



THE WAY OF LIFE

MAIN LINES OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

by

Josef Imberg

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BD, VDM, Church of Sweden

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FOREWORD

When this little book on the Christian faith is published I wish to thank the African Churches and Christians with whom I have spent so many happy years.

Further I wish to thank my fellow-workers of the Committee on Christian Literature who serve as Publishers of this book, and also Mrs. Patricia Sköld who has gone through my manuscript with regard to its linguistic form.

"THE WORD OF OUR GOD WILL STAND FOR EVER."
Isa 40:8.

Alvesta, SWEDEN, August 1987.

Josef Imberg

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I

What do we know about God?

Sometimes people ask questions like these: "Who am I after all?" "From where do I come?" To answer such questions we have to answer another question, which is much greater and much more important: WHO IS GOD?

Is it, then, possible to know anything about God, who He is, what He has done, and what He wants to do with us? We can answer this question with a definite yes, since *God has revealed Himself to us*. There are people who say that they have searched for God, but God was definitely first in searching for us. He has come to us by revealing Himself to us. "He is not far from each one of us."¹

There is a kind of revelation that is known to all peoples in the world. It is called *the general revelation*. By this is meant God's revelation in Creation, in the history of the peoples, and in the conscience. But God has also revealed Himself *in His Word* and *in Jesus Christ*. The latter two ways are called *the particular revelation*.

1. The general revelation.

This revelation starts with Creation. What we can see round us in this world gives evidence about God's greatness and power.² Nothing has begun its existence by itself.³ Only fools will be able to say: "There is no God."⁴

In other religions and philosophies we sometimes find thoughts about the creation of the world and "a Supreme Being". This thought, therefore, is not restricted to the Christian religion. But the similarities between such beliefs and the Christian faith are either very small or do not exist. If we look at the doctrine of

Creation as a whole, there is no religion or philosophical system that teaches what we find in the Christian religion, namely a creating God who is at the same time the saving God, a God who saves by becoming man, by suffering and dying for the sins of the world. And this salvation is performed by grace only, without any merit or worthiness on the part of those who become saved. Thus it is evident that the Christian teaching about Creation must always be understood in the light of the particular revelation.

Creation

Thus God has revealed Himself *in the creation*. But it has not been done in such a way that we can see God or His grace there. "No one has ever seen God."⁵ That means that He is inaccessible to our outward senses, because He is Spirit.⁶ But in the created world we can see His work, His hand and His footprints. When we look at the created world we can see where God has passed by. It is to see "God's back".⁷

When looking at the creation, God's work, we may marvel at different sides of it: the infinite greatness, the indescribable smallness, the conformity to strict laws, the unspeakable beauty, etc. Personally we differ in our views on these points. It also depends upon what we examine each time. But there are three sides of the creation that must stand out as most important. The first side is: God is the One who has existed from everlasting. He existed before anything else existed: "He is before all things."⁸ The second side is: Creation is not yet finished, since part of it is going on all the time. In such a way it is even now a revelation about God, about His existence, His power and His glory. The third side is: What is created lives, and moves, and exists only through God who keeps it and supports it: "In Him we live and move and have our being."⁹

But when we speak about these things we have to observe a certain danger. As we have already seen, creation and nature can reveal something about God by pointing to Him as "the fountain of life".¹⁰ But *creation and nature are not God*. If we think that God is the same as the vault of heaven, the beautiful flowers and trees, the mighty snowy mountains or the swelling waters of the sea, then we become guilty of that kind of false teaching that is called *pantheism* (which means that God is the universe, and the universe is God).

History

The doctrine of creation tells us that God has created not only the earth and the world, but also man and the peoples of the world. He is also continuing His creation work, since new men and new peoples are still being created. Because of this we can say that *there is a kind of revelation in history, i.e. in the life of the peoples*. As the Keeper of His creation God has allowed people to settle down and to live in different areas of the world. Even if they believe that they make all decisions by themselves, God governs everything, "having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation".¹¹

This can also be found along another line: there are some laws for all human existence. There are limits to suppression, crime and iniquity. These limits may not be seen for some time, but they become visible enough when God so decides. Even the strongest rulers may hear or learn this: "Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed."¹² These facts can be seen by almost everybody who studies the history of the world: Up to a certain point God may allow a bad development, but at last He puts a stop to it. It can also be seen how this is done: ". . . when the transgressors have reached their full measure".¹³

When we speak about "a revelation in history", we have to keep in mind that this revelation is part of the revelation in the created world. In the same way as God looks after created things and human beings He also leads the fates of the world. But we must also remember that we do not learn to know God or the way of salvation by examining the fates of the world. We may find that there is a God, although we do not yet know the Word of God. But when we get to know the Word of God, this Word will confirm what has already been revealed to us through creation and history. But only by studying the Word of God will it be possible for us to obtain a deeper knowledge of *how* God performs His ruling of the world.

Conscience

The third kind of general revelation is man's conscience. When God created the world, the individuals and the peoples, He also showed them that *there is a difference between right and wrong, between light and darkness*. The instrument that enables men to see this difference is called conscience. The word itself actually

means "knowing together". The owner of the conscience, i.e. man, has this knowledge together with God. Since man was created by God he has a means of knowledge, corresponding to God's knowledge. This applies to the Gentiles as well: Although they do not have the written law, they "do by nature what the law requires". Thus "they show that what the law requires is written on their hearts".¹⁴

In this way man is different from all other living beings: he has an instrument, which is capable of judging right and wrong, true and false. Because of being created in that way man can also be held responsible for his thoughts and deeds. This responsibility also becomes clear in God's wrath and judgment "against all ungodliness and wickedness of men . . . because God has shown it to them /in their consciences/".¹⁵

But conscience is not a very reliable judge on matters of right or wrong. The judgment of man has become darkened by the fall of mankind. Because of this the conscience has to be renewed and enlightened. This can be done only through a stronger source of light. As the moon can give light only by receiving light from the sun, so the conscience can be enlightened enough to give light only by receiving new light from the Word of God.

In other fields of knowledge, i.e. besides that of right and wrong, conscience cannot provide any knowledge or reveal any secrets about God. If man is to get any knowledge in those fields, it has to be obtained in other ways. Those other ways are called *the particular revelation*.

2. The particular revelation.

Even if we have seen something of God's majesty and work in the created world, in the history of mankind and in the testimony of conscience, this will not be sufficient for a true knowledge about God. Therefore we are not allowed to rely on our own ideas or thoughts about God. They cannot lead us to God. They can only help towards "seeking" and "feeling".¹⁶ Even a conscience, knowing the difference between right and wrong, is an unreliable guide. There is a definite limit to our knowledge about God, if the knowledge has come only through the created world and our

conscience. God Himself has drawn up this line of limitation by revealing Himself in a more clear way: He has overlooked the times of ignorance, "but now He commands all men everywhere to repent".¹⁷ Therefore the message is: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the Gospel."¹⁸ Since this Gospel has become known in the world, it is clear what the particular revelation consists of: The Word, or Holy Scripture, and Jesus Christ, Saviour and Lord.

This particular revelation is a *complete revelation*, because it gives us all the knowledge, guidance and help we need to become saved. This fact can be explained in this way: In the Word we get a more complete knowledge about God than the knowledge which is obtained through the Creation and the conscience. Through Jesus Christ, whom we meet in the Word, we get the full and true knowledge about God: "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known."¹⁹ But that is not all. The Son is also the only way to salvation, because He is "the way, and the truth, and the life".²⁰ "And there is salvation in no one else."²¹ For these reasons it is necessary to know that there is a particular revelation and that thereby a limit has been put to "the times of ignorance".²²

1 Acts 17:27	9 Acts 17:28	17 Acts 17:30
2 Ps 19:1-6	10 Ps 36:9	18 Mk 1:15
3 Heb 3:4	11 Acts 17:26-28	19 Jn 1:18
4 Ps 14:1	12 Job 38:11	20 Jn 14:6
5 Jn 1:18	13 Dan 8:23	21 Acts 4:12
6 Jn 4:24	14 Rom 2:14-15	22 Acts 17:30
7 Ex 33:23	15 Rom 1:18-19	
8 Col 1:17	16 Acts 17:27	

II

God has revealed Himself in His Word

We cannot know God or the way of salvation only by studying the greatness or beauty of creation. Nor can we do it by studying the history of the world or by listening to the voice of our conscience. It must be revealed to us who God is and what He has done for the salvation of man. This has been accomplished *in the words God has spoken to us*. We call these words **THE WORD OF GOD, THE BIBLE, or HOLY SCRIPTURE**.

The Bible tells us that it is the clearest revelation of God.¹ But this way of revelation does not exclude the other ways God has used, creation, history, and conscience. But on the other hand the three ways do not include Holy Scripture by pointing to it. From this it is evident that the clearest and most complete revelation about God is to be found in His Word. It is the key to all knowledge about God. What nature and our conscience tell us must be examined, understood and explained in the light of the Word.

1. The revelation in the Word stretches over a long time.

God revealed Himself to Adam and Eve before they had committed any sin. He wanted them to know something about Him and to know His will. He spoke to them.² This means that revelation came through the spoken word, the word of God. But later on, after the fall, men needed a special revelation, if they were not to be lost. And such a revelation was given to them in God's words.³ Before the sun set on the day of the fall, God spoke to the fallen people about their situation and about the way of salvation now open to them. The evil power that had caused their fall would be

crushed by "the Seed of the woman". This word points forward to Christ, who is that Seed.⁴

With regard to *the written Word* the first line is drawn at the time of Moses. He received from God written words in the shape of the commandments of the Law.⁵ He was also ordered to make a complete set of God's commandments.⁶ What the prophets wrote after that was a continued explanation of the law and of the promises, given by God.

There is a second line drawn at the time of Jesus Christ: "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."⁷ This confirms that the words, spoken by Moses and the prophets, were true. Jesus repeatedly states that God had spoken through Moses and the prophets.⁸ It is a key word in the New Testament that God "in many and various ways spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets", but this is also followed up by the corresponding statement that "in these last days He has spoken to us by a Son".⁹ Therefore it is often and strongly stated that the Church, the people of God, is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone".¹⁰

2. This revelation has a human side.

It is obvious that *God has used people* when giving us His Word. The human side also appears in such things that are created by men, e.g. paper and ink. Because of this human, outward side the Word of God is often considered to be a small thing, unimportant, something that can even be despised.

On this point we can compare the Word of God to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. From eternity He was the Son of God, but He entered this world and became man. This He did as a little child, who was wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger. In spite of this appearance in humility He was the Son of God. It is in a similar way with the Word of God. The word that comes to us in Holy Scripture truly is the Word of God. *It does not become the Word of God*, when people have examined it, tested it and approved of it. Instead *it is the Word of God right from the time it was spoken*. It was the Word of God, when it was spoken by the

prophets and by Christ, and also when it was written down by the prophets, the apostles and the evangelists.¹¹ But in spite of this it comes to us in an outward way, which is simple and lowly, just as the Lord Jesus Christ Himself came. It is the Word of God, although it has come in lowliness.

To understand and not to understand

There is a certain word, describing God's work in creation: "He spoke, and it came to be."¹² This expression can also be applied to the Word of God. It describes what happens every time God speaks: something happens. God's words, therefore, are not like the words of man: weak, often empty. Instead they are powerful and mighty. They accomplish great things.¹³

God used outward and visible means, when He wanted to speak to us. Generally the Word of God is expressed in clear words that we can understand.¹⁴ When the Bible says that "the Word became flesh",¹⁵ it speaks about Christ, but it can also be understood in such a way, that God's message became living and comprehensible to men, i.e. possible to understand in human languages and words. Thus ordinary languages and words are the instruments in God's hand to make Himself known to us.¹⁶

On the other hand there are some things in the Word of God which are difficult to understand, yes, even "unsearchable".¹⁷ These words we have to understand in the light of what is open and clear in the Word or, if that cannot be done, leave them to become disclosed in the eternal light, when we "shall understand fully".¹⁸

3. What the Bible contains is from God.

Although people have written all the words of the Bible, every word in it comes from God. He reveals Himself to us in His Word. How that is possible we do not understand in full. But the Bible itself testifies about this fact: "Men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."¹⁹ The definite guarantee of the truthfulness of Holy Scripture is given by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, e.g. when He says: "I and the Father are one."²⁰ "He who has seen me has seen the Father . . . The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does

His works."²¹ "Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth."²²

In this way Holy Scripture makes God known to us. This is done particularly by showing us who Christ is, the Son of God. But that is not the only work of the Word. The Word is also *a means of grace, that creates faith in us*. It was given for this purpose.²³ But when that work is accomplished by the Word, it is at the same time and in the same degree a work performed by the Holy Spirit.²⁴ When Jesus promised His disciples to send them His Holy Spirit, it was for this purpose: "When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth."²⁵

Human reason and the Word of God

Our reason cannot judge of the Word of God in a correct or true way. Reason is, of course, a good gift from God, but it has to be used in the proper way, such as it was meant by God. When we hear the Word, or read it, we must try to understand what was meant. If we fail to understand it the first time, we have to try again. That is what we ought to do, when people speak to us. Why should we behave less humbly before the Word of God? To receive His words in the proper way, that is a matter of humility, not of mastership. If our human reason is not satisfied to be a servant, but the master of the Word, it will undertake judging the Word of God, namely what it can approve of in Holy Scripture and what it wishes to reject. Such a reason is rejected by the Word itself. The apostle says: "We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ."²⁶

From this it will follow that the Church cannot bring forth other doctrines about God or about the way of salvation than those contained in Holy Scripture. This fact is also a matter for her confession: "We believe, teach, and confess that the sole rule and standard according to which all /beliefs/ together with teachers should be estimated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and of the New Testament alone." (FC)

Finally it must be very clear that no private "revelations", "visions" or "dreams", and no other thing whatever, can add anything to the Word of God or draw anything away from it. What is in the Word of God is necessary, clear, efficient and authoritative for all times and for all men. This is clearly stated in the Word itself.²⁷ If anybody wishes to add anything of his own to

the Word of God, then "he is puffed up with conceit, he knows nothing".²⁸

For the Church of Christ it is of the greatest importance how she stands and how she behaves with regard to the revelation received in the Word of God. It is likewise important what she does with the Word. The Word is her foundation and cornerstone.²⁹ It is her weapon for the fight she has been called to endure.³⁰ Without the sword of the Word she cannot prevail in that fight. But with the Word of God she can destroy the strongholds of the enemy of God, yes, not even "the powers of death" shall prevail against her.³¹

- | | | |
|-------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 1 Ps 19:7-14; | 9 Heb 1:1-2 | 22 Jn 17:6-19 |
| 119:105; | 10 Eph 2:20 | 23 Jn 20:31 |
| 2 Tim 3:14-15 | 11 1 Thess 2:13 | 24 Jn 6:63 |
| 2 Gen 1:28; | 12 Ps 33:9 | 25 Jn 16:13 |
| 2:16-17 | 13 Isa 55:11 | 26 2 Cor 10:5 |
| 3 Gen 3:15 | 14 1 Cor 14:9-11 | 27 Gal 1:6-9; |
| 4 Luk 1:26-33; | 15 Jn 1:14 | Rom 16:17-18 |
| Gal 4:4 | 16 1 Jn 1:1-3 | 28 1 Tim 6:3-5 |
| 5 Ex 24:12; 31:18 | 17 Rom 11:33-36 | 29 Eph 2:20 |
| 6 Deut 27:1-3 | 18 1 Cor 13:12 | 30 Eph 6:13-17; |
| 7 Jn 1:17 | 19 2 Pet 1:21 | Heb 4:12 |
| 8 Lk 24:25-27; | 20 Jn 10:30 | 31 Mt 16:18 |
| Jn 5:46-47 | 21 Jn 14:9-10 | |

III

God has made Himself known in Jesus Christ

1. The revelation in the Word and in Jesus Christ are closely related.

Within the holy Scriptures there is *a clear line dividing between then and now*. This dividing line was drawn up by the coming of Jesus Christ, His life and His work in this world. Because of this He is the central theme of the holy Scriptures. What they explain and convey concerns Him more than anything else. He has a position with regard to the Word that nobody else can claim, neither Moses or the prophets, nor the apostles or the evangelists. All these people are, of course, very important to the Bible and our faith, since they are the authors of the books of the Bible; but Jesus Christ is of a greater importance than all of them together. He is the Word. This means that the Word of God speaks about Him and deals with Him in all respects. Jesus Christ is the main reason for the existence of the Bible. When God spoke to the first people, He promised them the Messiah and the salvation through Him. This promise was fulfilled in such a way that *people could see the thought of God with their own eyes*: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father."¹

The clearest revelation of God has thus been given in Holy Scripture *and* in Jesus Christ, not in the one or the other of these two ways, but in both. If we make use of these ways we may understand who God is, what His mind is towards us, what He has done for us, and what He wants to do. This is the clearest revelation that exists about God; but these two ways must go together. We know Christ only through the Bible, not through visions or thoughts of our own. Christ wants to be known to us

through His witnesses in Holy Scripture. He has also promised that their words will have truth and power through His Holy Spirit. Through this Word His work will be accomplished.²

2. Both the Old and the New Testament deal with Christ.

When our Lord Jesus Christ appeared in this world, this happened in a certain people chosen for that purpose. The sending of the Saviour happened "in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy".³ The promises cover the time from the fall of man up to the time of the last book by a prophet.⁴ These promises are impossible to count. During the time they were given, the chosen people was prepared for the coming of the Saviour, the Messiah. During this time some people were expecting Him, some were not; but by His teaching and His guidance God wanted to find "a people prepared".⁵

The promises came gradually, i.e. step by step. The first promise was a general description that the Saviour would be "the Seed of the woman", and that He would crush the head of the Serpent.⁶ A later promise was given to Abraham that the Messiah would come forth from his family and that those who walked in Abraham's faith would bless themselves in the name of the offspring of Abraham.⁷ By the next step it is disclosed that the Messiah will come forward from the tribe of Judah.⁸ By another step it is disclosed that the Messiah will be a great leader like Moses but still greater.⁹ Finally, when the kingdom of David is at its height, God gives the promise about David's throne that it "shall be established for ever".¹⁰

The prophets of the Old Testament have indicated the main lines of the life of the Messiah. They have described Him as a prophet, high priest, and king. They have also told about His fore-runners, about His healing of the sick, and about those who would betray Him. They have written about His suffering and death, how He would rest in a rich man's tomb and how He would rise on the third day.

All this can be studied from another point of view: the fulfil-

ment. When we read what the gospels tell us about Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, we find how the promises were fulfilled. Christ came to the world at a time most suitable to the people and the situation in that part of the world. Still it was the time, decided upon by God for that very purpose: "When the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman."¹¹ "This was according to the eternal purpose which He has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord."¹²

3. What has Jesus Christ revealed about God?

What we learn in the New Testament is *not completely new*. In many parts it was already known in the Old Testament. But in Jesus it becomes clearer and much greater. He shows it, not in words only, but also in His own life and in His deeds. In the Old Testament many things were given in promises for the future; in the New Testament the corresponding gifts and deeds have become real and are given in full. Many things in the Old Testament were given by way of pictures. These pictures were like "shadows", "but the substance /the reality itself/ belongs to Christ".¹³

God is Truth

As an eternal and perfect being God is also Truth. One of His names, "I AM", means that He possesses all perfect qualities.¹⁴ This is also shown by the fact that He is the Truth. Therefore He is steadfast, also by keeping His promises to man and to the world. But this truth appears in all the words He has spoken to us, and in His Word generally: "The sum of thy word is truth; and every one of thy righteous ordinances endures for ever."¹⁵

What was spoken by God before the coming of Jesus Christ becomes clearer in Him and through Him. This can be shown with the word "truth" in the Greek language of the New Testament: *alétheia*. The word means: something that is not hidden, but on the contrary has become openly shown or revealed. This fact is confirmed by the description of the arrival of Jesus Christ: "The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world . . . grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."¹⁶

Jesus Christ has shown us what God is by Himself being the Truth of God. By learning to know Christ we can also know God.¹⁷ Now, since Jesus Christ is the Truth, He can also claim to be the True one in all respects: The Way, the Truth, and the Life.¹⁸ He is the true Vine, the true Shepherd, and the Door of the sheep. In Him is true salvation through His flesh and His blood.¹⁹ His Church is called to be "the pillar and bulwark of the truth",²⁰ because these things definitely belong together: belief in the truth, sanctification by the Spirit, and salvation.²¹

God is mighty

God alone has supreme power.²² The difference between God and man with regard to the power of creation is that God has that power by Himself, whereas with man that power is just a loan from God, although on a very small scale. Only God can command, and the commanded thing stands forth.²³

When our Lord Jesus appeared, He showed such a power that is never found with man. He performed things which only God Himself can do. Whether they are called "signs" or "miracles", there is one thing that must be considered to be the greatest: "the sign of the prophet Jonah",²⁴ which means Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Jesus had the power, not only to raise people from the dead, but also to rise from the dead. About this He says: "I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."²⁵ The rising from the dead is the greatest single deed after creation, it is also the strongest evidence of the divine power of Jesus Christ. It is also the strongest foundation of our hope of salvation.²⁶

God is righteous

To be righteous means two things: not to have broken any commandment, *and* to have fulfilled all the commandments of the law. Such a righteousness is not found in any man whosoever.²⁷ Because of this the world needed a real revelation and demonstration of righteousness, "until all is accomplished".²⁸ That is what happened when our Lord Jesus Christ appeared in this world, and this righteousness also works "that every man who has faith may be justified".²⁹

God is merciful and gracious

This means that He has *real love*; but with different words we

stress different sides of the one thing. People often think that they "deserve" mercy. It must be a mistake, because when mercy is shown it is directed towards people who do not deserve it. What is deserved can never be obtained by mercy.

Nobody in this world has ever shown love or mercy or grace as much as Jesus Christ did. He had mercy upon all sorts of people, simple, poor, and sick, yes, even dead people. The mercy of Jesus is real grace, because it is totally undeserved.³⁰

The grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ never excludes holiness on His side, not even on one point. By this He has shown in the clearest way *what God is*. However, with us all this is different. We show our qualities, sometimes more, sometimes less. Only God can show all His qualities fully and at the same time, and still make them all prevail. That is what Jesus Christ has done. Thereby He has made God known. Jesus Christ, therefore, is the clearest revelation of the holy, and righteous, and loving God.

- | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1 Jn 1:14; 1 Jn 1:1-4 | 12 Eph 3:11; 1:9-10 | 22 1 Chron |
| 2 Jn 16:13-15 | 13 Col 2:17 | 29:10-11 |
| 3 Rom 15:8-9 | 14 Ex 3:13-14 | 23 Ps 33:9 |
| 4 Mal 3:1-4 | 15 Ps 119:160; | 24 Mt 12:39 |
| 5 Lk 1:17 | Isa 45:19 | 25 Jn 10:17-18 |
| 6 Gen 3:15 | 16 Jn 1:9, 17 | 26 1 Cor 15:12-28 |
| 7 Gen 12:3; 17:1-7 | 17 Jn 14:9 | 27 Rom 3:10 |
| 8 Gen 49:10 | 18 Jn 14:6 | 28 Mt 5:18 |
| 9 Deut 18:18 | 19 Jn 6:55-58 | 29 Rom 10:4 |
| 10 2 Sam 7:12-16 | 20 1 Tim 3:15 | 30 Rom 11:6 |
| 11 Gal 4:4 | 21 1 Thess 2:13 | |

IV

God has revealed Himself as the tri-une God

1. God is one and yet tri-une.

In the Christian religion there are many things which make it different from other religions, e.g. the Word of God, the sacraments, Christ's death and resurrection, the reconciliation, the last judgment, and the eternal life. There is another important, decisive difference between the Christian religion and other religions, and this is found in the doctrine of the Trinity of God. This doctrine means that God is one and, at the same time, Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit. From time to time the Christian religion is criticized for teaching polytheism (i.e. a doctrine of several or many gods). Some religions claim, from that point of view, to be higher religions because of having only one god (monotheism). This criticism against Christianity, although it is often repeated, remains untrue, because *Christianity has always taught that there is only one God.*

Through the centuries the Church has been forced to fight for her doctrine and faith that *God is one*. This testimony was given already by the prophets in the Old Testament: "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God is one LORD."¹ In the New Testament this is self-evident. It only has to be repeated and confirmed now and then, e.g.: "We know that 'an idol has no real existence', and that 'there is no God but one'."² "You believe that God is one: you do well. Even the demons believe – and shudder."³

All this shows us one side of the matter. There is another side of it: Scripture, even the Old Testament, speaks about the one God as being Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit. God is one in three persons, and three persons in one Deity. This is the doctrine and belief of the Holy Trinity.

In the New Testament we find the clearest proof of such a doctrine in the institutional words of Baptism and in the apostolic blessing. When Jesus commanded His Church to baptize people, it was to be done "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit".⁴ Jesus does not say: ". . . in the name of Father, and in the name of the Son, etc.", as if they had different names. Instead there is only one name mentioned. The explanation is that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit do carry that high name which is reserved for God alone, "the name which is above every name".⁵

In his apostolic blessing⁶ St Paul gives another proof of the doctrine of Trinity. It is amazing how such a short formula of blessing can express so fully what the doctrines of salvation and Trinity mean: The love of the Father comprises everything, the creation, the keeping of the creation, and salvation; the grace of Christ is the firm foundation of our hope of salvation; the work of the Holy Spirit is performed in the Church and in our hearts to give us fellowship with the Father and with the Son.

2. The doctrine of Trinity is closely connected with the claims of Jesus Christ to be the Son of God.

There are clear words, spoken by Jesus Himself, on this point. He says that He was (i.e. existed) before the time of Abraham.⁷ He is without sin.⁸ The one who knows Him also knows His Father.⁹ The Son has life in the same way as the Father has life.¹⁰ He is authorized to perform the judgment of the world.¹¹ It is impossible to regard these things as of minor importance, since there are words that can show us the full truth about the Father and the Son: The Father and the Son are one.¹² The Father is in the Son, and the Son in the Father.¹³

Again this is one side of the Trinity: The honour and power and glory of the eternal God have appeared in Christ, the eternal Son of God. To find the other side of this doctrine we may first look at the outward life of Jesus, the carpenter and prophet from Nazareth in Galilee. This outward life shows us worldly poverty

and simple conditions all over. Since all this can be studied in the Gospels, this side of the matter is easily understood. But this side also raises the question: how can this plain human life be connected with the Trinity, or: how can this Jesus from a town in Galilee be the same as Christ, the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity? Generally speaking there is only one answer to these questions: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father."¹⁴

Two separated ways of speaking

In Holy Scripture we can observe an important circumstance in dealing with the Holy Trinity. The three persons of the Deity are clearly separated from each other, when the focus is on *the internal relations within the Deity*. Thus the Father bore the Son from eternity, and the Spirit is from eternity proceeding from the Father and from the Son. This is all within the one Deity. If, on the other hand, we look at *the work, extended towards mankind and the world* by the one God, then the three persons cannot be separated from each other in the same way. A few examples may clarify this point. It can be said about the Father that he has created the world, but the same can also be said about the Son¹⁵ and about the Holy Spirit. In the same way the three persons are connected with the salvation of the world, with faith, sanctification, etc. Omnipresence and omnipotence in the same way may be connected with the three persons in the Deity. The three persons can be addressed in prayer and adored. All this shows that the three divine persons cannot be divided with regard to the work directed towards the world. But *inside the Deity it is different*: We can say only about the Father that he has borne the Son.¹⁶ The Son, on the other hand, has not borne the Father or the Spirit. About the Spirit it can be said that he proceeds from the Father and from the Son,¹⁷ but it can never be said that the Father or the Son proceeds from the Spirit.

Holy Trinity and human reason

Our capabilities fail us if we want to understand these things in full. The Deity and what is in it are "unsearchable".¹⁸ This fact will stand out more, if we consider one particular point: It has always been a secret that nobody has ever managed to explain, why only the Son became man, not the Father, nor the Spirit.

Scripture only tells us that the eternal Son of God became man, that "the Word became flesh".¹⁹ Why it pleased God to accomplish the salvation exactly in that way we have never been told. We just have to bow before this unsearchable fact and this testimony from Holy Scripture.

3. The doctrine of Holy Trinity must be defended.

When Jesus Christ taught about His origin in heaven and His unity with the Father, many people protested strongly.²⁰ To them it was incredible, since they considered they knew Him from childhood. But Jesus did keep His claim: "I have not come of my own accord; He who sent me is true, and Him you do not know."²¹ It was because of this divine claim the Jews accused Him of blasphemy.²² This point was raised still more in the court case against Him.²³ When Pontius Pilate wanted to set Jesus free, the Jewish leaders protested: "We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God."²⁴ It cannot be shown more clearly how ordinary people look upon the claims by Jesus to be God. They say it is an absurdity: "It is absolutely impossible for a human being to be God at the same time."

It also happens that people who believe in Jesus Christ object to *His behaviour on some occasions*. They say: "If He was God indeed, why did He behave so mildly and leniently towards impudent people? Why did He not show His divine power in a clearer and stronger way?" There are several answers to that question. If He was to be, as for sure He was, the promised Lamb of God, who was to carry the sins of the whole world,²⁵ it was not appropriate for Him to make use of His divine power to remove the outward enemies from the hill of Golgotha,²⁶ nor to step down from the cross.²⁷ It would have been a false victory and triumph to do that. But the right triumph came at the right moment, at His resurrection. By this He was "designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness".²⁸

Since this doctrine about Holy Trinity is often contradicted, it stands like a barrier between faith and unbelief. There is such a

barrier between the things which human reason is willing to accept, and the things which a believing Christian accepts in great humility. What the reason does not accept it considers to be "a stumbling block" or "foolishness".²⁹ The human reason tries to understand God's plans and thoughts *from without*, although it can be done only *from inside*, in the light of Holy Scripture, in humility before God, and in faith. God's wisdom and knowledge have such a depth that they are unsearchable and inscrutable.³⁰

This part of the Christian faith is well expounded by Martin Luther in his Large Catechism: "Although the whole world with all diligence has endeavoured to ascertain what God is, what He has in mind and does, yet has she never been able to attain to any of these things. But here we have everything in richest measure; for here in all three articles He has Himself revealed and opened the deepest abyss of His paternal heart and of His pure unutterable love . . . In addition to giving and imputing to us everything in heaven and upon earth, He has given to us even His Son and the Holy Spirit, by whom to bring us to Himself. For we could never attain to the knowledge of the grace and favour of the Father except through the Lord Christ, who is a mirror of the paternal heart, outside of whom we see nothing but an angry and terrible Judge. But of Christ we could know nothing either, unless it had been revealed by the Holy Spirit."

1 Deut 6:4	11 Jn 5:22	21 Jn 7:28
2 1 Cor 8:4	12 Jn 10:30	22 Jn 10:33
3 Jas 2:19	13 Jn 17:21	23 Mt 26:62-66
4 Mt 28:18-20	14 Jn 1:14	24 Jn 19:7
5 Phil 2:9-11	15 Jn 1:3	25 Isa 53:4-12
6 2 Cor 13:14	16 Jn 5:26	26 Mt 26:53-54
7 Jn 8:56-58	17 Jn 15:26; 16:7	27 Mt 27:40
8 Jn 8:46	18 Rom 11:33-36	28 Rom 1:4
9 Jn 8:19	19 Jn 1:14; 1 Tim 2:3-6	29 1 Cor 1:20-25
10 Jn 5:26	20 Jn 8:57-59	30 Rom 11:33-36

V

Creation, providence and preservation

1. God has created everything.

God commanded, and things started to exist.¹ Before such words were spoken, nothing existed, not even an empty world, nothing besides God Himself. When creating the world He did not take anything from Himself, nor did He use any material. He created by the power of His word: "He spoke, and it came to be; He commanded, and it stood forth."² "From nothing", that is the meaning of the Christian words "create" and "creation" when they are used about God.

Creation is closely connected with God's position as God and as the origin of life generally. The doctrine of creation, therefore, very much concerns the majesty and glory of God. If it should ever happen that a human being said "Let there be"³ for the purpose of creating, that would mean making himself like God, and thus a sin against the majesty of God.⁴

2. Time and space in creation.

All thoughts about time and space belong to this world, the created world. Such expressions give sense, therefore, only when dealing with our existence in this world. Time and space did not exist before the creation of the world. Now it is in the same way with the end of all time, "the end of all things".⁵ When heaven and earth pass away, time and space will not exist as now.⁶ Eternity alone will then prevail.

When the Bible speaks about Creation it tells us how time and space were created and made provisions for the existence of the world and of man. It occurred when everything that exists outside

God had its beginning. It occurred "in the beginning".⁷ These words, three in the English language, are only one word in the Hebrew of the Bible. That single word is so rich in its contents, that if we had the full understanding of it, then all questions concerning Scripture, revelation, creation, and salvation would get their answer and everything be revealed to us. Only one proof of this may be needed: When S:t John commences his gospel about our Lord and Saviour, who is also the Creator of the world,⁸ he commences with the words "in the beginning".⁹

3. Faith in Creation and Salvation.

Faith in Creation and faith in Salvation are very much connected. Already at the time of creation God had a plan for the salvation of the world.¹⁰ He knew that the falling in sin would happen. Therefore His plan for the salvation was ready even before the world came into existence. This plan involved the sending of Him that is "the Word" and "the Son".¹¹ He would redeem the world and the fallen people after their fall.

The question of the six days of creation¹² has mostly been interpreted in four different ways. Some interpreters have found it somewhat embarrassing that God would need as much as six days to create the world. To honour God and to stress His power and glory they have chosen to teach that He performed the work of creation in the flash of a moment. But thereby they have not upheld the honour of the Word of God. They have abandoned the text of the Bible and denied what it says.

Other interpreters have moved in a different direction. In the word "day" they have found, as they say, "possibly a very long time", something covering ages or almost unlimited periods. When saying this some have even referred to a certain word in the Bible: "With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."¹³ But that word is wrongly used. The quoted words do not speak about the duration of the days of creation. They speak about the patience of God and about His disposition towards man. It is a way of saying that He is eternal and superior to space and time.

Again there are others who have interpreted "six days" as

extremely long periods, but for a different reason. They have wished to prepare the way for a doctrine of "evolution" within the doctrine of creation. But everybody who is tempted to think along such lines must consider what is at stake. The one who thinks that "the first and simplest thing" may have started to exist "of itself" or "by chance" is treading on dangerous ground: every thought of that kind includes, intentionally or not, a denial of God, of His power or even of His existence.

From a Christian point of view there remains only one possible way of interpretation, the fourth. That is the one that the Church has given at all times: the duration of creation must be understood according to the words. How long ago it happened we cannot figure out, since the authors of the Old Testament have not given us figures enough for the time after creation. As for the duration of creation itself we may state that if God had wished to create the world otherwise, in a longer or shorter time, He could have done so. But when He has revealed to us that it happened in six days we have to stick to that.

4. The doctrine of creation is connected with faith in many ways.

This is due to the position of man in creation. God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."¹⁴ Thereby man obtained a quality of life, different from that of the plants or the animals. No animal on earth can be said to have a conscience, nor has it been created to be like God. But about man it can be said that he is "the offspring of God".¹⁵ On this point, as on many others, creation and salvation go together, because when God entered the world of mankind in order to save it, it is said about Him that "He came to His own home".¹⁶

The doctrine of Creation can be accepted by faith only. In that respect there is no difference if we compare it with other doctrines. God's creation of the world is known to us only because God has revealed it to us in His Word. We may work it out in our brains, or have a feeling about it when looking upon the things of Nature, but we can know it for sure only through God's revelation in Scripture. That fact is accepted by faith in the same way as

other points or matters of Christian belief.¹⁷

Man is the only created being in the world that can take this position of faith towards God. Man's position is also remarkable from another point of view: the created world that saw man's fall will also provide him with time and opportunities to accept his rehabilitation. But when those opportunities are needed no longer, then heaven and earth may pass away.¹⁸ They are needed no longer, "for the former things have passed away".¹⁹

5. Providence and Preservation.

In one way the creation work is ended;²⁰ but in another sense creation work is going on all the time. This can be seen every day: the earth simmers with newly born life. To clarify this, we must observe a clear difference between creation "at the beginning" and creation in present days. The main point is that the continued creation does not occur "of nothing". Instead it occurs with the help of such means and instruments that were prepared before, in the first and original creation. When thinking about "creation" in this secondary sense we can mention how animals and human beings start to exist. Of course they are "born", which is a way of being created, but not "of nothing". God also keeps the world alive by "renewing the face of the ground": He gives to people such things that can be harvested or gathered together.²¹ But we should also remember how the air is renewed: the plants assist in keeping the air fresh for the benefit of animals and man. We can also remember how the rays of the sun work on trees and plants to produce the green according to God's promise.²² All this work performed in the created world may also be compared to the work of grace and salvation: "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth . . . It shall accomplish that which I purpose."²³

As it was in creation, so it is with its maintenance and preservation: God is "upholding the universe by His word of power".²⁴ But this work is performed in the same way as His sacraments: it is accomplished through some outward means. The highest and

most decisive factor is His Word, but yet He uses outward means. In the created world He calls upon one being to serve another. As plants and animals serve man, so members of the community serve each other. So man has been called to service, not to live in idleness or inactivity. But still, his work is only a tool in God's hands, because over all work and toil God alone rules.

When the normal order is broken in a wondrous way

Some things may happen that do not normally happen; sometimes they are even thought to be totally impossible in this world. It does not help if we just say they can't happen. There are some circumstances that may help us to postpone such doubts and judgments. It helps us to admit that sometimes we estimate and count wrongly. We must admit: "We were mistaken. We thought it could not happen, and yet it did." We have to allow for a certain failure on our side to know and understand. Furthermore God has spoken: "Is anything too hard for the LORD?"²⁵ "With God nothing will be impossible."²⁶ Therefore it is not for us to decide what is possible or impossible to God, or what can be true in the Word of God, when it speaks about signs or miracles. Anybody taking onto himself such a task wishes to make himself wiser than God.²⁷ The miracles serve as manifestations of God's glory.²⁸ In this way they reveal to man who God is, and also help in bringing about the salvation of man.²⁹

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|--------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 1 Gen 1:3, 6 | 11 Jn 1:3, 9, 14 | 21 Ps 104 |
| 2 Ps 33:9 | 12 Gen 1:3-31 | 22 Gen 1:30 |
| 3 Gen 1:3 | 13 2 Pet 3:8 | 23 Isa 55:10-11 |
| 4 Gen 3:5 | 14 Gen 1:26 | 24 Heb 1:2-3 |
| 5 1 Pet 4:7 | 15 Acts 17:28 | 25 Gen 18:14 |
| 6 Mt 24:35 | 16 Jn 1:11 | 26 Lk 1:37 |
| 7 Gen 1:1 | 17 Heb 11:3 | 27 Jer 8:9 |
| 8 Jn 1:3 | 18 Mt 24:35 | 28 Jn 2:11 |
| 9 Jn 1:1 | 19 Rev 21:4 | 29 Rom 15:18-19 |
| 10 Eph 1:3-10;
3:1-21 | 20 Gen 2:2 | |

VI

The angels and the fall

1. The angels and their creation.

Holy Scripture speaks about angels. Like man they were created "in the beginning". There is no particular day mentioned, on which they were created, but it must have happened on one of the six days, since before those days only God existed, and on the seventh day He rested from all his work.

The meaning of the word "angel" is messenger, i.e. somebody who is sent by God to perform some task, "sent forth to serve".¹ A prophet or another man of God is sometimes called an angel. Among others John the Baptist was called in that way in the Greek text.² Our Lord Jesus and his fore-runner are called angels by one prophet.³

In most cases the word "angel" indicates such a being that was created by God "in the beginning" but is different from man by being spiritual. It has no body, but unlike man it is a complete being even without a body. This difference between angel and man is very important. At a certain occasion it was stressed by Jesus Himself.⁴ – In those cases when Scripture tells us that angels have appeared in a bodily fashion, eaten and drunk with people etc., they have accepted that form of appearance for the special occasion.

When the angels are called "spirits" and God Himself is Spirit,⁵ they have one thing in common: they have no bodies. Otherwise there is a great difference: the difference that exists between the Creator and created beings.

2. The great fall.

When the first people had been created, they were like God: they had been created "in His image, after His likeness".⁶ It does not mean that they had all of God's qualities. E.g. they were not omnipresent or omnipotent. But they were still like God in righteousness and freedom from sin. They had the ability to keep God's commandments. Therefore it was unnecessary to fall and to sin. If they did, they would have to carry the full responsibility for that: they would die.⁷

From the beginning all angels were good, because everything created was good;⁸ but both angels and man were put to test. It means that they could choose between obedience and disobedience before God. And so the fall came, the great fall. It started by an angel falling, and other angels following him. There is a hint in Scripture that the cause of the first fall was pride and conceit.⁹ After this "war arose in heaven".¹⁰ After that time "the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour."¹¹ His wrath is directed first of all against God, but since he cannot do Him any harm he directs his assaults against man. He started with the first two¹² and has continued for ever after that.

The great fall is one of the most deciding factors in the history of man. It can only be compared with two other great occasions: the creation of the world and the work of salvation through Christ's suffering, death and resurrection. The account of the fall is a basic document in the Christian confession of faith. It contains both the explanation how it happened that man fell in sin, and what his situation is after the fall. Man tries to hide away from God, that he may not be seen by God. This is one of the most foolish things he can do.¹³ When he finds that he cannot hide from God he starts to give false excuses.¹⁴ In the last instance he accuses God as the one responsible for the fall, because he has created both man and the tempting force. The trustworthiness of the account of the Bible is strongly supported, if we study the present-day behaviour of people towards God and towards each other.

In many foreign religions different explanations are given to the existence of death. Only the Christian religion teaches that death has a definite connection with the fall of man.¹⁵ Death is not what

many people believe, "something natural". On the contrary it is unnatural, i.e. completely against the original nature man was given by God. Death came through the fall of one man and has been overcome by one man, Jesus Christ, our Lord.¹⁶

3. The position of man after the fall.

To describe this position Scripture uses a double explanation: sin depends on the devil, and it depends on man himself. This shows us two sides of the same matter. When the devil is doing his work in man's heart, good and evil will be mixed. Man will doubt what God has said and rather believe in the great Liar than in God.¹⁷ Sometimes man is not fully aware of what he is doing. He is confused. At other times he is fully aware of what he is doing. He knows that it is wrong, but will still do it. Thereby he is marked as a transgressor. Before other people we may seem to be good, and Jesus says that in some way we are.¹⁸ But strictly speaking, when everything is considered, we are evil in ourselves, from the bottom of our hearts.¹⁹

Original sin

In order to describe the position of man after the fall we often use the words "original sin". In these words both guilt and corruption are included. The sin is with us right from the beginning of our life. Therefore it cannot depend on actual sins only. It is due to something being carried forward from Adam in the same way as his mind.²⁰ The corruption means that all people after Adam are born with such a disposition that they are selfish, evil, turned away from God, and unable to do what is really good, particularly before God. The two words "guilt" and "corruption" therefore explain, by themselves and together, the position of fallen man.

But there are two other expressions in Scripture also describing the position after the fall: "the flesh"²¹ and "nature". When the word "flesh" is used in this connection it does not point to the body or the physical life as contrary to "the spirit" or "spiritual life". With man even the spirit is fallen and sinful. The words "flesh" and "fleshly" concern the fallen, unconverted man as a whole, body, soul, and spirit, together with his way of being and thinking. All people, therefore, are "fleshly" and need a new

mind by becoming born anew.²² By the expression "nature"²³ the same is meant as by "flesh". "Nature" in this connection means the fallen nature of man. That is what all people possess who are born after the time of Adam. They do need a different "nature", i. e. to "escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature".²⁴

Two ways of thinking and speaking

The doctrine about original sin does not say that man is unreasonable or useless in other ways. He still possesses many good gifts from the Creator. In other spheres of life man has a free will, but not with regard to righteousness and love for God. When the Church follows the Word of God and teaches that there is original sin, this does not include any denial of the great gifts in Creation. It only means that *she teaches fully about what happened in and after Creation*. It happens every day that people, who receive and administer great gifts from God, use them in a wrongful way and still think that they are wise and clever. But then they are fools, compared to God's wisdom.²⁵

The doctrine about the fall often raises three questions. The first question is: "Has God created the evil?", "Why did God create a world where the evil could appear?" Although all questions of this kind are beyond our wisdom and knowledge, there is a useful answer to them: If man had been absolutely tied to the good and to do the will of God, then he had not been free, rather a prisoner or a slave. A good creation must be connected with full freedom. This means, although it might sound incredible to us: freedom is part of a good creation, even the freedom to fall.

The second question: Why does God *allow* evil today? We cannot understand fully how God rules the world, but we can find that He allows the evil powers to exist and to work, but only to a certain point. However, through His great wisdom and power and according to His will, God is able to turn to good the evil committed by sinners.²⁶

The third question: Does God *collaborate* in what is evil? He never does. But He keeps and sustains *the life* even of evil people, e.g. by allowing them to breathe, and to walk about, and to stretch out their hands. "He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."²⁷ For what reason, then, does He not hinder the evil in men? He is

forbearing towards them, not wishing that they should perish but instead reach repentance.²⁸ But if the evil people use their time of grace for evil purposes, then they have to take the consequences.

4. The work of the good angels.

The good angels are blessed. The foremost sign of this is that they can always see the face of God.²⁹ Their work is to praise God continuously and to carry out His orders,³⁰ which they rejoice to do. Their will is in complete accordance with God's will. Their service aims at two things particularly: to promote God's Kingdom and His will, and to accomplish the salvation of man.

The good angels have a special task in connection with the children, and also such people that can be called "the little ones",³¹ "the least of these my brethren",³² and further all believers, not in the least when they are called to leave this world to enter the eternal world.³³ The good angels concern themselves with everything that serves the welfare and eternal salvation of man. Therefore they are ready to assist everybody in his particular need, all according to God's will.

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|----|-------------|----|----------------|----|---------------|
| 1 | Heb 1:13-14 | 12 | Gen 3:1-24 | 24 | 2 Pet 1:4 |
| 2 | Mk 1:1-4 | 13 | Ps 139:1-12 | 25 | 1 Cor 1:17-31 |
| 3 | Mal 3:1 | 14 | Gen 3:9-13 | 26 | Gen 50:20; |
| 4 | Lk 24:39 | 15 | Gen 2:17; 5:5 | | Rom 8:28 |
| 5 | Jn 4:24 | 16 | Rom 5:12; 6:23 | 27 | Mt 5:45 |
| 6 | Gen 1:26 | 17 | Jn 8:42-44 | 28 | 2 Pet 3:9 |
| 7 | Gen 2:15-17 | 18 | Mt 7:9-11 | 29 | Mt 18:10 |
| 8 | Gen 1:31 | 19 | Mt 15:10-20 | 30 | Ps 103:19-22 |
| 9 | 1 Tim 3:6 | 20 | Rom 5:18-19 | 31 | Mt 18:10 |
| 10 | Rev 12:7-9 | 21 | Col 2:18 | 32 | Mt 25:40, 45 |
| 11 | 1 Pet 5:8 | 22 | Jn 3:6-7 | 33 | Lk 16:22; |
| | | 23 | Eph 2:3 | | Mt 13:37-43 |

VII

Jesus Christ and our salvation

1. All people need a Saviour.

Sin consists in man being evil and in his heart being hostile to God.¹ The result of sin is death. This has affected all people. In this connection there are three kinds of death: spiritual, physical, and eternal death. The spiritual death consists in being alienated from God and thereby being His enemy. This kind of death can be avoided during a person's lifetime, but only by being raised again to life, through Baptism, faith, and justification and continuing in daily conversion and sanctification. The second kind of death is that of the body. It occurs when the unity between body and soul is broken. However, in the resurrection that unity will be restored. If the spiritual death is not cured in time, i.e. before the death of the body, it will change into eternal death. That kind of death will occur at the resurrection and judgment. The eternal death is an eternal departing from God.

This is the result of the great fall and the sin inherent in man: all people are in such a state that they need a Saviour.

2. The promises about a Saviour.

When our Saviour Jesus Christ appeared in this world, this was done as a fulfilment of the promises given by God. These promises cover the time from the day of the fall² up to the time of the last known prophet in the Old Testament, Malachi. The promises are almost innumerable. Jews, who were learned in the holy Scriptures, knew very well these promises and the circumstances indicated by them, and therefore it is not at all surprising that there was a general atmosphere of expectation at the time when

Jesus Christ appeared. As examples we may mention the behaviour of Simeon and Hannah in the temple³ and the reaction of the people towards John the Baptist.⁴

The predictions in the Old Testament about the Messiah also concerned His person. They clearly indicate that He is a true, real man. They also indicate that He is a member of the tribe of Judah and of the family of David, and a person who is in a certain way connected with the province of Galilee etc. Further they describe His suffering as a real, human suffering, although it surpasses the suffering of all human beings by its depth and importance.

The gospels tell us how these prophecies were fulfilled. The Lord Jesus, the promised Messiah, came into the world at a time that was the most suitable for the people and in the historical situation as a whole. It was the time set by God.⁵ All this "was according to the eternal purpose which He has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord".⁶

3. The different names of the Saviour explain who He is.

Among the names of our Saviour *Jesus* and *Christ* are those most commonly used. Very often they are also used together: JESUS CHRIST. The name Jesus is our Saviour's personal name.⁷ It was the everyday name of his childhood and youth.⁸ This name, "Jesus", means "The Lord saves" or "The Lord is salvation". It has a more common and a more particular meaning. According to the more common usage of the name other people could also be called "deliverers".⁹ But in the more particular usage of the word only God Himself can be called "Deliverer", i.e. "Saviour": "I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no Saviour."¹⁰

Every time the name "Jesus" is used about Jesus from Nazareth it is stressed that He is the promised Saviour. Already when the name was given to Him it was assured that "He will save His people from their sins".¹¹ It is also confirmed that there is a definite tie between His person and the Old Testament. This is also shown by the example of the first known holder of the name Jesus (in Hebrew "Jehoshua" or "Joshua"). In the same way as this Joshua led his people into the promised country of Canaan, so

the second Joshua leads His people into their promised country, the heavenly Canaan.¹²

The name "Christ" is not a personal name in the same way as "Jesus". "Christ" is a name indicating His official task or duty: to be the Messiah. He was not called "Christ" when He was a boy of Nazareth. He gave Himself that title when He entered His official service, and after that He was called "Christ" by those who knew Him as the Messiah. "Christ" means "The anointed one", i.e. anointed to be king. "Christ" and "Messiah" have the same meaning, "Christ" being the Greek word, and "Messiah" the Hebrew word. The double name, Jesus Christ, therefore means "Jesus, the King" or "Jesus, the Messiah".¹³

Jesus Christ has other names as well. Each name points to the fulfilment of certain prophecies or to a certain office, or to the rendering of a certain service. Here He can be compared to some office-bearers among men. The name of Jesus corresponds to reality because of His existence and the accomplishment of all that has been promised.

4. The Saviour is true God and true man.

Christ, the eternal Son of God, had to become true man, and also to live and die as a real man. This He had to do in order to be *the second Adam*. By his disobedience the first Adam had brought sin, guilt and death over all mankind.¹⁴ These things had to be put in order again by the second or last Adam. As all people were represented in the first Adam, they are represented in the second Adam, when He brought about the restoration. As a real and true man the Saviour must suffer and die for all people in order to pay their debt and reconcile them with God.¹⁵ Yet at the same time He would have to be God, because the righteousness of one single man would not be enough to counterbalance the unrighteousness of all mankind.

Scripture gives us many examples of the true humanity of Jesus Christ. He could be hungry and thirsty, grieved and angry. He slept in the boat when He was tired. He could weep when He felt deep sorrow. He staggered under the pressure of His cross. Scripture also describes Him with the words "body", "soul" and

"spirit", a description used for man only,¹⁶ not for God or angels. The same is said in other words also: "Of their race, /the patriarchs/ according to the flesh, is the Christ."¹⁷

5. Although Christ is true man, He is different from all other people.

When Christ became man, His human life was commenced through conception by the Holy Spirit. It was said already before His birth that it would be that way. It is also stated now and again in the New Testament that He is without sin.¹⁸ It is also shown that His own freedom from sin is the condition for His ability to help and save sinners. In the apostolic confession of faith it is said that we believe in Jesus Christ, "who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary". This is not, as some people say, "of minor importance". The prophecies about "the Seed of the woman"¹⁹ and about "a virgin" who "shall conceive and bear a son"²⁰ belong to the same firm foundation as the message that He will be born at Bethlehem.²¹

The Deity of Christ is manifested in His doing the same work as the Father.²² It is clearly stated which things, although possible for the Father to accomplish, are impossible for men. When the Bible tells us that Christ has done exactly the same deeds as the Father, it is a clear proof of His Deity. To such deeds belong the Creation and the Preservation of the world.²³ To these deeds also belongs the power of curing the sick and of raising the dead. The utmost proof of Christ's Deity, however, is His own resurrection from the dead. If He had not risen, His claims of being the eternal Son of God would have been false. Now His resurrection is the definite proof of His Deity and of the truth of the Christian belief.²⁴

Two pictures of Christ

Now, since Jesus Christ is true God and true man, Scripture depicts His life in this world by giving two pictures that are fitted together to make one. During His life in this world Jesus is poor and rich, weak and almighty, suffering and victorious, mortal and immortal. To our reason this sounds incredible, like something that does not fit together. However Scripture gives us the only possible explanation by speaking about *Christ's humiliation and*

His exaltation; but we have to remember that they both concern Christ's human nature, not His divine. The divine nature cannot be humiliated, since God cannot be humiliated with regard to His being or His qualities. He is always and unvariedly the same.²⁵ The divine and the human qualities in Christ are intermediate, i.e. there is a union between them, and still they are not mixed or changed.

The humiliation of Christ has a double purpose. First it has to make possible the salvation of the fallen mankind. This is done when the Son of God becomes man and in His life, His suffering and death represents all people before God. Secondly He has to become an example to all people in their fellowship and their service to each other.²⁶ This humiliation could be seen in the way Christ, although He was God, *quite willingly renounced the use of the divine power and glory that belonged to Him from eternity*. This renouncing or divesting was necessary, if He was to step in to represent us and be one of us, and if He was to be the one who was "under the law, to redeem those who were under the law".²⁷

The exaltation of Christ is the opposite of the humiliation. When Christ was exalted He resumed the full use of those divine powers which He had refrained from using during His humiliation. To the exaltation we count: the vivification (becoming alive), the descending to hell, the outward and visible resurrection, the ascension to heaven, and the sitting on the right hand of God. Jesus Christ is exalted to the power and glory of the Divine Majesty also with regard to His human nature. As such, divine and human in glory, He is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. As such He is the Lord of the Kingdom of Power, and of Grace, and of Glory. In that way He leads His Church, He watches over His people,²⁸ and He intercedes for them.²⁹

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|--------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| 1 Col 1:21 | 11 Mt 1:21 | 21 Mik 5:2 |
| 2 Gen 3:15 | 12 Heb 4:1–11 | 22 Jn 5:17 |
| 3 Lk 2:25–38 | 13 Mt 16:13–20; | 23 Col 1:15–17 |
| 4 Lk 3:15 | 26:63–64 | 24 Rom 1:3–4; |
| 5 Gal 4:4 | 14 Rom 5:12–21 | 1 Cor 15:14–20 |
| 6 Eph 3:11 | 15 1 Tim 2:5–6 | 25 Heb 1:7–12; |
| 7 Mt 1:21; Lk 1:31 | 16 Lk 23:46; 24:39 | 13:8 |
| 8 Lk 2:43; Jn 6:42 | 17 Rom 9:5 | 26 Phil 2:5–11 |
| 9 Judg 3:9, 15 | 18 Lk 1:35; Col 2:9 | 27 Gal 4:4–5 |
| 10 Isa 43:11 | 19 Gen 3:15 | 28 Eph 3:14–21 |
| | 20 Isa 7:14 (KJ) | 29 Rom 8:34 |

VIII

Jesus Christ – Prophet, High priest and King

There is only one salvation and this is accomplished through Jesus Christ; however it can be seen from different points of view. According to Scripture it can be divided into *three offices*: the prophetic, the priestly, and the kingly office.

A preparatory work was carried out during the time of the Old Testament. Some people had the task of teaching about salvation, sometimes also to depict it in their lives, even though they could give only a weak reflection of it. Christ is different from all of them, first by having all the three offices, secondly by discharging all His work and duties to perfection.

1. Jesus Christ – the Prophet.

To the office of a prophet belonged teaching, particularly about the will of God. Our Lord Jesus is the greatest of all prophets, both with regard to the depth and to the clarity of His teaching. To the office of a prophet it sometimes belonged to do "signs" or "miracles". But Jesus never did such in order to make impression upon people or to shock, nor for His own benefit or gain.¹ When doing miracles He aimed at helping people, both by giving them the outward, visible help and by showing them that He had been sent by His Father and was the promised Messiah. The signs as given by Jesus are never separated from the Word or from faith. A miracle is *a visible word from God*. It creates faith in the Word, but only in such a person that accepts the sign as given by God. Only the Spirit can work such faith in the Word and in the actions of God.

Christ has performed His prophetic office partly directly, partly indirectly. He performed it directly when staying among people as

Jesus of Nazareth, walking about in markets and streets, in the temple and in homes, teaching about God and His Kingdom.² During the short time between His resurrection and His ascension He was still performing this office in the direct way, "appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the Kingdom of God".³ After the ascension this was changed. Then He performed His prophetic office in the indirect way, i.e. through His servants as His instruments or tools. He had ordered it in advance to be that way.⁴ He had said: "He who hears you hears me."⁵ The first ones to be given such a commission were His apostles. After them others have followed who have been appointed to their office by the apostles, and after that by the followers of the apostles.⁶

2. Jesus Christ – the High priest.

Here is the right centre of the Christian faith. We teach and believe that God "did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all".⁷ This concerns the whole world and all people.⁸ This doctrine can be accepted only by faith.⁹ St Paul speaks about this doctrine when he says that he wishes "to know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified".¹⁰

The thought behind this is that God's justice and righteousness have been injured. The offending party has to bring a sacrifice for its cleansing and acquitting, something that corresponds to the guilt. In the Old Testament there is a rule prevailing that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins".¹¹ There were many different offerings. They had to be brought forth by the priests, among whom the High priest was the chief.¹² He had a double task, to bring forth the offerings, and to pray for his people. The offerings were a visible message to the people about God's grace and mercy. But they also reminded of Him who was to come, the Messiah.¹³ In that way the people of the Old Testament could accept God's promises by faith: "For by it the men of old received divine approval."¹⁴

The second task of the High priest was to pray for his people. This was done by the different high priests according to their gifts. But even if they were good and efficient they had to include themselves among the sinners, for whom they were sacrificing and

praying. And their work was not a final one: when one departed, his place was taken by a successor.

The highest High priest

From the New Testament we learn that something completely new has come through the great High priest, Jesus Christ. He succeeds and surpasses all those who have preceded and depicted Him. This is because He has brought forth a single offering that is valid for all people and all times.¹⁵ But this sacrifice is not separated from His person. The other high priests always offered something, but this one sacrificed Himself. His offering, i.e. His life, body and blood, could indeed atone people with God and take away all the sins of the world.¹⁶ As this offering was full and perfect, there is no need for it to be repeated.

When Christ suffered, it was because of the guilt of all mankind before God. As a representative of all men He suffered what they deserved to suffer because of their transgressions and sins. So God's wrath rested upon Him.¹⁷ Therefore the divine love withdrew from Him, giving Him no consolation. He was surrounded by darkness. He was abandoned in the way the prodigal mankind ought to be, because it had abandoned God. Jesus cried on the cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"¹⁸ It was really so: He was forsaken, i.e. abandoned by God, because God's wrath rested upon Him when He carried the burden of all sins of the world.

Jesus Christ is also called *Reconciler*. In the work of reconciliation there are two parts. The evil that has been done must be *atoned for*. This includes *the paying of the debt*. When that payment is accepted full reconciliation is effected. All this was promised and depicted in the Old Testament in many ways. The clearest one was the Day of Atonement.¹⁹ But that day came in its highest and clearest form on that day, when Jesus Christ, the greatest High priest, died.²⁰ "And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom; and the earth shook, and the rocks were split."²¹ This was the real Day of Atonement: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself."²²

Sometimes Jesus is called the *Redeemer*, i.e. the One who buys back prisoners to put them free. Here the emphasis is on the price, *the ransom paid*. Scripture clearly says what this price is. It is not perishable things, it is not silver or gold. It is "the precious

blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot".²³ That is what we confess in the Small Catechism: "Jesus Christ . . . has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won /delivered/ me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death."

3. Jesus Christ – the King.

As the eternal Son of God Christ is also *King*. But when He became man, His eternal power and glory were conveyed to the man Jesus. Therefore it can be said that the man Jesus, who was born at Bethlehem, grew up at Nazareth, died on the cross of Golgotha, and rose on the third day, will be a king "for ever", and that "of His kingdom there will be no end".²⁴ But when humiliated He refrained from using His power and glory.²⁵ On a few occasions it pleased Him to reveal it and as an example of this we can mention His transfiguration on the holy mountain²⁶ and His miracles. However, the full use of His power and glory was resumed at the time of His exaltation.²⁷

According to Scripture there are three different realms or kingdoms. They are very different, but they have one thing in common: Christ is their king. These realms are called the kingdom of Power, the kingdom of Grace, and the kingdom of Glory.

The kingdom of Power exists in this world, even outside the Christian church. It is not going to exist for ever. When the Gospel about Jesus Christ has been preached to all peoples, the present order will come to an end.²⁸ The kingdom of Power will then be needed no more. This kingdom does not correspond to any particular visible kingdom or country. It is a kingdom without border or frontiers. In it Christ rules over sun and wind, rain and waters. He keeps His hand over trees and flowers, animals and people. He rules through kings, governors, parliaments and officials. Nothing is too big, nor is anything too small to be created, directed, kept or stopped by the hand of Power. We do not know anybody else who has "all authority in heaven and on earth",²⁹ and therefore Christ is called "Lord of lords and King of kings".³⁰

For *the kingdom of Grace* other rules prevail than in worldly

kingdoms. Christ rules over this kingdom and directs its members by means of His Word and His Spirit. To remain there as members Christians have to live in the Word and be guided and taught by it: "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples."³¹

The kingdom of Power includes all people. So it is not with the kingdom of Grace. It comprises only those who have been born anew³² and thereby "share in the inheritance of the saints in light", and this they do because the Father "has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son".³³

One day the kingdom of Grace will reach its end. For every individual that end comes by death. With the world and mankind generally that end will come when there will be no time and no grace any longer. Then there will be no possibility to listen to the words of the Gospel or to receive the forgiveness of sins. This end is marked by *the coming of the judgment*. When this has taken place, the kingdom of Grace has been replaced by the kingdom of Glory.

About *the kingdom of Glory* Holy Scripture gives us clear and yet rather restricted descriptions. The main points are: the complete absence of all evil, seeing God as He is,³⁴ and finally the song of praise to the glory of God and the Lamb. Then there will be no more outrage on the kingdom of God or on His people. All slanderers and scoffers then have been silenced. But all those who during their lifetime were totally dependent on God because in themselves they lacked both light and righteousness, what will happen to them? To them this word applies: "When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory."³⁵

1	Mt 4:1–11	12	Lev 21:10–12	24	Lk 1: 31–35
2	Jn 18:20	13	1 Cor 10:1–4	25	Phil 2:5–11
3	Acts 1:3	14	Heb 11:1–2	26	Mt 17:1–8
4	Mt 28:18–20	15	Heb 7:23–28	27	Mt 28:18
5	Lk 10:16	16	Jn 1:29	28	Mt 24:14
6	2 Tim 1:6–14; Tit 1:5–9	17	Isa 53:5	29	Mt 28:18
7	Rom 8:32	18	Mt 27:46; Ps 22:1	30	Rev 17:14
8	1 Jn 2:2	19	Lev 16	31	Jn 8:31
9	Rom 4:23–25	20	Heb 9:11–12	32	Jn 3:3–8
10	1 Cor 2:2	21	Mt 27:51	33	Col 1:12–13
11	Heb 9:22	22	2 Cor 5:19	34	1 Jn 3:2
		23	1 Pet 1:18–19	35	Col 3:4

IX

The Holy Spirit — Helper of man

1. The Holy Spirit is God.

God is *one*. But at the same time He is three persons in *one Deity* (Godhead): Father, Son, and Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son. In the Nicene Creed we confess that we believe "in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life . . . who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified".

In Holy Scripture we are told how the Lord Jesus promised to send His Spirit to His disciples as their Helper.¹ However, this should not be understood in such a way that the Spirit was not known or did not work among men before that time. What Jesus speaks about is a new way of working in His Church. The Holy Spirit has existed from eternity and has been working at all times. Before heaven and earth existed, the Spirit of God was at work. At the creation the Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters.² After Creation the Spirit was at work in the world and among the first people personally. But through the fall there was a new situation, so that the Spirit of God turned away from man.³ But He did not leave them completely. It is the Spirit of God who has brought the promises about the salvation and worked faith in all those who become saved in their hope during the time of the Old Testament.⁴

In the Old Testament there was a special connection between the Spirit and those people who were spiritual leaders: patriarchs, judges, prophets, and other men of God. They had the Spirit as a special gift and equipment. Among them some are mentioned particularly: those prophets who have brought to us the books of the old covenant, the Old Testament. Jesus mentions the inspiration given to David. It helped him to give true testimonies about

the Messiah as his Lord.⁵ S:t Peter also shows how the prophetic teaching in Scripture is possible: "No prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."⁶

In the time of the New Testament the Holy Spirit has been working also before Pentecost.⁷ From the history of the first disciples it may be found how the Holy Spirit worked among them.⁸ If He had not done so, it would have been impossible for them to obtain faith in Jesus. On some occasions the Holy Spirit has made Himself known more conspicuously. The first occasion is the baptism of Jesus.⁹ On this occasion the three persons of the Deity are mentioned together: the Father speaks from heaven about His pleasure in the Son; the Son is the One, sent to the salvation of the world, and now commencing His official work; the Spirit is sent like a dove to confirm that Jesus is the promised Messiah, and that the time has come for the fulfilment of the promises. — The second occasion is the sending of the Spirit in a most conspicuous way on the day of Pentecost.¹⁰

The work of the Holy Spirit is a continuation of the work of Jesus Christ here on earth. When Jesus had finished that part of the salvation work, He left the visible fellowship with His disciples and the community round them. But this does not mean to say that He left them without help. He had told them: "I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you . . . I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Counsellor, to be with you for ever."¹¹ This promise was fulfilled on the first Pentecost. After that the Church of Christ lives under the continuous guidance of the Holy Spirit.

2. The Holy Spirit has given us the Word of God and works by that Word.

God has made Himself known to us in Creation and in our conscience. But still more clearly He has revealed Himself to those people in Israel that were called *prophets*. Their greatest task was to convey the promise to their people and to all the world about the Messiah, the Saviour, and to prepare the world for His arrival.

When Christ came he applied to Himself those words that had been spoken by the prophets about the Messiah. In that way He also connected Himself with the Old Testament in the clearest way possible.¹² But in Christ there is also a clear connection to the future. He gathered round Himself a group of followers to whom He gave the command to go out in the whole world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them.¹³ In spite of this He did not give them even one word written by Himself, but He commanded His apostles to carry out, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, everything He had told them to do. He assured them that the Holy Spirit would remind them about everything and thus lead them and all of us to the full truth.¹⁴ In this way Jesus has announced that the scriptures of the apostles are a true revelation of Him, and He has also told His apostles to give us the teaching that is needed for all times up to the end.¹⁵

How can such writing be the Word of God?

God has spoken reliable and true words through prophets, apostles, and evangelists. But how is it possible? About this the Church has always taught that *the holy scriptures are inspired by God*, i.e. they have been written because *the Holy Spirit moved and guided the authors*. First of all this means that God through His Holy Spirit gave *the impulse to write*. These people have been guided by the Holy Spirit in a way much stronger and clearer than has been the case with other servants of God. The Holy Spirit guided the apostles and the elders at the apostolic meeting in Jerusalem.¹⁶ Sometimes the Spirit forced, sometimes He hindered these men to pass the borders of other countries, when they carried out the gospel.¹⁷ In a similar way the Holy Spirit has worked on the apostles and the evangelists with regard to the writing of the Holy Scriptures.

When God through His Holy Spirit had given an author the impulse to write, *He also guided him with regard to the contents*. There is not even one hint in the Bible that the writers have hesitated about what to write or that they have written anything different from what God had told them. The guidance of the Holy Spirit also applies to *the wording*. It is testified both from the Old Testament and from the New Testament that the holy writers have been sure about themselves and between themselves that God has directed their tongues and their pens.¹⁸

The doctrine about the Inspiration of Holy Scripture does not say that the authors were without a will of their own, when they were under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Instead every author had his own, personal way of using the language. But his gifts and his personal ability were used in full by the Spirit. Every keen reader can observe this for himself when studying his Bible. The Biblical authors have had their mental and spiritual gifts engaged in full when writing under the guidance of the Spirit. Even about ordinary worldly authors it is sometimes said that they have been "inspired" when writing this or that work of theirs. This means that *the word "inspiration" has been borrowed from the Bible to explain a strong impulse from outside and a high degree of concentration.* But in the Christian field there is much more reason to speak of such impulses, concentration and spiritual guidance.

Inspiration does not exclude things normally connected with the writing of books and similar things: the authors of the Bible have collected material for their writing, and/or they have done research work to find facts. From olden times it is also clear that they have quoted sources available to them.¹⁹ A Biblical author had no reason to wait for personal revelations, when the material he needed was available through reliable witnesses or could be collected by himself.²⁰

3. The Holy Spirit still works.

Although the salvation work was carried out by Jesus Christ once and for all, in one way this work will continue until the end of the world. This is done when it is applied to people individually by the Holy Spirit. This happens, when somebody listens to the Word of God, and when the Spirit explains the Word and helps him to understand it and receive it. When the listener receives the offered grace by faith, he becomes reconciled to God.²¹ Therefore, when the Holy Spirit works through the Holy Scriptures and thus creates faith in them, this is another proof that these scriptures are not just ordinary pieces of literature. Instead it shows that the words in Holy Scripture are "spirit and life"²² and that "Scripture cannot be broken".²³

There is a rather thorough explanation of how the grace of God

is offered and accepted through the Word and the Spirit, by faith in God, and how this leads to personal reconciliation with God. That explanation is given in Martin Luther's Large Catechism when he is dealing with the Third Article: "We must take our stand upon the word Holy Ghost, because it is so precise and comprehensive that we cannot find another. For there are, besides, many kinds of spirits mentioned in the Holy Scriptures, as, the spirit of man, heavenly spirits, and evil spirits. But the Spirit of God alone is called Holy Ghost, that is, He who has sanctified and still sanctifies us. For as the Father is called Creator, the Son Redeemer, so the Holy Ghost, from His work, must be called Sanctifier, or One that makes holy . . . For neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe on Him, and obtain Him for our Lord, unless it were offered to us and granted to our hearts by the Holy Ghost through the preaching of the Gospel. The work is done and accomplished; for Christ has acquired and gained the treasure for us by His suffering, death, resurrection, etc. But if the work remained concealed so that no one knew of it, then it would be in vain and lost. That this treasure, therefore, might not lie buried, but be appropriated and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to go forth and be proclaimed, in which He gives the Holy Ghost to bring this treasure home and appropriate it to us."

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|--------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 Jn 14:15-17;
16:12-15 | 10 Acts 2 | 16 Acts 15:8, 28 |
| 2 Gen 1:2 | 11 Jn 14:18, 16 | 17 Acts 19:21; 16:7 |
| 3 Gen 6:5-6 | 12 Lk 4:16-21;
Jn 4:25-26 | 18 2 Sam 23:1-4 |
| 4 Heb 11:2, 7,
13-16, 32-40 | 13 Mt 28:18-20 | 19 Jos 10:13;
2 Sam 1:18 |
| 5 Mt 22:41-46 | 14 Jn 14:25-26;
16:12-15; | 20 Lk 1:1-4 |
| 6 2 Pet 1:21 | 20:30-31 | 21 2 Cor 5:18-20 |
| 7 Lk 1:41; 2:25-27 | 15 Lk 24:25-27; 10:16; 23 | 22 Jn 6:63 |
| 8 Jn 1:45-51; 2:11 | Acts 1:1-3 | Jn 10:35 |
| 9 Mt 3:13-17 | | |

X

Where salvation is to be obtained: the Church of Jesus Christ

One can say the Church has existed as long as people have been in need of salvation; this means from the day of the great fall.¹ On that very day salvation was promised. By faith in that promise "the men of old" could be saved in the time of the Old Testament.² We also find that there existed conditions and preparations for faith and salvation, although different from those found in the New Testament.

1. The Church is the Communion of saints.

That is what we confess in the Apostles' Creed: ". . . the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints". But how can people become members of such a communion? It is not possible without the Word of God and His Sacraments. About this it has been said: "The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered." (CA) From the time, when our Lord Jesus Christ walked among men in this world, it is arranged in such a way that He leads His Church partly through mankind, partly through His Word and Spirit. But this does not mean to say that there are two ways. There is only one way: those people, who in their office have to deal with the continued life and work of the Church of Christ, cannot do that otherwise than by administering the Word and the Sacraments. The reversed order also applies: when God allows His Word and Sacraments to work in His Church and its parishes, it is always brought about through human servants.

In this way it becomes clear *who belong to the Church of Christ.*

It is those people who have been accepted into the Church by the Sacrament of Baptism *and* have a living faith in Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord. Faith in Jesus Christ always includes faith in God as our Creator and Father and faith in the Holy Spirit as our Sanctifier. This is clear from the words of the Apostles' Creed. Thus the doctrine about the Church is clearly connected with the saving faith in the Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. What is meant, therefore, is not a way of thinking or knowing only. What is meant is the kind of faith that takes hold of God's promise and work through Jesus Christ and receives grace for the sake of Jesus Christ, His suffering, death, and resurrection etc.

Only through faith in Christ is it possible to be a member of the Christian Church. It is not enough to be a member of a certain community. Nor is it enough to use the Sacraments in an outward way. Nor is it enough to have associated oneself with other people by a sort of formal confession. Nor is it enough to have a certain connection with the Church through a worldly position. Only the personal faith in Jesus Christ as one's own Saviour and Lord is the factor that decides if anybody belongs to His Church or not.

Further characteristics of the Church

The Church is *one*, only one in the whole world. Since God is the only true God³ and Jesus Christ the only Saviour,⁴ there can be only one Church. Holy Scripture says very clearly about our Lord Jesus Christ that "He is the head of the body, the Church; He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything He might be pre-eminent."⁵ Scripture also explains how this unity works: "One body and one Spirit . . . , one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all."⁶

Furthermore, the Church is *holy*. This doctrine does not say that Christians have a holiness of their own. Nor does it mean that at first sight we can separate Christians from other people. First of all this doctrine speaks about Christ. He is the only one who has a holiness and righteousness of His own, complete and perfect. By faith all true Christians are united with Him, and through the grace of God they have a share in Christ's holiness and righteousness. By faith in Christ they have been declared righteous before God.⁷ After that the Spirit of God works in them, so that their

outward life, their words and deeds may be sanctified, i.e. be brought to correspond with the law of Christ and with the new life which they have been called to lead in His Kingdom. On that ground, and that ground only, Christians can be called "the holy", "those sanctified in Christ Jesus", or "holy brethren".⁸ Thus the doctrine about the holiness of the Church deals with Christ's own holiness in the first place, and after that with the work of the Holy Spirit. This work has already been carried out, if He has brought them to the righteousness in faith, and it is still being carried out when He leads them to the blessed goal, which is the full righteousness in God's heaven. Without such sanctification "no one will see the Lord".⁹

Further the Church is *Catholic*. "Catholic" is a Greek word meaning "common", "comprising the whole", "intended for the whole world". In this sense the Church is Catholic, because the reconciliation and salvation, brought about by the work of Christ, are intended for the whole world. Therefore there is only one way of salvation.¹⁰ "He is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."¹¹ This is so, because God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth".¹²

The Church is also *apostolic*. In three ways this is connected with the Word of God. First of all the Word has been handed over to us by the apostles of the Lord. Otherwise the Church could not exist or work. Christ has also told us that He will teach and guide us through their words.¹³ Secondly the Holy Spirit works only through the Word of God. It is impossible for man to believe or to be saved without the use of the apostolic Word. Thirdly the Word of God is the sole judge in matters of faith and life within the Church. If anybody deviates from the Word, be it a person privately or a church body, it means leaving the apostolic foundation: "We believe, teach, and confess that the sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas together with /all/ teachers should be estimated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and of the New Testament alone."
(FC)

2. The Church is the instrument of the Spirit of God.

When speaking here about Christ, the Church, and the Word we are also speaking about the Spirit. Christ is doing His work through the Holy Spirit, since the Word and the Spirit cannot be separated, neither from Christ, nor between themselves. Everything that is done among us by Christ, and everything that is done among us by the Word is done through the Spirit.¹⁴ This is explained in the following way: "The Holy Ghost effects our sanctification by the following parts, namely, by the communion of saints or the Christian Church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting; that is, He first leads us into His holy congregation, and places us in the bosom of the Church, whereby He preaches to us and brings us to Christ." (LC) Here the words "Church" and "congregation" are used alternately. What is meant is that greater community that comprises the whole world and aims at the salvation of all men: "He has a peculiar congregation in the world, which is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God, which He reveals and preaches, (and through which) He illumines and enkindles hearts, that they understand, accept it, cling to it, and persevere in it." (LC)

3. Certain offices and services are essential to the life of the Church.

"Some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ."¹⁵ These offices are only examples of all those mentioned in the New Testament.¹⁶ But they should all be administered to God's glory and to serve Christ's brethren and sisters, for the building of the body of Christ, that the different members may serve each other.¹⁷

Among the different offices and services we have to mention two particularly. The first one is often called "*the common priesthood*". It means that every Christian in some way is called to be a

priest.¹⁸ First of all every Christian has been given the right and possibility to care for his own spiritual life. It cannot be done by anybody else, and therefore he can be considered to be his own priest. This comes from the fact that he is entitled to free admittance before God, without the intermediate service by any person whatsoever. But this kind of priesthood also includes a definite responsibility for his neighbour. When a Christian uses the Word, the prayer, the Sunday service, and the Sacraments, this will be a testimony to the surrounding world. Everybody, in his home and in his worldly tasks, is called by God to give service to his brethren, because of the service God has bestowed upon him. That is to serve "the least of Christ's brethren".¹⁹

"The common priesthood" is different from "*the special priesthood*". The latter has not developed from the former. In the evangelical-lutheran Church it is often called "the Ministry", or "the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments", or "the Ministry of the Word and the Sacraments". It is also described as "a power or commandment of God to preach the Gospel, to remit and retain sins, and to administer Sacraments". (CA)

According to the testimony of Holy Scripture this ministry or priesthood was instituted by Jesus Christ Himself.²⁰ In their apostolic authority the apostles appointed some of their co-workers as "shepherds" and "teachers", or "bishops" and "presbyters", in the congregations. Such appointments were accompanied with prayers and the laying on of hands.²¹ Thus the ministry has been handed over from generation to generation up to our own time, and so it will be "to the close of the age".

In this ministry only spiritual weapons may be used. The office-bearers are not entitled to use the swords or weapons of the worldly powers, only "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God".²²

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|---|--|---|
| 1 Gen 3:15 | 9 Heb 12:14 | 19 Mt 25:40 |
| 2 Jn 8:56; Gal 3:7;
Heb 11:2, 7, 32-40 | 10 Acts 16:31 | 20 Mt 28:18-20;
Jn 20:19-23;
21:15-19 |
| 3 Jn 17:3 | 11 1 Jn 2:2 | |
| 4 Acts 4:12 | 12 1 Tim 2:4 | |
| 5 Col 1:18 | 13 Lk 10:16; Jn 16:
12-15; 20:19-23 | 21 1 Tim 3:1-13;
4:14; |
| 6 Eph 4:4-6 | 14 Jn 16:12-15 | 2 Tim 2:2; |
| 7 Rom 3:21-26;
5:12-19 | 15 Eph 4:11-12 | Tit 1:5-9 |
| 8 Phil 1:1; 1 Cor 1:2;
Heb 3:1 | 16 1 Cor 12:27-31 | 22 Eph 6:17;
2 Cor 10:3-4 |
| | 17 Rom 12:3-8 | |
| | 18 1 Pet 2:5, 9 | |

XI

The means of grace

1. The means of grace show where the Church is.

Under the circumstances prevailing in the world the Church of Christ is invisible. Faith in Christ is also invisible: "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."¹

But in spite of the fact that the Church is invisible *we can see the outward means God uses in His Church*, when He creates and maintains a living faith in Christ. We can see the outward shape of the written Word, e.g. the book covers, the paper sheets, the letters, and the ink. We can also see the water of Baptism and the bread and wine of Holy Communion. But the faith, worked by the Holy Spirit through these outward means of grace or salvation, none of us can see. Of course there are some things we can examine and from which we can make some conclusions, if we have reason to make observations about somebody's faith: the confession from his lips, and the fruits of his life, which he shows in his words and in his conduct of life.²

But what can the Church do about ungodly members, and what is their position with regard to the true Church? We can answer in this way: Only those who have a true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ do belong to His Church, whereas the ungodly and the hypocrites are outside the true Church, no matter what reputation they may have in the outward community of men.³

Because of the invisibility of the Church there must be some definite consequences to her life and work in the world. Of course it is impossible to sort out all false Christians. Christ has explained why it cannot be done: we might sort out even what belongs to

God.⁴ What can we do then? We must believe what a person says, when "with his lips" he confesses his faith in Jesus Christ and wishes to join the Church,⁵ this of course provided there is not any evidence that he wishes to deceive us. And what about the exclusion of people from the congregation and from the Church? Only in cases where a person openly denies the Deity of Christ⁶ or clearly departs from the Christian faith, e.g. "by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons",⁷ have we got the right to put him outside the Christian fellowship, and this only as a warning to make him repent, in order that he may be saved.⁸

The invisibility also raises other difficult questions. One of these is: *Where is the Church then?* We may answer: It is everywhere, where "the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered". (CA) To this it may possibly be objected that it must be difficult to manage a Church and to give it its true limits, when it is so difficult to draw up any lines round it. The only proper answer to that objection is: It is a matter for the Lord Himself. He has also told us when the true sorting is going to be done: at the time of harvest, i.e. the time of the last judgment.⁹

2. For the true life in the Church of Christ the means of grace are needed.

The Christian Church is the place and institution where salvation can be received. For that salvation this rule applies: "Men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith." But *how* can this salvation be known and accepted by man? "That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith, where and when it pleases God." (CA)

The Holy Spirit uses certain means. This is often and clearly stated in our confessional documents, e.g. in this way: "God the Holy Ghost . . . does not effect conversion without means, but uses for this purpose the preaching and hearing of God's Word . . . And it is God's will that His Word should be heard, and that man's ears should not be closed. Ps. 95:8. With this Word

the Holy Ghost is present, and opens hearts, so that they, as Lydia in Acts 16:14, are attentive to it, and are thus converted alone through the grace and power of the Holy Ghost, whose work alone the conversion of man is." (FC)

In another document it is stated in a similar way, but there the importance of the Sacraments is stressed even more: "In those things which concern the spoken, outward Word, we must firmly hold that God grants His Spirit or grace to no one, except through or with the preceding outward Word . . . Therefore we ought and must constantly maintain this point, that God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments." (SA)

We have seen how Holy Scripture contains clear teaching about the means that are used by the Holy Spirit for His work in man. But in spite of this there is a popular belief among men that "the Holy Spirit must work freely", without any outward means, in order to be "spiritual". For that reason they have also worded a maxim: "The Spirit needs no means or tools." In more recent times this belief has been worded thus: "Faith does not come through any outward means, e.g. the words in a book or the things in a sacrament, only through the personal contact with a historical reality." What do such words mean? Well, they might be mere words or very airy thoughts. But it is in reaction against such thoughts the words of the Smalcald Articles were written. They wish to state that Christ and the Kingdom of God, the forgiveness of sins, and eternal life do not come to us in this world in any other way, but only through God's Word and His Sacraments. What does not come to us that way must be something useless or dangerous: either it is pure imagination, or it is completely foreign to Christ.

But what about the prophets?

That is what many people ask: "Did not the prophets have direct contact with God? Didn't they speak such things that weren't heard of before? Didn't they go beyond what was written?" That is a very dangerous comparison! It is necessary to make a clear distinction between such people who were called to be prophets and apostles, and other people who were not called to such tasks, but were just referred to trust the revelation already given and thereby believe in Jesus Christ. In the case of some prophets and

apostles we are told in Holy Scripture that they had visions and revelations. To other prophets and apostles it was given, without such visions or revelations, to look into such things that are normally hidden from men. But in both cases it is a matter of God's guidance and inspiration.¹⁰ What prophets and apostles tell us in such ways is *God's word to all times*. But a person, who is not a prophet or an apostle, has no right to wait for visions or revelations, nor to rely on such "revelations" he thinks he has experienced. To ordinary men that order will be in force which God has given in His Word: "How are men to call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent? . . . So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ."¹¹ Together with the Word we have to mention the Sacraments: "It has been well said by Augustine that a Sacrament is *a visible word*, because the rite is received by the eyes, and is, as it were, a picture of the Word, signifying the same thing as the Word. Therefore the effect of both is the same." (ACA)

3. The use of the Word and the Sacraments.

In the Church of Christ we are referred to the Word and the Sacraments in order to be taught and trained, and to obtain faith. "The coming to Christ" may be explained in this way: "The Father will not do this without means, but has ordained for this purpose His Word and Sacraments as ordinary means and instruments; and it is the will neither of the Father nor of the Son that a man should not hear or should despise the preaching of His Word, and wait for the drawing of the Father without the Word and Sacraments. For the Father draws indeed by the power of His Holy Ghost, however, according to His usual order, by the hearing of His holy, divine Word . . . The Holy Ghost will be with His Word in His power, and work by it; and that is the drawing of the Father." (FC)

The word "sacrament" is not found in Holy Scripture. But the holy actions, which have later been called "sacraments", are both

described and commanded in the Word of God. They can be explained in somewhat different ways. One way is this: There are several holy actions in the Church, but those called "sacraments" need a certain outward, visible thing or medium in order to be complete and valid, like water in Baptism and bread and wine in Holy Communion. Now, if we say that there must be such an outward visible medium, if the holy action is to be called a sacrament, then only Baptism and Holy Communion can be called sacraments. And this is another way of explanation: If we do not count with a visible thing as being needed, then there will be another holy action, also instituted by Jesus Christ, that can be called a sacrament. That is the forgiveness of sins, also called "confession" or "absolution". This holy action was instituted by Jesus Christ when He said: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."¹² Another, more general, explanation to the term "sacrament" has been given in this way: "If we call Sacraments *rites which have the command of God, and to which the promise of grace has been added*, it is easy to decide what are properly Sacraments. For rites instituted by men will not in this way be Sacraments properly so called. For it does not belong to human authority to promise grace. Therefore signs instituted without God's command are not sure signs of grace . . . Therefore *Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Absolution, which is the Sacrament of Repentance, are truly Sacraments. For these rites have God's command and the promise of grace, which is peculiar to the New Testament.*" (ACA)

1 Lk 17:20-21

2 Rom 10:10; Mt 7:15-23

3 2 Tim 2:19

4 Mt 13:24-30

5 Rom 10:10

6 1 Jn 2:20-23; 2 Jn 9-11

7 1 Tim 4:1

8 1 Cor 5:5

9 Mt 13:24-30

10 Isa 6:1-13; Hes 37:1-14;
Rev 1:1-3; 2 Cor 12:1-10;
Eph 1:3-14; 3:2-13

11 Rom 10:14-17

12 Jn 20:22-23; Mt 18:18

XII

Holy Baptism

1. What is Holy Baptism?

Baptism is a holy action, instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself: "It is most solemnly and strictly commanded that we must be baptized or we cannot be saved . . . Here stand God's Word and command which institute, establish, and confirm Baptism. But what God institutes and commands cannot be a vain, but must be a most precious thing, though in appearance it were of less value than a straw." (LC)

Sometimes it has been argued that Baptism is only a symbol, a sign, or a demonstration of something that is only spiritual. But against all arguments of that kind we must adhere to what Holy Scripture teaches. Baptism is a "washing of regeneration": "He saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit."¹ What happens in Baptism is not, therefore, what man is doing, it is what God is doing. This doing includes, at the same time, the dying of the old man and the birth of the new man. Baptism also means that we receive the forgiveness of our sins, become united with the body of Christ, and receive the new life of the Holy Spirit.

2. How is Baptism to be administered?

Water belongs to a true Baptism. At all baptisms, mentioned in the New Testament, water was used. But there is no indication of *how much water* is needed, although we have reason to believe that *immersion* has been used quite often. The rule must be that water be used together with "the word of God which is in and with

the water . . . For without the word of God the water is simple water and no baptism". (SC)

A true Christian baptism also has to be administered *in the name of Holy Trinity*, i.e. in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. This has been commanded by Jesus Christ Himself: ". . . baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit".² When other expressions are used in the New Testament, they do not give the formal words to be used, instead they describe the contents and what happens, e.g. when they say "baptized into Christ",³ "baptism into death",⁴ or "baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins".⁵

The formula of Trinity, i.e. the name of the tri-une God, is needed for a true Christian baptism. This is not a matter of sounds, correct pronunciation or such things. *It is a matter of the meaning and of the contents of the words.* We have been given the instructions by Jesus Christ Himself and by His apostles. Therefore we have no right or reason to deviate from this teaching.

3. What happens in Baptism?

By His suffering and His death our Lord Jesus Christ has performed the atonement for the sins of all men. This atonement is offered to every man, and it is accepted in Baptism, which is a means of grace, instituted for this purpose: "A Sacrament is a ceremony or work in which God presents to us that which the promise annexed to the ceremony offers; as, Baptism is a work, not which we offer to God, but in which God baptizes us, i.e., a minister in the place of God; and God here offers and presents the remission of sins, etc., according to the promise, Mark 16:16: *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.*" (ACA) Here the words "remission of sins" are a summary of everything given to us by God in Holy Baptism. In the New Testament the gifts in Baptism are described in many ways. It is said: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."⁶ By this it is meant that the one being baptized puts off his old, sinful man as a worn and dirty piece of garment and instead puts on Christ and His righteousness. This can be done only because of what Christ

has suffered and achieved: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."⁷

We must remember both these sides of Baptism, the death of the old man, and the birth of a new man. Baptism regenerates, i.e. it gives new life. Even if that doctrine is forgotten at times, and abandoned at times, we have to adhere to it in the Christian church. For sure Baptism is "a washing of regeneration",⁸ because "it signifies that the old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts, and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever". (SC)

Holy Baptism also gives the Holy Spirit: "Be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."⁹ Thus the giving of the Holy Spirit is closely connected with Holy Baptism. There are not two kinds of Baptism, only one. And in this Baptism our Lord Jesus gives us His Spirit in order that we may walk in the Spirit throughout our life.

4. From where does the power of Holy Baptism come?

The power does not come from anything we do ourselves, nor does it come from the outward form or ceremony of the particular baptism, and it does not come from the water used either. Both in the Small and in the Large Catechism it is shown that water is needed for a true baptism, but the power of the baptism does not come from the water: "It is not the water indeed that does them /the great things/, but the word of God which is in and with the water . . . For without the word of God the water is simple water and no baptism. But with the word of God it is a baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Ghost." (SC) "It is not mere ordinary water, but water comprehended in God's Word and command, and sanctified thereby, so that it is nothing else than a divine water; not that the water in

itself is nobler than other water, but that God's Word and command are added . . . For the kernel in the water is God's Word or command and the name of God, which is a treasure greater and nobler than heaven and earth. Comprehend the difference, then, that Baptism is quite another thing than all other water; not on account of the natural quality, but because something more noble is here added; for God Himself stakes His honour, His power and might on it. Therefore it is not only natural water, but a divine, heavenly, holy, and blessed water, and in whatever other terms we can praise it." (LC)

5. Who may be baptized?

First we have to observe the great and general command, given by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.¹⁰ Because of the general character of His words there is no possibility of excluding children, unless they had been mentioned in the command itself as excluded. In order to understand why this is not possible we have to remember the position in the Old Testament. There children were accepted into the covenant of God. Why should they be excluded in the new covenant then? This is not a comparison of our own, it is made already in the New Testament: "In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; and you were buried with Him in baptism."¹¹

In spite of this it has often been argued that there is no indication in the New Testament that children have ever become baptized. That argument does not hold ground. In a number of cases it is stated that people became baptized, "with her household", "with all his family", etc.¹² In spite of this fact many have spoken about "the silence of the New Testament about the baptism of children". There is no silence of that kind, if we consider what the words "household" and "family" mean in this context. We have to remember that non-Jews, i.e. people of heathen origin, had been accepted into the Jewish religious community for a rather long time. The rite for such acceptance consisted, among other things, in circumcision for men, and baptism for women and small children. Such a practice, with baptism of children, had already

gone on for 100-200 years at the time when Jesus and His apostles started to baptize.¹³ Thus the baptism of children was a well known fact among the Jews at that time. Therefore we must make a certain conclusion: If Jesus had wanted only adults to be baptized in His Church, He would have said that, and it would have been a moral obligation for Him to say it clearly. "The silence of the New Testament" must be understood, therefore, in a very definite way: baptism of children was already accepted among the Jews, and by Jesus and His apostles. In that light we have to understand the words "with her household", "with all his family" etc. This conclusion also agrees with a statement from the early Christian time that the baptism of children had been received from the time of the apostles. This view is confirmed by another fact: the Gospel according to S:t John does not mention the institution of Baptism – because those things were already known through earlier gospels – but it speaks very clearly about the entry into the Kingdom of God.¹⁴ If this entry, the only entry possible, means the entry by Baptism, which the words "water" and "the Spirit" indicate, how can children be excluded? There is no other way of giving them that entry, that is clear from Jesus' words "baptizing – teaching".¹⁵ The gospels do not show us even by one word that children must grow up in order to be counted as full human beings, able to enter the Kingdom of God. The teaching of the New Testament goes in the opposite direction: grown up people must become like children, if they are to enter the Kingdom of God.¹⁶ The question if children can believe has also been answered by Jesus Himself when He said: ". . . these little ones who believe in me".¹⁷

Of course this doctrine about the baptism of children must be handled with great spiritual care. "Baptizing" must be followed by "teaching". Therefore it is possible to practise this baptism of children only in Christian families and/or with Christian "sponsors" taking charge of the "teaching".

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|-------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1 Tit 3:5 | 7 Rom 6:3-4 | 13 Jn 3:22; 4:2 |
| 2 Mt 28:19 | 8 Tit 3:5 | 14 Jn 3:5 |
| 3 Gal 3:27 | 9 Acts 2:38-39 | 15 Mt 28:18-20 |
| 4 Rom 6:4 | 10 Mt 28:18-20 | 16 Mt 18:1-3 |
| 5 Acts 2:38 | 11 Col 2:11-12 | 17 Mt 18:5-6 |
| 6 Gal 3:27 | 12 Acts 16:15, 33 | |

XIII

Holy Communion

1. This sacrament has many names.

In Holy Scripture this sacrament is called "the Lord's Supper"¹ or "the Table of the Lord",² but we also use such names as "Holy Communion", "the Sacrament of the Altar", and "Eucharist". The name "the Lord's Supper" refers to the fact that this sacrament was instituted at an evening meal, before the suffering and death of Jesus. The name "the Sacrament of the Altar" has been used for a long time in the Christian Church. It refers us, via "a large upper room",³ back to the time and place of the temple in Jerusalem. By this name it is stressed that the table of the Holy Communion is connected with those sacrifices that were brought to the altar of the temple. But this must be correctly understood. The sacrifice, when Jesus offered Himself on the cross, is *not repeated at our altars*. But at the altar of the Holy Communion we are reminded every time that the One who gives Himself to us at His table is the promised Saviour, the Messiah, the Lamb of God,⁴ who was depicted, day after day, in the sacrifices on the altar in the temple of Jerusalem.

2. Holy Communion was instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ.

The same thing applies as with regard to Holy Baptism: We have to learn "what is of the greatest importance, namely, that the chief point is the Word and ordinance or command of God. For it has not been invented nor introduced by any man, but without any one's counsel and deliberation it has been instituted by Christ." (LC)

Sometimes it has been said that Holy Communion was an institution for "the simple and primitive congregations of the original church", and that the congregations of our own times ought to be able to manage without such a sacrament. But there is no support in Scripture for such thoughts. On the contrary it is evident that the words of Jesus are valid for all times. This view is supported by S:t Paul's words: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."⁵ For this reason Holy Communion will be celebrated in the Christian Church up to that day when our Lord Jesus comes back in glory "to judge the living and the dead".⁶

With regard to the elements of Holy Communion, i.e. the visible things we use when celebrating this sacrament, we are bound by the instructions and the example given by Jesus Himself. In the words of institution He has mentioned bread and wine. Therefore we cannot exchange the bread and wine in Holy Communion for other things. We know how and when Holy Communion was instituted, before Easter, in connection with the eating of the Paschal Lamb, and therefore we know that Jesus and His apostles used unleavened bread and real wine. With regard to the bread the main point for us is that it is bread. When we eat the bread unleavened we are reminded how much Holy Communion is related to the Passover of the Old Testament.

Thus Christ instituted this sacrament with bread *and* wine. In the New Testament it is stressed that each element is the bearer of a certain gift. This is particularly clear from the words of Jesus, but also from the words of S:t Paul: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?"⁷ Thus both elements have to be used at the celebration of this sacrament, if we wish to follow the words and institution given by Jesus Christ.

3. What does it mean that Holy Communion is a Sacrament?

The Large Catechism says: "It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, in and under the bread and wine which we

Christians are commanded by the Word of Christ to eat and to drink. And as we have said of Baptism that it is not simple water, so here also we say the Sacrament is bread and wine, but not mere bread and wine, such as are ordinarily served at the table, but bread and wine comprehended in, and connected with, the Word of God."

In all this there is one really deciding factor, the word of Christ: "It is the Word (I say) which makes and distinguishes this Sacrament, so that it is not mere bread and wine, but is, and is called, the body and blood of Christ . . . If you take away the Word or regard it without the words, you have nothing but mere bread and wine. But if the words remain with them, as they shall and must, then, in virtue of the same, it is truly the body and blood of Christ. For as the lips of Christ say and speak, so it is, as He can never lie or deceive." (LC)

The "words", mentioned here and being of such great importance, are the words of institution. They have to be used every time we celebrate Holy Communion. Why it is so we may explain in this way: "In the administration of the Holy Supper the words of institution are to be publicly spoken or sung before the congregation distinctly and clearly, and should in no way be omitted, in order that obedience may be rendered to the command of Christ: *This do* (that therefore should not be omitted which Christ Himself did in the Holy Supper), and (secondly) that the faith of the hearers concerning the nature and fruit of this Sacrament (concerning the presence of the body and blood of Christ, concerning the forgiveness of sins, and all benefits which have been purchased by the death and shedding of the blood of Christ, and are bestowed upon us in Christ's testament) may be excited, strengthened, and confirmed by Christ's Word, and (besides) that the elements of bread and wine may be consecrated or blessed for this holy use, in order that the body and blood of Christ may therewith be administered to us to be eaten and to be drunk." (FC)

What do we receive, then, in Holy Communion?

When we celebrate this sacrament according to the institution by Jesus Christ we receive bread and wine, but together with this we receive His body and blood. But some people do not admit this. They argue that the word "is" in "this is my body, this is my blood"⁸ should be understood as "this signifies", or "this repre-

sents". But that would be wrong. The little word "is" stands as a barrier against the false doctrines which say that bread and wine are only pictures and signs of Christ's body and blood. Besides the word "is" there is another strong barrier: S:t Paul says that "the cup of blessing" is "a participation in the blood of Christ"⁹ etc. Everybody must understand that we do not participate in a sign or picture, but in the real things.

The real presence of Christ in His Holy Communion is repeatedly stressed in our confession. This is done, it says, "in order that all . . . may the more clearly perceive that we defend the doctrine received in the entire Church, that in the Lord's Supper the body and blood of Christ are truly and substantially present, and are truly tendered with those things which are seen, bread and wine. And we speak of the presence of the living Christ." (ACA)

4. What use is it to take part in Holy Communion?

Our Lord Jesus Christ has instituted Holy Communion for the same reason as Holy Baptism and Absolution. They are "means of grace", i.e. instruments to make us share the grace of God, which may be given to us for the sake of Jesus Christ, who suffered and died for the sins of the world.

There are some differences between Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. Baptism is the Sacrament of entry into the Kingdom of God, whereas through Holy Communion Christians can be strengthened and nourished to live as children of God in that Kingdom. They become confirmed in their standing in the grace and in their belief that they have the forgiveness of sins. "On this account it is indeed called a food of souls, which nourishes and strengthens the new man. For by Baptism we are first born anew; but . . . there still remains, besides, the old vicious nature of flesh and blood in man, and there are so many hindrances and temptations of the devil and of the world that we often become weary and faint, and sometimes also stumble. Therefore it is given for a daily pasture and sustenance, that faith may refresh and strengthen itself so as not to fall back in such a battle, but become ever

stronger and stronger . . . Now to this end the consolation is here given when the heart feels that the burden is becoming too heavy, that it may here obtain new power and refreshment." (LC)

5. How is this sacrament to be used?

A Christian should be eager to use this Sacrament quite often. But everything does not depend on the regular use or that it is used often. Holy Communion is a Sacrament of rejoicing and thanksgiving. But in the participation there should also be a spirit of earnest and seriousness. This includes *personal preparation*, which means that we should make ourselves ready to meet our Lord at the holy Table. This does not say that we should frighten ourselves or make ourselves shy before this Sacrament. Martin Luther has shown how people can frighten and burden themselves with regard to the Lord's Table: "A person tortured himself /in 'the old way', before they started to see the light of the Gospel/ to be so perfectly pure that God could not find the least blemish in us. On this account we became so timid that every one was instantly thrown into consternation and said to himself: Alas! you are unworthy! . . . Because nature and reason see this, they refuse to approach and /delay themselves/ until they are prepared, so long that one week trails another, and one half year the other. But if you are to regard how good and pure you are, and labour to have no compunctions, you must never approach." (LC)

Proper preparation should be undertaken in a different way. When we investigate and judge our own lives and hearts, our thoughts, words, and deeds, then we may also find a longing for our Saviour, for His love and righteousness, a hunger and thirst for the Kingdom of God. Then we should know that on His side Christ is most anxious to meet us at His Table: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me."¹⁰

- 1 1 Cor 11:20
- 2 1 Cor 10:21
- 3 Mk 14:15
- 4 Isa 53; Jn 1:29
- 5 1 Cor 11:26

- 6 2 Tim 4:1
- 7 1 Cor 10:16
- 8 Mt 26:26–28
- 9 1 Cor 10:16
- 10 Rev 3:20

XIV

Faith and forgiveness of sins

1. Baptism and faith.

Is baptism necessary for salvation? That question must be answered in the affirmative. For salvation it is necessary to have been born anew: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."¹ Our confession says: "Since the fall of Adam, all men begotten in the natural way are born with sin, that is, without the fear of God, without trust in God, and with /evil desire/; and that this disease, or vice of origin, is truly sin, even now condemning and bringing eternal death upon those not born again through Baptism and the Holy Ghost." (CA) Therefore it is also taught about Baptism "that it is necessary to salvation, and that through Baptism is offered the grace of God; and that children are to be baptized, who, being offered to God through Baptism, are received into God's grace." (CA)

The regeneration through Baptism and through the Word of God is the same, because in both ways the same Holy Spirit is working. Therefore there might be some cases, where a person through the Word of God has been brought to a living faith and has already died in this faith, without having had the opportunity of being baptized. In such cases the fact of not having been baptized does not exclude from salvation. From that we may conclude: If a non-baptized person has come to faith, he must be baptized as soon as possible, or else his contempt or neglect of Baptism will condemn him. On the other hand: if somebody has been baptized without a true faith – and that may happen even among those who receive baptism as adults – he does not need a new baptism, if he comes to faith later. Baptism is valid in itself, it is not founded on our personal faith.

But can a little child have faith? According to "reason" most

people would answer that question with a definite "no". But whatever objections we may have, the question has been answered once and for ever long before our time. Besides the fact that in the Old Testament small children were taken into the covenant with God, Jesus has answered the question at several occasions. He said, as already quoted, that we must be born of water and the Spirit, and that without that we cannot enter the Kingdom of God. Further He has said that "to such /the little children/ belongs the kingdom of God",² and further that grown up people must become like children, not children like grown up people, if they are to enter the Kingdom of God.³ But if we are not convinced by such words, there is another word by Jesus speaking even about the faith of the small children: "Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven . . . Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; but whoever causes *one of these little ones who believe in me* to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea."⁴ By such words the matter is settled. We must teach and believe that our Lord Jesus Christ deals with the children directly in Baptism, not only through parents, sponsors, or the congregation. He wants them to become children in His Kingdom. He gives them His grace and His Spirit. "For with God nothing will be impossible."⁵

2. Faith and the means of grace.

It is God who acts through the means of grace. He does so by His Holy Spirit, by His Word, through the outward, visible means. God's work is something real, objectively real. It does not consist in thoughts, ideas, or feelings only. This teaching about what is objectively real is a barrier against a belief, which is based on sensational "happenings" or "spiritual experience".

When we deal with God's work of this kind, there are two sides of it we have to examine further. One side is the importance of *the Word*, the other is *faith*. What gives Baptism, Holy Communion or Absolution their contents and power? It is not the outward action in itself, nor the outward, visible things, but the word of

God: "It is not the water indeed /in Baptism/ that does them /such great things/, but the word of God which is in and with the water . . . It is not the eating and drinking indeed /in Holy Communion/ that does them /such great things/, but the words which stand here, namely, *Given, and shed for you, for the remission of sins.*" (SC) But here we also have to observe the other side, already mentioned: "He that believes these words has what they say and express, namely, the forgiveness of sins." (SC)

Thus both the Word of God and faith are stressed at the same time. We must guard ourselves against the thought that the outward action, or mere partaking, in the sacrament gives us a sort of merit or standing. On the other side it must be very clear: the grace of God does not rest on our faith. Grace is not given to us because of our faith, nor is it our faith that gives power to the means of grace. The grace of God is the same as *forgiveness of sins, peace, and eternal life*. These things are given to us only for Christ's sake. Faith is of importance in these matters only as an empty hand stretched out to receive the gifts, which are totally undeserved.⁶

3. The order of grace.

When God gives His grace and creates faith in the forgiveness of sins for Jesus' sake, it is possible to speak about a certain order, *the order of grace*. In this order we may include: the calling, the enlightening, conversion, faith, justification, regeneration, sanctification, preservation, and glorification. Some of these matters are different sides of one and the same thing, namely the creation and the continuation of faith, and work very much together. For the sake of clarity, however, we deal with them separately.

With regard to *the calling* (to Christ, to become a Christian, to conversion) it is necessary to note a clear difference between God's work and what man can do. Man cannot decide about the time for God's calling, nor can he hinder God's calling to come. The calling may be restricted to a short time, and it may continue over a long period. It may be seen or heard in an outward way, or it may be like a soft voice in man's heart. Sometimes the calling is connected with sweet and delightful feelings, but it is essential to

know that such feelings are neither necessary, nor anything to rely on. Further it may be noted that such feelings must not be mixed up with faith, conversion or regeneration.

God's calling always comes *through the Word of God, strictly speaking only through that part of the Word which is called the Gospel.*⁷ When God calls people, He wishes to make them His children and members of His Kingdom.⁸ God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth".⁹

The enlightening of man's heart is done by the Law and by the Gospel. By the holy Law the Spirit of God sends His light into the heart of man. Man then in a fearful way becomes conscious of God's holiness and his own unholiness. It becomes necessary to confess that the judgment of the Law is true. If the words of the Law were the final ones, man would be lost. — The enlightening through the Gospel is of a different kind. It points to Christ, His work, His grace, and His glory. Furthermore it is a continued call, because in cases of falls, the Spirit invites man to come back to Christ for help.

The conversion of man consists in *turning away* from his old, evil life and *turning to* God and Christ's righteousness and grace, which is thereby received. Such a conversion is never done without faith, although this faith may be in its earliest and weakest stage. Conversion has two main parts: *repentance* (which is the same as contrition) *and faith*. Repentance is directed towards sin itself, not towards the possible punishment that may be expected because of the sin. The sinner regrets the very fact that he has thought and done such things that are bad and evil and thereby offended the holy God. The Spirit of God wishes to create in man's heart such a "godly grief" that "produces a repentance that leads to salvation".¹⁰ Such salvation is in Christ only. True repentance, therefore, always goes together with faith in Christ. Such people who have become struck by the Law take their refuge in Christ.¹¹

The saving faith is God's own work in the heart of man. But at the same time we must observe that the saving faith is not separated from man as a work totally foreign to him. It is not God or God's Spirit who believes, it is man who believes. Nobody else can do it for him. But this work in him is done by the Spirit of God.

Justification is so closely connected with the faith and with the regeneration, that these terms are often used alternately. Thus it has been said: "By faith alone in Christ, not through love, not because of love or works, do we acquire the remission of sins, although love follows faith: *Therefore by faith alone we are justified*, understanding justification as the making of a righteous man out of an unrighteous, or that he be regenerated." (ACA) But in spite of this rather frequent interchange of words it is necessary that we know the meaning of each word. Then "faith" is the instrument by which we receive God's gifts, whereas "justification" describes the new standing before God, attained by those who believe. In the same way there is a difference between justification and *regeneration*. "Regeneration", i.e. the birth of a new man,¹² is the new beginning in the converted man's heart and life, the kindling of the new life, after the death of the old man.¹³ "Justification", on the other hand, does not describe anything in the heart of man, nor in his life. It describes what happens in heaven, before God's heavenly court. "Justification" is God's work right through, but it occurs only when man receives God's grace in Christ by believing in Christ. This justification occurs, both in Baptism and when a sinner repents later in life and turns to God in a true conversion and faith.

Faith needs a continuation. All that also belongs to the order of grace. The first part of this continuation is *sanctification*. Sanctification is the application of God's holiness and love upon man's daily life, both before God and among people in the world. For such an application man needs *daily conversion*. Sanctification is also needed if man is to be kept in faith. This is the *preservation*. Finally, when faith reaches its goal, man is *glorified*.¹⁴

- | | | |
|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1 Jn 3:5 | 6 Eph 2:8 | 10 2 Cor 7:10 |
| 2 Mk 10:14 | 7 Rom 10:14-17 | 11 Gal 3:24 |
| 3 Mk 10:13-16 | 8 Mt 28:18-20; | 12 Jn 3:3-8 |
| 4 Mt 18:1-7 | Jn 3:16 | 13 Eph 4:22-24 |
| 5 Lk 1:37 | 9 1 Tim 2:4 | 14 Heb 12:14; |
| | | 2 Tim 2:10 |

XV

Confession

1. The position of Confession in the life and work of the Church.

Confession is also called Absolution. It is easy to explain why. Confession and absolution are the two parts of this means of grace which can, therefore, be described by the one name or the other. Whichever name is used it is important that we understand the thing itself. Sometimes this means of grace has been a thing of bad reputation in the Christian Church. Sometimes it has also been said that it has been abolished. But that is not true: "Confession in the churches is not abolished among us; for it is not usual to give the body of the Lord, except to them that have been previously examined and absolved. And the people are most carefully taught concerning faith in the absolution, about which formerly there was profound silence. Our people are taught that they should highly prize the absolution, as being the voice of God, and pronounced by God's command." (CA)

From this it is also clear that confession and absolution are very often used in connection with the celebration of Holy Communion. This can be done in two ways. Originally there was only one way open: private confession by each one before Holy Communion, but later the size of the congregations made it necessary to arrange confessions with the whole congregation taking part at the same time. But all Christians should be encouraged to make use of the private confession again, even where the common confession prevails.

It should be noted, though, that confession also exists apart from the celebration of Holy Communion. Confession is available to any Christian at any time wishing to make use of this means of grace.

2. What is Confession?

To understand that we must remember what has already been said: "Confession embraces two parts: the one is, that we confess our sins; the other, that we receive absolution, or forgiveness, from the confessor, as from God Himself, and in no wise doubt, but firmly believe, that our sins are thereby forgiven before God in heaven." (SC) This is to look at the matter from man's side. But we can also do that more in detail by using the terms "*contrition*" and "*faith*": "We have ascribed to repentance (or conversion) these two parts, namely, contrition and faith . . . We say that contrition is the true terror of conscience, which feels that God is angry with sin, and which grieves that it has sinned. And this contrition takes place in this manner when sins are censured by the Word of God, because the sum of the preaching of the Gospel is this, namely, to convict of sin, and to offer for Christ's sake the remission of sins and righteousness, and the Holy Ghost, and eternal life, and that as regenerate men we should do good works. Thus Christ comprises the sum of the Gospel when He says in the last chapter of Luke, v. 47: *That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in My name among all nations.*" (ACA) – The second part of repentance is faith in Christ, because "in these terrors the Gospel concerning Christ ought to be set forth to consciences, in which Gospel the remission of sins is freely promised concerning Christ. Therefore, they ought to believe that for Christ's sake sins are freely remitted to them." (ACA)

When the Church invites people to use Confession, then *both Law and Gospel are applied* to them by the Spirit of God.¹ By the Law those who listen will be convinced of their sins, both visible and invisible. This does not happen to raw, rough, and ungodly people only. The Law of God concerns all people: "You are all of no account, whether you be manifest sinners or saints (in your own opinion); you all must become different and do otherwise than you now are and are doing (no matter what sort of people you are), whether you are as great, wise, powerful, and holy as you may." (SA)

The Gospel, on the other hand, is "properly a doctrine which teaches what man should *believe*, that he may obtain forgiveness

of sins with God, namely, that the Son of God, our Lord Christ, has taken upon Himself and borne the curse of the Law, has expiated and paid for all our sins, through whom alone we again enter into favour with God, obtain forgiveness of sins by faith, are delivered from death and all the punishments of sins, and eternally saved." (FC)

3. Confession is closely connected with Baptism and Holy Communion.

The grace which is given in the Absolution is the same as in the Sacrament of Baptism: "Here you see that Baptism, both in its power and signification, comprehends also the third Sacrament, which has been called repentance, as it is really nothing else than Baptism . . . Therefore, if you live in repentance, you walk in Baptism, which not only signifies such a new life, but also produces, begins, and exercises it . . . Repentance, therefore, is nothing else than a return and approach to Baptism, that we repeat and practise what we began before, but abandoned." (LC) In that way Confession is closely connected with Baptism.

But Confession is also connected with Holy Communion. Every time man sins he falls from the grace of Baptism, if he does not repent and ask for God's forgiveness. Such forgiveness is given in confession. This is what it is for: to raise Christians who have fallen in sin. To be raised and to be put upright again, that is to be reinstated in the covenant of Baptism. Holy Communion is a pledge and the visible sign that a Christian stands in the grace and may believe in the forgiveness of his sins. The absolution that has reinstated him in grace should, therefore, also point to the table of Holy Communion and teach him to use that Sacrament often and regularly.

4. Confession is closely connected with faith.

The forgiveness of sins, given in the Absolution, has its foundation in the reconciliation made by Christ.² The condition for the

forgiveness, therefore, does not lie with man, but with God, "in Christ".³ From this it will follow that faith is not really a condition for the forgiveness of sins. The only condition is the reconciliation already accomplished. Faith is the hand of man, stretched out to receive the gift offered.

It has often been said that Confession as a means of grace is likely to be used in a wrong way. To this it must be answered that most gifts can be accepted and used wrongly, but that fact is no reason to abstain from the right use or to withdraw the gift altogether. The wrong use should be counteracted by right teaching. In that way people may be shown that only by true repentance is it possible to receive the forgiveness of sins. People should also be reminded that Confession is closely connected with the Word, Baptism, Holy Communion, and Prayer, and that it should not be separated from these things.

There is another frequent objection to Confession: how can the confessor, i.e. the minister of the Word of God, search the heart of the confessing person well enough, before he gives him the absolution? But that question is based on a misunderstanding. What is the pastor supposed to find, before he gives absolution? Should there be a certain degree of repentance, a change of life, or is the confessing person good enough and so on? Here we must understand that the sole condition for forgiveness and absolution is God's grace: God has been fully reconciled in Christ, when Christ atoned for the sins of the world.⁴ Therefore, because of this the forgiveness of sins can be given to man. When somebody believes this and wants to receive this gift it is enough. No further scrutinizing is needed. No further conditions have to be fulfilled or imposed.

5. How is this Sacrament to be administered?

It is done through "the power of the Keys". (CA)⁵ "Because God truly quickens through the Word, the keys truly remit sins before God (here on earth sins are truly cancelled in such a manner that they are cancelled also before God in heaven) according to Luke 10:16: *He that heareth you heareth Me.* Wherefore the voice of the

one absolving must be believed not otherwise than we would believe a voice from heaven. And absolution (that blessed word of comfort) properly can be called a sacrament of repentance." (ACA) Absolution "in a case of necessity" can be given even by a layman, (PPP) but ordinarily the keys are kept by the ordained ministers. The good practice of handling them can be described in this way: "You should speak to the confessor thus: 'Reverend and dear sir, I beseech you to hear my confession, and to pronounce forgiveness to me for God's sake.' 'Proceed!' 'I, a poor sinner, confess myself before God guilty of all sins; especially I confess before you that . . .' Then shall the confessor say: 'God be merciful to thee and strengthen thy faith! Amen.' Furthermore: 'Dost thou believe that my forgiveness is God's forgiveness?' Answer: 'Yes, dear sir.' Then let him say: 'As thou believest, so be it done unto thee. And by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ I forgive thee thy sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Depart in peace.' " (SC)

Is it possible to mention all sins?

Sometimes it has been taught that such enumeration of all sins is necessary, if the absolution is to be valid. But it is totally impossible to a human being to mention every sin. This matter can be explained in this way: "Before God we should plead guilty of all sins, even of those which we do not know, as we do in the Lord's Prayer. But before the confessor we should confess those sins alone which we know and feel in our hearts . . . But if any one does not find himself burdened with such or greater sins, he should not trouble himself or search for or invent other sins, and thereby make confession a torture, but mention one or two that he knows." (SC) The reason for this point of teaching may be given in this way: It is taught in such words that "an enumeration of sins is not necessary, and that consciences be not burdened with anxiety to enumerate all sins, for it is impossible to recount all sins, as the Psalm testifies, 19:12: *Who can understand his errors? . . .* If no sins were forgiven except those that are recounted, consciences could never find peace; for very many sins they neither see nor can remember. The ancient writers also testify that an enumeration is not necessary." (CA)

- 1 Jn 16:8–11
- 2 2 Cor 5:19–21
- 3 Eph 1:11–14

- 4 Rom 5:11; 1 Jn 2:2
- 5 Mt 16:19; Jn 20:22–23

XVI

Christians in the world

1. They live under two different rules.

This world is evil in many ways, and so it can be said: "The whole world is in the power of the evil one."¹ But in spite of this we are taught in Scripture that God as Creator keeps His hand over the whole world. He sustains all peoples and their countries, as well as all other created beings and things. His ruling of the world also pertains to the worldly community and the statecraft. But this ruling is indirect. It is different from the way He rules His Church and its members. Because of this we make a distinction between worldly rule and spiritual rule. If we wish to avoid confusion in these matters it is necessary to observe this difference.

The spiritual rule is connected with the salvation work that has been carried out by Jesus Christ. In one way this work is continued by His holy Christian Church. In her and through her He has "bestowed His Holy Ghost, who is to bring these things home to us by His holy Word, and to illumine and strengthen us in the faith by His power." (LC)

The worldly rule, i.e. state authorities, local administration etc., belongs only to this world. But in spite of that all Christians must count these authorities as part of God's work when He rules the world. If the authorities do their work well, then they are good, even if they do not count themselves as Christians. As worldly powers they have the responsibility to act rightly, be just and good, as good as a worldly power can be in a sinful world. A Christian shares the responsibility for this, together with all other citizens, Christians and non-Christians. The best instruments for this is faithfulness in all duties, together with prayer.² When we pray for the worldly authorities it is our wish before God that they may realize their duties and fulfil them according to their respon-

sibility before their fellow-citizens and their own consciences. — The Church has a prophetic duty to fulfil: to show what the Law of Creation and the law in our consciences demands from all of us. By doing so the Church is helping the worldly authorities to perform their duties.

But there are situations where Scripture not only admits the duty to be disobedient to the worldly powers, but even commands such disobedience. Such situations may come, whether the authorities are "heathen", "neutral", "atheistic" or "Christian". Such situations arise when the authorities order things that belong to "the spiritual rule", i.e. the Kingdom of God, matters of faith and salvation, etc.³ In such matters worldly powers have no say. If such situations occur, Scripture gives us this command: "We must obey God rather than men."⁴

2. Home and marriage.

All people live in that fellowship and community that is held together by God's creation and His continued keeping of the world. Home and marriage are a field of such community life. Of course it is not possible for each one of us to marry or to get married. But most people have had a home where they grew up and received their first care and the first impressions of their life.

The setting up of a home and the love between a man and a woman has its only rightful place in the married state where the demands of loyalty and faithfulness must be adhered to by both members. And because God so gloriously "honours and extols this estate, inasmuch as by His commandment He both sanctions and guards it . . . He also wishes us to honour it, and to maintain and conduct it as a divine and blessed estate." (LC)

The relations between parents and children are closely coupled to the relations between husband and wife in marriage. Therefore "it is of the highest importance to /God/ that persons be raised who may serve the world and promote the knowledge of God, godly living, and all virtues, to fight against wickedness and the devil". (LC) From this another conclusion must be made: ". . . that the young may be so guided that they conceive a liking for the married estate, and know that it is a blessed estate and

pleasing to God. For in this way we might in the course of time bring it about that married life be restored to honour, and that there might be less of the filthy, dissolute, disorderly doings which now run riot the world over in open prostitution and other shameful vices arising from disregard of married life." (LC) Children also have a certain responsibility for the relation to their parents: "Every child that knows and does this has, in the first place, this great consolation in his heart, that he can joyfully say and boast (in spite of and against all who are occupied with works of their own choice): 'Behold, this work is well pleasing to my God in heaven, that I know for certain.' " (LC)

3. In the worldly vocation.

God has created the world and put man therein to rule over the created things.⁵ Therefore our work is an essential part of the order of creation. But man is created to be, not a slave, but a free man in his work. He should not become burdened or tired by his work, rather happy and rejoicing. That is what it ought to be. But this has become totally changed through the great Fall.⁶ The change is most clearly seen in man himself. To him almost all work is a laborious toil in the sweat of his face. Thus it will remain, until he is delivered from his position as a sinner. Such deliverance comes when he is "set free from his bondage to decay" and "obtains the glorious liberty of the children of God".⁷ That position is not reached in full in this world or in the present time, but in a beginning way it may be started already here. Thereby his outlook on the world and the work and tasks here may be changed as well.

With regard to the work of a Christian in this world two sides of it may be pointed out particularly. One side is the *vocation*, the other side is *faithfulness*. If a Christian serves God in his worldly work of calling, it is a good work. It does not matter if it is a work of great honour among men or not, nor does it matter if it gives great influence among men or not. What matters is faithfulness, endurance, and true love and stewardship.⁸

4. Love towards our fellow-men.

The decay of the world has come through man, and therefore its restoration must begin with man.⁹ With regard to love it is neither sufficient nor right to say: "Of course we all have love." We have not. "Natural love", such as it exists in this fallen world, make us love only our own people (and even that very poorly at times), or those who are near us in some way, or "those who deserve to be loved". According to Christian doctrine and faith God has commanded us to love both God and our fellowmen. It is note-worthy that "on these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets".¹⁰

But there are many who wish to avoid the sharp point in all commandments of love by asking: "Who is my neighbour?"¹¹ They think: "How can I possibly know, among all people I happen to meet in this world, who is my neighbour?" We should note that Jesus has turned the matter completely round by pointing to us: *You* are the neighbour, don't look for one! This is a call to everybody who knows God and His Word and who has been taught what love is: In every need, and every trouble, and every distress to step in and help, and thereby prove oneself to be a "neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers".

5. As a witness about our Lord and our faith.

The faith of Christians expresses itself both in words and deeds, the latter both in the work of the calling and in love for fellow-men. In order to understand this fact more fully we have to study the calling of the Church in those fields that are called *mission and diaconal work*. First, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation",¹² secondly, every single Christian is a member of the body of Christ: "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together."¹³ Up to the time when Christ will come back in glory,¹⁴ it is the task of the Christian Church to spread the Gospel, "the good news", and to make people share the salvation that has been accomplished. That is the mission work. But besides this the Church has to carry

out the work of love in another sense, the diaconal work. We cannot choose between mission work and diaconal work. There is no choosing of that kind. Both these works have to be done.

When we have seen this work with regard to the Church, we must also note the duty of every single Christian and then consider the resources and gifts of everybody: "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them."¹⁵ In these matters everything depends on our relation to God, and to His Word, and on the sort of our faith. Faith, confession, prayers, offerings, and sacrifices are essential things for the work of the Church and for a Christian's fight and work for the Kingdom of God.¹⁶

6. In the Christian fellowship with brothers and sisters.

A Christian cannot live all by himself. He must be aware both of the local Christian community and the worldwide Christian fellowship. From the start he might not have seen all this. But it is essential to be led forwards in this direction. For that it is necessary to use the means of the congregation and the Church, i.e. the means of grace, prayer, confession, and deeds of love.

How all this is practised in words and deeds is not so much a matter for the doctrine of faith, it is much more a matter for the doctrine of the Church and for the parished and spiritual care. But there is one side of it we have to stress here: that side of the Christian witnessing that may be called *suffering*. Suffering sometimes comes through ourselves, by sins and mistakes of our own making, but sometimes it is put on us by the approval of God.

When a Christian suffers, it is essential to look upon the suffering not only as something to be accepted, but rather as a practice to be performed, and as a task and a fight, something commanded to us: "Take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus."¹⁷ This is a question of humility and patience. Therefore only a man of faith will come through in the right way. But nobody can stand by himself in all this. A Christian can fight and remain standing only if he remains in fellowship with Christ, with the Church and with his fellow-Christians.¹⁸

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|---|-------------|----|------------------------------|----|-------------|
| 1 | 1 Jn 5:19 | 7 | Rom 8:21 | 12 | Mk 16:15 |
| 2 | 1 Tim 2:1-2 | 8 | Mt 25:14-30;
Lk 16:10-12; | 13 | 1 Cor 12:26 |
| 3 | Mt 22:21 | | 1 Cor 4:1-5 | 14 | Mt 25:31 |
| 4 | Acts 5:29 | 9 | Rom 8:20-21 | 15 | Rom 12:6 |
| 5 | Gen 1:28-30 | 10 | Mt 22:34-40 | 16 | 2 Tim 2:3-7 |
| 6 | Gen 3:1-19 | 11 | Lk 10:25-37 | 17 | 2 Tim 2:3 |
| | | | | 18 | 1 Cor 12:26 |

XVII

The world outside the Church

The questions arising here deal with the other religions, other moral systems, and people in general who are outside the Christian fellowship. How is the Church to behave in all this? The deciding principles for the Christians in their thoughts and actions must be the following: God is the Creator of the whole world and of all men; all those who have become the children of God through Jesus Christ have been called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world,¹ and thereby the servants of men; and finally, Jesus Christ desires to become the Saviour of all men.

1. The relation to other religions.

According to the Word of God it is taught by the Church that God has made Himself known in all countries and among all men.² By this it is admitted that *in other religions there can exist a certain knowledge about God*. All people share the general revelation that is available in Creation, History, and Conscience.

But in spite of this the general worshipping among the people is futile, because the only true God is unknown to them. Sometimes their worshipping has led them to a countless number of gods, to vanity, to blasphemous offerings, and to immoral ways of living.³

A countless number of gods and spirits are believed to exist in the world of religions. In this situation the Church must teach that the true revelation of God has come in the Word and through Jesus Christ. When this is taught by Christians, it has nothing to do with egoism, or self-assertion. The Christians only adhere to and repeat what is given in God's Word and what Christ Himself has taught.⁴

Sometimes it has been said that Christianity is the highest form

of religion. It is a dangerous expression that should be avoided. It could be understood as if Christianity has *developed* to become what it is today and that other religions may follow and develop in a similar way. But that is not the case. Christianity has not developed from a lower into a higher stage. Christianity has come to us because God has revealed Himself through the prophets, through Jesus Christ and the Word. Whatever exists in the world in the form of other religions is "a feeling after God", it is not a real knowledge of God or real fellowship with "the only true God".⁵

How should Christians behave towards such people who confess faith in other gods? May it be enough here to say that we do not gain anything by personal judgments or cutting words. A confessing Christian has nothing to boast of himself. What he has, e.g. light in spiritual things and an eternal hope, has been given to him through God's grace. When a Christian approaches an atheist or a person of a foreign religion, it should be done in a spirit of love and in willingness to share what he himself has received with somebody who has not received it yet. This is not a mind of superiority, it is a way of praising "the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom /He/ has sent".⁶

2. The relation to other moral systems.

There are some fields where all people can meet: the field of Creation, and the field of moral principles. All people and all individuals must be very much concerned with these questions: what is right and what is wrong; what can we do to make it possible for people to live together in one world, and to make the good powers in the world prevail? The strongest powers in the moral field are Law and Conscience.

On the Christian side we can speak about the law in several ways, e.g. the law as a teacher or "custodian"⁷ that directs us to Christ, or as a guiding line or rule, if we wish to live in faith, love, and sanctification.⁸ We cannot share these things with non-Christians. What Christians and non-Christians have together is the question about *good and evil in this world and in the community life*. Those things must concern all people because they all live in

the created world.⁹ In this sphere Christians must admit that there can exist moral systems among those who are not Christians. Those systems have a great task. If they are fulfilled, it is another proof that God looks after His created world even where it has deviated from him. In this field "reason" has one of its greatest duties. When "reason" looks after this duty, to examine and to judge about worldly things and about the moral life of man in this world, it is a good power. But "reason" cannot be allowed to proceed into the field of faith, which is God's revelation of Himself: salvation, heaven, eternal life and happiness. It is essential that we see this difference when it is argued about the fellowship Christians can have with non-Christians. Real fellowship, we have said, can exist only in worldly matters and in the field of moral, i.e. ethics. In those fields the law of creation and reason is allowed to prevail, and in those fields all people should cooperate and work for the best of the individuals and of the community. Not to cooperate in such matters is to fail in one's moral responsibility, and that is to fail as a Christian as well.

From a Christian point of view the non-Christian moral systems cannot be condemned generally. First of all we must note the clear difference that exists between them. On the one side there are many, influenced by heathen religions, on the other side there are non-religious or atheistic moral systems. They must be looked upon differently. In the heathen moral system there are many principles that other people can respect, because in them there are forces at work from Creation and through God's preservation. These moral principles can be accepted, if they are supported by "reason". Even in the non-religious moral systems there may be some moral principles preserved, but there "reason" may have been allowed to play over a wider field, and possibly it has swept away some good things. All this must be considered when we examine other moral systems and the possibility of cooperating with them.

All moral systems have some importance for the human community, even in such cases where the existence of God is denied. If the followers of such a system give so much room to truth that they make a difference between good and evil, true and untrue, this means that conscience is allowed to function. Such people may be ready to assist in the moral field, so as to keep the world in

a good moral order. In this way, even those who deny God may be used by Him in order to sustain His world.

Heathen and other non-Christian moral systems have another contribution to give to the common good. It is apparent that willing or unwilling they repeat and teach many Christian thoughts, in part or in full. What the Christian Church has taught through the centuries has gone out into the world and become accepted by many individuals and peoples. Although they do not know where it has come from they have included it in their belief and general outlook. It is impossible to register all such "loans" to different moral and religious systems of thought. But it is even more essential, however, that the Church carefully watches over what it teaches and proclaims. Only those things which are of full validity according to Christ's revelation of God and according to the Word of God generally is "the good seed".¹⁰

3. The relation to men generally.

Christians will be different from other people not only with regard to their religious faith but also with regard to their moral outlook. To understand this we may look at two descriptions given in the Bible.¹¹ The first of these descriptions is *love*. The Christian love differs from many things which are called "love" in this world. The Christian love is an outflow from God's own love. When a Christian lives in the love of God, something he must do if he wishes to remain a Christian, he is being transformed into this way of being and living: love. When our Lord Jesus Christ speaks about the love of His disciples, He puts it in this way: "You are my friends, if you do what I command you." "Abide in me, and I in you . . . apart from me you can do nothing."¹² But on this point a great mistake is very common: many people believe that they can have the Christian moral without having the Christian faith and doctrine. In other words: they believe that they can have love in the Christian sense, without receiving it from the Christian revelation and without having Christ as their Lord and Saviour. They don't realize that by their way of thinking and doing they block the very source of love, and yet they imagine that they can treat others to drink from it. Scripture makes this matter totally

clear to us: "No one can receive anything except what is given him from heaven."¹³ "Let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God."¹⁴ "We love, because He first loved us."¹⁵

The second description of Christians in their relation to the surrounding world is their *foundation on things eternal*. As believing Christians they have both a citizenship in a worldly country and "a commonwealth in heaven".¹⁶ It is a natural consequence of their faith in God as their Creator and Father, and of their faith in Jesus Christ as their Saviour and King. When we are citizens in a country we have the duty to obey the laws of that country, that is also a duty for every Christian.¹⁷ But at the same time we have the duty to give to God what belongs to Him. That ought to be a civil right in every country. It is part of the Christian duty that we should "seek the welfare of the city" where we live or where we have been sent.¹⁸ On the other hand it must be totally clear that the country or the city where we have our citizenship is in no way our final station. Instead we have to "seek the city which is to come".¹⁹ While we are proceeding to that city our sanctification has to be practised among "the others", people of a different faith, but as a help and a testimony to them. This is one side of love, this is how it conducts itself and reacts with regard to "the world outside the Church".

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|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1 Mt 5:13-14 | 8 Mt 5:17-18; | 12 Jn 15:12-14; |
| 2 Rom 1:20; 2:14-15 | 1 Thess 4:1-8 | 15:4-5 |
| 3 Acts 17:16-31; | 9 1 Tim 1:8-11 | 13 Jn 3:27 |
| Rom 1:18-32; | 10 Mt 13:18-23, | 14 1 Jn 4:7 |
| 1 Cor 10:20 | 36-43 | 15 1 Jn 4:19 |
| 4 Mt 28:18-20; Jn | 11 Mt 5-7; Gal | 16 Phil 3:20 |
| 14:6; Acts 4:12 | 5:22-26; | 17 Mt 22:15-22; |
| 5 Acts 10:34-43; | Eph 5:1-11; | Rom 13:1-10 |
| 17:26-27 | Col 3:12-15 | 18 Jer 29:7 |
| 6 Jn 17:3 | | 19 Heb 13:14; |
| 7 Gal 3:24 | | 1 Pet 2:11-17 |

XVIII

God's people — a people on their way

1. It is a people of grace and truth.

Grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ,¹ but they do not come to us without *the means of grace*. By Baptism man is given the position as a child of God or, in other words, forgiveness of sins, life, and blessedness. By their baptism the children of God have such a communion with Christ that they may share the fruits of His suffering, death, and resurrection: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."² Here two things have been pointed out that describe the people of faith and their way through life. The first point concerns Baptism and the foundation of faith. In this means of grace we are baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ",³ in order that thereafter we may live our life in faith in Him. The foundation of faith is what is given in Baptism as an undeserved gift, by grace. The second point concerns the continued life, the right way of the walk, "in newness of life". Nobody can walk in that way all by himself. The continued life must also be founded on Jesus Christ, on His completed work of salvation, but with regard to the individual Christian it has its start in Baptism.

Thus by Baptism the foundation has been given for a life in communion with Jesus Christ and our fellowmen. Baptism, other means of grace and Prayer are connected with the local community of God's people and with the daily practice of sanctification. "After God through the Holy Ghost in Baptism has kindled and effected a beginning of the true knowledge of God and faith, we

should pray Him without ceasing that through the same Spirit and His grace, by means of the daily exercise of reading and practising God's Word, He would preserve in us faith and His heavenly gifts, strengthen us from day to day, and keep us to the end." (FC)

2. It is a people of faith.

If we wish to understand what Christian life is and how it manifests itself, the word "faith" has to be explained. Faith is of great importance among men in all spheres of life. We don't entrust ourselves to other people, unless we are sure that they are *trustworthy*, i.e. unless we feel that we can *believe in them*. By this comparison with our ordinary daily life we have also indicated what Christian faith is. Part of it is *a knowledge about God that He exists and that He is trustworthy*. But that is only the one side of faith. Another side is of still greater importance: *confidence and trust in God*. Faith in the true, Christian sense of the word trusts in God's promises, it takes hold of God's hand, stretched out in grace. But faith has another side again: it is active and working. It cannot stop at the point of having received something, or at the point of resting or feeling safe. At the same time it is active, working, and proceeding. It clings to the love of God,⁴ but it also proves itself to be "working through love".⁵

Christian life is directed towards God in everything. This is due to God's gifts in Creation. But in the same degree Christian life also depends upon salvation and faith in Christ. Fully we know God only through Holy Scripture and through Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. It is absolutely necessary to make these things clear, because without such clarity with regard to the knowledge of God and the fear of God, Christianity may be mixed up with almost any kind of religion. With regard to the eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ, we must always remember that "no one who denies the Son has the Father. He who confesses the Son has the Father also."⁶

3. It is a people of prayer.

Prayer must be there all the time. It is impossible to think of anybody living for a long time as a Christian without prayer, and then commencing to pray at a later stage. Christian life is a *fight about faith* all the time, but this fight is a *fight in prayer*. Therefore it may be said that the Christian life must be characterized by prayer, be developed in prayer, and consist in constant prayer.⁷

What Christian prayer is we can learn in the best way from the prayer Christ Himself has taught us.⁸ In all aspects it is a pattern for prayers: it has many and great and rich thoughts, although it is not long or rich in words; it gives people an opportunity to express all great and small needs they feel; but above everything stands God's name, His will, and His Kingdom. And when God has given us a prayer that He wants us to use more than any other prayer, there is a great promise involved. Therefore "we should be incited and drawn to prayer because in addition to this commandment and promise God anticipates us, and Himself arranges the words and form of prayer for us, and places them upon our lips as to how and what we should pray, that we may see how heartily He pities us in our distress, and may never doubt that such prayer is pleasing to Him and shall certainly be answered; which . . . is a great advantage indeed over all other prayers that we might compose ourselves." (LC)

The Lord's prayer is particularly a prayer "in Jesus' name".⁹ It is so because in this prayer we pray "thy will be done" in the same way as Jesus Himself prayed in Gethsemane.¹⁰ To pray "in Jesus' name" is to pray in the way He has taught us, but also to point to His promises: ". . . for Jesus' sake".

What we may ask for

It is often said that "daily bread" includes everything we need for the upkeep and necessities of life. This may be further explained in this way: "When you mention and pray for daily bread, you pray for everything that is necessary in order to have and enjoy daily bread and, on the other hand, against everything which interferes with it. Therefore you must open wide and extend your thoughts not only to the oven or the flour-bin, but to the distant field and the entire land, which bears and brings to us daily bread and every sort of sustenance. For if God did not cause it to grow,

and bless and preserve it in the field, we could never take bread from the oven or have any to set upon the table." (LC)

The need that forces us to pray to God does not come from outward enemies only. Our spiritual situation is such that we must ask for help in order to remain in faith: *a life in the Spirit needs prayer, in order that the believing Christian may remain in faith.* Prayer is also needed for a continued life in sanctification. This is a continuous and daily fight: "Although we have received forgiveness and a good conscience and are entirely acquitted, yet is our life of such a nature that one stands to-day and to-morrow falls. Therefore, even though we be godly now and stand before God with a good conscience, we must pray again that He would not suffer us to relapse and yield to trials and temptations." (LC)

Deviations in prayer

There is a common temptation in Christian prayer: to become selfish. In the first and simplest form of teaching about prayer it is usually started with our own needs, about *what we need ourselves.* It is essential that to such teaching is added, as soon as possible, a second point: *prayer must become a means for us to help and serve other people,* i.e. we must learn how to reach beyond our own needs and wishes, so as to assist other people in their needs. If this doesn't happen, our prayer will be characterized by great selfishness, and we will become more and more "curved into ourselves". Such prayer is not true Christian prayer. The true Christian prayer always asks for a stronger faith, more love, and greater willingness and power to help and serve other people.

This direction outwards, towards our fellowmen, is clear already from the words in our Lord's prayer: ". . . as we also have forgiven our debtors". This ought to be an important part of all Christian teaching, to direct thoughts and prayers in such a direction that fellowship, love and care are encouraged: "Therefore, every one of us should accustom himself from his youth daily to pray for all his wants, whenever he is sensible of anything affecting his interests or that of other people among whom he may live, as for preachers, the government, neighbours, /servants/, and always (as we have said) to hold up to God His commandment and promise, knowing that He will not have them disregarded." (LC)

4. It is a people witnessing for God.

On their way through the world Christians are called to witness for their Lord, both in words and in deeds, to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world".¹¹ The Christian witnessing cannot be referred to a certain place or to certain specified times, e.g. the pulpit of the church or special "meetings of witnessing". Instead the witnessing must be performed in all ways and at all times suitable for the purpose, e.g. at the place of the daily work, at home, among friends, in the private life and in public.

But if the Christian witnessing is to gain respect, it mustn't express itself in such forms or words that a person listening feels embarrassed or completely helpless in the hands of those witnessing. Instead the witnessing should have a natural form by being personal and by creating contact and understanding. If we look upon things that way we will not fail to "make the most of the time".¹² Only such Christians, who live in faith, prayer, and sanctification, will have experience enough and clear sight enough to see when such opportunities occur. Such opportunities are "good works, which God prepared beforehand".¹³

Many Christians have estimated too high that kind of witnessing that expresses itself in much "talk about faith". Very often the testimony in life and work do more than many words can do. It is possible that men "may be won without a word" by the behaviour of humble Christians,¹⁴ when they see their reverent and pure behaviour. Therefore it has been aptly said that it is not necessary always to carry one's Christian faith on the tongue, but always to carry it in the heart and in the daily way of living. That is a testimony in full accordance with the apostolic admonition: "Maintain good conduct among the Gentiles, so that in case they speak against you as wrongdoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."

1 Jn 1:17

2 Rom 6:3-4

3 Acts 2:38; 10:34-48;
16:31-33

4 Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 2:24-29

5 Gal 5:6

6 1 Jn 2:20-23

7 1 Thess 5:17

8 Mt 6:9-13

9 Jn 16:23-28

10 Mt 26:36-46

11 Mt 5:13-16

12 Eph 5:15-16

13 Eph 2:10

14 1 Pet 3:1-5; 2:12

XIX

The fight of God's people

1. The fight against outward and inner enemies.

There is one great hinder within God's people itself, it is *their weakness*. One common form of this weakness is *lack of knowledge*. Generally speaking "our knowledge is imperfect",¹ but here we should consider something worse: the shortage of such knowledge that we could have and should have. Such lack of knowledge often has bad consequences. In Corinth the congregation became divided, because the members didn't see the difference between loyalty to their leaders and loyalty to Christ.² In Galatia the lack of knowledge caused the members to become tempted to prefer Jewish doctrines of salvation to the Christian doctrine.³

Very few ages have got anything to boast of with regard to Christian knowledge. Sometimes there is an outcry of great need: "Mercy! Good God! what manifold misery I beheld! The common people, especially in the villages, have no knowledge whatever of Christian doctrine, and, alas! many pastors are altogether incapable and incompetent to teach (so much so, that one is ashamed to speak of it). Nevertheless, all maintain that they are Christians, have been baptized and receive the holy sacraments. Yet they (do not understand and) cannot (even) recite either the Lord's Prayer, or the Creed, or the Ten Commandments; they live like dumb brutes and irrational hogs; and yet, now that the Gospel has come, they have nicely learned to abuse all liberty like experts." (SC)

The lack of knowledge in Christian matters is often accompanied by *conceit and false security*. Against such spiritual dangers all Christians have to be on their guard. With such Christians, that

are yet "unsteady souls"⁴, there is another great danger: that kind of inquisitiveness that wishes to go on spiritual searching in order to find "new things".⁵ The congregations mentioned in the New Testament give us many examples of such dangerous doctrines that appeal to some people even nowadays, be it about food or drink, about the mortification of the body, about "wisdom", "worship of angels" or "visions".⁶ The apostolic word, "test everything, hold fast what is good",⁷ does not imply the abandoning of our Christian foundation, instead it advises us to try the prophesying that exists within the Church, if it is true or not. The apostle wants us to find out if the teaching of prophets, who appear now and then, is in accordance with "sound doctrine".⁸

The fight against false gods

There is a false godliness. It is false, because it is directed towards false gods. That is *idolatry*. When the people of Israel were on their march towards the promised country, they were often tempted to abandon the true fear of God.⁹ The worst thing happened when they made a golden calf, which they called their god, and before which they prayed and made offerings.¹⁰ The most common form nowadays is *the worshipping of Mammon*¹¹: "Many a one thinks that he has God and everything in abundance when he has money and possessions; he trusts in them and boasts of them with such firmness and assurance as to care for no one. Lo, such a man also has a god, Mammon by name, i.e., money and possessions, on which he sets all his heart, and which is also the most common idol on earth." (LC)

Next to money and possessions come *power and honour*: "Whoever trusts and boasts that he possesses great skill, prudence, power, favour, friendship, and honour has also a god, but not this true and only God. This appears again when you notice how presumptuous, secure, and proud people are because of such possessions, and how despondent when they no longer exist or are withdrawn." (LC)

Idolatry has many different forms. Even believing Christians may commit this kind of sin, either by ignorance or by weakness. Many kinds of idolatry may more suitably be called *superstition*. The different beliefs about "good luck", "bad luck", "the evil eye", horoscopes, mascots and the like either go back to old idolatry or are real idolatry even today. They are real idolatry, if

they are not mere foolishness. If people mean what they say, when they take certain steps to obtain protection, good luck, etc., they do commit idolatry. But if they do not involve any gods or idols and only speak empty words, then they commit another sin: "On the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."¹²

In more recent times the word "idol" has been taken up again in what may be called *admiration of some popular figures*. This is certainly not a worshipping of gods, but when artists, singers, musicians, athletes, etc., are adored in such a way that the admirers call them "idols", it is either an abuse of words or real idolatry. The Large Catechism gives a true statement about this: "That now, I say, upon which you set your heart and put your trust is properly your god."

What has been said here does not apply to property, money, power, and honour only. In the same degree it applies to *ideas and thoughts and philosophies*, or to "the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places".¹³ Such powers often make men their captives. They also get hold of such people who by their gifts and deeds give themselves an air of being good, although they are evil. Sometimes we do not realize that they demand obedience from us. Sometimes they do it openly: "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."¹⁴ Here we start to touch upon matters pertaining to the Devil and Antichrist.

2. The fight against Antichrist.

Once Jesus asked his disciples: "When the Son of man comes, will He find faith on earth?"¹⁵ Scripture itself answers in this way: "The Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, through the pretensions of liars whose consciences are seared."¹⁶ This development within the Church itself will be possible through the intrusion of Antichrist into "the most Holy" of God's Temple. To the conditions of the Church of Christ belongs this fact that "many antichrists have come",¹⁷ and that at the end of times a still greater one, Antichrist, will appear. According to

the teaching of Holy Scripture every false teacher (pastor) is an antichrist.¹⁸ What characterizes such teachers is their relation to Holy Scripture, and their relation to the Son of God and His atonement.¹⁹

Among all false teachers Antichrist will be the worst. It is said about him that he will reveal himself most clearly at the end of time. The teaching about this is given particularly by S:t Paul in his second letter to the Thessalonians.²⁰ At that time there will be a fall in the Church, unheard of earlier, a "lawlessness" of the utmost degree, and the one responsible for this will "take his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God". This doctrine is plain and dark at the same time. It is plain, because we can understand right away the seriousness of these matters; it is dark, because we cannot see yet when and where such things could happen. Therefore we must be careful not to point out "the son of perdition" too early, but yet look out for the steps of the evil powers, so that nobody "by fair and flattering words /may/ deceive the hearts of the simple-minded".²¹ Thus watchfulness must increase with us, because these warnings "were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come".²²

3. Tools and weapons for the fight.

When S:t Paul teaches about the great enemies he also mentions the weapons available for the fight.²³ "The helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God", are mentioned with particular emphasis. Nothing can be compared to the Word of God, because it is "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart".²⁴ It is also pointed out in Scripture that it is the Word of God that can defeat the great enemy.²⁵

There are some common thoughts about the Church that must be considered to be false: the one that the Church will go from victory to victory, and finally comprise and reshape the whole world; the other one that if the Church suffers, it is because it has made mistakes, and without such mistakes there would be no

suffering. The teaching of the Bible is different: If and when the Church teaches according to the Word of God, the more it will have to suffer. Christ has promised His Church that it will have to follow Him on His path of suffering.²⁶

But how can we speak about a final and glorious victory for the Church, if the true Christians are few and hard pressed at the end of time? The victory is found in God's will being done. It is not God's will that anybody should be lost, on the contrary He desires that all people should be saved.²⁷ But when the message of salvation is carried out over the world, there will always be a division, "for the fall and rising of many".²⁸ Thus there will be gathered, "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues",²⁹ all those who have received their salvation by faith in Christ. In the eyes of the world they may be a little flock, but truly they are "a great multitude which no man could number".³⁰ The victory belongs to Him who sits on the throne, because He has defeated all His enemies. But the victory also belongs to them who have received Him as their Saviour and King. They will also be declared victors, because they too have defeated their great enemy: "They have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony."³¹

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|--------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| 1 1 Cor 13:9 | 12 Mt 12:36-37 | 23 Eph 6:10-17 |
| 2 1 Cor 1:10-31 | 13 Eph 6:10-17 | 24 Heb 4:12 |
| 3 Gal 3:1-5 | 14 Mt 4:8-10 | 25 2 Thess 2:8 |
| 4 2 Pet 2:14 | 15 Lk 18:8 | 26 Mt 10:24; |
| 5 2 Tim 4:1-4; | 16 1 Tim 4:1-2 | Jn 16:33 |
| Heb 13:9 | 17 1 Jn 2:18 | 27 1 Tim 2:4 |
| 6 Col 2:16-23 | 18 1 Jn 2:19 | 28 Lk 2:34 |
| 7 1 Thess 5:21 | 19 2 Jn 7-11; | 29 Rev 7:9 |
| 8 Tit 2:1 | 1 Jn 2:20-25 | 30 Rev 7:9 |
| 9 Num 11-16 | 20 2 Thess 2:1-12 | 31 Rev 12:11 |
| 10 Ex 32 | 21 Rom 16:17-18 | |
| 11 Mt 6:19-21, 24; | 22 1 Cor 10:11 | |
| Lk 12:16-31 | | |

XX

The times of man

1. God is the Lord of all times.

According to Christian doctrine time is part of Creation. Time is one of the conditions for our life in this world. All events and all human activity have their particular time.¹ Therefore all times are different with regard to their contents. Some times are "times of trouble"² or accidents, of vengeance or visitation. Other times are "times of refreshing", "fruitful seasons", "the acceptable time" or "the day of salvation".³

Every time has its special significance because of the purpose of God. The importance of a certain time is not so much connected with its length, rather with the fact that it has been given by God. Then it has a certain meaning, it has to convey a certain contents, and it has to assist man in the fulfilling of God's will: "The word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it. 'See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil.'"⁴

God is the Lord of all times.⁵ Therefore He has also set the limits and borders of the peoples, both on the surface of the earth and in the periods of time, "having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation".⁶ In the history of salvation it can be seen very clearly how God deals with time, men and people. Here terms like "time" are most important, not in the least to show what "gospel" means. The Gospel brings the joyful message that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth".⁷ This happened "in time". Therefore it can be shown how the Son of God came into the world: it happened when Caesar Augustus ruled in Rome and when Quirinius was governor of Syria.⁸ In a similar way we are also told when Jesus commenced His official work, when He suffered and died, and

when He rose from the dead. When it comes to His final suffering and His death, even the hours are given. When the pre-requisites, decided or guided by God, have been fulfilled, then time is also fulfilled.⁹ This is how everything about time and salvation is summed up in Holy Scripture: "While we were yet helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly."¹⁰

When we try to understand the importance of time for the great events in the history of salvation, we have to remember this truth that God is the Lord of time. Since He is the Creator of everything, including time, He is the only one who has power to decide about the limits of the time and to give to every particular time its contents. He is the only one who can master it all. He Himself is an eternal God, superior to all time.¹¹ He created it to the service of man. When He "determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation", He did it "in the hope that they might feel after Him and find Him".¹²

2. The importance of time for our personal salvation.

Time is in the service of grace. With regard to an individual it means that in his lifetime he can receive the grace of God, provided he has not wasted his last opportunity by hardening his heart. If and when judgment comes upon him, the reason is that he did not accept the opportunity when he was visited by God.¹³

But salvation of man is also connected with *the eternal things*. The words "eternal" and "eternity" in their strictest sense can be applied only to God. Since He "was", before the world and man existed, He is eternal in the strictest sense of the word: He is the one existing before all times, and the one that will exist even after the end of all times.¹⁴ Therefore He is also called "the beginning and the end".¹⁵

The word "eternal" is also used about such things that express God's being and His deeds. From eternity it was His decision to save mankind, because in His omniscience he knew that man would fall. His decision and plan of salvation can therefore be called "eternal".¹⁶ In this way even men, created "in time" and during their life in this world limited in so many ways, may be

drawn into the relation of eternity. "The steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear Him",¹⁷ and therefore men can share the eternal life. God gives it to all those who become united with Christ through His Holy Church.¹⁸ But we should note that this participation of eternal life commences already here in this life. This shows us that "time" and "eternity" should not be understood as totally opposed to each other, so that all connection must be excluded. Instead it is a Christian doctrine that "he who believes in the Son has eternal life"¹⁹ already in this present time. This, of course, does not exclude that what the believer receives is only a beginning. The continuation of it will occur when time in this world has fulfilled its task and is changed into eternity.²⁰

"The good news", the Gospel, reaches us as a call here and now. That is what makes "time" so important to us. The time, in which we live, becomes "the acceptable time".²¹ When this happens, every time, every place, and every human heart may become a new Bethlehem, Nazareth, Jerusalem, Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida, because it is allowed to receive and house Jesus Christ. That means that there is preached "good news to the poor".²² But if that message is not accepted in such a way that the allotted time becomes "the acceptable year", then judgment will come instead of grace. Then judgment will come, "because you did not know the time of your visitation".²³ This is the most important meaning of the word "time": that period of the life of man, when he is visited by the grace of the eternal God.

3. Is life short or long?

In Scripture the life of man is sometimes described as "a breath" and his days as "a passing shadow".²⁴ Such words may teach us that life is short. When this is so, it is important to think of the meaning and the goal of life, "while it is day".²⁵

When people are anxious to obtain a long life they may be very mistaken. There are many who have lived a long life but filled it with poor or very doubtful things. In other cases we may find people who have lived a very short life but filled it with great things and in their short days accomplished things of great blessing. This

becomes particularly clear when we look at the life of Jesus Christ: a period of work of about three years from the day when He appeared in public after His silent years of youth. The question is: when and where in the history of mankind is it possible to find a blessed life or a blessed work of that magnitude, and yet comprehended into an amazingly short period? Nobody has ever embraced His teaching as thoroughly as He did Himself: "We must work the works of Him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work."

What gives life its worth and meaning is not its length in the first hand. But there is another mistake quite as common and quite as dangerous as that: the idea that to be rich our life must contain *riches in an outward way*, e.g. in the way of money, or possessions, or success, or power, or influence, or honour. All ideas of that kind are repudiated by Jesus: "Take heed, and beware of all covetousness; for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."²⁶ In the Kingdom of God there is a kind of rule that a loss or a disadvantage in outward, worldly matters may be balanced by a gain or an advantage in spiritual and eternal things.²⁷ Because still more important than a long and "successful" life is "to find one's life", the real life, life itself. This happens to those who have "chosen the good portion".²⁸ To them life is Christ.²⁹

Life has been entrusted to man as a loan, and therefore it also has to be accounted for. But it is for the all-wise God to decide if this or that life is to be long or short. That is exactly why it is important so "to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom".³⁰ More important than the length of our life is the grace of God, by which we have been called both to live and to work.³¹

From all things mentioned here it can be seen that the common thoughts about a long, happy and successful life are rather futile. If, on the contrary, a life is a life "in Christ", in faith, in love, and dedication, and faithfulness according to what Christ has taught us, then it would be good to have a long life to spend in such a good way. But is that what those people want who wish to get "a long life"? And when they get on with their "long life", they push their roots more and more deeply into that soil, from which they will have to pull them out one day. Therefore Scripture warns us:

"Brethren, the appointed time has grown very short."³² "Watch, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming."³³

If we consider the flight of time and the shortness of a human life, it will involve a sincere question to us: In all the worldly cases we meet, and in the daily communion with people, how will it be possible to be anchored in the heavenly and eternal world in such a way that we are prepared to leave this world at any time?³⁴ No specified rules will be of any particular help in these matters. Different advisers and philosophers have tried to help with symbols and words, e.g.: "Memento mori", i.e. "Remember that you will die." There is another and better way: the ordinary Christian life, in the daily calling among men, with the use of the Word of God, in prayer and worship; that is the best way of keeping in mind always that the appointed time is growing short,³⁵ "for here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come".³⁶

1	Eccl 3:1-8	14	Ps 90:2; Isa 40:28	26	Lk 12:15
2	Ps 37:39	15	Rev 22:13; Isa 43:10	27	Mt 16:24-26
3	Acts 3:19; 14:17; 2 Cor 6:2	16	Eph 1:9; 3:9; Col 1:26; Ez 37:26	28	Lk 10:41-42
4	Deut 30:14-15	17	Ps 103:17	29	Phil 1:21
5	Eph 1:21	18	Jn 17:3	30	Ps 90:12
6	Acts 17:26	19	Jn 3:36	31	Ps 63:3; 1 Thess 5:24
7	Jn 1:14	20	Phil 3:12; 1 Cor 13:8-12	32	1 Cor 7:29
8	Lk 2:1-2	21	2 Cor 6:2	33	Mt 24:42
9	Gal 4:4	22	Lk 4:18-19	34	Phil 1:19-26; 2 Tim 4:6-8
10	Rom 5:6	23	Lk 19:41-44	35	1 Cor 7:29
11	2 Pet 3:8; Ps 90:4	24	Ps 144:3-4	36	Heb 13:14
12	Acts 17:26-27	25	Jn 9:4		
13	Lk 19:41-44; Mt 23:37-39				

XXI

Life and death

1. The gift of life.

Life is a gift from God. Therefore He will also demand an account for what we have done with our personal life.¹ This applies to our body as well as our spirit and soul. For this reason we should take care of our physical and spiritual powers and not waste them. But the physical life is not an end in itself, so that it has to be preserved under all circumstances. The physical life has been given to us as an instrument to accomplish our task. Because of this we cannot look after the instrument to such an extent that we neglect or even miss our duties, as if the instrument were the sole or the main thing.

In this matter we have got the highest example in Him who said: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."² If a Christian fails on this point in a critical moment of his life, either because of being afraid of death or in consideration of the value of his own life, this only proves his lack of knowledge about the teaching of Christ.³

2. Why does death exist among us?

"Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned."⁴ By this doctrine the Christian religion differs from all other religions and schools of thought. How the world would have been today without the great fall nobody knows. We lack both knowledge and experience of such a state of things. But we do not need that knowledge either, since "because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man".⁵

Sometimes other reasons are mentioned for our death, e.g. age, weakness, and sickness. But these must be considered as only secondary factors at work. When the 70 or 80 years are mentioned as an ordinary limit of life,⁶ they are rather signs of the power at work after the fall.

3. What is death?

Holy Scripture tells us that in the physical death body and soul become separated, but they are not annihilated. We may die in very different ways, and we may be buried differently, but in all cases the body "returns to the ground, for out of it you were taken".⁷ If it is difficult for us to understand how God will be able to raise the remains of the body and give them life again, then we must consider that the difficulties are quite as great with regard to the beginning of life. The fact is: We have managed to understand the beginning quite as much, or rather quite as little, as we have understood death: "Thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb . . . My frame was not hidden from thee, when I was being made in secret, intricately wrought in the depths of the earth."⁸

When we try to understand the separation between body and soul, it is necessary also to understand the difference between the Christian doctrine and the teaching by some philosophical and idealistic schools. Many of them have the idea that the soul has become "enclosed in the prison of the body", and that it can be released from that prison only by the death of the body. All ideas of that kind are contrary to the Biblical teaching about Creation. According to it both body and soul have been created by God, both have been affected by the fall in the same degree, and both need salvation. The death of the body, therefore, does not include any liberation or salvation of the soul. Instead body and soul are *separated* in the moment of death, *but only temporarily*. They will be united again at the resurrection and be transformed to a complete human being again and as such face their eternal future.

It must be admitted that death is a dreadful thing. It is a terrible interference in the unity and integrity of man. But this interference is temporary. The dead body is put to rest in one way or

another. The soul proceeds to its "room" of rest, where it will remain waiting for the resurrection of the body and the reunion with it. Death, therefore, does not put a definite stop to the unity of man. That unity will be established again in the resurrection.⁹

The Christian doctrine about life and death must be kept quite apart from all other doctrines and thoughts, whether they resemble the Christian doctrine or not. All thoughts and beliefs about death, proclaimed as Christian, must be founded on the doctrines mentioned here: creation, the fall, the salvation in Jesus Christ, and the unity of body and soul. God created a good world, without sin and death, but through the fall of man and his uproar against God the evil powers came into the world, and thus death came. This is in general the truth about death. From this general truth we have to distinguish the individual cases of death among men. When a person dies, that is not a proof of his personal sinfulness or guilt. When he dies it is only proved that as a human being he shares the general condition of mankind, according to the word: "It is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment."¹⁰

4. Death is already defeated.

When St Paul has cried out: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?", he goes on with a shout of joy: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"¹¹ Why this difference? He is expounding the fact that Christ, the eternal Son of God, has come into the world and shared our human conditions. This happened, not in an outward way only, with regard to His childhood, education, training, work, tiredness, tears, and suffering. What is much more than that is that He suffered for our transgressions, died, was buried, and rose again from the dead. Through all this our conditions have become changed: "As sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."¹² "It will be reckoned to us who believe in Him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification."¹³ "If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who

receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ."¹⁴

Thus death is defeated. It has met its conqueror, our Lord Jesus Christ. But now people very often ask: "If that is the case, why do we have to die at all?" This question must be answered in a twofold way. First: Through original sin all people are sinners, and as such they are subject to death. It is true that the one who believes in Christ has been reconciled with God and "has passed from death to life",¹⁵ yet he shares the corruption of man. This inherited inclination to evil will be working in him up to the end of his life and may make him leave the way of life and go astray at any time. Death is the wages of sin to all men, because they are the bearers of the inheritance from Adam. Secondly: The one who believes, to him it remains to die only in the outward way, i.e. to pass the outward separation between body and soul. But the hardest and most difficult things in death have been removed from him: "He who believes has eternal life."¹⁶ "If any one keeps my word, he will never see death."¹⁷ "He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die."¹⁸

Even if death has been defeated, Scripture never denies that death has retained its power of causing pain, sorrow, fear, and trembling. A believing Christian may desire "to depart and be with Christ",¹⁹ but even so he is not free from pain and sorrow which so often accompany death. The pain and sorrow are due to many things, e.g. what happens in the last days and hours of life, the separation between body and soul, and also the separation from those who are left behind.²⁰ Therefore we may hesitate for what we should ask and pray: on one side to be delivered from the anxieties and pains of this life and be promoted to the life of our heavenly calling, or on the other hand to be allowed to continue our service to our fellowmen.

5. The time for departure.

With regard to death the question of "how" is much more important than the question of "when". This means that it is of minor importance if we die sooner or later, after sickness or without

being sick, etc. The most important question is *if death finds us prepared, when it comes*. We may say to ourselves: "I may die at any time." If we then make the right conclusion from that, we will also become and remain prepared to die. This can be explained in another way: During our lifetime there are many things we have to go through a number of times, e.g. matters of business, tests, examinations, sicknesses, etc. If we have failed repeatedly in such things, it may be possible to be tried again – and succeed. Here there is one single exception: death. *The trial of death is passed only once, and that single event determines the outcome of our life, if it is going to be blessed or not. Therefore it is so important to die in the right way, i.e. to die well.* To consider this is to "prepare to meet our God".²¹ In His grace God gives us many opportunities for such preparations: through our own sickness at times, or the sickness of other people round us, through accidents, or through the great happenings of our age. In all those things we can hear the voice of God: "Next time it may be your turn."

We all think differently about what is easy and what is difficult in regard to our death, for instance: if we are to have a long or short period of sickness before our death; if we are to be in full possession of our senses, or lie in a condition of deep unconsciousness and so on. All questions of this kind we have to leave to God's decision. However there are some things left to us that we can do and decide upon. The most important thing is to leave nothing whatsoever unsettled with God or man.²² If all quarrels with other people are settled when they are still fresh and if forgiveness is received and given, "if possible, so far as it depends on you",²³ then death may come at any time. If it comes earlier or later, it does not change our eternal relationship to God in any way. Sooner or later, according to God's will, we may then "depart in peace".²⁴

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|----------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 Rom 14:12 | 9 Lk 16:22; 23:43, 46; | 16 Jn 6:47 |
| 2 Jn 15:13 | 1 Cor 15:35–58; | 17 Jn 8:51 |
| 3 1 Jn 4:18–21 | 1 Thess 5:23 | 18 Jn 11:25–26 |
| 4 Rom 5:12 | 10 Heb 9:27; 2 Tim 4:1 | 19 Phil 1:23 |
| 5 Rom 5:15–19 | 11 Rom 7:24–25 | 20 Phil 1:21–26 |
| 6 Ps 90:7–12 | 12 Rom 5:21 | 21 Amos 4:12 |
| 7 Gen 3:19 | 13 Rom 4:24–25 | 22 Mt 5:21–26 |
| 8 Ps 139:13–15 | 14 Rom 5:17 | 23 Rom 12:18 |
| | 15 Jn 5:24 | 24 Lk 2:29 |

XXII

The return of Christ

1. A Kingdom that cannot be shaken.

When the people of God walk in faith, they look forward to a "lasting city", to "a kingdom that cannot be shaken".¹ There is a great security in knowing this. But the security itself is not the reason why they walk with Christ. *The security comes as a consequence of walking with Him.*

The central point of "a kingdom that cannot be shaken" is often called "hope". But the Christian hope must be well distinguished from all worldly hopes. The latter do not mean much more than uncertain wishes: "Let us hope so", "let us hope for the best". The Christian hope is "a living hope", "a hope on the living God".² Such a hope "does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us".³

2. Jesus Christ will return in glory.

The return of Christ is often and clearly expounded in Holy Scripture. This is done for many reasons. One reason is the scorn and ridicule of the adversaries of faith.⁴ Another reason is the rather common tendency among Christians to slacken in their vigilance, so as to become halfhearted or cool and finally lose their faith. That is why our Saviour says: "What I say to you I say to all: Watch." "When the Son of man comes, will He find faith on earth?"⁵ But the knowledge about the time for Christ's return has been withheld from us, according to His own words: "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."⁶ This circumstance may seem astonishing and unbelievable to us. But

when Christians have begun to think more thoroughly over these matters, they have been struck by the wisdom and grace God has shown us by keeping secret to us the time of Christ's return.

But in spite of the clear teaching in Scripture about the time for Christ's return, this fact has not always been respected. There have been periods in the history of the Church when people have been tempted to determine by intricate calculations the exact time of Christ's return. This has been done by ordinary Christians, and by renowned Church scholars as well. When doing this they have put together and assessed figures of time, available here and there in Holy Scripture, but also made an interpretation thereof in their own way. If their methods and results must be rejected, that is no judgment on their faith in the Lord or on their longing for "the day of Christ".⁷ When their efforts to fix the time are rejected, this is done only to state a fact: whether they know it or not they are in conflict with the teaching of the Bible.⁸

3. The signs of the return of Christ.

A number of signs are described which indicate that the time is approaching.⁹ These signs are of three kinds: signs in the world of man; signs in the world of nature and planets; and signs within the Christian Church. Among the first kind of signs may be counted wars, great diseases, famine, and persecutions. Among the signs of nature may be counted earthquakes, great floods, and great changes and catastrophes in the world of stars. Among the signs within the Church may be counted the appearance of false teachers in a greater number than ever, an amazing and unparalleled shamelessness, a more common and more conspicuous apostasy from the true Gospel of Christ, and, lastly, the appearance and work of Antichrist.

Against the signs in the world of man and in the world of nature it has often been argued that such signs have existed in all periods of the history of mankind and that no particular meaning can be assigned to them with regard to the return of Christ. But according to the testimony of Holy Scripture these signs are clear enough, if they are correctly understood. They become more frequent and more in accordance with other signs, the more we

approach the end of time.

If the common prophecies about the development in the world have been fulfilled to a great extent, then it is not amazing that the signs within the Church of Christ are increasing and becoming more conspicuous. The particular prophecies about a great apostasy in the innermost fields of doctrine, e.g. about the deity of Christ and His work of atonement for sinners, have already become fulfilled in many parts of the worldwide Church.¹⁰ This has also led to persecutions against those who refuse to deviate from the orthodox belief of the Church.¹¹ People who pay lip-service to Christ and His word take part in these persecutions together with the outward and sworn enemies of Christ.¹²

The most important signs

Generally it can be said that many of the signs have already occurred or that they appear one after another. But there are signs, around which most of the interest turns. These signs are the preaching of the Gospel to all nations, the situation of the Jewish people, and the final appearance of Antichrist.¹³ But on these points we have to be careful. We have to remember the warnings of Christ against false security in several directions. All this can be shown with the help of one single example: the fall and destruction of the city of Jerusalem.¹⁴ Even in this connection Jerusalem is "a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it shall grievously hurt themselves".¹⁵ No one has managed so far to explain in detail which words in Mt 24 apply solely to the fall of Jerusalem, and which words apply solely to the end of time. These two periods in many aspects go together in this chapter. When speaking to His first disciples Jesus has woven the two periods together in His words. This He did, it seems, in order that His words might serve them at their time, and thereafter serve people of all times, as information, warning and consolation; all this to help them keep watching.¹⁶

Furthermore it must be said that the full understanding of these prophecies and signs is possible only when the last signs have appeared: "When you see all these things, you know that He is near, at the very gates."¹⁷ Finally we must realize that there is another difficulty, if we wish to understand that the time for the return of Christ is close. That is the difficulty to assess in what degree the Gospel of Christ must have come to the peoples of the

world before the end of time.¹⁸ Is it necessary that the saving Word has been heard by every individual among the peoples? Or is it enough that the Word has become "a testimony" to the people in general? Whatever is the answer to that question, with the changes now at work in the world, we may soon come to a point where we have full reason to say, according to the Word of God: Now it must be the end of time, now Christ must be at the very gates.

4. Signs with regard to the country and people of Israel.

In some ways the return of Christ is connected with His own earthly people and country. But about these matters we must think and speak very carefully. As the fall of Jerusalem and the end of time are interwoven in Mt 24, so the matter of the Jews and the return of Christ are closely connected. Some things must happen to the Jews before we may expect Christ's return. According to the Word of God the Jews are the people of "the covenants",¹⁹ and they are protected by God in a definite way for a definite purpose. Before our eyes God wishes to reveal His power and glory, His judgment and grace upon this people. But He also wishes to show us that there are times of grace and times of hardening of hearts, both among peoples and among individuals, but that one day the end will come, when prophecies, threats, judgments, and promises will be fulfilled.

The whole question about the relation between the Jewish people and the return of Christ circles round one key word: "I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved."²⁰ Now, with this word before them, many have come to the conclusion that all Jews will remain hardened, until all people of heathen origin have become saved and, in full number, marched into the Kingdom of God. But there has been conversions among the Jews in every century so far. That is one side of the matter. The other side is described with the words "the full number". Here the Jews are not different from the heathen peoples. Although Christian mission work has

gone on in all times from the days of the apostles, we cannot believe that every individual among the heathen will be converted. It must be the same with the Jews: some will become converted and some will not. So far the position is about the same with the heathen and with the Jews. But there is a difference, comprised into the word "so": ". . . so all Israel will be saved".²¹ "So" means "in the same way": In the same way as so many of heathen origin march into the Kingdom of God during these times of hardening among the Jews, so the saved of Israel will march in, when the general hardening among them ceases. When this great number of Jews, here called "all Israel", have come to faith, then our Lord Jesus Christ will return in glory.

But how can S:t Paul call this "a mystery"?²² We must realize the difference between his time and ours. How could the readers in Rome ever imagine, first that the Jews would remain hardened for centuries, further that after such periods of hardening they would march in "in full number"? He told his readers that it was "a mystery". To us it is much less a mystery, because we have seen how the words of the apostle have proved to be true; yet it is a mystery to us as well, because we must still ask: How will such a development, "in full number", come about? It is an example of God's marvellous economy in matters of salvation, and at the same time it will be one of the greatest signs, preceding the return of Christ.

5. The sign of Antichrist.

In addition to what has been said above (p 107) about Antichrist we have to add a few remarks. The Antichrist is at work at all times through various antichrists, but he himself will appear in his most conspicuous form immediately before the return of Christ. S:t Paul calls him "the man of lawlessness", "the son of perdition", and says that he "exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship", and that he will "take his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God".²³ When those terrible things occur, and certainly they will, according to God's Word, then there will be no doubt any more; then "the Son of man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him".²⁴

- | | | |
|---------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 1 Heb 13:14; 12:28 | 10 1 Tim 4:1-3; | 15 Zech 12:3 |
| 2 1 Pet 1:3-9; | 2 Tim 3:1-9; | 16 Mt 24:4, 11, |
| 1 Tim 4:10 | 2 Pet 3:3-7; | 13, 25, 42 |
| 3 Rom 5:5 | 1 Jn 2:8-25; | 17 Mt 24:33 |
| 4 2 Pet 3:3-4 | Jude 17-21 | 18 Mt 24:14 |
| 5 Mk 13:37; Lk 18:8 | 11 Mt 5:11-12; | 19 Rom 9:4 |
| 6 Mt 25:13 | 1 Pet 4:12-19 | 20 Rom 11:25-27 |
| 7 Phil 1:10 | 12 Mt 24:9-10 | 21 Rom 11:26 |
| 8 Mt 25:13 | 13 Mt 24:14; | 22 Rom 11:25 |
| 9 Mt 24 | Mk 16:15-16 | 23 2 Thess 2:3-4 |
| | 14 Mt 24 | 24 Mt 25:31 |

XXIII

The last judgment

1. The Judgment and the Judge.

The last judgment, as the word itself says, will be the last one in a long chain of prior judgments.¹ When the Lord pronounces His judgment it means that the final word is said about good and evil, righteousness and unrighteousness, godliness and godlessness. Then mankind will reach its final destination. Nobody will have anything to object against the decisions of the Judge.² Complete justice will prevail. Therefore the final judgment will lead to the praise and glory of the righteous and eternal God. He is the Supreme Judge. But He is the tri-une God, and it has pleased Him in His eternal Majesty to let the final judgment be executed in the name of the Trinity by the Second Person, who is both Saviour and Judge.³

2. Who will be judged?

Before the Son of man "will be gathered all the nations".⁴ When the Apostles' Creed says "the living and the dead" the meaning is the same. The only difference is that the Creed distinguishes between such people who have died ("the dead") in the times up to the day of Judgment, and such people who are still living when the day of Judgment comes. Thus the words of the Creed strongly underline that the Judgment applies to all people, "all the nations".

But Holy Scripture also says that the Judgment will "begin with the household of God".⁵ This thought at first sight seems to be in conflict with many other words in Holy Scripture, where it is said that those who believe in Christ will not be submitted to any

judgment. But if the latter is true, how will it then be possible to speak of a judgment upon "all the nations" or upon "the living and the dead"? If we examine the total teaching of Holy Scripture in this matter we find that everything fits very well together.⁶ The explanation is that we have to distinguish between the individual, secret judgment and the official, open judgment. The latter is an open, formal and solemn confirmation of the former. In one way the judgment of a true, believing Christian was held already when he received Christ as his Saviour and for Christ's sake was declared righteous.⁷ This is a verdict of acquittal from the heavenly court, and this verdict solemnly becomes confirmed in the final judgment on the last day. But this final judgment is also needed for another reason: many false judgments have been passed and are current among men. Therefore everything will be brought into light, in order that a righteous and final judgment will be passed on all people.⁸

To those who do not believe it will be a judgment that is not only formal, but real. They cannot cover themselves with the righteousness of Christ, since it is not theirs. Therefore they will be standing before their Judge, dressed in their own deeds only.⁹ In that moment everything will depend on that fact that they have not believed in their Saviour and dressed themselves in His righteousness.¹⁰

3. The "books" at the Judgment.

"Books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done."¹¹ To understand these words correctly we have to be careful. Of course God does not need any books or registers, as we people do, in order to remember or know the things He has to judge.¹² When, in spite of this, books are mentioned, it is only to show, by pictures or other things we may understand, that nothing can be hidden from God in His judgment.

It may happen that these "books" cause us to be troubled in our minds about what may be held against us in the judgment. Then we should remember another book mentioned, "the book of

life".¹³ The grace offered to us in our lifetime aims at our names being written in heaven.¹⁴ This shows us that a person already in this life can be put on the side of those, who in the great, final test will be acquitted, provided that in his lifetime he was brought to a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁵

There is another question related to that of "the books": Will all sins, also those which had already been forgiven, be brought up again for a new scrutiny? Many Bible scholars have held that opinion. But it must be repudiated, because it clashes with the Biblical doctrine of forgiveness: "I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins."¹⁶ "Thou wilt cast all our sins into the depths of the sea."¹⁷

4. "Rewards" and "wages" at the Judgment.

In some cases Holy Scripture speaks of rewards to the faithful, yes, sometimes to all people. Also in connection with the last judgment, rewards are mentioned. Since rewards are of different kinds, it is necessary to know the difference between them.

The most important point in all these matters is that man is a sinner and that he falls short in so many ways that he cannot claim anything from God. Therefore he has no reason or right to demand any rewards or wages either. Another very important point is that salvation never has been, and never will be, dependent upon any efforts or deeds of our own. Salvation is given by grace only, for the sake of Jesus Christ. Not even such good things, that man believes in God's words or believes in Jesus Christ as his Saviour, are deeds that are praiseworthy or deserving rewards. Faith is only a hand stretched out to receive a gift, which is offered free of charge but totally undeserved. Thus there can be no question of rewarding the faith or rewarding the believer because of his faith.

Only when these points have been considered it will be possible to examine those cases in Holy Scripture where it is spoken of "rewards" or "wages". These cases are of different types. The first type concerns those good things people may do in this world. God uses all these "good" works for His purposes. As the Creator

and Keeper of the world He uses one man to help and serve another. Among these "good" works there is not even one that becomes unrewarded. Even if we hand our thirsty neighbour or a stranger a mug of water only, that simple deed will not remain unrewarded.¹⁸ We do not always know *how* God acts, when He rewards such works, but we have His promise that He will do so. In this matter there is no difference between believers and unbelievers. But *the rewards are given in this life*.

The second type of cases concerns salvation itself. Although salvation is obtained by grace only, for the sake of Jesus Christ and without any deeds whatever on man's side, it sometimes happens in Holy Scripture that *salvation is compared to the wages received by a labourer*. Salvation is of the same kind and of the same greatness to all who become saved. Nobody can become more or better saved than anybody else, if they are both saved. In order to show this fact Jesus has made a parable, in which He has woven together some details from the worldly life of labour. In this parable He shows that all people, those converted early and those converted late, in the same degree receive the eternal salvation.¹⁹ That is "to receive the denarius", "a full day's pay". This is the point itself in this parable: salvation is the same for all. Therefore it is impossible to expound this parable from a social or political point of view. If we try to apply such views we go wrong. The parable deals with this matter only, that God is good and gracious: he allows the one, who arrived late, to receive the same salvation as those who arrived early. That is the case, even when it happens that the late-comer is a criminal.²⁰

The third type concerns the service of the believers in the Kingdom of God. As God rewards all who do good (see the first type above), so He rewards His faithful people in eternity. At the Judgment He will reward all the good they have done in their lifetime, not in the least "one of the least of my brethren".²¹ God knows everything about these good deeds. He "is not so unjust as to overlook your work and the love which you showed for His sake in serving the saints".²²

5. The eternal condemnation.

When those who have been judged depart from God "into eternal punishment", that judgment has been passed which cannot be altered. That is condemnation.

Here we must observe that in the New Testament there is a clear difference between Hades and Hell. By Hades is meant the place where the lost souls are kept between death and resurrection. Hell of course exists already before the Judgment, because it is prepared for the devil and his angels, but the lost souls are not there before the judgment has been passed.²³

What is the main point, then, in Holy Scripture about Hell and the eternal condemnation? These points in the Christian doctrine clearly demonstrate the state of opposition, existing after the great fall, between fallen man and God. They also demonstrate that the fall cannot be cured otherwise than by the step God Himself has taken "according to His purpose which He set forth in Christ".²⁴

Therefore man cannot react otherwise than by acceptance of Christ or rejection of Him.²⁵ In the final judgment all this is put on trial, and an eternal verdict is passed. We cannot object to this with arguments like "that would be against the love of God". When people say this, they have been led astray by their own thoughts. First they have made a picture of "the God of love", then they examine and judge God after that model. But it must be the other way, that we become examined according to the picture of love God has given us.²⁶ The teaching about the Gospel and the teaching about the last judgment always must go together, without any contradictions. When that is done, *the teaching about the Judgment and the eternal condemnation strongly stresses what the Gospel means*: We are told about the grace of God, and about the unavoidable choice between condemnation and eternal salvation: "The Gospel is properly a doctrine which teaches what man should believe, that he may obtain forgiveness of sins with God, namely, that the Son of God, our Lord Christ, has taken upon Himself and borne the curse of the Law, has expiated and paid for all our sins, through whom alone we again enter into favour with God, obtain forgiveness of sins by faith, are delivered from death and all the punishments of sins, and eternally saved." (FC)

1 Rom 9:28	10 Rom 13:11-14	18 Mt 10:42
2 Rev 19:1-2	11 Rev 20:12	19 Mt 20:1-16
3 Jn 5:26-27; Acts 17:31	12 Heb 4:13	20 Lk 23:39-43
4 Mt 25:32	13 Rev 20:11-15	21 Mt 25:40
5 1 Pet 4:17-19	14 Lk 10:20	22 Heb 6:10
6 Jn 5:24; 2 Cor 5:10	15 Rev 3:5	23 Mt 25:41, 46
7 Rom 3:22	16 Isa 43:25; Jer 31:34	24 Eph 1:7-10
8 Mt 5:11-12; 1 Cor 4:5	17 Mic 7:18-19;	25 Mt 11:20-30; 25:41-46
9 Mt 25:41-46	Isa 1:18	26 Jn 3:16

XXIV

Eternal blessedness

1. A new heaven and a new earth.

In connection with the great judgment the present world will come to an end. There will be "a new heaven and a new earth".¹ Will God, when creating all anew, be using anything from the old creation? If He did, it would still be a new heaven and a new earth, "for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away". How the new things and conditions will be is beyond our understanding.² In these matters it is not important at all to think in terms of size, form or colour. It is much more important to know that "nothing unclean shall enter it, nor any one who practises abomination or falsehood".³ The reason is that God's will rules there. His glory dwells there, the throne of God and the Lamb is standing there, and the servants of God serve Him there for ever, because day and night are no more.⁴

Sometimes Christian scholars speak of a "restoration" of the creation and the world in the sense that not only the creation will be rescued and renewed, but that all people will be saved and obtain eternal blessedness. But the correct understanding of the word "restoration", if it is to be used, must be the following: The sending of the Son to the salvation of the world has been fulfilled. The devil, who by his uproar against God led people to their fall, has no power any longer. All enemies, including sin and death, are defeated. The damage, caused by the Fall, has been cured. The order within God's created world is restored. This is all confirmed at the end, when God will be "everything to every one".⁵

2. The heavenly glory.

When we wish to imagine or understand heaven, we are told that this is a matter of "what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him".⁶ Our poor abilities of understanding are not so much due to our ordinary human limitations, in a still higher degree they depend upon the fact that no man can see God and still live in this world.⁷ The prophet Isaiah was put before the glory of God in such a way that he feared he would die.⁸ On the mount of transfiguration three disciples from the group round Jesus were put before the glory of the eternal world. They were so overwhelmed by that sight that they fell to the ground and became filled with awe.⁹ When the Pharisee Saul met the glorified Saviour on his way to Damascus, he fell to the ground, blinded by the light from the eternal world.¹⁰

There is a clear tendency in Holy Scripture to be restrictive when describing the eternal blessedness and everything else pertaining to heaven. Our Lord Jesus rejected unreasonable ideas and claims, put forward by His disciples.¹¹ He also showed them that there is one thing that must come ahead of all knowledge about the heavenly and blessed life and, particularly, a detailed knowledge about it, and this is the strongest desire to enter the Kingdom of God and thereby win the eternal blessedness. This desire must surmount all hindrances.¹²

To describe "the undescrivable"

When the eternal life and blessedness are described in Holy Scripture it is often done *in pictures*. Thus it is often described as *a kingdom*. It is called "the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ",¹³ or "the kingdom which He has promised to those who love Him".¹⁴ Heaven and blessedness are also described as *a city*. That is "the holy city, new Jerusalem".¹⁵ "He has prepared for them a city", "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem", "the city which is to come".¹⁶ Heaven and blessedness are also described as *a home*. This home is described by Jesus as having "many rooms".¹⁷

Besides such pictures there are other descriptions, e.g. that *blessedness is freedom*: "The Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother."¹⁸ A blessed man is for ever free from those things

which have troubled and tormented him during his life in this world. Thus he will for ever be free from sin, against which he has had to struggle for such a long and strenuous battle.¹⁹ Further he is free from death, which he has feared so long and finally also gone through.²⁰

A blessed man can also be described as *owning certain things and qualities*, such as he was lacking in his lifetime. Thus in heaven he will have *complete light in his understanding*.²¹ He will also have *perfect purity and power in his will*, which will be in complete harmony with the will of God. He will also have *perfect security*, because there no longer exists any power that can separate him from "the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord".²²

This blessed state, described in the previous paragraph, cannot be compared to any earthly condition. It is a state of perfect understanding, purity, security, and power in Christ. "He /i.e. saved man/ will need neither the preaching of the Law nor its threatenings and punishments, as also the Gospel any longer; for these belong to this (mortal and) imperfect life. But as they will behold God face to face, so they will, through the power of the indwelling Spirit of God, do the will of God (the heavenly Father) with unmingled joy, voluntarily, unconstrained, without any hindrance, with entire purity and perfection, and will rejoice in it eternally." (FC)

3. What is the highest and greatest in the eternal bliss?

It can be summed up like this: *to become like the holy angels*. All physical deformities and weaknesses will be gone. The glorified bodies will be only beautiful and glorious, since they will be like Christ's glorious body.²³ They will be free from those needs and impulses that were so often the characteristics of the earthly life.²⁴

A blessed man will be like the angels also with regard to *the heavenly service*. The blessed have not been called to a carefree or idle life in heaven, although this is a very popular belief. As the angels of the Lord, the mighty ones, "do His word, hearkening to the voice of His word",²⁵ so the blessed serve God in heaven: "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day

and night within His temple."²⁶ The service also means *praising God*. This is a praise "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues".²⁷ This song of praise is "like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals". It is the great choir of all the saved and blessed singing: "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give Him the glory."²⁸ The heavenly service also means *prayer*. This may seem remarkable, when all needs and wishes have already been filled. But in spite of the heavenly fullness and joy there is one need remaining: the need of thanksgiving, praise and adoration: "Great and wonderful are thy deeds, o Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are thy ways, o King of the ages . . . Thy judgments have been revealed."²⁹

But the highest and greatest, when the blessed will become like the angels, is not the service, nor is it the song of praise or the prayers. The highest and greatest will be the fulfilment of their greatest longing. In one way this was expressed already by Moses, when he spoke to God: "I pray thee, show me thy glory."³⁰ This means to say, that the highest and greatest is *to see God*. Of course it is wonderful to see the holy angels, in most cases earlier invisible to man, and to see and recognize so many among the blessed in heaven, but above everything else stands this unspeakable thing: to see God, to see Him who will not be the Invisible any more; to see Him who will show His back no more, when He has passed by, and who will not let them fall to the ground, when His holy and eternal glory is revealed to them.³¹ Therefore, "when He appears we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is".³²

To see God, that is in one way the same as to see our Saviour, Jesus Christ. The Son of man, the eternal Son of God, has made God known to us.³³ This is also confirmed in heaven: to see God, that is the same as to see the Lamb. In heaven our Lord Jesus Christ is the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, where He accepts homage from all the saved: "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb! . . . Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen."³⁴

With unspeakable joy the saved will see Him, who has removed their sins and the sins of the world. This Lamb looks "as though it

had been slain".³⁵ Even in eternity Jesus Christ carries those marks of His fight and victory, which He had shown to His first disciples.³⁶ The fight and the victory are the theme of the song of praise that resounds through heaven: the saved have defeated their great enemy "by the blood of the Lamb".³⁷ For His sake their names have been written "in the Lamb's book of life".³⁸ And now, for ever they will keep on rejoicing to see the face of God, to "stand before the throne and before the Lamb",³⁹ and to be in the heavenly city, "for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb".⁴⁰

GLORY BE TO THE FATHER, AND TO THE SON,
AND TO THE HOLY SPIRIT;
AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING,
IS NOW,
AND EVER SHALL BE,
WORLD WITHOUT END

- | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 1 Rev 21:1; | 18 Gal 4:26 | 32 1 Jn 3:2; |
| 2 Pet 3:13 | 19 Rom 7:14-20; Eph | 1 Cor 13:12 |
| 2 1 Cor 13:9-12 | 6:12; Heb 10:32 | 33 Jn 1:14-18; |
| 3 Rev 21:27 | 20 Rev 21:4 | 14:8-11; 1 Jn |
| 4 Rev 21:1-22:5 | 21 1 Cor 13:9-10 | 1:1-3 |
| 5 1 Cor 15:24-28 | 22 Rom 8:31-39; | 34 Rev 7:9-12; |
| 6 1 Cor 2:9 | Rev 21:22-22:5 | 14: 1-5 |
| 7 Ex 33:12-23; | 23 Phil 3:21 | 35 Rev 5:6; |
| Judg 13:22 | 24 Lk 20:34-36 | Isa 53:4-12 |
| 8 Isa 6:1-7 | 25 Ps 103:20-21 | 36 Jn 20:19-29; |
| 9 Mt 17:1-8 | 26 Rev 7:15 | Lk 24:30-31 |
| 10 Acts 9:1-19 | 27 Rev 7:9 | 37 Rev 12:11 |
| 11 Mt 20:20-23 | 28 Rev 19:5-8 | 38 Rev 21:27 |
| 12 Lk 13:22-30 | 29 Rev 15:3-4 | 39 Rev 7:9 |
| 13 2 Pet 1:11 | 30 Ex 33:18; Jn 14:8 | 40 Rev 21:23 |
| 14 Jas 2:5 | 31 Heb 11:27; | |
| 15 Rev 21:2 | Ex 33:17-23; | |
| 16 Heb 11:16; 12:22; | Isa 6:1-7; | |
| 13:14 | Mt 17:1-8; | |
| 17 Jn 14:2; 2 Cor 5:8 | Acts 9:3-5 | |

Abbreviations

ACA	Apology of the Augsburg Confession
CA	Augsburg Confession
FC	The Formula of Concord
LC	The Large Catechism
PPP	Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope
SA	The Smalcald Articles
SC	The Small Catechism

- Remarks
- 1) Quotations from the above documents are according to **CONCORDIA TRIGLOTTA**, St. Louis, Mo., 1921. American spelling has been changed into English when appropriate.
 - 2) In most cases parenthesis () indicates original explanations within brackets //, whereas brackets // in the present text contain author's explanations or the exchange of a difficult word for a more understandable one.
 - 3) Bible quotations in the text of this book are according to Revised Standard Version (RSV) or, in one case, King James' Version (KJ).

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(Remarks: Words like God, Jesus or Christ, appearing on almost every page, are not listed. Instead look for more specific words, e.g. Creation, Love, Salvation, Redemption, etc.

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