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THE MESSAGE OF FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

I

IN England Friedrich Nietzsche is usually confused with Treitschke¹ and accused of having plotted the war. In support of this idea it is urged that his conception of *Wille zur macht* underlies both pre- and post-war Pan-Germanism. However that may be, it is none the less clear to any student of Nietzsche that the charge as such is fantastic. Nietzsche himself was neither a protagonist of German Nationalism nor was he a defender of German culture. Those ignorant people who thought that "auch die deutsche Kultur in jenem Kampf (the 1870 war) gesiegt hatte"² were for him the victims of a "weltverbreiteten aber schmeichelnden Wahn". Lacking unity of style, German culture was no more than "ein in sich kämpfendes Chaos des gesamten Auslandes, der gesamten Vorzeit".³ Its so-called celebrities were weak and trivial "Gelehrten"; "wandelnde Encyklopädien; eingefleischte Compendien und gleichsam concrete Abstracta".⁴ Even the State ideal, which had certainly triumphed, was not something to be prized in itself, but something cramping and futile, "ein Rückkehr, nicht ins Heidenthum, sondern in die Dummheit".⁵ Indeed Nietzsche saw in the State the greatest enemy of religion and philosophy, attempting, as it did, to harness philosophy in a debased form (*Universitätsphilosophie*), lest true thought should rise up and destroy it.⁶ In so uncompromising a critic it is surely idle to seek a chief protagonist of Pan-Germanism, and if the Kaiserreich came in for so harsh treatment one shudders to think what Nietzsche would have thought of Hitlerism and the new Aryan culture. If Nietzsche is quoted as a fore-runner by the experts of the Third Reich, it is only because his ideas have, as he always feared, been adopted by those least capable of understanding him.

A second charge commonly brought against Nietzsche in

¹ Treitschke, author of *Historische und politische Aufsätze*, etc.

² *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen I* (Werke I, p. 179 f.).

³ *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen II* (Werke I, p. 383).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

⁵ *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen III* (Werke I, p. 420 and cf. pp. 476 ff.).

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 476 f.

England is that he was an arch-enemy of the Christian faith. In that charge there is something of truth, but not the whole truth. If by Christian we refer to the conventional Christian faith of his own and indeed of our day, then the charge is wholly true; Nietzsche both detested it and despised it. His works consist largely of attacks upon it, and in the last years, when his mind finally gave way, he frenziedly opposed the worship of Dionysos to the worship of Christ. Whether he ever attacked vital Christianity, or for that matter ever knew it, is a different question. It is our purpose in this essay to see whether Nietzsche has not in fact a very urgent message for the theologians of the Church to-day.

In the generally accepted sense of the term Nietzsche was no theologian. This is not unexpected. But neither was Nietzsche a philosopher. He was first and foremost a thinker,¹ and in so far as his thought touches upon religious subjects, in so far as it crystallizes into a general Weltanschauung, Nietzsche strays into the realm of theology. He strays into that realm in a double capacity; first as a critic, then as a constructive thinker. Both as critic and as constructive thinker, Nietzsche has an important contribution to make.

As a critic Nietzsche attacks conventional religion root and branch. And strangely enough his first violent attack is not upon orthodoxy, but upon Liberalism. The *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*, taken as a whole, may indeed be construed as a polemic against modern Liberalism. In the first essay, David Strauss² is reviewed and ruthlessly demolished. In the second the historical attitude, which lies at the basis of all critical work upon the Bible, is considered and condemned. In the third, and partly in the fourth, the general weakness of the liberal position in religion and philosophy is fully exposed, the greatness of true philosophers and men of culture, i.e. Schopenhauer and Wagner being brought out by way of contrast.

II

The war against Liberalism is waged upon two main fronts. There is first of all an assault upon its general philosophical position; and then there is an evaluation of its historical

¹ Nietzsche himself always makes the distinction between philosophers who are "Gelehrten" and philosophers who are "Denker" (Schopenhauer, pp. 456 ff.).

² David Strauss, author of *Das Leben Jesu* and *Der alte und der neue Glaube*.

and critical approach. The philosophical position of Liberalism is as Nietzsche saw clearly enough, and as Brunner and Barth have since demonstrated, that of an Aufklärungsoptimismus. In the later years of the century there was a tendency to adopt the language of Darwinianism, but at root the Strausses and Hartmanns were true descendants, through Hegel and Schleiermacher, of Lessing and, above all, Herder.¹ Their talk is all of Werdend; they view history as a Weltprozess. With Philisteroptimismus they regard the late comer as the end and goal of history, the world and even God only becoming self-conscious with the development of the modern scholar.² "Der moderne Mensch," says Nietzsche with fine scorn, "steht hoch und stolz auf der Pyramide des Weltprozesses und ruft Wir sind am Ziel, wir sind das Ziel, wir sind die vollendete Natur."³

Nietzsche's attitude to this Hegelian optimism was consistent throughout his life. In *Der Antichrist* he could still write "Progress is merely a modern idea, i.e. a false idea".⁴ Nietzsche never attempts to disprove the idea; he simply treats it as absurd, the facts disproving it from the very outset. It is untrue to life, and manifestly so. The modern man is no nearer to the ideal than the Greek man of the seventh century B.C.⁵ There is no approximation of the historical to the ideal such as Schleiermacher postulated as the basis of his reconstruction of Christianity. The hope upon which Liberalism primarily rests, the hope of a growing Kingdom, the hope of a development to perfection, has no roots in historical reality. The value of Nietzsche's criticism, as with so many of his criticisms, is clearly seen when it is considered in the light of the modern Barthian attack upon Liberalism.⁶ In revealing the fact that Liberal scholarship is permanently affected with what he calls Hegelei und Schleiermacherei, Nietzsche has enabled us to put it in its historical perspective and to perceive the weaknesses which lie at its very heart.

The attack upon the historical and critical methods of Modernism is even more drastic than that upon its general

¹ The influence of Herder is usually under-estimated, but here, as so often, he stands at the source of the whole movement; cf. esp. his influence upon Schelling and Renan.

² Cf. Renan, *L'Avenir de la Science*. Introduction xiii l'humanité seule autant que nous savons crée la conscience de l'univers.

³ *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen II*, pp. 359 ff.

⁴ *Der Antichrist* (Eng. trans. by Common, p. 243).

⁵ Indeed, Nietzsche himself thinks him farther away.

⁶ See esp. Brunner, *Die Mystik und das Wort and Der Mittler*.

philosophical position. For Nietzsche the great disease from which the nineteenth century suffered was a surfeit of historical scholarship. And that scholarship had produced nothing but dry-as-dust "Gelehrten", professing objectivity but lacking the true objectivity which is alone the prerogative of the great artist. All culture, all thought, all religion, has been withered by historical research. It professes to seek truth, but it always destroys. Its main feature is a "Scharfsichtigkeit", but it is a "Scharfsichtigkeit in der Nähe, die mit einer Myopie für die Ferne verbunden ist". The historian "beurtheilt eine Schrift, weil er sie nicht im Ganzen zu übersehen vermag, nach einigen Stücken oder Sätzen oder Fehlern".¹ And in the long run there is no hope, as Renan fondly imagined,² of a recreation. The tattered remnants will be put together again in a new *synthèse*, but there will be in them no reality, no life, no truth. It will be a Straussian *synthèse*, a restatement of Christianity in terms of the *Weltprozess*, an uneasy fusion of elements borrowed from all sources, without originality, without style, without inner power. There is learning, but it is the learning of pedants, attractive with its parade of scientific knowledge, its aspect of modernity and its pandering to philosophy, but attracting only to confuse. The truth which it professes to advance is indeed only an obscuring of truth, a Babel-turm of human scholarship, blinding us to the truth as it is in God. How neatly Brunner sums up the whole position! "Our time," he says, "which has made unparalleled progress in scientific knowledge, is perhaps further away from the truth than any previous age."³

In the middle period of his life Nietzsche did himself gravitate for a while in the direction of a similar culture-destroying scepticism. Instead of his first and poetic love of the early Greek dramatists, we find a new enthusiasm for the man formerly hated as a destroyer, Socrates.⁴ Montaigne, Voltaire and Comte became his heroes. Darwinianism was beginning to exert an influence. The result is that Nietzsche's attack at this time comes to be based upon rational rather than cultural grounds. In *Menschlich es Allzumenschliches* he urges

¹ *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*, pp. 453 ff.

² In *L'Avenir de la Science*, Renan's thesis is that the age of Analysis, having destroyed the old Syncretism, will result in a new *synthèse*. See esp. chap. XVI.

³ Quoted in the *Expository Times*, Vol. XLIII, vii., p. 314.

⁴ Cf. *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, esp. pp. 77 ff.

a complete and thoroughgoing scepticism. Truth as such is unattainable. Even the romantic pessimism of Schopenhauer is now rejected. To the Idealist, basing his whole philosophy upon the Ding an sich—whether it be Idee as with Hegel or Wille as with Schopenhauer—Nietzsche replies, There is no Ding an sich. Truth is the sum total of things which go to make up any given factor. It is not absolute, but relative, and must be expressed in terms suitable for the promotion of the public welfare. Institutions, systems or religions claiming a monopoly of truth must be destroyed, and the shams which buttress them up torn down. Amongst these, Christianity and the State are the most powerful and thus the most pernicious.

This attack suffers of course from the fatal weakness that it is not the argument of a systematic philosopher. To say that there is no Ding an sich is no more scientific or rational than to say that there is. The question is open either way. On the other hand, Nietzsche is right in asserting that all human apprehension of truth can only be relative. There is truth and error in all philosophies and in all religions. The so-called Christian conception of God, as such, i.e. divorced from the self-revelation of God, is just as liable to criticism as the atheistic denial that there is a God. It is for this reason that the Liberal school, which denies revelation and seeks to express God in terms of man, again suffers most at Nietzsche's hand. The Liberal is either driven back to a soul-destroying agnosticism or to a more religious approximation, the possibility of a full apprehension of truth being permanently excluded. The only other solution is the revelation of God by God—and that not an indirect and progressive, but a direct and full revelation.¹

At this period Nietzsche was mainly occupied with the ethical absurdities of Christianity, not with its dogmatic assertions.² Indeed, throughout his life it is the ethical which predominates in Nietzsche's works. For him a religious system sought primarily to make men live irrational lives. Consequently the particular truths and errors of the various systems were not worth discussing. Destroy the ethical basis and the need for doctrine disappears. But Nietzsche has a further criticism to make as well. In the fourth section of *Also sprach*

¹ Cf. the Barthian conception of the Word of God.

² See *Jenseits vom Gut und Böse* and *Zur Genealogie der Moral*.

Zarathustra there appears in grotesque form an idea which he was to develop later at considerable length. He pictures various characters coming to the cave of *Zarathustra*, all of them cripples, deformed either in body or in mind. They lodge with *Zarathustra* for a night, hearing and professing to accept with joy his teachings. But they are little men, unable to bear the hard realities of *Zarathustra's* life and message. Confronted with *Zarathustra's* wild beasts, they take to ignominious flight. Here, surely, is Nietzsche's most penetrating criticism of Christianity. It is not a search for, but a withdrawal from, truth, a Romantic *Flucht in die Ferne*. To evade the stern issues of life, its battles and conflicts, man takes refuge in an ideal world of his inner self and religion is born.¹

III

That this seems to be in Nietzsche's mind is suggested by two facts. First of all, in his *Geburt der Tragödie*, he had already traced back the ideal-constructions of Apolline art to a similar source. The Greek, recognizing the "Schrecken und Entsetzlichkeiten des Daseins, musste vor sie hin die glänzende Traumgeburt der Olympischen stellen".² Secondly in *Der Sonnenaufgang* he analyses the steps in Paul's conversion³ and seeks to show that his interpretation of the Cross was nothing more nor less than a means of escape from the inner conflict of Romans vii.⁴ Even in the *Antichrist*, where Paul is portrayed as a villain, the representative of the priestly class in its striving for power,⁵ Nietzsche still condemns Christianity mainly on this score: that it is fundamentally a negation of life. Of the New Testament itself, for example, he says, "All in it is cowardice, all is shutting of the eyes, all is self-deception".⁶

This criticism applies with equal effect to all branches of our modern Christianity. It is seen in the Ritschlian attempt to subjectivize religion; the Ritschlians interpreting Christ's work, as Brunner points out in *The Mediator* as nothing more than the giving of a sense of release to the individual soul.⁷ And in this, of course, they only follow the teaching of

¹ Of course the section in question does not necessarily bear this interpretation, but the fact that in it Nietzsche parodies the Bible is strongly in its favour.

² *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, p. 31.

³ *Der Sonnenaufgang*, pp. 59-60.

⁴ Schopenhauer's retirement into the inner self is also attacked at this period.

⁵ Cf. the similar idea in Condorcet's *Esquisse*.

⁶ *Der Antichrist* (Eng. trans. by Common, p. 314).

⁷ *The Mediator*, pp. 90 ff.

Schleiermacher, who in his *Reden* laid emphasis upon inner experience as the essential common element in all religion. It is seen again in the similar concentration upon feeling by Traditionalists, the Pietist cult of emotion being at the root of this attitude. To escape from the realities of the world refuge is sought in inner and often mystic experiences; beautiful Jesus-dreams, inspiring visions of the Victory-life, sensations of the all-pervading presence of God, anything that is remote from the realm of fact. Finally it is seen, and here perhaps in its most enticing and its most pernicious form, in the Catholic glorification of the past, Romanticism again being at the heart of the movement, as with both Modernism and Pietism. We think, for example, of Wackenroder with his aesthetic enthusiasms,¹ of Novalis with his glowing dreams,² of Chateaubriand,³ of Walter Scott, of Froude and Keble and Newman. How they kindle the imagination, how they steep the mind in their golden dreamings! We read them, and the problems of life begin to lose their bitter edge. A sense of hopelessness gives way to a dreamy optimism. There is idealism, there is purpose, there is courage, but at the heart of it all there is a denial of life, a refusal to face its sterner issues. And from all these movements—Liberal, Pietist, Catholic—Nietzsche ruthlessly calls us. They are a trap, a snare, an escape—and how easily the religious man falls at this point. “The religious movement of man,” as Brunner says, “is always an attempt to flee from reality.”⁴ But God is not to be sought along this line. God will not be found in the fleeing of truth. Theology is useless — it is based upon the facts of life. Theology cannot live either on experiences of the soul or upon visions of the past. If religion is nothing more than this facile make-belief, better that its shams should be broken, better that the just criticisms of its opponents should be proclaimed and should triumph.

Finally in *Der Antichrist* Nietzsche still further develops this idea in conjunction with his conception of the relativity of truth; and he concludes that God is no more than a creation of the mind of man, a psychological projection of man's own twisted thoughts and corrupt ideals. “God is dead; he hath died of his pity for man.”⁵ Against the Kreuzigte, who is the

¹ See Franz Sternbald's *Wanderungen*, etc.

² *Die Christenheit und Europa*.

³ See esp. *Le Génie du Christianisme*.

⁴ *The Mediator*, p. 565.

⁵ *Also sprach Zarathustra* (Eng. trans. by Tille), p. 118.

contradiction of life, there stands the Dionysos, the god of ruthlessness and wine and dancing, "life's transfiguration and its eternal Yea".¹ The old conception has perished with the decadence of man: "when a nation goes to ruin, God becomes a sneak, timid and modest."² The truth behind this teaching is clearly brought out in the message of Karl Barth. As Barth points out we attempt to still our conscience by morality and religion; we make god in our own image; we philosophize about him and argue about him; eventually we need to justify him.³ Nietzsche of course would have included the God of the Bible under the same condemnation. But then he never understood the Bible, God's self-revelation. He read into it all the conventional thoughts and ideas of the Christians of his own day (just as they did in fact themselves). But accept the criticism in so far as it applies to our human conceptions of God and the ground is cleared for a more scriptural theology—a theology which shall not only recognize the hard facts of life but also find its centre in the Righteousness of God, that Righteousness which is revealed, beyond all human thought and human striving, alone to the eye of repentance and faith.

Nietzsche's contribution has so far been discussed mainly from this negative aspect—as a clearing of the ground. But Nietzsche himself does more than destroy. He also points us back to those great theological truths which modern Liberalism and Romanticism together have obscured. In Nietzsche's reconstruction, as in his criticism, there is much that must be treated with caution. Nietzsche was always a wild visionary rather than a systematic philosopher. He takes up ideas, plays with them, sometimes argues, sometimes drops them. He never or seldom formulates. In *Also sprach Zarathustra*, probably his most comprehensive work, his thought is couched in an elaborate and highly poeticized rhetoric. Theology in the sober sense of the word there is none. The philosophic and the poetic jostle each other, merge into each other. One suggested explanation of Nietzsche's final madness is that he knew his poetic reconstructions to be false, but refused to accept the fact.⁴ In any case, care must always be taken to distinguish between the form and the content, the extravagant presentation

¹ *Der Antichrist*, p. 262.

² *Ibid.*, p. 259.

³ *Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie I.*

⁴ For a discussion, see Knight, *Some Aspects of the Life and Work of Nietzsche*.

and the inner core of truth. If this care is exercised, then there are valuable lessons to be learned from Nietzsche's constructive ideas.

Especially is this so with the doctrine of the *Ewige Wiederkehr*. Appearing for the first time at the end of the *Fröhliche Wissenschaft*,¹ this doctrine is the dominant theme of *Also sprach Zarathustra*, the great central truth enunciated by Zarathustra to the despair of all other religious teachers. Time, says Nietzsche, is endless. Behind us is an infinity of time, before an infinity. "We are at a point, the present, and two roads meet here, the ends of which no man hath ever reached."² Now since there must be a limit to the number of things which can happen in this finite world, then obviously at some point or another the series must be ended and it must begin again. "All things which are now," says Nietzsche, "have been before and will be again and again throughout eternity. Everything goeth, everything returneth, eternally rolleth the wheel of existence."³

IV

This, it must be noticed, is no mere teaching of history repeating itself. It is not the commonplace view of history as cyclic.⁴ It does not prevent development, within limits. The cycle may take thousands, even millions of years to complete itself. But with an infinity of time in which events may take place, all possible combinations must finally be exhausted and a new beginning made. Within the cycle religions and ethical systems, States and civilizations, even the superman himself, who will control and plan the world, will all arise but only arise to fall and then to arise again. There is no final hope, no final progress in a world so closely bound within the limits of finitude.

This idea Nietzsche claimed as his most original if not his most important. The claim is somewhat extravagant when we remember that Nietzsche was a leading classical scholar⁵ and almost certainly knew the similar Pythagorean teaching.⁶ In any case the idea seems at first sight to have little positive

¹ Nachträge Aph. 216.

² *Also sprach Zarathustra*, pp. 213 ff.

³ *Also sprach Zarathustra*, p. 297.

⁴ For a statement of this view, see, of course, Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, etc.

⁵ He was Classical Professor at Basle.

⁶ Upon this point, upon the influence of the Greeks generally, see Knight (as above). Modern parallels are discussed by Kennedy, *The Gospel of Superman*, Appendix, pp. 211-16.

value either for philosophy or religion. Nietzsche made a gallant attempt to argue it systematically in *Der Wille zur Macht*, but on grounds of logic the proof offered is clearly inadequate. Eternal Recurrence is a poetic idea which can neither be proved nor disproved. There may be imaginative power in Nietzsche's conception of it, but the idea itself leads us nowhere. It is only when we come to ask why Nietzsche himself adopted a doctrine so unprofitable and fantastic that its real significance appears. Study it at its face value and it is useless and irrelevant. Seek the truth which Nietzsche himself was expressing and the force and beauty of the doctrine are strikingly revealed.

Now for Nietzsche the teaching of the *Ewige Wiederkehr* had in the first place only a psychological value. This is brought out clearly in *Also sprach Zarathustra*, where the Eternal Recurrence is presented as the most grievous thought of all, a destroyer of facile optimism, a means of rising above cowardly depression. If a man cannot face the world in all its hardness, he will go mad when this devastating truth is set before him. If, on the other hand, a man can accept this most grievous truth of all, the facts of every-day life, however hard and brutal they may be, will have little power to touch him. He will be able to affirm life.

Behind the *Ewige Wiederkehr* there is in other words a dark and cheerless pessimism. All the facts point to this same conclusion. In Nietzsche's early and most impressionable years, Schopenhauer was one of his foremost heroes. In the *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*, as we have already seen, Schopenhauer alone is praised because he alone of his age acknowledges and faces the facts. He sees modern life in all its drabness; "So wild, so farblos, so hoffnungslos ist Alles, und jetzt darin ein Ton der Freude, der gedankenlosen, lauten Freude (i.e. optimism)".¹ Later Schopenhauer was attacked as the inheritor of the Christian tradition,² but it is not the pessimism of Schopenhauer as such which is attacked, only its nature, and above all its solution—a retirement into the inner self. Even though he propounds a different solution, Nietzsche still holds with Schopenhauer's fundamental assumption that the world is bad.³

Again Nietzsche was convinced that the early Greeks,

¹ *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen III*, p. 420.

² In *Der Antichrist*.

³ In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche denies that he was influenced by Schopenhauer at all, on plea that he projected his own ideas into an ideal Schopenhauer. This is clearly not the whole truth.

before the rationalist and destroyer, Socrates, were at root pessimists. They built up a wonderful culture, but it was built upon a foundation of hopelessness. In *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Greek poetry is viewed as an escape from life.¹ Epic poetry (Apolline art) is an escape by means of ideal pictures, lyric poetry (Dionysiac art), an escape by means of an intoxicated acceptance; the two forms coalescing in the tragedy of Aeschylus and Sophokles. In every form pessimism is at the very heart as the only possible attitude in the face of the world.

Nietzsche was himself a pessimist; that is why he preaches the Eternal Recurrence. A pupil of Schopenhauer and the Greeks, he looked upon life and saw it evil. All the rosy dreams of development which the men of his day were noisily proclaiming, he viewed with horror and contempt. He defended the freedom of the will—on the strange plea that we have the illusion of freedom—but whether he liked it or not, Nietzsche was a Determinist.² The idea of the *Ewige Wiederkehr* necessarily implies Determinism. All things must take place as they have taken place before. There is the illusion of freedom, but no real freedom; the illusion of choice, but no real choice; the illusion of progress, but no real progress. The universe is closed—man cannot rise above himself. Human potentialities have a limit and beyond that limit they cannot pass. Nietzsche was not led to this position by the scientific Determinism of his day.³ The powers of Heredity and Environment, so strikingly illustrated in the works of the Naturalists,⁴ have little place in Nietzsche's system, except perhaps biologically for the production of a better physical race.⁵ But the outcome is the same. Man's mind and thought and actions run on a fixed and pre-determined course. Final progress is an illusion.

V

The theological lesson in this view is clear. We need not of course adopt the phantasy of the *Ewige Wiederkehr*—it is doubtful whether Nietzsche himself really believed it.⁶ But

¹ *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, esp. Section i.

² Determinist, that is to say, in the wider sense of the word.

³ But cf. *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen II*, p. 309. Denn da wir einmal die Resultate früherer Geschlechter sind usw.

⁴ See esp. *Hauptmann in Germany and Zola in France*.

⁵ An idea which has its basis in Darwinianism.

⁶ See Knight (as above).

the underlying teaching is of incalculable importance. In these days when theologians boost man's capabilities and hold out happy dreams of progress to godlikeness, the call of Nietzsche is challenging and vital. Man has no power to raise himself above himself. Salvation is not to be attained by the effort or the will of man. The force of tradition, the force of prejudice, the force of sin, is too strong. The mind and heart and will of man are cramped for ever within the confines of the same track. Deviations there may be by the way, but there is no upward development. The human will is in bondage.

This is pessimism, but it is the truth. This is teaching unpalatable to modern tastes, but it is the teaching of life. To ears turned to the soft cadences of Arminianism it is blasphemy, but it is the truth of fact and the truth of God, the truth which the Reformers perceived, the truth which the Bible everywhere proclaims. And Nietzsche calls us back to face this hard hopelessness of things. He himself thought wrongly that the Bible itself strives to hide the truth, but rightly he saw that modern Christianity dare not and will not face it. Hysterically, fantastically, he shouts his message to the world, but that message is the age-long message of the Bible, the age-long message of the Reformers—the message so clearly expressed in the collect, *We who have no power of ourselves to help ourselves.*¹

Nietzsche himself, it is true, had no solution to offer except to face the truth and to affirm life. His was a final hopelessness, with an only possible outcome either in resignation or in a hard and ruthless acceptance. Nietzsche did not look for salvation from without. Christianity was a mockery, religion a sham, God an empty name. Man not being able to save himself, no salvation was possible. Unlike Schopenhauer, he could not look for solace in a retirement into self: the way of cowardice and defeat. The call for Nietzsche was the call of Dionysiac art, reinterpreted in terms of Darwinianism. The world is hopeless, but man must accept it and rejoice in it. Impelled by the dominant power behind all human life, the *Wille zur Macht*, he must throw off all the restraints of convention, he must become hard, living out his life in an ecstatic affirmation. "*Werdet hart*" is the new and great commandment;² and for

¹ Book of Common Prayer, Collect for the Second Sunday in Lent.

² *Also sprach Zarathustra* (der alten und der neuen Tafeln), pp. 269 ff.

the race of joyous, destroying Supermen, Nietzsche sketches a programme for the reconstruction of society—a programme which provides for the enslaving of the weak and timid and the training of men who shall be ever harder and more cultured.

Along this path the Christian theologian cannot follow. It is a counsel of despair, as Nietzsche himself knew only too well. Even the civilization of the Superman must perish. It can only be a temporary measure in the face of a permanent evil. Nietzsche's greatness does not consist in the solution he attempts, but in his recognizing and stating of the problem. And for the Christian it is precisely this recognizing and stating of the problem which will lead him, not to dreams of the *Wille zur Macht*, but directly to God. Once the nightmare hopelessness of the world has been faced, man's dreams of self-advancement are at an end. In despair and repentance he is forced back upon God. All the old shibboleths—Progress, Liberty, Brotherhood—all the old institutions—State, Law, Religion—all these are found to be no longer of any avail. The chill wind of truth withers them and strips them bare. The dreams, the hopes, the ideals, the systems; the whole of human thought and the whole of human effort; they stare life in the face and they stand tottering and bankrupt. God alone can save. Not now the god of the philosopher and the theologian, the god whom Nietzsche contemptuously dismissed and could never replace. But the God who is above our human thought and striving, the God who is Holy, the God who is Judge, the God who is Righteous. This God, the God of the Bible revelation, the only true God, He alone can free the will from bondage, He alone can give purpose and meaning to life, He alone can bring a final redemption.

Nietzsche's teaching must lead either to an utter despair or it must lead again to God. And for the theologian only the one course is possible. Nietzsche calls him to clear away the debris of human efforts. The helplessness of man is again revealed, and with the helplessness of man the grace and the power of God. Sin is again put in the foreground. There is a call to theology to give up the barren quest for a human substitute for God. Nietzsche brings again the challenge of life and bids us face that challenge. He leads us to the point where there can be no solution except in God, and if Nietzsche himself attempts to work out a solution of despair, his real

message is the despair itself and not the solution of it. The greatness of his message for to-day is this, that like the Bible, like the Reformers, he strips man of his glories and ideals, he exposes the falsity of human systems and values, he brings us up with a jolt against the perversity of our fate and our helplessness in the face of it. Once that message is grasped, Nietzsche's work is done. The Bible becomes clear to us again. The need of redemption ceases to be a catch-word and becomes a startling reality. The supremacy and pre-venience of Grace ceases to be a creed and becomes a glorious necessity. The Cross takes its place again at the heart of the Christian Gospel; the Cross of human effort judged; the Cross of God's salvation manifested; the beginning, the end, the substance of our theology. There is a new orientation, a new vitality, a new certainty. Theology can be no more a mere formulation of human theories. It is the humble yet joyous proclaiming of the living Word of God.

Nietzsche's thought thus turns full circle upon itself. Destroying Christianity, it destroys only the human superstructure, and the basis of the Gospel is revealed. Nietzsche penetrates to the very heart of the problem. He leads us to an impasse from which there is no escape except in God. And that is where his message is so urgent to-day. On every hand the problem is under-stated and the assurance given that by this or that road there is a way upward to God. The No of the Reformation, the No of the Bible, is ignored. Nietzsche re-affirms that No in tremendous and frantic tones. If in our lives and in our theology we do not recognize and re-echo that No, and with that No, God's Yes in the Person of his Son, it may well be that not only will Christianity perish, a structure of shams and prejudices, but that No itself will be worked out in the blood and the weeping of men.

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