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# 3



## TWO SERMONS

### 1. THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

*You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

Matt. 5:43–48, RSV

My text is taken from the New Testament lesson: "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."

This text has been preached upon many times in the memory of all of us. Usually, however, the emphasis has been upon the moral admonition that we should love our enemies, and not much attention has been paid to the justification of the love of the enemy that Jesus gives by reference to the impartial character of God's love. It is on the second theme that I want to speak this morning.

There are many things to say about the first theme, for Jesus is suggesting in his Sermon on the Mount that you cannot be moral if you are too strictly moral. The highest morality of forgiveness is, as Berdyaev says, "the morality beyond morality." Nobody who is strictly moral can forgive, because forgiveness is at once the fulfillment of every concept of justice, and its annulment. Jesus justifies this "morality beyond all morality" by saying God is like that. The love of God is an impartial goodness beyond good and evil. The provi-

dence of God is an impartial concern for all men without any special privileges in it.

Thus, the structure of meaning for the Christian faith is completed against all the contradictions in history, where there are no simple correlations of reward for good and punishment for evil. God is like nature, says Jesus, like the impartial nature which you could accuse of not being moral at all, because the sun shines upon both the evil and the good, and the rain descends upon the just and the unjust. A nonmoral nature is made into the symbol of the transmoral mercy. Here is a very radical concept, and one of those words of Scripture that we never quite take in. It is a word of Scripture that has particular significance because it is set squarely against most of our religion, inside the Christian Church as well as anywhere else.

When we say that we believe in God, we are inclined to mean that we have found a way to the ultimate source and end of life, and this gives us, against all the chances and changes of life, some special security and some special favor. And if we do not mean that—which is religion on a fairly adolescent and immature level—at least we mean that we have discovered amidst the vast confusions of life what is usually called the moral order, according to which evil is punished and good rewarded, and we could hardly feel that life had any meaning if we were not certain of that.

The Bible is full of this debate between what might be called the instinct of religion and the gospel of Christ. The natural instincts of religion demand that my life be given meaning by a special security against all of the insecurities of life. If it should seem as if goodness and evil—punishment for evil and reward for good—were not being properly correlated in life, then God will guarantee finally that they will be properly correlated.

Thus, in the Scriptures the words of the Psalms, “A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you” (Ps. 91:7). Or the many intercessory prayers, the intent of which is “A thousand at your side, ten thousand at your right hand,” let it not come to my loved one. What a natural prayer that is and finally how impossible! “For in the time of trouble He shall hide me, and he shall set me upon a rock” (cf. Ps. 27:5). In a word, plead my cause, O Lord, against them that strive with me, fight against them that fight against me.

Examples can be multiplied and it must also be realized how very

natural are these kinds of prayers. Has there ever been a conflict in the human community where we have not felt we could not fight the battle were not the Lord on our side? Perhaps, as Abraham Lincoln said, we did not as frequently ask the question of whether we were on the Lord's side. These are natural religious instincts, the natural efforts to close prematurely the great structure of life's meaning. Much more justified is the other aspect of this sense of special providence—not that God would give me special privileges, special securities against the other man—but that in a very hazardous world where it is not certain that good will be rewarded and evil punished, at least God should set that right.

"Blessed is he who considers the poor!" to use another word of the Psalm, "The Lord delivers him in the day of trouble" (Ps. 41:1). Many years ago, tithing was popular in some of the churches. A member of my congregation had started tithing as a twelve-year-old boy and had become a millionaire. He was quite convinced that the millions were the reward of his tithing.

"Blessed is he who considers the poor! The Lord delivers him in the day of trouble." I was never much convinced by this millionaire businessman because of my first pastoral experience when I took the church of my deceased father for six months. The first pastoral problem I had was dealing with an old man whom I greatly respected, who really had the grace of God in him. He had considered the poor to the degree of giving striking miners so much credit at his grocery store that he lost his business. In the seventy-eighth year of his life, he had to face the problem of bankruptcy, and the fact that there was no simple correlation between his goodness and the fortunes of his life.

Both kinds of faith were wrong. First, that if we pray to God fervently enough he will establish some special security for us against the security of the other person. Or secondly, the belief that there are simple moral correlations between the vast processes either of nature or of history and human virtue. The history of our Puritan fathers in New England illustrates how wrong are both of these propositions. There were some very great virtues and graces in their lives. But the doctrine of special providence represents the real defect in our Puritan inheritance. These Puritan forefathers of ours were sure that every rain and every drought was connected with the virtue and vice of their enterprise—that God always had his hand upon them to reward them for their goodness, and to punish them for their evil.

Their belief in special providence was unfortunate, particularly so when a religious community developed in the vast possibilities of America, where inevitably the proofs of God's favor turned out to be greater than the proofs of God's wrath. It may be the reason why we Americans are so self-righteous. It may be also the reason why we still have not come to terms, in an ultimate religious sense, with our responsibilities; with the problems of the special favors that our nation enjoys compared with other nations. But first of all we have to realize that this picture of God's love is not true. The Scriptures also are full of testimony that it is not true. Certainly it is the point of the Book of Job. Job first hopes that God is a God of simple justice, but it is proved to him that this cannot be the case. Then Job protests against the fact that if he does wrong he is convicted as a sinner, but if he does right, he is no better off: "I cannot lift up my head." Ours is a confused kind of world, says Job, in which there is no guarantee that the righteous man will prosper. Is there a God in this kind of world?

These are the protests that run through the Scriptures as they run through life. "My feet had almost stumbled," says the great seventy-third Psalm. "My steps had well nigh slipped . . . when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. . . . Their eyes swell out with fatness, . . . and they say, 'How can God know?'" (Ps. 73:1–11).

"When I saw the prosperity of the wicked"—here is man in history involved in the web of relationships and meanings, but not of simple ones. There must be some moral meaning here. Is there not some punishment of wickedness in life? And I do not mean any of the arbitrary punishment which we inflict by our courts. For life is not completely at variance with itself. There *is* reward for goodness in life, and there *is* punishment for evil, but not absolutely. The same law which punishes the criminal punishes the Savior. And there are three crosses: two for criminals who cannot meet the moral mediocrities of life, and one for the Savior who rises above it. This is life.

Martin Buber, some years ago, made a remark about the special spiritual problems that we face in our world, where we cannot bring to any simple end the structure of moral meaning in which we stand. "When the Nazis ruled," he said, "even when they were at the height of their rule, I knew in my heart that they would fall, that they would be punished."

But now we face a future with greater threats of destruction than during the Nazi period. And this will continue partly because it is a

problem that involves all the confusions of modern history against which our own goodness is not adequate. There is no simple moral resolution of the nuclear dilemma. These are the facts of our historic existence; life cannot be correlated easily into simple moral meanings; nor can the Christian faith be validated by proving special acts of providence in your own or somebody else's favor.

I have a certain embarrassment about this issue in the great debate between Christianity and secularism. I am convinced of the Christian faith in the God revealed in Christ and whom Christ says is partially revealed in the impartialities of nature. Yet it seems to me also true that a certain type of secularism has advantages over us on any point where, to quote William James, Christianity becomes "an effort to lobby in the courts of the Almighty for special favors."

Against this lobbying for special favors, one must admit that there is an element of nobility either in modern or ancient Stoicism. Marcus Aurelius said: "If so be the gods deliberated in particular on those things that should happen to me, I must stand to their deliberation, but if so be that they have not deliberated for me in particular, certainly they have on the whole and in general deliberated on those things which happen to me. In consequence and coherence of this general deliberation, I am bound to embrace and to accept them." There is a certain nobility in Stoic courage. It has no sense of an ultimate relationship to God as a final expression of the Christian faith, but as far as it goes, is it not true?

Modern man, under the influence of natural science, sees the problem more critically than it was seen before. We see that nature, whatever may be God's ultimate sovereignty over it, moves by its own laws. Even so good a theologian as the late William Temple did not understand this. He tried to solve it by saying that the laws of nature are merely God's habitual way of doing things. If he does not want to act in the habitual way, he will choose another way. Surely this is too voluntaristic a conception of how the forces of nature work.

An analogous proposition would be that my heart beats in a habitual way, but if I choose, I could have it do something else. No, my heart has its own automatic processes as do the forces of nature. Many in our modern world have come to despair about this vast realm of seeming meaninglessness.

Though we have some sympathy from a modern scientific culture

which says such special providence is not true, what concerns us more as Christians is the protest of Jesus against the underlying assumptions. It is not true that God gives special favors, and it is not true that there are simple moral meanings in the processes of history. We cannot speak simply of a moral order which if defied, would destroy us. Though Jesus is concerned about the whole dimension of the gospel, it is not so much whether these things are true or not upon their own levels, but whether they would be right. God's love would not be right if it were this kind of a love. This is the point that Christ makes in the Sermon on the Mount, that God's love would not be right. The Christian faith believes that within and beyond the tragedies and the contradictions of history we have laid hold upon a loving heart, the proof of whose love is first impartiality toward all of his children, and secondly a mercy which transcends good and evil.

How shall we appropriate this insistence of Christ in our life? All of us, including some who are not conventionally religious, have a desire for an ultimate security. Even people who are not conventionally religious often pray in the hour of crisis. In that sense, all men are religious. Yet under the discipline of the gospel, we should bring each one of these prayers under scrutiny.

This does not change radically the problem of intercessory prayer. Perhaps we have to consider life in three different dimensions. First, there is the vast dimension of nature where we cannot expect that God will put up a special umbrella for us against this or that possible disaster. In the realm of nature, we face the problem of natural evil. Jesus was asked, "Master, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus' answer repudiated the idea of special providence: "It was not that this man sinned or his parents have sinned but that the works of God might be made manifest in him" (John 9:3). There is no meaning to this blindness except the ultimate possible meaning of how the blindness might become a source of grace. It is a most terrible thing to correlate natural evil immediately to any moral and spiritual meaning, and yet it is a wonderful thing to correlate it ultimately. Likewise Jesus replied, when asked about those killed by the fall of the tower in Siloam, "Were they worse offenders than all the others who dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you, no!" (Luke 13:4). Do not try to relate natural catastrophes to moral meanings. Do not ask the question whether people killed in an earthquake are more guilty, more sinful, than others. "I tell you, no!" Ask the question, rather,

what ultimate use, what final point for the grace of God is there in this calamity? But do not correlate it in such a way that it ceases to be a calamity, for this belongs to the realm of nature.

In the realm of history we have another problem, of course, because history is a realm of human freedom and human agency, and if it did not have any moral meaning at all, it would be intolerable. If there were not some reward for goodness, life would be absolutely askew. If there were no likelihood that forgiveness would produce the spirit of forgiveness, and mutuality the spirit of mutuality and reciprocity, it would be hard to love and trust each other. Yet in the processes of history these things are not simply correlated. The suffering of the innocent is one of the most terrible things in the collective enterprise of man. When, towards the end of the Second World War, we started to bomb the Germans into submission, we bombed Hamburg first, the city that had more anti-Nazi votes than any other German city. These anguishes are the facts of life as we find them in history.

There are no simple correlations. This does not mean that we will not pray for our loved ones in the hazards and tumults of history, when so frequently their destiny is a curious combination of the physical and the spiritual. We certainly will not stop praying for their health, particularly in view of what we know about psychosomatic characteristics in the human personality today. We will pray for the health of other people and pray for their healing.

This is the realm of history which is a vast middle ground between the realm of grace and the realm of nature. But ultimately, of course, our Christian faith lives in the realm of grace, in the realm of freedom. This is God's freedom and my freedom, beyond the structures of my body, the realm of grace where I know God and am persuaded, as St. Paul says, that he knows me.

In that realm, finally, all concern for immediate correlations and coherences and meanings falls away. The Christian faith stands in the sense of an ultimate meaning. We may be persuaded that God is on our side—not against somebody else—but on our side in this ultimate sense. We are “sure that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, . . . will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38–39).

It is on that level of meaning that the Christian faith makes sense. The lower levels are a threat, not only to the sense of the meaning of

life, but finally to the morals of life. We must not deny that there is a kind of religion that enhances the ego and gives it an undue place in the world. But from the standpoint of our faith we should take our humble and contrite place in God's plan of the whole, and leave it to him to complete the fragmentation of our life.

O God, who has promised that all things will work together for good to those that love you, grant us patience amidst the tumults, pains and afflictions of life, and faith to discern your love, within, above, and beyond the impartial destinies of this great drama of life. Save us from every vainglorious pretension by which we demand favors which violate your love for all your children, and grant us grace to appropriate every fortune, both good and evil, for the triumph of the suffering, crucified, and risen Lord in our souls and life. In whose name we ask it.

## 2. THE WHEAT AND THE TARES

*Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all  
generations.  
Before the mountains were brought forth,  
or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world,  
even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.  
Thou turnest man to destruction;  
and sayest, Return, ye children of men.  
For a thousand years in thy sight  
are but as yesterday when it is past,  
and as a watch in the night.  
Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep:  
in the morning they are like grass which groweth up.  
In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up;  
in the evening it is cut down, and withereth.  
For we are consumed by thine anger,  
and by thy wrath are we troubled.  
Thou hast set our iniquities before thee,  
our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.  
For all our days are passed away in thy wrath:  
we spend our years as a tale that is told.  
The days of our years are threescore years and ten;  
and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years,  
yet is their strength labour and sorrow;  
for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.*

Ps. 90:1–10, AV

*Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven  
is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while  
men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and  
went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth  
fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder  
came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field?  
from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath  
done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and  
gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye  
root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the  
harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye  
together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but  
gather the wheat into my barn.*

Matt. 13:24–30, AV

I want to begin my sermon with the well-known ninetyeth Psalm,  
and end it with the parable of the wheat and the tares, which is the

New Testament lesson of the morning. The ninetieth Psalm begins with the words, "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God." Then it goes on to describe the human situation in typically biblical terms. "Thou carriest them [that is, us] away as with a flood; . . . In the morning they are like grass which groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth; . . . in the evening it is cut down and withereth." The brevity of human life! "Thou carriest them away as with a flood." We are like corks that bob up and down in the river of time. The brevity of human life may fill us with melancholy because it seems to reduce life to such insignificance. We bring our years to an end like a tale that is told, says the Psalmist.

The second point in the analysis of the human situation is implicit rather than explicit. Man is indeed like a cork that is drawn down the river of time, carried away as with a flood. But he could not be altogether that, because he knows about it; he speculates about it as the Psalmist does, and about the significance of it. Man stands outside of the river of time, so that he can anticipate his death either with hope or with melancholy. Also he can create. He is not only a creature, but he is a creator because he is not quite in the river of time; although he might forget how much of a creature he is when he begins to create. Therefore we come to the third point.

This drama of human history is indeed partly our construct, but it stands under a sovereignty much greater than ours. "A thousand years are in thy sight but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night." The drama of our individual life and the whole drama of human history stands under a mysterious and eternal sovereignty. It is a mysterious sovereignty which the prophets are always warning that we must not spell out too much. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, my ways are not your ways." But it is not complete mystery because—and this is the distinction between the biblical view and the philosophical view—in spite of the mystery, there are also glints of meaning in it. This God is the mysterious creator of the world, but he is also a just and merciful God.

The New Testament adds to this story by suggesting there is a clue to the mystery. This is the light that shineth in darkness, the drama of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here we have a sense that the mystery of God's creativity and the mystery of his severe judgment

and the mystery of his mercy are related, and the clue to the mystery lies in the combination of his justice and his mercy. How are they related; this is our question, and how are these all brought together and revealed? The light that shineth in darkness enables us to live our life, not merely in the sense of its brevity, but with a sense of a purpose for it, and also with the sense of a purpose, and judgment and ultimate fulfillment beyond any judgments or fulfillments that we can envisage.

There are various alternatives—modern and ancient—to what the biblical faith tells us about our human story. One of the great alternatives Aldous Huxley has defined as the “perennial philosophy,” which many modern intellectuals, when they become religious, think is a plausible alternative to biblical faith.

According to this alternative view of life, attention is fastened on the second part of the human situation; man is in the river of time but is transcendent over it. This transcendence of his is indeterminate. He can rise higher and higher, and he can look at the whole thing and ask whether it has any meaning. Let him, therefore, rise higher and higher until he, in a sense, meets God. This is the strategy of detachment, according to which we all have our private airplanes, spiritually speaking, and these spiritual airplanes have indeterminate altitude records. There is no limit to how high you can go. You start, and raise yourself up from the human scene to the point where at first it seems creative, because you see, and are apologetic for, all your vanities and pretensions. You rise a little higher, and then you become apologetic for anything that you have done responsibly and creatively. And then you also begin to look at your fellowmen, and you see mothers caring for their children, scholars engaged in their enterprises, businessmen in the marketplace, politicians fighting for their causes, and you say, “What is the good of this? This is all in the river of time. This is all so brief, and also it may be corrupt.”

Playing God to the universe, in other words, can be very exhilarating but very irresponsible. It is a strategy of weakness rather than of strength; if you happen to be very weak, you can look at the world from the highest altitude you can think of. If you get high enough in an airplane, you know that the farm of the good farmer and of the bad farmer look equally like garden plots. All distinctions disappear. All moral responsibilities disappear. Indeterminate extension of our freedom over time is certainly no answer to the problem of life.

Probably not many Christians are tempted to this alternative, yet it is a perennial temptation through the ages; if you would have a religious census of the world you would find that more people than the Christians or the Jews have some vision of this alternative to biblical religion.

Which brings us now again to the strategy of life as we have it in the faith of the Bible. We look at the brevity of our life. We admit that we are creatures. We know that we are unique creatures, that God has made us in his image, that we have a freedom to do something that nature does not know, that we can project goals beyond the limitations, ambitions, desires, and lusts of nature. We are the creatures who, gloriously, tragically, and pathetically, make history. As we make it, we have to make distinctions between good and evil. We know that selfishness is dangerous. We must be unselfish. The more we rise above our immediate situation and see the situation of the other person, the more creative we are. Therefore, our life story is concerned with making rigorous distinctions between right and wrong, between good and evil. Part of the Christian faith corresponds to this interpretation. Certainly a part of the Old Testament is not quite sure whether man is in relationship to God, or whether the primary job for the righteous is to war against the unrighteous. We have to admit that it makes a very big difference when we defend freedom against tyranny, and truth against the lies of the world. How else could we build history except by these rigorous distinctions between good and evil, right and wrong?

But now we come to the New Testament lesson, the puzzling lesson of the parable of the wheat and the tares. The man sowed a field of wheat and the enemy sowed tares among the wheat. And the servants, following the impulse of each one of us, asked if they should root out the tares so that the wheat could grow. This is a parable taken from agriculture to illustrate a point of morals, and it violates every principle of agriculture or of morals. After all, every farmer and every gardener makes ceaseless war against the tares. How else could the flowers and the wheat grow? And we have to make ceaseless war against evil within ourselves and in our fellowmen, or how could there be any kind of decency in the world? Against all moral impulse, we have this eschatological parable.

"Nay," said the householder. "Lest while ye gather up the tares, you root up also the wheat." The suggestion is that a great deal of evil may come from the selfishness of men, but perhaps more evil may come from the premature judgments of men about themselves and each other. "Let both grow together until the harvest." These wonderful words of Scripture suggest that while we have to judge, there is a judgment beyond our judgment, and there are fulfillments beyond our fulfillments.

Consider how much more evil and good, creativity and selfishness, are mixed up in actual life than our moralists, whether they be Christian or secular, realize. How little we achieve charity because we do not recognize this fact.

Let us consider the matter of creativity and the desire for approval. What could be more evil than the avaricious desire for the approval of our fellowmen? But how closely related it is to the impulse of creativity. The diary of Virginia Woolf notes that when she put out a new novel, she had an almost morbid interest in the reviews. She was an established artist. Was her anxiety justified? Could not she just take for granted that people would praise her or would accept her work? Yet she had a morbid concern, as anyone who has written a book understands. You may think that you are creative, but you suspect you may have slipped. You have to be approved in order to establish your creativity; the wheat and the tares are very mixed up. "Let both grow together until the harvest." When we think of ourselves, we ought to remember that there is an ultimate judgment against excessive self-concern. But when we deal with our fellowman, we must do so in charity.

How curiously are love and self-love mixed up in life, much more complexly than any scheme of morals recognizes. The simple words of the parable are more profound than the wisdom of all our moralists. There is a self-love which is the engine of creativity. It may not be justified ultimately for that reason, but when we look at history, we have to say that it is an engine of creativity.

There is a debate whether Cervantes wrote the great classic, *Don Quixote*, in order to pay his debts, or in order to get even with his critics. But now it does not make any difference what the motive was. *Don Quixote* is no less a great work of art.

In the field of politics we see very clearly the curious mixture of egotism and desire for public welfare. Winston Churchill, for exam-

ple, was a very ambitious young man. His ambition gave him the chance to accomplish much. What he achieved was not only great statesmanship but had a quality of magnanimity that reminds us of the wisdom of the wheat and the tares. Churchill knew the mixture of good and evil in the dramas of history. We doubt whether he ever read or really heeded the parable of the wheat and the tares, yet in his magnanimity there was some of its wisdom. He showed the combination of creativity and self-love which we find particularly in politics, but is it not everywhere? There is a puzzling aspect to judgments about self-love or ambition. At what particular point do we think egotism so excessive that it becomes obviously corrupting? It is always rather corrupting, but when does it become *obviously* corrupting? We know certain people to be monstrous egotists, but can we put our finger on the spot where this mixture of love and self-love, which we all have, turns into monstrous egotism? We do have to make our judgments, but we cannot be exact in our moral measurement.

There are forms of self-love which are quite dangerous, but are enclosed in a great sea of vitality which robs them of some of their power. Let us compare America with Spain. In Spain, the somewhat medieval social and political order is according to the tradition of natural law and of the Catholic church. To us, it is stale and static. In this country, and in spite of all our weaknesses, our pride and pretensions, certainly there is life. Our national life is based upon the vitality of various interests balanced by various other interests. This is the heart of the free enterprise doctrine. These self-interests are not nearly as harmless as our conservative friends imagine them to be. Here we do have to violate the parable, and provisionally make judgments and say, "This form of self-interest must be checked." Or, "This form of self-interest must be balanced by other interest." Otherwise we will not have justice if the powerful man simply goes after his interest at the expense of the weak.

We make such provisional judgments, but all these provisional judgments stand ultimately under the truth of the parable of the wheat and the tares. "Let both grow together until the harvest." If we had more modesty about this, perhaps there would not have been such a debate between pure individualism and pure collectivism. On the one hand, this policy may be necessary. On the other hand, it may be dangerous. We had better try to find out how necessary and how

dangerous it is, but not absolutely, or we will make the kind of judgment that will pull up the wheat with the tares.

What is Communism but a vast example of pulling up the tares, and not knowing the wheat that is among these tares of so called self-interest or capitalistic injustice. Is it not surprising that we should have two great evils in our time, Nazism and Communism? Nazism represented such an obvious expression of collective egotism that we do not have to wait for the ultimate judgment. We all know that Nazism was evil! But Communism is a form of evil that comes from human beings forgetting that they are creatures, imagining themselves omniscient and righteous—absolutely righteous—and trying to rebuild the whole world in terms of their ideals, not knowing that their own sins are involved in it. The Communist knows nothing about the parable of the wheat and the tares, or about the ultimate judgment that stands over human existence, and above all nothing about the ambiguity of all human motives.

There is also that kind of selfishness which we might regard as an inadvertent and rather harmless corruption of the love impulse. Is it really inadvertent? Is it actually harmless? We do not know exactly. The sinfulness of parents in their love for their children gives us an example.

The love of parents for their children is one of the symbols of the kingdom of God. But we parents are not quite perfect. There are two crises which children face: one is in their youth when they find out that their parents are not as powerful as they thought; and the second is in their adolescence when they find out that the parents are not as good as they thought they were. No doubt every parent is better than an adolescent rebel imagines in the period of rebellion. The parent who claims to be absolutely loving and then insinuates into that love the old lust for power, which every human being has, obviously is vexatious. But it also must be recognized that there is some good in this evil.

Thus human history is a mixture of wheat and tares. We must make provisional distinctions, but we must know that there are no final distinctions. "Let both grow together until the harvest." Man is a creature and a creator. He would not be a creator if he could not overlook the human scene and be able to establish goals beyond those of nature and to discriminate between good and evil. He must do

these things. But he must also remember that no matter how high his creativity may rise, he is himself involved in the flow of time, and he becomes evil at the precise point where he pretends not to be, when he pretends that his wisdom is not finite but infinite, and his virtue is not ambiguous but unambiguous.

From the standpoint of the biblical faith we do not have to despair because life is so brief, but we must not pretend to more because we are so great. Because we are both small and great, we have discerned a mystery and a meaning beyond our smallness and our greatness, and a justice and a love which completes our incompletions, which corrects our judgments, and which brings the whole story to a fulfillment beyond our power to fulfill any story.

We thank you, our God, for your judgments which are sterner than the judgments of man. Help us to remember them when moral men speak well of us. We thank you for your mercy which is kinder than the goodness of men. Help us to discern this when we are overcome by the confusion of life, and despair about our own sin. Grant us, O Lord, always to worship you in all our doings in the greatness of your creativity and the wonder of your judgment and your mercy.