

Cambridge, May 8, 1950

Dear Margaret,

Your letter must have had an eager patron spirit to travel the long stretch from Philadelphia to Cambridge in a single day. I have read it just once, and I must answer it quickly, writing down, as the psychologists suggest, my first impressions only. I want to do as much work tonight as I possibly can, and I would like to start as soon as I can.

Your letter was extremely logical, - far too rigorous to fit my poor, frightened state of mind. I approach your arguments as I did those of Fichte when I read him this afternoon, intuitively affirming or rejecting certain isolated propositions, without presuming to question, - or even to understand, - the logic of the entire argument.

Probably many of the things you say are true. Only three which I remember seem obscure to me. Most significant seems the metaphor of the forbidden fruit, - which, you know, has a long and fascinating history, although I tend to think that the original version was probably more true to reality. No one knew better than I how bitter it would be. My taste, I think, - if I am not being too presumptuous, - is more sensitive to this bitterness, which, indeed, to many people seems sweet. For my part, I would not have come near the tree, if you had not been standing under it. I asked you to take a walk with me, but you could not. It was not for the apple's sake, but for your sake that I stayed. - You perhaps cannot understand how I can regard the physical and the spiritual as so completely separate. That terminology is faulty. It is not a contrast between body and soul but between purity and impurity. But purity, - in spite of Kierkegaard's overly zealous propaganda to the contrary, is not given to us, at least not on this earth. Yet, without wishing to minimize what was done, and always keeping its humanness and animality in front of my eyes, I know that many things worse could have happened, and I pray now that this may be ~~done~~ done and have passed over without having dealt the uttermost insult.

The second thing I must mention is your comment on our argument concerning the case of the badly overrated aunt. The alternatives which you suggest, to hate or to ignore, do not seem, to me, at least, to exhaust the possible attitudes which you might assume. On the other hand, I know, that my insistence on a difference in attitudes which is so fundamental, is very stupid and fruitless, and for this I must beg your pardon. Lastly, as to your attitude at Bethlehem and its potential implications, you are very right. Certainly I would be the last one to presume either now or in the future to be able to bear such responsibilities as are beyond me. What I wrote in my last letter concerning Bethlehem, you must disregard, you must draw a ~~xxx~~ heavy line through it, and mark it "corrected." What else shall I say? I have on my mind all sorts of schemes which would perhaps make it possible for you to get to Bethlehem on time, but these are quite in contradiction with the "corrected" attitude and must be discarded as soon as I find a place to put them.

5281, 8 June 1941

In closing let me only say that I am very painfully aware of this letter's bitterness. I did not intend to write in this way, but whatever I set out to say was buried under the avalanche of my feelings. You reject my pleas asking you not to be hurt by me as an easy excuse. ~~But~~ Beyond that I can suggest only that you consider my letter as the product of some sort of disease, - and I ask you, explicitly to destroy it, since I have no intention of entertaining possible <sup>future</sup> amateur psychologists. All I can say is that I like to think of my unhappiness as the only possible reaction to the consciousness of uncleanness. Without ~~that~~ the purification which that unhappiness seems to work in me I cannot imagine how I would continue to live. ~ I think your sister has chosen nice music for her wedding, although I begrudge it to her, knowing that what I hear when I hear it has been written only for me.

Good night.

John