



GOD

in the world

by

Josef Imberg

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*Ten short chapters
on Christian ethics*

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I

CREATION AND ETHICS

1. God and the created world

All people are concerned with questions of ethics, either they know it or not, either they are Christians or not. We cannot take a single step in our daily life or work without acting, or being acted upon, in an ethical or un-ethical way. But many of these questions will get a different answer, if an almighty God is believed to be the ruler of the world, or the world is believed to have originated by mere chance.

God has revealed Himself to all peoples in the world, both in Creation itself and in the conscience of man. But in spite of this it is not possible to get a complete knowledge about God by studying Creation or by listening to the conscience. If we try that way we do not hear anything about holy Trinity or about the sending of the only begotten Son.¹ For the question of salvation the revelation in God's holy Word and through Jesus Christ is of the greatest importance.

For our present study of ethics another thing is also very important: "When Gentiles who have not the law /of Moses/ do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts."² It is on this basis we can discuss matters of ethics more generally, both with people of other religions and with atheists. We can have deliberations with all of them about the state of the world, about political and soci-

al matters, about moral, schools, welfare, law, justice, civilization, health, etc. What we have in common is our reason and our common sense, but also our conscience by which we can decide what is right and wrong.

Although we have much in common with all sorts of people, it makes a great difference if we believe in God as our Creator or not. Creation shows us that we are not the owners of the world. The created things should be regarded as gifts or rather loans. We cannot create or produce even one single cell. What we are doing is either poor handling or good handling of the things we find here. In the worst cases we are soiling or even spoiling things to the effect that those who come after us may find a devastated world.

It is also important to note that there is a great difference between the created things. Some of them are given once and for all, e.g. the earth itself with its surface, its waters and minerals, etc., whereas some things are being created or renewed all the time, e.g. oxygen, plants, soil, fruits, meat, etc. Whatever these things are, no country and no people owns them. People depend upon them, they may use them, and they are responsible for the use of them.

A true respect for the created world cannot be shown unless we agree that we are stewards or trustees. From a believer's point of view this means that we must obey the Power that has put the things at our disposal. On this point Christians, together with many other believers, will be different from those who believe only in Man.

2. Ethics and moral

There is often some confusion when we come to questions about "ethics" or "moral". What is the difference between these terms? In many cases they may be used alternately, which means that if

the one word is used it can normally be replaced with the other. But on a different level of speech we can find a rather clear distinction between the two words. "Ethics" often means *the principles* governing our ways of acting, and also *the fundamental teaching about these principles*, whereas *the personal application* of such principles is called that person's moral. It is exactly here we touch upon a real difficulty with regard to the two terms. If an ethical way of acting in a certain sphere of life can be called "a moral way of acting", then, normally, the opposite way ought to be called "immoral". But "immoral" nowadays is a word often applied to certain modes of life, e.g. in sexual matters. To avoid thoughts in that direction we may rather say "un-ethical", when we speak about modes of life that do not reach a level of good ethical standard. In the following, therefore, we prefer to use the words "ethical" and "un-ethical" to avoid misunderstanding.

Generally it must be stressed that when we examine a certain mode of life from the ethical point of view we must always *consider the circumstances*: when the thing was done, how it was done, why it was done, by whom it was done, for whom it was done, and for what reason it was done. Together with this we also have to look at the mind and heart of the acting person, not at the outward action only.

Here we approach one of the most difficult questions in all ethics. *How is it possible to assess and judge what is good, first generally, in principle, and then also in single actions of man?* In some very common teaching about ethics we may find the following suggestions:

- i) everything is good that is *useful and profitable to man, or*
- ii) everything is good that will *promote the development of man, or*
- iii) everything is good that will *give the individual person happiness and prosperity, or sometimes even*
- iv) everything is good that *serves the interest of the community or the state.*

All these explanations are poor and fail to reach the level of good ethics. About all of them one can say that they only raise new questions: What is profitable to man, what does development mean, what is prosperity, and how can happiness be measured? And furthermore, with regard to the community or the state, who decides about its ethical principles, levels and measures? There is another great difficulty as far as the community and the state are concerned: those people who have influence upon us or govern us may easily use these ways to deceive us. They may say: Do this, obey us, and this obedience will bring development, happiness, prosperity and everything else that is good for you. This question leads us to another very important point.

All kinds of ethics originate, and must originate, in individuals. No kind of ethics can come about by official order. If authorities order bad or wrong things, then they are bad and wrong themselves and act un-ethically. On the other hand, *to order good ethics is beyond their authority and power.* They can plead for such things among their people and encourage such things. But why cannot authorities do more than that? It is because ethics concern the innermost part of man, mind, soul and conscience. From a Christian point of view this depends on the fact that man is created by God. But we also believe that every human being has a conscience either he believes in God or not. All ethical mode of life is connected with a conscience at work.

When we speak about the individual as the basic unit in all ethical matters, this does not exclude *the official way of thinking and acting.* All authorities and governments must consider the ethical side of all matters and remember that these questions are of the greatest importance to the whole community. If the authorities fail on this point, they are heading for chaos. It often happens that authorities plead with people to act "on faith and honour". How can they do that, if there is no conscience in man? As we shall see later on many points, the life of the community is often jeopardized by selfish and evil citizens, yes, even by officials and authorities. How can a moral renewal set in then?

Only if a new spirit is awakened in the people itself. But the start of such a renewal must come about in some individuals and then spread to other parts of the community, to the people and the country, or even further.

1 Jn 3:16

2 Rom 2:14-15

II

ETHICS AND THE CHURCH

1. The task of the Church

No people can exist without ethics of some kind. A people cannot live un-ethically purposely. Such a people is soon "laid waste", as Jesus says.¹ To declare "neutrality" in ethical matters will give evildoers and false teachers the right of way.

Thus the field of ethics cannot be reserved for Christians or for the Church, not even for "religious people". Among non-Christians we can often recognize Christian principles that have become accepted by them, either they know this fact or not. One of these very common principles reads: "Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them."²

The Church has been given the great task to proclaim the will of God in the whole world.³ By doing so, in words and deeds, she can give a great contribution to the life of the world, also ethically. This is how she becomes "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world".

The first thing the Church can do is to *stress the importance of law in general*. She can point to the Law as one of the Lord's most precious gifts to the world. No people can have ethics without law. In the Christian church the law is better known than anywhere else. In a brief form the law of God has been explained to the world in the Ten commandments.⁴ Of course many other laws have been given in the Old Testament, but everything has been summed up in this way: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your

strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.”⁵ Jesus has never contradicted the Law of the Old Testament, on the contrary, He has confirmed it in the strongest way when He says: “I have come not to abolish /the law and the prophets/ but to fulfil them.”⁶

Thus the contribution of the Church to the field of ethics is to give people a law to follow. Her case is so much stronger, since she knows the law through God’s own revelation. Furthermore, this revelation of the law has been confirmed and explained by Him, who is “the way, and the truth, and the life”.⁷

The difference between Christian ethics and ethics in other religions does not depend on their thoughts about the law only. It also depends on what we believe about God. God is holy and righteous. But He is also merciful, which means that He is full of love. This fact, therefore, will shape and colour God’s children in their being and their life, and also be of the greatest importance to their ethics, if their faith in God is true and consistent. These facts have been worded in the most clear way by Jesus Himself and by St. John.⁸ The love of Christians will always flow from that fountain of love which is God Himself.⁹

One difficulty with the word “love” is that it is often understood in a very general or sentimental way. This is wrong. The love of a true Christian for his fellow-beings is always very *realistic*. It is conscious of facts, either they are positive or negative. A true Christian will always consider questions like these: “What is God’s will with regard to this person?”, and “What is the aim of my present action?” To “help”, just in general, in order to “be kind”, and to feel satisfaction of having been good and kind, that is not pure love, it is selfishness in disguise.

2. *The importance of faith*

Generally speaking faith is of the greatest importance in all human life. It makes all the difference if we believe in a person or not, if we believe in an idea or not. But the importance of faith is even greater in matters of ethics. And yet, the Christian faith is not to be compared to an ordinary faith, like faith in a thing or an idea. Christian faith is faith in "the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords".¹⁰

This faith in God has another side: it believes in the *reality of evil*. Although the whole world has been created by God, we believe *there has occurred a great fall, a rebellion against God*. This means that men "exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature /≠the created things/ rather than the Creator".¹¹ This belief in the creation and the fall, the belief that there exists good and evil in this world, will explain the difference between Christians and non-Christians in many matters of ethics.

This fact leads us further. Thus from a Christian point of view it will be impossible to accept the rather common *compromising between good and evil*. Nowadays there is also a tendency to explain some things as rather "neutral", which means that from an ethical point of view they are neither good nor bad. There is also a tendency to state that since we cannot attain good things we have to accept and acknowledge less. Such a way of thinking is quite foreign to true Christian belief.

There is also a tendency, at least in worldly, modern thinking, that there is no real difference between good and evil. It is thought that the difference we see is due to some old ideas we have inherited from earlier, dark ages. This way of thinking is called moral nihilism. Such nihilism must be totally opposed by Christian thinking and teaching.

True Christian thinking also opposes all *utilitarianism*. In the ethical field this word stands for "the doctrine that the worth or value /of a certain action/ is determined by its utility". If people follow the utilitarian way they will always ask "What can I

win?" or "What is the advantage?", or they will say "It depends upon the outcome" or even more clearly "It depends upon the income".

What is, in these particular matters, the Church able to contribute to the ethics of people? The answer is: all the riches of the Word of God and of the ethical teaching of Jesus Christ. In that way God has given us clear information about good and evil and also clear roadsigns at the crossroads of life.

Jesus Christ is the great Teacher and Master, but also *the outstanding model of a human life*. On this point many are accepting Him, even such people who do not believe in Him as their Saviour. But here there is often a misunderstanding on their side. He has not come in order to be a model only. He has come to be the Saviour, and to those who believe in Him it is not enough to follow Him in an outward way, e.g. by trying to act and do as He did. He has always pointed to *the disposition of the heart, the mind and conscience of man*: "First cleanse the inside of the cup and of the plate, that the outside also may be clean."¹² St. Paul stresses the same: "Be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."¹³ This kind of personal renewal in Christ will always commence in individual Christians and after that continue to work upon other people and their ways of life. In this way Christians, ordinary people and the whole community may be renewed from an ethical point of view. Jesus has brought home this point in this way: "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? ... You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."¹⁴

1 Mt 12:25

2 Mt 7:12

3 Mt 28:18-20

4 Ex 20:1-17

5 Lk 10:27

6 Mt 5:17

7 Jn 14:6

8 Jn 15:12; 1 Jn

4:11

9 Ps 36:9

10 1 Tim 6:15

11 Rom 1:25

12 Mt 23:26

13 Eph 4:23-24

14 Mt 5:13-16

III

OUR FELLOW-BEINGS

1. Who are they?

This fact is obvious; when we work in the fields, in a store, in a factory or workshop, in a school or in an office, we cannot avoid meeting a number of people. Either we like it or not we have to cooperate with them in many ways. What happens then?

We will become influenced by them in many ways, and possibly there will also be some influence on them from our side. Sometimes we may have a rather negative opinion about them. It may be so, because we expect something from them which they cannot give. Therefore we may think that they are wrong or bad. Perhaps the fault is on our side, because they have other gifts which we have not cared to recognize. And still worse: if these people do not expect anything from us, it may be so, because they have not discovered any interest from our side. Then *our fellowship has failed, because it has been based on what we expect to obtain instead of being based on a willingness to serve and give.* To help and serve our fellow-beings is always a call and a blessing. This should come first. If we reverse this order and expect to be helped and served first, then we spoil our possibilities of creating a good fellowship. What is the help, then, against such mistakes? We should not expect much help from *theories* about ethics, instead we should start with this most realistic question: Who is my fellow-being?

Sometimes this question is answered in this way: *all people are our fellow-beings*. There is a certain danger in this kind of thinking: we do not know all people in the world, how can they be our fellow-beings then, and how can we love and serve them? But the opposite question will occur, if we reduce our fellowship to such people who live very near us: our families and the nearest co-workers in our daily work. For sure these people are fellow-beings, but what about those who depend on us, although we have never seen them? To understand this question better, let us look at it from two other points of view, what we shouldn't do and what we should do.

2. *What we shouldn't do and what we should do*

Of course there are thousands of things we should never do, but if we mention a few of them it will help us to understand much of the rest.

First we may mention *the many kinds of neglect*. When we neglect our fellow-beings we fail to see and understand their position, their wishes, their need or suffering. The result will be *unwillingness to help*. Secondly we ought to mention such actions where people have both seen and understood the need and suffering of their fellow-beings, and yet they do not help. Instead they do the very opposite of helping. Because of *being greedy, they are unjust and cruel* against their fellow-beings, or they even go as far as *robbing* them of their property or whatever they have. There are many faults and sins of this kind: *unrighteousness, mercilessness, fraud, and theft*.

There are other things we should not do which do not belong to the questions of bread, money or property. What our fellow-beings own also concerns their *names, honour and reputation*.

Therefore, *to be false, to slander, and to give false witness* against our fellow-beings will cause great harm to them, sometimes to the end of their lives, and after them to a following generation. Such actions, therefore, will be quite as unjust and cruel as to rob these people of money and property.

There are many actions that may look good but from another side must be called bad and unjust. Perhaps such actions are intended to help somebody, by money, by recommendation, by praise, by witnessing in court, etc. But if the actions are one-sided, which means speaking in favour of one party and neglecting or denying the right of another party, group or person, then these actions are not good at all. Instead they are false and wrong, because they are *biased, one-sided, and partial*. Such partiality is a crime in legal matters. In matters of ethics it is a great fault, it is even a sin.

When we turn to the question of *what we should do, it is not only the opposite of what we shouldn't do*. It is much more than that. In some non-Christian religions and schools of thought people have touched "the golden rule": "Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them."¹ Since this thought has been explained more fully and consistently in the Christian religion than anywhere else, we use the Christian teaching here as the best explanation of what we should do to our fellow-beings.

3. The Christian contribution to the teaching about our fellow-beings

In other cases it may be too much to say that all people in the world are our fellow-beings, but from the Christian point of view it is not too much. Holy Scripture tells us that God "made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their

habitation".² This divine power of creation has many sides. God is "lawgiver and judge", which means that He has the power to "destroy". But He is also able to "save".³ This love and willingness to save includes not only the chosen people, but also the heathen, because "the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel".⁴

This is where we find the source of love, both in relation to God and in relation to our fellow-beings: "We love, because He first loved us."⁵ Every kind of true love will get its explanation from this source, e.g. in this way: "Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."⁶

As a summary we may say that love does not only *satisfy needs*, it also aims at *edifying our neighbour in all ways possible*.⁷ Such a love is *obliging*, which means that it will do good without expecting any reward for it.⁸ To show such love is to "heap burning coals" even upon an enemy.⁹ The Lord has also described all kinds of love by His most remarkable words: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."¹⁰

When we explain the relation towards our fellow-beings, we often use the word *neighbour*. This word probably exists in all languages, first as a description of *local nearness*, but then also as a description of *close relationship, although locally we may live apart*. But what does the word "neighbour" mean, when we are given the commandment "You shall love your neighbour"?¹¹ Normally we understand the word as *the person we ought to love*, and so it is often explained in the Word of God. But the Christian contribution to the ethics of the world goes one step, or rather many steps, further. In His famous parable about "the good Samaritan" Jesus turns all our ideas upside down by asking: "Which of these three... proved neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?"¹² The correct answer was: "The one who showed mercy." What does it mean? It means that in the first instance *we should look upon ourselves as neighbours*, called not to receive, but to give and help. *This way of thinking makes our call and duty still more conspicuous and obliging*. It

again clarifies the word by Jesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Nobody in the whole world can give greater contribution to the community of men than the Church and the Christians, if they follow their Saviour and Lord.

1 Mt 7:12
2 Acts 17:26
3 Jas 4:12
4 Eph 3:6
5 1 Jn 4:19
6 Rom 13:10

7 Rom 15:2
8 Mt 5:43-48;
Lk 14:12-14
9 Prov 25:21-22;
Rom 12:20
10 Acts 20:35

11 Lev 19:18
12 Lk 10:25-37

IV

COMMUNITY AND STATE

1. The meaning of the words

Strictly speaking it is not necessary that the official life of the citizens is organised as a state, either this would be called a republic or a kingdom, either it would be ruled one way or another. Why isn't this necessary? To understand this we have to go back to earlier times in history. What is now a large country then consisted of a rather great number of areas or districts, "lands", ruled by minor leaders of different kinds, "chiefs" or whatever they were called. Also under such circumstances people could live and work, cooperate and help each other in different ways. It sometimes happens, even today, that a country and its organisation break up and fall to pieces, and then the different pieces continue to live, somewhat like the old "lands". All this shows us that when a state demands authority over its people, "because without the state you cannot live", it is definitely an overstatement.

If a state is not absolutely necessary under all circumstances, as we have seen, it is different with the community. *A kind of community is always necessary*, either it is named in one way or another. Individual persons or families cannot live totally independent of other people, as if they were states or communities in themselves. "None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself."¹ In all peoples of the world there is some kind of fel-

lowship, cooperation and mutual assistance between citizens. This is what we may call "the community". This community lives, works and functions on different levels, individuals, families and homes being the basic units. As a top organization here we may think of the state. It may be there, or it may not. Perhaps the communities on a lower level have decided to cooperate and to go together as far as to organize a state. But in their cooperation between themselves they can also follow another line. They can organize their cooperation in special fields of work only, e.g. post, transport, currency, defence or similar things.

When this has been said it must be stressed that whether we live in a state or in a different community, *we must always live under some authority*. It is impossible to mention a people or a country without such an authority. If there is an exception to this rule, it must be a lawless state, where a revolution is going on and a new authority has not been established yet.

The authority over a people may have been put in power by a vote from the people, or it might be in power according to some kind of tradition. What is right and wrong on this point cannot be explained here. It is up to the people concerned to decide for themselves.

What is *the duty* of the highest authorities of the country, either it is organized as a state or a community on a lower level? It is to look after what is good for the country and the people. This applies to laws, justice, health, education and general welfare. The difficulty on this point arises if we ask what is "good" or "best". Generally it may be said that there are *two guides* which ought to be listened to and followed: *conscience and common sense*. When we speak about "guides" for the worldly authorities, we cannot mention the Church or the Bible on this point. Christians or the Church cannot exercise worldly rule over people, whatever these people believe. The task of the Church in these matters is of a different kind, which will be explained later.

There is another difficulty with regard to the rule of worldly authorities: how far should they pay attention to individuals and their interests, or is it enough to satisfy the needs and interests

of the community as a whole? For sure this is a difficult question to handle. It may be answered in this way: There must always be a balancing between these two kinds of interest. When the balance turns over one way or another, then the rulership has lost very much in responsibility and justice.

2. Two different kinds of rule

We live in a world where there is good and evil in a mixture that affects the whole of mankind. God does not want this disorder, but it has come into the world through the fall of man.² But in order that people may manage to live and to live together God has set bounds to the evil. One clear example of this fact we find in one of the two kinds of rule we are dealing with here. This particular rule is carried out through *governments and all sorts of worldly authorities*. They exist in order to defend people, look after them, and safeguard them, so that evil does not get the upper hand. This kind of rule may be called *the worldly rule*.

The opposite kind of rule is *the spiritual rule* where the Church of God is at work. We are going to explain both of these rules more in detail, but be it said at once that both are there according to the will of God. Both should, therefore, be regarded with affectionate esteem for God's sake and for the sake of our conscience and welfare.

The outward, worldly rule will appear in different fields and spheres of life, but generally we sum them up by calling them "the authorities", "the community" or "the state", etc. This worldly rule has the task of keeping peace and order in our countries, of protecting all citizens against all kinds of enemies, and to procure the best outward kind of life that is possible under the circumstances of time. This kind of authority also includes the right and duty to protect one citizen against another. One of them may think that his right is jeopardized by another. But the

law of a good community says that no citizen should be allowed to put his right through against another citizen in his own way and by his own power. He might do it wrongly, also to the disadvantage of both one and two other parts, and such "justice" must be hindered by the community. This will be clear from one very plain example.

A certain person has lost his bicycle by theft. He finds it somewhere and simply takes it back to his home. But he has been observed by some witnesses when doing this, and he is reported to the police by the new "owner". He defends his right in court, but there he becomes convicted of "theft" himself, because the new owner has produced a receipt, showing that he has bought the bicycle from a store and paid for it properly. What has happened? The first thief stole it and sold it to the store, as his "own", and the storekeeper forgot to ask for a certificate of purchase and ownership. Not knowing the procedures of law, the first and real owner happened to become a thief by taking justice into his own hands. – This shows us that we should never take justice into our own hands, instead we should make use of the channels and facilities of the law and the legal authorities. That is how we can live together in peace. Thus in many cases our authorities will have to be mediators and middlemen between the individual citizens.

If in a case, like the one mentioned, we are tempted to be critical and a bit harsh, saying that "the authorities make things complicated to us", then let us consider the case of the bicycle again! Say that the bicycle found was not the right one, it was only very similar to the one stolen, then the "owner" was not the owner! He made a bad mistake and became a real thief! Then the case shows us that citizens should never be allowed to take justice into their own hands. Laws and authorities are there to help us, to safeguard the interest and justice of all, not of one or of a few only. And it is a real proof of God's care for us and for the world that *He has given authority and power to the worldly rule.*

The spiritual rule has a task that is completely different. It is given to the Church, and it is performed when people are given

the Word of God, when they are put before the almighty and omniscient God, and shown the grace of God. The Church wishes to make us the children of God, members of the Kingdom of God, and citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. This message does not come under the worldly rule, it belongs only to the field of grace and faith. In that field the worldly authorities have no say.

3. The relations between the two kinds of rule

Since we live in one world there will exist relations of different kinds between the worldly and the spiritual rule. It may be enough here to mention three very clear points of contact.

The first point of contact is *the outward order*. The worldly authorities are responsible for keeping such order, but it is also in the interest of the Church, because such order will benefit the life of all men, either they are believers or not. This outward order is also necessary for the spreading of the Gospel, "the good news".

The second point of contact is *freedom of thought and speech*. If this freedom is tampered with, hindered or even forbidden, then the access to the Gospel will also be very much hindered. But where such freedom of thought and speech prevails, then the Word of God may be read, preached and heard, and people may have full freedom to believe and to live as Christians.

The third point of contact is less clear but not less important. Although the Church does not interfere in the outward rule, *there are things which belong to her prophetic task*: justice, without prejudice and without consideration of the worldly position of men; righteousness and truth. It may happen in the worldly rule that authorities fail because of corruption, nepotism, and

general weakness, so that justice, fairness and truth are neglected or even trodden upon. Then the Church has to fulfil her prophetic task. This does not mean interference in single cases, rather the upholding of the general principles of fairness, truth and justice. If she does, she proves herself to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.³ There are many examples of this kind. It may be sufficient here to mention the prophets Nathan and Amos⁴ and Jesus' forerunner, John the Baptist.⁵

It is clear that these three points of contact all deal with *the Law*. The worldly rule has only got to do with law. It has nothing to do with the Gospel. But the worldly rule assists the work of the Gospel when upholding law, peace and good order. On the other hand the spiritual rule is not limited to the Gospel, so that it must keep away from all law. The spiritual rule strongly stresses the importance of the law. But it also stresses that it is the work of the worldly authorities to perform the outward work of the law. To this it should be added that in spiritual matters the law has another task, which is very important: it is a tutor that leads to Christ.⁶ This work cannot be carried out by the worldly rule. It is the work in the Church by the Holy Spirit.

What kind of worldly rule is best? This question cannot be answered to cover all cases. It can be answered only according to some general principles. Thus it may be said that a mild rule is better than a harsh rule, that a considerate rule is better than an absolute way of governing, and that some kind of self-governing is much better than a dictatorship, by which one man or one woman exercises a totalitarian rule. In countries where the Christian gospel has carried out its work over long periods, people are convinced that democracy is the best kind of rule from all aspects.

Sometimes it is not possible to obtain the kind of rule people would like to have. In very many countries of the world people are still living under rules they very much dislike. This state of affairs has been pressed upon them. No doubt it is very difficult to live in that way. From an international point of view it is not possible to assist them by force from outside, to try to "deliver"

them from such a rule. Such intervention would be branded as "interference" or "aggression".

How about Christians, when they are forced to live under a harsh or even brutal kind of worldly rule? It is remarkable, but we must put it this way: To those who are Christians it is both easier and more difficult at the same time. How can that be? It is easier in one way, because as Christians they have Christ in their hearts, and as citizens in the Kingdom of God they have an eternal hope.⁷ Then it is never futile to live, even if their outward life is extremely difficult. At the same time it may be more difficult to Christians than to other people, because as Christians they may be mishandled, persecuted and punished more than any other group. But in spite of that they try to be good citizens of their country. They try to serve it, also by "praying to the Lord on its behalf".⁸ This is in full accordance with the apostolic teaching and the teaching of the Lord.⁹

1 Rom 14:7

2 Gen 3

3 Mt 5:13-16

4 2 Sam 12:1-15; Amos 6:4-8;
7:10-17; 8:4-8

5 Mt 14:1-12

6 Gal 3:24

7 Heb 13:14

8 Jer 29:7

9 1 Pet 2:18-20; 3:13-17;
Mt 5:11-12

V

LAW AND JUSTICE

1. The importance of law and justice

All our life in this world has much to do with Law. Every kind of law in this world, if it is good, makes a kind of statement about God. He is not a god of disorder or confusion but the God of righteousness, justice and goodness. This fact will also shape and colour many human laws. No doubt some of them are weak, some even very doubtful, but when they aim at truth, justice and good order, then they will reveal something about God and His good will among men. At the same time such human laws will prevent much evil.

When we deal with questions about human law and justice we cannot expect that all legislators will count with a personal God. Perhaps the thoughts behind their work is a general belief or feeling that there is a kind of "power" behind "the development of the world", or only a belief that the world is running according to blind chance. But even so the legislators in very many cases are led by an unseen power to write laws for the advantage of the community or the state. When they are ordered to write the laws, it is expected from them that they do it "on faith and honour". If they do that, knowing or not knowing they will be doing God's work and reveal something about Him.

Laws, policemen, prosecutors, courts and judges have the general support of citizens, if they act against law-breakers and also act to support and help those who have become the victims of the law-breaking. But there are cases, when many citizens fail to understand what "justice" means. Sometimes it happens that dozens or hundreds of people are reported by the police because of traffic offences or accused by the authorities because of neglect in connection with declarations of income or similar things. Then out of hundreds of cases sometimes only half will be convicted, sometimes much less. Although the citizens themselves cannot see any difference in the faults or cases, they are treated differently. Then they say; "There is no justice at all in our country! What are the courts and judges good for?" In some big cases the accused are acquitted, whereas in many petty cases the accused are sentenced to fines or imprisonment. Then the same question is raised: "Where is justice? Is it only a matter of good or bad luck?"

There are three points we ought to observe in this matter. First: the citizens are not capable of judging correctly as a judge is. They can see only some outward things, whereas the judge must look at the cases from all sides and consider all "circumstances" for and against the accused. The second point: judges are human beings who can make mistakes at times. But is that a reason for scrapping all courts? Of course not, the laws and courts work in the interests of the country and the citizens, even if mistakes cannot be avoided.

The third point is not less important. The courts and judges are not supposed to establish justice in each and every case that may turn up in the country. Such a system has not been invented yet. Why? Could we pay for the courts, if the cases were three-fold or ten-fold in number? But what are the courts for if they cannot take up all possible cases? The most important thing is *to show what the law means* and *to show by example what the limits of the law are*. When the citizens find from court cases what they can do or cannot do, it has been demonstrated to them: this is a limit. Then, if a few are convicted,

and others are not, it is a different side of the matter. It may be regretted, but a society of law has shown what is right or wrong, although it is not possible to convict everybody who has failed in one matter or another.

2. Is it enough to adhere to the letter of the written law?

Many citizens think this is exactly what should happen. In their own cases they might also search intensely for a single letter that could speak in their favour. What is right and what is wrong on this point?

Of course judges and courts must follow what is written, in paragraphs, sentences and words. If there is a law, which they should follow, they cannot judge according to another law. But there is another point here. In very many laws there are words and sentences about age, "wilfulness", "extenuating circumstances", "conduct in the past", etc. All this must then be considered before a sentence is passed. An outsider will have an easy job to find a word or paragraph overruling all these considerations, in order to pass a sentence, but to the judge and court the task is the opposite, *to consider everything*, also what is best for the present and for the future, both for the accused and for the community.

Here we are touching one of the highest and strongest principles with regard to justice in all countries. It is to judge in all cases *so as to safeguard the interests of the common good in the whole community*. What is meant by that? A few examples may give the best answer. Neither way is good, if we let rascals get away with no punishment at all, or if we punish them severely as far as breaking them down. Nor would any of the two ways serve the community. Therefore the community wishes an alternative to both ways, even through the courts: A sentence that

helps to rectify things and persons, and also a way that helps to encourage a better behaviour in future. But where can we expect such consideration? Strictly speaking we should expect it in all countries and peoples in the world, because it is in total agreement with the constitution and regulations of the United Nations.

Although most judges at work do not know God, the Father of Jesus Christ, it may be expected that they follow common sense and their consciences and consider what is in the interest of law and good order. In other words: that they "do by nature what the law requires", because "what the law requires is written on their hearts".¹

3. What is the aim of a court sentence?

As we have said before, the outcome of court proceedings is not always "justice". Many of those who have done the same thing as the one sentenced are not taken to court at all. How can we call the courts and the justice good then? Besides the general upholding of the law and the open demonstration of what is right and wrong, what is the purpose of fining people or of putting them in prison? If we think of the offender personally there should always be three points in the treatment of him: first the official marking out of right and wrong in the community, secondly to give him a chance to think things over with regard to his behaviour, and thirdly to give him an opportunity to change his behaviour for the future.

If we then think of the prisons, many of them also have facilities for work in different trades. People, either they are skilled or unskilled, can obtain some kind of work which may become very useful when they leave the prison. That is how it is planned at least.

But there is, unfortunately, another side of this matter. In many countries prisons have deteriorated, because many bad

people have been gathered there, and then the prisons serve as centrals for learning more crime, for gambling, for business in narcotics, etc. How can anybody improve or begin a new and better life under such circumstances?

Besides all other reforms, all authorities concerned, churches, etc., should work for two common goals: a general improvement in the life and standard of prisons and, still more important, a general improvement in the ethics of people and in the moral standard of the citizens, so that the demand for prisons will decrease more and more.

4. When the authorities themselves are at fault

It is a sad fact, but it does happen now and then that authorities fail to do what they should do, and also that they do what they shouldn't do. A good and honest man may be taken to court for no reason at all or on wrong accusations, or he is sentenced with the help of some prefabricated evidence. Or it may be in another way: an individual is ordered to do what is totally wrong according to his conscience and to the Word of God. What can he do then? The advice from the Word of God is clear: "We must obey God rather than men."² But if he becomes punished because of his obedience to God and his disobedience to men? Then the answer is: He ought to rejoice that he has been "counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name /of Jesus/".³

But what happens to the system of justice, if such things are allowed to happen? First of all, such things should be regarded as exceptions in a good community. Normally the system of justice works and should be held in the highest esteem by all. And secondly, what would happen, if we despair and give up all hope and all trust in our system of justice? Then everything would fall

to pieces. Now justice will be administered in very many cases, yes, nearly in all. Such a state of affairs is what many people would long for in many countries! The few mistakes and faults we have to accept as results of human failure and of the impossibility to reach what we cannot reach in this world.

Thus we may conclude: Authorities must be there in every society in the world, whatever its name. Justice, courts and judges are also needed to make it possible for the citizens to live together in a complicated and sinful world.

But what about the Christians and the Church? The Church is well acquainted with suffering. Such has been there from the time of Abel, the son of Adam, when he was killed by his brother. The story then goes on via Joseph, Job, Jeremiah, and many others, who knew much about suffering. Even if they sighed and groaned at times, they knew that when others caused suffering and harm to them, "God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive".⁴ Thus *much suffering is representative, it is done for other people who will get the gain.* That is also the benediction of much suffering. And in all true faith there is a readiness for this kind of service and suffering: it happens at God's hands. And this is where the words of St. Peter apply so well: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time he may exalt you."⁵

1 Rom 2:14-15

2 Acts 5:29

3 Acts 5:41

4 Gen 50:20

5 1 Pet 5:6

VI

RICHES AND POVERTY

1. Two kinds of capitalism

When we wish to present the ethical teaching of the Church with regard to riches and poverty, it may be useful to do this against the background of some actual problems in the world.

Wherever there is work being done, there will be problems with money and ownership. According to one theory it is believed that *individuals* are the ones best fitted to look after their own interests and in that way also give the best contribution to the life of the community. Where these thoughts are stressed strongly and consistently, the system is called *private capitalism*. On the positive side of this thinking it may be said that it accepts and tries to make use of the ability, the interest, and the go-ahead spirit of individuals, families, companies, etc. On the negative side it may be said that selfishness and greed of gain will very often be present and cause loss and harm to many, either they are involved in the business or not.

To present an alternative to private capitalism some thinkers have tried to describe a different way. Their system, they say, does not aim at any gain to individuals or companies. *Everything*, the land, farms, companies, factories, etc., *should be owned and run by the state, because the state is supposed to know better than any individual what is best for all, for the common interest of the people and the country.* This kind of thinking

may be given different names, socialism, communism, *state capitalism*, etc. according to the degree of application. It may be practised on a total scale, where no individual owns anything (although in one of those countries a certain leader owned twelve very fast luxury cars), or on a minor scale, or in a more mixed form.

Because of her task and her message the Church cannot associate herself with any of these two schools of thought. No doubt both have pointed to mistakes in the past and to difficulties in the present world which they wish to remove, but both also make mistakes and introduce new difficulties. Therefore the Church must stress some points against both. Against private capitalism it must be said that there is a very great danger that the interest of personal gain overlooks the interest and need of many individuals and of the community as a whole. Against state capitalism and communism of all kinds it must be said that the tendency to restrain personal freedom and integrity is obvious in the system. And further, the land is not looked after in a better way under that system. The hungry are not fed in a better way, the pollution of the air and the spoiling of the natural resources are not held back more effectively there than in other countries, sometimes it is much worse. Furthermore the state machinery becomes an end in itself, preventing many things it was supposed to promote. Therefore, the spiritual message to all political, social and financial schools of thought must be: Look well after the personal freedom of the individuals; stress the duty of everybody to work for the interests and the common good of the community; encourage this general principle that we are all members of one body, and when living in it we have to serve each other in the best way we can.

2. Riches and poverty from the Christian point of view

There are many people in this world who have become rich by honest and diligent work. But it is also possible to become rich without having worked even one day. Some people have inherited or taken over everything they have from parents or other people. It may also happen that they have got everything by gambling. That is one way of becoming rich. Another thing is that many people who become rich in such ways very often spoil in a bad life what they have acquired.

From a Christian point of view *money and property are not ours*, although we may have acquired them legally and in a decent way. *They have been put at our disposal, as a loan for the time being.* They are meant as instruments for our service, work and stewardship among our fellow-beings.

But although money and property, and whatever we have at our disposal, are meant for service and stewardship, there is room for a high degree of personal judgment and independence, all corresponding to our gifts and our conscience, etc. But since we are all different, our judgment will be different, and so it will be easy for us to do what is wrong, also to go astray. But there are some general principles for the handling of money and property. One principle says: "Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required; and of him to whom men commit much they will demand the more."¹ Another principle says: "As a matter of equality your abundance at the present time should supply their want, so that their abundance may supply your want, that there may be equality."²

Nobody should be allowed to make such use of his fellow-beings that he increases his own wealth by being selfish, harsh or greedy in his relation to them. Here this word applies: "The labourer deserves his wages",³ and also this strong word: "Behold, the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the har-

vesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts."⁴

From this it will be clear that *temptations*⁵ always follow money, property, and riches. The worst outcome of such temptations is *greed* and *covetousness*. Covetousness may be regarded as the most unreasonable of all sins, because in it some wrong thoughts have combined to create an extremely great foolishness. The covetous man *believes that he plans for difficult times in the future*, but to such difficulties he exposes himself willingly even now, although the difficult times have not come. This is a common example: a man puts aside money in the most excessive way in order to have a lot "for a famine that may come", and because of this saving he must go hungry almost every day, as if the famine had already come. But the foolishness in his behaviour appears on this point: he does not realize his suffering, he finds in it a pleasure and a great satisfaction and happiness! It is not amazing that Scripture brands covetousness as *idolatry*.⁶

The question about money and property can never obtain a full and satisfactory solution in the society. To make up for this fact the individual members of the community should do their best to give a good example in their lives. But the worldly rule is in many ways involved with regard to the money and the property of the citizens. To some extent the worldly rule also represents God, e.g. when it demands taxes, customs fees and other duties and when it looks after the currency and the finances of the country. All this is done in order to finance the official work of the whole community.⁷

The greatest problems present themselves, when we approach the modern society, a kind of community that wishes to "take more and more in order to give more and more", seemingly without end. This may be acceptable in many ways, but in this circle, where money is going round and round, there is a built-in tendency to create more and more official jobs, where officials look after officials, and where bureaucracy, nepotism, corruption, etc. will thrive. For sure the modern society is doing a lot of good, but a bad side of it often becomes conspicuous.

Thus many people think that the financial and social machinery is wasting money without knowing what happens to the money. There is also a tendency that the single poor man in some way gets lost, while officials try to read and understand the paragraphs intended to help him.

3. The task of the Christians and the Church in particular matters

What sort of contribution can Christians give to their community in matters of this kind? The first thing, perhaps, should be to understand the general depravity in the heart of man. Briefly this means: "We are all sinful and bad in our innermost being. Therefore all evildoers should be stopped and checked, taught better ways, and possibly change their ways." But how can this be done? As we have already indicated, it is the duty of the community itself to look after its members, in order that a few of them may not pile up riches for themselves, while many of their fellow-beings suffer harm and starvation. "Equality", as mentioned before, can to some degree be effected by the community itself. But the innermost forces behind sin and evil can be checked only by spiritual powers. That is where the Church becomes particularly involved. She can teach people what righteousness and unrighteousness mean in a people, how people can be good to each other, without wishing to be seen and praised.⁸ The summing up of everything in these matters reads: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."⁹

Since the inner corruption of man will remain in many ways and always be at work among us, there will often be conflicts between individual citizens as well as between citizens and the community. Often there will also remain bad consequences of earlier faults and mistakes, e.g. when citizens have caused

poverty or financial harm to fellow-citizens. In such cases it may be the task of the Church, its congregations and members to help in all ways possible.

In many cases it is *necessary for the Church to raise its prophetic voice*. This should be done against evildoers in general in the society, but it should also be done against a particular evil which is under its way. If this is done, at the proper time and in the right way, much evil may be quenched in an early stage. But that is not all. The Church will also carry out *a lot of social and welfare work to help those who suffer and are in need*. Furthermore, and this is not the least important, she will use her cure of souls to uplift those who have been offended and harmed and also try to *awaken and rectify those who have done wrong*.

If the Church has been placed somewhat outside in matters of this kind, it often depends on herself. Perhaps she has not had the courage or zeal to go into the matters. But she has been called by her Lord to do that, which means to "give the sound of the bugle" or trumpet¹⁰ when people violate the law of righteousness in the society. In such matters she is authorized to explain to the people their transgressions.¹¹ In clear words she should teach them the good way which is justice, obedience, love, fellowship and stewardship.¹²

1 Lk 12:48

2 2 Cor 8:8-15

3 1 Tim 5:18

4 Jas 5:4-6

5 1 Tim 6:9-10

6 Lk 12:13-21; Col

3:5

7 Mt 22:15-22;

Rom 13:6-7

8 Mt 6:1-4

9 Prov 14:34

10 1 Cor 14:8

11 Is 58:1

12 Rom 13:1-10; 1

Pet 2:13-17

VII

DEFENCE AND WAR

1. What it means to defend ourselves

No community in the history of mankind has been able to live without *some kind of power to defend itself and to carry out its duties*. If we think of the smallest community that is possible anywhere, e.g. a village or a group of villages where a minor chief rules, this will be clear. If the chief gives an order on behalf of his area and this order is not followed by the person concerned, does the chief shrug his shoulders and say: "That's all, I can do nothing"? No, he sends a messenger or a watchman to help him carry out his orders. In the same way he watches over the common property of the area. If his villages are attacked by cattle thieves from other villages, which are under the rule of another chief, he will send out some kind of force to stop the robbing. These facts should be fairly clear to anybody capable of thinking.

But in many countries there has arisen a school of thought saying: We should not defend ourselves, because there should be no wars. — There are many faults in this kind of thinking. First of all: to defend the right of the community is not the same as to prepare for war. Secondly: Those who speak against the defence of their own country, what do they do when their houses are raided by thieves or when they are assaulted in the street? Most of them will cry: "Where are the policemen? Why doesn't the

police stop the robbers?" There we are! That is the total selfishness, saying: "I myself and my property should be protected, but my country and my people with its homes and families may be laid open to an enemy."

The fact is that we live in a world where there is evil of many kinds. If the authorities have no power of defence, what can they do then, when an enemy is approaching the borders? "While the other is yet a great way off", they can do nothing besides "sending an embassy and ask for terms of peace".¹ And what will that kind of peace mean? Only surrender on the conditions of the enemy.

In spite of this some people believe that if we stop all kinds of defence work, and if we do not train any soldiers, and if we do not make or buy any arms, then country after country will follow step and all wars be ended. But they overlook the most important argument: *the evil of man*. If ten countries disarm themselves, an eleventh country may be very willing to "defend" them, on its own conditions. Its leaders may think: Here we get a chance, free of charge, to extend our borders, to increase our riches, and our facilities of all kinds.

But all wars are not the same. All are not right or righteous. Some are completely unrighteous. And furthermore: there is no war whatsoever which is completely right. But how can we find the difference?

The first line of difference goes between *aggressive wars* and *defensive wars*. In principle it is wrong to start and carry out an aggressive war, whereas it may be necessary for a nation to defend itself against an aggressive enemy. But sometimes it is difficult to use these terms correctly. If an enemy has declared war, or announced over the radio that he is proceeding to cross the border, will it then be an aggressive war or a defensive war to attack that enemy before he crosses the border?

Secondly it must be stated very strongly that *there are no wars that are completely right or honest or "clean"*. Many unnecessary and dishonest and brutal things will be done also on the defending side. Many officers and soldiers will commit

unlawful and dirty things. When doing the right work of defending their country they may do many bad things. This shows us how extremely difficult the question of war is. What can be done by all authorities and citizens is a twofold duty: to do everything they can to avoid war and, if a war is forced upon them, *to do what is lawful in wars* and by all means refrain from what is wrong and evil.²

On this point many have tried to apply a word of Jesus: "if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."³ But this word applies to the personal Christian suffering and witnessing. It cannot be applied to the authority of the community or the state, where the words about Caesar applies,⁴ and also the words about the authorities which "do not bear the sword in vain".⁵

2. Is it right to start a revolution?

A revolution is something abnormal and terrible. The system of law, justice and order is of such a great value in a people that it must be regarded as wrong to turn it over and then make it necessary to start from scratch again. The question arises: *How long will it take to create a working system again?*

When a revolution begins, it often happens that the leaders give this explanation: "The order of law and justice has ceased to work in our country. A new order must be created. We promise most solemnly to do that." But how can it be stated with certainty that "the order of law and justice has ceased to work"? Who is most competent to assess and evaluate such things? What about if incompetent people make such statements only because they wish to become the new leaders? If so, will a revolution do any good? Do the prospective leaders wish to abolish the system of law and justice, because they have come in conflict with the law in personal matters?

When we consider the problems of revolution we find that for many reasons the arguments against are overwhelming. Therefore, can it ever be justified to turn over the existing system of law and order? Can it be justified to let the country enter a period of total lack of law, besides the "decrees" from a "revolutionary council"? Can it be right to let loose such forces that will prevail as always happens after a revolution? In many cases there will also start contra-revolutions and civil wars. In some countries there has been civil wars for twenty years or more after a revolution. Sometimes the dead in the civil wars can be counted in millions, whereas the cases that caused the revolution could be counted in dozens.

From all these arguments, and many more which have not been mentioned here, it must be very clear that all political revolutions are extremely poor instruments, if they are expected to solve any problems. More often they create more problems than those they wanted to solve, which they did not solve after all.

What is the alternative way of solving such problems? The best way is to think, teach and work well in advance, so that all revolutions can be avoided. If all people are taught in a spirit of good citizenship, fellowship and cooperation, then they might work in the interests of the community. At times there may be misunderstandings, ill-feelings or even a tug-of-war between different interests, but the common responsibility will help to solve the problems. The Christian way of thinking and the Christian ethics round "the golden rule"⁶ can encourage many to follow, not the way of revolution, but the way of "evolution", which here means *the way of gradual change for something better*. Possibly there is no other way in any country, if the people wish to avoid that abnormal and terrible thing that is called "revolution".

1 Lk 14:31-32

2 Lk 3:14

3 Mt 5:39

4 Mt 22:17-21

5 Rom 13:4

6 Mt 7:12

VIII

MARRIAGE, HOME AND FAMILY

1. Love and marriage

A single person cannot be the beginning of a human life. Before a new person is born, there will always be found two. From our present point of view they should not be regarded as two "single" persons, they are *the parents*. Parents, with their love, task and authority etc., can be regarded as the foundation of every kind of community.

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."¹ Because of this He wishes that the near relation between man and woman should be love, and that everything in this love should be subordinated to His will and to His laws of love, purity and faithfulness. From olden times marriage has been the special institution to safeguard all this, in the interest of the couple, of the children, and of the community.

But *why* is it necessary for a man and a woman to be married if they wish to live together? Why isn't a secret understanding and agreement between the two enough? In all kinds of civilization and religions there is a unanimous answer: The sexual relation between a man and a woman is not a private affair only, it is a matter for their families and their community as well as for

the coming generations. If difficulties arise in their life together, about children, property, inheritance, etc., who can settle these, if no witnesses or contracts have ever existed? In such countries, where "free love" and cohabitation (living together without marriage) are frequent, there is no end to the quarrels in courts about who is entitled to what, because very often the "secret promises", earlier referred to, are flatly denied. And where no marriage existed, very often the end of the quarrel is that the community is expected to step in and take over the responsibility: to look after the children and other victims, to pay where payment is needed, and so forth. But what was said when the cohabitation started? "This is our private affair! The community has nothing to do with it!" But then in the end the community has to be relied upon! *Marriage is the only alternative to such disorder.*

In all civilized countries this principle must be upheld and prevail: marriage is the only way of safeguarding the interest of parents, children, community, and the future generations. The practising of sexuality always and everywhere belongs to the matrimonial state. But in matters of marriage the interests of the community and the Church sometimes clash. It may happen, if either the state or the Church tries to go beyond its limits of authority. This ought to be clear: Marriage laws generally fall within the authority of the community (the state). But on the other hand the community should have *such laws that serve the rights and welfare of all*. This also means that faith, fidelity and faithfulness should not be disfavoured in comparison with the more loose ways of living. It also means that the teaching and the laws of the Christian church should be allowed to do its work *among the Christians and also as a salt in the community as a whole*. If members of other religions and non-religious beliefs are allowed to follow their conviction and also propagate it, then that privilege should be given to the Christians and the Church also. This is in total accordance with the teaching about "the two kinds of rule" (see above, p. 23). The worldly authorities should understand that it does not benefit the interests of the community if they suppress the beliefs and convictions of the

Christians. On the contrary, it is in the interest of the community that the Christians are allowed to give their contribution to the life and well-being of the whole community.

But if we wish that the worldly community should respect the Church and its teaching about marriage, then the Church ought to respect at least the best worldly views on marriage. This can be done for quite good reasons. In many communities in olden times marriage was held in great esteem, and that is the case even today in many countries and communities. Such traits in marriage as love, purity, responsibility and faithfulness are then stressed and encouraged, and wherever this is done today it should be praised and well accepted and acknowledged by the Church.

But with regard to the views on marriage there are at least four points on which the Church may give her greatest contribution. The first is to show the difference between "falling in love" and real, sincere love. The second is to show the importance of love in connection with marrying or being married. Although love is not the only foundation of a true marriage, the opposite also applies: marriage should never be a social contract only, or a kind of business undertaking, or an arrangement for sexual satisfaction. More than anything else marriage should be a matter of mutual understanding, love, fellowship and service, for the benefit of the wife, the husband and possible children, but also for the benefit of the whole community.

The third point concerns *the duration or permanency of the marriage*. According to some worldly views the marriage vows are no longer valid, if some important circumstances have changed afterwards. But according to the teaching of Christ the promises are given for life-time. Marriage is much more than a social contract: Man and woman are united to become "one flesh", meaning one unit, one organism that cannot be divided.² The one who breaks such a union breaks a holy thing.

The fourth point is this: The relation between a husband and his wife is based upon its likeness to the relation between Christ and His bride, the Church.³ In a world of much evil and social

restlessness the contribution of the Church on the mentioned points could be of the greatest importance to all communities.

The terrifying reports about the spread of the deadly sickness AIDS can demonstrate the need of the world. The sickness depends on the spreading of a virus that breaks down the immunity defence of the human body. The virus is spread through blood contact or sexual contacts. In some areas of the world great parts of the population are wiped out. Purely worldly-minded people now put their hope in medicines and vaccinations which they hope will be discovered. Here the Church can say: No, we have the only true "medicine", and it works. It can be described as pure sexual life, which means pure matrimonial life. Then there will be no wrong contacts and no disease.

2. Home, children and youth

All parents have received great gifts, for which they are responsible: their own love, their marriage, their home, and their children. If they fulfil this responsibility to a high degree they also give a fine and useful contribution to the community.

With regard to the children it is not enough to give them food, shelter and clothing, not even to arrange for their education, although this is good and important. Of still greater importance is the training with regard to ethics: good order, respect of people, obedience to superiors, and consideration for all. If the parents expect that the authorities of the community will look after all this for them, then they are mistaken. *The home is the small community, where the first steps should be taken with regard to ethical matters.* To make the education and training in this little community effective, *the parents have to be good examples to their children.*

Since the home is a community on a small scale, it is *the place where all rules of work and behaviour are first taught:*

attention, watchfulness, cooperation, team-work, readiness to step in and help or replace those who become somewhat hindered. It may soon be realized in a community where homes have failed. On the other hand it may easily be found where good homes are at work. Among these the Christian homes should always be found in the first line.

There may be two great questions towering up with regard to the future of our youth, besides the matters of loose living already mentioned. One concerns their amusements which tend to be taken over more and more by business companies in what is nowadays called an "industry". Since it is a field where the power of money rules, it is quite clear that the youth will be exposed to very great dangers, even the danger of losing their souls.⁴

The danger of AIDS has already been mentioned. Therefore let us as a second question mention *the danger of drugs or narcotics*. There are great business companies in the world trying to exploit the youth particularly. Their well-paid higher or middle agents aim at *turning many young people into addicts*. When they have become totally dependent upon the drugs, the agents can use them both as regular customers and as new agents. That is how the industry can be continually growing! Most of the crimes in many large cities in certain countries are carried out by such addicts of drugs. That is how they can support themselves and their wretched lives until they die in terrible misery. This terrible scourge in modern society can never be helped by courts or policemen only, not even by social workers only. It can be counteracted by proper information, i.e. through all kinds of good schools and authorities. But *the uppermost instrument for counteracting the use of narcotics is good homes*. This is a very strong call to the parents of this generation: Live with your children, your boys and girls, in such a way that you get their confidence. *By words and deeds teach and advise them never in their lives to taste, touch, buy or sell narcotics.*

1 Gen 1:27
2 Mt 19:3-9

3 Eph 5:31-32
4 Mt 16:26

IX

VOCATION AND WORK

1. The gifts and skills are different

Through the ages people have looked upon the work in many different ways. Some have looked upon all kinds of manual work as degrading to a respected man, whereas other people have looked upon all honest work as something good and praiseworthy. In some cultures all kinds of agricultural work have been regarded as commendable, whereas all sorts of workshop jobs have been looked down upon as of a mean and filthy character. In many cultures of previous ages all kinds of manual work were entrusted to slaves or poor day-workers.

The Christian church has mostly taken a definite stand in these matters. From the Old Testament she has inherited *a great esteem of all honest work*, either it is house-work, farming, or manual work of different kinds. All sorts of work that are honest are also decent and "clean" and should be respected by all. Therefore there isn't a kind of "Christian work" that should be respected, and another kind, a "worldly work", that should not be respected or respected less. To be a Christian, "to follow Jesus", is to be a Christian also in the daily work where we make our living. That is where the Christian faith should be practised.

Our daily work has its starting-point in God's creation of world and man. Through God's creation we have all been placed here and given a particular task to perform, either it is of great or low esteem among our fellow-beings. By giving us a certain

position and a certain work to perform God has shown us that He wants us to take part in the continued "creation" by which He looks after His world and maintains all people. Thus even the work of individual human beings may serve God's great purposes.

This being so, *the work of man is a duty*. No sound and healthy human being can claim that he ought to be exempted from this duty to work. If he claims this, he may be regarded as an easy-going, rather thoughtless person, lacking in responsibility. There are elderly, or frail, or sick, or handicapped persons who cannot be expected to do much work, perhaps no regular work at all. Instead it is the duty of the strong and healthy citizens to look after them. But yet it happens that rather sick or handicapped persons render a fine service to the community by doing some work, sometimes more than could reasonably be expected, sometimes even more than strong and healthy persons do. This is another call to all of us to find out if we are actually doing what we can or should do.

2. *Service to the glory of God*

Faithfulness and endurance are needed in our daily work. For that reason faith is also needed. By faith in God a Christian can obtain the firm foundation he needs to be diligent and faithful in his work. When a Christian serves his fellow-beings he is in fact serving the Lord Himself. This has been stressed very strongly by Jesus.¹ Jesus Himself is also the great example we are expected to follow in our work and service.²

When we are serving our fellow-beings in our daily work and service, this is also done *to the glory of God*. But on this point a certain temptation may deceive us: Perhaps we search for a work, for jobs and services that we find particularly good, suitable to give glory to God. Such thinking is wrong. It is more of a

Pharisean than a Christian way of thinking and acting.³ It is when we do our daily work, even simple, routine work, that we do what is pleasing to God. Then we work for God's sake and for the service of our fellow-beings. "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him... Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men."⁴

It is quite clear, therefore, that Christianity has a great contribution to give to the understanding of our daily work, *also to the purpose of work*. The most conspicuous aim, from the worldly point of view, is that *we ought to support ourselves*, i.e. be our own "bread-winners". From a Christian point of view another purpose must be added: To labour, doing honest work with our skill, so that we "may be able to give to those in need".⁵ This approach to the question of work is very little known but should be strongly stressed by the Church.

No Christian can become perfect in the work of his worldly vocation, nor by his diligence or faithfulness in his work. Even when he is at his best, he is imperfect and has many shortcomings. The best we can say about a good Christian is that he is on his way, heading for the goal.⁶ In other words it may be said that he is eager "to lead a life worthy of the calling to which he has been called".⁷ If he goes on in this way, in faith, in his calling and in his daily work, either it is of high or low esteem, then he may continue to be sanctified and more and more fit for service, and also to become more and more "restored, established, and strengthened".⁸

1 Mt 25:31-46

2 Jn 15:12-17; 1

Pet 2:21-25

3 Mk 7:9-13

4 Col 3:17, 23

5 Eph 4:28

6 Phil 3:12

7 Eph 4:1

8 1 Pet 5:10

X

THE TESTIMONY TO THE WORLD

1. It is the duty of the Christians to testify to the world

There is no reason for the people of God to put themselves on equal footing with the world. If they did, it would be the same as associating themselves with the enemies of God in order to be accepted by them. The only right thing for them to do is to be what they are: God's people, saved and sanctified by Christ, appointed by Him to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. If they try to please the world and to be praised by people, they will gain nothing: "Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets."¹

The people of God are a people on their way from this world to the eternal world. What counts is the call and grace of God and the Way itself, which is Jesus Christ,² and the eternal goal. What about the other people then, will they understand or only disagree? This question should be left to God. But we may be sure that a frank and clear testimony from the Christians will make a stronger impression than searching for a compromise. When seeing and hearing the testimony of the Christians many

people will say: "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."³

But what about *the difficulties of the Christian testimony*? They are many, no doubt, but there is a way right through: "The path of the upright is a level highway."⁴ To be "upright" means to be honest, to have an open mind, and to lift one's eyes to God, from whom the help comes.⁵ People who are of that kind will always find their way through the difficulties, according to God's promise: "The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your desire with good things, ... and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters fail not."⁶

There is *a certain danger* in connection with the Christian testimony: it may give the impression of being planned, i.e. *performed purposely*. If it is, then the Christians are trying to "do something", instead of *just being Christians*. To be a Christian is to be and to do what is right and natural for a Christian. That is God's own work through His grace in Christ. The planning, on the other side, is to give the testimony the character of being man's work only.

This question about the works and deeds of a Christian is a great secret. In one way the Word of God tells us that we ought to do "good deeds",⁷ on the other side it tells us that it is beyond our own power to do them.⁸ How can this be explained? The Word of God says: "By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God - not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*"⁹ By this it has also been shown that the good works and the testimony in general are closely related to faith and sanctification.

2. *The testimony through a sanctified life*

Whenever a Christian takes his faith and his life seriously, he will often find himself in this situation: he has sinned, and he has failed in many ways. It becomes obvious to him that he has not done what he should have done, whereas he has done what he should not have done.¹⁰ The good thing here is that his conscience has worked and still works. He clearly sees his sin and guilt. Then the only way out is the way of forgiveness. It is a wonderful thing that everybody, who asks for forgiveness for Christ's sake, will obtain it. Forgiveness is not degrading to man, as some people think, it is the opposite: it means to be raised up and restored again. This is clearly demonstrated in the parable about the prodigal son.¹¹ Among his false friends and among the swine he was debased and degraded, but when he went back to his father to ask for forgiveness, then he was raised up and restored to true sonship again. This is the experience every Christian will make in his daily repentance: he will be raised up to a life in faith, but also to a life testifying about the grace and work of Christ.

The forgiveness of sins is not only to have the sins and shortcomings blotted out, it also means receiving new will and strength to resist the evil, according to the word of the Saviour: "Go, and do not sin again."¹² When in this way a Christian takes upon himself the fight against all evil, in thoughts, words, and deeds, and when for this purpose he accepts help from the Word of God,¹³ *then he is being sanctified, he lives in sanctification.* Thus sanctification means that purposely he abandons what is evil and wrong and presses on for what is good.¹⁴ This is a testimony in itself that he takes his faith and his fight seriously and really wishes to live in the Church of God and with God's people. If this is so, then it is also a testimony before the world about the work God is doing.

If there is anything that is badly neglected among the Christians in the world today, it is this testimony through sanctified lives. It should not be that way. The teaching of the Word

of God is extremely clear: "Just as you once yielded your members to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now yield your members to righteousness and sanctification... Now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the return you get is sanctification and its end, eternal life."¹⁵ If Christians live according to this word "in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation", there is no doubt that they will "shine as lights in the world".¹⁶

The sanctification of a Christian always goes together with his eternal hope: "Since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation."¹⁷ Thus the Christian faith and the eternal hope never serve as an excuse for a Christian wishing to avoid the difficulties or battles of life. The opposite is true: the Christian faith and hope give him the strongest reason to fight and endure the battle of life, and thus win the crown of life: "Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him."¹⁸

1 Lk 6:26

2 Jn 14:6

3 Zech 8:23

4 Prov 15:19

5 Ps 121:1

6 Is 58:11

7 Tit 3:8

8 Mk 7:14-23

9 Eph 2:8-10

10 Rom 7:18-19

11 Lk 15:11-32

12 Jn 8:11

13 Eph 6:13-17

14 Phil 3:12

15 Rom 6:19, 22

16 Phil 2:15

17 1 Thess 5:8

18 Jas 1:12