

Ethics

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ETHICS

ethics of an honorable tradition, but they have proved inadequate for the struggle Bonhoeffer is engaged in. He asks: "Who stands firm?" The answer is the spirit that informs Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*:

Only the one whose ultimate standard is not his reason, his principles, conscience, freedom, or virtue; only the one who is prepared to sacrifice all of these when, in faith and in relationship to God alone, he is called to obedient and responsible action. Such a person is the responsible one, whose life is to be nothing but a response to God's question and call.¹¹

It is also Bonhoeffer's personal answer.

Christ, Reality, and Good. Christ, Church, and World

Those who wish even to focus on the problem of a Christian ethic are faced with an outrageous demand—from the outset they must give up, as inappropriate to this topic, the very two questions that led them to deal with the ethical problem: "How can I be good?" and "How can I do something good?" Instead they must ask the wholly other, completely different question: what is the will of God? This demand is radical precisely because it presupposes a decision about ultimate reality, that is, a decision of faith. When the ethical problem presents itself essentially as the question of my own being good and doing good, the decision has already been made that the self and the world are the ultimate realities. All ethical reflection then has the goal that I be good, and that the world—by my action—becomes good. If it turns out, however, that these realities, myself and the world, are themselves embedded in a wholly other ultimate reality, namely, the reality of God the Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer, then the ethical problem takes on a whole new aspect. Of ultimate importance, then, is not that I become good, or that the condition of the world be improved by my efforts, but that the reality of God show itself everywhere to be the ultimate reality. Where God is

known by faith to be the ultimate reality, the source of my ethical concern will be that God be known as the good [das Gute], even at the risk that I and the world are revealed as not good, but as bad through and through. All things appear as in a distorted mirror if they are not seen and recognized in God. All that is—so to speak—given, all laws and norms, are abstractions, as long as God is not known in faith to be the ultimate reality. That God alone is the ultimate reality, is, however, not an idea meant to sublimate the actual world, nor is it the religious perfecting of a profane worldview. It is rather a faithful Yes to God's self-witness, God's revelation. If God is merely a religious concept, there is no reason why there should not be, behind this apparent "ultimate" reality, a still more ultimate reality: the twilight or the death of the gods. Only insofar as the ultimate reality is revelation, that is, the self-witness of the living God, is its claim to ultimacy fulfilled. But then the decision about the whole of life depends on our relation to God's revelation. Awareness of it is not only a step-by-step progress in the discovery of deeper and more inward realities, but this awareness is the turning point, the pivot, of all perception of reality as such. The ultimate, or final, reality discloses itself to be at the same time the first reality, God as the first and last, the Alpha and Omega. Without God, all seeing and perceiving of things and laws become abstraction, a separation from both origin and goal. All questions of our own goodness, as well as of the goodness of the world, are impossible unless we have first posed the question of the goodness of God. For what meaning would the goodness of human beings and the world have without God? Since God, however, as ultimate reality is no other than the self-announcing, self-witnessing, self-revealing God in Jesus Christ, the question of good can only find its answer in Christ.

The source of a Christian ethic is not the reality of one's own self, not the reality of the world, nor is it the reality of norms and

values. It is the reality of God that is revealed in Jesus Christ. This is the demand, before all others, that must honestly be made of anyone who wishes to be concerned with the problem of a Christian ethic. It places us before the ultimate and decisive question: With what reality will we reckon in our life? With the reality of God's revelatory word or with the so-called realities of life? With divine grace or with earthly inadequacies? With the resurrection or with death? This question itself, which none can answer by their own choice without answering it falsely, already presupposes a given answer: that God, however we decide, has already spoken the revelatory word and that we, even in our false reality, can live no other way than from the true reality of the word of God. The question about ultimate reality already places us in such an embrace by its answer that there is no way we can escape from it. This answer carries us into the reality of God's revelation in Jesus Christ from which it comes.

The *subject matter of a Christian ethic is God's reality revealed in Christ becoming real [Wirklichwerden] among God's creatures*, just as the subject matter of doctrinal theology is the truth of God's reality revealed in Christ. The place that in all other ethics is marked by the antithesis between ought and is, idea and realization, motive and work, is occupied in Christian ethics by the relation between reality and becoming real, between past and present, between history and event (faith) or, to replace the many concepts with the simple name of the thing itself, the relation between Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The question of the good becomes the question of participating in God's reality revealed in Christ. Good is no longer an evaluation of what exists, for instance my essence, my moral orientation [Gesinnung], my actions, or of a state of affairs in the world. It is no longer a predicate that one can apply to something that exists of itself. Good is the real itself [das Wirkliche], that is, not the abstractly real that is separated from the reality of God, but the real that has its reality only

in God. Good is never without this reality. It is no general formula. And this reality is never without the good. The will to be good exists only as desire for the reality that is real in God. A desire to be good for its own sake, as some sort of personal goal or life vocation, falls prey to an ironic unreality; honest striving for good turns into the ambitious striving of the paragon of virtue. Good as such is no independent theme for life. To take it as such would be the craziest Don Quixotry. Only by participating in reality do we also share in the good.

There is an old argument about whether only the will, the act of the mind, the person, can be good, or whether achievement, work, consequence, or condition can be called good as well—and if so, which comes first and which is more important. This argument, which has also seeped into theology, leading there as elsewhere to serious aberrations, proceeds from a basically perverse way of putting the question. It tears apart what is originally and essentially one, namely, the good and the real, the person and the work. The objection that Jesus, too, had this distinction between person and work in mind, when he spoke about the good tree that brings forth good fruits, distorts this saying of Jesus into its exact opposite. Its meaning is not that first the person is good and then the work, but that *only the two together*, only both as united in one, are to be understood as good or bad.

The same is true of the distinction that the American philosopher of religion Reinhold Niebuhr has made with the concepts moral man and immoral society. The split between individual and society that is expressed here is just as abstract as that between person and work. What is inseparable is here torn apart, and each part, which by itself is dead, is examined separately. The result is the complete ethical aporia that today goes by the name “social ethics.” Of course, if good is seen as an existing entity’s conformity to what ought to

be, then the more massive resistance that society sets against what ought to be must lead to an ethical preference for the individual over society. (And conversely, precisely this result should warn us to detect in this concept of the ethical its sociological origin in the age of individualism.) The question of good must not be narrowed to investigating the relation of actions to their motives, or to their consequences, measuring them by a ready-made ethical standard. An ethic of disposition or intention is just as superficial as an ethic of consequences. For what right do we have to stay with inner motivation as the ultimate phenomenon of ethics, ignoring that “good” intentions can grow out of very dark backgrounds in human consciousness and subconsciousness, and that often the worst things happen as a result of “good intentions”? As the question of the motives of action finally disappears in the tangled web of the past, so the question of its consequences gets lost in the mists of the future. There are no clear boundaries on either side. Nothing justifies us in stopping at any arbitrary point we choose in order to make a definitive judgment. In practice, we ever and again stop to make such an arbitrary determination, whether along the lines of an ethic of motives [Motivethik] or an ethic of consequences [Erfolgsethik]. Whatever we do will depend on the different needs of the changing times. Neither has any fundamental advantage over the other, because in both cases the question of good is posed abstractly, severed from reality. Good is not the agreement of some way of existence that I describe as reality with some standard placed at our disposal by nature or grace. Rather, good is reality, reality itself seen and recognized in God. Human beings, with their motives and their works, with their fellow humans, with the creation that surrounds them, in other words, reality as a whole held in the hands of God—that is what is embraced by the question of good. The divine “behold, it was very good” meant the whole of creation. The good

desires the whole, not only of motives but also of works; it desires whole persons along with the human companions with whom they are given to live. What could it mean anyway that only a part be named good, motives for instance, while works are bad, or vice versa? *Human beings are indivisible wholes, not only as individuals in both their person and work, but also as members of the human and created community to which they belong.* It is this indivisible whole, that is, this reality grounded and recognized in God, that the question of good has in view. "Creation" is the name of this indivisible whole according to its origin. According to its goal it is called the kingdom of God. Both are equally far from us and yet near to us, because God's creation and God's kingdom are present to us only in God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ.

To participate in the indivisible whole of God's reality is the meaning of the Christian question about the good. To avoid misunderstanding, we need at this point a further clarification of what is meant here by reality.

There is a way of grounding ethics in a concept of reality that is completely different from the Christian way, namely, the positivist-empiricist approach. It attempts to remove the concept of norms from ethics completely, and sees in them only the idealizing of actual ways of behavior that are useful in life; good is seen as basically nothing but that which serves reality usefully and purposefully. It follows that there is no generally valid good, but only an endlessly manifold good that is determined to be such by whatever "reality" there happens to be. The advantage of this perspective over the idealistic view lies in its undoubtedly greater "closeness to reality." Good here does not consist of an impossible "realization," i.e., making real something that is unreal; it is not a realization of ethical ideas. Rather, reality itself teaches what is good. The question is only whether reality as understood here is capable of meeting this demand. It thereby

becomes clear that the concept of reality underlying this positivistic ethic is the vulgar concept of that which can be empirically established, which involves denying any foundation of this reality in the ultimate reality, that is, in God. This vulgar understanding of reality is therefore unsuited to become the origin of the good, because it requires nothing less than complete surrender to what is at hand, given, accidental, and driven by temporary goals in any given time. It is unsuited because it does not recognize ultimate reality and so surrenders and destroys the unity of the good.

Christian ethics speaks otherwise of the reality that is the origin of the good. It means thereby the reality of God as the ultimate reality beyond and in all that exists. It means also the reality of the existing world that is real only through the reality of God. The reality of God is not just another idea. Christian faith perceives this in the fact that the reality of God has revealed itself and witnessed to itself in the middle of the real world. *In Jesus Christ the reality of God has entered into the reality of this world.* The place where the questions about the reality of God and about the reality of the world are answered at the same time is characterized solely by the name: Jesus Christ. God and the world are enclosed in this name. In Christ all things exist (Col. 1:17). From now on we cannot speak rightly of either God or the world without speaking of Jesus Christ. All concepts of reality that ignore Jesus Christ are abstractions. All thinking about the good that plays off what ought to be against what is, or what is against what ought to be, is overcome where the good has become reality, namely, in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ cannot be identified either with an ideal, a norm, or with what exists. The enmity of the ideal toward what exists, the fanatical imposition of an idea on an existing entity that resists it, can be as far from the good as the surrender of the ought to the expedient. The ought as well as the expedient receive in Christ a completely new meaning. The irreconcilable opposition of

ought and is finds reconciliation in Christ, that is, in ultimate reality. To participate in this reality is the true meaning of the question concerning the good.

In Christ we are invited to participate in the reality of God and the reality of the world at the same time, the one not without the other. The reality of God is disclosed only as it places me completely into the reality of the world. But I find the reality of the world always already borne, accepted, and reconciled in the reality of God. That is the mystery of the revelation of God in the human being Jesus Christ. The Christian ethic asks, then, how this reality of God and of the world that is given in Christ becomes real in our world. It is not as if “our world” were something outside this God-world reality that is in Christ, as if it did not already belong to the world borne, accepted, and reconciled in Christ; it is not, therefore, as if some “principle” must first be applied to our circumstances and our time. Rather, the question is how the reality in Christ—which has long embraced us and our world within itself—works here and now or, in other words, how life is to be lived in it. What matters is *participating in the reality of God and the world in Jesus Christ today*, and doing so in such a way that I never experience the reality of God without the reality of the world, nor the reality of the world without the reality of God.

As we travel further along this road, a large part of traditional Christian ethical thought stands like a Colossus obstructing our way. Since the beginnings of Christian ethics after New Testament times, the dominant basic conception, consciously or unconsciously determining all ethical thought, has been that two realms [Räume] bump against each other: one divine, holy, supernatural, and Christian; the other worldly, profane, natural, and unchristian. This view reached its first peak in the High Middle Ages, and its second in the pseudo-Reformation thought of the post-Reformation period. Reality as a whole splits into two parts, and the concern of ethics

becomes the right relation of both parts to each other. In the high scholastic period the natural realm was subordinated to the realm of grace. In pseudo-Lutheranism the autonomy of the orders of this world is proclaimed against the law of Christ. Among the Enthusiasts the church-community of the elect sets out to struggle against the enmity of the world in order to build the kingdom of God on earth. In all of this the concern of Christ becomes a partial, provincial affair within the whole of reality. One reckons with realities outside the reality of Christ. It follows that there is separate access to these realities, apart from Christ. However important one may take reality in Christ to be, it always remains a partial reality alongside others.

This division of the whole of reality into sacred and profane, or Christian and worldly, sectors creates the possibility of existence in only one of these sectors: for instance, a spiritual existence that takes no part in worldly existence, and a worldly existence that can make good its claim to autonomy over against the sacred sector. The monk and the cultural Protestant of the nineteenth century represent these two possibilities. The whole of medieval history turned around the theme of the rule of the spiritual realm over the worldly, the *regnum gratiae* over the *regnum naturae*, whereas the modern age is characterized by an ever-progressing independence of the worldly over against the spiritual. As long as Christ and the world are conceived as two realms [Räume] bumping against and repelling each other, we are left with only the following options. Giving up on reality as a whole, either we place ourselves in one of the two realms, wanting Christ without the world or the world without Christ—and in both cases we deceive ourselves. Or we try to stand in the two realms at the same time, thereby becoming people in eternal conflict, shaped by the post-Reformation era, who ever and again present ourselves as the *only* form of Christian existence that is in accord with reality.

As hard as it may now seem to break the spell of this conceptual framework of realms, it is just as certain that this perspective deeply contradicts both biblical and Reformation thought, therefore bypassing reality. There are not two realities, but *only one reality*, and that is God's reality revealed in Christ in the reality of the world. Partaking in Christ, we stand at the same time in the reality of God and in the reality of the world. The reality of Christ embraces the reality of the world in itself. The world has no reality of its own independent of God's revelation in Christ. It is a denial of God's revelation in Jesus Christ to wish to be "Christian" without being "worldly," or [to] wish to be worldly without seeing and recognizing the world in Christ. Hence there are not two realms, but only *the one realm of the Christ-reality [Christuswirklichkeit]*, in which the reality of God and the reality of the world are united. Because this is so, the theme of two realms, which has dominated the history of the church again and again, is foreign to the New Testament. The New Testament is concerned only with the realization [Wirklichwerden] of the Christ-reality in the contemporary world that it already embraces, owns, and inhabits. There are not two competing realms standing side by side and battling over the borderline, as if this question of boundaries was always the decisive one. Rather, the whole reality of the world has already been drawn into and is held together in Christ. History moves only from this center and toward this center.

Thinking in terms of two realms understands the paired concepts worldly-Christian, natural-supernatural, profane-sacred, rational-revelational, as ultimate static opposites that designate certain given entities that are mutually exclusive. This thinking fails to recognize the original unity of these opposites in the Christ-reality and, as an afterthought, replaces this with a forced unity provided by a sacred or profane system that overarches them. Thus the static opposition

is maintained. Things work out quite differently when the reality of God and the reality of the world are recognized in Christ. In that way, the world, the natural, the profane, and reason are seen as included in God from the beginning. All this does not exist "in and for itself." It has its reality nowhere else than in the reality of God in Christ. It belongs to the real concept of the worldly that it is at all times seen in the movement of the world's both having been accepted and becoming accepted by God in Christ. Just as the reality of God has entered the reality of the world in Christ, what is Christian cannot be had otherwise than in what is worldly, the "supernatural" only in the natural, the holy only in the profane, the revelational only in the rational. The unity of the reality of God and the reality of the world established in Christ (repeats itself, or, more exactly) realizes itself again and again in human beings. Still, that which is Christian is not identical with the worldly, the natural with the supernatural, the revelational with the rational. Rather, the unity that exists between them is given only in the Christ-reality, and that means only as accepted by faith in this ultimate reality. This unity is preserved by the fact that the worldly and the Christian, etc., mutually prohibit every static independence of the one over against the other, that they behave toward each other polemically, and precisely therein witness to their common reality, their unity in the Christ-reality. As Luther polemically led the worldly into battle against the sacralizing trend of the Roman church, so this worldliness must be polemically contradicted by the Christian, by the "sacred," in the very moment when it is in danger of making itself independent, as happened soon after the Reformation, reaching its high point in cultural Protestantism. The issue in both cases is precisely the same, namely referring to the reality of God and the reality of the world in Jesus Christ. In the name of a better Christianity Luther used the worldly to protest against a type of Christianity that was making itself

dangerous relapse into abstract thinking. Since the appearance of Christ, ethics can be concerned with only one thing: to partake in Col. 2:9; 1:19), "through whom everything is reconciled, whether on earth or in heaven" (Col the reality of the fulfilled will of God. But to partake in this is possible only because of the fact that even I myself am already included in the fulfillment of the will of God in Christ, which means that I have been reconciled to God. The question of the will of God is not asking about something hidden or unfulfilled, but about what has been revealed and fulfilled. It remains, however, a genuine question insofar as I myself, together with the world around me, am placed into this question by the answer given by the revelation and fulfillment.

The will of God, as it was revealed and fulfilled in Jesus Christ, embraces the whole of reality. There is access to this wholeness, without being torn apart by manifold influences, only through faith in Jesus Christ, "in whom the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (1:20), whose body, that is, the church-community, is the fullness of the One who fills all in all (Eph. 1:23). Faith in this Jesus Christ is the single source of all good.

Ethics as Formation

Seldom has a generation been as uninterested as ours in any kind of ethical theory or program. The academic question about an ethical system seems to be the most superfluous of all questions. This does not come from any ethical indifference in our times, but rather the reverse, from the pressure of a reality filled with concrete, ethical problems such as we have never had before in the history of the West. In a time when there were firm orders of life [Lebensordnungen] that permitted at most the small, usually undiscovered, sins of human weakness, when the criminal was abnormal and removed from society under its outraged or pitying gaze, then the ethical as a theoretical problem could be interesting. Today we have villains and saints again, in full public view. The gray on gray of a sultry, rainy day has turned into the black cloud and bright lightning flash of a thunderstorm. The contours are sharply drawn. Reality is laid bare. Shakespeare's characters are among us. The villain and the saint have little or nothing to do with ethical programs. They arise from primeval depths, and with their appearance tear open the demonic and divine abyss [Abgrund] out of which they come, allowing us brief glimpses into their suspected secrets. It is worse to be evil than to do evil. It is worse when a liar tells the truth than when a lover of truth lies, worse when a person who hates humanity practices

neighborly love [Brudernliebe] than when a loving person once falls victim to hatred. The lie is better than truth in the mouth of a liar, as hatred is better than acts of neighborly love by a misanthrope. One sin is not like another. They have different weights. There are heavier and lighter sins. Falling away [Abfall] is far more serious than falling down [Fall]. The most brilliant virtues of the apostates are as dark as night compared with the darkest weaknesses of the faithful.

That evil appears in the form of light, of beneficence, of faithfulness, of renewal, that it appears in the form of historical necessity, of social justice, is for the commonsense observer a clear confirmation of its profound evilness. Ethical theorists, on the other hand, are blinded by it. With their preconceived concepts they cannot grasp what is real, let alone seriously encounter something whose essence and power they don't even recognize. Those who are committed to an ethical agenda are compelled to a senseless waste of their energies. Even their martyrdom becomes neither a source of strength for their cause nor a threat to those who are evil. But, remarkably enough, not only the ethical theorists committed to an agenda miss their opponent, but those who are evil are hardly able to recognize their rivals. They fall into each other's traps. We experience and recognize ethical reality not by craftiness, not by knowing all the tricks, but only by standing straightforwardly in the truth of God and by looking to that truth with eyes that it makes simple [einfältig] and wise.

The failure of *reasonable people* is appalling; they cannot manage to see either the abyss of evil or the abyss of holiness. With the best intentions they believe that, with a little reason, they can pull back together a structure that has come apart at the joints. In their defective vision they want to be fair to both sides, and so they are crushed between the colliding forces without having accomplished anything at all. Bitterly disappointed that the world is so unreasonable, they

see themselves condemned to ineffectiveness. They withdraw in resignation or fall helplessly captive to the stronger party.

More appalling is the bankruptcy of all ethical *fanaticism*. Fanatics believe that they can face the power of evil with the purity of their will and their principles. But the essence of fanaticism is that it loses sight of the whole evil, and like a bull that charges the red cape instead of the one holding it, fanatics finally tire and suffer defeat. Fanatics miss their goal. Though their fanaticism serves the lofty goals of truth or justice, sooner or later they are caught in small and insignificant things and fall into the net of their more clever opponent.

Men of *conscience* fend off all alone the superior power of predicaments that demand decision. But the dimensions of the conflicts in which they have to choose, counseled and supported by nothing but their own conscience, tear them to pieces. The countless respectable and seductive disguises and masks in which evil approaches them make their conscience anxious and unsure until they finally content themselves with an assuaged conscience instead of a good conscience, that is, until they deceive their own conscience in order not to despair. Those whose sole support is their conscience can never grasp that a bad conscience can be stronger and healthier than one that is deceived.

The safe *way of duty* seems to offer escape from the bewildering profusion of possible decisions. What is commanded is grasped as the most certain. The person in command bears responsibility for the order, not the one who carries it out. However, those who limit themselves to duty will never venture a free action that rests solely on their own responsibility, the only sort of action that can meet evil at its heart and overcome it. People of duty must finally fulfill their duty even to the devil.

Those, however, who take their stand in the world in their *very*

own freedom, who value the necessary action more highly than their own untarnished conscience and reputation, who are prepared to sacrifice a barren principle to a fruitful compromise or a barren wisdom of the middle way to a fruitful radicalism, should take heed lest precisely their presumed freedom ultimately cause them to fall. They will easily consent to the bad, knowing full well that it is bad, in order to prevent the worse, and no longer be able to recognize that precisely the worse choice they wish to avoid may be the better one. Here lies the raw material of tragedy.

In flight from public controversy this person or that reaches the sanctuary of a *private virtuousness*. Such people neither steal, nor murder, nor commit adultery, but do good according to their abilities. But in voluntarily renouncing public life, these people know exactly how to observe the permitted boundaries that shield them from conflict. They must close their eyes and ears to the injustice around them. Only at the cost of self-deception can they keep their private blamelessness clean from the stains of responsible action in the world. In all that they do, what they fail to do will not let them rest. They will either be destroyed by this unrest, or they will become the most hypocritical of all Pharisees.

Who may revile such failure and such collapse? Who of us does not know that we are also involved in one way or another? Reason, ethical fanaticism, conscience, duty, free responsibility, and quiet virtue are goods and convictions of a noble humanity. It is the best, with all they are and can do, who thus go under. The perennial figure of Don Quixote has become contemporary, the "knight of the doleful countenance" who, with a shaving basin for a helmet and a miserable hack for a charger, rides into endless battle for the chosen lady of his heart who doesn't even exist. This is the picture of the adventurous enterprise of an old world against a new one, of a past reality against a contemporary one, of a noble dreamer against the overpowering

force of the commonplace. Even the deep cleft between the two parts of this great tale is characteristic. In the second part that followed the first many years later, the author takes sides with the mean world, laughing at his hero. It is too cheap to deride the weapons that we have inherited from our ancestors, with which they achieved great things, but that are not sufficient for the present struggle. Only the mean-spirited can read the fate of Don Quixote without sharing in and being moved by it. Nevertheless we must replace rusty weapons with bright steel. Only the person who combines simplicity with wisdom can endure. But what is simplicity? What is wisdom? How do the two become one? A person is simple who in the confusion, the distortion, and the inversion of all concepts keeps in sight only the single truth of God. This person has an undivided heart, and is not a double-psyche, a person of two souls (James 1[:8]). Because of knowing and having God, this person clings to the commandments, the judgment, and the mercy of God that proceed anew each day from the mouth of God. Not fettered by principles but bound by love for God, this person is liberated from the problems and conflicts of ethical decision, and is no longer beset by them. This person belongs to God and to God's will alone. The single-minded person does not also cast glances at the world while standing next to God and therefore is able, free and unconstrained, to see the reality of the world. Thus simplicity becomes wisdom. The person is wise who sees reality as it is, who sees into the depth of things. Only that person is wise who sees reality in God. Knowledge of reality is not just knowing external events, but seeing into the essence of things. The best-informed person is not the most intelligent. Precisely the best-informed people are in danger of missing the essential amid the variety. On the other hand, knowing an apparently trivial detail may often shed light on the depth of things. So the wise person will seek to obtain the best possible information about the course of

events without becoming dependent on it. Wisdom is recognizing the significant within the factual. Wise people know the limited receptivity of reality for principles, because they know that reality is not built on principles, but rests on the living, creating God. So they also know that reality can be helped neither by the purest principles nor with the best will, but only by the living God. Principles are only tools in the hands of God; they will soon be thrown away when they are no longer useful. This liberated view of God and of reality, as it is real only in God, unites simplicity and wisdom. There is no true simplicity without wisdom, and no wisdom without simplicity.

This may sound very theoretical, and so it is as long as we are not clear about where this stance is grounded in reality and therefore can become real. "Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves" is a saying of Jesus (Matt. 10:16). As with all of his sayings, it is he himself who interprets it. No one can look at God and at the reality of the world with undivided gaze as long as God and the world are torn apart. Despite all efforts to prevent it, the eyes still wander from one to the other. Only because there is one place where God and the reality of the world are reconciled with each other, at which God and humanity have become one, is it possible there and there alone to fix one's eyes on God and the world together at the same time. This place does not lie somewhere beyond reality in the realm of ideas. It lies in the midst of history as a divine miracle. It lies in Jesus Christ the reconciler of the world. As an ideal, the unity of simplicity and wisdom is as much doomed to failure as are all other efforts to face reality; it is an impossible, highly contradictory ideal. Grounded, however, in the reality of the world reconciled with God in Jesus Christ, the command of Jesus gains meaning and reality. Whoever looks at Jesus Christ sees in fact God and the world in one. From then on they can no longer see God without the world, or the world without God.

Ecce homo—behold, what a human being! In Christ the reconciliation of the world with God took place. The world will be overcome not by destruction but by reconciliation. Not ideals or programs, not conscience, duty, responsibility, or virtue, but only the consummate love of God can meet and overcome reality. Again, this is accomplished not by a general idea of love, but by the love of God really lived in Jesus Christ. This love of God for the world does not withdraw from reality into noble souls detached from the world, but experiences and suffers the reality of the world at its worst. The world exhausts its rage on the body of Jesus Christ. But the martyred one forgives the world its sins. Thus reconciliation takes place. Ecce homo.

The figure [Gestalt] of the reconciler, of the God-man Jesus Christ, steps into the middle between God and the world, into the center of all that happens. In this figure is disclosed the mystery of the world, just as the mystery of God is revealed in it. No abyss of evil can remain hidden from him through whom the world is reconciled to God. But the abyss of the love of God embraces even the most abysmal godlessness of the world. In an incomprehensible reversal of all righteous and pious thought, God declares himself as guilty toward the world and thereby extinguishes the guilt of the world. God treads the way of humble reconciliation and thereby sets the world free. God wills to be guilty of our guilt; God takes on the punishment and suffering that guilt has brought on us. God takes responsibility for godlessness, love for hate, the holy one for the sinner. Now there is no more godlessness, hate, or sin that God has not taken upon himself, suffered, and atoned. Now there is no longer any reality, any world, that is not reconciled with God and at peace. God has done this in the beloved son, Jesus Christ. Ecce homo!

Ecce homo—behold God become human, the unfathomable mystery of the love of God for the world. God loves human beings.

but only their acceptance of the judgment of divine love. It is a mystery of God's reign over the world that this very cross, the sign of Christ's failure in the world, can in turn lead to historical success; this cannot be made into a rule, though in the suffering of God's church-community it repeats itself here and there.

Only in the cross of Christ, and that means as judged, does humanity take on its true form.

Ecce homo—behold the human being, accepted by God, judged by God, awakened by God to a new life—see the Risen One! God's Yes to this human being has found its goal through judgment and death. God's love for this human being was stronger than death. A new human being, a new life, a new creature has been created by God's miracle. "Life has gained the victory; it has conquered death." The love of God became the death of death and the life of this human being. In Jesus Christ, the one who became human was crucified and is risen; humanity has become new. What happened to Christ has happened for all, for he was *the* human being. The new human being has been created.

The miracle of Christ's resurrection has overturned the idolization of death that rules among us. Where death is final, fear of it combines with defiance. Where death is final, earthly life is all or nothing. Defiant striving for earthly eternities goes together with a careless playing with life, anxious affirmation of life with an indifferent contempt for life. Nothing betrays the idolization of death more clearly than when an era claims to build for eternity, and yet life in that era is worth nothing, when big words are spoken about a new humanity, a new world, a new society that will be created, and all this newness consists only in the annihilation of existing life. The radicality of this Yes and No to earthly life reveals that only death counts. To rake in everything or to throw away everything, this is the attitude of one who believes fanatically in death.

Where, however, it is recognized that the power of death has been broken, where the miracle of the resurrection and new life shines right into the world of death, there one demands no eternities from life. One takes from life what it offers, not all or nothing, but good things and bad, important things and unimportant, joy and pain. One doesn't cling anxiously to life, but neither does one throw it lightly away. One is content with measured time and does not attribute eternity to earthly things. One leaves to death the limited right that it still has. But one expects the new human being and the new world only from beyond death, from the power that has conquered death.

Within the risen Christ the new humanity is borne, the final, sovereign Yes of God to the new human being. Humanity still lives, of course, in the old, but is already beyond the old. Humanity still lives, of course, in a world of death, but is already beyond death. Humanity still lives, of course, in a world of sin, but we are already beyond sin. The night is not yet over, but day is already dawning.

The human being, accepted, judged, and awakened to new life by God—this is Jesus Christ, this is the whole of humanity in Christ, this is us. The form of Jesus Christ alone victoriously encounters the world. From this form proceeds all the formation of a world reconciled with God.

The word "formation" [Gestaltung] arouses our suspicion. We are tired of Christian agendas. We are tired of the thoughtless, superficial slogan of a so-called practical Christianity to replace a so-called dogmatic Christianity. We have seen that the forces which form the world come from entirely other sources than Christianity, and that so-called practical Christianity has failed in the world just as much as so-called dogmatic Christianity. Hence we must understand by "formation" something quite different from what we are accustomed to mean, and in fact the Holy Scripture speaks of formation in a sense that at first sounds quite strange. It is not primarily concerned

with formation of the world by planning and programs, but in all formation it is concerned only with the one form that has overcome the world, the form of Jesus Christ. Formation proceeds only from here. This does not mean that the teachings of Christ or so-called Christian principles should be applied directly to the world in order to form the world according to them. Formation occurs only by being drawn into the form of Jesus Christ, by *being conformed to the unique form of the one who became human, was crucified, and is risen*. This does not happen as we strive “to become like Jesus,” as we customarily say, but as the form of Jesus Christ himself so works on us that it molds us, conforming our form to Christ’s own (Gal. 4:9). Christ remains the only one who forms. Christian people do not form the world with their ideas. Rather, Christ forms human beings to a form the same as Christ’s own. However, just as the form of Christ is misperceived where he is understood essentially as the teacher of a pious and good life, so formation of human beings is also wrongly understood where one sees it only as guidance for a pious and good life. Christ is the one who has become human, who was crucified, and who is risen, as confessed by the Christian faith. To be transformed into his form is the meaning of the formation that the Bible speaks about.

To be conformed to the one who has become human—that is what being really human means. The human being should and may be human. All super-humanity [Übermenschentum], all efforts to outgrow one’s nature as human, all struggle to be heroic or a demigod, all fall away from a person here, because they are untrue. The real human being is the object neither of contempt nor of deification, but the object of the love of God. The manifold riches of God’s creation are not violated here by a false uniformity, by forcing people to submit to an ideal, a type, or a particular image of the human. The real human being is allowed to be in freedom the

creature of the Creator. To be conformed with the one who became human means that we may be the human beings that we really are. Pretension, hypocrisy, compulsion, forcing oneself to be something different, better, more ideal than one is—all are abolished. God loves the real human being. God became a real human being.

To be conformed to the crucified—that means to be a human being judged by God. People carry with them every day God’s death sentence, that they must die before God because of sin. They demonstrate in their lives that before God nothing can stand except in judgment and in grace. Human beings die daily the death of sinners. They bear humbly the scars and the wounds that sin inflicts on body and soul. They cannot lift themselves above other people or establish themselves as models because they recognize themselves as the greatest of all sinners. One can forgive the sins of others, never one’s own. Human beings bear all suffering laid upon them, knowing that it serves them to die to their own will, and to let the justice of God prevail over them. Only by acknowledging that God is in the right over them and against them are they right before God. “In suffering does the master impress his all-sufficient image on the heart and on the spirit.”

To be conformed to the risen one—that means to be a new human being before God. We live in the midst of death; we are righteous in the midst of sin; we are new in the midst of the old. Our mystery remains hidden from the world. We live because Christ lives, and in Christ alone. “Christ is my life.” As long as the glory of Christ is hidden, so the glory of the new life also is “hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:2). But one who knows, sees here and there already a glimmer of what will come. The new human beings live in the world like anyone else. They often differ very little from other people. They are not concerned to promote themselves, but to lift up Christ for the sake of their brothers and sisters. Transfigured into the form

of the risen one, they bear here only the sign of the cross and judgment. In bearing them willingly, they show themselves as those who have received the Holy Spirit and are united with Jesus Christ in incomparable love and community.

The form of Jesus Christ takes form in human beings. They do not take on their own self-determined forms. What gives them form and holds them in this new form is always only the form of Jesus Christ. Their forms, therefore, are not imitations or repetitions of Christ's form, but the form of Christ that takes form in human beings. Again, human beings are not transformed into an alien form, the form of God, but into the form that belongs to them, that is essentially their own. Human beings become human because God became human. But human beings do not become God. They could not and do not accomplish a change in form; God changes God's form into human form in order that human beings can become, not God, but human before God.

In Christ the form of humanity was created anew. What was at stake was not a matter of place, time, climate, race, individual, society, religion, or taste, but nothing less than the life of humanity, which recognized here its image and its hope. What happened to Christ happened to humanity. There is no explaining the mystery that only a part of humanity recognizes the form of its savior. The desire of the one who has become human to take form in all human beings remains to this hour unsatisfied. He who bore the form of *the* human being can only take form in a small flock; this is Christ's church.

"Formation" means therefore in the first place Jesus Christ taking form in Christ's church. Here it is the very form of Jesus Christ that takes form. The New Testament, in deep and clear indication of the matter itself, calls the church the body of Christ. The body is the form. So the church is not a religious community of those who revere Christ, but Christ who has taken form among human beings.

The church may be called the body of Christ because in the body of Jesus Christ *human being per se*, and therefore all human beings, have really been taken on. The church now bears the form that in truth is meant for all people. The image according to which it is being formed is the image of humanity. What takes place in the church happens vicariously and representatively as a model for all human beings. But it cannot be said too clearly that not even the church is a self-determined form apart from the form of Jesus Christ; therefore it can never claim rights, authority, and dignity independently and on its own, apart from Jesus Christ. The church is nothing but that piece of humanity where Christ really has taken form. It is solely the form of Christ that matters, not any form besides Christ's own. The church is the human being who has become human, has been judged, and has been awakened to new life in Christ. Therefore essentially its first concern is not with the so-called religious functions of human beings, but with the existence in the world of whole human beings in all their relationships. The church's concern is not religion, but the form of Christ and its taking form among a band of people. If we let ourselves stray even the least bit from this perspective, we fall unavoidably into those programs of ethical or religious world-formation from which we departed above.

We have recognized that we can speak of formation in a Christian-ethical reflection only by focusing on the form of Jesus Christ. Formation is not an independent process or condition that can somehow be detached from this form. Formation happens only from and toward this form of Jesus Christ. The starting point of Christian ethics is the body of Christ, the form of Christ in the form of the church, the formation of the church according to the form of Christ. Only to the extent that what happens to the church truly concerns all humanity is the concept of formation—indirectly—meaningful for all human beings. But here again it is not as if the church has been

set out as a model for the world, so to speak. Rather, we can only speak of the formation of the world in such a way that we address humanity in the light of its true form, which belongs to it, which it has already received, but which it has not grasped and accepted, namely, the form of Jesus Christ that is its own. Thus humanity is—so to speak, proleptically—drawn into the church. It is still the case that, even where one talks about the formation of the world, only the form of Jesus Christ is meant.

The form of Christ is one and the same at all times and in all places. The church of Christ is also One throughout all generations. Still, Christ is not a principle according to which the whole world must be formed. Christ does not proclaim a system of that which would be good today, here, and at all times. Christ does not teach an abstract ethic that must be carried out, cost what it may. Christ was not essentially a teacher, a lawgiver, but a human being, a real human being like us. Accordingly, Christ does not want us to be first of all pupils, representatives and advocates of a particular doctrine, but human beings, real human beings before God. Christ did not, like an ethicist, love a theory about the good; he loved real people. Christ was not interested, like a philosopher, in what is “generally valid,” but in that which serves real concrete human beings. Christ was not concerned about whether “the maxim of an action” could become “a principle of universal law,” but whether my action now helps my neighbor to be a human being before God. God did not become an idea, a principle, a program, a universally valid belief, or a law; God became human. That means that the form of Christ, though it certainly is and remains one and the same, intends to take form in real human beings, and thus in quite different ways. Christ does not abolish human reality in favor of an idea that demands to be realized against all that is real. Christ empowers reality, affirming it as the real human being and thus the ground of all human reality. Formation

according to the form of Christ includes, therefore, two things: that the form of Christ remains one and the same, not as a general idea but as the one who Christ uniquely is, the God who became human, was crucified, and is risen; and that precisely because of the form of Christ the form of the real human being is preserved, so that the *real human being receives the form of Christ*.

Thereby we are turned away from any abstract ethic and toward a concrete ethic. We can and should speak not about what the good is, can be, or should be for each and every time, but about *how Christ may take form among us today and here*. The attempt to say what is good once and for all always has failed from within. Either the statements became so formal and general that they no longer had any significance with regard to content or one got caught in the enterprise of taking up and elaborating all conceivable contents in order to say beforehand for every conceivable case what is good. But this created such an immense casuistry that it did justice neither to the general nor to the concrete. The concrete Christian ethic stands beyond formalism and casuistry. For while formalism and casuistry proceed from the conflict between the good and the real, the Christian ethic can proceed from the reconciliation of the world with God in the human Jesus Christ, in God's acceptance of real human beings.

The question of how Christ takes form among us today and here—in other words, how we are conformed to Christ's form—contains additional difficult questions: What do “among us,” “today,” and “here” mean? If it is impossible to determine for all times and places what the good is, it still remains to be asked: for which times and places can an answer be given at all? One cannot doubt for an instant that any time and place that we select must be understood as a part of the whole of human life. The human being, in every part of history, is simply the human being whom Christ took on. So

everything that is about to be said about a particular time and place will always point beyond it to the whole. Still, we must now answer the question: what times and places are we thinking of when we speak about being formed by the form of Christ?

To begin quite generally, what is at stake are the times and places that concern us, that we experience, that are realities for us. What is at stake are the times and places that pose concrete questions to us, set us tasks, and lay responsibilities on us. "Among us," "today," and "here" point then to the domain [Bereich] of our decisions and our encounters. This domain is doubtless of quite different scope for various individuals. One could conclude, therefore, that these qualifications would finally even dissipate into complete individualism. Against this, however, is the fact that we are placed objectively by our history into a particular context of experience, responsibility, and decision, from which we cannot withdraw without ending up in abstraction. Whether or not we know about it in detail, we actually live in this context. Furthermore, this context is marked in a very particular way since, even in our own times, the form of Christ has been consciously affirmed and acknowledged as its foundation. So we, as historical people, therefore stand already in the midst of Christ taking form in a segment of human history that Christ has chosen. In this sense we understand the domain for which we wish to speak and must speak to be the West [Abendland], the peoples of Europe and America who until this time have been unified by the form of Christ. A more narrowly drawn frame, for instance, limited to Germany, would nullify the fact that the form of Christ is the unity of the Western peoples, and that therefore none of these peoples can exist by itself or even be thought to so exist. A wider frame, on the other hand, would allow us to overlook the mysterious fact of the distinctive character of the Western world.

The following text will not develop a program for the formation

of the Western world. But it will speak of how the form of Christ takes form in this Western world. Therefore it has to speak neither casuistically nor abstractly but quite concretely. It remains true that no other form can appear alongside the form of Jesus Christ, for only he is the one who overcomes and reconciles the world. Only this form can help. Everything that is to be said concretely about the way this form takes form among us, today and here, will have to be strictly related to this form of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, assurance is given in Christ's becoming human that Christ wants to take form among us, here and today.

Ethics as formation, then, is the venture of speaking about the form of Christ taking form in our world neither abstractly nor casuistically, neither programmatically nor purely reflectively. Here we must risk making concrete judgments and decisions. Here decision and deed can no longer be shifted onto the individual's personal conscience. Here concrete commandments and guidance are given, for which obedience will be demanded.

Ethics as formation is possible only on the basis of the form of Jesus Christ present in Christ's church. *The church is the place where Jesus Christ's taking form is proclaimed and where it happens.* The Christian ethic stands in the service of this proclamation and this event.