'Some Remarks on the Relation Between Humanism and Christianity'

[254]

I

The concept of humanism is not unambiguous and therefore could probably do with a more detailed articulation, but I stick in this context to the view of humanism which appears in Løgstrup's book¹ and is probably the one generally held today. In this view, what matters is the given, natural human life in the natural and culturally given relations: people and their lives are both the measure of all things and their purpose.

Based on this view, Løgstrup believes that he can give a human interpretation of Jesus’s demand to love the neighbour. Indeed why not: when then it will be possible to understand Jesus’s proclamation in a human way, and one consequently puts into it what must be its meaning – when then it will be possible to understand it in a human way! In a human way i.e. so that man must be able understand it from himself, understand it as an expression of his own life, his well-being and happiness, so that he can see the reasonableness and meaning of what is demanded, since its purpose is human life; it is all about willing to be oneself in the right way, about what must be the will of God when God's will is one with human life’s flourishing. One can for that matter also provide a human interpretation of the demand to love God – then this demand is roughly identical to Løgstrup’s radical, one-sided and unfulfillable demand, that is identical with a religious conception of human life: thus has God created it, thus God wills that it be, thus is life in its created goodness. And then it can very well be reconciled with the human life urge, as it is only a proclamation of it in its created goodness. And the it is also comprehensible: there is good sense in obeying God, because this obedience has a purpose that is comprehensible for man: man's own life. God then becomes a God for human life, and man loves God by loving life. Faith in God and 'faith in life' come to the same thing. God’s will is one with man’s natural zest for life – of course in its created goodness. God’s grace concerns natural life, and man is or should be good by nature.

[255] But Jesus's proclamation makes absolutely no sense, if man is perceived as nature and his life or will as a will coming from nature. If one does this, his words concerning the hatred of father and mother, wife and children, and even of one's own life, concerning denying oneself and taking up one's cross and following him¹²– think of the words: the one who wills to gain his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will gain it¹³ – then [all these words] become a demand for self-effacement, if one does not, like Løgstrup rescue them by a human interpretation. For Jesus, of course nature is good as God’s creation, but whether man is good is a question of obedience or disobedience. Jesus did not say: you shall hate life in its selfish character, but hold on to it in its created goodness, but: you


should hate even your own life. Not: You should deny your selfish zest for life, but: you should deny yourself. This obviously does not make sense, if man is nothing but zest for life, that is if man only is nature, but not situated by Jesus’s words as a person in the decision before God, in the decision, which is all about obedience and thus the sacrifice of one’s own will or disobedience and thus self-assertion before God. If obedience does not mean self-denial, sacrifice of one’s own will, it is meaningless to talk about obedience. Jesus lets man’s natural needs, his natural life craving, be what they are, but he makes the demand that man must give up his desires and expectations, his claim for happiness and security; relying on God is self-denial, to have God as his hope is self-denial – otherwise it is nothing other than the pagan faith in the gods, in life and happiness. The servant without rights has no legitimate expectations of life and happiness, which is exactly why life for him is a matter of grace, and he has the possibility of living from God's free grace, not from fate’s whims interpreted as providence.

If there is no question other than the ethical one, then Jesus’s proclamation makes no sense. For Jesus, the crucial question is not what a person shall do, but why he is to do what he is to do, and the only reason is the one inherent in the command. Jesus did not radicalize the demand in the sense that he made it infinite, but in the sense that he denied any purpose to fulfilling it, every ‘in addition’, every ‘both-and’. Therefore he demanded that man should renounce his own life, abandon seeking his own, give up every desire to have anything other than God as his god, any desire to be anything other than being God’s creature and servant. This of course means that Jesus wanted to liberate man from the world, from his life, from his achievements, from his desires and concerns by binding him to God’s claim on him.

[256] It is usually said that Jesus proclaimed God’s will and the coming of God's kingdom. However, this is only true in the sense that he advanced God’s will, stopping man in the moment by confronting him with God’s judgment and God’s grace. He placed him in the decision situation regarding God’s claim through God's Word, not as a moral ideal, which can be sought, but so that when the demand sounds, man is already marked and, such as he is, comes under God’s judgment on those who are disobedient and God’s grace in relation to the obedient.

That Jesus preached God’s will is not right in the sense that he preached an ethic, a doctrine concerning what constituted the demand. He gave no information, but preached a commandment, and faced with a commandment a person can only either obey or reject it – or else it is not understood as a command. If a man first asks why and whereeto, he will not obey; he can then be willing to do many things, maybe even risk his life, but for his own purposes in a higher form, not simply and solely because he shall [skal]. He will not sacrifice his own will but act for a reason other than being commanded. He will not cease to live his own life, for the sake of his well-being and happiness, his future and security or his own righteousness, and therefore he is in all his pursuits a slave to himself and his own life. Only in unconditional and purposeless obedience is man free.

Jesus said: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind – and, you shall love your neighbour as yourself. He said: You shall. Why? Because you shall. Where to? Not for something relating to yourself, neither for your own life nor for the
other's life insofar as it is a part of your own life – otherwise you will of course not obey, but serve yourself. There is nothing but the divine why and the divine whereto. The demand is its own reason, its own meaning; if there was any other meaning to it, it would then not be itself that was the meaning, not obedience that was required, but in some way still man's own purposes. It is human self-assertion that has to be sacrificed, both direct self-assertion consisting in human desires and demands of life and indirect self-assertion consisting in self-abandonment. As Jesus does not address his words to man qua nature but qua will – as the human being that is claimed by the demand – so he neither takes into account man's aspirations and demands as something merely natural, nor with man's 'natural instinct of self-preservation', which is in itself neither good or bad, but a matter of fact: he takes into account the desire that manifests itself in self-preservation – and if not here, where? – and which is man's self-assertion [257] before God, his avarice, his rebellion against God, his attempt on his own behalf to have and be something.

As mentioned previously, faith and hope in God means also self-denial, namely the denial of one's concerns about oneself, one's wish to rest in oneself and be self-sufficient. Concerns are after all only another expression for wishes and expectations. And therefore equally disobedience. The faith and the hope that is not self-denial, is nothing but paganism, it is not just to have faith and just to hope, just doing it without getting anything for it and without being able to use it for anything. To love God as one's God is simply nothing more than in faith and hope and obedience to become nothing before God, namely in one's demands and wishes and struggle for self-security. It is to become God's creature, which is just the opposite of making God the giver of life – in order that man may justly get something out of it, both well-being and happiness.

Now can this demand be understood? Yes, it is readily understood as a commandment. Anyone can understand its meaning – the meaning of a demand for obedience can obviously only be obedience. Thus it did not cause Jesus's listeners any difficulty: some heard his word as the word of God, while others said that he was possessed. And either such an ungrounded demand is God's demand or it is insanity. It is the demand's authority, its ungroundedness and unconditionality, that is the reason for both heeding it and denying it. The demand is as easy to understand as possible, if people are willing to understand it i.e. recognize it and thus understand themselves from it – that is, if faced with the demand, they will decide who they are to be instead of asking: would God have said it?

But by 'understandable' one can also mean something different, namely that it is understandable and reasonable to do what is required, that one can comprehend the demand's legitimacy, its meaning or appropriateness. One thus understands oneself not from the demand, but the demand from oneself and one's own life, one's desires and expectations or ideals – whether it makes sense for a man to comply with it, a sense that is understandable and acceptable for a human being grounded in human life and with that as its purpose. And having realized the legitimacy of the demand, man can then decide to comply with it – but not to obey it. Hence the interest in what man must do while Jesus only spoke about why, and thus about how man shall do what shall be done. And it also goes without saying [258] that there can be no self-denial in any sense, no hating even one's own life, but only its selfish form, because otherwise one has nothing
left, no purpose or intention, that can make the demand legitimate. No, to love God with all one’s heart, soul and mind and therefore to sacrifice all one’s desires and expectations, one’s own life – there is really no meaning in this if it is not obedience to God, to sacrifice one’s own will in order to stand at God’s disposal. You can hardly say to God: Now I will think about it, and if it matches with my life’s flourishing and happiness, then I shall do as you say. Yes, by the way, one speaks in this way to ‘the God of one’s life’, whose purpose is that life shall flourish, and who therefore is in harmony with the natural human will to life in its goodness created by God.

Is there any meaning in fear, love and trust in God? No, there really is not, it serves no rational purpose, if it is not reinterpreted such that we can engage God in our life’s service – unless the meaning just consists in doing that. This will obviously lead nowhere – not to anything other than fear, love and trust in God. And he who does it gives up all his desires and expectations, his entire life – is there any meaning in it? It would then just be in bondage to God to become free of oneself and one’s life. Just being silent with all one’s whys and wheretos in order to listen to God, what purpose should this serve – except the one of listening to God. In the life of the moment to obey God, to put all his sorrow in God, in order to say ‘today’ and today exist for God, comes to nothing other than just being for God as a human being in the life of the moment. Far be it from me to want to prove that there is any meaning in that, but on the contrary I know that faced with this demand, i.e. faced with Jesus’s God, there are only two options: denial or worship, rebellion or hallelujah, and I know that in worship the human understands himself as human before God, while in denial he remains a horrifying riddle to himself. In obedience man understands God as his master and creator and himself as God’s creature, but in disobedience man dreams about with God’s help making himself master of life and thereby gaining security for his own life. An ‘uncomprehending’ obedience i.e. an obedience in which man does not understand himself as claimed, is only the slave’s obedience which is basically disobedience, but an obedience that has another why or whereto than the divine ‘you shall’, is really not obedience either, but the expression of man’s self-assertion – in expectations and concerns. For that is how it is: to have a life that shall flourish and to be concerned about it belong together. [259] Only by becoming nothing before God does man get a merciful God, only by becoming nothing before God in worship and praise can man be himself for God. And – which is the same thing – only then can man be himself as a man, be God’s creature and child, free of himself and his life by having his good, his life from God. Even if you give the pagan belief in life and happiness a Christian form and talk about life as God’s continuing gift, but thus think of life ‘lengthwise’, life with expectations and purposes to fulfill, you do not succeed in conjuring up the angst of life that is the core of faith in life and happiness, something even the ancient Greeks knew about. This angst does not really let itself be conjured up by religious formulas; only in the unconditional obedience to God, when man himself gives up his life to exist for God in worship and obedience and therefore will not have conquered angst or removed it from the world as people in our time in deliberate naïveté believe they can, but remain standing in the angst – only then can man rely on God in the midst of all his uncertainty; only then is there meaning in the meaningless life, namely the meaning of living it under God’s command; only then is man, though he has no prospect but death, not in the power of death, because by living in the moment he exists for God. Only in unconditional faith, in purposeless obedience, only in denial of his own will in
order to receive his life's content from God, can man be man, can his life be a real life. In
self-worship and the worship of life man flees from his own life as man. Only when man
exists for God as his creator and lord can he be present for himself in the life of the
moment. To love God with his whole heart, soul or mind is the road to life, and is life, is
the condition of salvation and salvation itself. Then there is nothing more to ask, as in
worship and obedience all questions are silenced and collapse into nothing. Just as God is
blessed by being present to himself in saying 'today' and not having his purpose outside
himself, so he has also given it to man to be present for himself for God by existing today
and having no other purpose than to be that which is given to him to be by God. Only
when man does not have to achieve anything, gain anything or own anything, only when
man has a merciful God and thus has everything that belongs to life and salvation, only
then can he give himself to life, respond to the demands of the moment with himself, and
this is precisely to love one's neighbour in one's own place. But you cannot have a
merciful God alongside something else, but only when you give everything up to content
yourself with God's grace. Jesus's demand is really a demand that man shall give up
everything he has [260], what he has and wills and is, to not have anyone other than God
as his lord and father and himself as his child – to love God and to hate even his own life,
otherwise it is that which is one's own that one loves in God, but one really hates one's
own life only by loving God in trust and obedience. God is man's truth and reality, his only
good – and man is good when he, free from himself, has himself from God.

If one knows no other problems than the contrast between the natural zest for life in its
created goodness and then the selfish form that we give it, thus a contradiction within the
human, then Jesus's demand must of course seem arbitrary, and then it must prove its
legitimacy and thus get assigned a role in human life, something whose why and where to
can be found in human life. So long as human will for life has not become problematic, it
indeed makes no sense to demand of man that he must deny himself. But Jesus did not
take aim at all at the innocent, harmless and fairly moderate natural zest for life, but only
at human self-assertion, by which man will put himself in God's place and be his own God,
will ensure his own life and therefore live for his well-being and happiness – who will not
settle for recognizing he is created, but will take possession of his own existence through
his cognition. Man must either become God or become nothing for God, that is how things
are. It was God that Jesus proclaimed, and man as his creation. To love God is the same as
to love oneself as God's creation, to love being God's creation, and this is of course again
the same as being it. The contrast is between living through God's justice and living
through one's own legitimacy, living through grace, or instead living through and for
one's happiness.

The Christian problem: how does man acquire a merciful God, how is he justified, so that
his life becomes true and real, an 'eternal life', one can not at all catch sight of from
human faith in man; from a human point of view man holds good essentially – cf. his
created goodness – so the question is only man arrives at his essence; even though one
might assert that it can only happen by means of a revelation, this makes no essential
difference: man has his justice from himself and not from God – in other words: in that
case God is not the one who makes that which is something into nothing in order to
create his child for himself from nothing, not the one who justifies the ungodly, but the
one who justifies or confirms the natural will to live.
A synthesis of the human and the Christian makes Christianity [261] into a kind of salvation humanism. But Christianity holds that just as the sacrificed natural love, and the sacrificed life craving continue to exist, the entire natural life continues to exist, both in naturally given and cultural relationships. When man is justified, he lives in the temporal – it is simply life in the temporal that is made into real life. When man does not have to take care of himself, then he has just to take care of things in this world; when he does not have to worry about life going well, he has to engage in living; when he does not have to achieve anything by that which he does, it is all good and pleasing to God, up to and including sleeping and eating. Yes, you could say that when life is to be for God in the moment, and thus does not have its purpose outside itself, then man just has to take care of the reasonable temporal purposes and not of others at all. It is with this just as with reason: when it does not want to storm heaven and comprehend God – and thus free itself from God – but restricts itself to understanding the created world, then it is a good gift that man should be thankful for. But, as things are, one must be free of oneself in order to be able to be oneself, just as one must be free of one’s life and death in order to be able to live one’s life and die one’s death.

II

It is the first and greatest commandment: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind. It is: living by the grace of God and therefore in unconditional obedience to God. It is having a merciful God by God’s grace and therefore not living for one’s own life, not wanting to be something or have something, living out of God and therefore engaging in blind faith in God, living because and therefore not in order to, living out of life and therefore not in order to secure life’s conditions. To live by the grace of God is the same as becoming nothing for God; becoming oneself as a human being, being satisfied with being human, is the same as being satisfied with God’s grace. This can never be understood by humanism which just wants God’s recognition of the human as something for God, but despairs about God calling one who is nothing to exist for him.

And the second [commandment] is identical with this: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. When the proclamation of Jesus is made understandable in human terms, and you put the meaning into it that it must have if it is to be understandable in human terms, then, as mentioned before, the second commandment becomes the demand’s content, whilst the first becomes the one-sided, radical and unfulfillable aspect of the demand – or differently expressed: the demand that is derived from an empirical fact [262] perceived in a religious way. Incidentally, for Kierkegaard by contrast the double commandment is one expression of the absolute demand and is set opposite life in the universal, the ethical, if you will. Neither does the second commandment have anything to do with human ethics.

Human ethics deals with the duties and rights, which emerge from the fact that human life is living together with and in relation to one another. And when one regards man and his life as something that is realized and valid in the human sphere, then, obviously, there is nothing to be added but the religious corroboration that renders the demand infinite.
The human interpretation of Jesus’s proclamation is thus, as [I have] said, quite right when it shall be made understandable in a human way. But then one has simply given up hearing what Jesus says.

Of course the point is not that man shall do two things: partly love God with all his heart, soul and mind, and partly love the neighbour as himself. The first commandment is not merely an expression of the second’s radicalness and onesidedness – any more than one can say that the second is the first one’s content. Man only has to do one thing: love God with all his heart, soul and mind; should he also do something else, one could then not say that it was with his whole heart, his whole self. But man shall express his love for God, his obedience to God, in loving his neighbour at God’s command. The person who loves God will also love his neighbour. As love for God is obedience, love for the neighbour is decision, action – works of love. To love God is to answer God’s question with one’s whole self, and this answer is through being for his neighbour and in relation to him giving oneself to God – by giving oneself to one’s neighbour, in obedience to God. Love for the neighbour is obedience, but the obedience is really also love for the neighbour, so the neighbour does not exist in order that man can use him to demonstrate his obedience.

Everything that was previously said about the first commandment can then be transferred to the second:

Love for the neighbour is neither a biological nor a psychological concept, man is not perceived in natural terms but as a person or as a will. To love his neighbour as himself is to love him in such a way as men indeed love themselves: ‘without further ado’, without demanding anything for it or without having a purpose for it, therefore it is the same as loving his neighbour in his own place i.e. in denial of his own will, his own wishes and desires, his own purposes, pay and results. Here we are [263] obviously not thinking about man’s natural expectations – man is not merely a natural being – but human self-assertion, that asserts itself through his nature, which is why the requirement to love the neighbour is a requirement to sacrifice one’s demands and desires, so the requirement to love one’s neighbour in fact does not contradict the requirement to hate one’s father and mother, wife and children, and indeed even one’s own life.

The emphasis here is not on what God says, but on the God that says it. Jesus has not delivered any sort of ethics – or fragments of an ethics that you can use later to make an ethics out of – but placed the individual in a decision situation regarding God’s demand on them. There is no more meaning in loving the neighbour than there is in loving God. There is only the divine why and whereto, no ‘finite purpose’, that is warranted by being made infinite and given a moral guise, no in addition, no both-and – all those things man must sacrifice in denial of his own will. The demand is comprehensible as a demand is comprehensible, namely in the decision in which one is faced with it, when one understands oneself from the demand and not the demand from oneself.

Why shall one love one’s neighbour? Because one shall. What purpose does loving one’s neighbour serve? Just doing it – for the neighbour’s sake, not to earn anything from it or gain by it. The works of love are ‘purposeless’, ‘intentionless’. The unconditional excludes purpose. By loving one’s neighbor, by existing for one’s neighbour, one’s own will is
denied, and human expectations and desires are sacrificed. Love of the neighbour is nothing but love of the neighbour. It makes good sense to help the neighbour, it is easily understandable from the nature of man, and also because man grows up and lives in community with others; but in being merciful there is no meaning, only mercy’s meaning – otherwise it was not mercy. The difference between natural love, preferential love – or whatever one wants to call it – and love of the neighbour is just that natural love has good reasons, a meaning to it, which is understandable by way of human self-preservation, but love of the neighbour is only obedience to the demand. Therefore the enemy is also a neighbour – while he is one’s enemy. In order to be loved he must not turn into a part of one’s own life or sphere of interest. To love him really has no meaning from the ego’s point of view, but only when man is required, not for some sensible and comprehensible purpose, but required for his neighbour, not for anything in him [the neighbour], but for [the neighbour] himself, not for his [the neighbour’s] opportunities, his life or his happiness – and this is also the case when one takes up [264] the neighbour’s life as a living part of one’s own life. In that case one obviously merely loves one’s own self in one’s neighbour, and we are not so stupid that we cannot understand that we get the most out of life by living for others and that we achieve the greatest happiness by making others happy. It is significant that, in general, in our times the view is that to love one’s neighbour is also not to begrudge others something and help one another get something out of life. It is obviously also the case that when you transfer your wishes and expectations onto your neighbour’s life, then you fall into the arms of concern that cannot be destroyed by life’s explanations, as these precisely are due to concern. As life becomes a means for man to achieve well-being and happiness, then also the neighbour and his life become something to be acted on, something that must flourish – in reality as the material from which we make a true man. Now admittedly I do not know the good [merciful] Samaritan that Jesus talked about, but this much is certain: had he been busy getting the attacked man’s life to flourish and thus had a thought other than mercy, then he would not have been merciful. It would really not be out of the way if, especially in our very religious and pious times, one viewed with a little bit of scepticism our desire to be something for others instead of giving it a religious corroboration; maybe one would then discover that hiding at the bottom of our abundant charity and beneficence there is a good deal of domineering and an urge to propagate our own lives as much as possible.

Love of the neighbour must be measured by God, who is love – but of course you can also imagine the love of God on the basis of ‘natural, human love’, then the love of God must have a purpose with man – have a purpose altogether and thus not just be love. In this way it becomes understandable that God is love, then it’s really a love that makes sense, as God then has a personal interest in it, he gets something out of it, maybe even as a living part of his own life! Such a sinister God who uses people as a means for his own enterprise, is the result of creating God in human form and understanding his love from the perspective of ‘natural’ human love. But as God is blessed by being present for himself, as God does nothing but be God, as God has no purpose outside himself, so he also wills that humans as his children shall be present for themselves for him in saying ‘today’ and not living for any purpose other than the one given with being for God, and therefore through his word existing for their neighbour so they do not have any purpose with him and shall [265] not get anything out of it – other than existing in this way. Existing in this way is salvation, but man is denied if he has to exist for something, well-
being or happiness, and life is denied, if it is made a means for something. The dream about the future is an escape from life and no less so when it is worldly, than when it is the hereafter. Love and mercy are not means to the achievement of results, but are life itself, which is always now, always in the moment. If man does not live there, he becomes prey to worry; therefore he must cast his ‘anxiety’ on God for only ‘worrying’ about living. This can also be said in this way: that to live is to love God with all one’s heart, soul and mind, to live by God’s grace, to ‘exist for God’ and to exist as one’s neighbour as a person belonging to God, free from oneself and from one’s life for living and hearing God’s voice through one’s neighbour. And as one must not worry about one’s own life, then one shall of course not help the neighbour to worry about his either. It is really not love of the neighbour to transfer one’s self-pity and claim for satisfaction and security onto him, but by unconditional obedience to God’s love to help the neighbour love itself i.e. God – obviously not by testifying to one’s own goodness, but to the goodness that obliges one person to the other. Love of the neighbour involves the possibility of offense, because it is nothing but love, because it does not demand to get something out of it and thus does not participate in the common interest. As was said previously, to love God is to exist as God’s creature, which, again, is the same as wanting to be God’s creature.

Humanly speaking Jesus’s talk of loving God is wholly incomprehensible, for humanly one understands everything from one’s own life and one’s claim for flourishing and happiness. And humanly speaking Jesus’s talk of loving one’s neighbour as oneself is wholly incomprehensible, precisely because one sees love of the neighbour as an expanded form of love for one’s own life, its well-being and happiness. Humanly speaking it is not man, but his life and happiness that is at stake. Pietistically one is concerned with taking care of one’s religious life, in the modern world with the ‘development of one’s natural life’; pietistically one is concerned about the soul’s ‘salvation’, in the modern world with making human life healthy and normal – there is no great difference between pietistic conversion treatment and the modern treatment of man; in both instances it is a matter of gaining life in order to justify oneself and tie God to one’s given life.

The human view of love of the neighbour in our times is philanthropy. ‘For the neighbour’s sake’ means in reality that it is a matter of a [266] benefit performance. And there is really an understandable and reasonable meaning to this – when one wants one’s own life to succeed, one must also want the other’s life to succeed! No, it really not self-denial in any sense, on the contrary it is the life of man for himself in every way and therefore with a claim to God’s agreement.

Luther’s question: how do I acquire a merciful God?, which corresponds to Kierkegaard’s question: how does man come into being for God?, is answered with reference to nature: man is justified by nature in its created goodness – of course given again to man after the fall – or to put it in a more civic way: in one’s calling and station whereby Christianity comes to serve as a confirmation and rehabilitation of nature or of civil life. In this case it is not man himself, his proper life will, that there is something wrong with, but only the selfish shape we have given it, which is why man does not need to become nothing for God, and God does not need to re-create his child out of nothing; there is something to start with, God and man are in fact in good agreement with each other.
As mentioned previously, in the New Testament man is not perceived as nature, his will not as a natural will. Therefore there is no question of nature at all, neither of its display nor its denial, but of man himself, whether in rebellion asserting himself against God or in self-denial becoming nothing to him. Natural love is neither good nor evil; of course it is good like everything God has created, but because man is not nature, but ‘spirit’, man is not good ‘by nature’, but in obedience to God. If man is disobedient he is evil in everything he does; if he is obedient he is good in everything that he does. It is the disobedience that makes the difference: selfishness, i.e. the assertion of one’s own claims and desires. It is the sacrifice of this one’s own will that is demanded – when sacrificed that which is natural is good, when asserted, it is evil. Justified by faith, when man exists for God, he lives in the natural purposes, in the naturally given and socially given relationships; there are no special Christian deeds: the neighbour shall be served as the real man he is, and of course with everything he needs for his body and soul. Life in this world is to be lived in a perfectly human and worldly way, also with forethought and care. Free from all concerns, free from his life and his death, man must plunge into living. He shall indeed not live to gain his life and happiness, but to live out of life and by the grace of God and therefore for the demands of the moment. Jesus’s word stating that one should not concern oneself about food and drink and clothes is neither spoken [267] to the birds nor to the lilies, but to people who need to gather the harvest in the barn and thus think of tomorrow – to be sure – and this is crucial – having first cast all their concerns onto God.

There is a close connection between the interpretation of Jesus’s proclamation from the human point of view, which makes man the purpose of his own life and tries to conjure up angst of life by means of the blessing of the gods or God, and the attempt to give a Christian explanation of life. As we want life to thrive and succeed for us, so we also through cognition want to make ourselves life’s lord and know its ground. As in all our will to life there is concealed a desire to secure and own our own lives, so there is in all our cognition a metaphysical drive. We will not settle for simply giving food to the hungry, but when it shall be food, then it shall certainly also solve his life’s problems and get it to flourish – that is why so-called materialism is in reality a religious day dream. We do not want just to know creation and its usefulness to humans, but we also want to derive ‘confirmation’ (to use the Kierkegaardian expression), our life’s goal and meaning, from the given life, whereby the so-called realism in fact becomes metaphysical speculation. And it only makes matters worse when it appears in the guise of Christian theology.

In opposition to all talk of natural life and the Christian interpretation of life Luther’s statement holds good: It is the highest article of faith when we say: I believe in God, the Father, the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. All who rightly and sincerely believe this are already helped, their life has been restored, and they are in the place from which Adam fell. But they are only a few who have come so far that they entirely believe that God is the one who creates and works all things. For to believe that man must have died away from all things (‘allen Dingen gestorben sein’), the good as well as evil, death and life, hell and heaven, and in his heart confess that he is not capable of doing anything by his own power. (Cited from Rudolf Bultmann, *Glauben und Verstehen*, II, p. 8). This is truly justification by faith – and therefore self-denial ‘in every sense’ – which is there just to be received in the confession of sins and insisting on the grace of God to defy death and the
devil. Compared to this the human confirmation of life and explanation of life are, to put it mildly, much too ‘cosy’: it has replaced faith in God with faith in man’s own life, his right and power, his future and his explanation of and through himself; it is a gospel that does not disrupt anyone in his peace of mind or self-righteousness, an unruffled faith which does not know the gospel’s offence and therefore neither its salvation.

Translated by Kees van Kooten Niekerk and Robert Stern

Translators’ notes

\(^1\) i.e. K. E. Løgstrup’s *Den Etiske Fordring* (1956); *The Ethical Demand.*


\(^{v}\) This alludes to Luther’s basic question ‘Wie kriege ich einen gnädigen Gott’: Olesen Larsen makes this explicit below.

\(^{vi}\) Cf. Matthew 6:25.

\(^{vii}\) Cf. 1 Peter 5:7.

\(^{viii}\) Cf. Matthew 6:27.