

*The Eternal is hushed and still,
The Temporal strident and loud;
Silently, over the strife on earth,
Moves the will of God.*

WILHELM RAABE

To the Reader

These sermons, delivered to congregations in Stuttgart, were addressed to people who continued to assemble throughout the horrors of the air raids, the declining days of a reign of terror, and finally through the period of total military and political collapse and the beginning of the occupation. They were begun in the Church of the Hospitallers when Stuttgart was still more or less intact and its cultural life still flourished in the midst of war. They were concluded in the small auditorium of St. Matthew's parish house, the largest auditorium available at the time when there were no more churches in Stuttgart and only bizarre remnants of walls showed where the venerable Church of the Hospitallers once stood, where people had lived for centuries, people who had now come face to face with Eternity.

The preacher saw written upon the faces of his hearers the destinies from which they had come or which they were approaching. He sensed the tension they were feeling, not knowing whether the next moment the scream of sirens would scatter them in all directions—which happened not infrequently. He saw on those faces the torment of doubt and despair, the hunger and thirst for a valid comfort and

encouragement that would stand the test in hours of work, in hours spent in underground shelters, suffering agonies of body and mind.

All that the preacher read in those faces and also what filled him to the brim, since he too was a participant, is doubtless reflected in these sermons. And the Lord's Prayer was able to contain it all. There was not a single question that we could not have brought to it and not a one that would not have been suddenly transformed if it were put in the form of a prayer.

The Lord's Prayer is truly the prayer that spans the world: the world of everyday trifles and universal history, the world with its hours of joy and bottomless anguish, the world of citizens and soldiers, the world of monotonous routine and sudden terrible catastrophe, the world of carefree children and at the same time of problems that can shatter grown men.

The whole world rests in the hand of the Lord, like the golden orb we see in medieval pictures. And it also rests in our hands when we lift it to God in prayer.

What greater thing could there be than to learn to see this world in a new way—by starting with prayer?

The following sermons are an attempt to gain this new way of looking at the world. And to the author it seems important that they should keep in view a world in which the furies had been unleashed, a world that was forced to reveal itself—the actual world in which these addresses were delivered. This meant that any kind of phrasemaking and glorification of the world was ruled out. Here only the whole truth and the naked truth can stand; here only the *center* of the gospel message can make us free. And the fact that we have penetrated to this center we owe not least to the times of catastrophe on this earth. For he who “has” at such a time, to him “will more be given.” But “from him who has not,” even what he thinks he has will be taken away.

HELMUT THIELICKE