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Heinrich Willkomm

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Jesus the Judge of the World

By HEINRICH WILLKOMM

(ED. NOTE: This is the companion essay of "Christ, the Hope of Glory" [cf. C. T. M., XXIV, December, 1953, 881—900] presented to the 1953 Free Conference of European and Missouri Synod theologians at Berlin. The essayist is pastor of one of the Lutheran Free Churches in Berlin. The Rev. Paul Koenig, one of the American commissioners, prepared the translation. In view of the forthcoming meeting of the World Council of Churches and its general topic, "Christ the Hope of the World," the essay is timely and extremely relevant.)

I*dem Christus palam rediturus est, ut iudicet vivos et mortuos.* Thus our fathers confess in the third article of the Augsburg Confession. They repeat therewith the words of the Apostles' Creed. Except for corresponding sentences in the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds and brief, withal plain and forceful statements in the discussions of the Large Catechism on the Second and the Third Article of the Creed and the explanation of the Seventh Petition, there is in the whole *Book of Concord* only one single article which expressly deals with eschatology. This is Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession and its Apology. It is surprising with what brevity it confesses and with what firmness and decision it declines and rejects both apocatastasis and chiliasm. Edmund Schlink has pointed out that we may not conclude from this observation that our fathers had an uneschatological theological orientation. He says: "We find in the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church so few particularly eschatological articles because their whole doctrine in all its parts is full of eschatological expectation" (p. 365).¹ Yes, we may say that the whole manner of speech and thought of the confessors is determined by the expectation of Judgment Day. What they say, they say in such a manner

¹ Edmund Schlink, *Theologie der lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften*, 1946.

as to be able to answer for it with joyous and fearless hearts and consciences before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. It is the joy of their heart that they have something to say to the Church, to troubled souls, that will stand in the fire and the terrors of the last Judgment. The expectation of Judgment Day gives firmness and determination to their speaking and their confessing, as Nik. Selnecker says in his introduction to the Psalms: "The Word of Christ demands decision, a not uncertain waiting for the outcome." All they must take this fact to heart who in confessional controversies can say neither yes nor no.

Thus, in all our theological discussion, we must turn our eyes to our Lord, concerning whom we confess: *Idem Christus palam rediturus est, ut indicet vivos et mortuos*. We dare not detract anything from the seriousness of His words. We dare not modify the comfort of His Word. This warning applies especially to eschatology. Here we must speak of realities that, in a special manner, lie beyond the boundary. Horst Stephan calls attention to this in his *Glaubenslebre*. He writes: "Since our hope is directed to an act of God that is incomprehensible to human experience and immeasurably transcends our desires or logical postulations, there comes into force in a special measure at this point the mystery of that God who is eternal and yet as the Living One creates time and history. We must take seriously the fact that saving knowledge receives its Law not from the longing of the oppressed human being, but from the knowledge of God" (p. 228). The greatest restraint is here demanded. We can speak of the eschatological activity of God only with reverential reserve as becomes us in the presence of God. This reserve probably explains the strong disinclination of the fathers of our Confessions and of Luther against all reveling in eschatological pictures and numbers. We must stick to the facts that Scripture presents and must let pictures be pictures that can be rightly interpreted to us only through the clear statements of Scripture itself.

Our attention is directed first of all to the word of the Lord: "I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). He who comes on Judgment Day is the Lord of His Church. He knows about the might and power of His enemies. The future belongs to Him and remains with Him.

For the enemies He cancels it by means of the simple *ou* substantiated by *oikodomēsō*. What the Lord here comprehends in a short sentence is developed in His eschatological discourses and in the proclamation of the Apostles. We shall attempt, in four sentences, to repeat what is revealed to us concerning the coming of Jesus as the Judge of the world.

THESIS 1: *The assault of His enemies against the Church precedes the coming of our Lord to Judgment. The conflict comes to a critical point ("spitzt sich zu") in the signs preceding Judgment Day. Everyone is here in danger and will stand his ground in the battle only as he penitently looks up to the coming Lord.*

As Lord of His Church Jesus Christ from the very beginning calls attention to the enemies that threaten His Church. Already the Baptist saw chaff among the wheat. In the very beginning of the Sermon on the Mount the two statements, "persecuted for righteousness' sake" and "theirs is the kingdom of heaven" stand in close proximity. At the end of that sermon we find the warning against false prophets, who inwardly are like ravening wolves. Among the parables in Mark 4 the very first one is that of the fourfold soil. The explanation begins with the words: "The sower soweth the Word. And these are they by the wayside, where the Word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately and taketh away the Word that was sown in their hearts." We know that in Luke the terrifying word is added, "lest they should believe and be saved" (8:12). Here already the note is sounded which in the eschatological discourses almost seems to indicate the victory of the enemies: "For then shall be great tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved." (Matt. 24:21, 22.) We may not expect a letup in the enmity before the Lord Himself shall appear. Concerning the end of Antichrist we read 2 Thess. 2:8: "whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming." And the Letters of the Apostles point to the gates of hell. And what our fathers confess concerning the Church in the Apology also is in accord with the words recorded Matt. 16:18. We read: "In the Church

itself, infinite is the multitude of the wicked who oppress it [despise, bitterly hate, and most violently persecute the Word, as, e.g., the Turks, Mohammedans, other tyrants, heretics, etc. For this reason . . . it often seems that the Church has completely perished.]” (Apology VII, 9. *Trigl.*, p. 229.)²

We must always reckon with the enemy and should know that the power of resistance and threatening increases. The Lord answers the question of His disciples: “What shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the end of the world?” not by referring to a gradually increasing superiority and world-wide power (*Weltmacht*) of His Church. He speaks of great unrest in the life of nations, convulsions in nature, persecution and hatred directed against His own. It seems as if in these external signs He would portray the superior power of the enemy, the *diabolos*. Behind all this disorder and unrest in nature and in the life of nations there truly stands the *diabolos*, concerning whom He says Luke 8:12: “He taketh away the Word out of their hearts lest they should believe and be saved,” as appears from the fact that the Lord at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of this discourse warns against the false prophets (Matt. 24:5, 11, 15, 23-26). In addition to the cosmic and political, the social and ideological agitations (*Erregungen*), we must count among the signs preceding Judgment Day the fact that error no longer is recognized in its dangerous character, whether such error appears as “enthusiasm” and idolatry or as the attempt to gain prestige for the Church in the world. In the Lord’s warnings against false prophets the word *planaō* (Matt. 24:5) is constantly repeated. Peter uses this word (1 Peter 2:25): “For ye were as sheep going astray [*probata planōmenoi*], but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.” That is the aim of all false doctrine: to entice the sheep away from their shepherd. That is especially the aim of antichrist: “Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son.” (1 John 2:22.) Because the fathers saw that the Pope’s teaching would entice them away from Christ, their Shepherd, and rob them of the greatest treasure of their heart, the free grace of God consisting in forgiveness of sins,

² *Triglot Concordia, the Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church, German-Latin-English*, Concordia Publishing House, 1921.

they never tired to warn against the Pope as the true Antichrist. Because the Pope condemns the heart of the Gospel, the doctrine of forgiveness of sins by grace alone, for Christ's sake, through faith; because he, as Paul describes him in 2 Thessalonians, sits in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God, our fathers confessed and we to this day confess with them "that the Pope is the very Antichrist" (*Trigl.*, p. 475: Smal. Art., Part II, IV, 10). At the same time we know, as the Confessions plainly state, that at all times, also today, there is much anti-Christianity also outside the Papacy. Should not the Church that lives alone by the free grace of her Lord and stirs herself against any anti-Christian power and tyranny rise up in arms against the adulteration of this central doctrine of her faith? We dare never forget that the Antichrist, just because he aims at nothing less than the destruction of the Church of Christ, will, to the very last, appear in the most enticing and blinding disguise (Heinrich Vogel). This is part and parcel of the signs named by the Lord that in spite of all constantly rising tensions the times seem to be similar to all other times. Yes, men will, in the last days, shout with increasing emphasis, "There is peace, and no danger." Thus also every individual belonging to the Church is personally endangered. Extreme peril is threatening. No ecclesiastical wall, no external orthodoxy, no church activity, can offer protection in this situation. We dare not be mere on-lookers and be satisfied with war bulletins. We all stand in the battle line, are all to the very last moment in danger of losing saving faith, of having our love grow cold, of having our hearts overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and cares of this life. The Lord warns His own as much against security and indifference as against fear and "enthusiastic" calculations. The call, "Be like unto men who are waiting for their Lord," runs through all admonition and preaching of these last times. The warning against antichrist in 1 John closes with the admonition: "And now, little children, abide in Him that when He shall appear, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (2:28). Nothing else is meant by the seven letters with their powerful plea: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." Likewise Paul in Ephesians 6 and Peter in 1 Peter 5 know no other advice against the temptation of the enemy than

faith in the Word, clinging firmly to the Lord. The confession, "I believe that He is my Lord," is the only help and salvation which Christ indicates to His Church. Upon this Rock alone, but most surely upon it, the Lord will build His Church so that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

THESIS 2: The building of the Church continues in spite of all temptations of the enemy. But the structure will be completed and revealed in all its glory only on Judgment Day, when the Son of Man will finally appear as the Judge of all the world in the glory of His Father before all nations.

The Lord knows about the powerful assault of the gates of hell. Over and against it He places His "I will build My Church." Also in the discourses concerning the end of the world we find among the words concerning the terrors of Judgment Day the word: "And this Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14). Not the assault of the enemies determines the end. The Lord of His Church determines the end. His plan must first be fulfilled and His Church built. The prophecy Rom. 11:25, 26, stating that all Israel shall be saved, must be considered at this point. In the eschatological sense the founding of the new Israeli State is indeed significant (Matt. 24:34). But we must definitely reject the assertion that all Israel according to the flesh will in the end be reinstated into its Old Testament rights. R. Seeberg states: "Romans 11 need mean no more than that at the end Israelites in large number shall be converted to Christ, or is this statement to be interpreted according to Gal. 3:6-16?" (*Grundriss der Dogmatik*, p. 120.) A nation will never be accepted by God on the basis of its origin or in view of external social influences. To the very last the rule obtains that we are saved by grace alone, for Christ's sake, through faith. To the great day of revelation this seal remains, "The Lord knoweth them that are His" (2 Tim. 2:19). To the last hour we must witness the Gospel of the grace of God in Christ Jesus before Gentiles and Jews, and we should withal be certain that it will not fail in a single point.

We now come to the question of the millennium. The Lutheran Church dare not simply overlook and leave to the sects the extolling of the millennium. We need something of the *agalliasis* which our

fathers had. Indeed, a fully developed doctrine of the millennium is missing. Yes, Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession expressly rejects gross chiliasm, but how well our fathers knew how to praise the kingdom of Christ in their confessions and in their hymns! They learned this from Paul (2 Cor. 6:9, 10; Rom. 8:31 ff.; 1 Cor. 1:4-7) and from Psalms 2, 46, 96, and 98. They interpret Revelation 20 more powerfully than the chiliasts of all times. From the confessional writings I shall bring only one quotation in which we sense this praise. After the Apology had just confessed that it seemed as if the Church had utterly perished, it continues: "Therefore, in order that we may not despair, but may know that the Church will nevertheless remain [until the end of the world], likewise that we may know that, however great the multitude of the wicked is, yet the Church [which is Christ's bride] exists, and that Christ affords those gifts which He has promised to the Church, to forgive sins, to hear prayer, to give the Holy Ghost, this article in the Creed presents us these consolations. And it says *Church Catholic*. . . . But the Gospel which is preached in the Church brings not [merely] the shadow of eternal things, but the eternal things themselves, the Holy Ghost and righteousness, by which we are righteous before God. [But every true Christian is even here upon earth partaker of eternal blessings, even of eternal comfort, of eternal life, and of the Holy Ghost, and of righteousness which is from God, until he will be completely saved in the world to come.]" (*Trigl.*, pp. 229, 231:VII, 9, 15.) One could also quote at this point the third article of the Augsburg Confession about the reign of Christ among those who believe in Him. That is the millennium in the Lutheran Church: the spiritual glory of the Church, which in the Gospel and the Sacraments has all the treasures of God and, despite all ravings of the enemies, may rejoice in and praise the promise of her Lord, "I will build My Church." Because of this concept of the millennium Wilhelm Bauer accuses the Lutheran fathers of deviating from the literal understanding of Holy Writ in the doctrine of the last things, "not to the benefit of the whole." After a description of the allegedly real millennium he states: "The interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Kingdom of Peace is, moreover, burdened with a great difficulty. What, according to the words of

the Prophets, happens in the Kingdom of Peace, the Apostles see already fulfilled in the first coming of the Lord." (*Christliche Dogmatik*, ed. Deinzer, pp. 410, 456.) I believe that with our fathers we should learn again and again from the Apostles and from our Lord Jesus Christ true sobriety in our expectation of Judgment Day. We may concede to Vilmar and Loehe the right to say that we know more about eschatology than the Church in the beginning of her history because of what has happened to us in the meantime. But what the future, the next hour, may bring, we know as little as they, and under the stress of the signs of our time we are in danger of underestimating the plastic and vital reality of the gifts of the Gospel. In the *Kirchenordnung* of Duke Henry of Saxony of 1539 we read: "When the holy Gospel comes into a city or village and expels Satan and the Pope, we should heartily rejoice that we again have in their purity Gospel, Baptism, Sacrament, absolution, etc. For where these things are found, there Paradise has begun, there we have the kingdom of heaven, as Christ Himself says." (Elert, *Morphologie*, I, p. 442.) But we dare not forget that, according to Apology, Art. VII, "the wicked, since they are in the kingdom of the devil, are not the Church; although in this life, because the kingdom of Christ has not yet been revealed, they are mingled with the Church and hold offices" (*Trigl.*, pp. 231, 233: VII, 17). Yes, there is no one among us who can claim such treasures without the Word. To quote a word from Luther's Large Catechism: "For let me tell you this, even though you know it perfectly and be already master in all things, still you are daily in the dominion of the devil, who ceases neither day nor night to steal unawares upon you to kindle in your heart unbelief and wicked thoughts against the foregoing and all the commandments. Therefore you must always have God's Word in your heart, upon your lips, and in your ears. But where the heart is idle, and the Word does not sound, he breaks in and has done the damage before we are aware." (*Trigl.*, p. 609: Third Com., 100.)

Thus, while we give thanks for the Gospel, which the kingdom of God brings us, there ever remains alive the sighing and the praying for the dear Judgment Day. We lack no gift and only wait for the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. As *simul iusti et peccatores* we long for the redemption of our body, for deliverance

from sin and all impotence in and around us. We do not wait for a millennium, but we wait for the Judge, who liberates us from sin. But we may, aye, we should, like the Apostles and our fathers, be constantly prepared for His coming. Astounding and unexpected possibilities and events lie hidden in the things which the Lord says concerning the signs preceding Judgment Day. This we know, this we dare not overlook. Of this fact the impressive pictures of the Apocalypse should remind us. They should impress upon us the reality and the seriousness of the opposition, but also the certainty of the revelation of the glory of Jesus Christ. We have in these pictures an impressive painting anent the word: "I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." While being prepared for the inconceivable, we dare not rob our Lord, who has promised to come, of His liberty. Every day we must take seriously His promise and warnings. We dare not postpone our own decision. We dare not permit special attempts at interpretation to dissuade us from praying every morning with our children:

Help me, as the morn is breaking,
In the spirit to arise,
So from careless sloth awaking
That, when o'er the aged skies,
Shall the Judgment Day appear,
I may see it without fear.

We know not when the Lord will come, but that He can come any hour, we know, and we wait for it.

Idem Christus palam rediturus est. That is the mighty interpretation of the word: "I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." He who as the Son of Man has redeemed His Church and has built it through His Word shall suddenly like lightning publicly appear before all eyes in His glory, a glory that is nothing else than the glory of the Father. Here we stand at the border. Judgment Day has come. The *aiōn mellōn* dawns. Our waiting has come to an end. The *heōs pote* (Rev. 6:10) no longer is heard. Time is replaced by eternity. He who seemed enmeshed in time and space and to have perished therein now suddenly appears openly before all. The glory of the risen Lord has been veiled in this world of sin. The veil now falls at the

parousia. On that Day "let him which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house. Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes." (Matt. 24:17, 18.) "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32). The things of this world move into the background. Heaven and earth shall pass away. "The Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works contained therein shall be burned up." We shall still hear of the new heaven and the new earth in which dwelleth righteousness. We also want to bear in mind that the Augsburg Confession, Art. XVII, equates the Last Day with *consummatio mundi*, thus confessing, not the annihilation, but the consummation of God's creation. But this consummation is achieved only through the Judgment. The Judgment begins in this way, that everything falls that prevented the glory of Jesus from being revealed and that He who has hitherto veiled and concealed it now reveals His glory.

And He shall come as the Son of Man in the glory of His Father and all the holy angels with Him. We speak here in the spirit of the Formula of Concord, Sol. Decl. Referring to another article of faith that cannot be comprehended with our reason and five senses, it says: "We are simply to believe it and adhere to the Word" (Sol. Decl. IX, 2). We must simply cling reverently to the words of Scripture. With the word *idem Christus* our Confessions refer to Him who was made man and then ascended into heaven. We are directed to the word of the angel on Ascension Day: "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). He shall be recognized as the One who once stood before His disciples. With the appearing of this Son of Man in the glory of His Father, which is at the same time His glory, the mystery of the incarnation shall shine forth brightly. The truth "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son" shall on that day be revealed in such a manner that all revolt of unbelief must stand condemned, while the joy of the redeemed will become perfect and eternal. Judgment will begin with the coming of the Son of Man, who is God the Lord. Thus shall be revealed the

immense seriousness and the unfathomable depth of the love of our holy God. At the same time the divine glory of the Son of Man shall be revealed. Then men shall see the all-inclusiveness of St. Peter's words: "Neither is there salvation in any other" (Acts 4:12). Now Jesus of Nazareth shall be revealed as the *kyrios* before whom should bow every knee of things in heaven and things in earth and things under the earth. And He who at one time gave the command to preach His Gospel to every nation will now finally interrupt and once and for all bring to an end the ragings of the enemies and gather all nations before His throne. He and no other appears—this fact is already the Judgment. The word *idem* is interpreted according to its two sides by Rev. 1:7 and 1 Peter 1:7, 8. On the one side all kindreds of the earth shall wail because they must recognize Him who cometh as the One whom they pierced and despised; on the other the believers shall rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory because Jesus Christ who now reveals Himself is the One whom having not seen they loved.

THESIS 3: On Judgment Day all the dead shall be resurrected. All men shall appear before the judgment seat of Christ Jesus to receive the sentence they deserved. The sentence according to the works of faith is a confirmation of the Gospel. The verdict of the Judge is final and eternal. An "apocatastasis pantōn," in the sense of removing the dualism in the double verdict, one unto damnation and the other unto eternal salvation, does not agree with the powerful testimony of Scripture concerning the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

Idem Christus palam rediturus est, ut indicet vivos et mortuos. Concerning this truth we confess in the Small Catechism: "At the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead." Christ says that all nations shall be gathered before His throne. He also speaks of the hour in which "all that are in the graves shall hear His voice and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:29). We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 3:10; Rom. 14:10), and there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust (Acts 24:15). Because of the close connection between the return of the Lord and a general resurrection of the dead, the dogmaticians have

rejected a double resurrection. In discussing the question whether there is a millennium between the return of Christ and the general resurrection of the dead, Thomasius states that Revelation 20 is the only text that *seems* to make it necessary to insert an intermediate stage into the chain of eschatological events. He says, among other things, that one should consider that the Pastoral Letters know nothing about chiliasm. When they refer to the coming of the Lord, they indicate as its purpose the judgment of the dead and the living (2 Tim. 4:1). One should consider that the Apostles nowhere, either for comfort or for admonition, remind the churches of the millennium, but urge them to wait for the Day of the Lord as for a moment in which the change occurs from the old world to the new.

When we confess, *Idem Christus palam rediturus est, ut iudicet vivos et mortuos*, we confess therewith the resurrection of the body. Luther says concerning this teaching: "The other articles of our Christian faith are also hard to believe, but this article is the hardest. The reason is that none so argues against experience as this one. For one sees before his very eyes how all the world is swept away by death and dies. We lay emperors and kings, high and low, young and old, in short, human beings all, one after the other, into the grave and inter them. The wild beasts devour the one, the sword slays the other; this one the fish in the water, the other the birds of the air, eat up. It is difficult to believe that man who perishes in such varied ways should live again and that man's members that are scattered and turned to dust and ashes in fire, water, and earth, should be reassembled and the soul of man again dwell in the same body in which it dwelt before, and man should have the same eyes, ears, hands, and feet, without the body with its members being changed into another being." (Leipz. ed., I, 300.) Against all such doubts we note the *idem Christus*. This *idem* refers to everything the Church confesses concerning Christ, to wit, that the same Christ is truly risen on the third day. . . . He who comes again to raise the dead is the One who is like unto a Son of Man and who says, "Fear not, I am the First and the Last, I am He that liveth and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen, and have the keys of hell and of death." Rev. 1:18. This connection between Christ's resurrection and our resurrection we find expressed

again and again in Scripture. "For to this end Christ both died and rose and revived that He might be Lord both of the dead and living." (Rom. 14:9. Cp. 1 Cor. 15:12 ff.; John 11:24, 25; Job 19:25-27; 1 Cor. 6:14). He who Himself has arisen from the dead shall come again; hence also the dead shall be summoned before Him.

To all puzzling and doubting questions concerning the resurrection of the dead the Lord gives the majestic answer: "Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the Scriptures neither the power of God? . . . Have ye not read in the Book of Moses how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. Ye therefore do greatly err." (Mark 12:24 ff.; Luke 20:38.) We are here not concerned with the belief in immortality, but with the revelation which surpasses all human thought and experience, that by virtue of His deity Christ shall resurrect the dead.

The word "for they all live unto Him" must satisfy us as the answer to the question now arising: What is man's state between his death and the resurrection? Plato's view concerning the immortality of the soul does not agree with the message of the Church. Plato as well as all philosophers fails to understand the seriousness of death as God's judgment upon man, who according to body and soul has fallen a prey to sin. But it is equally false to say that death ends all. We must reject what C. Stange says: "Because the ungodly have no part in Christ, they have no part in eternal life. They pass away with the temporal world. There is in them nothing that extends beyond death. There is properly speaking no annihilation of the wicked, since there is nothing that can be annihilated." (Quoted by Kuenneth, *Theol. der Auferstehung*, p. 246.) As fallen man with all his longing for immortality cannot regain the lost eternal life, not even according to the soul, so he cannot annihilate himself. Man, whom God originally created unto life, cannot end in mere nonexistence. No man can escape God, the Lord of his life and being. No man will escape the Judgment (Rev. 6:14-17; Amos 9:2; Ps. 139:7-12). The continued existence after death rests not on some quality in man, but solely on God.

Scripture says little about the state of man between death and Judgment. It does say that no one can get away from God. All are in God's hand. I need but mention the dying thief, Stephen, Paul ("I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ"), the martyrs, poor Lazarus, and the rich man.

Besides the brief statement in the explanation of the Seventh Petition "and graciously take us from this vale of tears to Himself in heaven," we find few references in the confessional writings concerning the state of man between his death and the resurrection. Edmund Schlink says that the confessional writings indicate most definitely that everyone must make a decision here on earth in the final struggle between the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God. On Judgment Day the living and the dead will be summoned to judgment. They shall be judged according to what they have done in life. Heb. 9:27 states: "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the Judgment." The files of life are sealed with the advent of death. After death there is no more possibility to correct the decisions of life. The hope of a deliverance from hell, as merciful as it may seem, is not evangelical, but is the death of the real Gospel and, as Francis Pieper states, hinders man in repentance and faith. The question of the fate of those who here on earth never heard of Christ is a veiled and sealed territory for us. Here are the mysteries of God which we can and dare not investigate. To the last hour our mission is: "Make disciples of all nations." The answer Christ gives us to such questions as the fate of those who have not as yet heard the Gospel we find in Luke 12:47, 48: "And that servant which knew his lord's will and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not and did commit things worthy of stripes shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required." Hence we are not to speculate, but in all seriousness perform the mission assigned to us. At this point the word of the Lord addressed to Capernaum (Matt. 11:24) is in place: "But I say unto you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the Day of Judgment than for thee." Here Christ not only tells us that there are differences and degrees of damnation, but also warns us against that sin, which, as Pieper says, calls forth the severest punishment

of God for despising His Gospel, or the *sola gratia*. This is in accord with Christ's statement that unbelief ("they believe not on Me," John 16:9) is *the* sin. And we hear overtones of this throughout Christ's message concerning the Judgment.

He will appear as the Son of Man. "*Idem Christus palam rediturus est, qui vere passus, crucifixus, mortuus, et sepultus, ut reconciliaret nobis patrem et hostia esset. . .*" He who once was judged for us will now, in uncovered glory, Himself sit in judgment. He will make manifest the counsels of the heart (1 Cor. 4:5). God will judge the hidden things of man through Him, according to the Gospel proclaimed in the world. Man sees what is before his eyes. He cannot with certainty distinguish between works done for our own sakes and for God's sake, between those done for reward or those done out of gratitude. But God looks upon the heart. Works done for merit and for praise among men He does not acknowledge. They have their reward, as Christ says in His Sermon on the Mount. And that will be the verdict on Judgment Day. They who will say: "Lord, if we had seen Thee, we would surely have served Thee," as well as they who deemed works of love done the poor and despised too insignificant or who think they can point to all manner of things the Judge should have seen and noted (Matt. 7:17-23), must hear the awful words "Depart from Me." But in those whom He places at His right hand Christ demonstrates the power of faith by their works of love, of which they themselves know nothing. For they never thought to merit anything, but constantly asked the question in their hearts: What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? He calls them His sheep and the blessed of His Father, the people for whom the inheritance was prepared long before they had ever done anything good. Hence the Apology is right in confessing: "If anyone thinks that he obtains the remission of sins because he loves, he dishonors Christ, and will discover in God's judgment that this confidence in his own righteousness is wicked and vain" (*Trigl.*, p. 162, III, 29). Yes, on that Day it will be revealed what a living, active mighty thing faith is. Only then it will become manifest how many truly good works flowed from faith. We shall be amazed at the power of the Gospel, Baptism, the Holy Supper, and brotherly admonition that will be revealed on that Day.

We shall be astonished at the breadth and the unconditional nature of the grace of God, which has plucked many a one of whom we never suspected it, like a brand, from the burning, according to the word of Joel, which Paul and Peter never tire to quote: "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." But there will also be much amazement and terror at the incorruptible sternness and the severity of this judgment upon all hypocritical faith. Then it shall be revealed how true the warning of Scripture was against unbelief and withal against the works of the flesh. It shall become plain how miserably many a one has, through secret or open sins, fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, through enmity and envy, through an unforgiving spirit and dishonesty, through careless speech and evil example, through idolatry and despondency, deprived himself of faith and salvation. Even the greatest deeds and sacrifices, though adorned with the name of Christ, will not bribe the Judge. He will separate the chaff from the wheat. The branches that sought to bring forth fruit of themselves, He will gather and cast into the fire, but those who abode in Him in their helplessness and ever turned to Him anew and brought forth fruit by Him, He will now totally purge so that they bring forth perfect fruit and His joy remain in them and thus their joy be full.

Yes, then in a moment He shall complete the building of His Church, and "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." "He will conquer the works of the devil," as Hermas says. The verdict of the Son of God made man completes and secures the building of His Church. For the last time the world will hear: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." But out of the same mouth that so often has invited proceeds also the terrifying word: "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." While the words of Jesus here in time called for decision, they now pronounce the division. By His words, "Come" and "Depart from Me," He will separate His people from the wicked as the shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. There is only this one alternative. There is no third possibility. And once the verdict has been pronounced, there is no turning back: "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal" (Matt. 25:46). To be compelled to go

away from God is the most terrible thing about the verdict. The man who in his sin wanted to be without God now must be without Him in eternal damnation. All walls that might hide or protect man have fallen. Man must now be what he wanted to be: The man for whom God no longer cares, who is rejected by Him. According to God's judgment, he must now be without God and therefore without hope. This judgment involves the whole man. Man according to body and soul has fallen away from God, and therefore the whole man is subject to the wrath of God after having rejected salvation earned by Him who has physically arisen from the dead. (Heinrich Vogel, *Gott in Christos*, p. 512.)

The decision of the Judge is irrevocable, final, eternal. *Ex inferno nulla redemptio*. He who would deny the eternal duration of the punishment in hell would therewith also give up eternal life. Both stand side by side. (Matt. 25:46; also cp. Rev. 14:11; 21:8.)

Although he whose conscience is struck by this message must keep silence and know that he has no right to rebel, we are ever inclined to raise questions and to find an answer. In his *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* Stauffer asserts: "The thought of eternal punishment is expressed frequently and plainly in the New Testament (Matt. 9:48; 2 Thess. 1:9; Heb. 6:2). Above all, John has carried it out with unmerciful consistency." But Stauffer continues: "Nevertheless the ancient Church did not give up the hope that the saving will of the all-merciful and omnipotent God will yet overcome the final No of the world that glories in itself. . . . The principle of the *gloria Dei* demands and guarantees the final victory of divine mercy. To Him be glory in eternity." We can only answer: It is not proper for us to philosophize to save God's honor, but we must, if we would honor Him, place our finger upon our mouth and worship in the presence of the Unfathomable and Incomprehensible. Vogel very aptly condemns the theory of *apocatastasis*: "This sounds obvious, not to say plausible, to the intellect of religious-ethical man. But it is in contradiction to the statements describing the line of thought of Scripture. . . . In the whole of Scripture there is not a single passage that would encourage or authorize us to speculate on possibilities of God beyond the limits set for us" (op. cit., 1017). We may add: Texts like John 3:36 and others are so explicit that we dare not and cannot risk such speculation. This leads us to the last thesis.

THESIS 4: *We dare not quibble about the seriousness of the decision of that Day, but must with all positiveness attest it to ourselves and to others in Church and world for the purpose of calling men to repentance and bringing them the only abiding comfort.*

In a letter to Hans von Rechenberg, 1523, Luther sharply attacks the opinion of "enthusiasts" that finally all men must be saved. But then he continues: "Whether God could give faith to some in the hour of their death or after death is another question. Who would doubt that He could do it? But that He does it one cannot prove." Yes, we must cling to the Word. We shall experience astonishing things according to the promise that what we now see in a glass darkly, we shall then see face to face. God's deity and the majesty of His grace and His holiness will put to shame everything that we may here have conjured up in our imagination. Vogel says: "As to the deity of God, it is just then misunderstood and turned into a caricature when we subject the Lord's majestic right to show grace to the postulate of an ideal divine love or even divine final harmony, according to which God will finally be easygoing and not insist on justice" (p. 1017).

The Lord's threats of eternal judgment, His sacrifice and His Gospel are too urgent, too powerful, for us to dare to tamper with a single word. These threats and promises are first spoken to us personally. They teach us that we have nothing, absolutely nothing, in the face of the eternal wrath of God. We must confess that before His judgment we are eternally lost unless we are delivered from such distress by our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a solemn, albeit inconceivable, judgment toward which we are hastening. But still we may hear and confess the *idem* with rejoicing and as an invitation. He who comes to judge has once come *ut reconciliaret nobis patrem et hostia esset*. Ours is the duty to flee to Him, and that today. Ours the duty to remain with Him. Ours the duty to direct and to call to Him all our dear ones and all whom we meet on the way. Not merely halfheartedly, not merely faintly, as if there were still another way of escape. But neither fearfully as if the message did not help all. "For such a call of God as comes through the preaching of the Word we should not consider a mere sham battle, but should know that thereby God reveals His will. . . .

And since the Holy Ghost wishes to be efficacious through the Word and to strengthen and give power and ability, it is God's will that we should receive the Word, believe and obey it." (Form. of Concord, Sol. Decl. XI, 29.) He whose conscience has been smitten by the message of *Christus rediturnus*, of the judgment seat before which we must all appear, of Christ as the One who became man for us, died, and rose again, can no longer halt between two opinions. He can only exclaim: "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." But he must add, to attest the urgency and the finality of this word: "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him. Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." *Idem Christus*. . . His heralds we must be, not philosophers, watching the trend of the times, turning their ears from the truth and leaning to myths. Over and against this temptation the word of Paul holds good: "I charge thee therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom, preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine. . . . But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry [*tēn diakonian sou plērophorēson*]." (2 Tim. 4:1-5.) This watchfulness (sobriety, earnestness, vigilance) and *plērophoria* we ask of God in view of our Lord, who comes again to judge the quick and the dead, before whose judgment seat we must all appear and be privileged to give an account, "with joyous and fearless hearts and consciences," of what we, like our fathers, have proclaimed.

Berlin-Reinickendorf, Germany