

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

Letters and Papers from Prison

Translated from the German Edition

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137. To Eberhard Bethge^[1]

April 30, 1944

Dear Eberhard,

Another month has gone by—is the time rushing by for you the way it is for me here? I'm often surprised at this myself—and when will the month come when you come home to Renate, and I to Maria, and the two of us can meet again? The feeling that any day great events can shake the world and change all our personal circumstances is so strong in me that I'd like to write to you much more often, because we don't know how long we still can, but most of all so as to share everything with each other as often and as long as possible. Actually, I'm firmly convinced that by the time you get this letter, the great decisions will be moving along on every front.^[2] So in the coming weeks we shall have to be stouthearted, and that is what I wish you. We have to keep our wits about us so that nothing catches us off guard. In view of what is coming, I'm almost inclined to quote the biblical $\delta\epsilon\iota$. . . ,^[3] and I feel something of the "longing" [Neugierde] of the angels in 1 Pet. 1:12,^[4] to see how God will go about solving what seems beyond any solution. I think it has now come to the point where God will arise and accomplish something that we, despite our inner and outer involvement, can only take in with the greatest astonishment and awe. Somehow it will be made plain—for those with eyes to see—that Ps. 58:11^[5] and Ps. 9:19–20^[6] are true; and we shall have to repeat Jer. 45:5^[7] to ourselves every day. For

[1.] NL, A 80,162; handwritten; note by Bethge: "arrived May 8," (under the date line) "Sunday." Previously published in LPP, 278–82.

[2.] In the south the Allies had begun to advance on Rome and would take the city on June 4, 1944. In mid-April the eastern front lay along the Odessa-Brest-Litovsk line, so that the Red Army's invasion of Poland was foreseeable. [Bonhoeffer also had in mind the expectation that the resistance would soon make its move.—JDG]

[3.] "It must come to pass," a New Testament (i.e., Mark 8:31 par., 1 Cor. 15:25) eschatological expression to indicate something that must happen according to the will of God. On $\delta\epsilon\iota$, cf. also DBWE 4:84, ed. note 2, and 87, ed. note 10. [The phrase "[these things] must come to pass" is from Matt. 24:6 KJV. The NRSV translates the Greek as "this must take place."—JDG]

[4.] "Things into which angels long to look." [In the German Bible the word in this passage is Neugierde, or "curiosity."—JDG]

[5.] "People will say, 'Surely there is a reward for the righteous; surely there is a God who judges on earth.'" In Bonhoeffer's Luther Bible, "God who judges on earth" is underlined in pencil and written in pencil next to it "the crucified one!" Cf. the conclusion of the July 11, 1936, sermon on Ps. 58 in DBWE 14, 3/19.

[6.] "Rise up, O LORD! Do not let mortals prevail; let the nations be judged before you. Put them in fear, O LORD; let the nations know that they are only human."

[7.] Cf. 2/115, ed. notes 24 and 25, and 3/145, ed. note 17.

you, separated from Renate and your boy as you are, it's even harder than it is for me to go through this, and I'll especially be thinking of you, as I am already doing now.

How good it would be for us both, I feel, if we could live through this time together and stand by each other. But [it's] probably even "better" that we can't, but rather that each of us has to go it alone. It's hard for me not to be able to help you in any way—except by thinking of you. I really do, every morning and evening and when I read the Bible and often during the day too. Please don't worry about me at all; I'm getting along uncommonly well; you'd be surprised if you came to see me. People here keep saying to me—and I'm very flattered by it, as you can see—that I "radiate such peace" and that I'm "always so cheerful"—so that if I occasionally experience myself as anything but, I suppose it's deceptive (which I don't really believe!).^[8]

✱ ¶What might surprise or perhaps even worry you would be my theological thoughts and where they are leading, and here is where I really miss you very much. I don't know anyone else with whom I can talk about them and arrive at some clarity. What keeps gnawing at me is the question, what is Christianity,^[9] or who is Christ actually for us today?^[10] The age when we could tell people that with words—whether with theological or with pious words—is past, as is the age of inwardness and of conscience, and that means the age of religion altogether. We are approaching a completely religionless age; people as they are now simply cannot be religious anymore. Even those who honestly describe themselves as "religious" aren't really practicing that at all; they presumably mean something quite different by "religious." But our entire nineteen hundred years of Christian preaching and theology are built on the "religious a priori"^[11] in human beings. "Christianity"

[8.] See the poem "Who Am I?" 3/173.

[9.] After "Christianity," "today" is crossed out.

[10.] Cf. the 1933 Christology lecture in *DBWE* 12, 2/12, p. 302: "The question of 'who' is the question about transcendence."

[11.] Bonhoeffer's doctoral supervisor at the university in Berlin, Reinhold Seeberg, defined the "religious a priori" (in his *Christliche Dogmatik*, 1:103) as "a purely formal, primeval endowment of the created spirit or ego that renders it capable of, and in need of, the direct awareness of the absolute Spirit"; and in his *Grundriss der Dogmatik*, 5: "All normal human beings possess this religious a priori, whether they are 'religious' or 'irreligious.'" The concept as introduced into theology by Ernst Troeltsch (in his "Zur Frage des religiösen Apriori," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 2:754–68; cf. *DBW* 11:150–53 and 161–63) had already been criticized by Bonhoeffer—clearly referring to Karl Barth's distinction between "revelation" and "religion," or "faith" and "religion" (see Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 229–70)—in *Act and Being*: "If we are to assume that the compelling ability to receive revelation and, by implication, to believe, is given with this a priori, we have already said too much. . . . All that pertains to personal appropriation of the fact of Christ

has always been a form (perhaps the true form)^[12] of "religion." Yet if it becomes obvious one day that this "a priori" doesn't exist, that it has been a historically conditioned and transitory form of human expression, then people really will become radically religionless—and I believe that this is already more or less the case (why, for example, doesn't this war provoke a "religious" reaction like all the previous ones?)—what does that then mean for "Christianity"? The foundations are being pulled out from under all that "Christianity" has previously been for us, and the only people among whom we might end up in terms of "religion" are "the last of the knights"^[13] or a few intellectually dishonest people. Are these supposed to be the chosen few? Are we supposed to fall all over precisely this dubious lot of people in our zeal or disappointment or woe and try to peddle our wares to them? Or should we jump on a few unfortunates in their hour of weakness and commit, so to speak, religious rape? If we are unwilling to do any of that, and if we eventually must judge even the Western form of Christianity to be only a preliminary stage of a complete absence of religion, what kind of situation emerges for us, for the church? How can Christ become Lord of the religionless as well? Is there such a thing as a religionless Christian? If religion is only the garb in which Christianity is clothed^[14]—and this garb has looked very different in different ages—what then is religionless Christianity? Barth, who is the only one to have begun thinking along these

is not a priori, but God's contingent action on human beings" (*DBWE* 2:58; see the entire section on pp. 57–59).

[12.] On "Christianity" as the "true" (form of) religion, see Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 1/2, § 17.3, p. 326: religion is not always "unfaith," but "[t]here is a true religion: just as there are justified sinners. . . . If we abide strictly by that analogy . . . we need have no hesitation in saying that the Christian religion is the true religion."

[13.] [The "last knight" is probably a reference to Emperor Maximilian I of Habsburg, who in German history and literature is often described as "the last knight," a symbol of the lost age of chivalry and the medieval knights. Here Bonhoeffer is indicating that traditional "Christianity" and its representatives seem to belong to a lost era.—JDG]

[14.] On religion as a "garb" or "clothes" (cf. Bonhoeffer's letter of June 25, 1942, *DBWE* 16, 1/185, p. 329: "the religious clothes they wear make me so uncomfortable"), see also the difference between "husk and kernel," "form and content," as Adolf von Harnack has said in order to "communicate the essence": "There are only two possibilities here: either the gospel is in all respects identical with its earliest form, in which case it came with its time and has departed with it; or else it contains something which, under different historical forms, is of permanent validity. The latter is the true view. The history of the Church shows us in its very commencement that 'primitive Christianity' had to disappear in order that 'Christianity' might remain; and in the same way in later ages one metamorphosis followed upon another" (Harnack, *What Is Christianity?* 13).

lines,^[15] nevertheless did not pursue these thoughts all the way, did not think them through,^[16] but ended up with a positivism of revelation,^[17] which in the end essentially remained a restoration. For the working person or any person who is without religion, nothing decisive has been gained here. The questions to be answered would be: What does a church, a congregation, a sermon, a liturgy, a Christian life, mean in a religionless world? How do we talk about God—without religion, that is, without the temporally conditioned presuppositions of metaphysics, the inner life, and so on? How do we speak (or perhaps we can no longer even “speak” the way we used to) in a “worldly” way about “God”? How do we go about being “religionless-worldly” Christians, how can we be ἐκκλησία,^[18] those who are called out, without understanding ourselves religiously as privileged, but instead seeing ourselves as belonging wholly to the world? Christ would then no longer be the object of religion, but something else entirely, truly lord of the world. But what does that mean? In a religionless situation, what do ritual [Kultus]

[15.] One of Bonhoeffer's early discoveries (see DB-ER, 73–77) was Barth's collection of lectures, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, first published in German as *Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie* in 1924. “The similarity in wording to LPP is astounding” (DB-ER, 77): “There have often been frankly unreligious men who felt the whole importance and gravity of the question about God much more keenly, and expressed it much more poignantly, than the most deeply and zealously pious.” “Biblical piety is not really pious; one must rather characterize it as well-considered and definite refusal to regard anything as sacred.” God “is not in another world over against this one; he submerges all of this one in the other” (“Biblical Questions, Insights, and Vistas,” in *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, 56, 66, and 74. [The third of the Barth quotations is better translated as in DB-ER, 77: God “does not wish to be transcendent (*Jenseits*), separate from this world (*Diesseits*).”—JDG]

[16.] On Tegel note 12 (NL, A 86) Bonhoeffer noted: “Barth. Revelation too is only religion; inconsistent.”

[17.] This reproach, “positivism of revelation,” raised here for the first time against Karl Barth (cf. also 3/139, p. 373, and 3/161, p. 429), is consistently preceded by an appreciation for Barth's critique of religion (for example, 3/139, p. 373: “Barth was the first theologian . . . to begin the critique of religion”). However, the remarks about “non-religious interpretation” and “arcane discipline” show that “positivism of revelation” is a programmatic term indicating that in his critique of religion, Bonhoeffer draws other consequences. For the origin of the concept “positivism of revelation” and its significance as a demarcating formula in theology, see Krause, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer,” in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, 64n1; Feil, *Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 175–177, with reference to DBWE 6:376–78; Pangritz, *Karl Barth in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 76–87; Wüstenberg, *Theology of Life*, 60–65.

[18.] “Those who are called out,” the church [*Gemeinde*]; see, for example, DBWE 4:156: “God's kingdom still is found in suffering and in struggle. The small community of those called forth. . .”

and prayer mean? Is this where the “arcane discipline” [Arkandisziplin],^[19] or the difference (which you've heard about from me before) between the penultimate and the ultimate,^[20] have new significance?

I have to stop for today so this letter can go off right now. I'll write more the day^[21] after tomorrow about this. I hope you understand more or less what I mean, and it's not boring you. Good-bye for now! It's not easy, always having to write without a response; you must forgive me if that makes it something of a monologue. I'm really not reproaching you for not writing—you have too much else to do!^[22]

Yours as ever, I think about you very much,
Dietrich

I have a little more time to write after all.

¶The Pauline question of whether περιτομή^[23] is a condition for justification is today, in my opinion, the question of whether religion is a condition

[19.] *Arcanum* (the “mysterious,” “hidden”); see 2 Cor. 12:4, ἄρρητος, translated in the Vulgate Bible as *arcanus* (“things that are not to be told,” NRSV). [See the discussion of the translation of this phrase in previous English editions of LPP and elsewhere in the editor's introduction to this volume, p. 32. See also Kelly, *Liberating Faith*, 133–38; and Matthews, “Responsible Sharing.”—JDG] Bonhoeffer first used *arcanum* in the context of the “confession of the church” in his lectures on “The Nature of the Church,” summer semester 1932, DBW 11:285: “Confession belongs in worship as *arcanum*. . . . The confession is not to be screamed loudly in a propagandistic manner; it must be preserved as the sacred good of the church-community.” The book *Discipleship* alludes to the “arcane discipline”; see DBWE 4:45 and ed. note 11: “What happened to the insights of the ancient church, which in the baptismal teaching watched so carefully over the boundary between the church and the world, over costly grace?” In the “Finkenwalde Catechism,” Bonhoeffer assumes that in the third through seventh centuries, preparation for baptism took place in three stages; with the final stage began the “baptismal instruction according to the symbol that the Christian has not known until now” (DBW 14:548). Similarly, in the “Finkenwalde Homiletics” (DBW 14:526): “The arcane discipline emerged under Origen, (as) closed assemblies that would receive the sacraments, the confession of faith, and the Lord's prayer. The arcane discipline (emerged) because of the derision of the world.” The phrase, coined in the seventeenth century, is used by Richard Rothe and others and thus belongs to the “inheritance from liberal theology” (4/186, p. 499) to which Bonhoeffer felt himself committed. On “arcane discipline,” see especially Pangritz's monograph *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Forderung einer Arkandisziplin*; also DB-ER, 880–84; Meuß, “Arkandisziplin und Weltlichkeit bei Dietrich Bonhoeffer,” 70–92; Feil, *Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 200–202; Dumas, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 197–214; Abromeit, *Das Geheimnis Christi*, 150–72; Pangritz, “Aspekte der ‘Arkandisziplin.’”

[20.] On this, see DBWE 6:146–218: “Ultimate and Penultimate Things.”

[21.] Beginning of writing in the margin.

[22.] End of writing in the margin.

[23.] “Circumcision.” For Paul (see Gal. 6:15), “circumcision” is no longer a necessary condition for faith in salvation history. On making circumcision functionally equivalent

for salvation. Freedom from περιτομή is also freedom from religion. I often wonder why my "Christian instinct" frequently draws me more toward non-religious people than toward the religious,^[24] and I am sure it's not with missionary intent; instead, I'd almost call it a "brotherly" instinct. While I'm often reluctant to name the name of God to religious people—because somehow it doesn't ring true for me there, and I feel a bit dishonest saying it (it's especially bad when other people start talking in religious terminology; then I clam up almost completely and feel somehow uncomfortable and in a sweat)—yet on some occasions with nonreligious people I can speak God's name quite calmly, as a matter of course. Religious people speak of God at a point where human knowledge is at an end (or sometimes when they're too lazy to think further), or when human strength fails. Actually, it's a *deus ex machina*^[25] that they're always bringing on the scene, either to appear to solve insoluble problems or to provide strength when human powers fail, thus always exploiting human weakness or human limitations. Inevitably that lasts only until human beings become powerful enough to push the boundaries a bit further^[26] and *God is no longer needed as deus ex machina*. To me, talking about human boundaries has become a dubious proposition anyhow. (Is even death still really a boundary, since people today hardly fear it anymore, or sin, since people hardly comprehend it?) It always seems to me that we leave room for God only out of anxiety. I'd like to speak of God not at the boundaries but in the center,^[27] not in weakness

to religion, see Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 126: "The problem should be stated as follows: Does the true claim of religion depend upon its being treated as a concrete factor in human life, forming a necessary preliminary to the emergence of a positive relationship between God and man?"; see also 129–31.

[24.] See also Bonhoeffer's letter of June 25, 1942, to Bethge, *DBWE* 16, 1/185, p. 329: "But I sense how an opposition to all that is 'religious' is growing in me. Often into an instinctive revulsion—which is surely not good either. I am not religious by nature. But I must constantly think of God, of Christ; authenticity, life, freedom, and mercy mean a great deal to me."

[25.] "The God from the machine." In the ancient theater this was a figure who could be made to appear "suddenly" with the help of a mechanical device and to solve problems "supernaturally." This common expression is also used by Reinhold Seeberg, *Christliche Dogmatik*, 2:314. Cf. *DBWE* 3:104, where Bonhoeffer changes it to "*diaboli ex machina*" (devils from the machine).

[26.] Cf. 3/152, ed. note 6.

[27.] Cf. also 3/152, p. 406 ("not only where we reach the limits of our possibilities but in the midst of life must God be recognized"; Jesus Christ "is the center of life"). On the words "boundary" (also "margin") and "center," see *DBWE* 3:86 et passim (also Claß, *Der verzweifelte Zugriff auf das Leben*, 83–92, 201–20; and Bonhoeffer's inaugural lecture of July 31, 1930, "The Anthropological Question in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology," *DBWE* 10, 2/7. On this topic, see also Feil, *Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 149–50; Plathow,

but in strength, thus not in death and guilt but in human life and human goodness. When I reach my limits, it seems to me better not to say anything and to leave what can't be solved unsolved. Belief in the resurrection is not the "solution" to the problem of death. God's "beyond" is not what is beyond our cognition! Epistemological transcendence has nothing to do with God's transcendence.^[28] God is the beyond in the midst of our lives. The church stands not at the point where human powers fail, at the boundaries,^[29] but in the center of the village. That's the way it is in the Old Testament, and in this sense we don't read the New Testament nearly enough in the light of the Old. I am thinking a great deal about what this religionless Christianity looks like, what form it takes, and I'll be writing you more about it soon. Here perhaps we in particular, midway between East and West, will be given an important task. Now I really have to close. How good it would be [to] have a word from you sometime about all this. It would really mean a lot to me, more than you can probably suppose. By the way, do read Prov. 22:11–12 sometime.^[30] This bars the way to all escapism in the guise of piety.

Wishing you the very, very best, with all my heart
yours, Dietrich

"Grenze und Mitte"; Schollmeyer, "Die Bedeutung von 'Grenze' und 'Begrenzung'"; Abromeit, *Das Geheimnis Christi*, 256–67.

[28.] The Kantian concept of transcendence, understood as "what is beyond our ability to know" (on Kant, see 3/170, p. 450), had already been rejected in *Sanctorum Communio*, cf. *DBWE* 1:51: "Beyond the limit to epistemological knowledge there is a further limit to ethical-social knowledge, or acknowledgment." See also *DBWE* 1:46–48; and Feil, *Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 103–4, 174.

[29.] "At the boundaries" inserted later.

[30.] Probably he actually meant Prov. 24:11–12: "If you hold back from rescuing those taken away to death, those who go staggering to the slaughter; if you say, 'Look, we did not know this'—does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it? And will he not repay all according to their deeds?"

May 5, 1944

Dear Eberhard,

Your leave should be due about now, so that you can get to know your son. I keep hoping my letter^[2] will be forwarded to you and thus be out of date. But since everything is so uncertain nowadays—and long experience suggests that everything is more likely to stay the way it is than to change soon—I'll write to you anyway. Christel visited me yesterday and told me that you are doing reasonably well and are managing at least to make Renate happy with a letter every day. It really is worthwhile having Renate stay in Sakrow so that at least you don't have to worry about her during the air raids here. I'd like to talk to Renate myself sometime, but there doesn't seem to be a way to arrange it. I'm just happy that we were able to see each other in December.^[3]

414 That was truly a good deed on the part of your father-in-law^[4]—probably one of his best, since he doesn't know how good it was. I wish so much for you that you can come soon, even though it's depressing that we probably still won't see each other. I'm doing fine personally, and so is my case, but the question of the date is still wide open.^[5] But all good things come overnight,^[6] so I'm confidently waiting and hoping. In my previous letter I enclosed an address^[7] that you can use if you like, but it isn't necessary, I just wanted to let you know.

A few more words about "religionlessness." You probably remember Bultmann's essay on "demythologizing the New Testament."^[8] My opinion of it today would be that he went not "too far," as most people thought, but rather not far enough. It's not only "mythological" concepts like miracles, ascension, and so on (which in principle can't be separated from concepts of God, faith, etc.!) that are problematic, but "religious" concepts as such. You can't separate God from the miracles (as Bultmann thinks); instead, you must be able to interpret and proclaim them *both* "nonreligiously." Bultmann's approach is still basically liberal (that is, it cuts the gospel short), whereas I'm trying to think theologically. What then does it mean to "interpret religiously"?

415 It means, in my opinion, to speak metaphysically, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, individualistically. Neither way is appropriate, either for the biblical message or for people today. Hasn't the individualistic question of saving our personal souls almost faded away for most of us? Isn't it our impression that there are really more important things than this question (—perhaps not more important than this *matter*, but certainly more important than the *question*!?)? I know it sounds outrageous to say that, but after all, isn't it fundamentally biblical? Does the question of saving one's soul

[4.] Rüdiger Schleicher, who arranged the permit for Bethge's visit; see 2/89, ed. note 12.

[5.] This refers to the date for the trial. Hearings had been held on May 3 and 4, 1944; Bonhoeffer had marked these days (Wednesday and Thursday) in his 1944 *Daily Texts* with "RKG" [Reichskriegsgericht, "Reich War Court"—JDG].

[6.] [I.e., "suddenly."—JDG]

[7.] The address of Sergeant Knobloch, a guard at the Tegel prison; see *DB-ER*, 848.

[8.] Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology" (1941). See also Bonhoeffer's letter of March 24, 1942, to Ernst Wolf, *DBWE* 16, 1/148, pp. 260–61: "I take great pleasure in the new Bultmann volume. The intellectual honesty of his work never ceases to impress me." In view of protests from the Confessing Church, Bonhoeffer adds: "This arrogance, which flourishes here . . . is a real scandal for the Confessing Church." See also 4/187, ed. note 24.

even come up in the Old Testament? Isn't God's righteousness and kingdom on earth the center of everything? And isn't Rom. 3:24ff. the culmination of the view that God alone is righteous,^[9] rather than an individualistic doctrine of salvation? What matters is not the beyond but this world, how it is created and preserved,^[10] is given laws, reconciled, and renewed. What is beyond this world is meant, in the gospel, to be there *for* this world—not in the anthropocentric sense of liberal, mystical, pietistic, ethical theology, but in the biblical sense of the creation and the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Barth was the first theologian—to his great and lasting credit—to begin the critique of religion,^[11] but he then put in its place a positivist doctrine of revelation that says, in effect, "like it or lump it." Whether it's the virgin birth, the Trinity, or anything else, all are equally significant and necessary parts of the whole, which must be swallowed whole or not at all. That's not biblical. There are degrees of cognition^[12] and degrees of significance. That means an "arcane discipline"^[13] must be reestablished, through which the mysteries of the Christian faith are sheltered against profanation.^[14] The positivism of revelation^[15] is too easygoing, since in the end it sets up a law of faith and tears up what is—through Christ's becoming flesh!—a gift for us. Now the church stands in the place of religion—that in itself is biblical—but the world is left to its own devices, as it were, to rely on itself. That is the error. At the moment I am thinking about how the concepts of repentance, faith, justification, rebirth, and sanctification should be reinterpreted in a "worldly" way—in the Old Testament sense and in the sense of John 1:14.^[16] I'll write you more about it.

[9.] See *DBWE* 6:147–48. [See also *DBWE* 4:255–56.—JDG]

[10.] Cf. the "orders of preservation" in *DBWE* 3:139–49 and *DBWE* 6:173, ed. note 8.

[11.] Cf. 3/137, pp. 363–64, at ed. notes 15 and 17.

453 152. To Eberhard Bethge⁽¹⁾

May 29, 1944

Dear Eberhard,

Weizsäcker's book on the *Weltbild der Physik*^[4] continues to preoccupy me a great deal. It has again brought home to me quite clearly that we shouldn't think of God as the stopgap [Lückenbüßer]^[5] for the incompleteness of our

[4.] See 3/149, ed. note 7.

[5.] The formulation "Faith . . . as the stopgap where knowledge fails" is found in Friedrich Brunstäd (*Die Idee der Religion*, 63, 108, et passim), referred to several times in Bonhoeffer's *Act and Being* (*DBWE* 2:49–53 et passim). For the phrase "God as gap-filler" [or "stopgap," as above—JDG], see Tillich, *Religious Situation*, 204.

knowledge, because then—as is objectively inevitable—when the boundaries of knowledge are pushed ever further, God too is pushed further away and thus is ever on the retreat.^[6] We should find God in what we know, not in what we don't know; God wants to be grasped by us not in unsolved questions but in those that have been solved. This is true of the relation between God and scientific knowledge,^[7] but it is also true of the universal human questions about death, suffering, and guilt. Today, even for these questions, there are human answers that can completely disregard God. Human beings cope with these questions practically without God and have done so throughout the ages, and it is simply not true that only Christianity would have a solution to them. As for the idea of a “solution,” we would have to say that the Christian answers are just as unconvincing (or just as convincing) as other possible solutions. Here too, God is not a stopgap. We must recognize God not only where we reach the limits of our possibilities. God wants to be recognized in the midst of our lives, in life and not only in dying, in health and strength and not only in suffering, in action and not only in sin. The ground for this lies in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. God is the center of life^[8] and doesn't just “turn up” when we have unsolved

description of the world” (referred to by Alberto Gallas in “Non santi ma uomini,” 282n40). Bonhoeffer had discussed Tillich's book in his lectures on “The History of Twentieth-Century Systematic Theology” in the winter semester 1931–32; see DBWE 11, 2/3. Cf. DBWE 16, 3/5, p. 641: “It is a misuse when we make God a stopgap in our discomfort.”

[6.] Cf. Weizsäcker, *World View of Physics*, 157: “For Kepler, the positive knowledge of science points to God, while for Newton it is just the gaps in this knowledge which have room for God. But such gaps are usually filled in in further development, and science cannot rest satisfied until they are filled in. Even if the hypotheses of Laplace had been false in some particulars, still every scientist must certainly set himself the goal of making the hypothesis ‘God’ superfluous in his field. God and the faded, half-religious concepts which have often been substituted for him in recent times, always designate, as scientific hypotheses for the explanation of particular facts, only incomplete points in science, and therefore with the advance of knowledge they find themselves in continuous and dishonourable retreat.” In his dogmatics seminar on Hegel's *Philosophy of Religion* in summer 1933 (see I. Tödt, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Hegel-Seminar*, 18), Bonhoeffer quoted Hegel, *Begriff der Religion* (vol. 12 of *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. G. Lasson), 4–5: “The more the knowledge of finite things has increased—and the increase is so great that the extension of the sciences has become almost boundless . . . so much the more has the sphere of knowledge about God become contracted” (from the 1895 translation by Speirs and Sanderson, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 35).

[7.] Karl August von Hase, *Ideale und Irrtümer* (Bonhoeffer's great-grandfather's “memories of youth,” which Bonhoeffer read in Tegel; see 1/30, ed. note 6, and 1/31, p. 111), 66: “If, after the first time, someone needs the good God to explain a natural phenomenon, one cannot talk to that person about scientific research.”

[8.] See 3/137, pp. 366–67.

problems to be solved.^[9] Seen from the center of life, certain questions fall away completely and likewise the answers to such questions (I'm thinking of the judgment pronounced on Job's friends!).^[10] In Christ there are no “Christian problems.” Enough on this; I've just been interrupted again.

[9.] Cf. DBWE 6:354 (“not a solution, but redemption [Erlösung]”); Matt. 18:11 and its parallel Luke 19:10 (“For the Son of Man came to . . . save the lost”).

[10.] Job 27:12b: “Why then have you become altogether vain?” [The literal translation of the passage in the Luther Bible is “Why then do you bring up such useless things?”—JDG] On the judgment against Job's friends, see Job 42:7: “After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: ‘My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.’” Cf. 2/102, p. 266.

161. To Eberhard Bethge^[1]

June 8, 1944

Dear Eberhard,

You ask so many important questions about the thoughts that have preoccupied me lately^[9] that I'd be glad if I could answer them myself. It's all still at a very early stage, and as usual I'm guided more by my instinct for responding to questions that may arise than being already clear about them. I'll try to describe my position from a historical angle. The movement toward human autonomy (by which I mean discovery of the laws by which the world lives and manages its affairs in science, in society and government, in art, ethics, and religion), which began around the thirteenth century (I don't want to get involved in disputing exactly when), has reached a certain completeness in our age.^[10] Human beings have learned to manage all important issues by themselves, without recourse to “Working hypothesis:

[9.] See 3/155, p. 413.

[10.] This passage in the letter is the first evidence of Bonhoeffer's intense study of Wilhelm Dilthey's book *Weltanschauung und Analyse des Menschen seit Renaissance und Reformation*; see also 2/119, p. 317. On this passage in the present letter, see *Weltanschauung und Analyse*, 90ff. On the relation between Bonhoeffer and Dilthey, see esp. Feil, “Der Einfluß Wilhelm Diltheys auf Dietrich Bonhoeffer's ‘Widerstand und Ergebung,’” as well as Feil, *Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 178–85; Gremmels, “Mündigkeit,” 360–66; Wüstenberg, *Theology of Life*, 104–12; Gallas, “Bonhoeffer lettore di Dilthey.”

God.”^[11] In questions of science or art, as well as in ethical questions, this has become a matter of course,^[12] so that hardly anyone dares rock the boat anymore. But in the last hundred years or so, this has also become increasingly true of religious questions; it’s becoming evident that everything gets along without “God” and does so just as well as before. As in the scientific domain, so in human affairs generally, “God” is being pushed further and further out of our life, losing ground.^[13] The historical views of both Catholics and Protestants agree that this development must be seen as the great falling-away from God, from Christ, and the more they lay claim to God and Christ in opposing this, and play them off against it, the more this development considers itself anti-Christian. The world, now that it has become conscious of itself and the laws of its existence, is sure of itself in a way that it is becoming uncanny for us. Failures, things going wrong, can’t shake the world’s confidence in the necessity of its course and its development; such things are accepted with fortitude and sobriety as part of the bargain, and even an event like this war is no exception. In very different forms the Christian apologetic is now moving against this self-confidence. It is trying to persuade this world that has come of age^[14] that it cannot live without

[11.] On the origin of the expression “Working hypothesis: God,” see Mauthner, *Der Atheismus und seine Geschichte im Abendland*, 3:440; Weizsäcker, *World View of Physics*, 156: “Laplace . . . answered the question where in his system there was still room for God: ‘I do not need this hypothesis.’” The “working hypothesis” of a “liberated reason [*befreite ratio*],” the success of which Bonhoeffer ascribes in his *Ethics* (DBWE 6:116) to the “incomparable rise of technology,” leads to the loss of meaning of “God as a working hypothesis” for the “discovery of the laws according to which the world lives” (see Bonhoeffer’s text above). See Weizsäcker, *World View of Physics*, 157: “Still every scientist must certainly set himself the goal of making the hypothesis ‘God’ superfluous in his field.”

[12.] Crossed out: “up to a point.”

[13.] See 3/152, ed. note 6.

[14.] This concept (including its variations such as “coming of age” or “maturity”), which appears “suddenly” in this letter (Bethge, *Ohnmacht und Mündigkeit*, 67), was influenced in its content by the reading of Dilthey’s *Weltanschauung und Analyse*, which on p. 90 reads: “When the theological-metaphysical system . . . had been shaken . . . in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries . . . the real needs of society gave rise in the seventeenth century, on the new ground of a *science* [*Wissenschaft*] *come of age* . . . to a scientific system of knowledge providing generally valid principles for the conduct of life and leadership of the society.” Or: “From the rebellion in the Netherlands to the French Revolution . . . [the “system of knowledge” that was formulating itself “as natural theology and laws of nature”] was among the forces at work in all major historical changes. ‘Much admired and much reviled,’ it is nevertheless the greatest expression in religion, law, and government of the human spirit *now come of age*” (author’s emphasis). [Translation by Isabel Best.—JDG] For Bonhoeffer’s earlier use of the concept “come of age,” see DBWE 12, 2/9, p. 280 (lecture on “The Führer and the Individual in the Younger Generation”); DBWE 6:120, 398; DBWE 16, 2/6, p. 494.

“God” as its guardian. Even after we have capitulated on all worldly matters, there still remain the so-called ultimate questions—death, guilt—which only “God” can answer, and for which people need God and the church and the pastor. So in a way we live off these so-called ultimate human questions. But what happens if some day they no longer exist as such, or if they are being answered “without God”? Here is where the secularized offshoots of Christian theology come in, that is, the existential philosophers and the psychotherapists,^[15] to prove to secure, contented, and happy human beings that they are in reality miserable and desperate and just don’t want to admit that they are in a perilous situation, unbeknown to themselves, from which only existentialism or psychotherapy can rescue them. Where there is health, strength, security, and simplicity, these experts scent sweet fruit on which they can gnaw or lay their corrupting eggs. They set about to drive people to inner despair, and then they have a game they can win. This is secularized methodism.^[16] And whom does it reach? a small number of intellectuals, of degenerates, those who consider themselves most important in the world and therefore enjoy being preoccupied with themselves. A simple man who spends his daily life with work and family, and certainly also with various stupid affairs, won’t be affected. He has neither time nor inclination to be concerned with his existential despair, or to see his perhaps modest share of happiness as having “perilous,” “worrisome,”^[17] or “disastrous” aspects. I consider the attack by Christian apologetics on the world’s coming of age as, first of all, pointless, second, ignoble, and, third, unchristian. Pointless—because it appears to me like trying to put a person who has become an adult back into puberty, that is, to make people dependent on a lot of things on which they in fact no longer depend, to shove them into problems that in fact are no longer problems for them. Ignoble—because an attempt is being made here to exploit people’s weaknesses for alien purposes to which they have not consented freely.^[18] Unchristian—because it confuses Christ with a particular stage of human religiousness, namely, with a human law. More about this later, but first a few more words

[15.] Cf. 3/155, p. 415, where Bonhoeffer notes: “‘Crisis!’ [‘] existential philos[ophy] psychotherapy.” On his judgment of psychotherapy, see 2/86, ed. note 18.

[16.] See 2/112, ed. note 14. [Bonhoeffer’s use of the term “methodist” here refers to a form of pietism that he rejected, not the Methodist Church. See also ed. note 20 below.—JDG]

[17.] Cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 225–73: “Care as the Being of Dasein.” On Heidegger, see Bonhoeffer’s inaugural lecture, “The Anthropological Question in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology,” DBWE 10, 2/7.

[18.] Replaces: “Ignoble—because it is exploitation of a person’s weakness for someone else’s purposes.”

about the historical situation. The question is Christ and the world that has come of age. The weakness of liberal theology was that it allowed the world the right to assign to Christ his place within it; that it accepted, in the dispute between church and world, the—relatively mild—peace terms dictated by the world. Its strength was that it did not try to turn back the course of history and really took up the battle (Troeltsch!),^[19] even though this ended in its defeat. Defeat was followed by capitulation and the attempt at a completely new beginning, based on “regaining awareness” of its own foundations in the Bible and the Reformation. Heim sought, along pietist-methodist lines, to convince individuals that they were confronted with the alternatives “despair or Jesus.”^[20] He was winning “hearts.”^[21] Althaus (continuing the modern positivist line in a strongly confessional direction) tried to regain from the world some room for Lutheran doctrine (ministry) and Lutheran ritual, otherwise leaving the world to its own devices.^[22] Tillich undertook the religious interpretation of the development of the world itself—against its will—giving it its form through religion. That was very brave, but the world threw him out of the saddle and galloped on by itself. He too thought he understood the world better than it did itself, but the world felt totally misunderstood and rejected such an insinuation. (The world *does* need to be understood in a better way than it does itself! but not “religiously,” the way the religious socialists want to do.)^[23] Barth was the

[19.] On this judgment, see passages on Ernst Troeltsch in Bonhoeffer's lectures on “The History of Systematic Theology in the Twentieth Century,” winter semester 1931–32, *DBW* 11:150–53, 160–62, 172–75, esp. 192: “(Last chapter of Troeltsch's *Social Teaching*) The proletarian masses speak a very different language from the one from Nazareth who brings the gospel under sunny skies. But he must be there, but where and how? Here is the dilemma for Troeltsch and Naumann's question. But their merit was to pose the question in this way. [They represent] the high point and the turning point of theology at the turn of the century.”

[20.] Only in Karl Heim's *Glaube und Denken* (vol. 1 of *Der evangelische Glaube und das Denken der Gegenwart*), published in 1931—which Bonhoeffer discussed in 1932 (*DBWE* 12, 2/5)—does the alternative “God or despair” appear (Heim, *Glaube und Denken*, 320; cf. also 307–19), which Bonhoeffer quoted (*DBWE* 12, 2/5, p. 252). On his critique of Karl Heim, see also Bonhoeffer's December 25, 1932, letter to Helmut Rößler, *DBWE* 12, 1/22, p. 83.

[21.] See 3/148, ed. note 3. Cf. *DBWE* 4:286: Bonhoeffer speaks of “the indwelling of Jesus Christ in our hearts”; the difference between this and Heim becomes clear when the quotation is carried further: “The life of Jesus Christ here on earth has not yet concluded. Christ continues to live it in the lives of his followers.”

[22.] Althaus, “Luther und die Politik,” 24–25: “Christendom has neither a political program nor any right to oversee or censure political life in the name of Jesus and the Gospel. . . . The constitution of love in the kingdom of God lies in another dimension from any possible political order.” “In reality, politics follows its own rules and necessities.”

first to recognize the error of all these attempts (which were basically all still sailing in the wake of liberal theology, without intending to do so) in that they all aim to save some room for religion in the world or over against the world. He led the God of Jesus Christ forward to battle against religion.^[24] πνεῦμα against σὰρξ.^[25] This remains his greatest merit (the second edition of *The Epistle to the Romans*, despite all the neo-Kantian eggshells!).^[26] Through his later *Dogmatics* he has put the church in a position to carry this distinction in principle all the way through. It was not in his ethics that he eventually failed, as is often said—his ethical observations, so far as they exist, are as important as his dogmatic ones—but in the nonreligious interpretation of theological concepts he gave no concrete guidance,^[27] either in dogmatics or ethics. Here he reaches his limit, and that is why his theology of revelation has become positivist, a “positivism of revelation,” as I call it.^[28] To a great extent the Confessing Church now has forgotten all about Barth's approach and lapsed from positivism into conservative restoration.^[29] Its significance is that it holds fast to the great concepts of Christian theology, but it appears to be exhausting itself gradually in the process. Certainly these concepts contain the elements of genuine prophecy (which include the claim to the truth as well as mercy, as you mentioned)^[30] and of genuine ritual, and only to that extent does the message of the Confessing Church get attention, a hearing—and rejection. But

[23.] For Bonhoeffer's critique of Paul Tillich, see *DBWE* 1:239, 273. On the relation between Bonhoeffer and Tillich, see among others Benktson, *Christus und die Religion*, 93–146. *DB-ER*, 857–58: “All Bonhoeffer knew of Tillich was what had been published before the Nazi period. It was this he had in mind when he argued for or against Tillich.”

[24.] Barth, *Epistle to the Romans* (“The Frontier of Religion,” 229–40, and “The Meaning of Religion,” 240–57).

[25.] “Spirit” against “flesh.” See Barth's interpretation of Rom. 8:3–9 in *Epistle to the Romans*, 275–85, for example, p. 284: “In time, it has been decided that we are all in the flesh. In eternity, it has already been decided that we are all in the Spirit. We are rejected in the flesh, but elected in the Spirit.” On the opposition of “flesh” and “spirit,” see 2/88, p. 231; *DBWE* 4:158–59, 266–67; *DBWE* 5:34–35, 38–39, et passim.

[26.] Comment in parentheses added in the margin. Cf. Karl Barth's self-criticism in *Credo*, 185: “At the time my whole desire was really to elucidate Paul's Epistle to the Romans. That was done partly by means of a strange incrustation of Kantian-Platonic conceptions.” See also *DBWE* 10, 2/17, pp. 472–73.

[27.] “Concrete” inserted afterward.

[28.] See 3/137, p. 364, and ed. note 17.

[29.] On Tegel note 4 (*NL*, A 86) on Rev. 2:1ff., Bonhoeffer noted the comparison “Ephesus = BK [Confessing Church]. Work, discipline, but the love you had at first!” Rev. 2:4, underlined in pencil in Bonhoeffer's Luther Bible: “But I have this against you [the congregation in Ephesus], that you have abandoned the love you had at first.”

[30.] See 3/155, pp. 413–14.

both^[31] remain undeveloped, remote, because they lack interpretation. Those who, like, for example, P. Schütz^[32] or the Oxford^[33] or Berneuchen^[34] movements, who long for "movement" and "life," are dangerous reactionaries, backward looking, because they want to go back before the beginnings of revelation theology and seek "religious" renewal. They haven't understood the problem at all, so their talk is completely beside the point. They have no future whatsoever • • •

Now I'll try to continue with the theological topics from where I stopped recently. My starting point was that God is being increasingly pushed out of a world come of age, from the realm of our knowledge and life and, since Kant, has only occupied the ground beyond the world of experience.^[9] On the one hand, theology has resisted this development with apologetics and taken up arms—in vain—against Darwinism and so on; on the other hand, it has resigned itself to the way things have gone and allowed God to function only as deus ex machina^[10] in the so-called ultimate questions, that is, God becomes the answer to life's questions, a solution to life's needs and conflicts. So if anyone gives no evidence of such problems or refuses to lose self-control or be pitied over these things, then this person is really closed to talking about God; or else the man without such questions and so forth must have it proven to him that in truth he is up to his neck in such questions, needs, or conflicts, without admitting it or knowing it. If we succeed here—and existential philosophy and psychotherapy^[11] have worked out some very ingenious methods in this respect—then this man is open for God, and methodism^[12] can celebrate its triumphs. But if people cannot successfully be made to regard their happiness as disastrous, their health as sickness, and their vitality as an object of despair, then the theologians are at their wits' end. The person being dealt with either is a stubborn sinner of the most malignant kind or is living an existence of "bourgeois self-satisfaction,"^[13] and the one is as far from salvation as the other. You see, this is the attitude that I am contending against. When Jesus made sinners whole, they were real sinners, but Jesus didn't begin by making every person into a sinner. He called people from their sin, not into it. Certainly the

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encounter with Jesus turned all human values upside down. This is what happened at Paul's conversion, but his encounter with Jesus preceded the recognition of his sins. Certainly Jesus accepted people living on the margins of human society, prostitutes, and tax collectors,^[14] but certainly not only them, because he wanted to accept all humankind. Never did Jesus question anyone's health and strength or good fortune as such or regard it as rotten fruit; otherwise why would he have made sick people well or given strength back to the weak? Jesus claims all of human life, in all its manifestations, for himself and for the kingdom of God.

Of course, I have to be interrupted right at this point! Let me just quickly state, once again, the issue that concerns me: the claim [Inanspruchnahme]^[15] of Jesus Christ on the world that has come of age.^[16] • • •

July 8

¶ God's being pushed out of the world, away from public human existence, has led to an attempt to hang on to God at least in the realm of the "personal," the "inner life," the "private" sphere. And since each person has a "private" sphere somewhere, this became the easiest point of attack. What used to be the servants' secrets^[10]—to put it crudely—that is, the intimate areas of life (from prayer to sexuality)—became the hunting ground of modern pastors. In this way they resemble (even though their intentions are entirely different) the most evil of the tabloid journalists—remember the *Wahrheit* and the *Glocke*?^[11]—who made public the intimate lives of prominent people. The intention of such journalism was societal, financial, and political blackmail; in the other case it's religious blackmail. Sorry, but I can't put it more sparingly. From a sociological viewpoint this is a revolution from below, a rebellion of the inferior. Just as the mean-spirited can only deal with eminent people when they can imagine them "in the bathtub" or in other embarrassing situations, it's the same here. There is a sort of evil satisfaction in knowing that every person has failings and weak spots. In my contact with the "outcasts" of society, the "pariahs," I have noticed repeatedly that the dominant motive in their judgment of other people is mistrust.^[12] Everything a person of high repute does, even the most selfless

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[8.] Major General Paul von Hase, city commander of Berlin, a cousin of Paula Bonhoeffer.

[9.] See 3/161, also with reference to what follows.

[10.] [See 3/173, ed. note 25.—JDG]

[11.] See Bonhoeffer's notes, 3/155, p. 415; cf. also 3/161, ed. note 15.

[12.] See 3/161, ed. note 16.

[13.] Cf. DBWE 6:349 ("bourgeois self-satisfaction").

[8.] Reference to the coming coup attempt on July 20.

[9.] Euripides, *Helen*, 560, quoted in Otto, *Homeric Gods*, 217; see also 3/165, ed. note 2.

[10.] Adolf von Harnack demanded that a "first-rate" biographer abstain "profoundly from vulgar valet's spying" (*Über die Sicherheit und die Grenzen geschichtlicher Erkenntnis*, 23). See also Staats, *Adolf von Harnack im Leben Dietrich Bonhoeffers*, 119, ed. note 79.

[11.] *Die Wahrheit* was published 1937 to 1938 in Berlin; *Glocke: Sozialistische Halbmonatszeitschrift* was published from 1915/16 to 1925 in Munich. [Both were German tabloids.—JDG]

[12.] On the social categorization of "mistrust," see DBWE 7:63, 65–66.

deed, is suspect from the outset. Such "outcasts," by the way, are found at all levels of society. In a flower garden they are only grubbing around for the dung on which the flowers grow. The less a person is connected to others, the more likely he will fall prey to this attitude. Among the clergy there is also a disconnectedness that we call being "holier-than-thou" [pfäffisch], that sort of prying into the sins of others in order to catch them out. It's as if you wouldn't know a fine house until you have found cobwebs in the remotest cellar, or you could appreciate a good play only after you saw how the actors behave behind the scenes. The same trend is found in novels of the last fifty years, which only think they have portrayed their characters honestly if they depict them in the marriage bed, and in movies, which have to have scenes of people undressing. To be clothed, veiled, pure, and chaste is considered a lie, a disguise, impure from the outset, which only gives proof of one's own impurity. This mistrust and suspicion as the basic attitude toward other people is the rebellion of the inferior. From a theological viewpoint the error is twofold: first, thinking one can only address people as sinners after having spied out their weaknesses and meanness; second, thinking that the essential nature of a person consists of his innermost, intimate depths and background, and calling this the person's "inner life."

511 And precisely these most secret human places are to be the domain of God!

¶ To the first assumption one must say that human beings are sinners, but that is a long way from saying they are mean. To put it tritely, does it make Goethe or Napoleon a sinner to say that they weren't always faithful husbands? It is not the sins of weakness but rather the sins of strength that matter. There is no need to go spying around. Nowhere does the Bible do this. (Strong sins: with a genius, hubris;^[13] for peasants, breaking the natural order (is the Decalogue perhaps a peasant ethic?); the bourgeoisie [Bürger],^[14] steering shy of free responsibility. Is that right?)

¶ To the second assumption: the Bible does not know the distinction that we make between the outward and the inward life. How could it, actually? It is always concerned with the *ἄνθρωπος τέλειος*, the *whole human being*,^[15] even in the Sermon on the Mount, where the Decalogue is extended into the "innermost" interior.^[16] The notion that a good "character" could take the

[13.] "Pride," "arrogance."

[14.] [*Bürger*, normally "citizen," but where juxtaposed with "peasants," "bourgeoisie" is an appropriate translation. See 3/145, ed. note 5.—JDG]

[15.] See 2/106, ed. note 16.

[16.] See Matt. 5:17–48. V. 48: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect," *τέλειοι* ("whole person," "complete," "fulfilled"). Cf. 2/106, p. 278.

place of all human goodness is completely unbiblical. The discovery of the so-called inner life dates from the Renaissance (probably from Petrarch).^[17] The "heart" in the biblical sense is not the inner life but rather the *whole person before God*. Since human beings live as much from their "outer" to their "inner" selves as from their "inner" to their "outer" selves, the assumption that one can only understand the essence of a human being by knowing his most intimate psychological depths and background is completely erroneous.

What I am driving at is that God should not be smuggled in somewhere, in the very last, secret place that is left. Instead, one must simply recognize that the world and humankind have come of age. One must not find fault with people in their worldliness but rather confront them with God where they are strongest. One must give up the "holier-than-thou" ploys and not regard psychotherapy or existential philosophy as scouts preparing the way for God. The intrusive manner of all these methods is far too unaristocratic^[18] for the Word of God to be allied with them. The Word of God does not ally itself with this rebellion of mistrust, this rebellion from below. Instead, it reigns. • • •

July 16 Now for a few more thoughts on our topic. I'm just working gradually toward the nonreligious interpretation of biblical concepts. I am more able to see what needs to be done than how I can actually do it. *Historically there is just one major development leading to the world's autonomy.*^[18] In theology it was Lord *Herbert* of Cherbury who first asserted that reason is sufficient for religious understanding.^[19] In moral philosophy Montaigne

[17.] Cf. Dilthey's sketch of Petrarch in *Weltanschauung und Analyse*, 20: "so he could grasp the idea of wanting to be a full, whole human being"; *ibid.*, 417: "The idea that had first been attained in Italy spread through the other countries; in connection with it, the great poetry emerged, with its power to express the inner life, as . . . practiced . . . since Petrarch."

[18.] Cf. Bonhoeffer's notes at the end of 3/155, p. 415: "existential philos[ophy] psychotherapy . . . aristocratic Christianity?"

[19.] See Dilthey, *Weltanschauung und Analyse*, 246–96 ("Autonomy in thinking, constructive rationalism and pantheistic monism according to their connection in the seventeenth century"). On "the world's autonomy" and the following passage of the letter, see Bonhoeffer's description of the historical development to the "level of purely autonomous culture" in his lectures on "The History of Twentieth-Century Systematic Theology," from winter semester 1931–32 (*DBW* 11:185–86). Bonhoeffer uses "autonomy" or "autonomous" in his early writings primarily to indicate a historical era (*DBW* 14:400: "emancipation of autonomous reason" as a hallmark of "rationalism") or as a criterion of the theological self-distinction ("Finkenwalde *Catechesis*," *DBW* 14:546: "Instead of ethical autonomy: the cross and forgiveness"); see also *DBWE* 2:31, 79.

[19.] Bonhoeffer quotes Dilthey, *Weltanschauung und Analyse*, 249 (referring to Herbert of Cherbury, *De veritate*: "The very investigation of the human capacity for moral and

and Bodin substitute rules for life for the commandments.^[20] In political philosophy Macchiavelli^[21] separates politics from general morality and founds the doctrine of reason of state.^[22] Later H. Grotius, very different from Macchiavelli in content, but following the same trend toward the autonomy of human society, sets up his natural law as an international law, which is valid etsi deus non daretur, "as if there were no God."^[23] Finally,

religious cognition is introduced by a thorough proof of the *sufficiency* of reason." From Dilthey, p. 248: Among the religious "truths of reason," which Herbert of Cherbury "first made the basis of the *autonomy* of religious consciousness in Christian Europe" (*De veritate*, 210–15), those counted as "notiones communes" to all religions are "Esse supremum aliqod numen" ("There is one supreme divine Being") and "Supremum istud numen debere coli" ("This supreme divine Being is to be worshipped"). See below, in ed. note 23, the discussion of Hugo Grotius. [Translation (incl. Latin from the German) by Isabel Best.—JDG]

[20.] On Montaigne, see Dilthey, *Weltanschauung und Analyse*, 36–39, 260–61: "The trend toward an autonomous morality" is continued in France "by Montaigne and Bodin." On Bodin, see Dilthey, 145–53, 274–75.

[21.] [Bonhoeffer spelled Machiavelli incorrectly as Macchiavelli.—JDG]

[22.] On Machiavelli, see Dilthey, *Weltanschauung und Analyse*, 24–36 et passim; 27–28: Machiavelli "did not believe that the moral governance of life could be achieved through the church in Italy." Machiavelli's guiding perspective was "looking at all human affairs exclusively from the viewpoint of reason of state." Cf. Bonhoeffer's assessment in *Ethics* of the notion of *necessità* in Machiavelli's doctrine of the state in 1942 (*DBWE* 6:273).

[23.] Dilthey, *Weltanschauung und Analyse*, 280: "As if there were no God," the statutes of natural law would have their own independent general validity." Dilthey is referring to Grotius, *De iure belli ac pacis libri tres* (*Three Books on the Law of War and Peace*) I (1625), Prolegomena (Introduction) §11, 31: "Et haec quidem quae iam diximus, locum (aliquem) haberent etiamsi daremus, quod sine summo scelere dari nequit, non esse Deum, aut non curari ab eo negotia humana" (Those things that we already mentioned have (some) ground, even if we were to concede—what cannot be granted without the greatest impiety—that God does not exist or that he does not care for human affairs). That the emergence of a "law of reason" presupposes the "abdication of the otherworldly Creator" is a characteristic "of the law of reason that for the older generation (Althusius, Grotius) had no validity at all" (Franz Wieacker, *Privatrechtsgeschichte der Neuzeit*, 147). See the continuation of the quotation from Grotius: "Both reason and the uninterrupted tradition have planted the opposite concept in us. . . . Consequently, God is the Master Workman, the one to whom we owe our existence and everything we have, and whom we have to obey unfaithfully." On the previous history and interpretation of the phrase *etsi deus non daretur*, or *etiamsi daremus . . . non esse deum*, already used earlier by Bonhoeffer in *DBWE* 5:115: "The psychologist views me as if there were no God," see, among others, Wieacker, *Privatrechtsgeschichte*, 147–48; St. Leger, *The etiamsi daremus of Hugo Grotius*; Hölzel, *Grundlagen des Rechts- und Staatsdenkens bei Hugo Grotius*, 15–48; Feil, *Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 180–83, and *Antithetik*, 83. Reinhold Seeberg, in *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 4:1, 324, cites Martin Luther: The worldly authorities should do their duty "als were keyn Gott da" [as if there were no God]. An opposing formulation is proposed by Adolf von Harnack, "Was hat die Historie an fester Erkenntnis zur Deutung des Weltgeschehens zu bieten?" 192: "There is no doubt—humankind works in history 'as if God existed,' as if

the philosophical closing line: on one hand, the deism^[24] of Descartes: the world is a mechanism that keeps running by itself without God's intervention;^[25] on the other hand, Spinoza's pantheism:^[26] God is nature.^[27] Kant is basically a deist; Fichte and Hegel are pantheists. In every case the autonomy of human beings and the world is the goal of thought. (In the natural sciences this obviously begins with Nicholas of Cusa and Giordano Bruno and their—"heretical"—doctrine of the infinity of the universe [der Welt].^[28] The cosmos of antiquity is finite, as is the created world of medieval thought. An infinite universe—however it is conceived—is self-subsisting, "etsi deus non daretur." However, modern physics now doubts that the universe is infinite, yet without falling back to the earlier notions

humankind, being descended from a higher origin, had to recover it by working toward it as a goal."

[24.] Gawlick, *Artikel Deismus*, 44–45: "deism" (or "deist"), from the seventeenth century the "self-designation of those who wanted to be neither atheists nor adherents of an inherited revealed faith," comprises a "profession of faith in natural religion," expressed, among other ways, in the idea of God as a "perfect builder . . . who no longer needed to intervene in the functioning of the world machine." On the origin of the concept, see Feil, *Die Deisten als Gegner der Trinität*. [See also A. C. McGiffert, *Protestant Thought before Kant*.—JDG]

[25.] Dilthey, *Weltanschauung und Analyse*, 283: "The deist doctrine of a universe that exists and can be constructed independently of its master builder was founded by Descartes with his concept of the world machine." For Dilthey on Descartes, see further *Weltanschauung und Analyse*, 348–59 et passim.

[26.] Pantheism (from *πᾶν*, "all," "the whole," and *θεός*, "God": doctrine originating around 1700 according to which there is "no divine being distinct from matter and this constructed world," so that "Nature itself, i.e., the totality of things, [is] the only and the highest God" (nullum dari Numen a materia & compage mundi hujus distinctum, ipsamque naturam, sive rerum Universitatem, unicum esse & supremum Deum), John Toland (1709), cited in Schröder, "Pantheismus," 59.

[27.] Dilthey, *Weltanschauung und Analyse*, 463, says that "Spinoza's fundamental teaching" is that of an "infinite and perfect natural world, not distinct from God." On the formula *deus sive natura*, cf. Spinoza, *Ethics*, pt. 4, foreword, 188: "that eternal and infinite Being whom we call God or Nature." For Dilthey on Spinoza, see also *Weltanschauung und Analyse*, 93, 284–89, 342–44, et passim.

[28.] Since Dilthey only mentions Nicholas of Cusa in passing (see, e.g., *Weltanschauung und Analyse*, 324–25) and presents Giordano Bruno mainly biographically (297–311), cf. here the final chapter of Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker's *World View of Physics*, "The Infinity of the World" (136–82), which deals with Nicholas of Cusa (145–51 and 155–56) and Bruno (155): "The next great proponent of the infinite world, Giordano Bruno—though he still admits conceptually the difference of God and the world—actually speaks only about the world. It is in the world that the glory of infinity now falls—that glory which was unknown to antiquity and, in the Middle Ages, was reserved to God." On the doctrine of the infinity of the universe, see Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* 1.8; 2.8 and 11–12; Giordano Bruno, *Über das Unendliche, das Universum und die Welten*, 1st Dialogue (33–56).

of its finitude.)^[29] As a working hypothesis for morality, politics, and the natural sciences, God has been overcome and done away with, but also as a working hypothesis for philosophy and religion (Feuerbach!).^[30] It is a matter of intellectual integrity to drop this working hypothesis, or eliminate it as far as possible. An edifying scientist, physician, and so forth is a hybrid. So where is any room left for God? Ask those who are anxious, and since they don't have an answer, they condemn the entire development that has brought them to this impasse. I have already written to you about the various escape routes out of this space that has become too narrow.^[31] What could be added to that is the *salto mortale*^[32] back to the Middle Ages. But the medieval principle is heteronomy, in the form of clericalism. The return to that is only a counsel of despair, a sacrifice made only^[33] at the cost of intellectual integrity. It's a dream, to the tune of "Oh, if only I knew the road back, the long road to childhood's land!"^[34] There is no such way—at least not by willfully throwing away one's inner integrity, but only in the sense of Matt. 18:3,^[35] that is, through repentance, through *ultimate* honesty! And we cannot be honest unless we recognize that we have to live in the world—"etsi deus non daretur." And this is precisely what we do recognize—before God! God himself^[36] compels us to recognize it. Thus our coming of age leads us to a truer recognition of our situation before God. God would have us know that we must live as those who manage their lives without God. The

[29.] This last sentence was written in the margin. Cf. the section on "the present critique of the idea of infinity" in Weizsäcker, *World View of Physics*, 164–75.

[30.] "(Feuerbach!)" inserted afterward. On Feuerbach, see Bonhoeffer's lectures on "The History of Twentieth-Century Systematic Theology" in winter semester 1931–32, *DBW* 11:148–49: "Feuerbach's two questions for religion: 1. According to the truth of its precepts (illusion); 2. According to its congruence with real life. Essentially unrequited to by theology, therefore socialism [arises]."

[31.] See 3/161 and 3/170. On the concept of "space" (*Raum*) and Bonhoeffer's rejection of thinking in terms of "realms," see *DBWE* 4:225–50; *DBW* 14:422–26 et passim; *DBWE* 6:57–64 et passim; Feil, *Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 132–33, 146–47.

[32.] ["Death-defying leap."—JDG]

[33.] "Only" inserted afterward.

[34.] Johannes Brahms, *Heimweh* (Homesickness) II (op. 63, *Lieder und Gesänge*): "Oh, if only I knew the road back, The dear road to childhood's land! . . . And nothing to search for, nothing to watch for, only dreams, light and mild; / Not to feel the passing of time, to be again a child! to be again a child! / Oh, just show me the road back, the dear road to childhood's land! / In vain I search for happiness, around me a waste of shore and sand!" Translation here by Isabel Best.

[35.] "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

[36.] "Himself" inserted afterward.

same God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mark 15:34!).^[37] The same God who makes us to live in the world without the working hypothesis of God is the God before whom we stand continually. Before God, and with God, we live without God.^[38] God consents to be pushed out of the world and onto the cross; God is weak and powerless in the world and in precisely this way, and only so, is at our side and helps us. Matt. 8:17^[39] makes it quite clear that Christ helps us not by virtue of his omnipotence but rather by virtue of his weakness and suffering! This is the crucial distinction between Christianity and all religions. Human religiosity directs people in need to the power of God in the world, God as *deus ex machina*.^[40] The Bible directs people toward the powerlessness and the suffering of God;^[41] only the suffering God can help. To this extent, one may say that the previously described development toward the world's coming of age, which has cleared the way by eliminating a false notion of God, frees us to see the God of the

[37.] "At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'" Parentheses inserted later. Cf. Martin Luther (WA 5:602, 25–28, *Operationes in Psalmos*, 1519–21): "Ubi velut contradicens sibi sese derelictum a deo clamat et tamen deum suum vocat ac per hoc non derelictum sese confitetur. Nemo enim dicit ad deum 'Deus meus' qui omnino derelictus est" (Where he seems to cry out as if to contradict himself, that he had been deserted by God and yet names God and thereby confesses that he is not deserted. For no one says to God "my God" who has been utterly deserted).

[38.] In his 1932–33 lectures on "Creation and Fall," Bonhoeffer had affirmed that the human being who has fallen away from God must "live before God without the life that comes from God" (*DBWE* 3:142). The formula "Before God, and with God, we live without God," defining Bonhoeffer's new understanding of God's absence as a mode of God's presence, was anticipated in Bonhoeffer's work in an *Ethics* manuscript written shortly before his arrest in 1943: "The cross of reconciliation sets us free to live before God in the midst of the godless world" (*DBWE* 6:400). See below in this letter, p. 482: "The world come of age is more god-less, and thus perhaps just because of that closer to God than the world not yet come of age."

[39.] Matt. 8:17, referring to Isa. 53:4: "This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 'He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.'" Both passages were mentioned by Bonhoeffer in his lecture on pastoral care at Finkenwalde, *DBW* 14:580: "Matt. 8:17, cf. Isa. 53:4!" See also *DBWE* 4:214–15 and ed. notes 6 and 7.

[40.] See 3/137, ed. note 25.

[41.] See Bonhoeffer's May 21, 1942, letter to the Leibholz family, *DBWE* 16, 1/165, p. 284: "So it is good to learn early enough that suffering and God is not a contradiction but rather a necessary unity; for me the idea that God himself is suffering has always been one of the most convincing teachings of Christianity." Cf., for example, Luther, Thesis XXI, *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518): "At Deum non inveniri nisi in passionibus et cruce, iam dictum est" ["God can be found only in suffering and the cross, as has already been said," *LW* 31:52]. Cf. also Bonhoeffer's poem "Christians and Heathens," 3/174: "People go to God when they're in need" and "Christians stand by God in God's own pain."

Bible, who gains^[42] ground and power in the world by being powerless. This will probably be the starting point for our “worldly interpretation.”

July 18

Do you suppose that some letters have been lost due to the raids on Munich?^[43] Did you get the one with the two poems?^[44] It was sent right at that time and contained some more preliminary discussion on the theological topic. The poem “Christians and Heathens” includes a thought that you will recognize here. “Christians stand by God in God’s own pain”—that distinguishes Christians from heathens. “Could you not stay awake with me one hour?” Jesus asks in Gethsemane.^[45] That is the opposite of everything a religious person expects from God. The human being is called upon to share in God’s suffering at the hands of a godless world. Thus we must really live in that godless world and not try to cover up or transfigure its godlessness somehow with religion. Our lives must be “worldly,” so that we can share precisely so in God’s suffering; our lives are *allowed* to be “worldly,” that is, we are delivered from false religious obligations and inhibitions. Being a Christian does not mean being religious in a certain way, making oneself into something or other (a sinner, penitent,^[46] or saint) according to some method or other. Instead it means being human, not a certain type of human being, but the human being Christ creates in us. It is not a religious act that makes someone a Christian, but rather sharing in God’s suffering in the worldly life.^[47] That is “μετάνοια,”^[48] not thinking first of one’s own needs, questions, sins, and fears but allowing oneself to be pulled into walking the path that Jesus walks, into the messianic event, in which Isa. 53^[49] is now^[50] being fulfilled! Hence “believe in the good

[42.] “Gains” inserted afterward over “has,” but without crossing it out.

[43.] *Wehrmachtberichte*, 3:166 (July 17, 1944): “Groups of North American bombers have attacked several towns in south and southwest Germany. . . . Especially in Munich . . . some of the damage and losses have been severe.”

[44.] 3/172, with the poems “Who Am I?” (3/173) and “Christians and Heathens” (3/174)

[45.] Matt. 26:40b.

[46.] “Penitent” inserted afterward.

[47.] See ed. note 67.

[48.] “Conversion,” “turning around,” or “repentance.”

[49.] Isa. 53:4–5: “Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.” V. 4 is quoted in Matt. 8:17 (see ed. note 39). In Bonhoeffer’s Luther Bible, Isa. 53 “(Ep[istle] for Good Friday)” is marked with pencil, including underlining in v. 1a “Who has *believed* what we have heard?” (in German the

news”^[51] and, in John, the reference to the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”^[52] (by the way, A. Jeremias asserted recently that “lamb” in Aramaic can also be translated as “servant.”^[53] That’s really fine, in view of Isa. 53!). This being pulled along into the—messianic—suffering of God in Jesus Christ happens in the NT in various ways: when the disciples are called to follow him,^[54] in table fellowship with sinners,^[55] through “conversions” in the narrower sense of the word (Zacchaeus),^[56] through the action of the woman “who was a sinner” (done without any confession of sin taking place) in Luke 7,^[57] through the healing of the sick (see above Matt. 8:17), through receiving the children.^[58] The shepherds^[59] stand [at] the manger just as do the wise men from the East, not as “converted sinners,” but simply because they are drawn to the manger (by the star)^[60] just as they are. The centurion at Capernaum, who makes no confession of sin at all, is held up as an example of faith^[61] (cf. Jairus).^[62]

text literally reads: “But who believes our preaching?”) and a line in the margin beside v. 7 (“he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter”). Cf. *DBW* 14, 2/3.6, Bonhoeffer’s outline for a sermon on Isa. 53.

[50.] “Now” inserted afterward. This *present* aspect, the “now” in which Isa. 53 is fulfilled in the present moment, is noteworthy because until then Bonhoeffer had *always* seen the suffering of God’s servant as accomplished on the cross of Golgotha; see Bonhoeffer’s letter of April 8, 1936, to Rüdiger Schleicher, *DBW* 14:146: “This however is the message of the Bible, not only in the New but also in the Old Testament (Isa. 53!) . . . : the Scripture, that is, the Old Testament, is fulfilled in the cross of Jesus.” Similarly, Bonhoeffer’s 1936 outline for a lecture on confirmation instruction, *DBW* 14:808; cf. *DBWE* 5:101. See also Bethge, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews,” 84–85.

[51.] Mark 1:15b; cf. Bonhoeffer’s underlining of “who has *believed*” in Isa. 53:1, see ed. note 49. [In Bonhoeffer’s Luther Bible: “who *believes*.”—JDG]

[52.] John 1:29; the Luther Bible refers the reader to Isa. 53 (see ed. note 49).

[53.] Article by Joachim Jeremias on ἀμνός, ἀρνίον, ἀρνίον, 339: The phrase encountered in John 1:29, 36, ὁ ἀμνός τοῦ Θεοῦ (Lamb of God), “gives us a highly singular genitive combination that can be explained only in light of the Aramaic. In Aramaic the word ܐܡܢܐ has the twofold significance of a. lamb and b. boy or servant.” For the connection with Isa. 53:7, see Jeremias, “ἀμνός, ἀρνίον, ἀρνίον,” 339. [The text gives an incorrect initial for Jeremias; it should be not “A.” but “J.”—JDG]

[54.] Cf. *DBWE* 4:57–76.

[55.] Cf. Matt. 9:11b (“Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”) et passim.

[56.] Luke 19:1–8.

[57.] Luke 7:37–38 and 44–46.

[58.] Mark 10:14–16.

[59.] Luke 2:15–16.

[60.] Matt. 2:1–12 (“star” in v. 2b [and 9–10—JDG]).

[61.] Matt. 8:5–13; Luke 7:1–10.

[62.] Matt. 9:18–19, 23–26; Mark 5:22–24, 35–43; Luke 8:41–42, 49–56.

The rich young man is "loved" by Jesus.^[63] The courtier in Acts 8,^[64] Cornelius (Acts 10), are anything but persons in desperate straits. Nathanael is "an Israelite in whom there is no deceit" (John 1:47), and finally there are Joseph of Arimathea^[65] and the women at the tomb.^[66] The one thing they all have in common is their sharing in the suffering of God in Christ. That is their "faith." There is nothing about a religious method; the "religious act" is always something partial, whereas "faith" is something whole and involves one's whole life. Jesus calls not to a new religion but to life.^[67] But what is this life like? this life of participating in God's powerlessness in the world? I'll write about this next time, I hope. For today I'll just say this: if one wants to speak of God "nonreligiously," then one must speak in such a way that the godlessness^[68] of the world is not covered up in any way, but rather precisely to uncover it and surprise the world by letting light shine on it. The world come of age is more god-less and perhaps just because of that closer to God than the world not yet come of age.^[69] Forgive me, this is all still put terribly clumsily and badly; I'm very aware of this. But perhaps you are just the one to help me again to clarify and simplify it, if only by my being able to tell you about it, and to hear you, as it were, keep asking and answering me!

338 The address now is H. Linke, Berlin-Friedrichshagen, Wilhelmstraße 58.^[70] I'm very glad you have already got over the mountain passes. We're getting up at 1:30 a.m. almost every night here.^[71] This is a bad time and rather hinders intellectual work.

I hope to hear from you soon, and send you all my good wishes, thinking of you always with gratitude.

Yours as ever,
Dietrich

[63.] Mark 10:21; in Bonhoeffer's Luther Bible, "Jesus, looking at him, loved him" is underlined in pencil. Cf. *DBWE* 4:72.

[64.] Acts 8:26–40.

[65.] Mark 15:42–46 (v. 43: "a respected member of the council"); Matt. 27:57–60; Luke 23:50–53; John 19:38.

[66.] Matt. 27:61; Mark 15:47; 16:1; Luke 23:55–56.

[67.] Cf., in Bonhoeffer's last period of work on his *Ethics* before his arrest, *DBWE* 6:370 ("learn to live with others"). [See also *Ethics* 6:250: "Jesus Christ is life itself."—JDG]

[68.] Beginning of writing in the margin.

[69.] Cf. *DBWE* 6:124: "promising godlessness." On theological appreciation for modern atheism, see Vogel, "Die christliche Solidarität mit dem Gottlosen" [and Rahner, "Atheism"—JDG].

[70.] Cover address for the illegal prison correspondence; see 3/172, ed. note 26.

[71.] Air raids on Berlin on July 16, 1944, from 1:18 to 1:48 a.m. and on July 18 from 1:27 to 2:10 a.m.

178. To Eberhard Bethge^[1]

54

July 21^[2]

Dear Eberhard,

This short greeting is all I want to send you today. I think you must be so often present in spirit with us here that you will be glad for every sign of life, even if our theological discussion takes a breather for a while. To be sure, theological thoughts do preoccupy me incessantly, but then there are hours, too, when one is content with the ongoing processes of life and faith without reflecting on them. Then the *Daily Texts* simply make you happy, as I found especially to be the case with yesterday's^[3] and today's,^[4] for example. And then returning to the beautiful Paul Gerhardt hymns makes one glad to have them in the repertoire.^[5]

¶ In the last few years I have come to know and understand more and more the profound this-worldliness of Christianity. The Christian is not a *homo religiosus*^[6] but simply a human being, in the same way that Jesus was a human being—in contrast, perhaps, to John the Baptist. I do not mean the shallow and banal this-worldliness of the enlightened, the bustling, the comfortable, or the lascivious, but the profound this-worldliness that shows discipline and includes the ever-present knowledge of death and resurrection. I think Luther lived in this kind of this-worldliness. I remember a conversation I had thirteen years ago in America with a young French pastor.^[7] We had simply asked ourselves what we really wanted to do with our lives.

[1.] *NL*, 81,196; handwritten; no year (1944); annotation by Bethge: "Friday." Previously published in *LPP*, 369–70. [When Bonhoeffer's papers were transferred to the Berlin Staatsbibliothek, Bethge kept this letter in his possession. He regarded it as his favorite of all the letters he received from Bonhoeffer. It was discovered in his study after his death. See de Gruchy, *Daring, Trusting Spirit*, 85.—JDG]

[2.] Written on the day after the failed assassination attempt on Hitler's life on July 20, 1944.

[3.] The *Daily Text* for Thursday, July 20, was Ps. 20:8 in Luther's Bible, which is v. 7 in the NRSV: "Some take pride in chariots, and some in horses, but our pride is in the name of the LORD our God"; and Rom. 8:31: "If God is for us, who is against us?"

[4.] The readings for Friday, July 21, 1944, were Ps. 23:1: "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want"; and John 10:14: "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me."

[5.] [See Henkys, "Paul Gerhardt, Gottfried Arnold und die 'guten Mächte.'"—JDG]

[6.] "Religious person."

[7.] Jean Lasserre; see *DB-ER*, 152–54, 389–92; Bethge and Gremmels, *Life in Pictures*, centenary ed., 49, 80, 83. [See also the editor's introduction to *DBWE* 10:26–27, 40–41.—JDG]

And he said, I want to become a saint (—and I think it's possible that he did become one). This impressed me very much at the time. Nevertheless, I disagreed with him, saying something like: I want to learn to have faith. For a long time I did not understand the depth of this antithesis. I thought I myself could learn to have faith by trying to live something like a saintly life. I suppose I wrote *Discipleship* at the end of this path. Today I clearly see the dangers of that book, though I still stand by it.^[8] Later on I discovered, and am still discovering to this day, that one only learns to have faith by living in the full this-worldliness of life. If one has completely renounced making something of oneself—whether it be a saint^[9] or a converted sinner or a church leader (a so-called priestly figure!), a just or an unjust person, a sick or a healthy person—then one throws oneself completely into the arms of God, and this is what I call this-worldliness: living fully in the midst of life's tasks, questions, successes and failures, experiences, and perplexities—then one takes seriously no longer one's own sufferings but rather the suffering of God in the world. Then one stays awake with Christ in Gethsemane.^[10] And I think this is faith; this is μετάνοια.^[11] And this is how one becomes a human being, a Christian. (Cf. Jer. 45!)^[12] How should one become arrogant over successes or shaken by one's failures when one shares in God's suffering in the life of this world? You understand what I mean even when I put it so briefly. I am grateful that I have been allowed this insight, and I know that it is only on the path that I have finally taken that I was able to learn this. So I am thinking gratefully and with peace of mind about past as well as present things.

Perhaps you are surprised at such a personal letter. But when I feel like saying such things sometimes, who else should I say them to? Perhaps the time will come when I can speak to Maria this way, too; I do very much hope so. But I cannot put that burden on her yet.

May God lead us kindly through these times, but above all, may God lead us to himself.

Your greeting made me especially happy,^[13] and I am glad that it isn't too hot for all of you there. Many more letters from me must still be on their way

[8.] [See the editors' afterword to *Discipleship*, DBWE 6:307–9.—JDG]

[9.] Bonhoeffer, *Zettelnotizen*, 33: "Marx: It is easy to be a saint if you don't want to be a human being" (Bonhoeffer was quoting from Jacques Maritain, *Integral Humanism*, 90).

[10.] Cf. Matt. 26:40: "Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, 'So, could you not stay awake with me one hour?'"

[11.] "Turning around," "repentance."

[12.] Jer. 45:4–5, cited frequently by Bonhoeffer. See 2/54, ed. note 5; 2/115, ed. note 24; 3/145, ed. note 17; see also DBWE 5:37, ed. note 13.

[13.] 3/176.

to you.^[14] Didn't we travel just about the same route together in 1936^[15] as you're traveling now?

Be well, stay healthy, and don't let go of your hope that we will all see one another again soon. In faithfulness and gratitude, thinking always of you,

Yours,
Dietrich

183. To Eberhard Bethge^[1]

548

July 28

Dear Eberhard,

I have not yet thanked you for the nice little photo, which was quite amusing for me with its Italian arrangement. Funny—so is there an Italian and also a German way even for taking photos? And the strangest thing of all is that this can be the case with such an ordinary picture. But do have one of your comrades take a picture of you sometime that shows all of you, and in a nature setting. Of course, it makes sense that you fellows work wearing shirts only.

You think that the Bible does not say much about health, happiness [Glück], strength [Kraft], and so on.^[2] I have thought that over again very carefully.^[3] I'm sure it is not true of the OT in any case. The mediating theological concept in the OT between God and the happiness [Glück],

[14.] [The literal translation is "Many greetings from me are still coming to you." This may have been Bonhoeffer's way of avoiding any reference to letters.—JDG]

[15.] On his trip to Italy with Bethge; see 3/169, ed. note 18.

[1.] NL, A 81,199; handwritten; undated (1944). Previously published in LPP, 374–75.

[2.] Cf. in Bonhoeffer's letter of June 30, 1944, 3/170, pp. 450–51. The end of a letter from Bethge in which he deals with this was lost; see 3/155, ed. note 19.

[3.] [Bonhoeffer's reflections about the concept of happiness at this time are also evident in the novel he wrote in prison. See DBWE 7:175.—JDG]

and so forth,^[4] of human beings is that of blessing, as far as I can see.^[5] Certainly in the OT, for instance among the patriarchs, the focus is not on happiness but on God's blessing, which itself encompasses all earthly good. This blessing is the addressing and claiming of earthly life for God, and it contains all [God's] promises. To regard the OT blessing as superseded by the NT would once again resemble the customary, overspiritualized^[6] view of the NT. But do you think it is an accident that the subject of sickness and death comes up in the context of the misuse of^[7] the Lord's Supper ("the cup of *blessing* . . ." 1 Cor. 10:16! 1 Cor. 11:30), or that Jesus restores people's health, or that when Jesus's disciples are with him they "lack nothing"?^[8] Now, should one oppose the cross with the OT blessing? That is what Kierkegaard did.^[9] This turns the cross and/or suffering into a principle, and this is precisely what gives rise to an unhealthy methodism^[10] that denies suffering its quality of contingency within divine providence. Incidentally, the person who receives blessing in the OT must also suffer much (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph), but this never (as little as in the NT) leads to making happiness and suffering, blessing and the cross, mutually

[4.] [Cf. 3/167, the poem "Fortune and Calamity," written in June 1944.—JDG]

[5.] [Another translation of the German *Glück* besides "blessing" (*Segen*) is relevant to this reflection, namely, "prospering"; cf. Joseph in prison, where "the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper" (Gen. 39:23). Cf. Bonhoeffer's meditation on this text in *DBWE* 16, 3/4, p. 628. We are grateful to Jürgen Henkys for making this connection.—JDG]

[6.] [This translates Bonhoeffer's *vergeistigt*, an unusually negative use of the root word *Geist* (mind, spirit). Cf. Bonhoeffer's reflection on Gerhard's verse "Ich bring alles wieder" in 2/88, pp. 229–31, with his distinction between *Vergeistigung*, which he associates with σὰρξ, "flesh," and *Wiederbringung*, which is καὶνὴ κτίσις, new creation by the Holy Spirit.—JDG]

[7.] "Misuse of" added later.

[8.] Luke 22:35 ("did you lack anything?"); cf. *DBWE* 4:168.

[9.] The Kierkegaard Research Center in Copenhagen could not document a direct opposition of "Old Testament Blessing" and "Cross" in Kierkegaard's works (letter of October 20, 1996, to the German *DBWE* editor). However, Bonhoeffer's statement in the above paragraph that the OT is concerned with "God's blessing, which itself encompasses all earthly good" does contradict Kierkegaard insofar as he argues (*Christian Discourses*, 120): "All earthly and worldly goods are in themselves selfish, invidious, the possession of them, being invidious or envious, must of necessity make others poorer; what I have, another cannot have; the more I have, the less another has." The editors are grateful to Magdalena L. Frettlöh for Kierkegaard references.

[10.] On Bonhoeffer's rejection of "methodism," see 2/112, ed. note 14.

exclusive.^[11] In this respect the difference between OT and NT may consist solely in the fact that in the OT the blessing also includes the cross and in the NT the cross also includes the blessing.

To change the subject completely: not only action but suffering, too, is a way to freedom. In suffering, liberation consists in being allowed to let the matter out of one's own hands into the hands of God. In this sense death is the epitome of human freedom.^[12] Whether the human deed is a matter of faith depends on whether people understand their own suffering as a continuation of their action, as a consummation of freedom. I find this very important and very comforting.

I am well. There is also nothing new to report from the family. Hans is completely laid up with the paralysis from his diphtheria.^[13] But people seem to be confident. Farewell, keep up your good spirits, as we are doing, and join us in looking forward already to a fine reunion!

Warmest greetings.

Yours faithfully,

Dietrich

Neues Lied, no. 370, v. 3.4.^[14]

187. Outline for a Book^[1]

I would like to write an essay—not more than one hundred pages in length—with three chapters: 1. Taking Stock of Christianity;^[2] 2. What is Christian faith, really? 3. Conclusions.

[11.] Cf. *DBWE* 6:127: "the blessings of suffering," and the "Devotional Aids for the Moravian *Daily Texts*" for June 8, 1944, on Ps. 34:20 ("The just must suffer much") and 1 Pet. 3:9 ("that you might inherit a blessing"), *DBWE* 16, 3/4, pp. 631–32.

[12.] See the poem "Stations on the Way to Freedom," 4/191.

[13.] See 3/177, ed. note 11.

[14.] The hymn cited here is Paul Gerhard's "Herr, der du vormals has dein Land mit Gnaden angeblicket" ("Lord, who hast looked upon thy land with grace"), *Evangelisches Gesangbuch*, no. 383. V. 3 reads: "O, that I may soon hear the Word / o'er all the Earth resounding / that news of Peace shall now be heard / wherever Christians dwell! O may God grant us / an end to war, an end to weapons' din / and to all misery!" V. 4 reads: "O may this evil time / to better days give way / that we in our great woe / might not despair for aye. / Yet to those who bow in fear / God's help and grace are ever near." Translation by Nancy Lukens. [*Ein Neues Lied* (1932) was a German Protestant youth hymnal conceived by Otto Riethmüller, later director of youth work for the Confessing Church. The second edition (1933) was used daily at Finkenwalde (Henkys, *Geheimnis der Freiheit*, 51–52).—JDG]

¶In the first chapter I would describe

557 ¶(a) The coming of age of the human being (as indicated earlier).^[3] Safeguarding human life against “accidents,” “blows of fate”; if it is impossible to eliminate them, then at least the reduction of danger. The “insurance industry” as a Western phenomenon (to be sure, it depends on accidents, but its purpose is to make them less painful); its goal is to be independent of nature. Nature used to be conquered by the soul;^[4] with us it is conquered through technological organization of all kinds. What is unmediated for us, what is given, is no longer nature but organization. But with this protection from the menace of nature, a new threat to life is created in turn, namely, through organization itself. Now the power of the soul is lacking! The question is: What will protect us from the menace of organization? The human being is thrown back on his own resources. He has learned to cope with everything except himself. He can insure himself against everything but other human beings. In the end it all comes down to the human being.

¶(b) The religionlessness of the human being come of age. “God” as working hypothesis, as stopgap for our embarrassments, has become superfluous (as indicated previously).^[5]

558 ¶(c) The Protestant church: pietism as^[6] a final attempt to preserve Protestant Christianity as religion; Lutheran orthodoxy, the attempt to save the church as an institution of salvation;^[7] Confessing Church: revelation theology; a δός μοι ποῦ στῶ^[8] standing against the world; with regard to it, an “objective” interest in Christianity. The arts, the sciences in search of their origin.^[9] Generally in the Confessing Church: Standing up for the “cause” of the church, and so on, but little personal faith in Christ. “Jesus” disappears from view. Sociologically: no impact on the broader masses; a matter for the lower and upper-middle classes. Heavily burdened by difficult, traditional ideas. Decisive: Church defending itself. No risk taking for others.

¶(d) Morals of the people. Sexual morality as example.

[3.] See 3/161, pp. 425–26 and ed. note 14.

[4.] [“Soul” (*Seele*) implies both intellectual powers and emotional resources.—JDG]

[5.] See 3/152, pp. 405–7, with ed. notes 5 and 7; 3/161, pp. 425–26, with ed. note 11.

[6.] After “as” the word “religion” is crossed out.

[7.] Cf. Bonhoeffer’s lecture at the preacher’s seminary in Finkenwalde, winter 1935–36: “Visible Church in the New Testament,” *DBW* 14:431: “Where God’s word and God’s deed are so torn asunder as is the case in orthodoxy, the church must become a religious institution and there is then no defense left against the pietistic, total dissolution of the concept of church.”

[8.] See 2/124, ed. note 28.

[9.] See *DBWE* 6:340 (“science, art”); 341 (“return to the origin”); and 132.

¶Chapter 2:

¶(a) Worldliness and God.

¶(b) Who is God? Not primarily a general belief in God’s omnipotence, and so on. That is not a genuine experience of God but just a prolongation of a piece of the world. Encounter with Jesus Christ. Experience that here there is a reversal of all human existence, in the very fact that Jesus only^[10] “is there for others.”^[11] Jesus’s^[12] “being-for-others” is the experience of transcendence! Only through this liberation from self, through this “being-for-others” unto death, do omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence come into being. Faith is^[13] participating in this being of Jesus. (Becoming human [*Menschwerdung*], cross, resurrection.) Our relationship to God is no “religious” relationship to some highest, most powerful, and best being imaginable—that is no genuine transcendence. Instead, our relationship to God is a new life in “being there for others,” through participation in the being of Jesus. The transcendent is not the infinite, unattainable^[14] tasks, but the neighbor within reach^[15] in any given situation.^[16] God in human form! Not as in oriental religions in animal forms as the monstrous, the chaotic, the remote, the terrifying, but also not in the conceptual forms of the absolute, the metaphysical,^[17] the infinite, and so on, either, nor again the Greek god—human form of the “God-human form [*Gott-Menschgestalt*] of the human being in itself.”^[18] But rather “the human being for others”! therefore the Crucified One. The human being living out of the transcendent.

[10.] “Only” added later.

[11.] The phrase “for others” in connection with “only” (see preceding note) is found already in Luther (*WA* 7:64, 15–17 [editor’s emphasis], *Tractatus de libertate Christiana*, 1520): “Non enim homo sibi vivit soli in corpore isto mortali ad operandum in eo, sed et omnibus hominibus in terra, immo solum aliis vivit et non sibi” (“For human beings do not live for themselves in this, their mortal body, to operate in it, but for all people on earth; indeed, they live *only for others* and not for themselves,” in “The Freedom of a Christian” (1520), *LW* 31:364, trans. altered). [See also *DBWE* 6:400.—JDG] Further references to the history of the expression “to be there for others” are found in W. Dreß, “Religiöses Denken und christliche Verkündigung in der Theologie Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s,” 60–61, n. 6.

[12.] “Jesus’s” added later.

[13.] After “is” the word “not” is crossed out.

[14.] “Unattainable” added later.

[15.] “Within reach” added later.

[16.] See 4/181, p. 490: “Christianity arises out of the encounter with a concrete human being: Jesus. Experience of transcendence.”

[17.] “Metaphysical” added later.

[18.] Concerning this passage, in which Bonhoeffer articulates his understanding of Otto’s book *The Homeric Gods*, see 3/164, ed. notes 3, 16, and 18.

¶(c) Hence the interpretation of biblical concepts on this principle.

(Creation, fall, reconciliation, repentance, faith, *vita nova*,^[19] last things.)

¶(d) *Cultus*.^[20] (Details to follow later, in particular on *cultus* and "religion"!)

¶(e) What do we really believe? I mean, believe in such a way that our lives depend on it? The problem of the Apostles' Creed [Apostolikum]?^[21] What must I believe? wrong question. Outdated controversies,^[22] especially the interconfessional ones; the differences between Lutheran and Reformed (and to some extent Roman Catholic) are no longer real. Of course, they can be revived with passion at any time, but they are no longer convincing. There is no proof for this. One must simply be bold enough to start from this. The only thing we can prove is that the Christian-biblical^[23] faith does not live or depend on such differences. Barth and the Confessing Church have encouraged people to entrench themselves again and again behind the notion of the "faith of the Church" rather than asking and stating honestly what they really believe. This is why even in the Confessing Church the breezes are blowing less than freely.^[24] Saying that it depends not on me but on the church can be a cheap clerical [pfäffisch]^[25] excuse and is always

[19.] Latin for "new life." "New Life in Paul" was the theme of Bonhoeffer's New Testament lecture at the Finkenwalde preacher's seminary in the summer of 1936; see *DBWE* 14, 2/15.

[20.] [The German *Kultus* is usually translated as "cult" but is also related to ritual.—JDG] Bethge had raised the question of *cultus*; see 3/155, pp. 413–14.

[21.] Apostles' Creed (*symbolum apostolorum* or *apostolicum*): allusion to the so-called Apostles' Creed debate [Apostolikumstreit] of 1892, in which Adolf von Harnack had argued (*In Sachen des Apostolikums*, col. 768) "for replacing, or using, in addition to the Apostles' Creed, a short confession that would more clearly and confidently articulate the understanding of the gospel gained in the Reformation and the time since, and that would at the same time remove the objectionable features that this symbol presents in its current wording to many serious and honest Christians, laypeople and clergy." See also the position Bonhoeffer takes in his lecture "The Nature of the Church," summer semester 1932, *DBW* 11:283–84 (from student notes): "Bonhoeffer's [critique of] the Apostles' Creed: Questions of liberalism (and of Harnack) [remain] open, [that] is yet to be resolved. Confession is a matter of our true standing before God! . . . The Word itself must be true! Not only the meaning!"

[22.] On this and the following, see *DBWE* 16, 1/27, p. 84.

[23.] "Biblical" added later.

[24.] Cf. 4/186, ed. note 7. Concerning the lack of "breezes blowing . . . freely" in the Confessing Church, see the attempts by Hans Asmussen and the general conference of Confessing Church pastors in Berlin to excommunicate Rudolf Bultmann because of his Alpirsbach lecture on demythologizing the Bible; cf. Bonhoeffer's protest, among other places, in his March 24, 1942, letter to Ernst Wolf (*DBWE* 16, 1/148, pp. 260–61).

[25.] "Clerical" added later [pfäffisch, a contemptuous term, referring to clergy; it also carries the sense of "sanctimonious" or "holier-than-thou"—JDG].

perceived that way outside the church. It is the same with the dialectical claim that I do not have my faith at my disposal and therefore cannot simply state what I believe. All these thoughts, justifiable though they might be in their place, do not absolve us from being honest with ourselves. We cannot, like the Roman Catholics, simply identify ourselves with the church. (Incidentally, this is probably the source of the common opinion that Catholics are insincere.) Well, then, what do we really believe? Answer: see (b), (c), and (d).

¶Chapter 3:

¶Conclusions: The church is church only when it is there for others. As a first step it must give away all its property to those in need.^[26] The clergy must live solely on the freewill offerings of the congregations and perhaps be engaged in some secular vocation [Beruf].^[27] The church must participate in the worldly tasks of life in the community—not dominating but helping and serving. It must tell people in every calling [Beruf] what a life with Christ is, what it means "to be there for others." In particular, our church will have to confront the vices of hubris, the worship of power, envy, and illusionism^[28] as the roots of all evil. It will have to speak of moderation, authenticity, trust, faithfulness, steadfastness, patience, discipline, humility, modesty, contentment.^[29] It will have to see that it does not underestimate the significance of the human^[30] "example" (which has its origin in the humanity of Jesus^[31] and is so important in Paul's

[26.] Cf. Bonhoeffer's interpretation of Matt. 19:21 in *DBWE* 4:73, where the challenge of voluntary poverty is called only an "intermediate link" between the rich young man's previous life and discipleship.

[27.] [*Beruf* can mean "career," but *Berufung* means a "calling" or "vocation." Following Luther, for Bonhoeffer every occupation is a God-given task, not just the call to the ministry.—JDG]

[28.] "And illusionism" added later.

[29.] In this series "trust," "steadfastness," "patience," and "modesty" were added later.

[30.] "Human" added later.

[31.] This phrasing goes back to Augustine's pairing of the concepts *donum* [or *sacramentum*] et *exemplum* (gift and example), in *De trinitate* 4.3, quoted by Bonhoeffer in his seminar paper on the Holy Spirit in Luther, *DBWE* 9, 2/10, p. 338, ed. note 54: "Ita Christus nobis proponitur ut donum seu sacramentum et exemplum" (Thus Christ is presented as a gift or a sacrament and an example for us to see). In Luther's pairing of the two concepts, the *donum* is the precondition for the *exemplum* (WA 10/1/1:11, 12–15: "Ein klein Unterricht, was man in den Evangeliiis suchen und gewarten soll" ("A short instruction on what one should seek and expect in the Gospels," 1522): "The chief message and basis of the gospel is that you accept Christ and recognize him as a gift and present given to you by God and your very own, before you grasp him as the example." Cf. Bonhoeffer in this regard, *DBWE* 4:287: "Only because we bear Christ's image already can Christ be

writings!);^[32] the church's word gains weight and power not through concepts but by example.^[33] (I will write in more detail later about "example" in the NT—we have almost entirely lost track of this thought). Further: revision of the question of "confession" (Apostolikum); revision of apologetics; revision of the preparation for and practice of ministry.

All this is put very roughly and only outlined. But I am eager to attempt for once to express certain things simply and clearly that we otherwise like to avoid dealing with. Whether I shall succeed is another matter, especially without the benefit of our conversations. I hope that in doing so I can be of some service for the future of the church.