

The Other Way: Responsible to God for the World

THE MAN WHO HAS BEEN TO THE CENTER		THE MAN WHO HAS RETURNED	
No longer responsible to the world	Accountable only to God	Responsible for the world	Our Calling As an Order
1-5	6-8	9-11	12-16

1. This is the year of the spirit. I don't quite know what that means, but it wasn't by chance that someone indirectly placed into my hands that book, Christ the Crisis by Gogarten. If you're like I am, when you read the book it's almost as if you're being led through worlds that you never dreamed existed, and then after you get halfway through them you see that, my Lord, you've been talking about this all your life. But it almost took the experience of this summer in order for you to be aware of it with a kind of vividness that begins to change all of creation or recreate creation.
2. Not using his jargon, but ours, what Gogarten is saying is something like this: that once you've been to the center, you've been to the center. That you never can live your life the same again in terms of the raw bottom of it all. That whereas you've been trained to be an accountable person, you no longer can be an accountable person. Ever since you were in your mother's arms, you were taught to be responsible. To be responsible to your family, to be responsible to your nation, to be responsible to your community, to be responsible to your church. Yes indeed, and some of us were trained to be responsible to all of history, to all of creation.
3. But once you've gone to the center, you can never be responsible again. That's the Christ happening within the Christ happening. Never again can you be responsible. For you live no longer in any way whatsoever before your family, before your community, before your nation, before your church, before all of history. You're not accountable. You're not responsible to anything or anybody. From now on, you're only accountable to and responsible to God. And if you can think of the biggest period that could possibly be dropped on history, put it there, just period.
4. About this the world knows nothing, that's why the world is the world that we know. This alone is the arena in which sin is defined. As long as you are responsible or accountable to anything of this world, sin is the failure to meet the demands of those things of this world before which you are accountable. But once you've seen the center, once you've beheld that there is an entirely different way to live that has nothing whatsoever to do with the way you've been trained to live in this world, then you see sin has nothing in the first instance whatsoever to do with the morality that is defined by being accountable to the things in the world.

5. Now, if you've got too much astonishment on your face, then all I have to say to you is that you have not seen yet that there is an entirely different way to live in this world than the world knows anything about. And because the world knows nothing about this other way to live in the world, you have sin, or the world is in sin. Sin has nothing to do in the first instance with brutality, it has to do with being responsible in this world. It has nothing to do with all of the rules and regulations without which you couldn't have this world.
6. There is an entirely different way to live your life and die your death than the world knows anything about. And when you've been to the center, then you know the abundant life, the LIFE that's spelled with capital letters. And once you've been to the center, then you live your whole life from that moment on directed only toward the center, directed only toward God. Never again toward your nation, never again toward your community, never again toward your family, never again toward your church. And you understand why Jesus was referred to as the one who went "outside the camp." And so have all who have participated in that happening. It compels and propels them to the center, or to the throne of God, if you please. You're only accountable to God and God is no thing.
7. In the feeble way in which men tried to get this said, this means that you keep our own conscience. That statement is not correct, but that's almost what you've got to say to everybody who still lives the life of this world. There's no other way to understand it. Pretty obviously, the conscience is kept before God, and yet because we are creatures of sociality, you have to talk about the interior council. But mark you, if you think that you have one person sitting on your council who in any way whatsoever for you lives his life accountable and responsible to this world, I want to say to you that that's not the council, that's simply the interiorization of the generalized other of this world. That simply advises you about this morality and that morality and this violation of this rule and the other violation of some law. The council are those and only those whose lives within you were lived only before the center.
8. The spirit man lives his life out of only one orientation: before God. Accountable alone to him. Therefore from any posture you want to take inside this world you are an outcast. You're an odd one. You are outside. And that's your doom. Never again can you be at home in this world. I suppose some people come here and can't stand it and feel it's the crumminess of the Order. No, we're crummy and we'll die crummy. That's not it. But people begin to smell that there's another way to live long before they're able to articulate it to themselves. This is the way it's been in all of history.
9. Now, the man who lives toward the center and is responsible only to God is the man who returns. Only that man is in a position where it is necessary or possible to return. He went outside. He does not return to be accountable to this world, to be responsible to this world, he returns to be responsible for this world. Not for any part of it, not for any dimension of it, but for all of it.
10. If you were able to bypass the intellectual anxieties of grasping that you were accountable not to this world, then the burden of being responsible for this world must give you double intellectual anxieties. No longer are you responsible for your children, no longer are you responsible for your family, no longer are you responsible for your church, no longer are you responsible

for your community, you are responsible for the world. And to be responsible for the world in terms of the image that I picture means being responsible for the sin of the world. And the sin of the world is that the world is responsible to itself, and not to God. That's why the world is always, though it may have a thousand faces, a closed system, it is turned in on itself, do you understand that? To be responsible for the world is fundamentally to be responsible for that turned inness.

11. Now let me draw back. When you see that sin is not a moral matter, but this ontological matter that I've just spelled out, then you don't have to go beating some individual over the head who still is trapped by his life in this world. There's nothing to beat him over the head about. And you don't say that he doesn't have a great life. He can have a great life in this world. Let's face it, he can have himself a fine marriage, he might be able to have himself a fine brood, he might be able to attain the fame and the success that this world offers, he might store up the good life that this world provides for some, he might be able to develop a character that would be the admiration, and rightly so, of his neighbors in this world. There's only one thing wrong, that he hasn't seen that this world is an illusion, that there is an entirely different posture possible to man. And to be in Jesus Christ is to have that entirely different posture.

12. Now when you talk this way you exaggerate. But let's say it's been 300 years since any man in this world knew this. Certainly it's been true of the broad sweep in Christendom. For I have been reared on a gospel that in itself had interpreted the way of the world as the way of life. I was inspired to live the good life, the moral life, to submit and to be accountable to this world. There is nothing bad about that. It's just there's another way. And perhaps, maybe in our time, the other way has been found anew. One of the tragedies from the point of view of the one who is accountable to God and for the world in his life is that he sees that the pieties of any time are the last final entrenchment of the way of life that is accountable to this world. The piety of an age protects the posture of life that is accountable to this world, and therefore makes it next to impossible to grasp and appropriate the other way, the way of the outcast, the way in which you are accountable to God and responsible for this world.

13. To put it in mythological terms, when you get to heaven, they're only going to ask you one question that has two forms. One is the individual/solitary form, "Did you live your life?" The other side of the same question is, "Were you responsible for the world?" You're going to be asked to give an account of whether or not you exercised your responsibility for this world before God.

14. If this is not what it means for us to be a historical order, then for the life of me I'm hard put to find a reason. We're not out to make men more accountable to this world, we're out to enable men to be responsible for this world. Which means to find the entirely, entirely different way of life, the way of life which is over against all other ways of life. Each one of them is simply a variation on how you become accountable to this world, rather than to God.

15. I don't know what will come of this year. But I intend, the Lord willing, to grasp inside of myself, in ways that I don't at the moment, what this means. I sometimes say to myself afresh, as if we hadn't said it a thousand times before,

that fundamentally we're just evangelists. I still hate that word, because of what the church did to it, trying to make men a little more moral, but when you come right down to it in the broad sense it gets beyond any sociological entity called Christianity. Here's our calling: to bring men to the other way of life.

16. It's nothing you can understand with your mind: finally only those who have been there know that the life of the world, with all its pain, with all its sorrow, with all its tragedy, is but an illusion. Wouldn't it be funny if, as we build the New Social Vehicle, we would discover that we were evangelists bringing men into not the new, but the other life, where men are men, and women are women, because they are the sons and daughters of God.

-JWM