

## Chapter 9

### HATE YOUR ENEMY?

After the fragmentary quotation of the commandment to love one's neighbor in Matthew 5:43 there follows in seamless continuity the quotation of a commandment to hate one's enemy, a quotation that could not possibly stem from Jesus himself. The strange imperative, "hate your enemy," turns the ethos of the entire Bible into a lie.

The conjecture that this hatred of one's enemy refers to a precept of the Qumran sect (DSM 1:3f.), where there is talk of "hatred of all the sons of darkness" (i.e., all enemies of the Qumran community), seems somewhat farfetched, for the twofold introduction, "you have heard" and "it is said," is used in the Sermon on the Mount as well as in rabbinical writings to introduce *biblical* traditions.

In Jesus' time the Qumran sect was too young, too distant, and too small to be presumed to have been a recognized norm—or antinorm—in Galilee.

This fact has since been generally recognized. The *Jerusalem Bible* is typical of most commentaries in noting of this alleged commandment to hate one's enemy: "The second part of this commandment is not, and could not be found thus formulated in the Law" (footnote on Matt. 5:43).

Even clearer is Ethelbert Stauffer, who, thanks to his notorious dejudaising of Jesus in the Hitler era, is above all suspicion of "philosemitism": "The synagogue has always justifiably protested against Matthew 5:43. There is no law that prescribes hatred of one's enemy either in the Old Testament or in the Talmud."<sup>27</sup>

It is not impossible that Jesus here used the Hebrew verb "to hate" in its secondary, considerably milder meaning, as we know it from two of his sayings.

Speaking of the conditions of discipleship, he told his followers, "If anyone comes to me and does not *hate* his father and his mother and his wife and his children, and even his own life as well, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). On the matter of death and what follows, he says in his farewell discourse "Whoever *hates* his life in this world will preserve it unto eternal life" (John 12:25).

Here "to hate" has the biblical meaning of "attach little value to" or "love less than," as for example in God's words, "I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated" (Mal. 1:2-3; Rom. 9:13). The same meaning is found in the passage about the husband with two wives, "one whom he loves, and one whom he hates" (Deut. 21:15), which prompts the rhetorical question in the Talmud, "Are there then beloved and hated persons before God?" (Yeb 23a).

The possibility of this gentler intention on Jesus' part cannot, of course, be absolutely rejected; nevertheless both the biblical tradition at work here and the inner coherence of this "superthesis" speak against it. It thus seems most likely that the final redactor of Matthew's Gospel, who seldom overlooked an opportunity to interweave polemical points and anti-Jewish barbs into his subject matter, is the author of this slander. This view is also supported by the fact that not one word of this "hate" is mentioned in the Lukan parallel of the sermon on the plain.

### THE JEWISH TRADITION

The very opposite of hatred of enemies is much more visible in Judaism. Hillel the Wise taught his disciples, "Be of the pupils of Aaron, loving peace and working for peace, loving humans and leading them to the Torah" (Aboth I, 12)—clearly referring to both friend and enemy.

Among the sayings of Solomon we read, "If your enemy should fall, do not rejoice, and if he stumbles, let your heart not gloat" (Prov. 24:17). From this adage the rabbis infer:

At Sukkoth, it says three times in scripture, one must rejoice (Deut. 16:14f.; Lev. 23:40). But at Passover, although it

concerns the liberation of the people, joy is nowhere mentioned in the scriptures. Why? Because the [enemy] Egyptians perished [Pessikta K 189a].

And so among the accusations that Job devised against himself, the question of conscience was not forgotten: "Have I rejoiced over the ruin of one who hates me, and been elated because misfortune struck him? No, I did not allow my mouth to sin in damning his soul with a curse" (Job 31:29f.).

Here the enemy is named correctly and precisely: the one who hates me, my subjective enemy, who today is my adversary but need not be tomorrow. But even when the enemy does something unkind to me, that person does not cease to be my *reya'*. For it is written, "Do not take vengeance and do not bear grudges" (Lev. 19:18). And even more clearly, "Do not say, I will repay evil. Hope in the Lord, who will help you" (Prov. 20:22).

Solomon repeats it for the hard of hearing: "Do not say, I will do to him as he has done to me; I will repay everyone according to their acts" (Prov. 24:29). And if Proverbs says (25:22), "The Lord will repay you," then the rabbis alter the reading of this verb (*jashlim* instead of *jeshalem*) to make this last passage read: "The Lord will bring him to peace with you" (Midrash Prov. 25:22). And the Bible says of Israel's archenemies, "You should not detest the Edomite; he is your brother. You should not despise the Egyptian, for you have been a stranger in his land" (Deut. 23:8).

Joseph, as viceroy of Egypt, tells his repentant brothers, "You thought to do evil to me, but God thought to make it good"; this "good" is explained immediately: "that is, to preserve a great people" (Gen. 50:20), meaning the Egyptians.

In rabbinic literature the universality of human love often expressly touches on the "hater": "Do not say, I love those who love me and I hate those who hate me, but I love everyone" (Test Gad 6).

The rabbis associate this prohibition of retaliation with praise of humble self-restraint, which they equate with divine love:

Of those who are humiliated and do not humiliate, who hear themselves insulted and do not answer, who act out of love and rejoice in correction, of them it is said (Judg. 5:31),

"Those who love God are as the rising of the sun in its glory"  
[Yoma 23a; Gettin 36b].

Because repayment always makes the behavior of the other a model for one's own action, in the end two bearers of the divine image suffer: you and your brother. The inference is obvious: "They are tormented and do not torment; they hear themselves insulted and do not reply; they act out of love and rejoice in sorrows; these are the ones who love God" (Shabbat 88b). Yet because the "hater" need not remain a permanent enemy, but could be only the victim of a spontaneous impulse of the heart, which like everything else human is fickle, Rabbi Nathan draws a constructive conclusion from this situation: "Who is the greatest hero in the land?" He answers his pedagogical question himself: "The one who wins the love of an enemy" (ARN 23).

That this lies within the realm of the possible is corroborated by the rabbis who point out that the difference between "enemy" (*oyev*) and "lover" (*ohev*) is but a single letter. Should we not summon up the strength, we are asked, to change a *y* to an *h*!

To sum up, the rabbinic warning—quite in the spirit of Jesus—says, "Whoever hates the *reya'* is among those who shed blood" (Derech Eretz Rabba 11).

### IN PRACTICE

How such exalted principles are translated into everyday practice may be illuminated by a single example representative of many. In the exegesis of Exodus 21:1f. the Talmud laid down that one must rescue the burglar who breaks into the house at night and in the process falls into mortal danger through carelessness, even if this means violating the Sabbath (San. 72b). Rabbi Nechonia taught his pupils to pray, "May it be your will . . . that no hate mount against us in a human heart, that no one be jealous of us and that we be jealous of no one else . . . and that all our works be well-pleasing before you like supplications" (j Ber 4:7d).

So impressive was a similar prayer by Mar bar Rabina that even today it is recited three times each day in the synagogue liturgy: "My God, guard my tongue from evil, my lips from untruth. Let my soul be silent before those who curse me, and may my soul be as

dust against anyone" (Ber 17a) (meaning, "may I ignore all slander, as if it were mere dust—nothing"). That one is not to be content simply with reciting the prayer is attested to by a Jewish war veteran of the first century: "Even the [conquered] enemy should be treated with kindness," wrote Flavius Josephus from his own experience (*Against Apion*, II, 28, 209).

Help, support, and care for the enemy begin in the first book of Moses. There Abraham prays for Abimelech, the king of Gerar, who had taken Abraham's wife Sarah away from him (Gen. 20:17), and interceded with God for the healing of this adversary. And Joseph forgave his brothers who had sold him into slavery, "comforted them and spoke to them as a friend" (Gen. 50:18-21).

Five times Moses prays for the well-being of the pharaoh and those same Egyptians who for centuries had brutally subjugated the people of Israel and intended eventually to exterminate them. "The pharaoh said, I will let you go . . . , but do not go too far, and pray for me! Moses said, . . . I will ask the Lord that tomorrow the flies may depart from the pharaoh and his people . . . . And the Lord did as Moses prayed" (Exod. 8:24-27). The pharaoh, however, repeatedly deceived him and then asked for forgiveness, breaking his word after the termination of each of the first nine plagues—and Moses nevertheless interceded successfully for him and the Egyptian people.

Similarly the sorely tested Job prayed for his false friends who put him off with hypocritical consolation, "and the Lord listened to Job" (Job 42:9).

The same is true of the young David, who spared King Saul who fell into his hands defenseless, although Saul had repeatedly sought to have the shepherd boy murdered. "I have not sinned against you," he said to his archenemy and lord, "but you hunt me down to take away my life" (1 Sam. 24:12).

That David, in displaying such magnanimity, was no exception among the rulers of Israel is shown by the story of the Aramaic king Ben-Hadad, who had waged war against Israel for years until King Ahab was able to overcome him and put his army to flight. Then we read:

Ben-Hadad fled into the city and hid. . . . Then his servants said to him, Look, we have heard that the kings of the house

of Israel are merciful kings. . . . Perhaps he will spare your life. . . . And they went to the king of Israel and said, Your servant Ben-Hadad directs us to say to you, Spare my life! . . . But Ahab said . . . He is my brother! . . . Then Ben-Hadad came out to him. And Ahab had him climb into his chariot . . . , made a treaty with him and let him go [1 Kings 20:30-34].

After Jeremiah had preached in vain to Jerusalem to accept peacefully its subjection to Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylonia, the holy city was demolished, the temple laid in ruins, and "the people who remained in the city were yoked together like cattle and driven into captivity" (2 Kings 25:8ff.). In the year 594 B.C.E., the prophet writes to those who had been taken away and whose Babylonian tyrants told them to "sing and be cheerful of heart" (Ps. 137:3): "Seek what is best for the city [Babylon] to which I have let you be exiled." So God speaks, whereupon the prophet demands that the exiles offer prayers for their own suppressors: "And pray for them to the Lord! For if things go well for them, then they will also go well for you" (Jer. 29:7).

The historical events proved him right: the prayer of the exiles was heard and the Babylonian diaspora witnessed one of the most fruitful flowerings in Jewish history.

### LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

The Synod of the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland was correct in its statement "On the Renewal of Relationships between Christians and Jews" of November 1, 1980:

In the Jewish and in the Christian tradition God's love embraces the entire creation. As God's image and partner the human being should work according to this divine model. The Jew and the Christian, therefore, may not withdraw love from their fellow humans, even if they should be their enemies—for even the enemy remains God's beloved creature. It is thus not astonishing that in Judaism, before, during, and after the time of Jesus, love of one's enemy was in force. . . . It is therefore incorrect to say that Jesus was the

first to free the commandment of love from all restrictions "by mandating love of one's enemy" [p. 27].

And nevertheless it must be stressed that despite the numerous parallels and analogues in Jewish scripture which extend love of neighbor even to the most distant and declare all God's creation worthy of love, the body of Jewish teaching knows no explicit demand of love of one's enemy. To be precise, "love your enemy" is an innovation introduced by Jesus.

Has it become a Christian characteristic in practice, as is suggested in so many sermons and lectures? In his search for exemplifications of love of enemy, theologian Ethelbert Stauffer found only four:

Jesus himself, who could still pray on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). The martyr Stephen, who dies with the words, "Lord, hold not this sin against them" (Acts 7:60). James, the brother of Jesus, who prays in the hour of death, "I beg, Lord, God, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, II, 13, 16).<sup>28</sup>

The fourth example is much more recent:

On October 20, 1958 the Great Chamber of the Supreme Court in Warsaw opened proceedings against [Nazi] District Commander Erich Koch. The accused was brought forth from the Warsaw prison. Koch declared on the first day of trial, "If I am still living, it is thanks solely to a great woman, the prison physician, Dr. Kaminska" [Dr. Kaminska is Jewish].<sup>29</sup>

For the sake of fairness, let me add: all four were Jewish! But they are not the only ones. Typical of the many concentration camp survivors who put down in writing the feelings bottled up in their souls is the short poem of a Jewish woman, Ilse Blumenthal-Weiss:

I cannot hate.  
They beat me,  
trample me underfoot.

I cannot hate.  
I can but atone  
for you and me.

I cannot hate.  
They strangle me.  
They cast stones at me.  
I cannot hate.  
I can but weep  
bitterly.

Jules Isaac, the French Jewish historian and educator, lost his entire family in Auschwitz. Yet in 1947, in his *Jésus et l'Israël*, he succeeded in laying the foundation stone of a Jewish-Christian understanding. It was this book that later induced Pope John XXIII—then yet nuntius in Paris—to place the relationship of the church to Judaism on the agenda of the Second Vatican Council. The final chapter of the book closes with an open question: "The glow of the Auschwitz crematorium is the beacon that lights, that guides all my thoughts. Oh, my Jewish brothers, and you as well, my Christian brothers, do you not think that it mingles with another glow, that of the Cross?"<sup>20</sup>

Leo Baeck was the most recent luminary of the German rabbinate. Three times he was offered the chance to save himself and his family by emigrating during the Hitler years. Three times he rejected the offer, which seemed to him to be fleeing from his assigned task. He wished to remain with his people as teacher "as long as a single Jew remained in Germany," as a history of the camp later put it. He was made a draft horse by the SS, daily transporting carts with buckets from the toilets.

And yet, in the wooden barracks, in the storerooms, and under the open sky, he held evening lectures on Plato and Kant, on Isaiah, Job, and Jesus—a yearlong sermon on the mount out of the depths of the abyss of abandonment, calmly witnessing to the good news of both Testaments. "Our Father in heaven is not dead—even if humans in God's image become inhuman." When the Russians liberated the concentration camp at Theresienstadt, where he was to the end the spiritual center, Rabbi Baeck—by chance or

providence—was among the 9,000 out of 140,000 prisoners who had survived the suffering.

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34), Rabbi Yeshua once prayed on the Roman cross for his tormentors. In the year 1945 Rabbi Baeck exercised all his personal influence to defend German officers and guards from revenge. As soon as he had recovered spiritually and physically he was among the first to speak in favor of reconciliation between Germans and Jews. His prayer from the first postwar years needs no commentary:

Let there be peace for those of ill-will, and an end to all vengeance and all talk of penalty and punishment. . . . The atrocities mock all standards; they stand beyond all borders of human comprehension, and the martyrs are many. . . . Therefore, O God, do not weigh their outrages with the scales of righteousness, and hand them over to executioners, demanding a terrible reckoning from them. Deal with them differently. Credit to the murderers and informants, betrayers and all evil persons the courage and the fortitude of the others, their personal modesty, their noble dignity, their silent efforts despite everything, the hope that does not surrender, and the brave smile that dries up tears, and all the sacrifice, all the warm love . . . all the harrowed, tortured hearts that still remained strong and ever-trusting in the face of death and in death, yes, even the hours of profoundest weakness. . . . All that, O my God, should count before you as ransom for the forgiveness of debt, should count for a rebirth of righteousness—all the good should count, not the evil. And in the memory of our enemies we should no longer be their victims, no longer their nightmare and terror, but rather a help that releases them from their frenzy. . . . That is all that is asked of them—and that we, when all this is over, may live again as humans among humans, and that there will be peace again on this poor earth, upon persons of good will, and that peace may also come upon the others.<sup>21</sup>

All that Yitzak Katznelson, a faithful Jew and director of the municipal high school in Lodz, has left us is a poem with the title,

"The Song of the Last Jew." It was written on the way to Maidanek on the back of three envelopes, and although he knew that his destination was the gas chamber, no thoughts of vengeance, not a single word of hate, passed his lips. What he was able to hand on to us as his last statement sounds more like a theology of vicarious expiation that lets the magnificence of his soul shine through:

Holy on the cross is my people  
 atoning for the guilt of the world.  
 If ever my people was a chosen people  
 because it suffered for others—  
 then it is now, now!  
 For never yet did a Jew die  
 purified like those who seemed so insignificant  
 in Warsaw, Vilna, or Lvov.  
 For out of every Jew there screams terrified  
 a Jeremiah—each is a king  
 of disappointment—who weeps for all.

During his first interview with a German journalist, Hans-Joachim Schilde, on November 3, 1978, in Jerusalem, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin was asked, "Can you really still believe in God after Auschwitz?" He answered:

Yes, I do, because Auschwitz is our sacrifice for God's justice in this world. I believe in God's direction in politics. Had Hitler not killed the Jews, he might have won the war. Were it not for divine providence, Hitler would have been the first to build the atom bomb. . . . Then our world would be one large prison. The Dark Ages would have begun. . . . We Jews made the greatest sacrifice in this battle for the survival of humanity. . . . Perhaps we had to make the sacrifice so that Hitler would lose.

David composed Psalm 109 in the face of a merciless adversary. Verse 4 reads, "Because I love them, they oppose me, but I pray." The rabbinic midrash extends this statement to the painful lot of all Israel: "Instead of loving me they hate me," says Israel to the peoples: "You ought to love us, for we offered 70 annual sacrifices

for you in the temple in Jerusalem; yet you do not love us but hate us; however, we pray for you" (Midrash and Yalkut Shimoni on Ps. 109:4).

If practicing love of one's enemy is at the center of Christianity, then I often am not sure who is closer to Jesus—his biological brothers and sisters from Judaism or his baptized followers from the gentile world.

## Chapter 10

# A LOVE THAT DISARMS

Hating one's enemies, rejoicing in their misfortune, and repaying evil with evil are expressly forbidden in Judaism. Magnanimity and kindness toward an enemy in need are commanded. But love of enemy as a moral principle does still seem to be tailored only for saints, as five thousand years of world history confirm.

When Bismarck said, "No state can be ruled by the Sermon on the Mount," and the West German chancellor commented in 1981 that "it would be an error to understand the Sermon on the Mount as guidelines for governmental action," both were no doubt thinking of this love of one's enemy as a practical program should an emergency, a political conflict, arise.

More surprising is the protest from the other side. Herbert Marcuse, the philosopher of the new left, exclaimed at a student gathering in Berlin in 1968:

With the Sermon on the Mount one cannot revolt. . . . Hatred of exploitation and suppression is a humane element. . . . Nothing is more abominable than the preaching of love: "Do not hate your opponent"—this in a world in which hate is everywhere institutionalized.

But if one can neither rule nor revolt with this doctrine of love, is it at all possible to live with it or according to it? Leonhard Ragaz is correct in questioning whether it can be fulfilled: "Is that not too much to demand? Can we love those who hate us and do evil to

us? . . . Is that not a moral utopia? Is that not an illusion?"<sup>32</sup>

The answer, which can be reached only via a retranslation into Hebrew, is a clear no. Neither sympathy nor maudlin sentimentality, much less self-surrender, are commanded here, but simply and solely "doing"—one of the most common words in Jesus' vocabulary. And, in fact, the commandment of love of neighbor (Lev. 19:18) that Jesus cites here does *not* say "Love your neighbor" in the accusative but in the *dativus ethicus*, a usage that in English can only be paraphrased: "turn to your neighbor lovingly," or "show your neighbor loving acts," or "take care of your neighbor." In a word, "do good, not harm, to your neighbor."

Because Jesus was neither a visionary nor a utopian, but a worldly-wise observer of human nature, he did not demand superhuman selflessness or sentiments that would be overdemanding for almost any human heart, but practical demonstrations of love such as visiting the sick, giving alms in secret, supporting the needy, consoling the sorrowful, sharing bread with the hungry, and all the thousand and one effective good deeds that create trust, demolish enmity, and promote love.

Because Jesus loved to preach in parallel, contrasting pairs and in rhetorical antitheses, the intensified "love your enemy" in the original Semitic wording must also have been formulated with the same *dativus ethicus*—by no means a call to a Platonic love of enemy, much less to a hypocritical pretense of love, but to a reconciliation with one's opponent aimed at a long-range rehabilitation.

Jesus also implied this by calling the opponent not "enemy" but "hater," as the Lukan parallel (6:27) suggests. The distinction is considerable for the keen of hearing. For the concept "enemy" indicates in all languages a kind of "full-time occupation," but a limited temporal quality is clear in "hater," a verb functioning as a noun. For the hater is someone who hated you yesterday and still hates you today, but maybe not tomorrow, if you only find the way to that person's heart.

Love of one's enemies, as Jesus understood it, means far more than covering things up with a smile by tolerating enemies or holding them at a distance with politeness; it entails an honest effort, a campaigning and struggling with them, so that they change, give up their hate, and become reconciled. In short—a

theo-politics of little loving steps aimed at making the enemy cease to be an enemy. The same is true of praying for one's own persecutor, as a similar episode from the Talmud attests:

A few dissipated fellows living in the neighborhood of Rabbi Meir pestered him badly. Rabbi Meir prayed that they would die. Then his wife Beruria said to him: "What are you thinking of? Perhaps because it is written, 'May sinners disappear' (Ps. 104:35)? But is it really written 'sinners'? Hardly, for we can also read 'sins' for the same word [as the vowelless wording of Hebrew permits]. Besides, continue the verse to its end: 'Then the evildoers will no longer exist!' As soon as sin disappears, there will be no more evildoers. So pray for them, so that they turn back in repentance, then there will be no more evildoers." Then he prayed for mercy for them, and in fact they repented [Ber 10a].

This is the wisdom of the Talmudic teachers who combat evil but try to win the evildoer over.

For all those other religious heroes—in Judaism and elsewhere—who succeeded in praying for their persecutors, their enemies, even their torturers, the Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski can speak:

The religious tradition, at least in our cultural circle, demands more than the mere challenge to renounce hate; beyond this we should show our persecutors kindness, pray for our enemy. Must a claim so offensive to nature be considered universally binding? The answer can be only the most banal: certainly there are and will be in the future only a very few who are really equal to this summons; but on the shoulders of these few rests the structure of our civilization, and we ordinary ones, insofar as we are able, are grateful to them.<sup>33</sup>

Yet Kolakowski errs if he thinks Jesus' demands that we renounce hate and love our enemy originate solely in a self-denial that has only our adversary's well-being at heart. The point here is really a double bridge, one between our world of violence and the reign of

heaven on earth, and the other between a legitimate self-interest and enlightened altruism.

That the Nazarene did not see it as a question of an enthusiastic self-surrender contradicting the biblical idea of human dignity and the ethos of scripture, but rather as a mutual dismantling of hostility by a vigorous reconciliation benefiting the hater as well as the hated is shown by the two concrete examples that Jesus gives as illustrations. But first we must outline the political background and the human climate of that age in which Jesus first saw the light of day.

It was a gloomy light and a dreadful day—full of panic, terror, and anxiety—at the time of that first Roman tax extortion, which Jewish writings of those dark times refer to tersely as "sucking the land dry." The much-touted *pax romana* was the tyrannic rule of a Roman occupational force that threatened to break the people down by its arrogant arbitrariness, shameless corruption, and brutal violation of law. The occupiers' heavy financial demands on the people were especially crushing: eleven different taxes, tariffs, and assessments that the despot had his Jewish puppets, the notorious tax collectors, round up. No wonder that these "stooges" were so deeply hated by the people as collaborators and betrayers.

Also on the side of the authorities were the great landowners, for the most part Jewish minions of the Romans, who, with the help of a corrupt judiciary, could cheaply buy up or expropriate the family holdings of small farmers deep in debt and often lease them back to their former owners, degrading them by inflated rents to the status of day laborers or serfs.

Other allies of the Roman authorities were the Sadducees, that little group of the Jerusalem priestly aristocracy who knew how to adapt to the brutal regime in order to defend their corner of power. The fact that in this they passively put up with and actively supported the exploitation of the people contributed considerably to their reputation as quislings.

Under the pressure of an acute Jewish eschatological expectation and the scourge of this triple oppressive front, the situation came repeatedly to open insurrection, in which Roman force, popular revolt, and religious impatience again and again solidified into a vicious circle that exacted a high toll in blood. Any Jew who has

lived in a country occupied by the enemy can empathize with the historical circumstances in Jesus' homeland during his lifetime.

### ZEALOTS AND SADDUCEES

All of Israel fell at that time into three groupings that as such had nothing to do with political or religious ties: the mass of the despondent, for whom naked survival in a time of need became the chief goal; the deserters who squandered their biblical right of inheritance for a mess of pottage at the table of the powerful; and the resolute, for whom a life without justice and freedom was meaningless. No one who can picture this tripartite division will have any doubt which group a man of the Nazarene's stature belonged to.

"Fanatics"—"zealots" in Greek—was the name taken by the leaders of those who in God's name stirred up the "mandatory war" against the pagan yoke in order to liberate their people from the hated Romans and their despised sycophants and accomplices. At bottom, just about all Jews of that day were zealots for God and the reign of God. Individual groups differed among themselves only in their methods and the portion of the work of redemption that they were willing to cede to God.

Passivists wished to hasten the day of the Lord by prayer and loyalty to the Torah. Activists set about with fire, sword, and guerilla warfare to drive out force with counterforce in order to usher in the fervently desired reign of heaven.

Each day the confession "Hear, O Israel" (Deut. 6:4), which makes absolute love of God the highest commandment, was recited with great ardor by members of all three groupings. In the exegesis of love of neighbor, however, they were of various opinions.

The Sadducee elite gave the *reya'* in the commandment of love of neighbor (Lev. 19:18) the restricted sense of "friend" or "compatriot." The Zealots made loyalty to the Torah and militant patriotism the precondition for being a neighbor. With an appeal to King David who had said, "I hate, Lord, those who hate you. . . . They have become my enemy" (Ps. 139:21ff.), they marched forward in their divine zeal over the bodies of Romans and disloyal Jews.

Jesus was certainly no Zealot, no revolutionary in the usual sense, not even a Galilean gang leader. His statements against violence as a political combat method are too numerous for this to

be doubted seriously. But one who can say, "I have not come to bring peace but the sword" (Matt. 10:34), and who advises his disciples to sell their cloaks "so that they can buy a sword" (Luke 22:36), is just as unlikely to be an outright pacifist. It is also clear that certainly one, but probably three and perhaps even five of the twelve apostles had a Zealot background. They are Simon, who is twice named "the Zealot" by Luke (Acts 1:13; Luke 6:15; cf. Matt. 10:4); Judas Iscariot, whose surname is an Aramaic corruption of "dagger-man" (*sicarius*), as the hard core of Zealots were then called; Simon Peter, whose other name, Bar-Jonah, may be an Aramaic synonym for "rebel" or "ostracized"; and the two sons of Zebedee who, with their nickname "Sons of Thunder," do not exactly give the impression of having forsworn armed service, all the more because their sole appearance in the New Testament is dominated by their angry words: "Lord, do you wish that we order fire to fall from heaven and consume these Samaritans?" (Luke 9:54).

It is thus evident from a historical perspective that Jesus could not have been completely out of contact with the militant activists in contemporaneous Israel.

Of Jesus' many references to swords, none of which advocate folding one's hands in resignation, one is outstanding for two good reasons: because it is the only saying that is mentioned five times in the Gospels, and because something like it is also found in a Jewish tradition of that time, where it is cited as a Zealot saying. "Only the one who is prepared to carry the cross shall follow after me," we read in Mark (8:34), twice in Matthew (10:38; 16:24), and twice in Luke (9:23; 14:27).

Much later the church fathers spiritualized and defused this summons into an otherworldly appeal to personal salvation. What it signified when Jesus said it on earth was much simpler, more challenging, and deadly in earnest. It was a well-intended warning to young hotheads in Galilee who wanted to join his movement in the flush of their enthusiasm. To them he said: whoever of you is not prepared to risk the possible consequences, the rebel's death on a Roman cross, stay home. It was the gruesome, brutal truth: thousands of Jews before Jesus, with Jesus, on both sides of Jesus, and after Jesus were put to death by crucifixion.

Even non-Zealots who merely showed interest in opposition or dared to voice political criticism of Roman imperialism had to

reckon with this consequence. The Twelve understood this when they left home and property behind them without looking back in order to fight for Israel with their master—for better or for worse.

"Yes," some Christians may object, "but Jesus did say, my kingdom is not of this world." In Greek and in English Jesus' statement may sound like a summons to flee the world, to postpone all that is good, beautiful, and noble into the hereafter, and to abandon this world to despots, dictators, and tyrants.

But translated back into Hebrew it signifies the exact opposite: my realm, which we all await so passionately, is of heavenly origin and divine descent—unlike the Roman empire of idol-worshippers. It will soon be inaugurated in this world to replace all the horror of pagan power and in the end to entrust dominion to God alone.

"My realm is not of this world." This saying was politically no less loaded with dynamite than the themes of "good news," "redemption," and "realm of heaven," which Jesus preached day after day and which resonated with revolt and liberation in all Jewish ears of that time. This could not be otherwise, because for faithful Jews God's omnipresence must logically also include the sphere of politics, a belief clearly exemplified in all the prophets of Israel. In bringing about the reign of God, exclusion of the political would therefore be an almost blasphemous denial of the divinely-willed world order.

The later depoliticizing of Christianity, on the other hand, split this world into two clearly distinct realms in order to defend the church from all defilement by worldly concerns, and, in contradiction to Jesus and his scripture, succeeded in surrendering the earth, allowing it to become an arena for dictators.

For the Jew Jesus, on the other hand, there was no cleft between body and spirit, between religion and politics, no bifurcation of competencies, but only *one* total person under the *one* God and *one* dream of an all-encompassing heavenly realm.

### JESUS' THIRD WAY

Just as corporeality and concern for physical well-being are not to be separated from his Instruction on the Mount, politics cannot be amputated from his good news. Liberation from the pagan yoke, redemption from faintheartedness, and boundless love of

God and fellow humans—these are the three chief goals of his salvation teaching, which he, as a practical-minded Jew, knew could not be realized on this earth without down-to-earth methods. For if the eschatological peace-vision is to be prepared in an earthly manner—though of course with heavenly authority—then humans as God's collaborators must make use of political means to make it concrete. Moses knew that on Sinai; all the prophets of Israel knew it—and so did Jesus of Nazareth, who never wished to give unto Caesar what belongs to God alone.<sup>34</sup>

Martin Luther was right in his polemic against the rebellious peasants and Pastor Thomas Münzer when he characterized the urge for freedom as "Jewish." It is not by chance that the body of faith of all Christian freedom fighters—from the Cathari of southern France, the Waldensians of Piedmont, the Hussites of Prague, the Puritans in England, and the Pilgrims in North America, to the Maoris of New Zealand, the black churches of contemporary South Africa, and the *campesinos* of Latin America—is permeated with the language and turn of mind of the Book of Exodus, that hymn of God-given freedom. And Jesus of Nazareth, who in all the physical and spiritual characteristics of his humanity was totally a Jew, an arch-Jew, is never more Jewish than in his opposition to subjugation, whether it be enslavement to the literal faith of the priestly caste or oppression by the brutal Roman authorities and their Jewish camp followers who exploited his people godlessly and shamelessly.

But above all he was a threefold rebel of love, much more radical than revolutionaries of our day. He dared, without weapons, to protest against the cruel Roman domination; he opposed the high clergy of the Sadducees who assumed in their narrow-mindedness that they had a monopoly on God's love; and at the same time he raised an eloquent protest against the faintheartedness of many of his compatriots who would not credit the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with a salvation politics of liberation.

And yet Jesus was against naked armed force—neither out of unworldliness nor out of cowardice, but out of biblical farsightedness and realistic worldly experience. Between the quietism of the silent majority and the fanaticism of the despairing minority Jesus found a third way—the golden mean—which promised that "the meek will possess the land," as both the Psalter and the Instruction

on the Mount foretell (Matt. 5:5; Ps. 38:11). "Not with power nor with force, but by the spirit of the Lord," preached the prophet Zechariah (4:6). Jesus did not want it otherwise.

"One of those accompanying Jesus drew his sword," we read at the capture in Gethsemani; but Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its scabbard, for all those who draw the sword will die by the sword" (Matt. 26:51-52).

"Lord, see, here are two swords!" the disciples urged him. "But he said to them: That is enough!" (Luke 22:38).

"Lord, shall we smite them with the sword?" the foolhardy nevertheless asked. "But Jesus said: Stop! No further!" (Luke 22:49f.).

Jesus' third way relied neither on passive powerlessness nor on militant counterforce, but on a completely new course of human interaction that would invert all dominant relationships and deprive them of power:

You know that those who are considered the rulers of the gentiles oppress their peoples and that their great men tyrannize them. But it must not be so among you. Whoever among you will be great should be your servant, and whoever among you would be the first should be the servant of all [Mark 10:42-45].

How such an ethos of equality, of comradely service and disarming love, should be modeled by the community of disciples amid a brutal world full of ogres grabbing for power and getting the upperhand was illustrated by Jesus with two straightforward examples from the everyday life of that time, to be taken up in the following chapter.

## Chapter 11

### JEWISH CREDITORS AND ROMAN TASKMASTERS (Matt. 5:40-41)

#### TUNIC AND CLOAK

*If someone wishes to take you to court to take your tunic away from you, then let him also have your cloak [Matt. 5:40].*

The reference here is to indebted day laborers, to mortgage law, and the protective provisions for those who lived from hand to mouth, those whom Jesus' Bible intends to defend from the "justice" of the state. The pronouncement has to do with a legal renunciation that at first seems to border on the paradoxical but is calculated to achieve beneficial results.

But first to the biblical background of this unheard-of precept. Both Deuteronomy and Exodus hand down the text of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:2-17; Deut. 5:6-21) as the "fundamental law" revealed immediately by God for the people. The decalogue is then followed in both instances by individual rules intended to make this fundamental law, which is valid always and everywhere, concrete and actual for sundry situations. This is illustrated particularly by Exodus 22:20-27, consisting of two parallel passages in which God puts order into and shapes communal life. In the first (vv. 22-23) the text shows clearly that God will not