

The West's Changing Values

Christian Theology is public for it speaks of the kingdom of God. What does it say in our present crisis of values?

LET ME BEGIN WITH A LITTLE STORY: At the birthday of the Modern World three good fairies came and brought their good wishes. The first brought freedom, the second equality, and the third prosperity. But in the evening of that same day the evil witch came and said: "You can have only two of the three wishes fulfilled: Choose." So the Western Modern World chose freedom and prosperity and never reached equality, and the Eastern Modern World chose equality and prosperity and never found freedom, and the philosophers and theologians chose for their Ideal Modern World freedom and equality and never gained any prosperity.

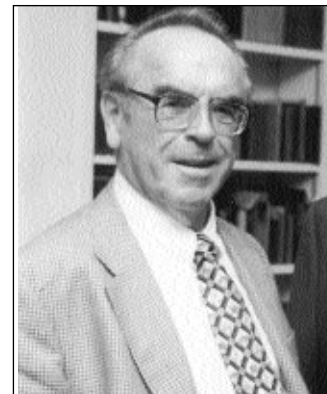
I will not defend the "values" of the western world in the feared "clash of civilizations" (Huntingdon) against representatives of Islamic "theocracies" (Iran) or Confucian "educational dictatorships" (Singapore). Neither do I intend to reinforce the Western "feeling of self-worth," nor consider the status of that self-worth. Modernity and the Western world must come to terms with their crises of values on their own. Every defense against external attacks merely hinders the "reevaluation of values" that must take place today in the West if humankind and the earth are to survive.

Rather, as a Christian theologian I intend to ask: What do modernity and the Western world owe to Christianity and to the biblical traditions that have entered into them largely through Christianity itself; and what in Christianity and in the biblical traditions is a burden to them? By "biblical traditions" I am also referring to Judaism, to whom the modern, Western world owes more than it realizes. I am referring above all to that particular shaping of the Western world by the "Old Testament," by

Abraham's exodus and covenant, by the God of Israel, and by the visions of the prophets. The inspiration of the Western world by biblical traditions extends even into the fundamental notions and values of modernity; the Western world has rediscovered its own history of freedom in the biblical story of God, and has identified with that story even in secular figures.

Now that, however, it has discovered the "dialectic of the Enlightenment" (Adorno/ Horkheimer) and has been suffering under the internal contradictions of modernity, it may well be that a postmodern world will take leave of these biblical impulses just as it takes leave of modern impulses—and will do so precisely because it identifies the latter with the former—and become a post-Christian World. As Christian theologians we must therefore ask ourselves, whether and how, from the perspective of our own traditions and hopes, we, too, might participate in overcoming the internal contradictions of modernity which we—or our predecessors—obviously have caused. The values of society and their reevaluation represent original tasks of public, Christian theology. From the perspective of its origins and its goal, Christian theology is public theology, for it is the theology of the kingdom of God. Its historic traditions relate the "history of the future," and its prophetic traditions outline the visions of this future. What do these traditions say in our present crises of values?

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The God of the Bible and the Experience of History

There is a correspondence between a given regard for values and the experience of reality. So let us begin with the biblical “experience of history” (Georg Picht) and inquire concerning the values of human beings as persons and of human fellowship.

The God about which the biblical traditions speak is not always revealed in the laws and cycles of nature, but rather through human beings and in contingent events of human history. This is why God is named after the human beings whom he has called and after the events through which he has revealed himself to human beings. There is the “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” and the “Father of Jesus Christ.” There is “the Lord” who liberated his people Israel from the historic power of Egypt, and there is “the Father” who liberated Christ from the power of history, from death. The God of historic callings and of saving experiences is justifiably called the “God of history” in contradistinction to the gods of nature.

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all appeal to the “God of Abraham” and the God-experience of Abraham and Sarah. But what was Abraham’s and Sarah’s God-experience? It was the Exodus-experience of freedom and alienation (in German: Freiheit und Fremde): “Go out of thy country and from thy kindred, and from your father’s house unto the land that I shall show you . . . and in thee all nations on earth shall be blessed,” we read in Genesis 12: 1,3. Their souls became restless and their bodies homeless. Their God-experience was their experience of freedom from any home and of longing for God’s future everywhere, a freedom always accompanied by the desert wind of exile.

Every comparison with the great Asiatic religions of the cosmos demonstrates the uniqueness of the Abrahamite religions: The future is something new, and is not a recurrence of the past. The world does not exist within the great balance of the cosmos and its harmony, but rather, as God’s creation, is directed toward the future of his kingdom, and for that reason is temporal. The “arrow of time” governs all systems of matter and life that are in a state of evolution. In the process of tradition and innovation, time is irreversible and is experienced in the unbridgeable difference between past and future. The past is irretrievable reality, the future

inaccessible possibility, and the present the interface at which the possibilities of the future are either actualized or missed, and thus the point at which the future is mediated with the past.

The “Abrahamite religions” discovered and sanctified time rather than space. Elsewhere, the divine was venerated in the ever-recurring order of the cosmos, whereas here it was encountered in the fortuitous, that is, the underivable and unanticipated events of history, and in the element of the new introduced by the future.

This understanding of reality, described but briefly here as the time of history, has a special affinity with the modern understanding of reality, since the modern world emerged from the extraction of human culture from its correspondences and concordances with nature. The agricultural world was superseded by the industrial world, and the village by Megalopolis. Through industrialization and urbanization, a human world emerged that is constructed solely according to human wishes and standards, a world through which only the values of human beings are actualized. In modern, mass cities, cities which in a few years will be the domicile and home of more than half of all humankind, the sun is replaced by neon lights, and woods and meadows by streets and roads. This city needs neither plants nor animals, living rather from its own creations. The real world perceived through the senses is simulated and eclipsed by the “virtual reality” of the computer and the information super-highway.

As a result of action taken in Brussels this year, the older standards of inches, yards, and miles—standards derived from the proportions of the human body—have been replaced even in England (though not yet in the United States) by the metric system of centimeters, meters, and kilometers. Increasingly, the natural environment of human beings is being replaced by a technical environment, and the natural landscape by the “media landscape.” The course of every individual life is no longer determined by the cycles of the earth and the rhythms of its celestial bodies, but by the tempo of the modern world itself.

Although we will have occasion to investigate this in greater detail as it involves the self-experience of the inhabitants of the modern world, it is enough to point here that this extraction of human culture from the earth has generated that particular “ecological crisis” that can condemn to fail-

ure the entire enterprise of modernity. Environmental destruction grows in proportion to the urbanization of human beings, as demonstrated by the increasing need for energy and the production of refuse in big cities. If Christianity has introduced into the modern world this understanding of reality as “history,” and thus the displacement of nature and its subjugation, then it is both its self-critical and cultural-critical task to develop values for a reconciliation with nature, and a new harmony—one capable of survival—between modern culture and nature.

“Progress” is the leitmotif of modernity; “equilibrium” was the leitmotif of premodern cultures. What we need for survival is a balance between “progress” and “equilibrium” if we are to develop from the older cultures of equilibrium and the modern culture of progress the “ecological culture” that will be the culture of the twenty-first century.

Is the God of the Bible really as one-sidedly and in as modern a fashion the “God of history” as modern theology has asserted? Is he not from the very outset—and not merely retrospectively—believed to be the “Creator of heaven and earth,” and his creative wisdom venerated in the laws and cycles of nature? With what did Israel replace the fertility cults in the land of Canaan? By no means with a notion of pure worldliness for the sake of using the land, but rather with “the Sabbath of the earth,” commensurate with the creation story (Leviticus 25 and 26). In the Sabbatical Year and in the Year of Jubilee, fields are to remain unsown so that the earth can pause and “observe a sabbath for the Lord,” this fallow period making it possible for the exploited earth to regenerate itself. In the sabbath legislation for human beings, animals, and the earth, the great difference between the biblical “God of history” and the modern experience of history becomes clear.

The sabbath is also the characteristic sign for the distinction between the world as “nature” (perpetual fertility) and as “creation” (with the interruptions of sabbath rest). We thus find that in the biblical traditions the “God of history” is no other than the “Creator of heaven and earth,” and that, accordingly, the “experience of history” remains surrounded and imbedded in the experience of nature. If we intend to address the values and life experiences of modern human beings, then we can do so only with an integrated model of history in nature.

The Human Being: A Part of Nature or a Person?

Whereas all Asiatic and African religions understand human beings as a part of nature, the biblical traditions introduced into the world the understanding of the individual human being as a person. Human beings understand themselves to be a part of nature when they believe that the earth is their “mother,” the moon their “grandmother,” and that their lives are “floating” in the great “family” of all living beings in the cycles and rhythms of the sun, moon, and earth. Human beings understand themselves to be a part of nature when they believe in reincarnation, because every individual living being comes from within the great weave of life and then returns to it—to come back again in other life forms. Finally, individual human beings understand themselves to be a part of nature when they see themselves primarily within a long series of generations. Family members that precede them are ancestors to be venerated; family members that come after them are the children for whom they work. The individual consciousness understands itself to be imbedded in and carried by the collective consciousness. The death of individuals is of no great significance, since the chain of generations remains, as shown by the generational lists in the Old Testament and, for example, in Korea. The “Earth Charter” of the United Nations Organization (October 28, 1982) thus calls human beings a “part of nature.”

By contrast, every modern declaration concerning human rights begins with a fundamental article about the inviolable “dignity of human beings.” But in what does this unique “dignity of human beings” consist? It is the dignity of every individual human being for himself or herself, and presupposes the individuality of each and every human being. This individual human dignity is the source of all individual human rights, as established in the General Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and signed by all the member nations of the United Nations. Personal rights, equal rights, as well as the freedoms of faith, conscience, opinion, and assembly all follow from the notion of individual human dignity. How is this individual human dignity protected? By insisting that no human being may be treated as an object, but rather always and everywhere to be respected as a subject. Any reduction of human beings to slaves, to mere labor or merchandise—as in the case of prostitution—is thus prohibited.

The modern democratization of politics begins with this principle, namely, that “all human beings are created free and equal.” All liberation movements and liberation theologies work on the basis of this principle.

The modern understanding of the dignity of each and every human being derives from the biblical traditions and from the history of their influence in the Western world. The traditions are concerned, however, not with the individual human being as an “individual,” but rather as a “person.” An individual, like an atom, is literally the ultimate element of indivisibility. But an ultimate element of indivisibility has no relationships and cannot communicate. Hence Goethe is quite correct in his dictum: “Individuum est ineffabile.” If an individual has no relationships, then it also has no characteristics and no name. It is unrecognizable, and does not even know itself. The totally individualized person is the “idiot” in the Greek sense of the word.

By contrast, a person is the individual human being in the resonance field of the relationships of I-you-we, I-myself, I-it. Within this network of relationships, the person becomes the subject of giving and taking, hearing and doing, experiencing and touching, perceiving and responding. Without community a person cannot be a person. Life is communication in community.

In the theological sense, the “person” emerges through the call of God, who calls human beings out of their relationships in their “fatherland and friendships” (Gen. 12:1). Abraham and Sarah, who follow the call of God and set forth, are the prototypes of the biblical person. God calls Moses “by name,” and Moses steps forth and says: “Here I am” (Ex. 3:4). The prophets are called after his model, and according to Isa. 43:1 the following affirmation applies to everyone: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.” That particular God who is not a part of nature but rather stands independently over against it as creator, brings it about that human beings, in his image and in correspondence to him, step out in a fashion that juxtaposes them both with visible creation and with themselves (Psalm 8). Human beings become persons before God on earth. This makes their lives singular and incapable of repetition. It elevates them above other creatures with relative freedom, and bestows upon them a special commission in the name of that transcendent God, yet also burdens them with special responsibility for other living creatures.

According to the biblical traditions, the dignity of human beings consists in their being created in the image of God. Pico della Mirandola introduced this into the Renaissance culture of the Western world in his famous treatise *De dignitate hominis* (1486), thus preparing the way for the acknowledgment of human rights in politics, for individualism in society, and for occidental anthropocentrism in nature. The consequences, both positive and negative, have been profound. Let me try to put together two of these positive and negative values.

1. **Abraham’s, Sarah’s, and Hagar’s Children.** Human beings are persons, called out of the world by the transcendent God; then they lead an Abrahamite existence. They leave their familiar environment of family, home, and fatherland, and become strangers in a strange world. They feel at home nowhere until their hope in God’s promise is fulfilled. Although this freedom is above the world, it is the freedom of the wilderness. Abraham’s children are characterized by openness to the world on the one hand, and by homelessness on the other. The present never gives them rest or entices them to linger. As long as the divine promise is not fulfilled, their hearts remain restless. In both good and bad, they become *bestia rerum novarum cupidissima*; dissatisfied with all their surroundings, they break through all barriers. Their impulses are immoderate because they have been stimulated by the infinite God.

But if Abraham becomes the “father in faith” of the Jews, the Christians, and the Muslims, and if Sarah and Hagar always go along rather than stay at home like Penelope, then the corresponding cultures will be characterized not only by dominion over nature, but also by alienation from nature. Nature cannot be the “mother” of someone who, like Abraham and Sarah, follows the God of promise. But then what is nature for the children of Abraham and Sarah?

As Paul explains in chapter 8 of his letter to the Romans, nature becomes in a positive sense the “sister” and traveling companion of hoping and searching human beings. And it is not only human beings who live from hope and yearn for the redemption of the body from the dominion of death. All other earthly creatures and even the earth itself groan under the power of transitoriness and yearn for the glory that the “children of God” are already experiencing in their freedom. God’s spirit reveals to believers and to all transitory creatures that the suffer-

ings of this time are the labor pains for the new world of eternal life, the eternal home of all things.

That is, the restless world corresponds to the restless hearts of the children of Abraham. All transitory creatures, like Abraham's children, are on their way to a future in which the restless God comes to rest and finds his home in the house of the completed creation. There Abraham's children find the home of their own identity. All creatures are traveling companions of the children of Abraham, who harbor a profound understanding of all other creatures. Abraham's children do not view the world as being divided into cosmos and chaos, but rather as a process moving in a unified fashion toward its redemption.

2. *Augustine's lonely soul.* The inhabitants of the Western world are both blessed and burdened by Augustine's soul, since no one has shaped Occidental psychology more, and no one has more profoundly grounded Western individualism than this Latin church father. He desired to know "God and the soul." "And nothing else? No, nothing else." But why precisely and only the soul? Because the human soul bears the image of God within itself like a mirror. Thus whoever would know God must forget the world, close off all his senses, and enter into himself through meditation; then he will simultaneously recognize both self and God. "Go back into yourself: truth dwells in the inner person." For Aristotle, the soul was one human organ among others. He could describe objectively the characteristics of the soul. For Augustine, however, the soul became the inner self of a person, mysterious and unfathomable. Through his reflexive inwardness, along whose paths he sought both God in himself and himself in God, Augustine discovered human subjectivity.

Descartes, with his own philosophy of modern subjectivity, merely followed him, adopting Augustine's own argument: I can doubt all sense impressions, but not the fact that it is I who am doubting; I can deceive myself in all things, but not in the fact that it is I who am deceiving myself. The inner certainty of self is stronger than any external objective certainty, for it is immediate, whereas the former is merely mediated through the senses. Put simply: Each person is his or her closest, most intimate referent, for we know ourselves best. This is why love of self is the presupposition for love of one's neighbor, and only love of

self leads to love of God. If the soul is the subjectivity of the ego, then it governs the body and the senses, and is not governed by them. Here, too, the soul corresponds to God: If God is the ruler of the world, so also does the soul as correspondent to God rule the body. The likeness of God in human beings comes to expression in self-governing, self-discipline, and self-control, as Puritans and Jesuits have taught us.

But Augustine erred when he considered that this likeness of God inhered only in the soul of the individual human being. "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:26). The likeness of God is to be found in the mutual relationship between man and woman, and this relationship is always mediated through the senses and through the body. There is no biblical reference to any precedence being accorded to the self-reflective individual soul. One does not find God by going into oneself, but rather by going out of oneself. The whole human person is the likeness of God in the unity of soul and body, of the internal and the external, of the spirit and the five senses. The entire human community of women and men, parents and children, is to correspond to God and become his reflection on earth. The differentiated unity of person and nature corresponds to God's idea of creation: The person represents nature, and nature carries the person. Burdened with "Augustine's soul," we today are searching for the "return of the body" and the "rediscovery of the senses" and of the world perceived through the senses, and in so doing we are listening to feminist theology.

The separation of person and nature is mortally dangerous, and leads to moral irresponsibility. Radical humanism, such as that advocated, for example, by Peter Singer, defines the human person as the subject of knowledge and will. Human beings who are not yet, no longer, or have never been in control of their knowledge and their will, are viewed not as human persons, but rather only as human material. Such include embryos and fetuses, the severely handicapped, and the senile aged. In reality, however, only the healthy man between the ages of thirty and fifty is a person in the full sense. Prior to this, he is a person to be developed, and after this he is a retired person. It follows, then, that only a person in the full sense of the word has claims to

human rights, while human material can be treated like an object of nature. This radical humanism thus leads to perfect inhumanity, since it withdraws human dignity from life that is allegedly “not worth living.”

Theologically, the likeness of God inherent in human beings is grounded not in their qualities, but rather in their relationship with God. This relationship between human beings and God is of a twofold nature: It is God’s relationship with human beings, and it is the relationship of human beings with God. The objective likeness of God inherent in human beings consists in God’s relationship with them, and this relationship can be neither destroyed nor lost. Only God himself can suspend it. The dignity of each and every human being is grounded in this objective likeness of God. God stands in a relationship with every embryo, every severely handicapped person, every aged senile person, and is respected and honored in them when their dignity is respected. Without the fear of God, his likeness is not respected in every human being, and then reverence for life is lost because it is displaced by the perspective of utility. In the fear of God there is no life that is “not worth living.”

The Person between Personal Freedom and Social Loyalty

In traditional societies, an individual person’s entire life was predetermined and regulated from the cradle to the grave. Membership in families, castes, social strata, and a particular people determined the course of a person’s life, with little room for personal decisions and development. One’s personal name meant little, and in some societies daughters were simply numbered, since after their regulated marriage they acquired the family name of the husband. By contrast, one’s family name meant everything. A “good family” insured one’s social status. One had to come “from a good house,” as we used to say in Germany. In traditional societies, stability meant everything, while individuality meant little.

Modern societies place the values of personal freedom above the values of membership and belonging. Tradition no longer shapes life. We live in free choice societies, for we believe that only in its individual persons can a society become creative. This is why we may no

longer accept anything as predetermined and prearranged. Every person must be able to determine everything himself or herself: free choice of schools, vocations, partners, domicile, politics, religion, and so on. We are even working on being able to determine freely our genetic composition as well. Nothing is permitted to be “destiny,” not even gender; everything must be determinable. In half-traditional societies in Europe, a person is yet addressed by the family name; in completely modern societies, and among young people, the only name that applies is Jim and Joan, that is, a person’s first or given name or the Christian name.

Modern big cities individualize and isolate persons. Only in villages or smaller towns can one live in an extended family. Modern apartments and cars are designed for at most four persons—father, mother, and two children. Free choice of vocation and free choice of domicile are tearing the older extended families apart. Ever since our own children have been living in Berlin, Hamburg, and New York, we rarely see our grandchildren. In the big cities of Berlin, Hamburg, Frankfurt, and Munich today, more than half of all households are single households. More and more, family members are becoming single persons. This does not necessarily mean isolation, though this, too, is present to an unnerving degree, for example, among the aged; to a much higher degree than before, freely chosen friendships are replacing the predetermined family. The residential group (*Wohngemeinschaft*) is becoming the new life form, and “patchwork families” are emerging in which no one knows or cares anymore just who is descended from whom or who is related to whom, but rather only who cohabits with whom or who is living with whom. The “reference person” (in German *Bezugsperson*) is replacing relatives.

In every living room, the public sphere is furnished by television. Persons merely sitting alone in front of the television set do participate in all the events of the city, nation, and world, or at least they think that this is the case, even if in truth they are participating merely in the “virtual world” of previously selected information and entertainment. Certainly, a person can turn the television on and off, but this act does not constitute control of the media. Although people can indeed participate in everything insofar as they watch the news, they cannot

participate in determining these things, since they cannot broadcast anything themselves. This distinguishes the television public from every human face-to-face discussion. Human beings are always rendered controllable through individualization: *Divide et impera*.

Finally, there are indications that a new culture of death is emerging. In traditional societies, a person was in a religious sense “gathered to his fathers,” and in an earthly sense interred in the family grave. In the cult of ancestors, in the Korean Chosū festival, and at the Christian All Souls’ Day or Totensonntag, people visit and decorate the graves of their ancestors. In modern societies, personal care of graves is becoming increasingly difficult because people no longer live in the vicinity of the cemeteries. Religious interest in the family tradition is disappearing. This is why there are more and more “anonymous burials” in the secular spheres of modern human beings: the corpse is cremated and the ashes spread on a field or the sea. “No one knows the place.” The isolated, now merely self-determinative, person disappears into nothingness. Actually, this is quite consistent, since the family name already counted for nothing in life. Why should it now bind the children to the graves of the dead?

A series of excellent attempts has been made to balance out the deficits of the human person in modern society through a reflection on community values. I am referring not to conservative and fundamentalist retrogressions, but rather to the communitarian idea of strengthening once again the sensibility of modern human beings for the notion of membership and belonging. This includes the creation of local forms of community in overseeable circumstances; a reacquisition of the values of the common good; an enhanced appreciation of social consensus; and the development of a participatory economic democracy. All in all: the idea of the “good society,” of a “civil society,” actualized at every level, both large and small.

I endorse such a balance between the values of personalism and communitarianism, and will contribute no further vision here. I will restrict my consideration to personal freedom, a freedom that as a result of ever progressing individualism cannot be maintained. Neither can it be surrendered for the sake of belonging to a traditional society. In my opinion, it can be preserved only through dependability and loyalty.

The free human being is the being that can promise (Friedrich Nietzsche) and that must also keep these promises. Through promises that I make, I in my multiplicity am making myself unequivocal both for others and for myself. In the act of promising, a person defines himself or herself and becomes dependable, acquires fixed contours, and can be addressed. In keeping one’s promises, a person acquires identity within time, since that person reminds himself of himself whenever he is reminded of his promises. Only within the nexus of promises made and fulfilled does the free person, the person not predetermined by traditions, first acquire continuity within time and thus identity.

A person who forgets his promises forgets himself; a person who remains true to her promises remains true to herself. If we keep our promises, then we gain trust; if we break our promises, we are mistrusted; we lose our identity and no longer know ourselves. This identity of the human person within a life history is designated by a person’s name. Through my name, I identify myself with the person I was in the past, and anticipate myself as the person I want to be in the future. I can be addressed by my name; I sign contracts with my name and vouch for my promises. Free persons live together socially in a dense weave of promises made and kept, of agreements and trustworthiness; such coexistence cannot exist without trust. It is not predetermined membership, but rather covenant that is the paradigm of a free society; and this covenant is based on social consensus and responsibility.

The making and keeping of promises, the giving and receiving of trust—these are not restrictions on personal freedom, but rather the concrete actualization of that freedom. Where do I feel personally free? In a supermarket where I can buy whatever I want, but where no one knows me and not even the cashier looks into my eyes, or in a community in which I am accepted, and in which others know and thus affirm me as I am? The first is the reality of individual freedom of choice; the second the reality of communicative freedom. This first focuses on things; the second on persons. For me, true freedom is realized through mutual acknowledgment and reciprocal acceptance, that is: it is realized personally through friendship, and politically through covenant. The atmosphere of true freedom is trust.

The Modern Distress of Time and the “Discovery of Slowness”

Modern human beings are everywhere and always at a loss for time. Has the Christian understanding of irreversible time and the incessant march of time from the future into the past brought us into this temporal distress? How can we be relieved of this distress? Never before have human beings had as much free time as today, and yet they have never had as little. Time has also become “valuable,” since “time is money.”

Although the world offers us unlimited possibilities, our own life-spans are short. Hence many people panic because they think they might miss something, and thus they accelerate the tempo of their lives. The difference between life-span and world possibilities seduces us into a “race with time.” We want to gain more time so we can get more from life, and precisely in so doing we miss life. We believe that only the person who lives faster gets more out of this short life. What we so proudly call “our modern world” is called such because we are forced to modernize it at an ever faster pace. We move increasingly quickly from one place to the next, collecting so many “experiences” in experiential parks (Disneyland) or on experiential vacations that sociologists now speak about our “experiential society.” We make more and more “contacts” with other people, and we know many people. “Fast food” has become the symbol of our “fast life.”

The modern accelerated man is cared for by McDonald’s: poor guy! He has a great many encounters, but does not really experience anything, since although he wants to see everything, he internalizes nothing and reflects upon nothing. He has a great many contacts but no relationships; he is unable to linger because he is always “in a hurry.” He devours “fast food,” preferably while standing, because he is no longer able to enjoy anything; after all, a person needs time for enjoyment, and time is precisely what he does not have.

Modern people have no time because they are always trying to “gain more time.” Because a person cannot essentially prolong his life, he must hurry so that he can “get as much as possible from life.” Modern people “take their own lives” in the double sense of the word. By seizing it this violently, they kill it. The scarcity of time is not diminished by a single second through accelerated living; quite the contrary: because of the fear of com-

ing up short and missing something, a person does indeed come up short, and misses everything.

We tourists have been everywhere, but we have arrived nowhere. We never have time for more than a brief visit. The more we travel and the more quickly we race after time, the more meager do the spoils become. We are everywhere in transit, and only in transit. A person who lives ever faster so as not to miss anything, always lives superficially, and misses the deeper experiences of life. Everything is possible in that person’s world, but only very little is real.

The mechanical time of omnipresent clocks governs our lives. Such time does not care whether the measure of time was empty or full, whether boredom desolated us or whether “time flew”: After sixty minutes, the hour is gone. Mechanical time pays no attention to our experienced time, and makes all times the same. Experienced time, however, is the quality of our lives; measured time is merely its quantity. “Happiness is aware of neither the hour nor the minute,” we say. Hence it is important in times of intensive life experience to put aside one’s clock, or at least not to pay attention to it. Life becomes enlivened only when we break this dictate of the clock. An Indian wise man said to my friend last year: “You have the clock—and we have time.”

It is presumably our own repressed fear of death that makes us so hungry for life. Our individualized consciousness tells us: “Death is the end of everything; you cannot keep anything and you cannot take anything with you.” Unconscious fear of death manifests itself in accelerated haste in life. In traditional societies, individual persons understood themselves to be members of a greater whole such as the family, life as such, or the cosmos. Even though the individual dies, that in which that individual participated does, after all, go on living. The modern, individualized consciousness, however, knows only itself, relates everything only to itself, and thus believes that with its own death “everything is over.”

Perhaps we cannot return again to the old sense that we “belong” to a greater whole that endures even when we pass away. We can, however, surrender our own finite and limited life to the eternal, divine life, and then receive it back again from that divine life, just as this happens in the experience of the community of God in faith. The experience of the presence of the eternal God brings our own temporal life as if into an ocean that sur-

rounds and supports us when we swim in it. Thus does the divine presence surround us on all sides (Psalm 139) like a “broad space” of life which not even finite death can restrict.

Within this divine presence, we can affirm our limited life and become engaged in its limits. We become calm and composed, and we begin to live slowly and with enjoyment. Only the person who lives slowly gets more from life! Only the person who eats and drinks slowly, eats and drinks with enjoyment: slow food, slow life! T (by Stan Nadolny) has justifiably become a bestseller and a consolation for overstressed modern souls.

Only the person who is extremely rich can waste time. A person who is certain of eternal life has a great deal of time. We linger then in the moment, and open ourselves up to the intensive experience of life. We experience eternity in the moment (in German:) that is lived utterly and completely. Is not the life intensity of the experienced moment more than any hastening, in the extensive sense, through one’s time of life?! Only repressed fear of death makes us hungry for life and in a hurry. The experienced proximity of death, however, teaches us to experience utterly and intensively every single moment as an eternal moment. This proximity sharpens our own senses in unimagined ways. We see colors, hear sounds, and taste and feel as never before. The experience of death that we accept makes us smart for living and wise in dealing with time. The resurrection hope that we seize opens up a broad horizon beyond death, so that we are able to take time for ourselves.

In conclusion: The modern world has emerged from the Western world, even if one no longer really sees that this is the case, for example, in Asia. The Western world emerged from Christianity, especially Protestantism. Human rights and personal freedoms such as freedom of religion, of beliefs, and of conscience, the democratic political forms and the liberal understanding of life—all these emerged together with Protestantism. The crisis of values of modernity and of the Western world is also a crisis of Protestantism. We are thus called in a special sense to work toward the necessary reevaluation of values so that this world may live rather than die.