

# **Christ In Catastrophe**

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PENDLE HILL PUBLICATIONS  
WALLINGFORD, PENNSYLVANIA

And then Christ himself was in my cell in prison, saying, “Blessed are the poor in spirit...Blessed are the meek...Blessed are the peacemakers...” I heard the question, “Is that true?” And I was able to say in great joy and peace, “It is true.”

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## **Foreword**

Emil Fuchs, a man who has passed through great suffering, has walked among us and lived among us. He spoke to us with the authenticity of one who has seen Truth and heard it and felt it; and even when he spoke of disasters his face was serene. Now he has gone back to labor in Europe, leaving this writing for us; therefore we set down these words about him.

We saw him as a short man, full faced, with white hair and gentle probing eyes. He smiled constantly, and his smile was that of the child, the saint, the man who can bear the hardness of the world without losing his own softness of spirit. When he gave lectures to us, stressing always the simplicity and power of Truth, he spoke with such intensity that his face shook. At other times, he shared with selfless humility our troubles of spirit and took joy in our happiness. Always the stamp of Truth was on him. To be in his presence was to experience in some part what he had experienced. He had found something so big that he was given completely to it. And some part of what came to him spilled over through his eyes and his voice to those around him.

Emil Fuchs was born in Germany in the town of Beerfelden in 1874. He was a minister in various places until 1918 and from then until 1921 in the industrial center of Eisenach. After 1921 he worked closely with the Social Democratic Party and with a group known as the Religious Socialists, and traveled much around Germany. He became a member of the Society of Friends in 1925. In 1931 he became professor of religious science at the teachers' college at Kiel.

A period of great suffering followed. He was dismissed from Kiel when the Nazi Party came to power. Shortly thereafter he was imprisoned. After he was released, he was under the constant watch of the Gestapo; but until 1936 he

was able, together with his sons, to assist the escape of refugees by operating a car hire business. The vehicles were confiscated in 1936. His sons fled Germany. His daughter, a sensitive painter who had given herself to political work, helped her husband escape, but she did not know where he was or how she and her infant son could join him, and she began to suffer recurrent disturbance of mind. Finally she threw herself from a moving train to her death.

Of all these things we know little, for Emil Fuchs did not talk of them much. We know from his living among us that he would sometimes awake at night and the troubles of the past would come into his thoughts. Then he would arise and sit in silence for some hours, and in the morning he would greet us smiling and serene.

After a year of teaching at Pendle Hill he has gone back to Germany to work as professor of ethics and religion at Leipzig university. This writing which he has left with us is about his life and experience in Germany, but it is about all life and all experience. It is the witness of a man who is both saint and prophet.

Eleventh Month, 1949 Pendle Hill

## Christ In Catastrophe

During the winter of 1932, the last hard struggle went on in Germany against the rising power of Hitler, against the worship of nation and the religion of arms. More and more it became dangerous to speak aloud for freedom and peace and reconciliation. You could never know when a meeting would be raided by Storm Troopers and the audience and speakers misused, even killed. More and more we became lonely people. Many persons — leaders of churches, professors, teachers, pastors — became silent or went over to Hitler, not daring to show friendship to those who went on speaking against him. Friends warned us. The President of our Academy in Kiel said to me, “Please be silent. Do not give public lectures any more. Then perhaps we can save you.”

There remained a small company of men and women who knew that something of the fate of a nation — more than that, something of the fate of mankind — was being decided in this struggle; that here the great question was put to us, whether our nation should become a stronghold of peace in the center of Europe or whether she would open the doors of violence and war again. It is an easy thing to open the doors of violence, but who then will close them?

In March 1933 Hitler came to power and the reign of terror began. In three months some hundred thousands of persons were killed, taken into concentration camps, or forced to flee. Many who had stood firm until then succumbed before a danger they had never imagined possible in law-abiding Germany.

I was dismissed from my professorship in Kiel and imprisoned. My youngest son hid himself because he had been sentenced to be lynched by the students at Kiel, where he had been a leader of anti-Nazis. My eldest son and daughter were in great danger. A high official of the Ministry of Education in Berlin tried to build a golden bridge for me,

asking if I would not try to instruct myself better about National Socialism and show hope of joining. I answered that I was quite clear; it would be absolutely impossible for me to be connected with the movement.

People who fell into Nazi hands were treated with cruelty, and I was in great anxiety. One night I became nearly mad. I saw my children, cruelly killed, lying before me. And in this hour of utter despair I heard a voice saying, "What do you want? Shall they save their lives by losing their conscience?" I was able to say, "They shall keep their conscience." Peace came to me. From that moment I could bear the hardships my children had to go through.

And then Christ himself was in my cell in prison, saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit...Blessed are they that mourn...Blessed are the meek...Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness...Blessed are the pure in heart...Blessed are the peacemakers..." I heard the question, "Is that true?" And I was able to say in great joy and peace, "It is true."

One terrible, bitter question torments us when we see the mighty success of what we believe is wrong, when we see that millions of persons, hundreds even of our friends, go along with this success. It is the question: "Are you alone right and all others wrong?" Are you mad or are they? Are those right who tell us that in this sinful world a politician must go the way of cleverness and deceit, fraud and violence?

Even my friends put this question to me when success after success came to Hitler. Yearly his power grew. "Is he not right?" they said. "Must a politician not use these means? Look how the great men of other nations give in to him." Again and again I would say to myself and to those doubting people, "How high must the tower be from which we have to fall?" That we would have to fall was certain to me from the hour Christ entered my cell.

During the continuing hours of anxiety and fear, it was my only help that the presence of the living Christ was with

me. I remember many meetings in silence with friends and many lonely hours in which a Divine Presence strengthened us and gave freshness and insight. Then there came an hour of deepest need. My eldest daughter, worn out by what she had endured for her convictions, died a very bitter death, and in the hour of her burial I went into the chapel in utter darkness of spirit. But there the presence of God surged around us. It was so strong that all felt him, even one man, irreligious and a national socialist, who said to me, "What is this? In this hour I feel such a power as I have never before felt in my life."

### **Was It Human Imagination?**

That I saw him, that I heard his voice, that might have been imagination. But what cannot be imagination is the new life, the strength and the insight which his presence gave. No mere imagination, no impact out of the subconscious mind can give a father the strength to face danger to his children and remain certain and full of peace because they go the way of their conscience. No imagination can overcome the darkness in which you live when a person you love is handled with cruelty and forced into fits of fear and despair of mind. You are hopeless; you must look on while mind and life are destroyed by suffering. Nothing which is of the imagination only can ease revulsion against the meaningless cruelty of fate. Nothing which is of imagination only can bring out of that revulsion peace: the overpowering awareness of an eternal love whose ways you do not understand, whose will you have to accept without comprehension, but whose reality you know.

I know that I experienced in terrible hours the reality that the disciples experienced in the resurrection, that Paul experienced on the road to Damascus. They saw and heard him. That may have been imagination, vision, hallucination. But his being, his reality touched them and became a new

strength in them. So strong was this reality that they could cry out his message, not only without the fear that had hindered them, but also with a power that told other people of the same reality.

I think that we who have to go through terrible times of great catastrophe in the changing world have also this grace from God, that once again he makes it possible for us to see his reality clearly, more clearly than the generations before us. The word of the Epistle of John is again true: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen ... declare we unto you."

Since a different kind of beginning, the beginning of Hitler, I had felt that there was working in Nazism not the spirit of Christ but the spirit of blasphemy. Against this I worked. Now I had assurance and unshakable peace in Christ's presence. I began in prison to set down an account of the New Testament, beginning with the Gospel of *Matthew* and the *Sermon on the Mount*. I wrote of Christ's gospel and of seeing in it our own sufferings. There were difficulties and dangers, searchings and warnings, but it was possible to send this writing out. And it was possible in later journeys through Germany to bring it to friends, and thus to hold up Christ's spirit of resolution, faith and hope against the Hitler propaganda and terror. That Christ had given me a new work to do, a new opportunity to carry his message seemed to me then and seems to me now like another miracle. Before this it had seemed as if the ordinances of Hitler and the power of the secret police made impossible every work for peace and the message of Christ.

Was it imagination that enabled people like me to know, from the beginning of all the propaganda, that the spirit of Hitler was not of God? Why did so very many, very clever and orthodox theological thinkers, scholars, pastors and leaders of churches not recognize evil? Many churchmen and church people, liberal and orthodox, went with evil until evil went against them. Without their help Hitler would have

been impossible. But they were worshippers of nation and lovers of armies first, and afterwards Christians. They had Christianity as doctrine, very elaborate, very refined, very traditional; but they had not that experience in which the living Christ, the risen Lord, gives his call and task for this day and this time — out of the same spirit in which he taught his disciples two thousand years ago.

### **Two Thousand Years Ago And Today**

It is the great mystery of the history of men that the Eternally Creative speaks to us in the humble poor carpenter of Nazareth. We do not know very much of him. If we read the Gospels, which are only the reflection of him in the minds of unlettered people, his sentences look simple. It is as if a child had formed them. But then some of them begin to speak to our mind, to our condition, and they challenge our inward being. And in challenging us they begin to lay a task upon us: to be perfect “even as your father which is in heaven is perfect.” “Your father?” How that unfathomable mystery holds out a goal for us poor finite beings. More and more its challenging power becomes a changing power in our lives, and we begin to experience, to live some part of the creative mystery itself.

Then we read the story of his suffering and death on the cross. Helpless he is. He does not ask his followers to defend him, so they lose confidence in him and in his cause. He does not try to flee or to avoid the traps of his enemies by clever devices, and he does not deny the message which is bringing him to death. Helpless he dies, only knowing that he goes the way of him who called him, whose purpose, whose will he accepts even though not understanding it.

It is really a very bewildering story. But again it begins to speak to our condition and again it challenges. We begin to realize that here a very simple man, this carpenter of Nazareth, challenges the authorities of this world, this

society — his time, our time — those priests and scribes, these preachers and scholars, those Caesars, these Hitlers with all their faith in soldiers and weapons, devices and money and all that is used to oppress. He challenges us, poor finite persons that we are, that we may be men, perfect, pure in heart, hungry for goodness, yearning for peace, denying of violence, and thus victorious throughout the earth. And the goal is shown to us not only for individuals but for mankind. There shall be a uniting power and changing love, by which we will be led to create the society of the meek, who are stronger than the strong; the society of the loving, who cannot be broken by force; the society of those who live in the truth that rends the power of insincerity. The kingdom of God shall be built by those who can suffer and forgive and love, and overcome evil with good.

The disciples had fled. They were wholly discouraged by his strange inactiveness before the might of his enemies. And then we do not know exactly what happened. We have different stories and they do not give us one clear picture. Most of them seem to come from the experience of later times. But still we know that the challenge was again in the disciples' minds, that their innermost beings were roused and changed by it. They were quite certain that he again stood beside them and that his word and being met them. So mighty was the challenge that they saw him and heard his words. Visions and hallucinations? Yes. But breaking forth out of them was the live experience of the power that touched and changed their inward being. They became messengers, writing down as well as they could what manner of challenge had come into them.

And so it is now. In every generation, the challenge comes to those who struggle to grasp a meaning of life, even amid the ugly, greedy, acquisitive world around them. Behold today pathetic men driven on by stupid passions of greed and power to spoil their own inner purity and that of others around them. But behold, also, the fresh challenge of the

carpenter who lived in the creative power of God and who died against the spirit of this world. So people are always experiencing anew the resurrection; so faith renews itself through the centuries, not through belief in outward miracles — no tale of old miracles can give you faith — but through the inward experience of a power living today.

Thus the reality of his resurrection broke into my life. It broke in as a clear, strong security in the hardest hour of trial and suffering and made me strong, gave me peace, and made me able to work and speak in joy.

He stood before me. He stands before mankind, asking us all, asking the nations and the leaders of nations, the statesmen and the simple people, whether they will destroy themselves or whether they will give themselves to the grip of his power and find thereby a new life in which love, not greed or lust for power, is the new dynamic.

### **The Iron Yoke**

In the summer of 1947 I spent six weeks in Switzerland visiting my son whom I had not seen for twelve years. It was the first time I had been outside bewildered Germany since 1932. Then I returned home with a new eye for everything. When I traveled on the crowded trains or streetcars, I saw with a new sharpness the expressions on the faces around me. I see them now: the offended faces, saying, "How can such hard things happen to me, a respectable law-abiding person?" The hard faces, saying, "I will win again what I have lost. I have no time to care for others." Then there are the empty faces, the unfulfilled eyes of this man or this woman, who goes on doing his daily task and earning his living, no longer seeing meaning or hope. There are blank faces, too, behind which stand evil secrets, things that a man hides from himself while still he finds no rest. There are faces which say, "I will be happy and forget." These faces I see more and more as things improve and as more and

more people try to begin a happy life of forgetfulness of past suffering, past despair. But where is there strength, where real life in forgetting?

I see these faces now, and sometimes among them I see a face on which it is written that this man, this woman overcame suffering and despair, that behind the face is serenity, a conscience at rest and yet awake to love, truth, helpfulness. But when I see all the faces, I suspect that many of them, particularly in Germany but perhaps in other places, say, "I am offended." I long and pray to give them this one thing: that they may be able to accept their fate, accept their suffering — not trying to flee, to evade, to forget, to hide it from themselves — simply to accept.

Millions suffer terribly. Millions had to die, had to give sons and daughters, their hope for life and future. Is one person alone to be spared? Can he wish to be spared? To the empty eyes, I would say, "Look around. Quite near is a man, a woman, a child, a human being suffering as you suffer; try to be a comrade to them, help if you can help and, if you cannot, be full of that sympathy that gives strength. See, in so doing you will overcome helplessness and emptiness and a new meaning will come to you. For in that helpful love you will experience the changing power of the eternal God."

And to those out of whose eyes speak hidden fears and secrets, I would say, "Accept, accept and look at what you have done in an evil hour. Accept it and take the challenge of him who calls to a new life and a deep changing of heart." I say it again because it cannot be said too often, "Accept your fate, your suffering, accept it as a call out of the power of God, who challenges both in happiness and suffering, challenges us to overcome evil and suffering in truth and love."

To those of my own nation who try to forget, I would say, "We have not the right to forget the disaster to which we brought the whole world and to which we brought

ourselves. Forgetting means that we do not overcome ambition, servility, love of arms; the tragic background of so much in our nation, the tragic block to the great possibilities we still possess." We are in the situation of Jeremiah, who said to his nation, "Thus saith the Lord: Thou hast broken the yoke of wood; but thou shalt make for them yokes of iron." We have to bear the iron yoke and we have to bear it with our nation. All who try to put it off from their own necks only put it on the necks of their neighbors.

I stood against that evil which was in Hitler. But I have to bear my part of the suffering of my nation. I take that part, forgiving those of my own people who made it so hard, and forgiving also those of other lands who made it harder than it need have been. That man has no need to forget who knows what forgiveness is. Through it something of the redeeming power of the cross comes into his life. Out of suffering and scarcity we create fellowship and peace and happiness for our children and grandchildren.

You, what will you do? Live on in selfishness, forgetting the experiences of the war, shifting the burden from your shoulders to the shoulders of others, creating antagonism, hatred, strife, war again and again? Or will you take your yoke on your own shoulder, not asking whether you — or others — made it heavy, and change it to a cross?

### **Despair**

The winter of 1941 was very cold. Hitler was at the height of his power; France was conquered, victorious German armies were fighting in Russia. Two young men came to me. They had sometimes attended our meeting for worship. More I did not know of them. They asked me whether I could come with them. They brought me to a large dining room of a private house where a score or more of young people were assembled, some officers, some soldiers, some civilians, some women, too. One of them said, "All of

us have been enthusiastic followers of Hitler. We volunteered for the army. Now we have just had leave and we have to return to our different places in the army. This is our last meeting together, and we do not know whether we shall see each other again. But during these days at home we have all realized that we no longer have faith in Hitler. We see that his whole propaganda is a lying and deceiving device to hold him and his party in power. And now we have no hope. Can you say something to us that will give us hope?"

It could have been a trap of the secret police, but it was necessary to speak.

They had been roused by clever passionate propaganda to a blind fanaticism for which the "nation" was the last ideal, the only value in the world worth dying for. They had been taught, and they had accepted, that it was right to lie for the nation, to deceive, to trick, to kill. Then, slowly and terribly the suspicion had risen that this last ideal might itself be an untruth, a means of deceit — a lie fostered to support the power and egotism of men who lived in might and splendor while others went out to die.

Helpless and empty, these young people were going out to fight, perhaps to die. What could I tell them?

"For outward greatness and happiness, I can not give you any hope or faith," I began. "We are rushing to a catastrophe for our nation greater than we can imagine." Then I told them of a letter from a refugee, who wrote out of very hard experiences, "We had not thought that our way would be so hard. But if we had to choose again, we would choose the same way."

"What a difference," I said. "Hitler and your cause in splendid success and you lose faith and hope. And here a refugee, in distress, writing, 'We would choose the same way again.' For this man and his conscience the nation is not the highest measure. He knows about man and the value of a man. He knows of a world of truth and justice which is

higher than man, and which a man can realize in his work, and, by his work, in mankind. He obeyed a call. So in his distress he has hope and faith.

“In your very despair, this call is here for you today, You will have to go through more hard experiences. If you come back from the war, you will find a broken-down country: like you, full of hopelessness and misery. Then the question will be whether there is a higher strength in your life. Do you belong to those who in their egotism lament their misery and poverty and seek to find a way out only for themselves? Or do you belong to those who see a way of help for others, who see that outward power and armies are unnecessary to great things? If you do, you will have a great work to do, and your life will have strength and meaning.

“It may be that some will not come back, that some have to die in war. If they have only despair and hopelessness, their life is lost in a lost cause. But if they are able to hear the message of hope and give it on to a single friend in his own despair, then life is in them and works on after them, a part of that eternal life which can never be extinguished.

“In Jesus the faith in success to which millions succumb is challenged. This world, which seeks salvation and life in selfishness, in cleverness, in power and money, splendor and pride — this world is challenged.

“ ‘The meek...shall inherit the earth.’ ”

### **Can There Be Happiness?**

When I live through beautiful spring days or a summer such as we had this year, or when I have the opportunity to live in a happy family with children, I often think of the young mother who lost her child one winter, and when spring came, cried out bitterly, “My child cannot see it.”

There are millions in this world today in whom this cry

lives, millions for whom the beauty of nature in the spring and all the happiness of other people are only terrible pains, making despair harder to bear. Have we any right to enjoy anything, to be happy with our families when we know of the millions in despair?

I not only say that we can enjoy; I say that we must find again the strength to enjoy — but not by forgetting what we have lost or what others have lost, certainly not by forgetting our shortcomings and our sins. There is another, stronger way.

There was a time when beauty and happiness only deepened my own despair and pain. The spring and summer of 1933 were good to look upon. But my children were scattered, my family destroyed, my life's work broken. My friends were in danger; some had fled; others had been imprisoned; many had been killed. And around me was the success of what I knew was the power of destruction and injustice. I hated the beauty of that spring and I fled the sight of families and the sounds of music. Hiding its terrors behind sparkling life made fate seem doubly cruel.

But then came the experience of Christ's presence, and it became stronger and stronger in my being. And out of it came again the challenge of him who was happy with children, who calls us to enjoy the lilies of the field and the birds of the air. More and more it came to me that all joy and happiness are great gifts of God, his greetings, showing us something of the goal which will be achieved when love and truth are victorious on earth. In the beauty of nature, in the lively innocence of children, in the joys and pleasures of young people, I felt more and more a hidden presence. All joy is holy.

Because he violates what should be holy, man brings suffering into this world. He loses and then destroys the reverence owed to all life, all happiness, all real joy. Can we not save these for ourselves so that our suffering will be a

means of saving them for others? Only now perhaps we know what joy really is, only now, taught by bitter suffering, when we see the deep holiness of all life. Even when we do not have joy for ourselves, we can reverence it in others.

Do not, therefore, close your eyes before the sufferings of your neighbors. Do not fear that it will destroy your happiness if you live in sympathy with them. This indeed brings something like a shadow into your life, and at the first moment you feel you cannot endure it; so you try to forget it. No. Hold it fast; take it into your life. Bring it into touch with your own happiness and joy. All that is only superficial will vanish, but the real happiness of family, of art and song, of nature and friendship and devotion — all will grow and become more real until they become that holiness in which they are a part of God's presence in our lives.

### **Love's Great Help**

My daughter had died. Her husband was a refugee. We did not know where he was. All my other children were scattered through the world. I was alone with the boy of four years who had lost his mother. It was a time of helpless darkness out of which only the miracle of which I have told could have saved me. Life was so full of pain that every happiness seemed sin. But what would become of the boy? Must I not live for him? And if I lived for him, should I be a sad empty-hearted grandfather, never happy and never bringing happiness? Oh, I knew that a child will not talk, will not even sit beside you if he does not find happiness. But God gave me love for this boy, and I could be happy with him, more and more happy, and through him alive to the joy of other people.

Is not failure to enjoy other people's happiness a very real source of hatred and unrest? There is envy, because

you feel the success of other people's work or the handsomeness of their children or the peace of their home — or even the helpful spirit by which they try to make you happy. An important truth: if we can share other people's joys and happiness, we find an important link uniting us with them. If we cannot, we will be separated from them — even if we do mighty works to help them in their need.

It is a great thing to help others, to comfort them in sadness and to strengthen them in deep suffering. I often say to people who cannot overcome their suffering: try to find a person to whom you can bring help and strength in his life. Christ's love then will greet you and strengthen you. But the same is true, perhaps more true, of sharing joy. It is possible only if the joy of others is your joy. How good is the experience of man in deep suffering, when, look, he sees before him the chance to bring a small bit of joy to a child.

When people have to go through really deep sorrow, when something of the fundamentals of their lives is destroyed, they feel as if they walk and live under a great glass bowl. They see and hear other people, but they seem separated from them by an intense pain that others, even the most sympathetic, cannot feel. But if love works its great miracle, it reaches through the invisible wall. You do not forget what you lost, but sometimes you think that now for the first time you feel the innermost reality and beauty of joy, the creative power which comes to you out of it.

Thus to men and women struggling amid the hard sorrows of life, there is given something of the charm which Jesus means when he says, "Become as little children." It is the secret of serene old men and women who have come through a life full of sorrow and hard work, and who perhaps have to go on in more pain and more toil. Suffering and joy are in a miraculous way connected with each other in this world of God.

### Can These Things Be?

How desperately people ask, "How can God be love, when all still happens that has happened in the world of men — and will go on happening in time to come?"

The same world with the same history cries out to me in a clear voice, "God is love."

If God is love and you hate your brother, you live without God. You live without the one creative power of life. Do you wonder that you live in a world of death? Three or four thousand years ago, a poet said:

Thou sendest forth thy spirit; they are created.  
Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled.  
Thou takest away thy breath, they die,  
And return to their dust.

When men and whole generations of men and whole nations and civilizations seek their life from wealth and power and oppression and injustice, when they live without love in greed and hate, they separate themselves from God and return to their dust.

When nations and civilizations have to die, as in the times we live in, a stream of death and terror runs over the earth. It is not because God is far away, but because man in his hatred and selfishness does not reach out to him, does not reach out to the creative power around him, even within him. God asks more from us than to be small, narrow, selfish, respectable people going the way of money-getting and traditional righteousness. He asks us to be strong upright people who dare to give happiness and life for him and for his kingdom. He created man out of the animals by making him hear this call, and as long as we hear it, so long do we live as men, and his strength is in us. When we do not hear this call, we are living in nothing better than narrow selfishness. Great achievements and discoveries become

mere instruments of this selfishness. Hatred and antagonism grow. Man and his civilization begin to die in all the torments of death.

God's love is in this, that he gave us a great goal. The challenge of God's love may therefore be a terror for man. We have to decide whether we pass through this terror into peace and certainty of life's meaningfulness or whether we shrink from it into destruction. Just as those who crucified Christ had to decide, so we also have to decide: whether we shall hear his challenge and seek the way of truth, love and brotherhood, or whether we will again crucify him in all his suffering brothers and sisters — and return to our dust.

### **Christ Re-crucified**

Sometimes we wonder why in the books, letters and testimonies of Jesus' time and immediately after, there is no mention of him. For the great men of Rome and Greece the happenings in Galilee and Jerusalem were as the news of the lynching of a Negro in an unknown township of the South is to people nowadays. They read, shudder a little and forget. And if a destitute Negro is lynched, or if a hungry child dies in China, or if a drunken man stumbles through the slums of Philadelphia, or if a rich man supports a Hitler or otherwise oppresses freedom and truth, sacrificing righteousness to profits: then in each of these events is Christ's challenge: how much of God may there have been in this your brother, your sister, whom you killed, starved, denied education and constructive living, or drowned in luxury?

“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me... Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.”

There are many in whom Christ's challenge mingles in a strange way with the traditional, inherited faith in force.

Such people try to help their suffering brothers by fighting against those who oppress them. And there are other ways of trying to join obedience to Christ with obedience to tradition. There are the churches who try to speak his message clearly, and yet tremble to offend the easygoing, the comfortable and the influential. There are the millions of men who mingle the challenge they hear with an egoistic longing for a more comfortable life and for materialistic striving. But at the same time there is the growing number of those, very often trembling like the disciples, who are forced by a divine challenge to stand and struggle and work and speak, bringing people to a clear understanding of Christ's way and to a clear decision between him and tradition, injustice, self-deceit and force.

We must know, all of us, that we are fighting against him insofar as we hinder any of our brothers from finding his own constructive life. And we know that we stand for him — again, all of us — insofar as we stand for the rights of others, for understanding and peace and truth and justice, and — most important of all — insofar as we are prepared to sacrifice our comfort and our privilege for the lives and rights of our brothers.

### **Experience And Authority**

Again and again men have tried to tell us various things about God: how he is and what he is and how he created the world and how Jesus became his revelation. Men have put together their accounts out of the Bible or out of their heads, and again and again we have to recognize that God is too great a mystery for us to comprehend. He is dwelling in the Light unto which no man can approach. The creative mystery of the world cannot be known through man-made doctrines and teachings. God put in the midst of history a simple man, pure in heart and strong in truth, giving in

him the message of what we shall be and what mankind will be.

And behind this man stands the history by which God taught a nation to come to an understanding of a great goal roused in the inward being of its prophets and leaders. In this history the Bible tells us of Abraham, who had to go out from his father's house in a higher search; of Moses, who had to take the shoes from off his feet; of Isaiah, who saw God in the Temple; of Ezekiel, who saw him by the river Chebar; of all the prophets and poets, who denounced unrighteousness and sang redemption.

What all these men saw of God and can tell of him is the image of the eternal mystery in the human mind. We know that they experienced his challenge to them and his call to their people; we know that the continuing reality of his self-revealing leads to Jesus.

So we read the Bible, not to construct doctrines about God or laws about society, but to experience with men and women before us the way God spoke to them. We hear his message and we hear how the word — the terrifying challenge — came to them and how they obeyed, had to obey, and how the word became an overpowering force in their lives. We do not have to dispute with men about doctrines, and we do not have to argue whether this or that church or this or that religion is right; none of that matters. What matters is that people heard the word and tried to live obedient to the light of truth, hope and love in which the living God showed himself.

I like the song "Lead kindly light amid the encircling gloom." When I sing it I feel that the man who wrote it stands before the eternal Light and seeks guidance as I seek it. This man was a cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church. He became a Roman Catholic because he could not find peace and rest in his faith without the ancient sacred authority of the church behind it and behind his experience of God and Christ.

Very often people say to me, "How can you dare to stand so entirely alone? We need the authority of the Bible and the authority of the church. Our own unaided experience does not give us the strength to risk our lives going on the hard way." But I had to go my way alone. When I was a young pastor, Christ showed me the spiritual distress and loneliness of the German laboring people, people who could not hear the message of Christ because the church defended the oppression under which they suffered. So I had to stand against the majority of the churches and the church people. When I was in distress and did not see what to do, the living Christ was there, and he showed me the next step, the one step needed.

I had to go through many struggles against church authority, tradition and prejudice. No words of the church, no explanations of theologians made my way clear. He himself spoke to me. Jesus of Nazareth became the message of God for me today. He taught me to accept my cross; he made me certain of his resurrection; he made me strong to stand alone. After a life of hardship, lonely struggling and difficulties, came the real decisive question, whether I could stand when all the foundations of life seemed to break and death was imminent.

Not the church, not the poor pastor who visited me in prison, not anything of authority was my help, but the living Christ. He made me clear that his goal is the truth. He made me certain that for me and my children it was better to take suffering than to deny conscience. He makes me certain again today when, in disappointment, I sometimes ask, "For what did we suffer if the people are again going the wrong way?"

I do not deny that people like Newman, the cardinal, can find the reality of Light where I did not find it. I do not deny fellowship to those who follow Christ in other words and doctrines, and who feel called to other tasks. But I often

think that very many do not come to the full reality of God because, before they find it, they rest in authority. In catastrophe everything is changing. For millions of people the traditional words and doctrines and images of God are meaningless. How can we bring them the message if we ourselves are bound up in tradition and cannot show them God's presence, as it came to us, in words that make them understand?

We will never come to a full strength in God if we do not acknowledge the sin of our lives. But, for many good Christians, faith is so bound up with tradition that they never realize the deep sinfulness of custom. Luther, for instance, was so dominated by inherited feelings of reverence for mighty men and princes that he never realized the egotism of the princely revolution that destroyed Germany and made his own work an instrument for enslaving subject peoples.

Again and again the churches have been the last to see the injustices of tradition. Capitalist organization and technical development brought growing welfare for millions while at the same time it created slavery for other millions. The churches have been very slow. It is hid from their eyes that tradition is not sufficient to give truth and insight, that once more we must stand before God alone and hear his voice.

There are millions who are full of peace and strength because they have found God in tradition and authority. There are millions whose lives go on without consciousness of new need. But there are also millions who have lost the ability to live in old ways. The ethics of the past have become lies to them, its laws injustice, its faith deception. And there are those who see this fact, this need, and are called to seek a new foundation for man's life and work. They are those people to whom God says today, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee."

He leads them through despair and loneliness and doubt and error and even through sin and helplessness and darkness. But he gives them new visions, new thoughts, new outlooks — and perhaps the power by which eternal truth again overwhelms the inward being of the millions. “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.”

At the end of a talk I gave in a German town, a man of perhaps fifty years came to me saying, “I must speak to you in private.” We went aside, and he said to me with tears in his eyes, “For many years I have longed, Sunday by Sunday, to go to church to hear the old hymns and to serve God, but it has become impossible for me. When I come near the church, I see standing in the door the field chaplain who was with us in the war, and I hear again the words he said to us in 1914 when we were young men waiting for our first attack. He said, ‘Shoot them, beat them, kill them. Win the attack.’ So I cannot go into the church.”

When the man had left I asked who he was, and I was told that he was a well-known man, chairman of the Communist party of that district. In that moment I knew that the living Christ stood behind this man when he spoke to me, and that in this man is a challenge to all Christ’s followers. Here is a man who cannot go into the church, cannot come to the worship of God because between him and the church is the war cry of a Christian pastor.

He is one of millions who cannot hear the message. This man, longing for what is eternal, went to the Communist Party. He longs for a world of justice, of peace. He lives in a world of hatred and privilege and oppression. In the Communist Party he hears a loud voice promising him a world of justice, peace and love in which property and economic antagonism can no longer set men against men. He is aware of the message of Christ that violence and hatred are not the right way. But at the same moment he sees

Christians prepare for war to defend their privileges and their domination. And then, sad at heart perhaps, he hears alike from Christian pastors and Communist leaders the same hopeless teaching: man is such a wretched, such a sinful, such a greedy being that his passions will never be overcome. Always he will fight before giving up domination, privilege, nationalist ambition.

From both sides the same gospel of despair: in this world you must fight, fight even for the highest purposes. Christians believe that they have not only the right but also the duty to use things like the atomic bomb to realize ideals. And oppressed men conclude that they have not only the right but the duty to fight in the same way for their ideals. Both are so strongly dominated by unhappy experiences with other men, so involved in distrust, that they cannot see the human being in their opponent — the human being who would have no ideals or longing for love and fellowship were not the image of God in his innermost being. Such men dare not trust in the power of God. They have not the courage to speak to that of God in man, that of God in their antagonists. That is why they are helpless to overcome hatred.

Distrust of man is the essence of the outward history of man. History shows clearly that man defends privilege violently and tries violently to free himself from oppression. But for Christians can that be the reality of man and history? I hear the cry of Jesus out of the mouth of that Communist. I hear his challenge from all the helpless men and women who see no hope for themselves except in force and fighting. But I see great danger when such helpless, faithless people call themselves Christians. Jesus did not ask his followers to fight for him. He did not ask his heavenly Father to send him twelve legions of angels. He went to the cross and suffered, certain that suffering love would overcome the

world. And yet Christianity identifies itself with one opposing power or another, not seeking justice but following tradition.

Let us hear the challenge of Christ. There may be hard disappointment and bitter suffering on the road he points to. He never promised quick or easy victory. Only by our suffering can we overcome prejudices bred in millions of people by the inability of Christians to speak to their times. Mahatma Gandhi led a great nation along his way of truth and came to a great creative success. When will the Christian conscience be strong enough to unite those who call themselves after Jesus in the building of a world of brotherhood? When will we be ashamed to call Christian those who trust in the sword?

### **Is God Real? Are We Real?**

There were many good Christians, among them pastors and church leaders, who told me when Hitler came to power, "I cannot lose my position since I must care for my children, and they have to continue their education." Or they said, "My son cannot lose his calling. He must say, 'Heil Hitler.' What will he do if he loses his job?" They all thought that material existence was more important than conscience. What was their God? They had an idea of God, but the reality to which they trusted their lives was money and the getting of money.

I speak of Germany. There are today good Christians, pastors and church leaders, who in sermons, articles and pamphlets excuse themselves and their nation. From all history they search out the evil deeds of others and point to every mistake and injustice of other nations. "Look," they say, "they are no better than we are." When they speak of the terrible guilt which the German nation brought on itself during the last century, they look at others and compare themselves. They do not stand before God, and they do not

try to bring their nation to stand before God. It seems to me that one of the decisive tasks of Christians in Germany is to bring people to realize the reality of God. If God is reality, then I know that I will never find a good way in the future, not happiness, not strength, until I find his forgiveness and his spirit to begin anew.

So long as God is an idea in which we believe only with the mind, whilst in real life our chief aim is earning money and winning influence and power, we will never overcome the inward weakness that is servility. We will never overcome that outward weakness, nationalism, so long as it is more important to defend the honor of a nation against accusation than to find the right relation to God in our conscience. And it may be that what is true of Germany is true of all mankind.

When we think of the future of our nations, do we trust in God or do we trust in weapons and armies and all the clever arts which have nothing to do with him? Is he real to us at all if, in important problems of life, we do not trust in him? What does it mean, this trusting in God? I think it means that we are certain that spiritual power is life's precious foundation. It means that we are called as nations and as individuals to take a great task, to lose our lives and to find the life and power which overcomes distrust and hatred and cowardice.

We look back to those whom catastrophe destroyed, those who could not live out their lives, those who gave them because they could not submit to that which was against their consciences. They gave their lives because they had heard Christ's challenge. They had to obey. Something of his eternity lived in them and made them forever his fellow workers, even though we cannot realize it now.

For now, when outward improvement comes, guilt and suffering are zealously forgotten. It seems as if poor and empty people will again win leadership and as if the nations will again run the way of momentary power and success. It

is utter darkness if out of the catastrophe not only individuals but whole nations go on as poor and empty of spirit as before.

But the challenge of the living Christ is behind catastrophe; it is in it, beside it, through it. We had to suffer and risk our lives, and we have again to suffer and risk our lives in confronting more catastrophe. But by hearing his voice, hearing it in the midst of ruin, obeying his voice, taking our task in suffering, forgetting ourselves and becoming his instruments — thus we become real. His victory comes into our lives because we try to do his work. Eternity is in our lives overcoming fear and hatred, and giving us this great vision: that we are Christ's fellow workers on earth, united with him in his eternal being.