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## **The Petitions of the Lord's Prayer in Light of the Lord's Passion**

Frank Gantt

\* In continuation of the Lenten series under the title above, this issue offers the next two sermons on the Second and Third Petitions of the Lord's Prayer.

### ***THY KINGDOM COME***

**(Luke 13:18-19)**

Thanks be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who "has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love," in whom "we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins."

"Are you a king then?" Pilate, perhaps mostly in amusement, had questioned Jesus. Pilate, of course, was thinking about an earthly kingdom, one ruled by force and based on law. Jesus corrected Pilate's error: "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world: to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice" (John 18:37 *ESV*). The Lord's kingdom is not of this world; nor does it operate like any worldly kingdom. His kingdom is a kingdom of truth, namely, the truth of God.

Last week we began our midweek Lenten meditations with the petitions of the Lord's Prayer as our guide. This evening we are considering the Second Petition: "*Thy kingdom come.*" We will see that just as Pilate and the Jews were confused as to what the kingdom of God would be, so also many today remain confused, seeking the wrong kind of kingdom in the wrong place. We use as the basis for our meditation the parable Jesus told in Luke 13:18-19:

***Then He said, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches."***

If you search for the word “citizenship” in the Bible, you will find that it occurs only two times. One is in Acts 22, in which Paul is questioned by a Roman commander about his Roman citizenship, a citizenship that provided a level of protection for Paul on a few occasions, and for which, I’m sure, he was thankful to God. The second time the word “citizenship” occurs in the Bible is, coincidentally, also by Paul as he encourages the Christians in Philippi with these words: *“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”* (Phil. 3:20). I want you to notice something about how Paul expresses that citizenship. He doesn’t say, “Our citizenship *will* be in heaven,” but rather, *“Our citizenship is in heaven.”* To Paul being a citizen of the kingdom of God was not a matter of future wishing, but a present reality. It was as real to him as his Roman citizenship was, but even more important.

Now looking back at our text, we notice that Jesus also speaks in the present tense when describing the kingdom of God. He says, *“The kingdom of God is like. . .”* Why make such a big deal out of this point? Well, as we live in this world so corrupted by sin, we need constant reminders that the kingdom of God is not something for which we have to wait. Rather, it is something we have right now. The point is really one of great comfort. As the world frets in a constant state of worry and crisis over kingdoms and nations that come and go, the child of God lives within the blessedness of a divine kingdom that is constant and abiding.

Many will argue this point, however, as they ask: Where in the world is it? I can find the United States on a map. I can find China on a map, and England, and Greece, and Israel. But I don’t find a kingdom of God anywhere. Many of these people contend that Jesus will certainly set up a kingdom on earth one day, but He has not done so yet. They base this contention on a passage in Revelation, which talks about Christ reigning for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4). But they miss the simple statements throughout the New Testament, and even the Old Testament (cf. Daniel 2), which speak about the kingdom of God as already in existence. It’s sad, really, because what they are doing is robbing themselves of the great comfort that Christ wants us to have as we live in this world.

Listen again to that short parable Jesus told in our text. *“It (the kingdom of God) is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches.”* Around here we have wild mustard growing to a height of a man’s knees. Obviously this local plant isn’t the kind that Jesus was talking about. He’s referring to the black mustard, which in one season can grow from a seed a little bigger than a carrot seed to a tree twelve to fifteen feet in height. Though it’s not a massive tree, for an herb garden it’s huge. How many of you have birds nesting in your herb gardens? Here’s an herb plant that provides shelter and a home for such birds.

This earthly situation is what Jesus compares the kingdom of God to, for which we pray in the Second Petition that it come. But what does the parable mean? There are some who say that the seed in the parable is Jesus, while others claim that the seed is the Word of God. It doesn’t matter, really, because Jesus and His Word always go hand in hand. Jesus and His Word are implanted into the human heart as God sends His Holy Spirit through the Gospel in Word and sacraments. Thus the implanted Gospel springs to life within the hearts of converted sinners, and through that event come protection and joy for believers—a blessing illustrated in the parable by the birds nesting in the branches.

Now what protection and joy, exactly, does the kingdom of God provide to its citizens? We have a clue from the parable Jesus told. Yesterday was a mildly windy day, even by South Dakota standards. I walked out of the side door of the church and heard several birds chirping. Those birds weren’t sitting up on the power lines, nor were they flying around over head. They were nestled beneath the evergreens on the east side of the church. There the wind had little effect on them. They were chirping away as though it were a warm, calm, sunny day.

The picture is apparent, isn’t it? While we live in a nation founded on the principle that we are free to pursue happiness, we often find happiness a difficult thing to come by. We are often beset by

confusion, worry, sadness, and grief. Some of it is simply the result of living in a world that is passing away under the curse of sin—a condition which, of course, pervades our own cherished nation. Yet much of the grief we experience is also a direct result of our own sins and misplaced affections. We have troubles in our relationships, including our marriages, because of our selfish pride. We have worries about finances because too often we build up for ourselves treasures on earth. We have concerns about our children because in many ways we have failed to pass on to them true wisdom. Whatever troubles or worries we have are all evidence of a much greater threat to our souls, one that exists because of that slavery to sin into which from birth we came into this world.

Thankfully, what our Lord provides through the words of our text is the remedy: His own invitation for us to take refuge in Him. He provides protection for us through His cross. Now the protection that He brings is not the certainty that our investments will always increase or that our nation will always be here for us and our children. He isn't assuring us that life in this world will cease to be hard. Rather, He invites you and me to take refuge in Him as He provides to us the kingdom that abides forever and in which we have peace with God through the forgiveness of our sins.

It is in view of this forgiveness, which we have through the cross of Christ, that Paul says in Romans: *"For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"* (Rom. 14:17). Right now Christ is ruling as King in your hearts, teaching and leading you to follow Him in faith and to do those things that are pleasing to God. Right now Christ is reigning in your hearts, giving you that peace that surpasses all understanding—peace with God through the forgiveness of sins. Right now Christ is ruling in your hearts, giving you the joy of knowing that all things are yours and that your names are written in the book of life. It is this eternal kingdom that the Son of God has firmly established by coming as man into the world and taking upon Himself the guilt and punishment of all our sins.

Martin Luther, a man against whom his government and even his church had turned, was given the grace to comprehend that his citizenship was also in heaven. It was this truth that led him to write these words, with which we are all familiar, but of which we always need a reminder:

*"And take they our life, Goods, fame, child, and wife,  
Let these all be gone, They yet have nothing won;  
The Kingdom ours remaineth" (TLH 262:4). Amen!*

***THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN***  
**(Matthew 26:39)**

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, "who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father." Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed by the blood of Christ:

What does a condemned man do on the night before his execution? I don't know. I imagine that some write letters to loved ones. Some listen to music to sooth their minds. Others may order their favorite meal. Another maybe plays a game of solitaire. I would imagine that many wait for a phone call, desperately hoping that their lawyer has managed to negotiate a last-minute reprieve. I can't imagine that many of them sleep. If you knew that the exact time of your death was just a few short hours away, would you be able to sleep?! Well, Jesus didn't sleep either. Instead He spent those hours of distress and trouble in prayer to His heavenly Father.

Of course, there's a difference between a convict on death row and Jesus. It's more than the fact that the convict is guilty and Jesus is innocent. The difference is also that Jesus could have walked away. No army could have held Him if He had wanted to walk away from Good Friday. He could have called twelve legions of angels to come to His aid in the Garden of Gethsemane. No prison cell could ever confine Him against His will. Please remember that as you hear these words of our Savior in Matthew 26:39:

***He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."***

It is the Holy Spirit of God who caused these words to be recorded, giving us an opportunity to listen to our Savior's innermost thoughts as His Passion drew nigh. And so we pray: Sanctify us by the truth, O Lord; Your Word is truth. Amen.

When speaking about God's perfect will, we have to go back to eternity. Before sin entered the world, even before there was a world, God's will was good and gracious toward us. That is, God had already determined to purchase our redemption through the death of His Son and thereby to give man eternal life with Him. In Ephesians 1:4 we read that God "*chose us in*" Christ Jesus "*before the foundation of the world.*" Scripture likewise refers to Jesus as "*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*" (Rev. 13:8).

Then came the six-day event of creation, the world's foundation, and along with it the creation of man. In creating mankind, God gave Adam and Eve free will, the ability to choose to live in perfect accord with His will. Since all was perfect, man's will was in perfect harmony with God's will, and that included the desire to live eternally with God and in obedience to all that He said. But not long after creation free will was lost to everyone when Adam, in his freedom, chose to disobey God's command. The result of that fatal choice was that everyone now enters the world with a will that is ever opposed to God's will. It's a will centered entirely on self rather than being centered on God, and as such the will of every person is not free, but thoroughly bound to sin.

Consequently, this corrupt human will, always bound to sin, reveals itself by dishonoring God's name and opposing the coming of God's kingdom. Even among Christians the bondage of the will is evident, as we are so quick to believe that which is contrary to God's Word and to live in a manner contrary to that Word. That is why we defend ourselves at all costs when our faults are exposed. That's why we fall so often to all kinds of temptations, those of greed, malice, envy, bitterness, cruelty, and many more. Our sinful actions surely demonstrate the total corruption of our wills.

It's very important that we also understand how damaging this corruption truly is. God's will, remember, is that we live with Him both now and in eternity. But our corrupt wills only oppose that will of God. Sin, then, is an attempt to go it on our own, apart from God. But apart from God there is only death, which is why this issue is extremely important. By opposing God's will we reject life. And yet, no matter how deeply I stress upon you the seriousness of this issue, you and I can't fix the problem. Your will and mine, remember, are bound to sin. Jesus said: "*Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin*" (John 8:34). Where does that leave us? It leaves us, as the Scripture declares about our natural state, "*dead in trespasses and sins*" (Eph. 2:1).

Now I want to turn your attention back to our Savior's words of prayer to His heavenly Father. Specifically, let's consider these words: "*Not My will, but Yours be done.*" In our state of having corrupt wills that are bound to sin, we hear these words and almost think of Jesus as having a will in conflict with the will of His Father. After all, Jesus did pray, "*Take this cup from Me.*" But our failure to comprehend how Jesus could pray both for this cup to pass from Him and also that His Father's will be done does indicate how far we have fallen from the perfect state of free will, with which Adam and Eve were created.

God did not create robots. He created man to serve and obey Him, not by compulsion, but in sincere and perfect love. Since Jesus was not conceived by a human (sinful) father, He also had a free will. He was not a robot either. There before Him on the night of His betrayal was the path laid down by the will of God from eternity. But that path was one of immense sorrow and anguish, for it would involve much more than the flesh-ripping scourge or the nails of the cross. It would include bearing the full brunt of His Father's wrath over man's sin. And although this path had been God's will from eternity and promised throughout the years by the LORD through the prophets, Jesus still had a choice in the matter. The Father did not force any of it upon His Son.

It is in this vein that we behold the amazing love of our Savior—both for His Father and for each one of us. When Jesus prayed, *"Let this cup pass from Me,"* His request was not in opposition to God's will, but in submission to God's will. From the very depths of His heart He chose, even in the face of the immense, undeserved suffering that would come upon Him, to remain in perfect harmony with the will of His Father and to lay down His life on the cross as our substitute. He wasn't requesting that the Father let Him off the hook just this one time. He was not asking for His Father to turn a blind eye so that He could walk away from the cross. He prayed that, if it were possible, the Father find another way.

But another way was not possible. The only way for us to be reconciled to God and escape the curse of our sin was for God Himself, in the person of the Son, to bear the wages of our sins on Himself. Since the cross was the only way, the Father willed it and the Son submitted to it. And for you and me, for all sinners throughout the world, it is very good that He did. In choosing to remain in perfect harmony with the will of His Father, Christ obtained our eternal "redemption through His blood," which means, as Paul declares, that we have "the forgiveness of sins" (Eph. 1:7).

God's will for our redemption has now been fulfilled. That is to say, the full payment for sin has been made. God's will, however, is still opposed. There are those who remain firm in their opposition to God's will that we receive eternal life through Christ Jesus. Satan ever opposes that will of God for us. The world is likewise opposed to God's will for us. And our own flesh remains treacherously opposed to God's good and gracious will for you and me in Christ. In their opposition these three make up an axis of evil that attempts to destroy God's Word, as well as the preaching and hearing of it. It is through His Word, however, that God extends to sinners the benefits of Christ's sacrifice, and so the Word of God has become the target of Satan's fury, the world's ridicule, and our old Adam's constant rebellion.

Were these enemies of God left unchecked, unhindered, no one would ever become the recipient of what God desires for us to have. God's salvation would be unclaimed and His heavenly mansions left empty. The Lord, however, does not wait around for you and me to bring about or even cooperate with His will. He takes action for the glory of His name. He thwarts the devil, brings to nothing the plots and schemes of the world, and even wars against our sinful flesh whenever and wherever He causes His Word to be preached and believed. He keeps His saving Word pure in spite of the enemies' raging against it, and He pierces the hearts of sinners with His grace, so that He might renew in them His image.

Dear friends, in giving you faith Christ has entered into your heart, and there He lives, constantly at work to break and hinder what the devil, the world, and our flesh are trying to accomplish, or rather, what they are trying to keep from happening. They don't want God's will to be done. They don't want you to live with God, either here in time or hereafter in eternity. But your Father does not leave you alone to fend for yourself and hold on to that new life and new will created within You. He remains graciously at work, working all things together for the good of those whom He has called according to His purpose, His will. And so His angels are given charge to keep you in your ways. His Spirit is at work, warring against the lusts of your flesh. All of this concerted effort has one essential goal: to keep you in faith for as long as you live, so that you finally come to everlasting paradise when you pass from this world. That ever remains God's good and gracious will.

Let us be aware, however, that in this world God has not made us robots. Yes, He's given us saving faith in Christ. Yes, He's renewed us in His image. Yes, He's constantly at work to preserve us from our enemies. But we, because of our flesh, still retain the ability to choose death instead of life. We still have the ability to reject God's grace. We still have the ability to despise His Word. In short, we still have the corrupted will that is bound to sin, and that corrupt will clings to us for as long as we live on this earth.

What does this problem mean for you and me and our prospects of being with Him forever? Does it mean that we should worry and fret about losing our faith? No, it does not! It means that we should look ever and always to our Savior and His cross. It means that we need Christ to live in us with His perfect will. It means that we need our Savior to be our constant guide and companion as we encounter the temptations and attacks of our enemies. Christ will show us and work in us the living reality of our faith, namely, that we believe God's Word and strive to live according to it. His will, which ever remains in perfect harmony with the Father's will, is that we be saved. And so we pray: Heavenly Father, we know that You are at work accomplishing Your good and gracious will of bringing sinners to repentance and life through faith in Your Son. We pray that You would do this work in us, so that we become and remain the beneficiaries of Your eternal will, which brings us into everlasting life by the merits of Your Son. In His name we ask what You in your grace are ever ready to give. Amen.

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### ***Journal of Theology: Fifty Years Ago***

In our continuation of selected reprints from Volume 1, which was published in 1961, the two articles chosen both involve the hand of Egbert Schaller. The first, the title of which translates as "All Christians Agree on the Gospel," appeared in the very first issue (*Journal* 1:1, Feb. 1961) under its Latin title given below. The original article had many footnotes of citation. The reprint in this issue will provide citation parenthetically in accord with MLA guidelines. See page 23 for Works Cited and a few endnotes.

The second reprint combines the first two *Journal* installments of the series by John Schaller entitled "The Kingdom of God." In its original German this lengthier series first appeared in the *Quartalschrift* (Vol. 15, Nos. 2-3) in 1918. Egbert Schaller translated the series, beginning with part I in the *Journal* issue dated October, 1961.

In both reprints all Scripture quotations are from the King James Version. Words enclosed in brackets have been added by the editor.

#### ***Omnes Christiani de Evangelio Consentiant***

Egbert Schaller

God is to be thanked, Luther declares in the Smalcald Articles, that in the Reformation Age even a child of seven can be expected to understand and know what the Church is (*Triglot* 499, XII, ¶2).

In like manner it belongs to elementary Christian understanding to know what the Church is not. It is not a visible institution, an outward polity. Enlarging on what the Creed says about the Church, Melancthon in his Apology of the Augsburg Confession goes on to state:

And it says *Church Catholic*, in order that we may not understand the Church to be an outward government of certain nations (that the Church is like any other external polity, bound to this or that land, kingdom, or nation, as the Pope of Rome will say), but rather men scattered throughout the whole world..., who agree concerning the Gospel, and have the same Christ, the same Holy Ghost, and the same Sacraments, whether they have the same or different human traditions. (*Triglot* 229, ¶10)

Cf. also *Concerning Church Fellowship*, Parag. 57.

It is not necessary, here among us, to review at length these essentials of the doctrine of the Church. But there is a facet in this gem of revealed Truth that merits further polishing. Article VII of the Augsburg Confession states: “*Et ad veram unitatem ecclesiae satis est consentire de doctrina evangelii et administratione sacramentorum*” [“And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments.”] (*Triglot* 46, [47], VII, ¶12). This pronouncement lends itself to the service of unionistic ends, and has been employed for such purpose, if it is understood as defining the degree of unity required by God for the exercise of fellowship and joint work among Christians. Thus Dr. M. Reu wrote:

The notion that those who wish to enjoy church fellowship must agree in all points of doctrine rests upon an erroneous interpretation of I Corinthians 1:10 and similar Scripture texts. Careful study of the respective contexts will lead to different results. Furthermore, this notion requires more than what *Augustana* VII declares to be essential for unity in the church. Here we read: “To the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments.” Now we must not, of course, ignore the historical situation in which this famous “it is enough” was pronounced. It set forth that agreement in ceremonies is not necessary for church union, but only agreement in doctrine and in the administration of the sacraments. Nevertheless, it is very significant that the doctrine is simply denoted as “the doctrine of the Gospel.” (Reu 32)

In an essay read to the Northern Illinois District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in 1931, the author analyzed the Augsburg Confession and, in regard to its seventh Article, said:

It is not difficult to recognize the inner connection between this and the preceding articles. In these the confessors, on the basis of the divine Word, had shown how the faithful God reconciled the sinful, lost and condemned world through the suffering and death of his Son Jesus Christ and now offers and confers such reconciliation, or forgiveness, in the Gospel, the Means of Grace. Now they who accept the Savior by faith become partakers of all heavenly treasures, receive therewith the absolution won for all the world and lay hold on eternal life. This fellowship of the believers with Christ then reveals itself in a life guided by the Word in the form of works done to the glory and praise of God. The believers, however, do not stand isolated, but form a great and intimate communion, the members of which are most intimately connected with Christ, their Head, and therefore also with one another. This communion, born of the working and gathering activity of the Holy Spirit, is that divine institution which in Scripture is called *ecclesia*, congregation of believers, or church. Of this Church of the Lord, then, this Article treats. (Synod Report 13)

Of the fact that Article VII of the Augsburg Confession deals with the spiritual unity of the *Una Sancta*, and does not concern itself with the terms of union in the visible church, the Apology is the best evidence and unimpeachable witness:

These things seem, for the present, to be sufficient for the defense of the description of the Church which we have presented. Neither do we see how, when the Church, properly so called, is named *the body of Christ*, it should be described otherwise than we have described it. For it is evident that the wicked belong to the kingdom and body of the devil, who impels and holds captive the wicked. These things are clearer than the light of noonday; however, if the adversaries still continue to pervert them, we will not hesitate to reply at greater length.

The adversaries condemn also the part of the Seventh Article in which we said that “to the unity of the Church it is sufficient to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments; nor is it necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by men should be alike everywhere.” Here they distinguish between *universal* and *particular* rites, and approve our article if it be understood concerning particular rites; they do not receive it concerning universal rites. (That is a fine, clumsy distinction!) We do not sufficiently understand what the

adversaries mean. We are speaking of true, i.e., of spiritual unity (we say that those are one harmonious Church who believe in one Christ; who have one Gospel, one Spirit, one faith, the same Sacraments; and we are speaking, therefore, of spiritual unity), without which faith in the heart, or righteousness of heart before God, cannot exist. (*Triglot* 237, ¶29-31).

But there remains for us a question of the extent of doctrinal unity envisioned in the Seventh Article of the Augustana. What is predicated concerning the essence and extent of the faith of those “*qui consentiunt de evangelio?*”

I. Through the medium of saving faith lost and condemned sinners become saints of God and are numbered with that blessed communion known as the Holy Christian Church. Thus we confess with Luther in his explanation of the Third Article: “The Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.” Of the early apostolic days in the Church it is written: “And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women” (Acts 5:14). So on the Day of Pentecost “they that gladly received” the message of Peter “were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41).

The common bond of all true Christians is the same faith in this same message, as St. Paul indicates in writing to the Ephesians: “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph. 2:19-22). The Apostle assures the saints in Galatia: “Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:26-27).

To such faith men attain only through the marvelous work and operation of the Holy Ghost; for “no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost,” (1 Cor. 12:3) and “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:14). Saving faith is the product of the miracle of regeneration, as St. Paul describes it to the Ephesians: “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:4-7). The Formula of Concord observes: “In spiritual and divine things, which pertain to the salvation of the soul, man is like a pillar of salt, like Lot’s wife, yea, like a log and a stone, like a lifeless statue, which uses neither eyes nor mouth, neither sense nor heart. For man neither sees nor perceives the terrible and fierce wrath of God on account of sin and death..., but ever continues in his security, even knowingly and willingly.... All teaching and preaching is lost upon him, until he is enlightened, converted, and regenerated by the Holy Ghost...” (*Triglot* 889, ¶20-21). Defining the process of regeneration more exactly, the Formula states: “In genuine conversion a change, new emotion..., and movement in the intellect, will, and heart must take place, namely, that the heart perceive sin, dread God’s wrath, turn from sin, perceive and accept the promise of grace in Christ, have good spiritual thoughts, a Christian purpose and diligence, and strive against the flesh. For where none of these occurs or is present, there is also no true conversion” (*Triglot* 909, ¶170). In [H. Schmid’s] *Doctrinal Theology*, therefore, Hollaz offers this definition: “Conversion ...[is] the act of grace by which the Holy Spirit excites in the sinner sincere grief for his sins by the word of the Law, and kindles true faith in Christ by the word of the Gospel, that he may obtain remission of sins and eternal salvation” (qtd. in Schmid 466).



In the moment that Spirit-wrought faith is kindled in the heart of a human being, he becomes partaker of the blessings which Christ has earned and won for all men. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:1-2). Whether he is a malefactor on the cross or an Apostle of the Cross, saving faith created by the Holy Ghost comes to him with its full dowry of the treasures earned and won by the Savior: forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal life. The pattern of faith in the Holy Christian Church is not a Joseph's coat of many colors, but a unity, as it is written: "Even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4:4-6).

Faith has a unity both of form and of content. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14). In form it is, first of all, knowledge. The Apostle asks: "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" (Rom. 10:14). Scripture allows no answer to this question save a negative one. Our Lord declared: "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). Therefore St. Peter also teaches that "his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (2 Pet. 1:3). Such is the "knowledge of salvation" referred to by Zacharias in his Benedictus (Luke 1:77). As God's Will that all men be saved led to universal redemption and justification, so His Will that men come to the knowledge of the Truth results in their regeneration which confers such knowledge. This is neither a mere familiarity with facts, nor is it a purely intellectual knowledge acquired by the exercise of human abilities. Scripture speaks of the knowledge of faith as a gift, a product of divine grace and not of man's intellect. "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given us of God" (1 Cor. 2:12). Saving knowledge is a part of the saving gift of faith, and its conferring a miracle of grace which is wrought in the baptized infant as well as in the adult and has an origin beyond our comprehension.

In form, saving faith likewise includes assent and trust. The Call of the Holy Spirit addresses itself to the newly awakened mind and will of the regenerate man, as is indicated by the appeals and exhortations of the Gospel: "Be ye reconciled to God!" "Repent, and believe the Gospel!" "Come unto me...and I will give you rest!" Of Paul preaching at Ephesus it is said that "he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8). And again at Rome: "There came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening" (Acts 28:23). It is, of course, not the natural will of man which is operative in the act of agreeing to and trusting the message of the Word. The assent as well as the ensuing confidence are acts of the New Man "created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24) by Him [through His Word] which "effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1 Thess. 2:13). Here too, as in the whole area of saving faith, the words of Jesus to the Jews apply: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" (John 6:29).

As saving faith in all saints has unity of form, so also it is uniform in its content. Both the words and the examples cited in Scripture confirm this beyond question. "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Rom. 10:8-9). And Jesus said: "This is the will of him that sent me, that everyone which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:40). Thus Paul and the jailor at Philippi came to stand as equals in grace when both obeyed the divine invitation: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). Consonant with this view of the essential object of true faith, Dr. F. Pieper in his *Christian Dogmatics* observes: "A

person's membership in the Christian Church depends on his confessing that he deserves damnation before God and at the same time believing that God is gracious to him for the sake of Christ's *satisfactio vicaria*. Cf. Luther's explanation of the Second Article" (3: 400). We sing: "The saints on earth and those above But one communion make; Joined to their Lord in bonds of love, All of His grace partake" (TLH 478:1). Such is the meaning of Article VII of the Augsburg Confession when it says: "To the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments" (Triglot 47, VII, ¶2).

It goes without saying among us that the above has no relevance when we discuss the extent of confessional agreement necessary for the scriptural fellowship of Christians in the visible church. Here both the Word and the Confessions apply an entirely different standard. Passages such as Romans 16:17 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6 are too familiar to require comment here. The Formula of Concord makes our position regarding togetherness in the visible church clear: "Thus...the churches will not condemn one another because of dissimilarity of ceremonies when, in Christian liberty, one has less or more of them, provided they are otherwise agreed with one another in the doctrine and all its articles, also in the right use of the Holy Sacrament..." (Trig. 1063, ¶31, emph. ES). And again: "But we ... are on our part sincerely inclined and anxious to advance that unity according to our utmost power, by which His glory remains to God uninjured, nothing of the divine truth of the Holy Gospel is surrendered, no room is given to the least error, poor sinners are brought to true, genuine repentance..." (1095, ¶196, emph. ES).

Nothing less than complete agreement in doctrine is the basis upon which we are permitted to recognize brethren and engage in the privileges of a fellowship that reflects the unity of Christ's spiritual body. But that which establishes membership in the *Una Sancta* is solely the acceptance by a contrite sinner of God's boundless mercies and infinite love for him in Christ the Redeemer, as revealed in the Word.

II. While the faith of the regenerate consists of knowledge as well as of assent and trust, it does not follow that the new-born creature of faith is necessarily endowed with a dogmatic knowledge which embraces the entire system of organized truth.

The fact that "no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost" (1 Cor. 12:3) indeed gives us leave to infer that the new life of faith in the Christian is perfect, as also St. John declares: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (1 John 3:9). It is manifest that the new man never opposes the Truth, but receives it and accepts it. "He that is of God heareth God's words," (John 8:47) Jesus says; and again: "My sheep hear my voice" (John 10:27). When St. Paul therefore writes: "Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24), he exonerates this creature of the Holy Ghost from every charge of error and corruption.

At the same time, Scripture finds it necessary to teach the new man in us to pray: "Lord, increase our faith" (Luke 17:5). Does not St. Peter admonish us to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ"? (2 Pet. 3:18; cf. also 2 Cor. 10:15). It was on Resurrection Day, long after the disciples had been brought to the knowledge of their Savior, that the risen Lord "opened their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures" (Luke 24:45). Not only did He "upbraid them with their unbelief and hardness of heart" (Mark 16:14), a condition caused, not by their regenerate hearts but by the sinful flesh which still clung to them; He also taught them many things after His resurrection which they could not bear before (John 16:12), just as the Apostle later told the Corinthians: "I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able" (1 Cor. 3:2). The complaint was registered against the Hebrew Christians that "when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the

first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat” (Heb. 5:12). Among the members of the *Una Sancta*, then, there are children as well as men of faith.

Read in the light of this scriptural premise, the confession of our church *Concerning Church Fellowship*, as adopted, will be correctly understood when it states in paragraph 5:

Christians according to the new man are perfectly joined together in the same mind. The Holy Spirit makes them children of God, and He makes them all the same. They are agreed on sin, its nature, its origin, its means, its fruits, etc. They are agreed on grace, its sufficiency, its means, its fruits, etc. There may be different degrees of understanding, differences in the intensity of the experience, yet as far as the essence is concerned, all believers are perfectly agreed. (6)

It is to be noted with due care, however, that here, as well as in paragraph 6 of the same confession, the Christian is viewed exclusively according to his new birth in order to define precisely the nature of the unity existing in the *Una Sancta*. While this is a technical refinement suitable for the exact doctrinal proposition to be advanced, we must guard against false inferences.

The *Una Sancta*, though a creation of the Holy Ghost, must not be regarded as an ideal society by virtue of the perfection of its constituency. Glorious things are indeed spoken of “Zion, city of our God.” The Church is called holy by its King, Who says to its members by His Apostle: “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5). Yet the members of this priesthood cannot be separated from the flesh that adheres to them in this life. As saints they remain human beings; and as such they are sinful. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). It would be unrealistic, therefore, to suggest that membership in the Communion of Saints is limited to, or must be ascribed exclusively to, that part of the Christian which the Holy Ghost has created by the Word, as though the Christian were the new man only and the totality of the Church were for that reason a perfect and perfectly functioning organism especially in matters of faith and confession.

Not only when viewed from our perspective, but in the eyes of God as well, the Christian is a sinner and comes short of the glory of God. “The sins of Christians are not painted sins; they are real sins. The Christian flees them, he fights against them, he hates them, but they are there. Therefore the Christian daily asks God for forgiveness, and he is comforted by the fact that the saints of old were also troubled by their sinful flesh” (Sommer 288). Our Confessions say:

For since in this life we receive only the first-fruits of the Spirit, and the new birth is not complete, but only begun in us, the combat and struggle of the flesh against the spirit remains even in the elect and truly regenerate men; for there is a great difference perceptible among Christians not only in this, that one is weak and another strong in the spirit, but each Christian, moreover, experiences in himself that at one time he is joyful in spirit, and at another fearful and alarmed; at one time ardent in love, strong in faith and hope, and at another cold and weak” (*Triglott* 907, ¶68).<sup>1</sup>

Scripture speaks frequently of the spiritual dichotomy by which the Christian is plagued in his earthly, temporal existence. Especially noteworthy and well-known in this respect is the complaint of St. Paul in the seventh chapter of Romans. He writes: “For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Rom. 7:22-23). In admonishing the Ephesians to “put on the new man,” he in the same breath exhorts “that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts” (Eph. 4:22).

When the Christian cries with Paul: “Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:24), he knows, as Paul did, how and when this question will be answered with action. “We shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Cor. 15:51-52). The saint in his heavenly home will not be a combination of spirit and corruptible flesh. As he is already here transformed in mind and spirit unto a new man, so his entire frame will then also bear the image of the heavenly; and that renovation, here begun, of which Baptism is both the instrument and the symbol, will be consummated

so as to conform with final and utter adequacy to the description of the Apostle: “For if we have been planted together in the likeness of (Christ’s) death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin” (Rom. 6:5-7).

“Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15:54). But until then, “with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin” (Rom. 7:25).

We observe that while Scripture and the Confessions distinguish the Christian according to the new man when urging upon him the duty of sanctification and its problems, neither Scripture nor the Confessions emphasizes the divided state of the Christian when specifically speaking of him as a member of the *Una Sancta*. Though he deplores the vile burden of his fleshly nature, St. Paul never viewed himself as being vertically or horizontally divided in the state of Grace. As he describes his inner conflicts, he says: “For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.... So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin” (Rom. 7:19-25). But when speaking of those justified by faith, he prays for himself as for the Thessalonians that the “whole spirit and soul and body” might “be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:23).

Dr. F. Pieper explains: “1 John 3:9: ‘Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His seed remaineth in him’...describes the Christian according to the new man who maintains dominion over the old man. The Apostle distinguishes between ‘committing sin’ (*ἁμαρτίαν ποιεῖν*, 1 John 3:9) and ‘having sin’ (*ἁμαρτίαν ἔχειν*, 1 John 1:8). Christians do not ‘commit sin,’ that is, they do not permit sin to rule over them, to give it free reign; they ‘have sin,’ but in the power of the new man, the offspring of God, they control sin” (3: 32).

The Christian as a member of the *Una Sancta* is embarrassed and harassed by his weakness, and cries: “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief” (Mark 9.24). Our confessions say:

We are speaking not of an imaginary Church, which is to be found nowhere; but we say and know certainly that this Church, wherein saints live, is and abides truly upon earth; namely, that some of God’s children are here and there in all the world, in various kingdoms, islands, lands, and cities, from the rising of the sun to its setting, who have truly learned to know Christ and His Gospel. And we add the marks: *the pure doctrine of the Gospel* (the ministry of the Gospel) *and the Sacraments*. And this Church is properly *the pillar of the truth*, 1 Tim. 3:15. For it retains the pure Gospel, and, as Paul says, 1 Cor. 3:11 (“Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ”), *the foundation*, i.e., the true knowledge of Christ and faith. Although among these...there are also many weak persons, *who build upon the foundation stubble that will perish*, i.e., certain unprofitable opinions..., which, nevertheless, because they do not overthrow the foundation, are both forgiven them and also corrected. And the writings of the holy Fathers testify that sometimes even they built stubble upon the foundation, but that this did not overthrow their faith. (*Triglot* 233, ¶20-21)

Thus [also Pieper in Volume II]: “There is great diversity among Christians. Some are strong in their faith, others weak. Some have an excellent knowledge of the Christian doctrine, others are woefully deficient in this respect. (Eph. 4:13-14; Rom. 14:1ff.). There are orthodox Christians and heterodox Christians (see Chapter I in the section ‘Saving Faith’: ‘Orthodoxy and membership in the Christian Church are not coterminous’). But there is full accord among Christians on the doctrine of justification. All Christians are at one in believing that God forgives their sins by grace, for Christ’s sake, without any merit of their own. For it is this faith which makes the Christian” (2: 516).

So it behooves us that we set up guards against a recurrence of the error of the Gnostics in the Alexandrine period of church history, when, in speaking of the Christian, regeneration and sanctification were sometimes utterly confused. Thus Clemens Alexandrinus: “Having been baptized, we are

illuminated; having been illuminated, we are made sons; having been made sons, we are perfected; having been perfected, we are superior to death.... We, the baptized, have erased our beclouding sins, the condemnation of darkness, by the divine Spirit, have the free and unhindered and bright vision of the Spirit.... Therefore we have washed away all our sins, and are immediately no longer evil. This is the one grace of illumination, viz., to be no longer the same as before, or to have cleansed the way.”<sup>2</sup>

Similarly we must reject and shun the Pelagian-Arminian view of man espoused by the Oberlin School of Theology, notably of its prominent teacher C. G. Finney (d. 1875), who in his *Systematic Theology* “teaches that it is impossible for sin and virtue to coexist in the human heart at the same time...; and that the soul is either wholly consecrated to Christ or it has none of His Spirit. These two states may alternate, and this man may be a Christian at one moment and a sinner the next; however, he cannot be at one moment a sinful or imperfect Christian” (“Perfectionism” 578).<sup>3</sup>

We do well to emphasize, therefore, that it is not the perfection of his new nature which holds the saint in true and full communion with the Body of Christ, just as he is not a member of the *Una Sancta* because according to the new man he never contradicts or rejects any truth of God. If the Church which Christ loved and for which He gave Himself is “a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:27), this is essentially a product of the forgiving grace of God which by the blood of Jesus Christ covers the saints wholly with an alien, heavenly righteousness. In heaven it will be said of the members of the Communion of Saints that “these are they which have come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them” (Rev. 7:14-15, emph. ES).

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>The word order of the first sentence was changed by Schaller.

<sup>2</sup>This quotation of Clement of Alexandria comes from *Paedagogus* (“The Instructor”), Book I, Chapter VI. The source of the translation given by Schaller, however, is unknown.

<sup>3</sup>See also J. L. Neve, *A History of Christian Thought*, Vol. II, p. 278, ¶17.

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## The Kingdom of God

John Schaller

\* We herewith reproduce for our readers, in translation from the German, an article which appeared in the *Quartalschrift*, the theological magazine of the Wisconsin Synod, in 1918 (Vol. 15, Nos. 2-3). The original author was Prof. John Schaller. Our discerning subscribers will recognize the significant and timely contribution which the article makes toward an understanding in the current discussion in Lutheran circles relating to the doctrine of the Church. Because of its length it will appear in our *Journal* in installments.<sup>1</sup>

### Part I

a certain occasion a Pharisee inquired of our Lord "When the kingdom of God should come." The same question, posed in exactly the same sense, has since engaged the minds of many Christians, and a variety of false premises has led them to a great diversity of answers. In all their diversity, however, such conclusions manifest the common trend which has found concrete expression and almost universal recognition in chiliastic thought. He who is so oriented has a specific *Weltanschauung* which colors his judgment of all events particularly in the history of nations and of the human race. In tranquil times this viewpoint confronted us primarily in theoretical form, except in instances when intrusions of church leaders and their parishes upon the processes of public affairs were justified with the argument that the Church has a call to pave the way for, if not indeed to bring about, the realization of the kingdom of God. But whenever an age of revolutionary events dawns in which numerous changes in international relations develop, the hope that the desired hour may have arrived is kindled anew in all who raise the question of the Pharisee.

It was inevitable that the world war [World War I], which does not yet appear to have run its full course, would rouse to action all those who regard themselves as prophets of the millennialist hope. In the first stage of the war, of course, when the horrors of modern combat in its unprecedented fury and scope were unfolded before the eyes of men, those especially who had been nurtured with chiliastic hopes were as people turned to stone. They came to doubt, not only these expectations, but the true Christian hope as well. When enemies of the Christian faith sardonically inquired whether this fearful world-conflagration were the best product of which the faith in Jesus Christ was capable, few were prepared to give the proper answer; even in Christian circles one heard the conjecture "that Christianity proved a failure." In time, however, men became adjusted to the headlines of disaster, and hope again revived that one of the belligerents might by a genuine victory succeed in advancing the cause of the kingdom of God on earth toward a realization. After this anticipation had for a long time nourished itself with all sorts of miserable crumbs, it was measurably strengthened by the conquest of the British forces which succeeded in wresting southern Palestine and the city of Jerusalem from the Turks. Since that victory every chiliast fondly believes that the fulfillment of those promises is imminent in which according to their interpretation God gave assurance of the restoration of a kingdom of the Messiah on earth; for on the basis of such prophecies it is supposed that a return of the Jews to the Holy Land and a restoration of the ancient glory of Jerusalem will be show-pieces of the expected reign of God on earth.

While the Lutheran Church has ever recognized and rejected Millennialism as unscriptural enthusiasm, this has from the outset been, and to this day remains, a prominent characteristic of Reformed Protestantism. Not all Calvinistic teachers, indeed, have incorporated coarse chiliastic ideas in their doctrinal systems; yet in their entire conception of the kingdom of God on earth lies the fruitful seed of all false hopes which a Chiliast is disposed to harbor and nurture in his heart. On another occasion (Seminary Catalogue 1915-16) we have demonstrated that the liberties enjoyed by our nation have been imperiled by the growing influence of Calvinism upon its political life because the Reformed

denominations have never understood or approved a separation of church and state in its fundamental principle and because over a period of decades, with increasing success, they have diligently sought to becloud for our people the true standard of this essential feature of our form of government. In that connection we also outlined the relation between this activity and the Reformed concept of a visible kingdom of God on earth. In the meantime we have been supplied with conspicuous and abundant evidences of Reformed designs. For the well-balanced observer of the national scene there can be no doubt of the fact that in assessing the nature of the present war, in which we ourselves have now become actively engaged, many of our fellow-citizens are governed by considerations which are not only political, but religious as well. For proof of this we need only to refer to the acclaim accorded many sectarian clergymen who are abusing the privilege of the pulpit by engaging in vulgar rabble-rousing. But here the religious background is none other than the false concept of the kingdom of God and the related conceit that some nation or country is divinely appointed to bring to pass the institution of this divine State on earth.

It might seem legitimate, furthermore, to express the fear that the Lutheran Church in our country, too, has become widely infected with this aberration of the Reformed, and has, in the matter of the separation of church and state, also been deprived of clear vision and firm conviction. In recent years many Lutheran parishes, headed by their pastors, as well as larger Lutheran associations in meetings attended also by numerous members of the clergy, have publicly recorded their views on issues connected with the war and have done so in the name of the Lutheran Church. Unduly emphasizing their rights of citizenship, Lutheran pastors individually participated in political agitation designed to bring influence to bear upon measures planned by the Federal government, insensitive to the fact that their efforts could be influential or successful only because, as a result of the Calvinistic training of our people, they were bound to be regarded as representatives of their church bodies. Such conduct constitutes an egregious blunder indeed, and we are already suffering painfully from the consequences. But it is in no wise necessary to seek for it any explanation other than the emotional excitement which in these days can adversely affect even the judgment of otherwise sober people. Nevertheless such developments indicate that we have every reason for reflecting upon the divine truths which are to govern our judgment and by which we ourselves want to be governed.

This study is not intended to be exhaustive, but is to serve as stimulant for more profound reflection. At numerous points it will content itself with hints and references. But even within so limited a scope it is possible to underscore and outline as scriptural several thoughts, namely: 1. that "kingdom of God" essentially denotes, not a mere state or condition, but an uninterrupted activity, a continuous rule and operation of God; 2. that in exhibiting this ruling activity of God the Scriptures refer only incidentally to God's general dominion over the world and, strictly speaking always envisions only His rule through the Gospel; 3. that in its derivative sense "kingdom of God" designates a place at which men arrive, or a possession to which they may attain; and 4. that "kingdom of God," when used in this latter sense, never refers to anything material and outward, but invariably only to the gifts which are imparted to us by means of the Gospel. If in this discussion we deal primarily with statements of the New Testament, it is not because the Old Testament speaks otherwise concerning the kingdom of God. Although because of the theocratic relationship between God and His people Israel such a difference in speaking might be anticipated, our occasional references to familiar Old Testament passages will show that in this matter the point of view of the Old Testament fully conforms to that of the New.

It will doubtless be conceded without question that among us the understanding of Scripture statements concerning the kingdom of God is strongly influenced by the view that Scripture with the use of that term designates certain persons or things which under God's rule are joined together as a unit. This view is manifested when we, for example, say that God's kingdom of power constitutes the entire universe and consists of the totality of all creatures; that the Church on earth is the kingdom of grace

and consists of the believers; that the kingdom of Glory consists of the angels and the elect. Among us that is so predominantly the prevailing conception that without further reflection we gather many offerings “for the kingdom of God” and that in so doing everybody assumes that the sums thus collected serve “for the building of the kingdom of God on earth.” This, however, immediately gives rise to a substantial number of exegetical difficulties which place a heavy burden on the preachers and induce them to make an effort, whether they are conscious of it or not, to force upon a number of well-known statements of the Lord and His Apostles an interpretation which will bring them into harmony with the concept they entertain. The mistake lies in this, that without further reflection a metonymy, which in itself is entirely appropriate, is substituted for the actual sense, and the latter is entirely set aside, instead of reversing the process and deriving and justifying the metonymy from the actual sense. The prevalence of this mistake among us is the more astonishing when, after careful examination of the passages involved, one realizes that it is doubtful whether the equation: kingdom of God = Church is at all to be found in the Scriptures!

The Greek word for *kingdom* is βασιλεία. Since this is the βασιλεία θεοῦ, God is βασιλεύς and His rule is called βασιλεύειν. It is essential that at this point and for the present we rule out as inappropriate and irrelevant those pictures which the German (or English) words conjure up in our minds. When we hear of a king, we imagine a person in a certain position of respect, dignity, and authority. A king is king, even when he sleeps or lies unconscious in an illness, yes, even when he is mentally incompetent for the performance of the duties of regency. Indeed, the modern world is familiar with kings who serve as mere ornaments of a certain form of government and never minister as kings, whether awake or asleep. History knows of many an example of kings for whom others made it impossible to enjoy more than the nominal honor of being kings; yet even such figure-heads retain the honor, the dignity, the office. In their case, too, one could venture to speak of a βασιλεύειν in the sense that it may in our terms of reference be predicated of a king even when he is playing horsey for his little prince in the nursery. In other words, according to our normal manner of thinking, kingship is a condition which exists and is present whether it is activated or not. Being king is the foundation of the authority.

When Scripture speaks of God’s kingship, the attributes of validity, of dignity, of authority are certainly not excluded; but essentially the term signifies an activity, a functioning. As βασιλεύειν primarily means “to function as king,” so also with βασιλεία the accent lies upon the active discharge of regal powers. In the parlance of Scripture “God is King” does not in the first instance mean: “He has kingly authority which according to His option He may or may not employ,” but says that God operates, creates, rules—that He engages in the activities of a divine King. The “kingdom of God” in its exact sense therefore is the divine rule per se. This verbal sense of the term is evident also in certain Scripture passages which do not speak of God’s kingdom. In his address concerning Beelzebub Christ says: “If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand?” (Luke 11:18). This observation surely concerns itself, not with the state of being a ruler, but with the activity of regency. Not merely Satan’s prerogatives as monarch, but his entire functioning as regent would terminate, were he not in accord with himself. The term receives the same value in that question raised by the disciples on the day of Christ’s Ascension: “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). It expressed, not so much their hope that Israel might again acquire its own king, but rather their desire that national independence and self-rule might be restored to Israel. In these passages, too, the idea of authority, though present, is entirely secondary; the emphasis rests upon the concept of the activity and functioning of the power of rule.

This meaning of the term unquestionably faces us in those assertions that speak of the kingdom of God without including any reference to the persons or things subject to the kingly activity of God. Here the saying of Paul is very instructive: “For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power” (1 Cor. 4:20). In the context, the Apostle had just announced that he would come to the Corinthians shortly and then would “know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power.” He would not be



deceived by bombastic, sonorous phrases; if they are actually under God's influence, His power would have to be manifest in them, since the βασιλεία, the kingly activity of God, is not an empty phrase or a mere title, but an actual administration of power. For the divine power is never mere capability, a latent capacity for the exertion of power, but the exerting itself. Only in this sense, also, is the statement of Jesus intelligible: "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God (with the finger of God, Luke 11:20), then the kingdom of God is come unto you" (Matt. 12:28). These words remain incomprehensible as long as "kingdom of God" is taken to mean a specific group of human beings; but they reveal a great Truth as soon as it is understood that the Lord is speaking of the regal ruling activity of God. The Pharisees should and could have concluded from the miracles of Jesus that God had in a special manner drawn near to them with His activity; for in this very activity which was taking place before their eyes does the kingdom of God consist.

St. Paul also uses the term in this sense when he writes: "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17). He who approaches this passage with the presupposition that "kingdom of God" denotes the subjects of God the King and thus expects to find herein a description of the Church discovers that the very first words immediately involve him in difficulties. One could conceivably suppose that according to Paul's words all those people belong to the kingdom of God who have righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; but then one would by the same logic be obliged to accept the proposition that those are people who neither eat nor drink! Is here not intent upon showing who it is that belongs into the kingdom of God, but writes these words in order to demonstrate that externals such as eating and drinking, not eating and not drinking, are not at issue when we speak of the correct attitude of a human being toward God. Certainly God also creates food and drink, as well as the enjoyment of these gifts; but the activity of God with which evangelical preaching deals is not concerned with such externals. The Gospel proclaims that function of God by which He prepares righteousness, peace and joy and offers them to men. "For he that in these things serveth Christ," that person is under the rule of God's Grace and is, *sola gratia et efficacia Dei*, "acceptable to God, and approved of men" [Rom. 14:18].

Similarly, yet from quite another point of view, Jesus tells the Pharisees: "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20f). Many interpreters join Luther in regarding this passage as being exactly parallel with the passage from Romans discussed above; but that is an untenable view. While we may concede that ἐντὸς ὑμῶν can mean: "Inside of you," that interpretation is impossible here since Jesus is addressing the Pharisees, His unbelieving opponents (compare the contrast v. 22: "And he said unto the disciples...!"). Certainly the Savior neither would nor could say of the Pharisees that a new, spiritual life had had its inception in their hearts. They had asked when the kingdom of God should come. The sense of their question was: By what token can we anticipate the coming of the kingdom of God? The sense of the Lord's answer may be summarized as follows: Such advance calculation is impossible; there are no signs that enable you to predict the coming of the kingdom of God in the fashion in which an astronomer charts in advance the movements of heavenly bodies; and the most conclusive evidence of this lies in the fact that God has already begun His working and creating among you and you are unaware of it! Quite obviously the Lord in these words refers to what He had previously told these same people in Luke 11:20.

We include at this point an evaluation of the passage John 18:36: "My kingdom is not of this world" etc.<sup>2</sup> This was a most appropriate answer to Pilate's question: "Art thou the king of the Jews?" The governor was not interested in knowing whether Jesus bore the title, but whether Jesus laid claim to the right of functioning as king. How inadequate the reply would have been had Jesus intended to use the word "kingdom" as a term for the subjects of the kingdom! But the sense of His answer actually was: My kingly activity is of a nature quite other than that of earthly kings. These seek the protection of physical weapons and employ the services of other people; but my βασιλεία, my royal activity, is not of

this nature; “now is my kingdom not from hence,” my rule is not founded upon earthly investiture of power. In this sense Pilate understands Him; for he pursues the subject: “Art thou a king then?” Do you actually rule? And Jesus replies: Yes, I am king, and my ruling is carried on by my testifying to the Truth. Whoever is of the Truth stands beneath my scepter. This last statement, introduced here only to complete the line of thought, will bring its full weight to bear in the next succeeding point of our discussion. For present purposes it suffices to have shown that the wonderful statement of Jesus reveals its significance to us only when we understand the term “kingdom” as a designation for the activity of Jesus Christ the King.

It is wholly consonant with the facts presented, therefore, when we understand that the concept “kingdom of God (Christ)” cannot be better transcribed than with the words of the Lord: “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (John 5:17). The kingdom of God in the true sense is the eternal and continuous rule-activity of the almighty God, by which He pursues certain purposes with specific means to the attainment of a predetermined objective. It is unnecessary that we add further proof-passages to establish this understanding of the term; once it has been clearly perceived, it obtrudes everywhere. Therefore it is presupposed in all that follows in this discussion, although there will be ample occasion for repeated emphasis.

In the treatment of the doctrine of the kingly office of Christ it has been the practice, for the sake of a simpler review, to group all statements concerning the activity of the glorified Savior under three heads and thus, to speak of a three-fold kingdom of Christ. This division, which Scripture does not make, suffers from substantial weaknesses, and efforts to apply it consistently meet with failure in several respects. Most of the difficulties arise because precisely in this context the expression “kingdom” is taken to refer to a specific group of things and persons, whereas in conforming to the biblical manner of expression one ought to regard the “kingdom” as designation for the activity, the ruling, the administration of God and think only secondarily of the persons whose relationship with God is determined by the nature of a given phase of His ruling. The latter view, to be sure, makes it difficult to characterize the “kingdom of Glory” as a separate “kingdom,” since in accord with Scripture we teach that God at all times, and Christ’s human nature since its glorification at God’s right Hand likewise, has ruled and will thus eternally rule. But even the distinction between a kingdom of power and a kingdom of grace leads to inconsistencies, because in this distinction the Grace of God appears to be separated from His Power, whereas according to Romans 1:16 and especially in the light of Ephesians 1:19f it is precisely in the so-called kingdom of grace that the almighty Power of God alone accomplishes the result which He purposes. Certainly we shall, with our feeble reason and logic, never penetrate the depths of the wisdom and knowledge of God or thereby succeed in analyzing His ruling in all its ramifications. We doubtless best approximate the mystery when we apply the familiar distinction between Law and Gospel current among us and simply say: With the term, God’s kingdom of power, we denote the divine rule in which with irresistible power God unfailingly carries out His full purpose and relentlessly immobilizes every conscious or unconscious resistance. On the other hand we define as kingdom of grace that power-activity of God which through the Gospel He applies to the hearts of men, free of any coercion and yet in such a manner that every resistance of the individual is overcome and God achieves His objective, the salvation of the sinner. But even such definitions are unsatisfactory as an effort in ordering the divine thoughts, as we know them by revelation, according to our rules of reason; in every concrete instance the borders of the two “kingdoms” overlap.

For that very reason the Scripture makes no such distinctions between various “kingdoms” of God. It describes but one ruling of God over His creature, with the single purpose of carrying out His predestined plan for the gathering, edifying, and final glorification of His Church. The Scriptures do indeed provide a sufficiency of information concerning the rule of God under Law, which is evidenced in nature by what we call laws of nature, but among men by the fact that God through the application of

moral or physical force maintains a certain outward order and that all human activities are, sometimes obviously and sometimes more subtly, made subject to the interests of God's drive toward His objectives. But where Scripture speaks of the "kingdom of God," the universal rule of God in nature and in human existence—though it is of course presupposed—is never directly designated by the use of that term. In short: "kingdom of God" in Scripture never means simply "kingdom of power"; and only very rarely does the expression contain so much as an allusion to "kingdom of power." For the latter category no more than two passages can be listed, both of them in the Book of Revelation. Rev. 11:15: "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ"; and Rev. 12:10: "Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ." Yet even these passages manifestly deal primarily, if not exclusively, with the success of the divine rule of Grace which at last overcomes all resistance.

Even in the Old Testament, wherein one might more reasonably expect to find passages in which God's kingdom of power is called His "kingdom," we search in vain for express statements of this sort. It is Daniel who writes most frequently of the "kingdom of God" (2:44; 4:31; 6:26; 7:14, 27). But from among these references we immediately eliminate the statements of Nebuchadnezzar and of Darius (4:31; 6:26); for one will not want to assume that these men spoke in the Spirit of prophecy, and it would be difficult to demonstrate that they possessed more than a mere outward knowledge of God. So only Daniel 2:44 and 7:14, 27 need be considered here; but in these passages the prophet proclaims the rule of the Messiah, so that the accent on a rule over the world cannot simply be construed as denoting "kingdom of power." In the historical books, so far as I can determine, only 1 Chronicles 29:11 is relevant here: "Thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all." But who would not immediately see that David is of the Messiah-activity of God and expresses himself exactly as Paul does in Ephesians 1:21f? From the Psalter only Psalm 103:19 ("The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.") could with some appearance of justification be cited as proof-passage for the "kingdom of power"; and yet the entire Psalm so definitely treats of the ruling of God by the Gospel that the general world-rule of God, if it is meant at all, is referred to only as a subordinate basis of comfort for believers. Passages such as Psalm 22:28 ("The kingdom is the LORD's; and he is the governor among the nations."), Psalm 45:6 ("Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever: the scepter of thy kingdom is a right sceptre.") and Psalm 145:11-13 ("...speak of the glory of thy kingdom... the glorious majesty of thy kingdom.... Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom") refer so unmistakably to the Messianic "kingdom of grace" that it would be a very clumsy exegete who would find in them so much as a reference to the power-rule of God.

### **The Kingdom of God: Part II**

Thus we arrive at the proposition that the expression "kingdom of God," when employed by Scripture in its proper sense, appears exclusively as a designation for the gracious creating, working, ruling of God by means of the Gospel. What manner of persons, then, constitute the "kingdom" as subjects of the King—taking the term in its derived sense—is an issue not proximately relevant. Whatever God has done, still does, and will do to achieve His gracious purposes in men—that, according to Scripture, is "God's kingdom." Since God Himself with His excellent power is active in the Gospel, therefore all passages dealing with the power and activity of the Gospel speak specifically of the "kingdom of God," that is, of God's kingly activity, even when the expression itself is not employed. The same applies in the case of the Savior Jesus Christ; wherever mention is made of His redemptive work, there God is preaching His Gospel, and where the Gospel is preached, there is the kingdom of God.

The Holy Spirit Himself thus identifies these various things in the parallel passages Matthew 19:29, Mark 10:29, Luke 18:29 ("everyone that hath forsaken ... for my name's sake ... for my sake and the Gospel's ... for the kingdom of God's sake"). When therefore our Lord says to His disciples: "Unto

you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God” (Mark 4:11, Luke 8:10), this means on the one hand: You know the Gospel; but on the other hand also: You know the mysterious, marvelous manner in which God is active for men in their salvation. But since the Lord utters these words in connection with His instruction relative to His parables, we must assume that the stereotyped words of introduction to the several parables refer to the same thing. “So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground”; “Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? ...It is like a grain of mustard seed ...like leaven” (Mark 4:26, 30; Luke 13:19, etc.). It indicates that in the parables the active ruling of God through the Gospel is being delineated in one perspective or another, as it were: “This is the manner of God’s activity in the Gospel.”<sup>3</sup>

In completing our assembling of evidence we might call attention to the singular manner of speech employed by Luke on several occasions in saying that the kingdom of God is preached. The very expression is in itself instructive. Preaching the kingdom of a king cannot simply mean to lecture on the geographic location, the extent, the nature of the soil and the inhabitants of the kingdom, but to supply information concerning the ruling activities of the king. In all simplicity Luke says on one occasion: “He received” the people “and spake unto them of the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:11), and another time he writes more solemnly: “He sent them to preach (κηρύσσειν) the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:2). In both instances he stresses only the fact that such preaching concerned itself with the ruling of God. But the very circumstance that Jesus and His messengers associated their preaching with those concepts of the kingdom of God which were familiar to the Jews from the promises of the Old Testament, that is to say, with the Gospel in its Old Testament context, is evidence for the connection between kingdom of God and Gospel. To this we must add that Luke expressly defines the preachment concerning the kingdom of God as Gospel-preaching. Thus Luke 4:43: “I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent”; Luke 8:1: “preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God”; Luke 16:16: “The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached...”; Acts 8:12: “They believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ.”<sup>4</sup>

In these statements the correct significance is clearly indicated. The Gospel proclaims the gracious ruling of God in that He has redeemed sinful mankind by His Son and now brings men to faith through the message concerning Him. Thus the expression kingdom of God summarizes all that God does for the deliverance and blessedness of man. He who rightly preaches the Gospel proclaims this kingdom of God.

It is therefore also appropriate to say that the kingdom of God comes to men or departs from them. This too would be an utterly incomprehensible manner of speaking were God’s kingdom to denote essentially the persons who are subjects in a kingdom which is visualized as constituting God’s sphere of power. But if the kingdom of God is the term that designates God’s activity and ruling and if it consistently calls to mind primarily the activity of God by means of the Gospel, then such statements have a significant content. On the basis of Old Testament promise the Jewish people waited for the coming of the kingdom of God. From this promise they had of course derived a false gospel and trusted that God would restore the kingdom of Israel as a visible theocracy. And inasmuch as this hope was associated with the promised Messiah, he too was visualized as a temporal ruler who in the power of God, as a mighty hero, would bring about the external deliverance of the nation. But there were always a few who in genuine confidence of faith, though not always with adequate understanding, waited for the kingdom of God as for a spiritual redemption. Thus it is written of Joseph of Arimathea that he also waited for the kingdom of God (Mark 15:43); and the Evangelists seem intent upon indicating that his confidence had not been wholly shattered by Jesus’ death. In accord with that which we have already established, we make bold to say that what is stated of Simeon may also be affirmed of this Joseph: He waited “for the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25). The Pharisees and the people they were deceiving, as well as the handful of believers, immediately understood that Jesus was announcing the arrival of the

time in which God through the Messiah would accomplish the work that He had proclaimed since the day of the Fall. For them the coming of the kingdom of God meant: Now begins the gracious rule of God of which He had so long assured His people.

Jesus did not employ such expressions as referring primarily to Himself personally. He is not the kingdom of God; but it comes with Him; that is, through Him God achieves and creates the fulfillment of His promises. Included here is the thought that through the preaching of salvation the hearts are converted to God, which is exactly what He wills to bring about through the preaching of the Gospel. With the Gospel comes the kingdom of God, that is, wherever the Gospel reaches, God creates and works for the saving of souls that which He wishes to bring about. When Jesus sent the Seventy out to preach, He included among His instructions the following: "Heal the sick ... and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you" (Luke 10:9). But how could that be? Well, only and inevitably in the preaching of the Gospel which the disciples brought and through which God desired to create true faith in His saving health. Whoever rejects this preaching rejects the kingdom of God, isolates himself from the gracious operation of God. And when Gospel preaching departs from a given area, the kingdom of God has ceased there, that is, God no longer labors there with His saving grace. Jesus orders His messengers to say to those who despise their message: "Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you" (Luke 10:11). Since we know that God administers His kingdom by means of the Gospel, this remark of the Lord implies no less than that because of their stubborn contempt the Gospel, the effective preaching of grace, will be withdrawn from the Jews and carried to the Gentiles—the very truth that Paul and Barnabas announced to the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia: "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46).

What therefore does Jesus mean when He teaches us to pray: "Thy kingdom come"? We have long since recognized this Petition as a Mission prayer, and rightly so, for in accord with the intent of Jesus we are to clothe these words with the following thoughts: O God, grant that Thy gracious work through the Gospel continue among us and all people on earth. [Cf. also Luther]:

All this is nothing else than saying: Dear Father, we pray, give us first Thy Word, that the Gospel be preached properly throughout the world; and secondly, that it be received in faith, and work and live in us, so that through the Word and the power of the Holy Ghost Thy kingdom may prevail among us, and the kingdom of the devil be put down, that he may have no right or power over us, until at last it shall be utterly destroyed, and sin, death, and hell shall be exterminated, that we may live forever in perfect righteousness and blessedness.<sup>5</sup>

Again, what does it mean when Jesus says: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness" (Matt. 6:33)? Nothing other than this, certainly: Let it be your prime and principal concern to abide under the strong activity of the Gospel in which God deals with us according to the righteousness which Christ has purchased for us and labors creatively within you to the deliverance of your souls.

In the light provided by this understanding the other statement of Jesus, so often misunderstood and abused, comes into proper focus. Addressing a certain scribe, He said: "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34). These words have frequently been read as expressing the thought that in this man's heart a change had already taken place to the degree that, while not yet converted, he nevertheless had moved closer to conversion than others. From this the conclusion was promptly drawn that this is the normal course by which conversion is effected in a person, namely, that by and by, step by step, so to speak, he is brought nearer the kingdom of God until at last he enters it. This latter conclusion could with sufficient justice be disallowed merely by pointing out that it constitutes an unjustified generalization. We do not know what it was that Jesus in His omniscience saw

in the heart of this individual and can therefore not assert that it will consistently recur in others under similar circumstances. But Jesus did not, after all, say that the man had closely approached conversion; His statement was that he was near the kingdom of God! Illuminated by the clear passages which we have heretofore considered, this word of the Savior reveals a meaning that indeed makes it applicable generally in similar cases. How could it have benefited the man had Jesus with cold calculation offered this diagnosis: Thou hast indeed moved quite near the borders of the kingdom of God, but thou art not yet entirely within? But what the Lord actually did say to him, in words which the scribe must immediately have understood in the frame of reference provided by his Jewish concepts, was not concerned with the subjective attitude of his heart. Jesus saw that he had answered discreetly, that is, that he was not rejecting out of hand, in blind fanaticism, the things which did not fit his preconceived notions. Therefore the Lord spoke a winning word, an evangelical message: If only you would open your eyes and behold Me rightly, if only you would pay heed to My statements, you would realize that you are not far from the kingdom of God, but that in Me and in My Word it is confronting you at this moment. With an exquisitely fine understanding of his personality Jesus desired to alert this scribe to the fact that God had brought him face to face with the Savior in order to subject him to His gracious operation toward the man's salvation.

Because the gracious activity of God extends beyond the immediate present into the distant future, into eternity itself, it may under certain circumstances properly be said that even they who already stand in the faith are waiting, or ought to be waiting, for the kingdom of God. Passages of this nature, too, do not admit of the thought that the expression "kingdom of God" denotes the sphere of divine working; for this is, certainly, always and invariably the creature, whether in its totality or in its parts. But God's kingdom means the working and ruling of God! In this sense Jesus intended it when He says: "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt. 26:29); or, as Luke reproduces the words: "... I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.... I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come" (Luke 22:16-18). Herewith He does not contradict His earlier claim that the kingdom of God was already here. Rather, He thought of the imminent events whose arrival also belonged to the kingdom of God, inasmuch as it was through the determinate purpose and counsel of God that He was delivered into the hands of His enemies. The gracious ruling of God in behalf of mankind waxed in strength through the very labors and suffering which He was to undergo during the approaching hours. His emphasis, then, lay not upon the promise that He would at some time in the indefinite future once again eat bread and drink wine with His disciples, although from this too they might have derived a certain measure of comfort during the dark hours of the next several days. Rather, the Lord sought to arm them against the period of severe temptation with the thought that what they were about to experience was no quirk of cruel fate but was actually under the control of God's gracious rule. Of what import the Lord considered this very thought to be for His disciples is seen in the fact that, even before He allowed the disciples at Emmaus to recognize Him, He demonstrated to them from the Scriptures that Christ must suffer these things. Then they recognized God's kingdom, that is, the gracious ruling.

This understanding supplies the key for the remarkable word of Jesus: "Verily I say unto you, that there will be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power" (Mark 9:1). It is by no means necessary to deduce from this remark that Christ in His humiliation wrongly assumed that Judgment Day would dawn during the life-time of the specified persons. The grand revelation of God's Ruling at the Final Judgment is, after all, only a part of His kingdom, that is, of the ruling which had its inception at the exaltation of Jesus Christ in His session at the right hand of the Father. The import of the promise, then, is that some of His hearers—whether many or few, Jesus did not say—would live to see the beginning of the mighty power rule of the Exalted One. It is certain that at Pentecost Peter was expressing only the conviction that the

kingdom of God was come with power when he said: "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted ..., he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear" (Acts 2:33).

Pointing farther into the future, Jesus said: "When ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand" (Luke 21:31). The context clearly shows that He is speaking of His return to judgment. Upon this divine power-working which is to bring final deliverance from all evil to the children of God on earth, they also wait in all confident hope. That is the springtime toward which they look expectantly (v. 29f.), that portion of the kingly rule of God and of His Christ which they regarded as certified in the future through the promise. This same part of the power-rule of God St. Paul also denotes simply as the kingdom of Christ: "The Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:1). The kingdom of Christ, that is, not merely His right to rule, but the actual unfolding of His power, His working and ruling, will then become manifest before the eyes of all people. Finally, the Savior also notifies His disciples of the truth that this mighty ruling of God will not end with time, but shall actually endure as an eternal kingdom. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13:43); in other words, they shall throughout all eternity continue, as here on earth, under the same fatherly-divine ruling. Herein, and only herein, lies the assurance of ceaseless, eternal blessedness, that it is perpetually wrought in them by God Himself. As the sun obtains every ray it emits through God's power-working alone, so also will the brilliant glory of the just made perfect be continuously supplied them, created and wrought in them by God.

It goes without saying that in these passages as well we have the fundamental premise that God in this working is motivated by His grace, so that here also the proclamation concerning the kingdom on the one hand and of the Gospel on the other are identical concepts. Now therein we find the key for those other passages in which the preachment of the Gospel is defined as a ministry of the kingdom of God. Matthew 13:52 belongs to this group: "Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old." Jesus was acquainted with scribes who were not "instructed unto the kingdom of heaven," no matter how well versed they were in Scripture and how expertly they knew their way about in contemporary dogmatics. They did not perceive the kingdom of God, the rule of God in the Gospel. Only he is a true scribe who knows the Gospel as power of God through which exclusively God creates and works the salvation of men. Such an one—and the context proves this to be the sense in which the Lord spoke—can then, as a result of this knowledge, relate his traditional, natural knowledge of nature and human life to the new idea of the Gospel and is able to find parallels and to devise parables; in brief, he is able to make profitable use not only of the Gospel itself but, by virtue of his understanding of the ruling of God, also of all his knowledge of natural phenomena. The point of comparison, then, is not the faithfulness of such a householder in making provision for his family, but rather his ability to provide in conformity with the will of God. Thus the proper application we are to make of this to those who are called as servants of the Word is obvious. They are stewards of God in a sphere of activity determined by their vocation; they achieve all genuine success only by means of the Gospel, through which God exercises His rule as King; as colaborers with God, therefore, (συνεργοί, 1 Cor. 3:9), they actually participate in His kingdom, in His gracious ruling among the children of men. In this sense undoubtedly Paul also intended the word of praise which he accords his associates: "These only are my fellow workers unto the kingdom of God" (Col. 4:11).

We may, moreover, here refer to the word of Christ: "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). The entire manner of the Lord's speaking at this point indicates without question that in this instance the issue is not that following of Jesus which comes of the Spirit and of faith. In that matter no person is more fit or "well disposed" than another. The man to whom Jesus thus spoke had offered a physical discipleship; he desired to accompany the Lord as disciple and considered himself properly prepared for any service which such a

following-after might entail. But from the request of the man for permission to arrange a farewell dinner in his home before assuming his discipleship, it was manifest to the Lord that the state of his heart was not yet correct. He lacked the proper singleness of mind which knows but one aim and one objective in serving the Lord. Whoever wishes to assume a share of the work in the kingdom of God, in the activity of God for the saving of sinners—that is to say, he who desires to be a servant of the Gospel in that specialized sense current among us—must not allow himself to be influenced by all sorts of secondary interests. Collaboration in the kingdom of God in this sense demands the entire man with all his thoughts and energies. If anyone is not prepared so to dedicate himself to it, we would indeed not be justified in questioning out of hand the genuineness of his heart's attitude toward Jesus; but we would judge that he lacks the intensity of conviction which alone could qualify him for participation in the kingdom of God, that is, in the direct, vocational Gospel work.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> These introductory words, by way of a footnote, served as a preface to the first installment, which appeared in issue 1:4 (Oct. 1961), pages 13-26. Part 2 appeared in issue 1:5 (Dec. 1961), pages 11-21. As noted on page 10 earlier, the translator was Egbert Schaller. In this issue the two parts published in Volume 1 have been combined, with original footnotes converted to one set of endnotes covering both parts.

<sup>2</sup> For our present purpose it is not necessary to analyze the distinction between kingdom of God and kingdom of Christ; these are two designations for the same concept defined as seen in varying perspective, as is manifest from Ephesians 5:5 [“... in the kingdom of Christ and of God”] where Paul uses them as synonyms.

<sup>3</sup> The concepts “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven” are indeed not wholly synonymous; but for the present investigation there is no need of elaborating upon the marks of distinction. In their bearing upon the issues that concern us here, the two concepts are indeed identical. The “kingdom of heaven,” too, as it occurs in Scripture (it is a favorite term of Matthew) is never visualized as consisting in a group of people, and therefore does not in its primary sense mean the Church. The kingdom of heaven also, and indeed in a pronounced manner, is concerned only with the Gospel as an active means in the hand of God.

<sup>4</sup> Generally speaking, in the English translations the revised versions have reproduced the sense more explicitly [i.e., in recognizing the verb forms of εὐαγγελίζεσθαι that are used] than the Authorized Version [King James Version]. Luke 8:1: A.V.: “shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God”; R.V.: “bringing” for “shewing”; Luke 16:16: A.V.: “preach the kingdom of God”; R.V.: “the gospel of the kingdom of God”; Acts 8:12: A.V.: “preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God”; R.V.: “good tidings concerning the kingdom of God”; Luke 4:43: A.V.: “preach the kingdom of God”; R.V.: “the good tidings of the kingdom of God.”

<sup>5</sup> Luther in his Large Catechism [cited from *Triglot* 713, ¶17, *emph. added*]. Read the entire context. *Triglotta* pages 711ff. [713ff.].

(To be continued)

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### Book Reviews



## Going Back to the Ancients

The book reviews in this issue have a common thread, which is, for the most part, what the ancient church fathers have written as their interpretation or commentary on various Scriptures. It is in this light, then, that the reviewer, David Lau, has given the five reviews below a theme—Going Back to the Ancients—which should not be taken as the title of an actual book.

**Robert L. Wilken, Editor: *The Church's Bible—Isaiah—Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007, hard cover, 590 pages.**

**Mark W. Elliott, Editor: *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture—Old Testament XI—Isaiah 40-66*, Inter-Varsity Press, 2007, hard cover, 349 pages.**

Martin Luther and the Lutheran confessional fathers of the 16th and 17th centuries were much more familiar than we are today with the writings of the early church fathers, such as Augustine, Athanasius, Jerome, Chrysostom, and many others. They were studied in their schools and made many quotations from their ancient books. In fact, it is very possible that a second-generation theologian like Martin Chemnitz, one of the authors of the Formula of Concord, quoted the fathers more frequently than he quoted Luther or Melancthon.

Even though the works of the ancient fathers are readily available in English translation today, our pastors probably do not spend much time reading these works. It seems we would much rather turn to Luther and the Lutheran Confessions or to more modern commentators on Scripture for help in understanding the Bible. In most cases that is a wise decision on our part, for the fathers did not always understand the differences between Law and Gospel, and their words might just as often mislead as enlighten us.

Nevertheless, in recent years there has been an effort to recover and make available to modern readers the voluminous writings of the church fathers, particularly their commentaries on the Bible text. No doubt, a main reason for this effort is the fact that so many modern commentators on the biblical text do not respect the text as God's Word. Thus the recovery of the church fathers is intended to help in the recovery of respect for the divine authority of the Bible, and we can applaud to an extent these efforts for that reason. The comments by the church fathers may not be superior to the comments of Luther and other orthodox Lutheran fathers, but they certainly are superior to the remarks of many Bible scholars today who interpret the Bible in a way that is contrary to its plain meaning. And even if they happen to explain it correctly, they nonetheless do not accept it as the Word of God.

We note two massive projects being undertaken at this time. One is under the general direction of Thomas Oden as a series entitled *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*. Fourteen large volumes on Old Testament books and fourteen large volumes on New Testament books have been published, some of them already in a second edition. Four of the volumes have been edited by Lutheran scholars of the Missouri Synod: William Weinrich on *Revelation*, Arthur A. Just, Jr., on *Luke*, Quentin Wesselschmidt on *Psalms 51-150*, and Dean Wenthe on *Jeremiah, Lamentations*.

The other large project, *The Church's Bible*, has just begun to take shape. At the time this review was written, only three volumes in the series were available: *The Song of Songs, Isaiah*, and *First Corinthians*. Robert Wilken is named as both translator, along with two others, and the general editor.

For purposes of comparison we can look at how the two series treat Isaiah 53, the chapter that describes the suffering Servant of Israel, our Lord Jesus Christ. The comments on Isaiah 53 in the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* take up a little over sixteen pages of text. The Revised Standard

Version of Isaiah 53 is printed in full. After an overview summarizing the views of the commentators, short paragraphs of comments from various fathers are printed. The comments on Isaiah 53 come from Augustine, Jerome, Tertullian, Rufinus of Aquileia, Caesarius of Arles, Ishodad of Merv, Origen, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Gregory of Nazianzus, Isaac of Nineveh, Cyril of Alexandria, Athanasius, Gregory Thaumaturgus, Eusebius of Caesarea, Theodoret of Cyr, Gregory the Great, Theodore of Heraclea, Melito of Sardis, Leo the Great, Alexander of Alexandria, Marius Victorinus, Cyril of Jerusalem, Hippolytus, Procopius of Gaza, Ephrem the Syrian, and a writing called *The Apostolic Constitutions*. Augustine leads the way with twelve individual paragraphs on various verses in the chapter.

The comments on Isaiah 53 in *The Church's Bible* take up eight pages of text. The English translation of Isaiah 53 is printed out in full; the translation used is *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, the Greek version of the Old Testament that was most available to the church fathers. A short paragraph introduces the comments of the church fathers about this chapter. The New Testament references to Isaiah 53 are printed as the earliest commentary on the Old Testament text. Then come the comments of the early fathers. *The Church's Bible* tends to present longer sections of the comments from the fathers, whereas the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* has chosen to give shorter snippets. *The Church's Bible* quotes the following: Cyril of Alexandria (six pages), Eusebius of Caesarea (less than a page), Augustine of Hippo (about four pages), *The Apostolic Constitutions*, Theodoret of Cyrus, no doubt, the same as above (one short sentence), Irenaeus of Lyons (a short paragraph), Origen of Alexandria (one page), Gregory the Great (a short paragraph), Basil of Caesarea (half a page), Gregory of Nyssa (two paragraphs), and John of Damascus (one paragraph).

Whether we read one or the other of these collections of ancient comments on Isaiah 53, it is clear that Jesus Christ and His suffering on the cross is being described. On Isaiah 53:12 (“He was numbered with the transgressors”) Augustine wrote: “Three men were crucified in the same place, the Lord in the middle, because ‘He was reckoned among the wicked.’ They placed the two robbers on either side, but they were not crucified for the same reason. They were flanking Christ as He hung there, but they were far removed from him in reality. They were crucified by their crimes, he by ours” (*Ancient Christian Commentary—Isaiah 40-66*, p. 172). Cyril of Alexandria likewise found Christ and His suffering in Isaiah 53, saying at one place: “But this **discipline** (53:5)—which ought to have been placed upon those who had sinned, that is, the enemies of God, in order that they might be reconciled with Him—came upon Christ instead.... We have gone astray, turning away from the living God and following after our own desires. But the Lord of all things, that is, God the Father, **gave Him over to our sins**, in order that He might deliver us from judgment and save those who have faith” (*The Church's Bible—Isaiah*, p. 419, *emph. orig.*).

If one were preaching a sermon on any section of Isaiah 53 and wanted to obtain the comments of various fathers on a particular text, it would involve a long and laborious search to find translations of all the ancient books where these comments are made. For that reason, then, it is handy to have a representative selection of such comments available on the text in question, all gathered together in one place. Because there is so much material available, there may not be much duplication of content to be found in the two series. But I suspect that most of our pastors would not feel inclined to buy even one of the sets of these ancient commentaries. Nevertheless, it is good to know that both sets will soon be available. Maybe a few of us at least will be inclined to get more acquainted with Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria, and all the rest, and will therefore want to purchase at least one of these sets.

We do not want to leave this topic without commenting on one of the reasons for this new interest in the ancient fathers. At least some of the promoters and publishers of the two series believe that Christians of various denominations and traditions may find common ground in the writings and beliefs of the earliest fathers. In other words, the idea seems to be that we can get rid of our doctrinal differences and overemphasis on certain doctrines by delving into the past and agreeing on the

consensus of the fathers. Back in the days of Lutheran orthodoxy at least one leader held this view. George Calixtus (1586-1656) maintained the idea that if we could just accept the Apostles' Creed and be satisfied with the views and teachings of the Christians of the first five centuries, we could all get together as one united band of Christians instead of being divided into so many branches and sub-branches. The fact is, however, that even if there was general agreement on basic Christian teaching in the first centuries, there was considerable error also—not just in so-called minor matters of doctrine, but also and especially in the central teaching of universal justification and justification by faith. The evidence for this early falling away into error was gathered by Theodore Dierks in a 1938 dissertation and book called *Reconciliation and Justification*.

A similar critique can be found in the *Lutheran Spokesman* issue of October, 1960, on pages 6-8. There Prof. Egbert Schaller stated that George Calixtus “must be accounted the father of Pan-Lutheranism and the guiding spirit of all unionists.... He was dedicated to the proposition that the Apostles' Creed contains a complete doctrinal guide of truth for all time and expresses the fundamental teachings of the Scriptures, so that really nothing more needs to be added. Therefore all churches which confess the Apostles' Creed are basically one church and ought to recognize one another without further debate or contention about doctrine” (“Profiles in Church History,” *Lutheran Spokesman*, 3:5, p. 6).

How thankful we can be that Calixtus was opposed by such staunch confessors of the truth as Johann Dannhauer and Abraham Calov. Dannhauer rightly said that if Calixtus were right in his views, we would have to stop praising Luther and apologize for the Reformation. One can likewise find in the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* of December, 2007 an article by Timothy Schmeling that presents the controversy between Calixtus and Calov and outlines the document Calov drew up to fend off the views of Calixtus. Calov rightly understood that every false teaching, as small as it might seem to be, is dangerous and a threat to the pure Gospel. Sad to say, it seems that most Lutherans of our time are on the side of Calixtus rather than Calov or Dannhauer. Unionism is the order of the day— not only unionism between Lutherans of various stripes, but unionism involving Lutherans with Reformed, Lutherans with Roman Catholics, and in some cases even unionism involving Lutherans with non-Christians.

**Ambrosiaster: *Ancient Christian Texts—Commentaries on Romans and 1-2 Corinthians*, translated and edited by Gerald L. Bray, InterVarsity Press Academic, 2009, hardcover, 270 pages.**

Having completed the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, Thomas Oden and Gerald Bray have begun editing another series entitled *Ancient Christian Texts*. Fifteen volumes are projected in this series, including commentaries by Jerome, Eusebius of Caesarea, Cyril of Alexandria, John of Damascus, and Origen. William Weinrich of the Missouri Synod is named as the editor of two ancient commentaries on Revelation. In the General Introduction to the first volume in the series, Oden and Bray indicate their intention to present “the full text of ancient Christian commentaries on Scripture that have remained so unnoticed that they have not yet been translated into English” (*Commentaries on Romans and 1-2 Corinthians*, p. vii).

The first published book in this series is a set of commentaries on Romans, 1 Corinthians, and 2 Corinthians. The author is given as Ambrosiaster, but there is no evidence that such a person ever lived. The fact remains that no one knows who wrote the commentaries which bear that name. For a long time it was thought that the author was Ambrose of Milan. Augustine of Hippo thought that the author was someone named Hilary, perhaps the well-known Hilary of Poitiers. Not knowing who the true author was, Benedictine editors in the seventeenth century created an imaginary author and gave him the name Ambrosiaster. The evidence indicates that the commentaries were written in Latin in the late

fourth century. The biblical text that was used was a Latin version that predated Jerome's famous Vulgate.

On Romans 3:24 Ambrosiaster's comment seems to indicate a sound understanding of justification by faith, as the commentary states: "They are justified freely, because they have not done anything nor given anything in return, but by faith alone they have been made holy by the gift of God" (p. 29). But then we read the comment on Romans 3:28 and wonder whether the writer really grasped the concept. For there he states: "Paul says that a Gentile can be sure that he is justified by faith without doing the works of the law, in other words, without circumcision or new moons or the veneration of the sabbath" (p. 30). Apparently he understood by "law" not the moral law, but only the ceremonial laws given to the Jews. Clearly the writer of this commentary also did not understand universal justification, for he wrote on Romans 5:18: "Some people think that because the condemnation was universal, the acquittal will also be universal. But this is not so, because not everyone believes" (p. 45).

Certainly, it is of interest to learn what Ambrosiaster has to say on passages that we find difficult to understand, such as the reference in 1 Corinthians 15:29 to a baptism for the dead. His comment on the practice was this: "It seems that people were baptized for the dead because they were afraid that someone who was not baptized would either not rise at all or else rise merely in order to be condemned. A living person would therefore be immersed on behalf of a dead one.... In citing this example, Paul is not showing approval of their behavior, but merely illustrating what a firm faith in the resurrection had led to in their case" (p. 196).

The English translation of these ancient commentary texts gives us essentially the same benefit that Martin Luther and our Lutheran fathers had, since they were much more able than we are to read these commentaries in the original Latin. For this we thank the editors and translators of these ancient writings.

**Gerald R. McDermott: *God's Rivals—Why Has God Allowed Different Religions?—Insights from the Bible and the Early Church*, InterVarsity Press Academic, 2007, paperback, 181 pages.**

**Thomas C. Oden: *The Good Works Reader* (Classic Christian Readers series), William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007, paperback, 360 pages.**

McDermott's book, *God's Rivals*, illustrates the danger of becoming too fond of the ancient Christian writers. On the relationship between Christianity and other religions we cannot depend on the writings of such ancient authors as Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, or even Irenaeus. For example, we certainly cannot agree with this statement from Justin Martyr: "Those who lived reasonably are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists; as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus, and men like them..." (qtd. on p. 94). When Ulrich Zwingli expressed similar ideas, Martin Luther vigorously disagreed, as indeed we must if we want to be faithful to our God. Justin Martyr proposed the untenable notion that such as Socrates would come into contact with Jesus Christ through His descent into hell, which was allegedly to give another chance to those who had no opportunity to hear the Gospel in their lifetimes. Clement of Alexandria likewise proposed that "Jesus and even the apostles went to Hades (he intimates that there are different degrees of retributions, and thus presumably this is different from hell, where the most serious offenders would be punished) to preach the gospel to those who never had the opportunity to hear it on earth" (*God's Rivals*, p. 124).

One of the issues currently being debated among Lutherans and others is whether Muslims and Jews worship the same God as Christians. McDermott writes: "Many of the religions, Clement would say, worship the same God whom Christians worship. For there is indeed only one God" (p. 129). Origen went even further, maintaining that "God fills with the Holy Spirit and sanctifies only those who deserve it" (p. 146). "No one is polluted essentially (all were created good, and still have enough goodness in them to be free)" (p. 147). In other words, salvation becomes a matter of a person's rightly using his free will to make good choices. One can see what has happened to the true Gospel of salvation by grace in Origen's

system. Finally, Origen proposed that “God is leading every soul to eventual salvation” (p. 149), thus becoming, it would seem, the father of universalism, which is one of the favored false teachings of our time.

What many of the early fathers failed to understand was the distinction between Law and Gospel. They failed to realize that the similarities between Christianity and the other religions were only in the sphere of the Law. Because God’s Law is written in the hearts of all, false religions have demonstrated some understanding of the concept of Law, of right and wrong, and can therefore propose appealing codes of morality. But the true Gospel of Jesus Christ and salvation by faith in Him alone are totally unknown in non-Christian religions. Therefore any God that is not one and the same God with Jesus Christ is not the true God. Since Muslims and Jews reject Jesus Christ, they do not have the true God. Jesus said as much to the unbelieving Jews of His day: “All should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him” (John 5:23). Cf. also 1 John 2:23.

It seems that McDermott has in some respects been deceived in his own thinking by the false thinking of the fathers. For he says in a summarizing chapter “that the world is a happier place than it would be without these [non-Christian] religions” (p. 166). He also states: “If believers in other religions are saved, it is only by the work of Christ in His perfect life and death” (p. 168). This seems to mean that Christ will save or has saved those of other religions without their believing in Him. Well, how does this idea agree with Jesus’ declaration in Mark 16:15-16: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned”?

Thomas Oden’s book, *The Good Works Reader*, is a companion to an earlier work, *The Justification Reader*. In both volumes Oden gathers together quotations from the fathers to present what he considers the basics of Christianity. He says in his introduction: “My purpose is simple: to set forth nothing more or less than *the classic Christian teaching of good works* grounded in salvation by grace through faith. I will focus on those texts on which there is substantial agreement between traditions of east and west— Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox—with regard to both their importance and ecumenical authority” (p. 2).

*The Good Works Reader* is divided into seven parts: The Poor, Food and Hospitality, Reaching Out for the Outcast, The Imprisoned and the Persecuted, The Least of These, Philanthropy, and Deeds Not Words. Many different writers are quoted. The ones mentioned in the introduction include those known as the eight great doctors of the church: Athanasius, Basil, Gregory Nazianzus, and Chrysostom in the East, and Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and Gregory the Great in the West. Besides these eight the others mentioned in the introduction are Cyprian of Carthage, Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrosiaster, Cyril of Alexandria, Leo, and John of Damascus. No doubt, there is much we can learn from these ancient writers in dealing with social problems in our own time, which are not significantly different from those in the past.

Among the conclusions that Oden presents at the end of the volume we note these: “1. The ancient Christian writers showed sustained, compassionate interest in the poor, the sufferer, the lowly, the sick, the prisoner, and the disabled.... 2. The earliest and most consensual authoritative sources enjoy a substantial agreement on what the scriptures teach about good works.... 6. ... The classic exegetes provide the basis for cooperative ministries among Christians with very different ecclesiastical and liturgical memories. The proximate unity of orthodox, consensual moral teaching in the first five centuries may be the most reliable basis for overcoming the antipathies of the last five centuries” (pp. 359-360).

The sixth point above seems to indicate that Thomas Oden may well be a modern George Calixtus, whose overall aims we cannot agree with. Nevertheless, there is much we can learn from the ancient writers concerning many aspects of Christian doctrine and life, as long as we keep in mind that

only the canonical Scriptures have the final word.

David Lau