

THEOLOGICAL ETHICS AND ETHICAL THEOLOGY

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Immanuel Kant, at the conclusion of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, states that for pure reason "theological ethics" is "impossible," just as it makes no sense to speak of "theological physics." Kant requires, instead, an "ethical theology" for which "religion is the perception of our duties as divine commandments"—a statement which Kant went on to expound in his book *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*.

Kant's statement could well stand as the motto of this my treatment of Kant's theme. My procedure will be as follows. In the *first part*, I shall present the essence of theological ethics and the ethical problematic of its establishment in salvation history. In the *second part*, on the basis of an ethical reflection and in confrontation with the theology of salvation history, I shall outline the essential moments of an ethical theology, which I think is required today.

I.

The Problematic of Establishing Theological Ethics in Salvation History

There are very different forms of *theological ethics*. In all the differences, however, all forms have something basically in common. They all relate themselves to the divine salvation history revealed in Holy Scripture. For theological ethics, the Bible is not merely a document of religious history, but a witness to God's revelation—a witness which awakens faith and which is understood in faith. Both the witness to revelation and its acceptance in faith belong to this salvation history, which stretches from the creation to the fall of Adam, the old covenant, the Christological work of salvation and the new covenant, and, finally, to the completion of the history in a new creation. We shall now present, in the given order, the ethically essential aspects of this salvation history as it is witnessed to in the Bible and systematized in traditional Christian doctrine.

We have, first, to refer to the *revelation-character* of the basis of knowledge of theological ethics. For the answer to the question about what one should do, the individual is not referred merely to oneself, one's environment and the history of that environment. One can, to be sure, find answers to one's question in these, but the answers found in them are unsure and contradict one another. On this basis, the meaning of the world and of one's existence in it will remain unknown. Faith perceives the answer, therefore, in the

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witness of Scripture to the revelation of God, which has occurred and which ever again occurs through the witness of Scripture. Faith perceives what God's plan for God's creation is, what God has done for creation's salvation and what God will yet do. To that belongs also God's declaration of God's will in the commandments. On the basis of these commandments, a person can know what is good and evil and what one, accordingly, should and should not do.

In this connection, the idea of the *creation* becomes ethically significant. God is not simply the mysterious original ground of being. The world is the creation of God's spirit and will. God created humans in God's own image, equipped with spirit and will, and made the human co-worker and partner in covenant. God entrusted humans with the cultivation of the earth. God allows the doings of this partner in covenant to occur in freedom, but humans have to hold to God's commandments. Not only that. Humans must respect the order which God has given creation. If they do not, they fall to the punishment of the judgment God has already spoken against evil.

That brings us to the *Fall of Adam* and the curse of sin and guilt. The Bible sees human history—not entirely, but in wide sections—under this curse. The Bible does not depict a perfect world, but the world of paradise lost. In Christian theology, in spite of the emphasis on divine providence, we find a further development of the doctrine of original sin. In connection with this doctrine and with the doctrine of salvation, the doctrine of predestination has been further developed. This whole complex of doctrines presents the greatest difficulties for theological ethics, but theological ethics can also here find its greatest ethical depth. For here one actually has to do with the deepest, most abysmal problem of ethics—a problem all too often covered over in other kinds of ethics. But we must also say that theological ethics itself can be guilty of the same mistake.

Before we go into this problem, however, we move on to the other points to be considered. We refer to the *doctrine of reconciliation* in its establishment in salvation history and to its positive significance for ethics. We mention, first, the fact that this doctrine takes the guilt of humanity seriously, and, indeed, not only as in the doctrine of original sin, as human destiny, but also in view of the possibility of liberation from personal guilt. Second, we have to say positively that this redemption is seen as being everything but self-evident, for it does not have to do with a grace standing at our disposal. Positive is also the fact that, in the realization of reconciliation, the moment of atonement is given great significance. It is all positive in that one tries to keep grace from being either cheap or magical, and to keep it from being limited to the sphere of individual inwardness. Rather, one tries to let it be openly effective in society.

This existence-changing effect of salvation history's idea of redemption is especially important in the significance the *church* has in the structure of salvation history. The church is understood not only as mediator of salvation, but also as the area where the salvation it mediates becomes effective as world-changing in a struggle which will end with the victory of the church's Lord

over the powers of the world. As fantastic and different as the depictions of the *end of the world* in the Bible are, they are, nevertheless, the expression of a faith which does not compromise with sin and guilt in human existence, but which fights against these powers, which remains undaunted in set-backs and which is ready to make sacrifices as it ever again throws itself into the struggle to reach its goal. With all its talk of a life beyond and of other-worldliness, the church's doctrine of the last things also brings such an ethical attitude to expression.

Paul writes in the 13th Chapter of the First Letter to the Corinthians, "Now remain faith, hope and love. Among these, love is the greatest." We have, therefore, also to emphasize the *love* in the essence of God and in God's commandments. This is the last in our series of the ethical motifs in salvation history. If it is initially weak and in many places darkened and displaced, it nevertheless moves, finally, victoriously through the whole history of God with creation and shows itself—at this history's high points—to be the completion of this history.

We can speak of the love of God and of fellow humans as the most sublime ethical motif in the history of salvation, but we must also include its occasional absence, darkening and displacement. This fact allows us to focus more sharply on the other parts of the establishment of theological ethics in salvation history—those parts we emphasized prior to love as being ethically significant. However, here we must say that just in those parts the problematic of this establishment also becomes evident. For there the establishment of theological ethics shows itself to be highly questionable, and, indeed, in the entire scope of these parts.

The *belief in revelation* itself, presupposed by the whole of salvation history, can have a questionable result for ethics. That is true both for the believer's attitude toward self as well as for the attitude toward one's fellow humans. The faith of salvation history is bound together with definite mental images—images in which people in a specific situation expressed the feeling that perception could go no further, or images in which people in a specific situation expressed the feeling that they won insight into the possibility of overcoming difficulties through the way they actively or passively behaved toward those difficulties. Here the determination of a limit of perception is questionable because one does not simply speak of a limit of perception in a specific case, but of a limit of perception itself in general. Such limits are, however, severely transgressed when what is supposed to lie beyond these limits is characterized and defined with thoughts about what it is that limits perception. That happens in statements about God which faith makes. That which limits, which has shown itself to be something empty for perception, is brought into connection with possibilities of meaningful behavior, whereby these possibilities are drawn from one's own specific personal experiences. Here the danger exists that faith, in order to insure its own *experience of meaning*, so paints its ideas of God—ideas which from the beginning represent a

transgression of the limits of possible experience—that these ideas seem to guarantee the experience of meaning which faith has had. The guarantee seems, then, to be once and for all and to encompass all being and events generally. A faith that tries so to insure its own experience of meaning will pay for it with inner insecurity. And, in order not to have to admit this insecurity and in order to conceal it from others, one will bear oneself with all the greater self-surety before oneself, one's environment and, finally, even before one's God. The history of piety shows enough examples of such perversion. The superstitious person, of whatever kind, necessarily becomes a fanatic. In matters of faith, such persons can tolerate no views other than their own because, if they were to be tolerant, they would become unsure. Fanaticism, however, is always a sign of *superstition*.

These basic difficulties and dangers of perception stand over the whole faith of salvation history and threaten, therefore, the whole of the theological ethics based on this faith. We may see that in the problematic of this ethics' use of the Biblical *idea of creation*. With this idea, to be sure, theological ethics can refer to the respect we owe to all creatures. But, to cite only one example, we also know how fatal the creation story's command of God can be. God says, "Subject the earth!" One need only mention how this command was effective in the imperialism and colonialism of Christian peoples and how it is today effective in the threat to the environment by Christian people's technical capacities. Certainly, theological ethics here objects that such wrong-doing is a misunderstanding of the *dominium terrae*, for the creator also gave commandments forbidding such inhumanity. However, in the creation story itself, there is no talk of commandments limiting the rule of the world or the use of nature. Furthermore, neither the divine commandments which emerge in the further course of salvation history, nor the orders of creation put into creation by the creator, nor the natural right derived from those orders are as humane and friendly to the environment as one would like. Moreover, the commands and orders require human interpretation for their application, and therewith they unavoidably lose the divinity attributed to them. For theological ethics, they belong anyway to the world corrupted by sin. The old law is deposed by Christ and replaced with a new law. The relation of this new law to natural right and the following of the Sermon on the Mount within the existing world, however, present even greater problems. In this connection, the idea of the continuous creative activity of God also becomes problematic. For here is presented not only the—also ethically—significant question about theodicy—the justice of the divine government of the world—but also especially the question about the relation of divine omnipotence and human freedom of will, behind which stands the question of predestination. It is no wonder that it is practically impossible to bring all the different covenants of God into an orderly series. How could God at different times make such different requirements? How can God punish humans for doing what God had earlier commanded?

May God punish humanity at all—in history and, at the end of history, in

the last judgment—after God had allowed, if not ordered, the *Fall of Adam* and allowed or made possible the consequences of the Fall? But the Fall of Adam touches not only the justice of God. This doctrine—in its development into the doctrine of original sin—also especially places in question human ability to judge what is and is not just, not to speak of the possibility of being able to strive for justice. And, therefore, it also places human guilt in question. As profound as this doctrine is, it has the effect—especially in its form in Reformation doctrine—of laming ethics.

We have to say the same thing about the complement of this doctrine, the *doctrine of reconciliation or of redemption*. To be sure, in this doctrine the significance *grace* has corresponds to the weight *sin* has. But, just as sin is a foreign thing poisoning life, so also grace is a foreign thing which is supposed to heal life, only that the healing is more difficult to imagine and to effect. If already in the doctrine of sin one can not really speak of guilt when the matter is regarded legally, so in the doctrine of redemption guilt is only imaginatively extinguished by a foreign sacrifice which may be transposed and made effective only by sacramental magic or fictive legalism. The mutually exclusive doctrinal systems of the different confessions themselves judge one another for manipulating an awareness of guilt that may not be manipulated.

Today, theological ethics vainly tries to escape this problematic of its doctrine of redemption on the one hand, by borrowing from secular psychology and, on the other, turning to the long neglected sphere of society and politics. In psychologizing the old *order of salvation*, theological ethics runs the danger of abandoning its foundation. In speaking of the “politics of God,” the foundation shows itself to be crumbling. The psychological structure of secular humanity is different from that of Biblical humanity. The secular idea of world and history is different from that in which the plan of divine salvation history was conceived. Especially in the form it was actualized in the New Testament as the expectation of the near end of the world, this plan has shown itself to be antiquated simply by virtue of the continued existence of the world. Whoever today, standing on the platform of our world, still believes in that long since cancelled schedule and still waits on the arrival of the “Advent Express” is deceived about the state of things, and will hardly be able to say anything clarifying about the order of things. Rather, such a one urgently needs enlightenment.

The problematic of theological ethics’ reference to its basis in the revelation of salvation history cannot be made more radically clear than it has been made with the ascertainment that salvation history’s plan, which was long ago expected to be culminated in the end of the world, is completely antiquated. This ascertainment uncovers that problematic at its very root. Basically, theological ethics is aware of this problematic and wrestles with it, just as, since its beginnings, the theology of revelation has ever again attempted new solutions. As a theological structure, the theology of revelation, as all Christian theology, owes its origin and its history to one fact: *the non-occurrence of*

the parousia. The disaster of theological ethics and its promise lies in that non-occurrence. It is the fate of theological ethics that it sees itself caused, by the unexpected course of history, to try to make valid the salvation in its salvation history by ever new theological formations in history. Beyond that, and as seen in our survey of its problems, theological ethics, to its detriment, develops in many parts into theological dogmatics. Even today the advocates of theological ethics think they can solve their problems with theological dogmatics. Their theology is the disaster of theological ethics. However, the promise of this theology lies in the fact that theology is done for the sake of ethics. But the promising aspect of this undertaking does not lie in its theological character, which is questionable throughout. Rather, the promising aspect consists in the fact that it is a reflection on ethics. Such a reflection on the essence of the ethical is the task given theology by the non-occurrence of the parousia. If theology truly sees that this is the case, the promising possibility opens before us of attaining an ethical theology in which also the ethical significance of theological ethics' basis in salvation history can find its proper validity. This brings us to the *second part* of my presentation, which has to do with the attainment of an ethical theology. I begin by setting forth the essential moments of ethical reflection.

II. The Essential Moments of Ethical Theology

The role played by revelation and faith in theology is in ethics that of awareness of responsible personal being. Just as the whole of salvation history, to which theological ethics refers, presupposes revelation and faith, so ethical reflection in all its essential moments presupposes an awareness of responsibility or of being determined for responsibility.

Awareness of personal responsibility is so comprehensive that it encompasses every reflection of whatever kind, whether theological or specifically ethical. In every case *we* are the ones who do the reflecting—whatever the area intended is, whatever the circumstances and conditions of the reflection are. What reflects is not something outside us, not something other than we, but exactly we ourselves. We are the *subject* of our reflection on any given thing. As this subject, we distinguish ourselves from every object on which we might reflect. In this sense, we also distinguish ourselves from ourselves, insofar as we can make ourselves the object of our reflection. We are always something other than the self which can be the object of our reflection on ourselves. The object "myself" is and is not "myself." We are the subject that makes the self into an object. But this, our being as subject, is never identical with any of our ways of objectively thinking it. In all its objectifications, our being as subject always shows itself to be *what cannot be objectified*. To be sure, we would not know about ourselves at all if we did not make the self into an object. But, at the same time, the self escapes every attempt to grasp it. In all comprehension,

exactly in it, the self remains ungraspable. With relation to this ungraspable self, therefore, we speak of an awareness of the self in its being as subject and distinguish it from our consciousness of the self as an object. Consciousness of self is psychologically graspable and can be analyzed. The awareness of self in the *act of* self-understanding withdraws itself from every psychological or other scientific or even intuitive comprehension. In distinction from the latter, self-understanding acts in rational conceptuality, but in such a way that it is, with relation to the self, aware of the limits of rational conceptuality. And these limits cannot be dissolved. The self occurs actually as the appearance of the unconditional in the midst of all its objectively demonstrable conditionedness. In this unconditional aspect of the self, the essence of responsibility stands as *unconditional responsibility in distinction from all relative responsibilities*. This distinction is of the greatest significance for ethics, for it is the question about what should be.

The self has not only to do with itself, but also and just as much with the environment in which it always already finds itself in its reflection on itself and on the question about how it is to behave actively and passively in the environment. This environment stretches infinitely from the objectifications of our self to everything that can be an object of our consciousness and, therefore, of our experience and our knowledge. The objects of our conscious world are related to one another in researchable orders. In and according to these orders, these objects present themselves to us in meaningful courses of events. However, we are able neither to grasp the whole of beings nor to perceive a univocal meaning of the different appearances of the whole of beings. On the one hand, the horizons of our knowledge can be widened. On the other hand, we always remain within these horizons. Our perception is never complete and absolute, but always remains incomplete and relative. There is no answer to the ultimate questions about the why and for-what of being. The *ground of being* remains for us a *mystery* and its *meaning* an *enigma*.

This openness and relativity of our perception is also true when we ask how we should behave within this mysterious and enigmatic area of being, of which we ourselves are a part, and when we ask what responsibility we carry for our individual behavior within it. Here there are, in distinction from others, demonstrably more correct insights and better ways of behavior, which can themselves be judged differently according to intentions pursued and the measures applied. What is useful or damaging or what is good or evil remains *relative* within these perceptible connections and *conditioned* through the outer and inner circumstances from case to case. Correspondingly, the responsibility for the choice we make for our behavior among the possibilities at hand, and for the effects resulting from that choice, are also, objectively seen, only conditional and relative.

Our responsibility is in only one point and relation *absolute* and *unconditional*: in that self of which we are aware only as a magnitude which cannot be further objectified. That does not mean that we here disregard given outer and

inner circumstances as we make judgments about this responsibility. On the contrary, only with the best possible ascertainment of the relative responsibility we carry in the connections of relations in which we find ourselves—only with this ascertainment do we become aware of the unconditional character of our responsibility as that of a self in the authentic sense.

The demonstrably relative responsibilities belong to what is given in our existence in the world. Behind them stands for us, finally, the *silent mystery of being with its enigma of meaning*. In our awareness of our determination to being self, this silent mystery reveals itself to us as the *voice which calls us to responsibility*, and in a special way in the midst of the constant enigma of the whole of its meaning.

Not only the fact that this voice can be silent belongs to this enigma of meaning, but also the fact that we can refuse to listen to it, that we can refuse our determination to being self, that we can content ourselves with the relative responsibilities and that we can try to excuse this our failure by appealing to the conditions of the relative responsibilities. But, just in connection with the possibility of such *guilty* failure, the enigma of meaning shows itself in our existence in another way. What I mean here is something that does not stand at our disposal and is not a matter for our choice about how to understand ourselves. Rather, it goes before our choice irresistably and encompasses it, so that when we speak of it we cannot easily speak of our guilt. This yet more original appearance of the enigma of meaning in connection with our determination to being self consists in the fact that we cannot speak of the self and its determination without *objectifying* them in images and concepts, even though we become aware of both in their non-objective character. In fact, only in the images and concepts of thought can we become aware of the self and the special revelation of the mystery of being resulting from the awareness of self. Even when we speak about the limits of thought in this matter, this acknowledgement of limits is possible only in objective thought. Already in comprehending the limits of thoughts we transgress on something which is incomprehensible in its essence. This is true more than ever when we make what lies beyond the limits of thought into an object of thought.

Here we have clearly to do with the *mystery of what should not be* and, indeed, not simply from the point of view of perception theory, but also in view of the metaphysical depth of this mystery. But this mystery also has significance for our action, for what we do. Transgression of set limits and objectification, for purposes of being able to dispose over it, of what is not an object, shows itself exactly in *practice* to be the *original image of evil*. At the same time, this transgression and objectification shows that the guilt of violating what should not be is not merely to be sought in our striving to make disposable what does not stand at our disposal, but that this audacity of ours hangs together with a structure of being, and, indeed, in such a way that, if we wanted to fathom and measure out this abysmal depth, our wish would be, more than ever, *hybris*.

Our involvement with evil has the character of fate, and it is impossible for us to deny our guilt in the realization of evil. Just in this fate, however, do we catch sight of the *essence of the good that should be*, whose image we are. This essence of the good that should be exists in our assumption of our responsibility unconditionally in spite of all the unavoidable circumstances that condition our responsibility, and in the grasping of the possibilities of acting in accordance with the obligation assumed. Once we have become aware of this our determination, we can never deny it. If we should try to deny it, the determination would only show itself in the subject-being of the denial itself. As we, in the acknowledgement of our being obligated, experience freedom through the awareness of our determination, so we experience the loss of freedom when we deny being obligated.

Just as little as we may render harmless the abysmal depths of this matter can we overlook the possibilities which open to us in the depths of guilt, however it has risen. These possibilities open when we are ready to assume the guilt unconditionally, as alone corresponds to our being as self, instead of trying to push the guilt from us with superficial or profound reason. As we do this—first, at least, in the action of understanding ourselves to be unconditionally responsible—we cancel the guilty objectification we have performed on ourselves and our environment. Because the environment of the self belongs to our self-understanding, we cannot cut ourselves off from the environment. Rather, we have to regard it as the area of influence of the change which has taken place within us, and we have to try to compensate for the damage our behavior has done. In the degree to which we can do this, we have a measure for the reality of our own process of becoming self. As much as the realization of our self-understanding and its effectiveness in the environment is our matter, just as much will we see in both the mystery of a gift given us—the gift of the special effectiveness of the mystery of being. To the fate in evil corresponds a grace in the good.

Just as there is a history of the effectiveness of evil, so there is a history of the effectiveness of good. As we have emphasized in relation to both, they are not limited to the individual, but also belong to one's sphere of influence. Because irresponsible behavior endangers or, indeed, takes away the possibility of responsible self-being in others, the responsible person knows he or she is obligated to respect the self-being of the other and to assist, spiritually and materially, in the realization of the other's self-being. Only in community is responsibility possible, but responsibility also makes community possible. That is true even as we have to admit that new problems arise just by virtue of the necessary objectification of community.

To be sure, the ethics of responsibility we have sketched here is not a cure for all ethical problems. It also cannot guarantee its own success. But it is filled with *hope* for the success of the inner and outer ways of behavior that it perceives as good. Hope is proper to the degree in which it corresponds to the measure of the good and to the degree in which we engage ourselves for the

good critically, actively and with the willingness to suffer. Responsibility is in hope. Hope is in responsibility. Both are unconditional.

It should be clear that the above-presented essential moments of ethical reflection parallel the essential moments of Biblical-Christian salvation history. This parallelism is basically not surprising, for in both it is a matter of the same question, if with entirely different presuppositions. It is the question about the meaning of our existence in the world and the possibility of its realization. It may certainly seem that our ethical reflection, when compared with the dynamic of the theological ethics of salvation history, is an abstract philosophical structure of thought which has no right to be called theology. For, one may ask, in this ethical reflection, is not everything that is proclaimed as God's work and expected of God in the theology of salvation history here loaded upon and expected of humans? But, however many advantages it may offer, the assumption of salvation history is felt as a burden by persons who are not able to believe as salvation history believes. But it could also be the case that more theology is contained in our ethical reflection and that its content is more related to that of biblical salvation history than might appear at first sight.

If that were the case—and I think it is the case—the holy history could, in the light of our profane reflection on the essence of the ethical, receive real ethical significance for us. Our ethical reflection could also, in the holy tradition as ethically understood, win an historically powerful language, just as the proclamation of salvation history once possessed. In conclusion we wish, at least in an indicating way, to try to make this very promising possibility visible.

For this purpose we begin again with the *presuppositions of perception and their theological-metaphysical implications*. Not only the so-called perception of faith, but all perception presupposes revelation, that is, the making-itself-known of reality for our experience and perception. That something is rather than nothing—that does not result from us ourselves. Nor does it result from us that we can become aware of this mystery of being in our existence among beings. Just as "*creation out of nothing*" through a power transcending our thought is the adequate expression for this mystery of being, so "*revelation*" is the adequate expression for this making-itself-known to our astonished awareness of it. *Faith* is, first, nothing other than the astonished awareness, which silences us, of this mystery of being and of our being-in-relation to this mysterious power. *We* become aware of this mystery and of our relation to it, but we are not its origin. Rather, we owe to it our existence in the world. Therefore, we call this original power of being "*Creator*."

This personal designation of the creative mystery hangs together with the other side of revelation. This other side consists in the fact that we not only experience ourselves astonished by it, but we are also caused, in view of meaning and meaninglessness, to ask about the meaning of our existence in this enigmatic meaning of being. It is a *special revelation* of the creator in his creation that this question emerges in us at all and that we experience ourselves—in

all entanglement in the enigma of meaning of nature and history—as determined to a self-being which must ask about meaning and which knows itself responsible for its choice and for the consequences of its choice. “You are in every case responsible for your decisions and the consequences of your decisions.” This is the voice of God in us. It is God’s *commandment* that we know ourselves unconditionally responsible. Our image of God consists in our awareness of being called to such responsibility. For responsibility is, in the frame of our causal thought, like a creation from nothing. It presupposes a rationally ungraspable new beginning of unconditionalness in the midst of all demonstrable conditionedness. For its realization, the given orders of the different areas of being are to be taken into consideration and ordered together anew for the purpose of attaining goals of meaning, which goals are themselves to be set by humans. To be sure, all of this activity is always bound with new complications of meaning. For all these creative sides of human action, a better image is to be used than that of the world-architect and the idea of providence. The better image is the original *mystery of the struggle with the dragon*, which is found in different forms in the whole of biblical salvation history. From the doctrine of the continuing creation, we can use the thought of the *covenant* as the expression of the ethical obligation which cannot be destroyed by any of its transgressions. The remaining parts of this doctrine, on the other hand, are rather problematic in regard to ethics, unless they are understood in the sense of the on-going struggle with the power of chaos mentioned above. If they are so understood, they can be freed of questionable metaphysical constructions and win an ethically positive validity.

However, whether mythology or speculation be used to interpret the situation of the person in the world, statements about the self and about transcendence always present an objectification of what cannot be objectified. In this danger, also, their symbolic use stands as a statement for self-understanding’s relation to transcendence, that is, for the form that *faith* assumes here when correctly understood. With the admission of this unavoidable failure, which includes the gain of mature faith, we touch on the mystery of the guilt bound essentially with human existence. This guilt is the original image of all evil. However, from the way we, in our ethical reflection, have understood the fatal character of objectification and the possibilities contained in it, there results for us an understanding of the Fall of Adam and its consequences which does not end in tragedy, resignation and protest. Rather, it shows how the curse, which lies upon sin as transgression of God’s commandment, can be canceled by the assumption of guilt. This assumption, however, can only be experienced as being pardoned.

The sharpest form of the struggle with the “old serpent, which (according to Revelation 20:2) is the Devil and Satan,” and the completion of the victory in this struggle are presented in biblical salvation history as the *Messianic work of salvation*. According to the Bible, Jesus accomplishes this in his earthly appearance and as the ascended heavenly lord Christ. Just as regards the presen-

tation of *redemption and reconciliation* in our ethical theology, if much that is essential to redemption and reconciliation is found without the Biblical-Christian tradition and is represented outside it (as history shows), then we must say—again, in view of history—that the deepest content of ethical reflection is contained in this tradition in a singular way and in a language adequate to this content. We only add the qualification that this language is adequate to this content if it is not understood objectively, but is in faith, that is, in self-understanding, recapitulated as faith's symbolism.

We have called this the occurrence of grace, which we have presented as reconciliation in the acknowledgement and assumption of guilt and in the grasping of possibilities of atonement and betterment. I think this can form the basis for a *Christology* and for a *soteriology* for an ethical theology. Here, too, the last two points of our series of themes, namely the church and eschatology, can be rightly valued.

On these I have only the following short comments. The *true church* occurs where people know themselves determined to be unconditionally responsible for each other, where they can so form their existence that the individual can perceive what responsibility is, and where it is possible for the individual to live responsibly. From the essence of responsibility itself we see that this is not true of every community, much less of every social institution. As we have presented it, the essence of responsibility corresponds exactly to the biblical commandment of love of God and one's fellows and to the Pauline image of being a member of the body of Christ. Whoever tries to be seriously responsible will experience the fact that responsibility is not a formal criterion, but a very concrete criterion which is socially effective. It is a criterion which, like the *Holy Spirit*, is able to distinguish among spirits and which presents the principle of life of the new world promised in the Bible—a new world which breaks into our reality where we let ourselves be led by this concrete criterion.

If in these statements the difference between theological ethics and ethical theology is again indicated, then, in the confrontation of the two that we have given, not just what separates them should be clear, but also what it is that unites them. And that can only be a gain for both.

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