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**Antichristian *Christlichkeit* and  
Athleticism in Nietzsche's  
Philosophy of Life**

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**Antichristian *Christlichkeit* and Athleticism  
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**Abstract**

A deep suspicion toward the human body has plagued Christian thinkers and believers. Critics of Christianity have seized upon this resentment of the human body as evidence of Christianity's metaphysical nihilism. Friedrich Nietzsche epitomizes the critique. To understand it one must gather a concrete picture of the Christian self-conception as it presents itself in the biblical accounts, notably in the words of Nietzsche's antipode, the apostle Paul. An assessment is best done with the degree of authenticity available to us through the original texts. The language of the New Testament speaks its philosophy through the lived experience of faith for the purposes of expressing the ethical reality of its truth. Reliance on the original Greek is important, because, as Martin Heidegger recognized, 'an actual understanding [of primordial Christianity] presupposes a penetration into the spirit (*Geist*) of New Testament Greek.' Once we see the truth of faith at work in the lifelong everyday struggle for redemption, we may be able to witness in the practice of faith itself an 'athletic struggle' (ἄθλησις παθημάτων) that needs the body to execute the struggle (ἀγών). When Nietzsche's critique is measured against this lived experience of the Christian struggle of faith, we may discover that despite his total condemnation of Christianity Nietzsche shares much of the original Christian message, what he calls 'Christianism' (*Christlichkeit*), that motivated his resentment of it.

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## Introduction: Sisyphus Revisited

In this paper I will examine a tension that has marked the Western tradition of Christianity. A deep suspicion toward the human body with its extensions into the mind has plagued Christian thinkers and believers since the inception of the Christian faith. Much of the critique galvanized against Christianity has received its incentive from this resentment. Friedrich Nietzsche, a self-proclaimed ‘Antichristian’ epitomizes the critique. To understand his scathing criticism, it is important to construct a concrete picture of the Christian self-conception as presented in biblical accounts, notably in the words of Nietzsche’s antipode, the apostle Paul.<sup>1</sup>

An assessment of the Christian essence is imperative and best done with the degree of authenticity available to us through the original texts. The language of the New Testament speaks its philosophy through a terminology that is specifically coined by the lived experience of faith for the purposes of expressing the ethical reality of its truth.<sup>2</sup> Reliance on the original Greek text is important here, because, as the German philosopher Martin Heidegger recognized, ‘an actual understanding [of primordial Christianity] presupposes a penetration into the spirit (*Geist*) of New Testament Greek.’<sup>3</sup> Once we see the truth of faith at work in the lifelong everyday struggle (ἀγών) for redemption, we may be able to witness in the practice of faith itself an ‘athletic struggle’ (ἀθλησις παθημάτων)—as the apostle Paul puts it—that needs the body as the condition for the possibility of its ‘execution’ (ἀγωνίζομαι ἀγῶνα).

What happens in the Sisyphean effort of faith is an inconspicuous growth away from the fallen state of the ‘human-all-too-human’ condition back toward humanity’s original state of godlikeness. Here Nietzsche and Paul speak the same language of faith,<sup>4</sup> what Muslims call ‘*jihad*’ and Kierkegaard (in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*) terms ‘persistent striving,’ an infinite approximation of divine perfection. Faced with the impossibility of the task, believers recognize time as the crux of the matter of life. The problem of finite existence bears its futile solution: the burdensome being of time. Christians are always pressed for time by the rush of time. Constantly running out of time it is the abundance of time that throws the believer from one predicament into the next. There is no relief. The hermeneutical circle is vicious. Thus, the goal in life is not reaching a final end as the ultimate state of

<sup>1</sup>Nietzsche sees Paul as the founder of Christianity, the mendacious religion of nihilism that has severed all ties to healthy living. Paul has remained Saul, the persecutor of God. Cf. *The Wanderer and his Shadow* [85], *The Antichrist* [41], [42], [47], in Walter Kaufmann (1982). *The Portable Nietzsche*. New York: Penguin Books, pp. 68, 616-618, 627f, henceforth referred to as PN.

<sup>2</sup>I rely on Kierkegaard’s insight into the supremacy of subjective truth. Cf. Søren Kierkegaard (1974). *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 284.

<sup>3</sup>He does so in his lecture course ‘Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion’, held at Freiburg University during the winter semester of 1920–21. The lecture course is published in Martin Heidegger (2004). *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*. Trans. Matthias Fritsch & Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei. Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. *Ibid.*, p. 48. Martin Heidegger (1995). *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens*. GA 60. Ed. Matthias Jung et al. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>4</sup>Gen. 1: 26. 27. For Paul cf. Rom. 3: 5 & 1 Cor. 3: 3: κατὰ ἄνθρωπον. I Cor 3: 4: οὐκ ἄνθρωποι ἐστε;

being, which would be the end of life. The goal of life is a relentless *reaching out for* the end as the *prospect* of salvation, which bears the seed of salvation. Christian life is a race against time. In its inception Christianity is this intensified living. Motivated by *the prospect of* salvation it already gives *the experience of* salvation. Hence, Christians are engaged in a transitive living of time. The religiosity of the ‘Christian experience lives time itself,’ ‘lives temporality as such,’ as Heidegger puts it.<sup>1</sup> The meaning of life lies in this redemptive struggle for salvation. In inconspicuous tribute to Sisyphus the Christian faith seeks its victory in defeat.

The Sisyphean athleticism of this enterprise calls for examination. When Nietzsche’s criticism is measured against the lived experience of faith, we may discover that despite his condemnation Nietzsche shares much of the original Christian message that motivated his resentment of it.

### The Athletic Struggle of Faith

The apostle Paul likens the *profession* of faith to the *comportment* and *outfit* of the Roman soldier, since military discipline has its life-saving virtues (Eph. 6: 10-20). When he does so, Paul speaks metaphorically, not literally. As soon as he has identified the specific pieces of the Roman war equipment, he redefines them, not just as symbols, but as real instruments of peace for the Christian cause of redemption. An image of a soldier of a different order emerges, namely that of the ‘good soldier of Jesus Christ’ (II Tim. 2: 3-4), who, *like* the Roman soldier, *is* armed, yet not with weapons made of metal, but with an armor of a different kind. ‘For,’ Paul says, ‘we do not wage our battle against blood and flesh’ (Eph. 6: 10-20), but against the forces of evil and darkness. Those forces must be met with a different set of ammunition, which disarms and defeats, paradoxically, by being disarmed and prone to defeat. Rom. 12: 21 spells it out: μή νικῶ ὑπὸ τοῦ κακοῦ ἀλλὰ νίκα ἐν τῷ ἀγαθῷ τὸ κακόν. ‘Do not be defeated by evil, but with the good defeat evil.’ These words by Paul are consistent with the preaching of Jesus Christ in his sermon on the mount. The key message of the sermon in Mt. 5: 39 must be read properly. *Not* ‘not to resist evil’ is the core message that Jesus is trying to advance here, but ‘not to resist *with* evil’ (μὴ ἀντιστῆναι τῷ πονηρῷ) is the principal tenet of his teaching—against all popular translations including that of *King James*. The dative τῷ πονηρῷ has an instrumental sense. It correlates and resonates directly with the dative Paul employs (τῷ ἀγαθῷ) in the Roman passage and is thus instrumental for the proper reading.

The primordial battle of faith must be understood as a spiritual struggle fought with ‘the full armor of God’ (πανοπλία τοῦ θεοῦ). God’s armor is categorically different from the common war equipment. Unlike the Roman war attire it consists of the girdle of truth (ἀλήθεια), not deception, of the ‘breastplate of justice’ (θώραξ τῆς δικαιοσύνης), not wrongdoing, of the boots of peacemaking (εἰρήνη), not warfare, of ‘the shield of faith’ (θυρεὸς τῆς πίστεως), not self-reliance, of ‘the helmet of salvation’ (περικεφαλαία τοῦ

<sup>1</sup>*Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens*, pp. 80, 82. *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, pp. 55, 57.

σωτηρίου), not destruction. ‘The sword of the spirit’ (μάχαιρα τοῦ πνεύματος) is God’s redeeming word itself (ῥῆμα θεοῦ). This categorical change of armor does not change the nature of life as a physical struggle. The battle is the same. It is still fought over life and death, but it is fought differently, because life and death are understood differently. Christian believers do not indulge in egotistical self-advancement, but fight for the liberation of themselves for the universal good.<sup>1</sup> Justice, truth, peace and the trust of faith in them are the defining moments of a better life, of a life that is *better* by *virtue* of these *lasting values*. Thus death is no longer the *final moment* of life. It has crystallized into the *defining element* in life.

It is essential to the Christian self-conception to recognize the literal force with which it speaks. Its metaphors are *symbols* in the true sense of the word. They reveal a reality hidden in nature. In the total commitment to the mission of faith time itself becomes the engine of the Christian life driven by the prospect of salvation. The ambition is not fooled by (the) illusion (of a better afterlife), but fueled by the *lived* experience of *both* desperation *and* salvation, of redemption *not from, but through* despair. The Christian life is life-, is this-oriented, not lost in the beyond of an afterlife. Once the ethical strife of actual living emerges from the military imagery of the Christian teachings, they lose their exclusive metaphorical force to speak with the literal force of live flesh and blood. The spirituality of the Christian faith depends on the physical reality of the human body. There is no faith outside of the concrete reality of the physical world. Faith is to be lived in this world, not as its negation, but confirmation. The meaning of life is life itself, not its destruction, but preservation. The literal force that speaks through the military metaphor of the Christian language does not promote, but condemn war. War functions as a metaphor insofar as it relates the believer to life as a struggle that may well end in death. The strife of life is essentially an athletic enterprise, not a military operation. The indefatigable athlete represents best the religious fervor of the believer. Faith in its essence is an athletic endeavor, both in the spiritual and the physical sense. It is here where, unbeknownst to Nietzsche, Nietzsche and Paul do actually meet.

### **The Pneumatic Struggle of Faith**

The New Testament Christian would never ‘parade body to celebrate himself’ (παραδῶ τὸ σῶμά μου ἵνα καυχῆσωμαι), but burn it to death to illumine the divine (παραδῶ τὸ σῶμά μου ἵνα καυθήσωμαι).<sup>2</sup> Nietzsche speaks of this burning in his poem ‘Ecce Homo’:

Ja! Ich weiss, woher ich stamme!	Yes! I know now whence I came!
Ungesättigt gleich der Flamme	Unsatiated like a flame
Glühe und verzehr ich mich.	My glowing ember squanders me.

<sup>1</sup>Rom. 12: 17: προνοούμενοι κατὰ ἐνώπιον πάντων ἀνθρώπων. Focus on what is good for all. Cf. I Cor. 10: 33: μὴ ζητῶν τὸ ἐμαυτοῦ σύμφορον ἀλλὰ τὸ τῶν πολλῶν. I do not seek what benefits me only, but the benefit of the many.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. I Cor. 13: 3 with its text variants.



Licht wird alles, was ich fasse,	Light to all on which I seize,
Kohle alles, was ich lasse:	Ashen everything I leave:
Flamme bin ich sicherlich.	Flame am I most certainly! <sup>1</sup>

The flame of striving for the divine is relentless, and itself already a reflection of the presence of what it is reaching for. In its glowing light the flame reveals the divine power of self-sacrifice. Its origin is as its destiny the catalyst for its burning self-consumption to illumine all that, which it is striving for. Faith in the divine battles the ego's self-love. The yearning for self-importance is the *nemesis* of humanity. The bloated ego negates faith. Consequently, not to boast and gloat (μη ... φυσιοῦσθε) is a key Christian command (I Cor. 4: 6). Since Christian love, the charity of *caritas*, by its definition of ἀγάπη, in contrast to the laws and forces of nature (φύσις), does not *puff up* (οὐ φυσιοῦται) the ego (I Cor. 13: 4), pride finds no room for *natural growth* (φύσις) in people of faith (πίστις). The flame of faith contains that growth through self-consumption. Divine virtues consume the ego's selfishness to illumine the lasting values of eternal life.<sup>2</sup>

Paul is acutely aware of the distinction between the ways of nature (φυσική) and the spirituality of faith (πνευματική). He recognizes in the forces of nature the principle of life (ψυχή). While life with the egoisms (πάθη) of its instincts (ἔπιθυμια τῶν καρδιῶν) consists in its will to live (ὄρεξις), faith has the power of freedom (ἐλευθερία) from this will (II Cor. 3: 17). Spirit's (πνεῦμα) control over the life-force (ψυχή) of nature (φύσις) generates in the life-long struggle (ἀγών) of faith a new body in gradual replacement (ἐπενδύσασθαι ... ἐνδυσάμενοι οὐ γυμνοί) of the old. The pneumatic aging process culminates in a sudden (ἐν ἀτόμῳ, ἐν ῥιπῇ ὀφθαλμοῦ) and total exchange (πάντες δὲ / ἡμεῖς ἀλλαγησόμεθα) in the moment of death, 'when our earthly tent-house is taken down' instantly (ἐὰν ἐπίγειος ἡμῶν τοῦ σκηνοῦ καταλυθῇ).<sup>3</sup> Christian believers are engaged in a mysterious transformation

<sup>1</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche. *Fröhliche Wissenschaft*. 'Vorspiel in deutschen Reimen': 62 in: Friedrich Nietzsche (1997). *Werke II*. Ed. Karl Schlechta. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, p. 32. Friedrich Nietzsche (2001). *The Gay Science*. Ed. Bernard Williams. Trans. Josefine Nauckhoff & Adrian Del Caro. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, p. 23. Richard Hollingdale gives the following word by word translation: 'Yes, I know whence I have sprung! Insatiable as a flame I burn and consume myself! Whatever I seize hold on becomes light, whatever I leave, ashes: certainly I am a flame.' Cf. R.J. Hollingdale (1999). *Nietzsche. The Man and His Philosophy*. Revised Edition. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, p. 77.

<sup>2</sup>The following line from a Christian hymn ('O breathe on me, o breath of God') by Edwin Hatch in *Between Doubt and Prayer* from 1878, confirms the reading: '... my will to yours incline, until this selfish part of me glows with your fire divine.'

<sup>3</sup>Cf. I Cor. 15: 51-52 & II Cor. 5: 1-3. This is a combined reading of I Cor. 15: 50-55 and II Cor. 5: 1-10. While the passage in *First Corinthians* invokes the image of the end of times (of this age—cf. I Cor. 15: 52: ἐν τῇ ἐσχάτῃ σάλπιγγι σαλπίζει γάρ), the *Second Corinthians* passage operates with the concept of the end of an individual life. Here life on earth is understood as a temporary dwelling in a perishable tent to be replaced with 'a building (οἰκοδομή) from God,' 'a house (οἰκία) not made with hands [but] eternal in heaven.' God's spirit, which is the spirit of faith, authors this eternal dwelling place. It is noteworthy that the Greek word for tent, σκῆνος, is a cognate with our word 'skin'. For Paul the physical life of flesh and blood is housed in a tent made up of perishable (φθαρτόν), mortal (θνητόν) skin, which is categorically different from the imperishable (ἀφθαρσία), immortal (ἀθανασία) and

process, the end of which ‘we [can only] recognize dimly and schematically [as if looking] through a [fractured] mirror’ (βλέπομεν γὰρ ἄρτι [ὥς] δι’ ἐσόπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι). As the old, physical body of nature, made of flesh and blood (σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα), gets consumed in this process, a new, ‘spiritual body’ (σῶμα πνευματικόν) comes to the fore and shines through words and deeds until complete revelation happens in the totality of death, ‘when we shall see [God’s eternal truth] face to face’ (I Cor. 13: 12). The perfected spiritual body is the body of resurrection (ἀνάστασις, I Cor. 15: 42). It replaces Adam’s mortal ‘body ensouled’ (σῶμα ψυχικόν) with the ‘living soul’ (ψυχὴ ζῶσα). Spirit, in contrast, does not engender mortal life, but is the source of eternal life. It is life-making (πνεῦμα ζωοποιοῦν) and in this sense, through its defeat of death (κατεπόθη ὁ θάνατος εἰς νίκος), life-saving (I Cor. 15, 45; Genesis 2: 7; I Cor. 15: 54-55; Isaiah 25: 8).

In light of his anthropology, Paul rejects all forms of *natural* boasting as the ‘bragging of the flesh’ (II Cor. 11, 18). The urges of the flesh speak the language of the ego. Since there is no ultimate satisfaction of the flesh, its cravings become the target of faith. Faith’s task is to contain the relentless demands of the flesh. It is important to distinguish Paul’s concept of the flesh (σὰρξ) from that of the body (σῶμα) here. While human being and body are virtually indistinguishable, they are discretely distinct. Their conceptual distinction, however, must (Δεῖ, I Cor. 15: 53) not assert their actual separation in life. Nature’s aging process of life-long dying is a gradual process of their alteration and as such a measure of temporality that stands in contrast to eternity. While being solidifies through acts of faith into the last and *lasting* abode of the spiritual body, the physical body made of flesh gradually disintegrates—for the believer directly into the eternal body of resurrection, for the non-believer it vanishes into the nothingness of naked being deprived of any body after the flesh has died and the blood dried.

Essential to Christian religiosity is this acute experience of time *as a lived* experience. The ‘factual life experience’ of New Testament Christianity, Heidegger reminds us, ‘lives time itself,’ in the *active-transitive* sense of the verb. The subtle grammar evokes the philosophy of New Testament theology.<sup>1</sup> As temporality is *being* lived, *transition* toward eternity sets in. The *process* of this transition has its physical reality in the experience of mortality. Life-long dying consists in an inconspicuous separation from the *flesh*. Without faith’s persistent activism, the divorce of the mortal body of flesh and blood from human being corrodes the perishable body (τὸ φθαρτόν) into the nothingness of decomposition as the endpoint of natural corruption (φθορά, I Cor. 15: 42, 50, 53-54.). Since Paul cannot envision the human being as not *being embodied* in some way, he must conceive of the nothingness of this fleshless bodylessness in terms of nakedness. The metaphor of nakedness intends to grasp the

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eternal (αἰώνιον). This is (1) *why* ‘flesh and blood cannot inherit [the resurrection (ἀνάστασις) into (ἀναστήσονται / ἐγερθήσονται)] the kingdom of God’ (I Cor. 15: 50: σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα βασιλείαν θεοῦ κληρονομήσαι οὐ δύναται), and (2) *how* ‘this perishable must put on imperishability, and this mortal immortality’ (I Cor. 15: 53: δεῖ γὰρ τὸ φθαρτόν τοῦτο ἐνδύσασθαι ἀφθαρσίαν καὶ τὸ θνητόν τοῦτο ... ἀθανασία). The transformation from the earthly to the eternal through the spiritual (faith) defeats the finality of death’s destructive nature.

<sup>1</sup>*The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, pp. 55, 57. *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens*, pp. 80, 82.

unthinkable: negative embodiment of fleshness being, human being disembodied. Being—naked (γυμνός) in this sense, stripped of its physical body through death, and left with a negative, fleshless body, a schematic shadowlike placeholder that is in want of its spiritual replacement—longs for this, its final and ultimate fulfillment of full spiritual embodiment. The yearning of nakedness to overcome itself is a self-indictment. Caused by the hybris of unbelief, naked being has failed to bring forth the second (δεύτερος) and last (ἔσχατος), i.e. permanent attire of a spiritual body to take the place of the first (πρῶτον), as this, the original human being (πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος), Adam, made of earth (ἐκ γῆς χοϊκός), and mortal, is destined to vanish.<sup>1</sup> Striving for divine perfection to correspond to the image of God (Gen. 1: 26-27; 5: 1; I Cor. 15: 49) human being ‘must not be found naked’ (οὐ γυμνοί εὑρεθησόμεθα, II Cor. 5: 3). Humanity is called to the truth of the scriptural promise that ‘death is swallowed up by (the) victory (of life)’ (κατεποθῆ ὁ θάνατος εἰς νίκος).<sup>2</sup>

### Resisting the Flesh’s Will to Power

The Christian truth does not pertain to believers only. As an eschatological fact it has cosmological proportions and affects everyone. Unbelief is not equivalent to the disobedience of disbelief. Non-Christians like pagans may unknowingly (ἀνόμως) practice Christ’s teachings out of nature’s (φύσει) common sense, a deep-rooted rational inclination (ἐαυτοῖς εἰς νόμος), as if it is ‘written in their hearts’ (γραπτὸν ἐν ταῖς καρδιαῖς αὐτῶν) to do what is right (ἐργαζομένων τὸ ἀγαθόν—τὸ ἔργον ἀγαθόν) and reasonable (τὰ τοῦ νόμου ποιῶσιν—τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου) without the specific intention to comply with the explicit teachings of Christianity. Karl Rahner’s concept of the anonymous Christian finds support in Paul who recognizes this possibility of the virtuous pagan and righteous gentile (Rom. 2: 13-16).<sup>3</sup> Not the knowledge of those who heard Paul’s message (οἱ ἀκροαταί), but the practice by those who do what is called for (οἱ ποιηταί) is decisive (Rom 2: 13). The practice of

<sup>1</sup>I Cor. 15: 45-49. Cf. Gen. 2: 17: The day you eat from [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil], you shall die (θανάτῳ ἀποθανεῖσθε).

<sup>2</sup>I Cor. 15: 54. Isaia 25: 8. Cf. II Cor. 5: 4: οὐ θέλομεν ἐκδύσασθαι, ἀλλ’ ἐπενδύσασθαι, ἵνα καταποθῆ τὸ θνητὸν ὑπὸ τῆς ζωῆς. We do not wish to be unclothed, but to be further clothed, so that the mortal be swallowed up by life.

<sup>3</sup>Karl Rahner (1976). *Theological Investigations*. Vol. 14. Trans. David Bourke. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, p. 283: ‘We prefer the terminology according to which that man is called an ‘anonymous Christian’ who on the one hand has *de facto* accepted of his freedom this gracious self-offering on God’s part through faith, hope, and love, while on the other he is absolutely not yet a Christian at the social level (through baptism and membership of the Church) or in the sense of having consciously objectified his Christianity to himself in his own mind (by explicit Christian faith resulting from having hearkened to the explicit Christian message). We might therefore put it as follows: the ‘anonymous Christian’ in our sense of the term is the pagan after the beginning of the Christian mission, who lives in the state of Christ’s grace through faith, hope and love, yet who has no explicit knowledge of the fact that his life is orientated in grace-given salvation to Jesus Christ.’ For a discussion of Rahner’s concept cf. Gavin D’Costa (1985). ‘Karl Rahner’s Anonymous Christian - A Reappraisal.’ *Modern Theology* 1 (2): 131-148.

the good and just is driven by ‘the witness of conscience and assisted by critical reasoning.’<sup>1</sup> Not nature per se, but the individual creature is in its addictive selfishness the target of the Christian faith.

If the cosmological fact of the Christian truth applies to everyone, Paul provides a universal critique of humanity. Here his concept of the flesh is crucial. As the flesh (σάρξ) exposes the addictiveness of sin (ἁμαρτία), it becomes Paul’s metaphor for sin. The urges of the flesh affect everyone and infect anyone. It brings humans, like any animal, under egoism’s power (ἐξουσία). Through the cravings of the flesh the will to live asserts itself as a will to power. Survival depends on its compulsion. As greed it goes beyond basic needs, but already the specific articulation of hunger and thirst itself speaks the language of the flesh. Excessive satisfaction results in addiction. For Paul the flesh is not just potentially, but essentially insatiable.

Since greed penetrates all aspects of human being, Paul warns against any form of addiction. To drive his point home he engages in a play on words. I can obviously decide to be engaged in anything I want. However, the fact that ‘everything *is permitted* to me’ (πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν) does not mean that doing so is going to be beneficial (ἀλλ’ οὐ πάντα συμφέρει). In fact, if I execute the *power* (ἐξουσία) of the freedom of choice excessively, it will overpower me instead. Permission (ἔξεστιν) inconspicuously switches into oppression and calls for prohibition (ἐξουσία). Hence, Paul warns, one ‘must’ beware of the danger of addiction and ‘not *fall under the power* of anything’ (ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐγὼ ἐξουσιασθήσομαι ὑπό τινος, I Cor. 6: 12). The bare necessities have their rightful place. ‘Food belongs to the belly, and the belly to food’ (I Cor. 6: 13). But ‘humans do not live by bread alone’ (Deuteronomy 8: 3, Mat. 4: 4, Luke 4: 4). What exceeds the basic needs becomes an addictive force that does not sooth but *enslave* me (ἐξουσιασθήσομαι). Self-inflicted slavery, however, undoes (καταργήσει) the liberation of salvation by faith (I Cor. 6: 13, Rom. 3: 3, 4: 14). Since nature lacks the force of faith, its safeguards against addictive self-enslavement are the evolutionary laws of the Darwinian survival struggle of the fittest.

### **Nietzsche, The Anti-Christian (*Antichrist*)**

Christianity breaks the laws of natural selection. It turns the laws of evolution upside down. Paul condemns all boasting (II Cor. 5: 12). Only weaknesses may be shown off: τὰ τῆς ἀσθενείας μου καυχήσομαι (II Cor. 11: 30, II Cor. 12: 5. 9. 10). The unboastful love of faith (I Cor. 13: 4-7) flourishes in the negation of pride, in the simplicity and modesty of humility and patience. Talents are not self-authored. *Gifts* are *given* to those who have them. It is here where Nietzsche’s opposition to a Christian ethic finds its strongest application.

Nietzsche is less concerned with the immorality of an ethic of self-negation than with a life-negating ethic. His indictment of Christianity

<sup>1</sup>Rom 2: 15: συμμαρτυρούσης αὐτῶν τῆς συνειδήσεως καὶ μεταξὺ ἀλλήλων τῶν λογισμῶν κατηγορούντων ἢ καὶ ἀπολογούμενων. Their conscience bears witness [to the works of the law in their hearts] together with the dialogue of their thoughts that accuse and excuse them.

condemns the devolution of the triumphant selflessness of Jesus Christ epitomized by the cross to the voluntary subjection to permissive servility preached by the apostle Paul. What he detects in such submission is not the virtue of humility but the vice of cowardice. The love-affirming philosophy of life, manifest in the exemplary mission of Jesus Christ, has been supplanted by the self-defacing and life-hating truth-trouncing of Paul's theology of the cross. There is a pride in the virtue of life, which lies in the joy and beauty of living. For Paul, however, life is a nemesis, infected by the 'sting of the flesh' (ἐδόθη μοι σκόλοψ τῆ σαρκί) with the sin of egoism on all moral and physical levels of human existence (II Cor. 12: 7). Since Christianity is inextricably linked with the teaching of Paul, Nietzsche must reject it by its name in the strongest possible terms. Hence, the title chosen for one of his final works, *The Antichrist*, written in the months preceding his fall into insanity. The anti-Christian Nietzsche does not hurl his vicious polemic against the tradition and institutions of Christianity blindly. In turn, readers must not be blinded by the power of hatred amassed in the work to the conceptual distinctions resonating in the book. Nietzsche is careful to differentiate between the life-affirming 'Christianism' (*Christlichkeit*) of Jesus Christ and the corruptive 'Christianity' (*Christentum*) of Paul and the Christian Church. Jesus was too busy *living* his faith to get lost in futile dogmatic distinctions. Paul was too eager to preach a salvation from this life to envision the possibility of a divine humanity.

Nature's will to power cannot be eliminated. Christianity had to pervert it. The perversion of nature happened with the nature of the perversion. Pity did the trick. It co-opted and reasserted the will to power against itself to advance the decadence of a corrupted life with the force of envy and jealousy against sound and beautiful living. What had once earned the right to live became suspect and was stigmatized with the stamp of sin to the catastrophic detriment of humanity. God became the god of the sick. Churches turned into hospitals and became 'tombs and sepulchers of [a dead] God.'<sup>1</sup>

### **Conclusion: A Possible Resolution The 'Christian' (*Christliche*) Nietzsche**

Nietzsche's rejection of the Christian perversion of the will to power detects in nature's 'law of selection' life's 'law of development'. Insofar as Christianity impedes natural growth, it negates life with its 'practice of nihilism' called faith.<sup>2</sup> This indictment, however, is not an endorsement of Social Darwinism. Nietzsche rejects the crude application of the laws of evolution to humanity. As he advocates the right to life of the 'weaker' and 'degenerate type' as key to individual and communal stability, he rejects 'the famous struggle for existence' as 'the only point of view from which to explain the progress or the strengthening of a human being or a race.'<sup>3</sup> There is no opposition between weakness and strength. On the contrary, strength depends on weakness. A later passage makes this even clearer. While the 'armed peace' is a fatal threat to humanity, it is total disarmament and fearless

<sup>1</sup>AC 2, 6-8 in PN, pp. 570, 572-5. *The Gay Science* [125] in PN, p. 96.

<sup>2</sup>AC 7 in PN, p. 573.

<sup>3</sup>*Human, All-too-Human* [224] 'Ennoblement through degeneration' in PN, pp. 54-56.

defenselessness that constitutes the ‘means to real peace’. Nietzsche speaks here like the New Testament Christian of the Sermon on the Mount: ‘Rather perish than hate and fear, and twice rather perish than make oneself hated and feared—this must someday become the highest maxim.’ How this may one day happen, is not obvious. Why anyone should *want* to take the drastic step toward total vulnerability is a mystery. However, here, too, Nietzsche gives us a clue. The only way anyone would want to take the *crucial* step is ‘out of a *height* of feeling’ (*aus einer Höhe der Empfindung heraus*).<sup>1</sup> We may take Nietzsche by his word here as the next paragraph in this aphorism suggests together with an even later aphorism. A godly inspiration can prompt one to rise up to the challenge of the divine burden of the overman to leave behind the ‘human, all-too-human’ and do what is necessary. An individual or community who muscles up courage and will to tackle the task, has ‘become god[]’ himself as Nietzsche commands we must, given the forsaken state of the godless humanity.<sup>2</sup>

In *The Antichrist* Nietzsche brings this idea to the point of absolute clarity, deliberately *in* the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount: ‘*Not* to resist, *not* to be angry, *not* to hold responsible—but to resist not even the evil one—to love him,’ is an achievement of the ‘divine man’ whose ‘*practice*’ of life is epitomized by ‘his behavior on the *cross*.’<sup>3</sup> This behavior is not borne of cowardice, but the courage of liberty and the liberty of courage—what Paul calls *παρησία*—to stand ‘*beyond and above any resentment*.’ ‘[T]he freedom, the superiority *over* any feeling of *ressentiment*’ is the ‘exemplary’ proof of the truth (*das Vorbildliche*) in the life as lived by Jesus Christ that calls for imitation.<sup>4</sup> The proof lies in the height of *feeling* itself that comes with this practice, as this feeling is both generated and motivated by the practice. The philological liberty that Nietzsche takes to render the exchange between the crucified Jesus and the robber on the cross to make his point is telling:

The words to the *robber* on the cross contain the whole gospel. ‘This was truly a divine man, a child of God!’—says the robber. ‘If you feel this’—the redeemer says—‘*then you are in paradise*, then you are a child of God.’<sup>5</sup>

To Nietzsche, Jesus’ reply to the robber crucified with him proves the truth of a life that has the courage and strength to accept death on the cross. The self-proof of this truth consists in the superiority of the ‘*height* of feeling’ that is free(d) of any resentments. Such a state of being is nothing less than ‘*divine*’.

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<sup>1</sup>*The Wanderer and his Shadow* [284] ‘The means to real peace’ in PN, pp. 71-3. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche (1997). *Werke I*. Ed. Karl Schlechta. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, p. 986-7.

<sup>2</sup>*The Gay Science* [125] ‘The Madman’ in PN, p. 95-6. Cf. Nietzsche, *Werke II*, pp. 126-8.

<sup>3</sup>AC 35 in PN, p. 609. Cf. Nietzsche, *Werke II*, p. 1197.

<sup>4</sup>AC 40 in PN, p. 615. Cf. Nietzsche, *Werke II*, p. 1202.

<sup>5</sup>AC 35 in Nietzsche, *Werke II*, p. 1197. This section of three sentences is missing in Kaufmann’s translation. Nietzsche’s original words are as follows:

Die Worte zum *Schächer* am Kreuz enthalten das ganze Evangelium. »Das ist wahrlich ein göttlicher Mensch gewesen, ein Kind Gottes!«—sagt der Schächer.»Wenn du dies fühlst«—antwortet der Erlöser—»*so bist du im Paradiese*, so bist du ein Kind Gottes.«

In inconspicuous reminiscence to Paul (Phil. 2: 5-11, cf. Acts 5: 30-31), to Nietzsche too, and not coincidentally, does the literal and physical elevation of Jesus on the cross correspond to the moral superiority of the metaphorical height of feeling that is the essence of a total liberation from the human-all-too-human to the state of salvation.

The magnanimity of the state of mind lays bare the intrinsic connection between the exemplary humility of the first Christian Jesus Christ and the shamelessly healthy and exuberantly athletic pride of the overman who in the superior vision of a divine humanity recognizes the absolute necessity of strength through courage toward redemption in free self-sacrifice as the gateway to salvation.