and research have so vastly transformed and enlarged the concept of natural law that enigmas leer at us around every corner. Further research continues to lead into mystery past the plunge of plummet of any human thought.

It goes without saying that these three reservations are not sufficient by themselves to tip the scale. Mathematical formulations have in a certain sense a compelling absoluteness, but it is quite different with respect to the great, all-embracing questions of life. This is because we human beings are much too personally involved in answering the questions. If our entire life is estranged from God, in that we have torn ourselves away from the hold of His majesty, then it is as though a kind of blindness has stolen upon us, as though our eyes are no longer capable of seeing the luster of His glory. Our thinking is far less objective or free of prejudice than we often suppose. Anyone who listens perceptively in time of war to the arguments for or against this country or that immediately realizes that as far as countless matters are concerned our intellect is little more than the humble

servant of our heart. Our intellect thinks what our heart wants it to think. This is true in much greater measure the moment the supremely important questions of God and the world come into consideration. Then the compass of our thinking displays quite apparent variations. Knowledge of the truth is in the first place a moral value granted only to the pure of heart. Living in sensual desire, in hatred, and in ambition deprives us of a view into the most profound realities on which the universe has been grounded.

In other words, with respect to this most important question of the origin of all things it is impossible for the intellect to make a decision. If one intends to wait until scientific investigation has pronounced a judgment that settles the question once and for all, he can keep on waiting till the end of time. One is confronted here by the great choice which he cannot sidestep. We human beings are like a child, exposed as a foundling, who afterwards is never able to say with intellectual certainty where it comes from unless somehow a tug at the heart-strings points out a blood relationship.

The Christian faith is quite aware of all this and therefore places in the foreground quite emphatically: I believe in God the Father, Creator of heaven and earth. This is no scientific conclusion, no well-substantiated demonstration, but it rests in belief in the Word of God. In this world, in the midst of enigmas without number, whenever I am pondering the question of origins I can do no more than trust that all this meaningful and still so bewildering universe is the masterpiece of a Supreme Being, of a wise Maker, who is also our Father.

So far as this creation goes, it is a powerful achievement of God, regarding which we are unable to make even the most remote conjectures. When the Bible speaks of how it may have been, it is always in words of enigmatic profundness. I have in mind here the beautiful phrases of Psalm 33: "For He speaks . . . and it exists; He commands . . . and it is established." After this word *speaks* one involuntarily catches his breath, and the rest follows like a shout of surprise. Or I think of the well-known expression from the New Testament: "That what is seen was made out of things which do not appear" (Hebrews 11: 3 RSV). These are as yet extremely faint indications of the inexpressible mystery which we comprehend in this simple little word *creation*. By His almighty will God has brought the world into existence. Then all the stars and suns were born, with their orbits; then the Milky Way was woven like a glowing band about our galaxy. Then the earth — this little earth — set out on its royal way. And just as the earth continually revolves about the sun, and travels as it were in the radiance that streams from the sun, just so this universe exists only through the Light that streams from the face of the Eternal. He is the Sun of the world. From Him, and through Him, and to Him all things exist.

One of the great concepts of God's creation is that He did not at once form this world in a cut-and-dried fashion. I do not know how this world appeared directly after it had been brought into existence by God. Perhaps it was molten and glowing; possibly thick, dank vapors boiled up from it. Out of this seething and obscure mass the mountains rose, extruded from the interior of the

earth as the result of indomitable pressures. The dark earth lay quaking and trembling.

At a later time the first germs of life began to awake, through the almighty will of the Creator. Plants began to grow on the mountain slopes, in the crevices of rocks, on the trackless plains. And so, like a song of wisdom and might, it was executed – this great process of the becoming of all things. As the last of the visible creatures, man was born. He is the most needy of all beings. He requires air for breath, food in every form and combination in order to hold his own. He could only enter this world-dwelling when these other things were already there. He could never have been the beginning – only the end. In his heart the splendor of eternity is reflected.

And thus the Bible gives us a glance at the origin of all things, and of the origin of our own being.

## VI. WHO ARE WE?

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SOMEWHERE in an inconspicuous place in the Bible there is a wonderful expression about Adam: "the son of God." Actually, this is the answer at once to the question that we asked above. Who are we? We are God's sons, children of God, born out of eternal Light.

It is possible to entertain all kinds of ideas about the being of man. One can say that man has come into existence gradually as the result of natural forces out of lower beings that prepared for his existence. These forces, as it were, propelled him toward development. One can also say: Man is in the profoundest sense "the son of God." This latter does not mean that man has fallen out of the sky all at once, but that man, even though he is on the physical side related to the animals, and although he is and will remain material, nevertheless has about him an unmistakable nobility that can be explained in no other way. He bears as a secret treasure within him a glorious crown, which gives him a line of action in the happenings of life, and which enables him to rise high above the animal world.

This choice between the two ways of looking at man is again something impossible to resolve solely by means of the intellect. The intellect can indeed accumulate a great many arguments for either of the two views. The mind



can clearly and decisively show that man is truly material, or, on the other hand, emphasize that there is a force operating within man which starts out far above the physical. But in the end the choice itself cannot be made by thinking alone. What do you think about your own life? How do you regard yourself?

Here it is necessary to note that the heart is not entirely unprejudiced. If we say that man is descended from the animal and in the ultimate analysis has to be regarded as an evolved animal, then we have abundant justification for the fact that we so frequently resemble animals. Why should anyone be surprised that in time of war a man, like an animal, is eager to shed blood, or why should anyone be astonished that sometimes man permits himself, like a beast, to be driven by his passions? Is it not rather much more remarkable that he is already so far along the way toward being human? Has he not found new pathways for himself in endlessly numerous respects? Although we are still far from the goal, and although a long course of evolution stretches before us, there is no occasion for gloom. The twilight that we are living in is not an evening twilight, but the dawning of a new day!

Nietzsche especially has been the eloquent prophet of the ideals which are incorporated into this outlook. Man, he says, is still something to be overcome; I shall show you the way to the super-man. Man is not the goal, but simply a link in the long chain. And so let us advance with hope and with confidence along the road of evolution!

On the other hand, if one believes that man is a son of God, that he, in contrast to all other creatures, bears within him something noble, then at the same time one

is forced to acknowledge the tremendous fall which man continues to make day by day. For the level of our life lies far below that plateau which we regard as the genuinely human. In our finest moments now and then, when we seem to lose this world and to rise above the mountain tops, we sense something of what life could be and should be. Then how does it happen that in the ordinary course of daily existence we continue to revolve about ourselves and we do not even hesitate to inflict pain on others or to jostle them aside?

Why do we all fall prostrate in prayer before the sacred "I"? And still we feel that we are fools, that to live the self-sacrificing life is much more noble and ultimately far more satisfying than to exist trammeled up within one's self. How hard it is "to kick against the pricks." Sometimes, when we grow older, the thought comes to us, What an inexpressibly richer life we could have made of it. And how tedious, how colorless our path often remains!

In the depths of man's heart there is a sludge; it is as though an invisible hand were choking the fountains. Man is a fallen and continually falling "son of God."

There are three little traits by which man discloses his exalted origin. In the first place, man is a moral creature. He is sensitive to a difference between good and evil. One cannot deny that the pure norm is many times distorted, and yet every man has the vague supposition that there are standards. His living, his thinking, his speaking are subjected to a higher law. There is wrong that cries for punishment, that needs to be judged, to be repudiated. There is also a good that asks to be sought, to be praised, to be rewarded. In the conflict between the two moral forces we must station ourselves heart and

soul on the side of the good. Moral good makes demands on us; it requires us to devote ourselves indefatigably to its service, to admit its unlimited sovereignty. This state of affairs is so evident that all peoples have been impressed by it, and everywhere there are echoes of surprise at this moral law which lies concealed within us like a hidden compass. It is as though for all of us, deep within, the ideal of *holiness* lingers.

The second characteristic is that of the need to know. Man not only seeks to know that which is immediately important for him, but he also peruses the riddles of the universe. He is by nature a thinker. People of antiquity pondered the movements of the heavenly bodies, the origin of things, the essence of everything that exists. The question at the back of all phenomena continues to occupy man. Even the child at every minute asks why. Man is an inquirer, seeking the unity, the harmony, the nature and the destiny of creation. It is as though he is trying to look through creation as through a well-polished crystal, as though beyond the universe itself he wishes to catch a glimpse of the divine hand that brought it into existence. It is as though for all of us human beings, deep within, lies the ideal of perfect *knowledge*, the resolution of all problems in all-comprehending unity.

As a third phenomenon we must mention the desire to exist in harmony, in peace, in communion with the Divine Being. Here again it should not be difficult to assemble references from the history of all peoples. Have they not frequently sacrificed the very finest they possessed in order to placate the highest powers, which they recognized as being above all? There is an impulse in the heart, which shows above the mundane, which makes man

flee to solitude, which compels him in silence to listen to the voice of God whispering through the universe. This yearning to come once again into God's sphere, to be withdrawn from the forces that pull one downward, to stand once more in God's communion, is one of those very real forces which have dominated history. It is as though deep within all of us exists the ideal of *uprightness*, of harmony, and of communion with the Origin of all things.

In these three impulses man stands at the apex of all creatures. Thereby he has become identified as a being of another order, and his history is governed by other forces. He does not, it is true, possess these three supreme values. He longs for them; he has a yearning for them. But this very yearning demonstrates that these mighty possessions are a part of his being, that he cannot do without them. They are a real part of his being. They are his crown, his nobility. They write ineradicably upon him the signature of the royal birth: we are God's kin. Adam . . . "the son of God."

## VII. THE MEANING OF LIFE

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ONE of the questions frequently raised in our time has to do with the meaning of life. This question is extraordinarily understandable. Consider for a moment: we live a brief number of years. If we take a high number, it will be around eighty. But in these eighty years there are only a few moments that we really live to the full. In days of early childhood we live perhaps a little while. Then it seems as though we come to life again for a moment in adolescence when a great love invades the soul and makes our entire being tremble to its foundations. Then we go to sleep again. Now and then we are roused with fright when tremendous things happen in our immediate vicinity, but that is really very seldom. For the rest of our lives, we dream. That is to say, we tramp on the treadmill of daily existence; we eat and drink, we return home, read the newspaper, watch the television, and go to bed. We are promoted, we try to get ahead of this one or that one, we make more money, we have children, and we grow old. All of this develops according to formula. You could put it down in advance in a note. Now and then we are grieved, and now and then we are happy, but not very much. We love this one and hate that one, but not very deeply. We find pleasant things and tedious things, we laugh and we weep, but on the whole all of

this remains on the surface. We are almost never moved so strongly any more that we feel as though we were really alive. Quietly and passively we shuffle along the tedious little road which lies plotted and paved before us. We grow older and we die.

And here, as superficially seen from the outside, is the life of many people. It is all extremely simple; it can also be quite pleasant. But the question remains whether there is really any meaning to such a life. One can say that it is a dream — a pleasant or an evil dream, as he chooses. One may also suggest that it is a play — a comedy or a tragedy, just as he happens to regard it. A person must, however, ask himself from time to time whether it has any meaning, whether it is worth the trouble. Has it a deeper significance? Ah, here are the burning questions of our time.

It is not so remarkable that these questions should come compellingly forward now. This is the age of the machine. Everything becomes mechanized; the machine rules everything. In the Middle Ages an individual person could endow his work with far more of a personal stamp. He was able to put something of himself into it. Everything did not go quite so rapidly, nor so easily, but what he finished was his own work. In contrast to him put a man from among countless millions of our own time. For forty years his daily work consists of nothing more than pulling down a lever and raising it, as the result of which he has helped in the fabrication of a rather insignificant part of this or that piece of furniture. It is useful, but I ask, What is the meaning of such existence? What must such a man feel when his days finally come to an end? What has he done, or what has he given? A

human being is a costly, but unfortunately still an indispensable extension of our machinery. He is an extremely disadvantageous little engine which consumes a tremendous amount, but which cannot be completely dispensed with. Is it any wonder that in such an era, an era of roaring machines, of impersonal, purely mechanical toil, the question repeatedly arises: What is the meaning of life? I know that we want to justify, to protect our lives as much as possible, but is not this more of a passion of nature than something that springs up out of a true love for life itself? Do not all of us seem more and more to lose the concept of meaning from our lives?

The question of the meaning of life is an uncommonly difficult one. What do we actually mean by it? Perhaps a simple illustration can give some clarification. I am writing down the words: "The silver moonlight shone horse-trader upon the water."

Now this word *horse-trader* has no meaning in this context. Certainly it has a signification, it says something, but it has no meaning, it does not make any sense. How is this possible? Simply because it cannot be placed into the whole, it does not fit. It stands like a kind of indissoluble lump in the midst of the other words. It hinders and harms more than it assists and supports. Then when does a word have "sense"? Whenever it can be dissolved without any residue into its context, when it fits into a milieu. Elsewhere the word may have a great deal of significance, but the entire sentence remains nonsense. When does a human life have meaning? Whenever it has been able to enter harmoniously into a larger meaningful complex, whenever it is part of a mighty world-plan.

We already have a more expanded view when we put it in this manner. Say, for instance, that each human life resembles a word which one moment is uttered and which dies away the next. It can be a long word or a short one; it may be melodious or harsh, but it has no meaning in any case. This it acquires only when one can assume that something is expressed in this life, that it is a segment, an infinitesimal segment, of a tremendously vast world concept. Then it performs a service toward a larger totality. Then the word may die, but the meaning remains. Our words, in fact, also die when we speak them, but after they have been uttered the sense remains. And so too the individual human life may die. But at the end there will be majestically evident the great divine outline, the world-plan.

Suppose we take a more concrete example. There is a businessman whose unmistakable ambition is to become rich as quickly as possible. He is ready to do his utmost toward this goal and he sacrifices everything for it. What will this man be likely to regard as the most important thing in his life? The size of his income, whether he earns a great deal or little. But, although he himself finds this most important, although he himself is concerned with it, this is not the meaning of his life. It is much more true that he is involved in a larger context. In his business affairs he participates in the culture, in the development of his country. By his example, his associations, his practices, he influences others, perhaps for good and possibly for evil. As the result of his life the problems of his age are rendered more acute or brought nearer a solution, or modified in some manner. But in any case his life is something — a fraction of an entire —



a word — within a larger context. If the man eventually enjoys anything additional from the profits that he has made, some of his influence continues to keep working. He has helped mold other people, possibly embittering them, possibly sustaining them. At length he dies. The utterance is ended. What is the meaning of life? In any case it is not what he considered to be most important.

Whenever we inquire more deeply, or on a broader scale, we are confronted as it were by the figure of Jesus Christ. He tells us, not once but again and again, that the profoundest meaning of human life lies within the kingdom of God. Something is able to come into the human soul of the light of God, the light that calls and beckons to a person. One must frequently sacrifice everything for this; it is the pearl of great price for which he must be prepared to give up his life. A person may also draw back from this. He can occupy a circular track of self-indulgence and sin. But in any case, something happens in his life. There are eternal forces at work within him; they struggle for his soul. A thread runs through his life. For this reason Jesus Christ shows us something tremendously noble back of all of these seemingly petty human affairs and human experiences. He lets us see that a man can tear himself free from the grasp of God, but also that he must bow himself before God until the kingdom of God fills his entire life. Projected against such a background everything has meaning, every deed of a human being has value. And in the struggle of the world itself Jesus Christ reveals to us the coming of this same kingdom. All of this is a single mighty and glorious plan of God. He has conceived it; He directs it. He is the invisible Director. Anyone who is able to see this in such

a profound sense no longer asks about meaning, for it is obvious. This is why Jesus Christ answers the burning questions of life with such tranquillity. He shows us the deep, eternal meaning of human life.

Is it perhaps because we no longer see the background that we are so agitated in our days about the meaning of life? Is the reason it often appears to us to be a capricious fumbling, because we are no longer aware of the eternal background on which all of this is sketched? Can we not therefore understand that in all of these little scratches and insignificant lines of our lives there nevertheless is one firm line, a decisive line, the line of God — of His everlasting kingdom?

## VIII. GOD'S PLAN: THE GREAT CHESS GAME

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WE have discussed the fact that a great and glorious plan of God is being completed in all human events. Now before we proceed, it is necessary to examine this idea somewhat more closely.

There is a question, for example, which occurs to everyone regarding the all-directing will of God in relation to the problem of evil in the world. If it is true, so the argument goes, that there is a mighty God who rules all things, how does it happen that there is so much injustice and so much misery? Our thoughts are directed unawares to the needy, to the lonely, to those without ideals, to all those whom life offers nothing but trouble and sorrow. We have in mind wars, cruelty and oppression, and it disturbs us to observe how often the course of events is in conflict with what we should regard as being right and virtuous. There seems to be no justice in the fortunes of men or of nations; the noble and weak is trampled and killed by brute force and there is no Hand from above to offer assistance or rescue. World history often resembles utter chaos, lacking direction or goal. How is all of this to be reconciled with a belief in God's great and glorious plan?

Beyond this problem looms up another, still more difficult and still more unfathomable than the first. Countless times it appears that evil is stronger than good, as though God Himself were suffering defeat at the hands of evil. If it is true that a holy and righteous God is governing the events of the world, then it is reasonable to assume that on every page of history there should be evidence of the triumph of good. God is stronger than all the forces arrayed against Him, or rather, He controls everything and nothing can move without His will. He only is the mighty One. But notice that whenever we examine the actuality in regard to world events the opposite seems to be true. God appears to be the weaker, and evil appears to be great and powerful. Pious people who have reposed their entire trust in God find themselves reviled, imprisoned, and killed. The issue of events is determined with machine guns and cannon, and anyone who supposes that God Himself should enter the battlefield as a champion is bitterly shamed. The Gospel, so far from glossing over these matters, tells about Jesus Christ, the One sent from God, and shows how He, the noblest of all, God Himself in human form, was seized by violent hands and crucified. The Lord of the world experiences defeat by the forces of evil.

Whenever these and similar questions come up in our hearts, we presently sense that we are face to face with one of the most profound enigmas with which our human understanding engages itself. And I do not believe that there will be found a complete solution to these problems. We stand here like little children observing with amazement the events of the world, never being fully able to comprehend why all of this is as it is.

In our reflection about these matters, however, we encounter certain things which we must not overlook unless we are to get involved in a host of side issues.

A primary requirement, first of all, in all considerations of the great questions about life and the world is an attitude of meekness and humility. There is a Japanese proverb which says: Only in humility can one enter the innermost sanctity of nature. The same also applies to history. The deepest secrets of history are unveiled only to the one who delves into them with a humble spirit. As we saw earlier, that in all considerations of the existence of this world we come into contact with the great mystery which transcends all thinking, so in the consideration of events we are obliged to bow our heads. We are merely standing on the battlefield of world history; we cannot survey the whole of it; we do not yet know how it will turn out; we do not know the strategic lines. We are, however, not unprejudiced. Moreover, we are small, insignificant people, able to see only here and there a feeble gleam of light in the dense night of the world's enigmas.

More than this, we are often in danger of attributing to God various matters which are fundamentally occasioned by our own fault. Whenever one wishes to express in words the utter tragedy of our modern world, I believe he can do no better than to say that our scientific capacities and our educational capabilities have grown far beyond our moral powers. We have acquired powerful weapons, but we are morally too weak to use them. In spite of our scientific attainments we are proud and self-willed people, unworthy of possessing so much power. Our learning and our science are completely out of pro-

portion to our moral strength. The essence of the present-day period of world history can be stated in this way: In this kaleidoscopic tumult of peoples one tremendous truth is demonstrated, namely, that power, including technical power, is an unlimited curse whenever it does not serve the cause of love. Perhaps this is the profoundest meaning of the history that we are living. Perhaps God is busy teaching us these things by way of blood and tears. There is not a single respect in which we can hold Him responsible for our suffering and misery, because, as a matter of fact, what we are now experiencing is the bitter harvest of the seed we ourselves have planted. If we were able to survey and penetrate everything, I am positive we should hear God's voice clearly above all these world events, calling us to our senses even in our own times.

In the third place, we must guard against considering the external as the only important aspect. Goodness and nobility may indeed often suffer defeat by what is unworthy. A scoundrel armed with a machine gun is, on the purely physical level, more powerful than an unarmed saint. But this does not mean that what we call defeats are necessarily such. At the end of his life Napoleon came to the conclusion that there are defeats which, as time goes by, begin to be tremendous victories after all. He came to realize that Jesus Christ, who, as far as external circumstances are concerned, suffered an appalling defeat from the forces of evil when He died on the cross, by means of that very cross established a kingdom which still endures thousands of years later, and that there always continue to be millions of persons who regard Him as their Lord and King.

In discussing these more profound matters, it is perhaps well for us to try to obtain a fuller view by means of a simple comparison. It occurs to me that many of the difficulties that strike us are understandable from a distance when we look at them in comparison to a game of chess.

Anyone who has ever played chess with another person considerably more skillful at the game recognizes the bewildering sensation of feeling as though his hands were tied. Every move you make fits into the plan of your opponent. You advance your pawn; you capture his bishop and for a moment you have visions of winning. Later you realize that your opponent wanted it just that way, that each of your moves worked into his plan. He has planned out five, six moves in advance; he has already thought out every possibility; he has your entire game in his own hands. Presently when the game has progressed it becomes apparent to you that you cannot do anything except what he wants you to. Your play has been thought out in advance by him and you can only carry out his will. Every one of your moves will assist by and by in making his victory still more complete.

In the same way, as it were, the totality of world history is a single vast chess game of black against white. We human beings are pawns, living pawns; some of us are bishops or rooks. We all stand in the service of a power that is greater than ourselves. We can stand on the side of white, on the side of the Light; or we can dedicate our strength to the service of black, to the power of the evil one. The game has gone on for many centuries. White advances his men; black captures them. Sometimes black captures an important piece in white's defense line

and then he dreams of victory. But all of black's moves, no matter how brilliant, no matter how annihilating they may appear to be, fit into white's wise master-plan. The one Chess-player has the game in hand and every play of His opponent is ruled by Him. Ultimately it will become evident that everything which seemed to be a conquest by black was nothing but His single mighty triumph.

As I write these things there comes to my mind one of the most critical moments of world history, the moment at which all world events came together as into a focus. It was the moment when Jesus Christ lived and labored in the world. I can visualize how the forces of black, the forces of the evil one, attacked Him and seized Him from all sides, and finally crucified Him. If there was ever a moment in which white seemed to be weaker than black, this was it. This was the great defeat of God. God appeared to be more insignificant and weaker than the force of the evil one. It seemed as though the world were turned upside down, as though the Creator were conquered by the creature, as though the power of love, on which the universe is grounded, had been made to capitulate before hate. But observe — this act of black, this apparent victory of evil, has appeared after the course of centuries to be a mighty victory of God's. That cross on which the King of Light was put to death was comprehended from the very beginning in the all-encompassing plan of the world. The power of sin has been broken by that cross and the kingdom of God has come with power. The cross was seemingly the defeat of God, but viewed in the light of the higher plan it is the point at which the heart of God was opened widest and at which His love appeared to us.



Nobody is capable of drawing clear lines through the events of our times. We are experiencing days of struggle between communism and democracy. Nobody can predict the end, but we are all aware of this one thing, that a fearfully heavy judgment is to be executed upon all our vain human thoughts and pretensions. If we have faith that a divine plan is being revealed in all the events of this world, then this is our one certainty, that when the clouds begin to lift and we are able to see plainly what has happened, we shall also realize that every other kingdom has been shattered or obscured, but that the one kingdom which is to come is the kingdom of God's love which has appeared to us in the cross of Christ.

## *IX. OUR IDOLS: MONEY*

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WE now want to enter somewhat more deeply into the great ideals of human life. With this we must make a single preliminary qualification regarding the exceptionally great life-ideals, the source and tap-root of all further ideals. In his own life every individual has a deep-seated need, namely, to be able to use his own special gifts. It is a need of being permitted to arrive at a complete unfolding of one's inner self so that the various abilities with which one was born may really be expressed. Everyone looks for an area into which he can throw himself completely, in which what is unique in his life can come to its own. This is a powerful and a moral ideal because it is rooted in the great law of service that we spoke about earlier. And it also takes into consideration the important idea that we live in a meaningful world.

If this ideal — this basic ideal, as we might call it — could completely capture one's life, then in a certain sense one should be in a perfect situation. But unfortunately this is not the case. This most profound force is not the only one that rules our life and the lives of others. There are other tendencies which behave as parasites upon the original trunk, sending life off into entirely wrong directions. These are the three idols that we wish to discuss now, of which the first is a tremendous, wild desire for

money which drives and impels the lives of countless people and which is the dynamic of innumerable lives.

When we speak of a desire for money, we do so in a broad and also in a more restricted sense. Here we do not think, for example, of the dollar that we need in order to buy a few gallons of gasoline. It is something different. In all people, young and old, there is a constant desire to get rich. If you were to ask a group of young folk what they would like most in all the world, you would quite likely get this answer from most of them: to get rich. There is something romantic about being rich, especially for those who have not experienced it at all. Money is a magical concept. It unlocks the doors of palatial hotels, luxurious palaces, and lush gardens. There is something quite wonderful about money, something that dances before many eyes like a great romantic ideal. If you want to know this magic better, then go to the gambling casinos of Monte Carlo, and observe how money can inflame the imagination, can make the eyes glitter, can make all the powers conspire. Then money is like a god which can set afire the hearts of men.

If you ask how this is possible, we are obliged to list a variety of factors. In the first place, money has this quality that it is nothing of itself, but can become everything. Money by itself is simply a ticket, but with this ticket I can buy whatever I want. Money is pure potentiality, pure possibility. This is what is so highly romantic about the money concept, but at the same time this constitutes its great disenchantment. Everything we buy with it must eventually weary us and seem no longer to content us. But money itself transcends this fault because as yet it is nothing. For this reason it is a very hazy, un-

outlined image, capable of bewitching in a great degree the true money-seeker. But this is also the reason it can acquire such a god-like control over the soul. Everything else disappoints because the vision of an object is always more beautiful than the object itself. It is only money which continues to occupy the throne like a god, its hands laden with treasures, ready with a kind of "open sesame" to unlock all the doors leading to glory and splendor.

In the second place, money has such a bewitching influence over the human soul because it secures one against loss or damage. We feel this most intensely when we regard the basic ideal that resides in every human being — the dream of being able to exercise all of one's powers and one's utmost capabilities. In order to attain this ideal you enter a sphere of activity, one that demands your complete powers, which makes it possible, as it were, to mobilize your entire soul. Viewed in line with the basic ideal, love is the great treasure, because love is able to open the most profound and most noble inclinations of the human heart. This ideal, however, becomes slanted in the wrong way in every man. The necessity of exploiting one's capacities yields to that of "when I am well off at last!" This is the result of a number of factors driving the soul in the wrong direction. "It doesn't matter how I earn it, as long as I have enough money." In this attitude is sheltered a rebelliousness against life itself. It is as though a person gets out of the way of the strain of life, as if he turns himself away from it into a thorough-going pessimism. The pure ideal of every human soul lies in the direction of wanting to become something, of desiring to *be*. The distortion of this lies in the direction of wanting to *have* something. In this there is actually a

deeply concealed animosity toward society, or, still more deeply, against the control of the world, against the tendencies of life. Nothing turns out right, as a matter of fact. Everything is ultimately hopeless. Just give me a handful of money. This affords compensation for the lost ideal of being able to bestow one's life and one's abilities in the joy of giving.

But this is not all. Money has still another function, no less magical. It is that simply by the possession of riches one becomes another person. Money is not merely something that you have, but something that you are. It elevates the worth of your person, it makes people listen to you with greater interest, it causes you to carry your head higher. You may be a genius, but if you are wandering about the chilly damp streets of a big city without a nickel in your pocket, when not a single door will open to let you in, when your stomach calls insistently for something to eat — well, then you feel yourself to be just a poor blunderer. And, on the other hand, you may be a nobody in every respect, in intellect and in character, but when doors open everywhere, and sycophants bow to you wherever you go because you are Millionaire So and So, then you will at last begin to think that you do amount to something in this world. This is what money does. It makes a person feel differently about himself, it gives a certain accent to all of his personality. We attract attention by means of this accent. It makes people friendly toward us; it makes them honor us and bow to us. Money is everything, particularly for people who inwardly amount to very little. Think of them without that accent and they fall back into the vacuity of nothingness. Anyone who robs them of their money actually takes from

them their importance in the world, their everything, their life itself. But the reverse is true as well. A person who really amounts to something, who is someone in the world, is able to manage with relative unconcern with respect to money. He can travel serenely by subway; he can admit without embarrassment that he is short of cash. There is even a certain sparkle of pleasure in leaving out the accent of money because then something is left for him. He can permit himself the luxury of poverty because in spite of this poverty he still retains his place.

And even this is not everything. Money gives still more. It presents the possibility of developing one's life in many respects. This is the function of money. It unlocks universities, the world of books. It gives possibilities for refining the spirit, the development of the understanding. In life it beckons the way toward more responsible occupations to which the complete personality can give itself more fully. For this reason there are commonplace parents who dream of money, who struggle for it, so that they can offer their children these things.

When we survey all of this we are struck by the power of money. It has a romantic glow about it. It is a god because it does godly things. When life disappoints us because there is so much in our souls that cannot escape, because we are often so full of tensions within that cannot be realized, then money gives us consolation. Then, at least, we still have our money. The lives of an incredible number of people are spent with neither satisfaction nor purpose. For all of them money is the comfort which can charm away that inner discontent. When life frightens us because we are ourselves such helpless little creatures, often such unfortunate wretches, then money lends us an

importance; it underscores the little word *I*, it makes us feel as though we were somebody once again. For this reason it increases our worth, or at least our notion of our worth. And finally it grants us the possibility of developing ourselves better and more fully, in this way coming nearer to our ideal. Money does all of this and does this without being anything. It is pure possibility. It is still nothing, but it can give everything. It is a voucher that raises our entire life to a new level. Is this not a god? Is this not divine power?

And yet in all three aspects there lies an illusion, a fearful illusion. Money does indeed give comfort, but not the true comfort. It does unlock the doors to possessions, but not to the true, rich possessions. Neither love, nor health, nor a long and blessed life, nor intelligence, nor inner joy are to be bought with money. It is a voucher with which one can buy everything except just that which makes life beautiful. For this reason it comforts, but does so with illusion, with counterfeit.

Money does give accent to the personality, a concept of worth. It enables you to go through the world with your head raised higher. It underscores the word *I*. And it does this well. But the accent it gives your life is in essence a deceitful one. It can hang king's robes about the souls of swineherds. It gives no true worth, no eternal worth. A nobody with much tone remains after all a nobody. It is in essence illusion and for this reason money makes it difficult for the soul to know itself as it really is.

And in the third place, money gives more possibility for developing one's gifts and powers, but one is not refined by this. It awakes no new powers in the soul and arouses no new possibilities of the character. The person

remains essentially as he was before. Money is no moral force; it does not make one holy. For this reason it is able to confer capacities for developing intellectual and esthetic gifts, but it is quite unable to create. An exquisite taste, a profound inner life — such things it cannot give. It produces no rebirth.

Money is a god. The concept of money is surrounded by romantic emotions in the soul of the human being; it arouses feelings of longing in the heart. But you must not unveil the image of this god. Whoever unveils it perceives that it is a false god and that in its deepest essence it is a liar.

All this you feel very strongly if for a moment you come near to Jesus Christ. If you think of the two — Jesus Christ and money — you are forced almost involuntarily to smile. I do not say that Jesus did not recognize money in its useful functions, that He never used it. But when He perceived money playing the part it has assumed in many hearts, namely, that of a magical god, then He resisted with His full power. With what emphasis did He demand of men that they give away everything that they had! How sharply did He slash at the desire to serve both God and mammon. Money has all the functions of a god and this is the reason that it finds its power in the need for God which has been rooted so deeply and ineradicably in man. Our soul thirsts for God. But if it is money that arouses the desire and apparently satisfies it, then it is all a great lie.

And so Jesus Christ, in the radical reorienting of all values, could exclaim in that holy passion which was the secret of His entire being: How is a man to profit if he should win the entire world, if he should have all the



money in the world, and he should suffer the loss of his own soul? In eternal matters the concern is not with having, but with being. "Happy are the poor in spirit." They find grace with the true God, who is far more austere, but also far more merciful than money, because He is eternal, holy Power.

## *X. OUR IDOLS: HONOR*

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“A GOOD name is better than good ointment” we have been told by one of the greatest sages of antiquity. And it is true; a good name is a treasure for which one will sacrifice much because it has great value.

It is not difficult to show how this happens, particularly when we start with this basic ideal of human life, the ideal, namely, of arriving at a harmonious development of the inner being. Indeed, whenever we seek to discover this harmonious development, we find that we need the appreciation, the confidence of our fellow-men. The most noble attributes of the personality can expand only in an atmosphere of trust and of love. Then the finest buds of the human soul burst into bloom. Everyone senses this as if by intuition. Honor and trust are indispensable in the lives of all of us. Without these we pine away in sulking abuse of the people who have failed to understand us.

It all very much goes without saying that we presently condemn in others any attempt to exploit too crudely the precious ore of their good name. There are those people who with distorted imaginations, with stupid minds, defy all feelings of others, arousing within a short while a great deal of comment so that they are soon famous as fools or as scoundrels. Such persons may rail at a contrary world, but they have not realized that whoever mars his

reputation is trampling his fortune with rude feet. Just as our bodies require air in order to breathe, so our souls have to have trust, esteem of others, and honor in order to express themselves. This is one of the axioms of the wisdom of life.

For this reason also, in trying to save a person who has strayed, the last resort that we often use is that person's sense of honor. If you don't care to control your bad habits, your thirst or whatever it may be, for the sake of your mother or your father, then do it for your own sake. Be brave; conduct yourself like a man; make it possible for other people to look up to you! As soon as this possibility fails with a person's soul — as soon as he says, "It doesn't matter whether people respect me or not," then he is no longer easy to save. Then one of the most reliable brakes on his character has gone out of order.

And yet, regardless of how strange it may sound, this reputation, this esteem can also become an idol. In fact, honor often is this with many people. It always happens when something that in itself is simply a means becomes an end, whenever a person is concerned about this honor and it no longer remains a condition for the real goal, namely, this basic ideal. It happens when a person begins to aim at something that he may only regard as desirable, or in a sense necessary, in order to gain that goal. Then the haze drops over the soul once more, then the idol shoves itself into the place of the ideal, then the true recedes farther and farther.

A single illustration will easily clarify this. I am at a convention and I am arousing the people with an ardent argument for a particular cause — a good cause. I exhaust myself in arguments, I apply all my capacities and re-

sources in order to captivate my audience, to convince them, to stir them up. That is splendid. As long as I am still speaking everything is fine, for then I stand in subjection to the cause I want to serve. This cause is important. And it is really wonderful to serve with one's entire soul a cause which is worthy of being served. Naturally, when I am speaking it is not a matter of indifference to me whether people listen to me or not. It *may* not be indifferent to me because I want specifically to persuade and arouse these people. I struggle for their attention, for their confidence in my words, not for myself, but for the cause I am serving. I am subjected to this cause. I have finished my speech, and now I am sitting down. At the same moment applause bursts forth in the hall. I am congratulated with warm conviction. A thought steals through my mind, "I have certainly said it nicely." And here the deviation begins. Right now I am superior to the cause; now everything centers about myself. I am pleased to discover that the people found *my* words good, not any longer that the cause which I represented was good, but that I was the one who said them. I stand higher than the cause and no longer serve it; but the cause serves me and presents me with distinction. If by and by another person arises in this same auditorium and with even more crushing arguments defends this same cause, so that people listen to him even more than they listened to me, then I do not find this particularly pleasant. The cause is being well served, but I am not being served. At that moment a switch has come into my spirit and the train of my life has started out on the wrong track. What was permitted as a means, now becomes an end. First I was serving, bestowing my strength in the service of some-

thing good. Now the spirit is in charge, endeavoring to win the praise of men by misusing a worthy cause. There is the difference.

Now we human beings are not at all alike in these matters. This often depends on our own personal sense of security, on the attitude that we assume toward ourselves.

Some people are strong, and ever since their youth have had the tacit assurance that they were right. They are sure of themselves, of their insights, of their intellect. And because they are so sure of themselves, they are often much more easily capable of defying multitudes of others. They can collide head-on with them and refuse to step aside for opposition. But this does not mean that they are entirely indifferent with regard to "honor." In the depths of their hearts they struggle for the acclaim of men, alarmed when this threatens to fall off for a moment. They have confidence: it will be coming. But they watch for the instant when people applaud. They are often far more enslaved to human praise than they themselves realize.

Side by side with these are others who have a great irresoluteness within. They are never entirely sure of themselves and always afraid that they may have done or said the wrong thing. They tremble with every action they have to take because they feel themselves so confused within. It is obvious that such weak spirits will have to be far more closely dependent on the esteem of others. They are constantly wondering what people will think of them, their conduct and utterance. As a result of their inner uncertainty, they search for a support in people — in their approval and applause. They actually let themselves be guided by such people at every opportunity.

They are the tremblers whose eyes are fixed on the bystanders, begging approval from them.

Between these two extremes there are infinite numbers of different shadings. There are people with big mouths and very little hearts; people who seem very sure of themselves, but who also have within themselves an opposite pole of timidity and uncertainty. There are capricious combinations and strange transformations. But all human societies are at one in this that people take something which is a means — which is worthy and meritorious, but then only as a condition — and place it above the cause itself.

This small, or at least apparently trifling shift revolutionizes all of human existence. This is not difficult to describe either. We can do this most clearly when we first of all state the ideal: a man is subjected to a cause. He possesses artistic and scientific talents; he has practical insights and an attitude of benevolent helpfulness. Now he enlists in the service of greater good in order to give himself to humanity. He himself does not matter; the important thing is what he has to offer, what he can give. The man is subjected to his commission. And because he places himself beneath his message, he is higher than others. He wants to serve them; he seeks them out of love. But he is not their slave. His message is his mark of nobility; he does not bow to others. Whenever he wants to move people to listen to him, it is for their sake and not his own. The man stands below his message, and thus above people. He goes about as a serving king, above everyone and yet a servant of all in his self-surrender.

When at the same time a man seeks the sympathy and esteem of others, the resulting inner dislocation and

shifting make a slave out of him. Now he is superior to the cause and he himself receives the honor and esteem. To this extent he rises. But as a result of this he now comes to be subjected to people; he becomes a slave to people; he finds it necessary to receive their praise and homage. He loses his prophetic mission and becomes a beggar for people's favor. He descends far lower than he had ever imagined. This is the distortion in his soul which has turned him into an entirely different person, which has twisted askew all his relationships with other people. From such a moment on we no longer confront each other artlessly in our mutual praise or in our disapproval. When we reprove each other, there is something bitter about it. No longer do we simply see the cause, but always we manage at the same time to see the person. That is because we are not living artlessly any more. The cause is no longer all-important. Between ourselves and our most noble words, our most splendid testimony, there always stands a little idol whose name is "I." No longer can we completely escape this.

In his book *Fuhrer Europas* the well-known historian Emil Ludwig gives an account of the end of World War I. He describes how, on November 9, 1918, Churchill and Lloyd George were deliberating on what was to happen. They asked each other whether it would not be the best procedure to send a few ships loaded with foodstuffs to grievously beset Germany, and in this manner to lay the foundation for a real friendship between England and Germany, which could be established on a moral basis. At this critical moment they were afraid to do this. For they feared that their people, still seething with hate toward Germany, would not approve. And when in De-

ember of the same year Lloyd George began delivering speeches in various parts of England with an eye on the coming elections he shouted words of fierce hate against the defeated enemy, gratifying the people precisely in what they wanted to be gratified. He won the success he was looking for. More than 80 percent of the votes were cast for him. "Nevertheless," says Ludwig, "the fact remains that Lloyd George, who in war acted with energy and in peace considered with wisdom, in the short interval of two months let himself be dragged along by the instinct of a popular orator. He flattered the masses where he should have educated them." In that decisive moment, when the concern was with erecting a new freedom for Europe, he was not independent of himself; he was too much afraid of losing the favor of the people which he had so laboriously attained. If one wants to be served by a cause, then it is an inescapable conclusion that he must become a slave to his fellowmen. In the great moments of history this has often appeared as a fearful human failing.

One sees this most strikingly when he loses himself briefly in the life of Jesus Christ. He was the most artless of all the children of men; artless in the sense that He was always dedicated to His task, to His message — that He always stood subjected to the message, and thus above the people. "I do not seek my own glory" (John 8:50). Never do you see in Him the peering eyes, the expectation of homage or applause. Never do you catch in a single word of His the little idol that at once deprives a man of what is noble. He always stands subjected to what He does, to what He says, "I honor my Father!" Actually, when you ponder deeply the life of Jesus Christ, you first begin to sense what all of us lack. The noblest



of us, the men of splendid messages, of great witness, are all still like dethroned kings, compared with Him.

There is the little idol "honor" that corrodes the soul. Never can we quite get rid of ourselves, to be completely subjected to the cause.

## *XI. OUR IDOLS: PLEASURE*

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IN the vortex of forces which agitate the lives of people there is one in particular which has raised its head in this time of strangely complex living. It is the search for pleasure. It was said of the ancient Romans that they demanded two great benefits from life: bread and circuses. These two comprehended, so to speak, a brief summary of all their ideals, and their hearts went out after these things. Well, in somewhat the same manner the life of the great mass of people is impelled by comparable drives.

Whenever one ponders more deeply this hunger for pleasure, he presently realizes how many strange matters are locked up within it. Taken by itself, pleasure is oddly organized. Pleasure is really an automatic accompaniment to every powerful, progressive, and successful effort. I am, let us suppose, engaged on a mathematical problem. I have thought about it for a long time, hoping to solve it, but without result. Suddenly I see through it; I understand how it is to be solved. I make a few small calculations and realize that I have now really found the solution. Then there is a sparkle of joy in my eyes, something resounds in my spirit, and with a kind of triumph I proceed toward the solution. Pleasure is the companion of labor.

If a well-lubricated locomotive, standing on the tracks with a full head of steam, could be conscious, it would

derive an intense pleasure from being able to race over the plains, from being able to speed on its majestic journey. A cabinetmaker who has bestowed great care on making a chest and who now sees that he has succeeded, a scholar who has pondered deep problems and now has an insight into them, a businessman who as the result of various dealings sees opportunities which promise much success — briefly, every one who does something and does it with all his soul, who devotes himself to it, will always sense pleasure whenever his labor in one way or another advances to its anticipated goal. Pleasure is a manifestation accompanying true work, accomplished with the entire soul.

If you think about it for a moment, this will appear to speak for itself. The great ideal in the life of everyone — this basic ideal, as we have called it — is the quiet, harmonious development of talents and abilities. For this reason this development must always go hand in hand with gratification. One cannot be conceived of without the other.

It takes no rare insight to realize that this feeling of pleasure also accompanies all kinds of physical effort, as a result of which the organized practice of sports has acquired its place in life. Besides, as the converse of this, simply sitting down to rest and completely coming to oneself again after continued labor can arouse singular feelings of gratification. Thus pleasure is something that occupies an important place in our lives and fills much of our lives, even though it is often of an almost ephemeral quality. There is a kind of glow of happiness covering most of the experiences of life but we so seldom pay attention to it because it is so uniform. It is only out

of the darkness that we see it. For this reason when in later years we are in distant foreign countries a recollection of earlier days may appear to us like a brilliant sunbathed landscape. There is more joy in our existence than we actually realize.

Now in the lives of countless people, a stark contrast is drawn between work and pleasure. Work is coming to be regarded more and more as simply a necessary burden, a continual pressure, and in contrast to this pleasure is pictured as a small oasis in the wilderness of toil. Life has been split into two areas, into two very carefully distinguished spheres of existence: obligation and gratification, work and relaxation. Only the latter is regarded as pleasurable, as acceptable. More and more the former is felt as being void of pleasure, as having no glow of satisfaction. It is not our purpose to consider here the factors that have brought about this distinction, the manner in which the milk of our lives has gone sour. No doubt there are many social and peculiarly cultural factors which have contributed. The mechanization of work has certainly exerted its share of influence. But, however this has come about, the fact is here: work and pleasure are regarded by millions of people these days as two completely distinct domains of life, as opposite quantities.

As the result of this noteworthy division, pleasure has assumed an entirely different character. It has had to be divested as completely as possible from all traces of work. All kinds of gratifications which of themselves demand effort, as listening to a beautiful concert or reading a complicated book, in the eyes of many these have depreciated in value and have been shoved aside as demanding too much labor. Pleasure borders more and more on

doing nothing, on stupor, on ignorance, on idleness. Only sport has fortunately fulfilled in these days a kind of cultural mission by raising a dam against the desire to enjoy everything in a dull and stupid manner. So in general, pleasure has become a kind of idol — an ideal which one serves. The part of life that people are able to turn over to sheer gratification has come to be regarded as the only part of life worth living. The rest is necessary evil. And this has led automatically to a kind of pursuit of pleasure which has begun to assume frightening proportions, especially in the larger cities.

We do not wish to inquire further into the forms of gratification which modern man creates for himself, because such a detailed treatment would get us too far off the subject. The important consideration is for us to establish the absolute separation between work and pleasure which has become fixed in the outlook of the great masses.

A brief comment on a single noteworthy phenomenon closely tied in with these matters is still in order. In the first place, the division between work and pleasure has made both desperately poor. When men begin to look at their labor as a dreary monotony, they begin to demand such a powerful stimulus from recreation that it becomes impossible to gratify. The brief moment of recreation has to raise the spirit so mightily and to such a pitch that it also seems to serve in cheering a little the barren period of labor that is to follow. That is an assignment which no single form of recreation can continue to accomplish. Regardless of how much our science strains itself to intensify and to refine this recreation, it is unable to keep on satisfying the demand for more powerful stim-

uli. As a result we have the kind of despair about human existence which is beginning to arise in many people.

Part of this is related to the fact that pleasure is increased only with the greatest of difficulty. Ordinarily calculations fail the moment they are applied to pleasure. With other matters a simple rule quite generally holds true: 1 plus 1 equals 2. One apple plus one apple equals two apples. But this is not true of pleasure. The first taste is the most delightful. And this is true of every source of pleasure. The joy you had on your first ride, your first trip to another country, your first settling down in a cozy new room was not experienced the second time you did these things. Everything becomes customary and monotonous. In the world of gratification 1 plus 1 is never 2, but always less than two. That is also the poverty of riches. A rich man may easily spend twice as much money on a trip as an ordinary laborer who has permitted himself a little trip after long and difficult toil. But with twice as much money he will never buy twice as much pleasure. A rich man may spend ten or twenty times as much as a couple of young people who after saving for a long time are finally able to be married and to furnish their little house with a few simple pieces of furniture. But he cannot buy ten or twenty times as much joy as they can. In the world of pleasure, increase is a remarkable thing. With twice as much money, you may actually get only half the joy. An automobile trip of several hundred miles and a dinner in a splendid restaurant may not give you anywhere the pleasure you once derived from a very ordinary bicycle ride and a sandwich you had taken along from home and which you ate with a soft drink or a bottle of milk. All of this is quite strange and not at all

as we should have imagined. The principal fact is that multiplication of costs, or of possibilities is not accompanied by a proportionate multiplication of pleasure. One plus one is never two.

If one sees these matters in their proper relation, he will observe that every person who divides his life into segments, work and pleasure, and who is thus required to get all of the joy of his life from this little part of recreation, is running along a dead-end street. He has to apply continually stronger stimuli in order to maintain an equal degree of pleasure. Since this is impossible, he grows continually more discontented. Life cannot give him what he looks for. Pleasure, like a curiously contrived idol, is incapable of gratifying man's needs. This explains the profoundly tragic dissatisfaction with life which spreads like an epidemic and which has turned life into a burden for many people.

One can escape all this confusion only when one's work and one's pleasure have come closer together, when they begin to coincide once more.

Only the simplicity of life in which the development of one's self, the giving of one's self, the offering of one's self in service is a pleasure, only this offers the strongest defense against discontent. But then one comes back again to the basic ideal: there is a joy in human life to be found in expressing and realizing all one's powers and gifts, in the awareness of a great, divine call, in the service of a great and divine command. Only in this is joy.

One does not see this at once. He sees it best when he comes near Jesus Christ. In the life of Jesus Christ this serving with His entire being, this giving, shines with a brilliant light. "My food is to do the will of my Father

in heaven." This was completely automatic in His life. There were no idols to claim a place. The milk of His life does not become soured. Thankfully, He walks along the highways. Thankfully He does His daily work. Presently He lays down His head with thanksgiving. His life flows like a brook, clear as crystal. For this reason all the problems of life find a solution in Him.

The man who finds insufficient pleasure simply in service, simply in self-giving, simply in doing the will of the Father in heaven, needs three idols.

He needs money in order to bring his life to a higher level. He needs the powerful spice of honor in order to season the food of life. He needs pleasure in order to quench his thirst after happiness. The three, when brought together in this manner and as it were placed in contrast to the great ideal itself, are idols. They are the trinity of sin. They leer at and lure human life, they pump it dry and then drive it off, and each of the three is an illusion. They are themselves far too poor to be able to satisfy for any length of time the hunger of the human heart.

They are powerful gulfs which tug at the little ship of one's life, which draw it to the bottom, and there is no human being who can struggle himself free from their attraction. Nobody is above this, with only a single exception. A consideration of all of the questions of life brings one to the ever more profound acknowledgment that there has been only one man who has known what life was, who has really lived, who has placed Himself beyond these three illusions, who has not bowed down before the trinity of sin — the man Jesus Christ. That is



why all the questions of life converge on Him. "Lord, teach us to live!"

He offers the solution: Struggling one, you can live only if you begin with a quiet trust that you are living in a meaningful universe which was conceived and made by the eternal Father. It is possible only if you repose yourself on the confidence that He has given you your existence, your talents and your abilities, and that you have nothing more to do in the place where He has put you than quietly to shine and to serve. If you thus believe that the Father is behind everything and in everything, then you no longer need these three — money, honor, pleasure. Then you can go on your way like a child. Then you have the only true and high ideal of life that is worth the trouble to live for, namely the purpose which the Father has granted you the capabilities to complete.

If you can do this, if you can believe so firmly in Him, believe that everything in the world has its place and purpose to which it has been conceived and assigned by Him . . . but human soul, you are living then, aren't you? To live is to serve in the confidence that one is placed in a meaningful world, by the hand of the wise Father.

## *XII. SIN*

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IT is not an attractive word that we have written at the head of this chapter, but it is imperative that we think about it. Up until now we have been speaking about the three false gods which as it were stupify and mislead the human life, and we have noticed how little capacity man often possesses for offering resistance. Human life is full of inadequacies, errors, misconceptions, faults and shortcomings. To admit this is still quite different from speaking about sin. In the concept of sin lie the elements which are far more deep and far more serious.

In order to understand this well, we should go back for a moment to the explanations that we are able to give for such faults and the weaknesses in human life as we have established up to now.

In the first place it is apparent that a great many of these shortcomings can be explained by a consideration of our stupidity and ignorance. Man is often a blind child. He lives and carries on his dealings and actually does not know what he is doing. He lets himself get dragged along by passions, sentiments, and it is very seldom that he even comes to awareness. There is so much intoxication in a person's life. Whenever one thinks these days of belligerent nations, of the scientifically aroused attitudes of hate which control these peoples, then it is possible to realize how mightily a blind intoxication can

control the lives of not merely individuals, but of entire nations. There is no longer any calm reflection in this nor any sober consideration. In this there is dark desire, there is witchcraft and stupefaction. One cannot hold a soldier completely responsible when in the violence of battle he raises his murdering weapon against defenseless people. He is not acting as a consciously thoughtful, reasonable person, but there are sinister powers that have taken possession of him. And this is true of so many human deeds, that they have a kind of intoxication, that they are born out of sullen angers, out of forces more powerful than one's self. Buddhism regards as the deepest root of evil the ignorance, the delusion which holds human lives in bondage.

In the second place it seems as though the responsibility for many of our faults and failures may be laid at the door of the society into which we have been born, of our parents and teachers, of the books we have read, the people who have cooperated in forming us. There was a time when people preferred to say it thus: "A man is the product of his environment." By environment was meant the totality of influences which have been operating on a person ever since his earliest youth. Environment, it was thought then, has built the character, has given the life a definite direction and structure, and in one's later conduct it is possible to ascertain which factors have contributed in forming him.

In the third place, there is an inclination to account for many of these faults by means of the peculiarly dualistic composition of our being. We have an intellect, have control over spiritual and mental capacities, but at the same time we are utterly bound to the material. We can

stroll on the mountain tops of splendid sentiments, of noble reasonings, but sooner or later we tumble downwards. Purely physical considerations — weariness, hunger, pain, lust — these can produce catastrophes within us of which we had no previous conception.

As long as we keep these three considerations in sight, we are able to acknowledge fully that there are faults and failures in human life. Nevertheless we can maintain a respectable distance from the concept of *sin*. We can acknowledge that man is a bundle of conflicts and is full of errors, and at the same time we can oppose the word *sin* tooth and nail. The erring person, one may say, is really an object of sympathy in every respect. He is a poor wretch and every now and then he kicks his own happiness in the face, but sinful? No, he is not sinful. How does it happen that there is such a universal objection toward that word *sin*? Or, to put it another way, what does the word *sin* mean that is not comprehended in the word *defectiveness*?

The word *sin* is characterized by two very special thoughts. In the first place the word *sin* always incorporates a certain intention and deliberateness. When I admit my sin, then I express with this that I am taking the responsibility for the faults and failures which I possess, that I am writing them into my own account. The gospel is prepared to grant all the excuses that we named above to hold force to the full. When Jesus Christ was being crucified at the hands of sinful men He prayed for His enemies, for, as He said: "They do not know what they are doing." Indeed, in human error there is an extremely important element of ignorance, and this ignorance can to a certain extent be accepted as an excuse.

But then there always still remains that other — this will that is bent askew. The people of Jerusalem could have supplied countless explanations in order to make clear why they did not follow Jesus. They could have said that they had been misled by their teachers, blinded by national passions. But when Jesus at a particular moment characterizes their attitude, He states as the deepest reason: “You did not want to!” Back of all our strayings, back of all our faults there lies something of unwillingness. Man loves darkness and he finds it pleasant to stray. Whenever he is brought to an awareness, whenever he is shown his faults, then he is inclined to become angry and to take a firm stand. The essential element in the concept of sin is that I take account of my shortcomings, that I admit that my warped will has produced these shortcomings.

And in the second place there is within the concept of sin a relatedness-to-God factor. In the idea of sin there is always something of God. It has as its most profound background the fact that I am tearing myself out of God’s hand and that I am opposing myself to His will. Just as the idea of badness for a child always has a relationship to his parents, the transgression of the will of his parents, in the same way there lies in the concept of sin as an unexpressed element the idea that all our activities stand in a certain relationship toward God, who has set the pathways of our life. As long as I speak about our shortcomings, our wanderings, I remain on a horizontal line and I still see merely the mundane aspect of things. The moment I use the word *sin*, I am moving on a vertical line. Then I see the bond that binds our lives to the Eternal One: I sin against God; I place myself opposite

Him as a rebel; I trample the order that He has set up for my life.

In the Bible we are told much about God. One of the ideas which repeatedly comes to the foreground is that He is the Holy God. It is not a simple matter to plumb the meaning of the word *holy* to its utter depths but one of the thoughts concealed here is expressed more fully in this way: "You, O God are too pure of eyes to be able to see sin" (Habakkuk 1:13). The Most High turns, so to speak, His face away from petty human commotion. He rejects all of this search for wealth and for honor which holds our life in bondage. "No one who lives," says the Psalmist, "will be upright before Your face." As the thought of the majesty and holiness of God penetrates us deeply, when we begin to feel who He is, the One who observes our lives into the inmost secret corners, then presently we will begin to understand something about what the word *sin* includes. I lie prostrate before the three idols of riches, honor, and pleasure. I am bound by the evil forces which hold my life prisoner. But all this is external; it is still not the core of my life. I have alienated myself from my Father in heaven, I have pulled myself away from His companionship and have lived a life which in every respect is in conflict with His will. Now I am standing as a sinner before Him, as one who "did not want to."

As soon as we come to this place, then we enter the sphere of the gospel. Here the gospel begins to speak to us. Here Jesus Christ sees us, and He approaches our lives. When I have uttered the word *sin* God answers with the word *salvation*. When I acknowledge the first, then the other can be fulfilled in me.

### XIII. SALVATION

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THE great basic ideal of human life is to develop oneself with all of one's inner abilities, to serve with joy. That ideal was held up before man at his creation in the cultural mandate that was given him then. The splendor of that ideal still floats before his spirit, although with shattered gleams.

Whenever we ponder this more fully, it strikes our attention that we are obliged to think in particular here about the great and noble powers given man at his creation. It was these that he was to exploit, that he had to develop, by means of which he had to serve God. Man has actually many abilities and gifts — physical and also spiritual — but at the apex of all there were three: knowledge, peace with the Supreme Being, and holiness. These three confer on man his unique character, distinguished over and above all other creatures. They mark him as a rational, spiritual, moral being. We must inquire further into these three most profound gifts, because they can assist us in making decisions about many things.

First of all, with respect to this knowledge — it must be taken particularly in its deep meaning. There is, to be sure, a great variety of knowledge, of which not all kinds possess the same value. There is first, the knowledge of a fact, of a thing, and nothing more. I know a chestnut

tree, which is to say that I know how it looks; I know how to distinguish it from other trees. I know my house, my town, my friend. I know gold, silver, stone, wood, iron, and other materials. Many things, many persons, many facts are known to me. In other words, I know about them. I have made acquaintance with them. This knowledge can be extremely superficial, to be sure. Of itself it is useful and necessary in life, but for all this it does not represent any great value.

A second type of knowledge consists of knowing something in relation to its origin. If I observe that the light bulb in my room has gone out, it is of considerable importance to me to know why this is so, what caused it. Then I know not only the fact, but the cause of the fact, and perhaps I can change the cause. A still higher form of knowledge consists of knowing the purpose of things. I know the nut tree but I also know, for instance, the uses to which the fruit, the trunk, the roots may be put. In this case I can make practical use of the object of my knowledge, I can profit from it, I know the consequences, the fruit of it. All of these types of knowledge are valuable in daily living. But not one of them was what we had in mind when we considered knowledge as one of the greatest ideals of human life.

A still higher form of knowledge is possible. We can also acknowledge the world as the revelation of the Divine Being, who has expressed Himself in it. There is a divine thought in every creature, great or small, and every creature is moreover sustained by the might and wisdom of God. God is, so to speak, the center of all existence, the foundation which supports everything, the keystone on which everything rests. Once we know things



in their relationship to Him, as a revelation of Him, we have fathomed their being and we have penetrated to the uttermost depths. All other knowledge remains no more than surface knowledge, at the periphery of the circle. It is when we have drawn a line to the center that we have measured the entire area. For this reason the highest form of knowledge is that which regards things as transparent, enabling the divine glory to shine through. And it is precisely this form of knowledge that we so greatly lack. We know very well indeed how and by what and for what various things exist, but the question of their being, how they are arranged in the ordering of the universe — such a question we cannot fathom, let alone solve. For this reason we must frankly acknowledge that the true knowledge, the knowledge of God, and the knowledge of the world in God is completely wanting in man.

And, unfortunately, we are bound to reach the same conclusion when we think about peace. By this we are to understand that man lives in a harmonious relationship with the Divine Being, that between him and his God there is peace. This can be considered from two viewpoints.

In the first place one can say that the human being must be pointed, as it were, with his whole soul in the direction of God. Just as the flower is turned to the light, and as the compass needle is drawn to the North, impelled by an invisible magnetism, in this manner the compass of man's being must be directed toward the eternal Cause. This should be logical. It is possible for water to evaporate, and as vapor to be drawn high above the surface of the earth. When it has once been so drawn up, it condenses again and falls back to earth as rain,

because it was taken from the earth. And so it should follow that man should point once more toward God, should be directed inwardly to God.

This can be thought of the other way round. There must also be a relationship of peace, of harmony, of rest from the direction of God. It is the tragedy that man feels one thing with ever greater certainty, namely that his relationship with the Supreme Being has been completely severed. His own compass is not directed toward God, but points instead with unmistakable clarity at himself as the object of life. He is always, whether consciously or not, occupied in serving himself and seeking himself, and the forces which actually impel him toward God are exceedingly feeble and rare with him. In addition to this he feels that God seems to stand over against him and that God with just judgment rejects, punishes and threatens him. He regards himself as banished by God, an outcast, obliged always to fear punishment, eventually to be cast down into death. There is no harmonious relationship between him and God; justice is a demand, it is true, and it is a necessity of life, but it is not actuality. All people have shown this most clearly with their sacrifices and with their self-tortures.

And if one should ask finally, "How is it with regard to holiness?" the same answer has to be given. It may indeed be true that man continues always to feel within himself something of the majesty of the good, but this does not minimize the fact that his life is frequently loaded with an incredible amount of sin. Human egotism and hard-heartedness can be quite remarkable when one person stands opposed to another. One has a habit of lying, another is somewhat careless in the realm of morality,

and a third is a world of bitterness toward his fellowmen. When you have made a fuller acquaintance with the world, and particularly when you have learned to distinguish between the way things seem to be and the way they are, you will frequently come to conclusions that are not at all inspiring. Things are not in fine order in respect to the holiness of people. The human heart carries a great many passions which one would rather not expose to another.

Here also we are impressed by a tremendous distance from the norm, and this strikes us even more to the extent that we elevate this norm. It is really not enough that we should preserve the external appearance of virtue; also in our thoughts and desires a moral order must reign. And exactly here the buoyancy of evil is often irresistibly powerful.

As one considers his destination in life, one is obliged to admit that his life is bankrupted thrice over. He does not fulfill this purpose, nor can he. And there is no hope moreover that he will learn this within the course of years, because experience shows us that the progress we make is very easily overestimated. And there is very little basis for expecting that one's children will succeed any better; actually, there is reason for concern that each succeeding generation, as the result of more severe warfare, will descend to gradually lower levels. And finally, he has no right to expect that after death in another existence he will be able to finish the long road separating him from the ideal. We live separated from the ideal. We are coming no closer to it. In a higher sense, we have to feel that our life has miscarried. It may glitter still and it

may seem very beautiful, but every severe judgment leads to the admission that it has not found its true worth. It is from this that there resounds continually and earnestly throughout all the history of this world a cry for salvation, for the liberation of life.

## XIV. THE SAVIOR

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THE cry for salvation, for liberation of life, echoes continually and earnestly through the whole history of the world. That was our conclusion at the end of the previous chapter. We shall have to explain this somewhat more fully.

In most religions that we know the real point is the salvation of the person. This salvation is often pictured in extremely primitive ways. People imagine that evil spirits, that is, demons, are operating in all kinds of phenomena, and that one is able to mislead these spirits in a variety of subtle ways, or otherwise to bribe and dispel them. With many peoples there is an elaborate spirit-worship, which as it were saturates the entire life and is influential in every important transaction or decision. Even though these uncomplicated religious attitudes already point to a need for salvation, they show nevertheless that they do not comprehend to even the slightest degree the profoundness of the need, and thus can give no outlook upon an actual liberation which the human being desires from the depth of his soul.

The three great religions of the world are Buddhism, Christianity and Mohammedanism. Of the three Buddhism is the oldest. This Indian religion began with the king's son Siddarta, born about 550 B.C. If we examine to learn which ideas are particularly important in Bud-

dhism, we are struck at once with the fact that Buddha was extraordinarily deeply impressed by the power of suffering in the world. His life's circumstances undoubtedly contributed to this. Born in royal surroundings, surrounded by luxury and beauty, he did not come into contact until relatively late with the other side of life — with sickness, death and misery. It is understandable that this should have made an indelible impression on the young man. The joy of the court, the pleasure of feasts and parties, these he felt from that moment on to be an unconscious falsehood, a contradiction of what was ultimately the only reality — suffering. It occurred to him that it was better to withdraw himself from the illusory world of laughter and rejoicing into the holinesses of truth, in observing with both eyes the supreme power of suffering which accompanies each human life from the cradle to the grave. And what is the cause of suffering? Buddha supposed that it lay in this that the soul always desires — permanence of life and pleasure of life. It clings to the smallest shred of hope, it seeks love, passion, and sensual pleasure. In brief, it continues to grasp towards what is outside itself, it bows down before the world of illusion, and as a result it finds itself drawn along from suffering to suffering. Is this world then the cause of suffering? No, indeed, but the root is concealed far deeper, within the soul itself in the wild yearning, in the irrational passion.

For even though the world should give us everything that we desire, we should still not be fortunate. We should continue to desire more. This desire for life, for enjoyment, is an inextinguishable fire, and every realization brings forth a new desire. And how then are we to

escape this suffering? It is only when this violent desire within us is silent, when the soul turns back into itself and lets go of the world, no longer desires, no longer pursues, no longer seeks, that we have peace and tranquillity. The soul, as a result of this desire, enters a new body after death and so comes back to earth countless times. At last it is released from this compulsion and is then liberated from this cycle as it dies away in the Nirvana, in the extinguishing of desire.

According to this way of thinking, Buddha himself was the discoverer of truth. This is because he had traveled the long road from life to life and had come to the end. He was ready for the Nirvana, but in order to save others, he denied himself for still a short while the joy of entering, and preached to suffering people the gospel of salvation. As far as he himself was concerned, he was unimportant and he could be forgotten. The important thing is the truth — the concept. And he was merely the bearer of this concept — the prophet. He had given knowledge back to humankind.

It was completely outside of the intention of Buddha himself that his followers in general should have accorded such a great place to the founder of their faith. The truth has been subordinated to the person; the idea itself to the bearer of the idea. The reason for this has to be sought especially in this, that human misery is far too profound. One idea is all man can manage. He feels as it were intuitively that an idea cannot free him, but that a strength greater than his own is required to draw him from the morass of sin and suffering. Buddha underestimated this need and it is conceivable that he should have done so. But history has demonstrated with utter

clarity that man cannot be satisfied with only an idea but that man desires, and must desire, a Savior, an eternal power who can actually liberate, who can, in fact, save.

Mohammedanism is of a far later date. More than a thousand years have intervened between the two. This religion was also born in an entirely different climate, among another race. Where the fierce sun blazes, in the endless wilderness of Arabia the ideas were developed which were to become the core of this world religion. Mohammedanism has also absorbed a variety of elements from other religions, from Judaism and paganism, from Christianity and Oriental philosophy. Where Buddhism reasons around God and does not really require the existence of a divine power, for Mohammedanism it is simply the existence of the one God that is regarded as the totality of belief. Allah, the Almighty Disposer. What should be possible contrary to the will of Allah? Who may ask why Allah created the world thus, and not otherwise? Before the One God nothing is proper but fear and adoration. And salvation? Mohammed does not feel the power of suffering as strongly as does the son of the Indian king. Who gives himself to Allah with his whole heart may be assured that his way will lead to eternal bliss. The remainder appears particularly in the five great religious obligations: confession, prayer, alms, fasting, and the pilgrimage to Mecca. Again Mohammed was no more than the bringer of this concept, the prophet who made known the truth. He was not the only, also not the first, but indeed the last and greatest prophet, the par excellence.

It is curious that both these religions degrade salvation in the direction of knowledge. It is truth, an idea, that



saves people. For whenever a person once possesses and experiences truth, then he can turn his life around and start on a better course. The bankruptcy of our lives actually lies in our complete lack of true knowledge, of an insight into the destiny of life. For this purpose all that is needed is a prophet who distinguishes the truth clearly and brilliantly. Then all of life is redirected and then the destination is automatically attained. Further, the prophet proclaims simply the truth, the possibility of salvation. Man himself must apply the knowledge and put it into practical use. The program is given to him and by it he must save himself and blaze his own trail. You might say: God saves man to the extent that He sends the prophet who makes known the truth. You may still more accurately say: Man saves himself to the extent that he applies the truth, and in the way he adapts the truth, and in the way he follows the truth.

Wherein does the uniqueness of Christianity lie? In that it comprehends far, far more profoundly the misery and the bankruptcy of life, and for that reason also thinks of salvation in a way completely different from every other religion? Is it enough for us to know the truth, when the way to salvation is etched out for us? No, for we do not follow the way. I can know perfectly well how I must act, but there is a force within me that always drives me toward evil. The good that I know I do not do. Misery is not simply a matter of the understanding, of ignorance, of error. There is more in a person's life that has to be changed. For, as we observed, this bankruptcy applies in three aspects. Man lacks the knowledge, the insight into truth. Man lacks the peace, the uprightness, the harmonious relationship toward God. And finally,

man lacks the holiness, the will to do good. Liberation of life must liberate man along the whole line of his existence. Salvation has to be threefold, just as man's misery is threefold.

## XV. *JESUS, THE SAVIOR*

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WHENEVER one wishes to speak or to write about Jesus Christ, he is overcome by a sensation of painful inability. It is as though it were quite impossible to say anything about Him. You must first have seen Him — seen Him at a moment when the heart is quiet and very near the actuality of the great things of life. You must have seen Him in a moment of tremendous earnestness when the illusion fell away from things and you were standing before the Eternal Truth.

First of all we must say that we are acquainted with the picture of His person from the Bible, particularly out of the holy Gospels which in a quiet, noble language portray His being and His work so that all of us should believe in Him.

When you think of Him, you perhaps see Him first in an unpretentious appearance, as He travelled the roads of Galilee. What is there about Him that so inexpressibly moves people? He stands outside of the great intoxication of life to which all others fall prey. He lives with money, but money does not become a power over His soul. He receives honor and homage, also shame and contempt, but you never find Him looking for human applause nor do you find real embitterment as the result of injustice done by men. He is entirely different; He is the true

prophet, who stands in another order of existence. Is this what you see?

Perhaps you see Him in another way. As you look at Him, as you read about Him, you sense all at once that you are seeing for the first time what life is. He transcends the mountain tops of life. You see this in every respect. In His hands He carries the golden jewel of knowledge. Does He not see everything in God? When He looks across the rolling fields, does He not see at once the Father who has clothed the grass of the fields and the lilies? Is not the world for Him a transparency of God? Is He not in moments of sadness and joy — when He stands at the grave of Lazarus, but also when He joyfully greets His disciples on the return from their journey — is He not at once directly in front of the face of God? It is no leap for Him. He knows the Father in everything, in every direction of life. And do you not feel in His life the true peace, the true uprightness? Is there tension between Him and God? Does He not, as it were, lay His head to rest in God's arms? Then you should have seen Him on one of those quiet evenings, when He stole away from among the multitude, climbed the mountain all alone in order to be with His Father. And does there not lie over all His works an aura of holiness? He is very different from all the others. In Him you see life itself, as it should be possible to be, as it should be.

Whenever you go still more deeply into His life, something begins gradually to strike you which was obscure at first. First you noticed in particular that He was the real man, the only man, that in Him the true humanity, as it were, dazzles forth. When you learn to know Him better, it seems to you as though it is still otherwise. You see

Him so powerfully together with God, so to speak, one with God, that in your idea the two gradually seem to mingle. This comes to your attention in His words. His words well up directly from the heart of God. You sense in His words the immovable absolute which is from God. Jesus Christ repels people and He draws people to Himself and in both you feel yourself in the presence of the Highest Majesty which is God Himself.

As a result you cannot evade the fact that He Himself is completely aware of this. He knows that His words are the words of the Father. He says it Himself in this complete certainty that who has seen Him has seen the Father. And those who are with Him every day feel at once the truth of it: He is the Son of the Living God, for He has the words of everlasting life. You can see God in a thousand things – in the roaring waterfall and the foaming brook, in the unspeakable loneliness of the wilderness and in the twinkling splendor of a bright starry evening. God is everywhere. But when you stand before Jesus Christ, then you see Him as it were face to face; then you stand before Him and He before you. That is the secret of His personality.

One should really follow the entire life of Jesus in order to clarify that. Nevertheless, one thinks automatically of two things which come to the fore with extraordinary force, His severity and His mercy. Who could ravel out the life of a person, penetrating to the most intimate hiding places of the heart, as He could? In His eyes there was something of a stern, powerful force. For that reason very many were filled with a secret shyness before Him. He seizes people so suddenly – a Samaritan woman in her persistent sinful life – the rich

young ruler in his helplessness before the true good. He beats people down, He flashes lightning in mighty anger; He can in a moment succeed in completely reducing a person's good opinion of himself. He is mighty as no one ever has been mighty. But in the incomprehensible severity there is nothing of bitterness. As the Samaritan woman heard His accusation regarding the several men that she had already had, she was undoubtedly reminded of the people who for the very same reason had flung it in her teeth. People had avoided her, despised her as a woman with whom one cannot associate, as a woman of less than good morals. She had heard that so often and it had left her cold. She knew perfectly well that the very people who so scrupulously stepped to one side to let her pass as though she were impure, were exactly like herself. Oh, if she could only turn those little souls inside out. The hypocrites! That is what makes a person bitter. Now she stands before Jesus Christ. He tells her, too; He strikes her life to the ground as a worthless game. What does she feel now? She trembles deep in her soul. How does she happen to tremble? Because there is something quite different in Him. His severity is the spear point from the flames of God's holiness. She burns in her soul. With Him it is also possible to receive the wonderful perception of: strike me to the ground, Master! Make me small under the breaking power of Your judgments.

And the second, in which men sense it so strongly, is His mercy. It is never weak, never silly, never sentimental. It is always great and majestic. He can beat someone down until his soul is crushed, and then He can reach down to this same person, lying groaning on the ground, with incomprehensible love. He can detest the

mean sins of the self-righteous Jews and analyze razor-sharp in a long, terrible discourse, and at the end of it He can cry in compassion, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I would have gathered you together as a hen gathers her young ones." A man may think much about God, and he can make a great many representations of God for himself, but when he stands in the depths of life, as he listens to the great actuality of life, then it always comes to his mind: now I know how God must think. God is, as a matter of fact, as Jesus Christ was. In my moments of most real earnestness I am able to bring but one God to my mind — the God whom I behold when I see Christ face to face.

None of the apostles felt this more intensely than John. Hence the rich name that he gave Jesus — the Word. The word utters what is in the soul. Jesus utters what is in God. He is the living Word — the Word become visible. He is the eternal and only Son of God.

About the person of Jesus Christ the tension and the conflict increase from day to day. And it would be difficult to think of it any other way. If life were simply a pleasant conversation and Jesus merely somebody who explained a new theory about God, then one could accept His words and acts as information. But that is not the way it happens to be, and He who is personally standing in the middle of life does not want this either. In everything in life He takes sides, in every event of life He draws a line toward God. Thus He makes His appearance in the midst of all the conflicts of life. And in all of them He stands as God Himself in the midst of humanity.

For the people that He is concerned with are perfectly ordinary people — people who live under the spell of the

three idols. They are people who push and shove each other, who find it extraordinarily important that they should come to the top, who slander each other, injure each other, trample on each other and everything else. That is the life into which Jesus Christ throws Himself. As He stands in the midst of it, as the Flame of God, He calls up opposition from all directions. He stands amid the conflict and it bursts about Him as a mighty storm.

If God were merely a nice, delicate idea on a quiet summer evening, then people would want to build a golden shrine and make a pilgrimage there once or twice in a lifetime. If God is as Jesus Christ is, who like a fire touches life itself in all its commotions and all its deliberations — if God stands directly in front of us and strikes us down in royal anger — if God is like that, what can a person do but tell Him time and again, "I don't want to!" Then our rights in our lives are at stake; then we must, in fact, defend ourselves to the last inch of ground. It cannot be this way! We have no room for such a God. We cannot use such a One. He is our enemy. Hence there is conflict around Jesus, the tension increases and begins to assume fiercer forms. Life is not simply words, but deeds, too. The deed wakes up — the terrible, destructive deed — the deed in which the strength of the heart expresses itself.

At length the resentment toward Jesus grows. The atmosphere around Him becomes laden with hate. And at last it has to break out in a terrible event. There rises the cross as the fearful deed of humanity. There is carried out the most enormous deed that the world of man has ever committed.



In that moment one danger threatens that we perhaps cannot adequately imagine. Then there is the danger that Jesus Christ, viewing this storm of hate against Him, should burst out in bitter curse over us, that He should let us go, should reject us as unworthy of love. He is the One who stands between God and us. He receives our hatred toward God. Shall He now throw us away from Himself and draw Himself back to God? Shall He not avoid us, heap us with curses and exterminate us? You shudder when you think about it. Then the life of Jesus Christ would have been nothing more than a fearful demonstration that man does not want God, the living God, the God such as Jesus Christ is; and that God does not want man, the hating man, the man living in sin. Then with Him the cord that binds God and the world were, so to speak, forever broken. Then would no bond be possible.

Nevertheless, quite to the contrary, you now see in Jesus Christ that wonder of wonders, namely, that He does not do it. He catches up our hate in His love. He permits Himself to be crucified through our sin, but in His cross He continues to surround us with His love. He carries the burden of our sin and He assumes this as an offering out of uncomprehended, unfathomable love. And therein He is the act of God, the act of God's love, for God so loved the world. When we wandered under the great enchantment, God gave Him to us as the Word. And when we recognized Him and rejected Him and crucified Him, then God placed opposite our deed His own deed: the great sacrifice. He has placed all our iniquities upon Him. Thus Jesus went into the valley of the pains of hell. If ever a single person has suffered, it

is this holy, unique Son of Man. But in all these agonies He looked beyond the shrieking, hating people and saw the Father who had asked Him to make this sacrifice. "The cup that My Father has given Me, should I not drink it?" The Savior of the world bows Himself under the cross that the Father lays upon Him.

That is the part of the gospel that makes an ineradicable impression on the sin-conscious human heart. He was crucified for my sake. Among these matters there are many things difficult to understand and we cannot discuss them in full here. In the middle stands this one: that which was the greatest manifestation of our aversion toward God, and thus an act and an evidence of our curse, He has accepted from God's hand as a sacrifice and in love He bowed Himself under it. He sacrificed Himself in death for the sake of our sins. He is the priest of the world who does not spare Himself, who completes the greatest deed of forgiving love — the sacrifice. He stands between God and us and by means of the cross He establishes a new bond. He places our sinful hands in the Father hand of God. God was in Him, redeeming the world with Himself. He is our Peace.

Against such a background the gospel paints the great and enduring work of Jesus Christ. There were three great possessions of life that once constituted the nobility of humanity — knowledge, peace with God, and holiness. The tremendous loss that we suffered through sin is also of three sorts — our knowledge became distorted to error and ignorance, our peace with God turned into enmity and bitterness, and our holy nature degenerated into vile desire and passion.

Over against these three the person Jesus Christ now stands, the One in whom God is, who is Himself God, in whom we see God Himself.

He is the Word, the signal which causes us once again to know God Himself as well as ourselves. In Him we see everything anew. He possesses the knowledge, but also gives the knowledge. He tells about God. His entire being and His speaking is a single expression of who God is. He is the One who grants knowledge. He is the prophet.

But the knowledge He gives is not simply of words. It strikes against our heart, it collides with our unwillingness, it calls for the deed of our aversion — the cross. Viewed from our side that cross is hurling back and pushing back God. That is the deed of human beings. In contrast to this deed He places God's deed, the infinite sacrifice, the assuming of the cross as a sacrifice, placed on Him by the Father as the sin-offering for our guilt. Viewed from His side, the cross is the carrying of the full burden of our sin as well as the burden of God's wrath against our sin, so that He should redeem us. He is the one who grants peace. He is the priest.

When He did that — when He reconciled the sinful and guilty human heart with God — then He came also as the silent guest in the human soul in order to make the person different, to burn out the undying desire for sin, to place a new life within man. He is the invisible King who draws the lines of the new life, the new light, in the heart that knows and accepts Him. He is the one who grants holiness. He is the King.

Over against the three great possessions stands His threefold work. He gives the summing up of the three in what He often calls the kingdom of God. The kingdom

of God comes quite strangely in the human life. It comes when a human being sees Jesus Christ and recognizes God in Him, when a person becomes conscious of his fearful sin against this God, of which the cross is the symbol, but also like a child realizes and accepts the incredible sacrifice of God's love which Jesus Christ completed. Then a man bows himself so low that he is no longer anything and God becomes everything in him. Then he seizes God in Jesus Christ. He is the Word and the Act of God in this world. He speaks to us and deals with us and seeks to make new people of us.

In comparison with other religions, Christianity is far more powerfully convinced of human inability. A prophet alone would not be sufficient to save man. For then man should be able of himself to follow the way that has been pointed out. Man is deprived of all true good. He is not only in error, but also completely and utterly guilty and is in bondage like a slave as the result of his sins. Man must be powerfully liberated. If this is true, he is not able to do it himself, and neither is another. Only He can, who comes in the might of God. Time cannot raise itself to eternity, the finite to the Infinite, and sinful man to the Holy God. But what can happen is this: God can draw man, in spite of his sins, into His own sphere; the eternal can receive time into itself, and the Creator can draw His deeply fallen creature back to Himself.

Christ is the hand of God, grasping fallen man and drawing him upwards. Christ is the mouth of God, whispering the great secrets to the ignorant heart. Christ is the might of God, who breaks man's inability and transforms him into a pilgrim to the Light, into an heir of the kingdom.

## XVI. THE SALVATION THAT HE GRANTS

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IN the teaching of Jesus Christ the concept of the kingdom of heaven stands dazzlingly high. That kingdom of heaven is the totality of all the good of life. In the first place it is a reasonable good for it involves knowledge, the true knowledge, which sees God always through all the experiences of life. In the second place it comprehends a moral good, for it expresses itself in an increasing urge to serve God as a child. And finally, it contains a great spiritual, religious good, peace with God as with the merciful, sin-forgiving Father. Because it incorporates these three, it makes an entirely different being of the person, giving him back his original destiny.

In a certain sense it is possible to say that there still is in every person a longing after the good of the kingdom of God. The reason is that this good was once the possession of man and therefore cannot be completely forgotten. The empty place it has left behind points to our royal birth. But on the other hand there is in man a life apart from this good, a continued depravity, a receding from the true and eternal good. In the human heart there remains, it is true, a certain imperfection and at times this can occasion severe anxiety, but for release from this he is inclined to search in completely wrong

directions. He gropes after knowledge, but is content the moment he acquires merely an external, superficial knowledge. And he searches for holiness also, but he finds that he has gone a long way all by himself, at any rate in comparison with so many others who have strayed farther away. And also with respect to peace with God, he lets himself be reassured far too easily with the delusion that everything will come out all right. The lack is there and it continues to smart in the depth of his heart, but in his ordinary daily life a person is rather quickly contented. For that reason he turns his face from the great good, from the kingdom of heaven, and turns himself to the idols that beguile his soul.

With this it is noteworthy that various circumstances are continually detrimental to the feeling of the great want. Man is inclined to attribute his suffering and misery to causes outside himself. In part he looks for the cause in the people he associates with. If these were only different, if they only manifested more love and kindness, then one's own life would automatically be much better and much nobler. In the vast corrupt society that we live in, nobody can really remain safe, everyone must degenerate into a gross egotist, and the foundation of all happiness in life is deprived of footing. And in holy zeal man girds himself in order to bring about the most radical alterations in society with the hope that everything will then turn out all right. He stands amazed when it appears that in spite of all the changes society continues to remain just as sinful as before and his life does not become any happier. Man has overlooked the fact that the great sin, the cause of all the suffering in life, does not lie first of all with others, and far less in "so-

ciety," but quite soberly only in himself, in his own failings, in his own guilt. We prefer as much as possible to attribute our faults to persons and institutions outside ourselves in order to safeguard ourselves continually from all shame, while the only course to actual salvation lies precisely in our complete acknowledgment of our guilt, in admitting that the deficiency resides in our own soul. Or to put it in another way, man is inclined to set himself up as a victim of gigantic hostile forces outside himself, but in this feeling of being a victim he deprives himself of a stimulus toward any true conversion. What he, therefore, has to do, first of all, is to realize that he is missing everything, that his life is completely in want of destiny, and that he himself is to blame for it, that he is obliged to look for the cause first of all in himself. Only then is the need for being saved felt.

In this need things are again involved. Man has a yearning to know. Rescue me from my ignorance and error. "I desire to know God and my soul," was the famous word of St. Augustine. In the darkness of not-knowing we are straying. We do not see the future, nor where we go and whence we come — our beginning and ending in God. We are bound, blind and wandering, in every respect. We cannot throw open the doorways which give a view of the truth, for in these matters we are powerless. If we find Christ the prophet, the Word of God, then the one thing we can do is listen and surrender ourselves. It may be possible that, when we hear His words we feel deep in our soul: "The truth is like this." The great deed which is to bring rescue is the surrender, the willingness to receive and to listen.

This also applies to the second and no less important question. There is in many people a thirst for righteousness, for a harmonious relationship with God, for peace.

How do we become free of guilt? If we feel that we, so to speak, are being rejected from God's nearness by being laden under our guilt, how can we come to Him looking up with trusting eyes to Him as to a gracious Father? A person cannot justify himself before God, cannot pave the way with sacrifices or with virtues, for with these he cannot stifle the voice of guilt. He cannot open the gates which lead to the Great Peace. It is only when the soul finds Christ, that hope can rise once more. He is the Reconciler. He is our Peace. In Him we find the answer to the hunger for righteousness. It may be that as we come in contact with Him, we learn to know Him and feel: "He is the One." The great act which is to bring salvation is the surrender, the willingness to receive, to listen.

And in case we put to ourselves the third question: How do we lose our evil heart? we also arrive at the same answer. It is stupid to suppose that we might be in a condition where we could improve ourselves radically until we walk about as perfect saints. Holiness is not something one finds lying about, and it is noteworthy that we observe that however much we pursue it, we are still endlessly far from it. A person can guard himself against great and obvious sins, but the heart, oh, the heart! What vile, what ignoble, what false thoughts storm through it! We must find the glorious Christ, the King of our soul. There must be a cry, a plea from our heart: Rule us, direct us! O God, in Your strength, help us! We are unable to travel the long and wearisome road of



holiness; we cannot change ourselves completely either, but we must *become* changed, must let ourselves be changed. It may be that when we come into living contact with Christ we feel strength within us. "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me!" The great act which is to bring salvation is the surrender, the willingness to receive, to listen.

In other words, the great salvation does not lie in great deeds, nor in great zeal, but in the dominating and humble deed of surrender. There lies the secret of all salvation. As soon as this surrender is fundamentally accomplished, then God again stands at the center of life. It is God who will grant us knowledge, as well as righteousness, as well as holiness. These holy powers flow to us from above. We are elevated to eternity. Christ is the hand by which God encounters us and by which He will grant us these things. It is nothing except the surrender which can put us into possession of this good.

The surrender is ultimately that which is often called faith. Faith is not merely a question of intelligently accepting, but of trusting, of surrendering. To be sure, intelligent acceptance is bound up in this, but this acceptance serves here as the motive for surrender.

To grasp the hand is to decide.

Sinking into unconsciousness and rejection by God and into unholiness, the soul clutches the last and only chance. It gives itself up in grace or disgrace to God. O God, help me, seize me and save me! Forgive me and strengthen me!

Great Christ, Eternal Light, be to me prophet, priest, and king.

## XVII. THE MEANING OF THE WORLD

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WHEN we look at an individual life we feel almost at once that it can be regarded as a meaningful totality only when it is fused into a greater unity into which it has, as it were, been completely absorbed. Then it has meaning, then something emanates from it, then it has importance.

Now the life of all of us is a part, an extremely small streamlet of the broad and mighty river of human life in its totality. The life of humanity has already gone on for thousands of years and has particularized itself into peoples and races, and is still experiencing the most radical alterations. The great and difficult question, which has come up in the mind of all thinkers is this: Has the life of humanity itself any purpose, any meaning, any permanent significance? Is it going anywhere? Is anything *born*? Are all the centuries, all the events, all the wars, all the discoveries unproductive? May we say that world history is an actualization of a plan, and that it will somewhere be expressive of something? And if this is true, if we may conceive of world history as a meaningful entity, as something that leads somewhere, what is it to end in? To what does it lead? What is the meaning of the world?

We can divide the answers given to this question into three groups.

The most optimistic idea is this — that world history is an area of continuous progress. Gradually but surely mankind goes forward. Out of eras of barbarism it has advanced to the period of culture, and culture itself develops to continually higher and higher forms. The Greeks and Romans built on the Egyptian and Babylonian culture. And on the peak of Greek civilization the foundations of the new world were laid. It is an endless advance, ever higher, ever more beautiful in form. If one asks regarding this theory, "In what respect does humanity advance?" then the answers are quite different. One will answer, In freedom. In the most ancient times despotism prevailed; the ruler was the possessor of all; but gradually a glimmer of liberty appears. Another will assure one with equal emphasis, In knowledge, in love, in unity. In former days people stood opposed to people, man against man. The world is still divided, to be sure, into two camps, but we are still not at the end of the road. We are marching forward to world peace. And how unbelievably the knowledge of humanity has increased! Mankind moreover advances in wealth, in technique, in ability. If our ancestors could see what we are doing and what we are able to accomplish, they would think that we had become angels or gods. In all areas there is development and progress. Where will it end? At the level on which the human race has attained the highest degree, it will be perfection of knowledge, ability and will. Then everything will be one, then the dawn of true culture will break. How long is this going to take? Nobody can say, but it is possible that our culture based on selfishness will at some particular instant tumble down with a crash and that as a result of a fearful revo-

lution the day will at once confront us. It really does not matter how long this requires, so long as we know that it is coming.

This is what the first, the optimistic, point of view declares.

Exactly opposed to this is the strongly pessimistic idea. According to this view there is really nothing good. Oh, yes, it is true that we can shoot through space with airplanes and that we can speak with any place in the universe by means of radio, but that is really no great matter. You can easily get everything as a gift with a little human luck, but in what is real — the great good — we are continually slipping backwards. That lies in the nature of the situation. As the result of our culture we separate ourselves farther and farther from the natural, instinctive manner of life. For a long time this may be quite all right, but finally this growth will express itself in increasing dissatisfaction. We are not happy, nor serene, nor childlike any longer.

And do you really mean that we had advanced in virtue? Do not selfishness, immoral passion, rapacity and lust continue to rage unabated — in fact, do they not become stronger century after century? Are not the wars of the past a picnic in comparison to what we are accustomed to calling war? No, the world is going backwards more certainly and more rapidly. The degeneration increases by leaps and bounds. World history is the history of regression, degeneration and decay. The end of all this will be that the entire creation collapses wearily into the eternal rest of non-being, in the impassivity of death.

Side by side with these two one-sided views is still a third, which actually touches the question itself. You may

not ask whether there is advance or decline, because there is neither. Within a specified area you may speak at times of progress or development, but history teaches us that every culture at a certain stage also decomposes and perishes. There are always new cultures, new ideas, which for a brief moment arouse enthusiasm in people but one after another they sink away and give place to new possibilities. That is why you cannot speak in general about progress. World history is a continual being-born and dying, rising and declining. Every great line fails, there is no permanent gain, no real outcome. All our profit in spiritual good we presently lose. Every religion, every science, every social or political system, every idea has its period of flowering, but withers and dies away. The question about purpose, about meaning, is utterly foolish and irrational. The meaning of life is life itself. All search for a deeper meaning is in vain.

When you observe these several points of view over against each other, you realize how difficult the question confronting us is. Where is there growth in world history? Where is it going and in what does it express itself?

We are limiting ourselves to a few general remarks because the subject is far too profound for us to be able to develop it more fully.

In the first place it should be pointed out that particularly during recent centuries there has come about a continually stronger concentration. It is as though the human race is beginning to become unified again. In former times the various culture areas were absolutely separated from each other. What did a person in Rome know about China, or one in America about India? The life of humanity flowed in different streams, next to and

independent of one another. There was no connection; no unity. And so it was impossible to speak of one mankind.

If the marvels of modern invention have changed a single important thing, then it is this. The steamships that cross the oceans in a few days, the telegraph and radio that speak over the entire earth, the aircraft that conquer immeasurable distances in a few hours, have made the world small and interdependent. What is discussed in Geneva is reported the same evening in America and Arabia, and tomorrow morning it is published and editorialized in the newspapers of Tokyo and Calcutta. The lives of the people are drawn toward each other. There are no longer any walls that protect the cultures from foreign influences. Does anyone any longer speak of an unbridgeable gulf between East and West now that East and West are actively drawing closer together every hour of every day? The conflicts of the Middle East will be reflected tomorrow on the stock exchanges of London and of New York. Humanity has become one body, one whole. That is a marvel whose immeasurable consequences we cannot even remotely comprehend. What illimitable changes will this phenomenon alone bring about in the lives of hundreds of millions of Orientals who have lived for centuries in silent separation? What are we approaching? One world state? One world culture? Will the profound difference be levelled out? Will the divergent characters merge? Will East and West grow together into one? However this may be, one of the mightiest phenomena that we are witnessing is that the life of mankind begins at once to be entwined into a single life.

In the second place, every thought that history is a process that leads to freedom, fortune, love, or perfection must be dismissed as visionary. History does not offer the slightest support for it. External forms may alter, but the core does not change. Man does not actually become better or more fortunate or more contented. It would be pleasant if it were otherwise, but this is the way it is. Progress in culture has very little to do with progress in virtue. It seems that for every step we go forward in one respect, in another we are drawn backwards.

If one chooses to trace a line through the capricious events of the world, then I believe that it will only be possible in the sense that the gospel does this. The gospel shows that world history from its very first page is governed by two factors. To see these gives us, at least from a distance, a kind of insight into the meaning of the world.

The first factor is that of sin, the self-deification of man. In the development of the world-cultures this self-deification assumes new forms from time to time. In the ascetic religions of the East it is revealed as a convulsive endeavor to become so completely one with the Godhead that a person feels the power of the Creator embodied within his own being. The same self-deification is held up as an ideal in ancient Babel and comes to reality in the furious longing for a world empire. It stands as the firm support of classical culture, the culture of harmonious reasonableness. It also operates as a driving force in the world of the West. In the course of the centuries this striving appears in a variety of forms and attains constantly higher actualizations. It is a tempestuous desire for power, and man acquires power, a power that tran-

scends the loftiest fantasies. It is a consuming thirst for knowledge, and man gains knowledge, a knowledge which all but breaks through all boundaries. It is a courageous attempt to make the forces of nature subservient to himself and man succeeds in reaching what he desired. Man climbs steadily higher; he strides wearily forward on the road to deification.

And the end of all this we already see in a very faint outline before us. The end is that humanity goes more strongly toward an inane chaos than it ever has before. The end of it is that the means for power of modern technique have fallen into the hands of utterly corrupt characters, that life becomes mechanized and externalized. One must read a book like Professor Huizenga's *Shadows of Tomorrow* in order to feel into what kind of oppressive impasse we are steadily falling. To spin fairy tales about an approaching "world peace," about a coming "ideal state" appears more stupid than ever. The younger generation is growing up in the certainty that the future stands before us, hard and truculent.

In one of Vondel's dramas we read these lines:

Holy, holy, once more, holy,  
Three times holy — praise to God.  
Nowhere safe outside of Him,  
Holy is the great command.

If I should wish to characterize what is becoming a terrible certainty as the result of examining the world events, then I should express it in these words: "No place is secure outside of Him."

The self-deification of man, in whatever form — be it in the shape of a mystical wish to grasp the unity of God,



be it in the ideals of world empires, or of culture and knowledge — always and undeniably leads to a deeply tragic failure, because actual salvation is only possible when man will stand once more in the place appointed him in the structure of creation, that of being a child of God.

And the second factor which the gospel shows us in world history is that of the work of the grace of God. Into the middle of human bungling the Almighty embroiders the plan of His kingdom. It is a kingdom of grace, in Jesus Christ. It is a kingdom that teaches man to bow deeply before the face of its King. It is a kingdom that proceeds through world history along a *via dolorosa*, a road of sorrows, just as the Lord of the kingdom, Jesus Christ Himself, has travelled this road of sorrows. This kingdom is continually engaged in being levelled, in being secularized; it becomes drawn along by the attraction of the life of the world. And in spite of this God keeps on carrying and enduring it. In the last book of the Bible we are given a dramatic description of how the final crisis of this kingdom will be in the world, and here is also shown in a tender and restrained manner which transcends all description, that after the end of all things, God will be all in all.

## XVIII. *THE END OF LIFE*

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THE final question that we wish to take up in this series is that regarding the end of the personal life. Is man immortal? Is there a life after this one? Where do we go? What lies behind that strange, mysterious curtain that we are used to calling death? This question also has a long and notable history back of it.

First of all, with respect to this it should be observed that virtually all people have believed in a life after this life. However, they have thought of it, or have fancied, that the soul remained as a shade wandering about the earth, or migrated to distant regions, or that it returned to earth in other forms of life transposed at once in a state of greater or lesser blessedness. Behind this lay always the constant conviction that this life does not become completely annihilated with death, but changes so to speak, into another form of existence.

The question can be put: How does it happen that this belief is so universally encountered? In answer to this question, it seems to us that especially the following convictions are relevant.

First, it is felt most strongly that this life in all respects has a fragmentary character. It is not finished, not a completed whole. This is already evident in the fact that very little of that which is hidden in the soul can be expressed during this life. There are inclinations, long-

ings, higher needs which are on the whole outbid by the lower drives for self-preservation, the struggle for one's daily food and so on. What is most noble, most genuinely human, often lies deeply concealed and cannot be expressed during a lifetime. It gives life a kind of incompleteness; we should almost say a kind of worthlessness. It is not bad and not good. It is worse than that — it is petty and insignificant. You stand back and say, "This can't be all." In no single respect does life bear the character of a mature fruit, but it shows the unmistakable marks of a bud, of a blossom. Even stronger: Many people have clearly had the feeling that this life resembles a dream, sometimes an anxious dream, sometimes a pleasant one, but never more than a dream. And they attached to this the ineradicable certainty that what we call dying is nothing more than an awakening, a crossing from the dreamworld into a state of really being.

In addition to this is the fact that man's feeling of justice is least of all satisfied throughout this life. Often things go quite differently than we should expect or desire. The scales of justice are almost never in balance. This too has aroused the thought: This life can't be all. Something more still unknown to us has to lie ahead.

You are familiar with the ancient symbolic representations of the Egyptians. In a realistic manner they let us see how the soul is weighed in the realm of the dead, and shortly thereafter it receives an invitation to appear before the king of the dead. Similar ideas of a weighing after death, or of a bridge which the dead must cross, you will find spread all over the world. These show us that deeply and ineradicably rooted within a person lies

the concept that there must be a righteous judgment which everyone must experience.

And finally, the human soul bears within itself an intuition of eternity. In the midst of the stream of the events of life the soul feels itself as imperishable. Simply the fact that it is aware of transitoriness, of time, of change, is an indication that it carries something within that is to be prolonged above, that is eternal.

These three convictions seem to form, as it were, the intuitive basis for the concept that there is something within a person that does not entirely go to ruin at the time of death. This concept continues to live on in all peoples and it is questionable whether it can ever be entirely lost in a person.

Just as belief in a life after this life is universal, so the conceptions of conditions after death are varied. Without further dwelling on these things, we wish to close with a single remark about what we are taught by the gospel regarding these things.

The gospel shows us that with respect to human beings there are two possibilities, that of being alone or that of being in Christ. In the state of being alone the person depends on himself, he lives on the foundations of his own nature. And since this nature, as we saw earlier, lies shackled in ignorance, error, guilt and weakness, we cannot typify this being alone any better than by describing it as being bound in "the power of darkness" (Colossians 1:13). This word *darkness* everywhere in the Bible has an alarming meaning that we immediately grasp with our feeling without being able to comprehend it completely with our mind. Being in Christ signifies something noble and beautiful in the Bible. It is this, namely, that

a person in the depths of his lost-ness has seized fast on Jesus Christ, the great Savior of his life. From this moment on the person lives as it were in His aura, he is surrounded by His sheltering nearness, he is borne up by the radiance that shines forth from Him. These are the two possibilities of human existence.

It is hard to describe what happens at the moment of death. Death itself we can best call the gate which affords entrance to the Kingdom of Truth. Then all false values and false powers drop away and the soul falls back into the final actualities. Then is revealed what was previously true but which lay for a long while in the enfoldings of half-light and of uncertainty.

In death all the gateways to what is material are irrevocably closed. No longer does the eye tell of the glow of visible things, no longer does the ear receive the sounds that flow toward it from this world. All the doors to the material world drop shut and even thinking in the ordinary sense, as we are familiar with it now, cannot continue any longer, bound as it seems to be to all kinds of somatic processes. What happens to all of us at evening, however, now happens to the soul. The stars shine all day but we do not see them because their light has been swallowed up in the sunlight. But as soon as the sun sets in the evening we see them twinkle in all parts of the sky. As soon as the gates of the soul are closed irrevocably to the material world and the soul itself becomes still because images no longer rise from the subconscious, then begins to shine within it the spiritual light of God and the angels. It finds itself taken up into another sphere; things that seemed unreal now become the highest reality. The material fades away and it arrives into new and

different areas of existence. God has been there all along, He lives all about us, but in the clamor of this world we did not hear His voice, and in the dazzle of this world we had forgotten His light. But now that the other falls away, we fall, as it were, back on Him, as the only certainty.

Whenever a person has stood on earth in aloneness, when he has clung with both hands to the rational things and their powerful spell, the instant of death is a moment of fearful alarm. During all his days he has pushed God outside the domain of his life, has hated Him and rejected Him and sought to withdraw himself from His hand. Now the gates to rational things fall shut and all that remains is God Himself. At the first beholding of His light the soul is gripped by a nameless terror. It wants to flee but flight is impossible. It has nothing to cling to, no place to escape to. A tremendous, all-encompassing horror which no words can express, like something we may feel in dreams, heavy as lead upon us, comes over it. This confines it so powerfully and intensely that it feels itself saturated with an immeasurable anguish.

On the other hand, it is also possible that during the time of this life a person has lived in Christ. During his earthly days he was frequently intoxicated by the world, but something quite different came into his life. Then the strength of Jesus Christ carried him, and His nearness made him stand firm. All the days of his life there was a longing within for Him and a thirst after His companionship. Every fiber of his existence was infused by a hidden longing after God as the supreme good. For such a person death will occur as an astonishing revela-

tion. Perhaps in the first moment the soul will be embarrassed, and will still feel a hesitation. But as soon as it begins to observe the lights, as soon as it begins to discern in the distance the reflection of the presence of joy, there is born in the soul an unending rejoicing. Is that You, O eternal beauty, that I have always sought? With unbelievable rapture it will hasten to Him, and will embrace Him as its All, as its salvation. And in the beholding, in the sight of His glory, it will advance from joy to joy, from light to light. And in the joy which it will then experience, eternity is comprehended, for God is eternal. At the same moment in the wonderful power of the Spirit of God, it is made holy so that all the stains of sin fall from it.

In some manner like this we may think of the entry to the heavenly country. It is not proper to think or speak much about it.

Those who pay attention already catch the rustlings of eternity in their lives. Sometimes they are startled by it, and they long, yes, their souls faint with a deep longing for what is then to be revealed.

Blessedness does not lie in big words nor in great deeds. It lies only in the entry into the nearness of God, in beholding Him who is Himself blessedness. Of Him the soul never wearies. He is the rest and the life, the power and the peace, the joy and rapture.

Like drifting vessels we wander alone over a gloomy sea of life, sometimes violently agitated, then again in still waters, sometimes hurled wildly upon the rocks, or sucked down into whirling abysses. Life is tremendous and frightening. But those who know, set their course.

Hold fast to Jesus Christ as the Guide to blessedness. In Him is knowledge and peace and holiness. Who believes in Him has eternal life.

If, then, you know these things, happy are you if you do them.