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Sermon Study on 2 Cor. 5:1-10

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coming ages. But his soul triumphantly rises by faith in Christ's gracious pledges on to another day, to the day of joy everlasting. Then also his crumbled earth, his very dust and his ashes, united again with the soul, will rise in glory resplendent and bear the reflection of Him who saves us from every evil and exalts us to beauty unseen, to bliss beyond comprehension, to peace no mortal now feels, to life that never expires. It is fitting that the pastor's mortal remains should be robed in the vestment in which he preached the deliverance from all evil through Jesus Christ, the Lord of Life, and that a palm leaf be laid on his casket as a symbol of victory. *Liberatus ab omni opere malo, dormit secure in manu Iesu.*

Los Angeles, Calif.

G. H. SMUKAL

Sermon Study on 2 Cor. 5:1-10

Eisenach Epistle for the Sunday after Christmas

This text is taken from that section of the Second Letter to the Corinthians in which Paul describes "the glory of the Apostolic ministry: human weakness permeated and transfigured by the power and glory of God" (Bachmann), 3:1—6:10. Human weakness (cp. 4:7-12, 16, 17; 6:4-10); God's power and glory as manifested in the Gospel (3:1—4:6; 5:11-21), and changing weak human beings into unconquerable heroes of faith (4:7-18; 6:1-10). Therefore "we" in our text refers primarily to the incumbents of the ministry of Jesus Christ, the Apostles and their associates, such as Timothy, named 1:1 in the superscription, and Silvanus (1:19), one of Paul's assistants. Yet Paul does not mean to say that the precious truths expressed and the experiences described by him pertained exclusively to pastors and preachers. No, they apply to all who like Paul and Timothy and Silvanus are believing children of God, whether Apostles and preachers or not. What glorifies and transfigures their human weakness as ambassadors for Christ (5:20) is the very same power and glory which permeates and glorifies and transfigures every Christian's life, spent in the weakness and frailty of human, earthly existence. While this text is particularly appropriate for a pastoral sermon, in the Sunday sermon the preacher will naturally apply its truths to all the hearers directly.

V.1: "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." The Apostle had spoken of his mortal flesh (4:11); of death working in him (v.12); of the perishing of his outward man (v.16). What perishes is his mortal

flesh, his body, in which death works, that body in which he bears about the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in his body (4:10). In this our mortal flesh, in this our dying body, the life of Jesus is made manifest, which life, inherent in our body as living water, flows forth from our mortal body into your hearts to give you life, true life, spiritual life, eternal life working in you (v. 12). Note the continued emphasis on the weakness of the *body*, the earthen vessel (4:7), in which he has the marvelous treasure described (4:1-6). And this earthen vessel, his body, is now called "our earthly house of this tabernacle." The body is called a house, οἰκία, a dwelling, since it is the habitation of the soul, which was breathed into the lifeless body (Gen. 2:7). This house is defined by the appositional genitive as a tabernacle, a tent, σκηνός,¹ just as Peter calls his body "this my tabernacle," σκηνώμα (2 Pet. 1:13, 14), again emphasizing the weakness and frailty of the human body, stressed so frequently in the preceding chapter. It is called "earthly," ἐπίγειος, the Greek term designating not the material out of which man was made, but the place, earth, on which (ἐπί) he lives and to which locality his body is adapted. Paul now posits a possible eventuality in full keeping with the frail nature of the body and the nature of things visible in general (4:18 b): "if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved." Καταλύω means to destroy, demolish. It is also used of taking down a tent, so that it no longer serves as a dwelling. This dissolution takes place at death; when man's body according to God's decree returns unto the ground out of which it was taken, dust unto dust (Gen. 3:19). Ἐάν with the aorist subjunctive is used to designate the condition as undetermined, though with a prospect of fulfillment. The subjunctive designates the fulfillment as possible and even probable but always leaves an element of doubt hovering in the mind of the speaker. This suits exactly the case of the Apostle and his fellow workers. They expect to die, for that is the lot of all human beings. Yet the Apostle knew of another possibility, which he had clearly stated in his first letter to the Corinthians, written less than a year prior to the second. He had revealed to them a mystery: "We shall not all sleep (die); but we shall all be changed" (1 Cor. 15:51). And since there might be for him also the possibility to be among those who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord (1 Thess. 4:15), he does not state positively that his body will be dissolved into dust and ashes.

¹ In profane and Biblical Greek ἡ σκηνή is never used to designate the human body as the tabernacle of the soul. While τὸ σκηνός is almost exclusively used in this figurative sense, τὸ σκηνώμα is used in profane Greek almost exclusively in the literal sense, in LXX and Acts 7:46 also of the Temple; in New Testament (2 Pet. 1:13, 14) and ancient Christian literature apparently only figuratively of the body.

Yet if his body will succumb to death before the glorious Day of the Lord, he is not on that account despondent. The destruction of the body is not a destruction of himself, but a demolition only of the tabernacle, the dwelling in which he lives so long as he is on earth. He himself survives the destruction of his earthly tenthouse. And he will not forever be without the body, without a dwelling. The destruction by death is not an annihilation. "We know that we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," so he triumphantly exclaims. That is not a guess, not a theory, not an uncertain hope. We *know*, that is the divinely created knowledge and conviction of faith (cp. Heb. 11:1). We have a building, an edifice, "of God," ἐκ, out of God, proceeding from, originating in, God; a "house" in which we shall dwell just as we dwelt in our body; yet a house "not made with hands." Heb. 9:11. Human bodies are brought into existence by the Lord through the human agency of parents, and they are flesh born of the flesh, sinful, corruptible, mortal. This body is eternal, incorruptible, unaffected by the passing of years, timeless. Our present body is "earthly," yonder body is "in the heavens," adapted to heaven and its heavenly life as our earthly body was adapted to earthly life only, not being able to inherit the incorruption of the heavenly kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50). This body we "have," ἔχομεν, the present tense. Not as though already in this life there were implanted in our body a resurrection germ at Baptism or in the Lord's Supper. Nor does the Apostle mean to say that at the moment of death there will be given to us an immaterial body, a shadowy form, betwixt and between the earthly and the heavenly body. Nor does the present tense, "we have," of necessity state that this body is already prepared for us, is being reserved in heaven to be handed out to us as a glorious garment on the Last Day. And, finally, the present tense does not oblige us to identify this "building of God" with the heavenly bliss into which the soul enters at death. The ἔχομεν, "we have," is simply the futuristic present occurring so frequently in the apodosis of conditional sentences using εἰν with the aorist subjunctive. (Cp. Matt. 5:46, 47; 8:2; 18:12, 13; Luke 15:8, 9; 1 Cor. 7:39, 40; etc.) This construction of using the present in the apodosis is especially appropriate here, since Christian faith is the substance of things hoped for (Heb. 11:1). We have not yet in our possession that body which will be ours in the resurrection, the resurrection body, of which Paul writes (1 Cor. 15:42-54). What we have now is the corruption, the frailty, the dishonor of a natural body. That body is sown as it is; and this selfsame body will be raised (Job 19:25-27; John 5:28, 29; 1 Cor. 15). But it will be raised a changed body, as a body transformed into the likeness of the glorified body of our Lord

Jesus; or this transformation will take place in the twinkling of an eye in those who live to see the Day. And this glorious house is not made with hands. That we have not inherited from our parents. That is purely from God, purely heavenly, a miracle possible only to the Lord of Life, a product solely of His power and grace in Christ Jesus.

Vv. 2, 3: "For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven; if so be that, being clothed, we shall not be found naked." The *καί*, omitted in A. V., adds another thought, which the *γάρ* denotes as more closely defining the resurrection body. It is, namely, one for which we sigh while in this tabernacle, an edifice out of heaven. 'Εν τούτῳ, viz., σήναι, cp. v. 4: "we that are in the tabernacle," and the fact that in v. 2 also the resurrection body is called a "dwelling."² While dwelling in our earthly tent, we sigh, "earnestly longing to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven." In v. 1 it was called a building, *οικοδομή*, stressing its construction, an *οικία*, emphasizing its purpose. In v. 2 it is called an *οικητήριον*, a habitation, a house to live in, in which we shall dwell. It is described as *τὸ ἐξ οὐρανοῦ*; hence it cannot be heaven itself, but one originating in heaven, coming as it does *ἐκ θεοῦ*, from God (v. 1). We earnestly desire, we long "to be clothed upon" with this house. To understand these words, we must revert to 1 Cor. 15:52-54. There the Apostle had described the change which the believers living to see the Last Day will undergo. "This corruptible must put on incorruption; this mortality must put on immortality." The Apostle uses the word *ἐνδύσασθαι*. The middle voice usually must be translated "to clothe oneself," yet since if one has clothed himself, one is clothed, the middle is used in the passive sense in a number of passages where the idea of clothing oneself is out of question. Compare Luke 24:49, where the A. V. renders very properly the middle by "be endued." Just as surely the middle is used in the passive sense in 1 Cor. 15:53, 54 and 2 Cor. 5:2-4. The dead certainly cannot clothe themselves with incorruption and immortality while they are dead. Nor do they clothe themselves after they have been brought to life, they are raised incorruptible. They have "put on" incorruption and immortality only because God has clothed them with immortality and glory in the exact moment of their vivification. The same act called "putting on," *ἐνδύσασθαι* (1 Cor. 15), is designated in our text (vv. 2, 4) as *ἐπενδύσασθαι*, "being clothed upon," in order to distinguish it from *ἐνδύσασθαι*, used in the sense of "being clothed"

² Some interpreters regard "in this" as the object toward which the sighing is directed, this object being specified either by the participial clause, v. 2, or the *εἶπε* clause, v. 3. Yet the direction of sighing is indicated either by *ἐπί* or by a participial clause as here, never by *ἐν*.

in our mortal body (v. 3). The Apostle changes the figures. What was called building, house, habitation, is now viewed as a garment, because the Apostle is not thinking of an actual house, but of our body in which we dwell, or in which we are clothed now, and which we put off in death in order to be clothed upon with the resurrection body. This clothing upon must not be thought of as putting on one garment, one body, over another; so that in heaven we would have two bodies. No, this corruption must put on incorruption, and that very act of being clothed upon with incorruption strips off all incorruption, changes completely our vile body (Phil. 3:21). This change will not be a matter of hours, or even minutes, one imperfection gradually disappearing after the other. Those that had died before the Last Day will be raised incorruptible. Those that are still living will be changed in a moment (1 Cor. 15:52). To them this lightning change will happen while they are living, without having been obliged to taste the bitterness of death or to face the certainty that their body will disintegrate into dust and ashes.

Now the Apostle in v. 3 makes a statement which has proved a puzzle to many. Farrar in *The Pulpit Commentary* refers these words "to those whom at His coming Christ will find clothed in these mortal bodies, and not separated from them" (hence not naked, γυμνοί, unclothed) "i. e., quick and not dead (1 Thess. 4:17; 1 Cor. 15:51)." He continues, "This seems to be the simplest and most natural of the multitude of strange interpretations with which the pages of commentators are filled." We agree with him.³ Paul assures us that he and his companions while in their mortal body sigh, longing to be clothed upon with the resurrection body, if so be that they will be found also clothed, alive in their body, not unclothed, dead. The Apostle does not say positively that he will be found alive, but the entire connection expresses his desire to be found so on the Last Day rather than to be unclothed, disembodied, before that Day arrives. In the next sentence Paul adds (καί) an explanation (γάρ), clarifying the meaning of the sighs and longing.

V. 4: "For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened; not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life." "We that are," and as long as we are, ὄντες = durative participle, "in the tabernacle," the body, sigh, "being burdened" with all those trials mentioned (4:8-12) and to which he again refers (6:4-10; 11:23-33). He had felt the working of death in his own body (4:12), and that was not

³The only reasonable objection would be the ἐνδυσάμενος if translated "having put on," since we did not put on our physical body. But we have seen that the aorist middle in 1 Cor. 15 and 2 Cor. 5 is used in the passive sense of "being clothed."

a pleasant sensation (cp. 1:8-11). Knowing the agony of death by these personal experiences, together with his companions he sighs, groans. The burden of their sighs is stated in the next clause introduced by ἐφ' ᾧ, here used, as in Rom. 5:12, in the sense of ἐπὶ τούτῳ ὄτι, because, since. They do not wish or will "to be unclothed," "naked" (v. 3), disembodied in death, but their will is to be robed with the resurrection body while still alive, so that mortality, τὸ θνητόν, that which is mortal, might be swallowed up completely, thoroughly, by life, not a whit of mortal remaining, every form of death having been swallowed up. Compare 1 Cor. 15:54, where the same word is used after the process of swallowing up had been described as a robing, putting on (v. 53), and a changing, transmutation, of the believers, whether dead or alive (vv. 51, 52).

Such longing is not unworthy of the Apostle nor of any believer. It does not flow from weariness with life. It is not at all on a line with Elijah's petition (1 Kings 19:4) or with Jeremiah's vehement complaint (Jer. 20:14 ff.). Elijah desired to die, and Jeremiah wished that he had never been born. Paul longs to live on and to labor on, joyously, loyally doing the Lord's work, and then, while in the midst of activity, behold the Lord's coming and experience that quick glorious change from mortality and frailty and sinfulness to perfection and power and immortality. Neither Elijah's petition nor Paul's longing was fulfilled.

What Paul here expresses is that natural dread of facing death which caused even Jesus to exclaim: Luke 12:50; 22:42; cp. Heb. 5:7. There is not a Christian to whom the consciousness that the night of death is coming closer is not fraught still with many an anxious thought, who is not anguished at the thought that sooner or later his body and soul will languish in the icy grasp of death, and who will not in such moments exclaim with the Apostle, "We would rather not be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life."

V. 5: "Now He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit." This swallowing up of death by life, so utterly beyond human understanding that it is denied and ridiculed and regarded as a crazy notion (Acts 26:24), is nevertheless a glorious fact. Man can destroy, and his power of destruction has increased horribly during the last decade. But man cannot bring back to life anything that has by his own or any other agency been dissolved in death. This is possible only to God. With superb skill the holy writer brings out this fact. The copula is dropped and in the very center is placed God as on an exalted throne, flanked on the one side by an act of omnipotence in the past, and on the other by a guarantee of everlasting grace for the future. In the past He has "wrought

us," thoroughly prepared us by hard labor, for the resurrection unto life. That was hard work, costing God His own Son, costing the Son the agony of being forsaken of God, costing Him infinite patience and tireless seeking and inviting until He had won us as His own. Yet God did not rest until He had finished His work on us, that labor of everlasting love begun in eternity. Note the three composite verbs with *κατά*, denoting thoroughness. Death is thorough in his work of dissolution until man is unrecognizable (v. 1). Life is even more thorough in swallowing up, annihilating all that is mortal (v. 4). And God is divinely thorough in preparing us completely so that we may be fit for the robes of resurrection. God, being God, does what He undertakes thoroughly. Not only has He provided for us in the past, but He provides thoroughly for our future. He has given us the earnest of the Spirit. The genitive is appositional, defining the earnest as consisting in the Spirit. The earnest money is the first payment as a pledge binding one to fulfill all obligations. Man may treacherously, for various reasons, renounce his pledge. God is God, unchangeably truthful, the God of the Amen (Is. 65:16; 2 Cor. 1:20). We were made temples of the Holy Spirit by God's omnipotent grace transferring us from spiritual death to spiritual life. Can there be any doubt that He is able to effect for us also the swallowing up of mortality by life? God being the unchanging God of everlasting faithfulness, need there be any question of His willingness to do what He has pledged to do by giving us His Spirit as an earnest? Surely our hope for the resurrection body is based on an unmovable foundation.

And now the Apostle makes the proper application of these glorious truths.

Vv. 6-8: *"Therefore we are always confident, knowing that whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord (for we walk by faith, not by sight); we are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord."* Vv. 6-8 form a complex sentence of which v. 8 is the principal clause, the first word of which resumes in the indicative the first participle, *θαροῦντες*, of the two subordinate participial clauses (v. 6). V. 7 interrupts the smooth connection between 6 and 8 by a parenthetical statement. "Therefore we are" (rather "being therefore") "always confident." In view of what has been stated in the preceding context, all being the work of God, who should not be confident having such a God as his own? (Cp. *Lutheran Hymnal*, 423, st. 5.) The Greek term for being confident, *θαρεῖω*, denotes a state of confident and courageous cheerfulness, sometimes stressing the confidence, sometimes the cheerfulness, sometimes the courage. It is used by Christ and the Apostles invariably to denote that specifically Christian confidence and courageous cheerfulness based on the conviction of God's grace in

Christ Jesus.⁴ We are "always" confident. Oh, yes, there were in Paul's life, as there are in the life of every Christian, periods of depression and downheartedness (cp. 2 Cor. 1:8; 2:4; 7:5; 12:7, 8, 15, 20, 21; Gal. 4:11-19). Yet those were passing moments. No trial, no sorrow, no heartbreaking experience could extinguish that deep-seated courageous confidence and cheerfulness engendered by the knowledge of Christ, His Savior.

Another participle follows, adding another fact influencing the inner life of the writer. "Knowing that whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord." 'Ενθιμείω, to live among one's people, to be at home, present; ἐκθιμείω, to be separate from one's people, away from home, absent. As long as we are in our bodies as in our earthly home, we are away from home, absent, from the Lord. In order to prevent any misunderstanding, as though the writer meant to doubt or deny the constant fellowship of the believer with Christ, who has given His promise Matt. 28:20, an explanatory statement is added in the form of a parenthesis.

"For we walk by faith, not by sight" (v. 7). "Sight," εἶδος, invariably denotes the outer form, the external, visible appearance of a thing. Yet the English version, while not literal, correctly renders the idea. "By," διὰ, is here used of an area, a sphere, a state, or condition, through which one passes, the state or area being defined by the genitive. We are walking through the area, or on the way, or in the sphere, of faith, and not in the area of visible forms and manifestations. Faith is not seeing, even though it is assurance and conviction (Heb. 11:1, 13). As long as we are at home in the body, that corruptible mortal flesh and blood which is unfit for our heavenly heritage (1 Cor. 15:50), we are away from that state in which we shall see Christ, in this sense away from Christ, away from our true home which He has prepared for us (John 14:2), into which He will receive us (Heb. 9:28; 1 Thess. 4:17).

V. 8. "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." Though we are not yet walking by sight, though we still are away from Christ, yet we are confident, of good cheer, in good spirits, and this cheerful confidence of an everlasting union with Christ is manifested by the fact that although we would personally rather live to see Christ's coming, yet we are well pleased, we are perfectly willing, rather to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord. "With," πρὸς, face to face, as the Word is "with" God (John 1:1); as the Lord spake to Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend (Ex. 33:11), while to other prophets, though as really and

⁴ Christ uses this term Matt. 9:2, 22; 14:27; Mark 6:50; 10:49; John 16:33; Acts 23:11; Paul uses it 2 Cor. 5:6, 8; 7:16; 10:2. It occurs also in the Letter to the Hebrews (13:6); in 2 Cor. 10:1 it is used by the opponents of Paul in the sense of a boaster's futile claim to courage.

actually present with them as with Moses, He spake only in visions and dreams, not in visible form and appearance.

To be at home with the Lord — what a joy! To be face to face with Him whom we loved and longed for, though we saw Him not — what ecstasy! To behold Him with our eyes and see Him as He is, whom we could see here only in His Word as through a glass darkly, whom we could know only in part, to know Him perfectly, to see Him and bask forever in the sunshine of His unclouded grace — what heavenly, unspeakable bliss!

Paul had experienced a brief foretaste of this bliss (2 Cor. 12: 1-4), and this brief vision only increased his longing to be forever with the Lord. So overwhelming is the bliss of heaven that the very thought of it causes him to forget his dread of death and the hopeful desire to remain alive till Jesus comes. He has learned from the Savior to pray: Not my will, but Thine be done! If God wills that I remain till that Day, I shall be pleased. If He wills that in addition to the many deaths I have undergone (4:11, 12) I finally meet the grim foe face to face and undergo the painful parting of body and soul, the slow disintegration of my mortal home, well and good! I am not only ready, I am well pleased with His will, for then I shall be finally at home, forever with the Lord! Not the manner of arriving there, by being unclothed or by being clothed upon, is after all the thing that matters. The only thing that really concerns me is to be at home with the Lord.

And now Paul draws the practical conclusion. V. 9: "*Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him.*" "Wherefore we also labor." *Kaí* adds another verb to "we are of good courage" and "we are pleased": "we labor." That is the biography of a Christian: confidence in Christ; submission to His will; glad service. Labor, *φιλοτιμούμεθα*, to love one's glory, to seek one's honor, to be ambitious. Man's ambition naturally is centered upon himself, his own glory, the satisfaction of his own desires, the gratification of self-chosen pleasure, the fulfillment of his own will, the realization of his own plans. Paul's ambition is diametrically opposed to that. His sole ambition is centered upon Christ and His commendation. The honor he loves most, the glory he cherishes above all, is to be accepted of Him, *εὐάρεστοι*, well pleasing to Him. Oh, may this my glory be that Christ is not ashamed of me, that He is pleased with all I do! For this purpose he had cast away honor, prestige, his own righteousness, everything that men count worth while (Phil. 3:1 ff.), and here, in view of what Christ has done for him and will grant to him, he repeats his solemn vow: to let his sole glory ever be and remain to please Christ. And then the question whether that day shall find us at home in the body or absent from the body, alive or dead, dwindles into insignificance.

Though the name of the Christ Child is not once mentioned in this text, it is a very suitable text for the Sunday after Christmas, the last Sunday of the year. The pastor may call attention to *The Wonderful Blessings the Christ Child Procured for Us*. (1) Now we know that we have a home in heaven. (2) Now we can willingly bear our burdens. (3) Now we can labor joyously to please Him. — Or: *The True Christmas Spirit*. (1) Joyous hope of an eternal home (vv. 1, 2). (2) Willing commitment of our times into Christ's hand (vv. 2-8). (3) Firm determination to please Him (v. 9). — *We Have an Eternal Home in Heaven*. (1) That is our assured conviction (vv. 1-5). (2) That is the object of our longing (vv. 2-8). (3) That is a constant impulse to loyal service (v. 9). — *The Christian's Longing for Home*. (1) Its glorious object (vv. 1-4). (2) Its firm foundation (v. 5). (3) Its blessed fruits (vv. 6-8). — *Let Us Thank God for Christian Assurance!* (1) This upholds us in life and death. (2) This makes us fruitful in good works. — One often hears the term *Weltanschauung*, world view. That is usually restricted to affairs of this world. The Christ Child makes all things new. *The Christ Child Gives to the Believer a New Outlook*. (1) On life. (2) On death. (3) On eternity. On life, since the Christian no longer regards the life lived in the body, nor the body lived in this life, as the chief thing. Though in this world, he is otherworldly. His body is but the tabernacle of his soul. He longs to be with Jesus and seeks to please Him in all he does. On death, since death is no longer a terror to him, but though death and its preceding burdens cause him to sigh, they are but a gateway to Jesus. On eternity, which is not a nirvana, a bodiless existence, something to be dreaded. In eternity body and soul will be re-united; the body will be glorified; soul and body will be forever with the Lord. — This last part could be expanded into a sermon on *The Christian's Glorious Resurrection Hope*. —

The last Sunday of the year reminds the Christian of the rapid flight of time, the decay of all things, his own death, the approach of endless eternity, his own sinfulness. With the burden of sin he flees to his Savior, knowing that to this day, to the end of time, in eternity the message of 2 Cor. 5:18-21 remains true. And with all other disturbing and harassing thoughts and worries on this last Sunday *We Flee for Refuge to the Manger of Bethlehem*. There we find (1) comfort in the burdens of life; (2) peace when the dread of death and eternity oppresses us; (3) strength to strive above all to be accepted of Him.

THEO. LAETSCH