

The Kingdom Of God

[This study was written in German by Professor John Schaller for the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* (*Theologische Quartalschrift*) and appeared in two installments in the April and July, 1918, issues (Vol 15, Numbers 2 and 3). Professor Schaller served as president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary from 1908 to 1920. The translation is by Professor Ernst H. Wendland of the Lutheran Seminary, Lusaka, Zambia.]

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I.

Our Lord was once asked by a Pharisee: "When is the kingdom of God coming?" The same question asked in precisely the same way has since then kept many Christians busy. From all sorts of false presuppositions people have come up with the most varied replies. One common thrust stands out among all these variations, however—finding in chiliasm a concrete formulation and almost universal acceptance. The people taking this position are influenced by their entire outlook on world events, especially those relating to the history of nations and of mankind in general. Whenever the affairs of this world are reasonably quiet, this view is to a great extent merely theoretical. There are those times, of course, when church leaders and their congregations become involved in politics, justifying themselves by saying that the church has a call to prepare for the eventual realization of the kingdom of God, even though for the time being that goal cannot be fully realized. But whenever revolutionary developments take place in this world—especially in the relationship of entire nations to each other—the hope flares up that now the desired time for the coming of the kingdom of God is finally at hand.

Although the present world conflict has not yet ended,¹ it was unavoidable that the prophets of the millennium should have become active. In the first phase of this war, as the gruesome methods of modern warfare never before experienced began to unfold, the people who had been nourished on chiliastic hopes were petrified. Not only were their hopes dashed to pieces, but they became disenchanted with Christianity as such. When the enemies of Christianity maliciously asked if this gruesome world-holocaust were the best that the Christian faith was able to achieve, practically no one had an answer. One could even hear the despairing opinion expressed in Christian circles that "Christianity has turned out to be a failure." Gradually one became accustomed to the horror-stories, and hope was reawakened that one of the warring parties would become victorious and bring the kingdom-of-God-on-earth concept closer to realization. After nourishing itself for quite a while on crumbs, this hope received a massive boost when England succeeded in snatching southern Palestine and Jerusalem from the Turks. Since then every true chiliast believes that God's presumed promises in the restoration of a visible messianic kingdom on earth are soon to be fulfilled. As a part of these so-called promises, they include the return of the Jews to their promised land and the restoration of the old glory of Jerusalem.

While the Lutheran Church from the very outset recognized and rejected millennialism in all its shadings as fanaticism, this teaching has to this day remained a prominent characteristic of Reformed Protestantism. Not all Calvinists, of course, have included gross chiliastic notions in their doctrinal systems. In their overall understanding of the kingdom of God on earth, however, lies the seed for all the false hopes which chiliasts nourish and cultivate in their hearts. Elsewhere² we have shown how through the growing influence of Calvinism all political freedom in our country has been called into question, since Reformed communities have never really understood nor desired the fundamental separation of church and state. In the course of decades they have worked with increasing success toward wiping out this distinction pertaining to our country's form of government. In the article referred to above, the Reformed concept of the visible kingdom of God on earth was

¹ This article was written shortly after the United States entered World War I (tr.).

² Seminary *Catalog*, 1915-1916.

also pointed out. Since that time there have been abundant demonstrations of this Reformed effort. For the thoughtful observer there appears to be no doubt at all on the part of many of our citizens that the decision to enter the war in which we are now engaged not only has a political cause, but a religious one as well. Many sectarian preachers are abusing their pulpits with coarse warmongering—and receiving applause in the process. This religious background, however, is the same old erroneous concept concerning the kingdom of God, with its accompanying delusion that a certain nation or land has been called to establish a theocracy on the earth.

With a certain amount of justification one can also express the misgiving that the Lutheran Church of our land has been infected by this Reformed confusion as well. As a result, it has also lost its firm conviction and clear understanding in questions relating to the separation of church and state. Lutheran congregations with their pastors in the forefront, also large Lutheran associations in whose gatherings many pastors have participated, have expressed strong opinions concerning the affairs of war—and this in the name of the Lutheran Church. With narrow-minded emphasis on their rights as citizens, Lutheran pastors have become personally involved in matters of political agitation intended to influence federal legislation. They fail to realize that the only reason they can have any influence or can look for any results is because of the Calvinistic training of our nation, in which representatives of church bodies must be recognized. These are certainly unfortunate derailments, the results of which cause us to be sensitive. But it is not absolutely necessary to consider them as anything else than emotional outbursts, which in these times can occasionally tarnish the judgment of sensible people. Nevertheless, these incidents ought to show us that we all have reason to heed those divine truths which *should* determine our judgment and according to which we should *want* to be guided.

This study does not presume to be exhaustive, but it is intended to serve as an incentive toward deeper reflection. On many points allusions and references will have to suffice. Even though the presentation is somewhat limited, however, certain important thoughts come to the fore, namely, (1) that the "kingdom of God" in its proper sense does not designate merely a condition or state of being, but an uninterrupted *activity*, a continuous *rule* and *working* of God; (2) that in its presentation of this rule of God the Bible mentions his general world-rule only incidentally, and strictly speaking refers to his rule *through the gospel*; (3) that the "kingdom of God" in a *derived* sense designates a *place* to which people come, or a *possession* which they can acquire; and (4) that the "kingdom of God" in this sense never designates something *material* or *external*, but always points to those gifts which are made available to us through the gospel.

In our consideration of this topic we shall refer primarily to the New Testament. This does not mean that the Old Testament possibly has a different way of referring to the kingdom of God. Although this would not be impossible because of God's theocratic relationship to the nation of Israel, our occasional references to well-known Old Testament statements will show that both Testaments agree completely in their view on this matter.

One will have to concede that our own understanding of biblical statements pertaining to the kingdom of God has been strongly influenced by the view that the Scriptures make use of this term to designate specific persons or things which are bound together as a unit under the dominion of God. This viewpoint surfaces, for example, when we explain that God's *kingdom of power* takes in the whole universe and includes all creatures; that the *kingdom of grace* is the church on earth and includes the believers; that the *kingdom of glory* includes the angels and the elect. This viewpoint prevails to such an extent among us that without much reflection one gathers many offerings "for the kingdom of God" and everyone has the idea that the collected funds serve "the building of the kingdom of God on earth." From this, however, immediately emerge many exegetical difficulties which preachers must struggle with and which lead them to interpret a number of familiar passages of the Lord and his apostles according to rules which must somehow be brought into agreement with this concept. The error lies in this, that without further reflection a legitimate metonymy is used in a *literal* sense, pushing the real sense aside, instead of reversing the order and deriving the metonymy from the proper sense of the word and justifying this use. That this error has become so common among us is all the more remarkable

when after careful examination of the passages used one begins to realize that it is doubtful if the equation: "kingdom of God = church" can actually be authenticated in the Scriptures!³

The Greek word for the German *Reich* is βασιλεία; the English word *kingdom* is therefore a somewhat more exact translation, although this difference will not be of further concern for our consideration here. Since this is the βασιλεία Θεοῦ, God is the βασιλεύς and his rule is designated as βασιλεύειν. We must immediately set aside here those impressions which are suggested to us by the German or English words. When we hear of a king, we think of a person who is in a certain position of respect, dignity, and authority. The king is king, also when he is asleep or lies in a coma, yes, even when he is mentally incapable of taking care of the business of a ruler! In our own day we know of kings who are used only as decorative symbols of a certain form of government. When awake, they function as little like kings as when asleep. History also supplies us with many examples of kings who existed as such in name only. Even such figurehead kings have the honor, the worth, the office. In other words, we customarily think of the kingship as a *position* someone holds, whether the person is outwardly active or not. To be a king means having authority.

When the Scriptures speak about God's kingship, there is in no way a lack of right, of dignity, of authority whenever this title is attributed to him. In the first instance, however, we think of God's kingship as an *activity*, a function. Just as βασιλεύειν means first of all "to function as king," so also the emphasis of βασιλεία lies in an active exercise of kingly power. "God is king" in the language of Scripture does not mean in the first instance: "God has kingly authority which he uses or does not use as he sees fit." These words rather convey the meaning that God as king works, creates, rules—in short, that God carries out the activity of a divine king. The "kingdom of God" is therefore in its real sense the divine activity itself. The verbal usage of the word βασιλεία is apparent also in certain passages of Scripture in which the subject matter does not deal directly with the kingdom of God. In the discussion concerning Beelzebub, Jesus says: "If Satan is divided against himself, how can his βασιλεία stand?" (Lk 11:18).

In this passage we are not concerned as much about the fact of *being* a ruler as about the *activity* of a ruler. Not only Satan's right to rule but also his entire *activity* as a ruler would come to an end if he would be "divided against himself." This thought is also expressed in the question which the disciples asked on the day of Christ's ascension: "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the βασιλεία to Israel?" (Ac 1:6). Their desire was not so much that Israel would again have a national king, but that national independence and self-rule would again be granted to the entire nation. Clearly, the thought of authority, although present in these passages, recedes into the background, and the emphasis lies on the activity, the exercise of the power to rule.

Without a doubt this understanding comes to the fore in those statements of Scripture which plainly deal with the kingdom of God, where it also makes no difference over which persons or things the kingly activity of God is extended. Especially instructive here is the word of Paul: "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power" (1 Cor 4:20). Paul had just stated that he would come "and find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have." He was not about to let himself be taken in by bombastic, sonorous rhetoric. If they would really be under God's influence, his power would surely be apparent in them. Even the βασιλεία, the kingly activity of God, was not an empty way of speaking, not an empty term, but an actual application of power. For godly power is not merely potential, a latent capability which shows power, but a real demonstration of power itself. Only when understood in this way does it make sense when Jesus says: "But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Mt 12:28). These words are simply unintelligible when one understands the kingdom of God to mean a specific group of people. The words immediately set forth a great truth, however, when one realizes that the Lord is speaking here about the divine exercise of kingly rule. The Pharisees should and could have recognized from the miracles of

³ To call the church the kingdom of God, or of Christ, or of heaven is, however, a legitimate *ecclesiastical* metonymy, which is used also in the Lutheran Confessions, e.g., in the Apology: "...the Church, which is truly the kingdom of Christ...." (*Triglotta*, 230:17) (ed.)

Jesus that God had come near to them with his activity in a most unusual way. In this very activity which took place before their eyes the kingdom of God was in evidence.

This is what Paul also means with the expression, "The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Ro 14:17). Whoever presupposes that the "kingdom of God" in this passage is a designation for the *subjects* of the kingdom, and thus wants to find there a description of the *church*, runs into difficulties in the very first words of the passage. According to Paul's words one could, perhaps, understand that all those who belong to the kingdom of God have righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. In that case, however, one would have to accept the fact that these are people who neither eat nor drink! Yet it is not Paul's purpose here to show who belongs to God's kingdom. He rather wants to make clear with these words that we are not concerned with externals such as eating and drinking, non-eating and non-drinking, when it comes to a person's right to stand before God. Although it is God indeed who both creates food and drink and gives the ability to enjoy these gifts, his rule which embraces the proclamation of the gospel has nothing to do with such externals. It is this gospel which proclaims the rule of God that prepares righteousness, peace, and joy and offers these to mankind. Whoever serves Christ by preaching the gospel is acting under God's gracious working and is, *sola gratia et efficacia Dei*, pleasing to God and of benefit to men.

Similarly, but at the same time from an entirely different point of view, we should understand Jesus' words to the Pharisees: "The kingdom of God does not come visibly, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within⁴ you" (Lk 17:20f). Many interpreters, including Luther, understand this to be a parallel passage with the one previously cited from Romans (14:17), but that cannot stand. Although one may admit that ἐντός could mean "within you," that interpretation is out of the question here because Jesus is speaking these words to the Pharisees, his unbelieving opponents (cf. the contrast in verse 20: "Then he said to his *disciples*..."). Jesus would surely not say of these Pharisees that a new, spiritual life had begun in their hearts.⁵ When they had asked, "When is the kingdom of God coming?" they meant, "How can we know in advance that the kingdom of God is coming?" According to the context the Lord thereupon replied, "Such an advance recognition is impossible." There are no signs through which one can predict in advance the coming of the kingdom of God—as the astronomer computes the movements of the stars. This is therefore the most compelling proof that God has already begun his working and creating in your very midst—and you are not even aware of it! With these words the Lord clearly referred to that which he had held before these very same people in Luke 11:20, "If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you."

To this passage we must immediately attach a consideration of Christ's words in John 18:36, "My kingdom is not of this world."⁶ That was surely a very fitting answer to Pilate's question, "Are you the king of the Jews?" The governor did not really want to know if Jesus was a titled king. His concern had to do rather with whether or not Jesus would claim the right to exercise kingly functions. How inappropriate Jesus' answer would have been if he had used the word "kingdom" to mean the subjects of the kingdom! His information as conveyed in his reply, however, conveys this sense: "My kingly rule is of an entirely different nature from the rule of an earthly king. Earthly rulers protect themselves by means of external weapons and make use of the services of other people. My βασιλεία, my rule as king, is not of this nature at all. Therefore my kingdom is not from there." Christ's kingly activity, in other words, in no way rests upon an earthly show of power. This Pilate understands. He inquires further, "You are a king, then!"—as if to ask, "Do you really manage governmental affairs?" And Jesus replies, "You are right in saying that I am a king. My kingly rule takes place in this that I testify to the truth (the gospel!). Whoever is on the side of truth is under my governing power." We cite this last sentence only to complete our present train of thought. It will receive more attention in our next point. For the

⁴ NIV footnote: "among."

⁵ "You" may, however, be understood in a generic sense, meaning "people," so that this statement reinforces the point, "The kingdom of God does not come visibly." It is spiritual and internal. This is an exegetical question. See "An Exegetical Note on Luke 17:21," WLQ, Vol 84, No 3 (Summer 1990), pp 226-230 (ed.).

⁶ For our present consideration it is not important to stress the difference between the "kingdom of God" and the "kingdom of Christ." These are two designations for the same thing, chosen from different viewpoints as we see from Ephesians 5:5 where Paul identifies the two: "No immoral, impure or greedy person...has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."

present it is sufficient to establish that this wonderful word of Christ can be understood properly only when one sees in the word "kingdom" a designation for the kingly activity of Jesus Christ.

In view of all these facts, we must acknowledge that the entire concept of the kingdom of God (Christ) is perhaps best of all conveyed in Christ's own words, "My Father is always at his work to this day and I, too, am working" (Jn 5:17). Thus the kingdom of God in its proper sense is the eternal and unceasing rule of God, in which he pursues specific purposes with specific means and toward a foreordained goal. It is not necessary to demonstrate the understanding of this concept any further as true and correct with other passages of Scripture. Once one has understood this clearly, this becomes strikingly apparent everywhere. This meaning will therefore be presupposed in the entire discussion which follows. There will be many opportunities, of course, to emphasize this thought.

When we teach about the office of Christ as king, it has become common procedure, in an effort to achieve overall clarity, to bring all statements pertaining to the exalted Christ's rule into three groups, referring accordingly to a *threefold kingdom of Christ*. This division, *which the Bible does not make*, has great weaknesses. Whoever attempts to carry out this classification logically meets with failure in various points. The chief problems arising out of this threefold grouping are a result of viewing the expression "kingdom" as a designation of a specific group of things or persons. According to the biblical usage of the word, one should rather regard it first of all as the designation of an activity, of a rule, an operation of God, and then secondly think about the persons whose relationship to God is being defined by the manner of his rule. In addition to this, it is difficult to characterize the "kingdom of glory" as a special "kingdom," since we teach on the basis of Scripture that God at all times and the human nature of Christ after being exalted to God's right hand as well have both ruled in divine glory and will do so to all eternity. With respect to the distinction between "kingdom of power" and "kingdom of grace" one also meets with inconsistencies. Through this distinction one apparently separates God's grace from his power, but according to Romans 1:16 and especially Ephesians 1:19ff it is especially in the so-called kingdom of grace that the almighty power of God accomplishes those activities which he has purposed beforehand. We, to be sure, with our minute logical understanding will never fathom the depths of the wisdom and knowledge of God and be able to clarify for ourselves his rule in all its ramifications. No doubt the closest we can come is when we apply the familiar distinction between law and gospel and simply declare: We refer to God's *kingdom of power* as that kind of rule with which he with irresistible force unflinching carries out all his purposes and without regard hurls to the ground all conscious or unconscious resistance. On the other hand, we refer to the *kingdom of grace* as that working of God's power which he exercises on the hearts of people, doing this without any compulsion and yet in such a way as to conquer all resistance and to accomplish his own purpose of saving the sinner. All this is but an unsatisfactory effort to organize divine thoughts in so far as we can know them from revelation. In a concrete situation the borders of the two "kingdoms" constantly overlap.

This is also why the Bible does not make any distinction between the various "kingdoms" of God. It is all one rule of God in his realm of creation, with the one purpose of carrying out his foreordained plan for the gathering, edification, and eventually the glorification of his church. In this respect the Scriptures indeed give abundant information concerning the rule of God in his law, which in the world of nature becomes apparent in the so-called laws of nature. Among people in general, however, this becomes apparent in the fact that God through moral or physical force maintains a certain, outward order, so that to a greater or lesser degree all human actions are clearly recognized as subject to his divine direction toward his final purposes. Wherever the Scriptures speak about the "kingdom of God," however, this general rule of God in nature and in the lives of people is self-evidently presupposed, although never directly so designated by name. Consequently, "kingdom of God" is never designated in the Scriptures exclusively as "kingdom of power," and only very seldom does there lie in this expression a reference to the "kingdom of power."

Generally speaking, in the New Testament we can consider but two references which come into consideration here, both found in the book of Revelation. In 11:15 we read: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ," and in 12:10: "Now have come the salvation and the power

and the kingdom of our God." In both passages, however, we are clearly dealing primarily, if not exclusively, with the results of the divine rule of grace, which has finally overcome all opposition.

In the Old Testament, where one might be more likely to run across such passages in which God's "kingdom of power" would be designated as his "kingdom," one also searches in vain for clear expressions of this nature. Daniel most often refers to the "kingdom of God" (2:44; 3:33; 4:31; 6:26; 7:14,27). In this book the statements of Nebuchadnezzar and Darius are to be excluded (3:33; 4:31; 6:26), for one would not wish to accept that these men spoke in a prophetic spirit, neither can one bring evidence that they had more than an external knowledge of God. Consequently, only the passages 2:44 and 7:14,27 come into consideration. In these passages, however, the prophet proclaims the messianic dominion, so that the emphasis upon world-rule can in no way be understood exclusively as "kingdom of power." As far as I can determine, from the historical books only 1 Chronicles 29:11 comes under consideration, where we read: "Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all." But how can anyone fail to see at once that David speaks here about the messianic rule of God and says the same thing as Paul in Ephesians 1:20ff? In the Psalms, only 103:19 can be cited as having the appearance of being a proof-passage for the "kingdom of power." Here we read: "The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all." But the entire psalm has to do so decidedly with the rule of God through the gospel that the general world-government of God, if meant at all, is cited only as a subordinate basis of comfort for the believers. Such passages as Psalm 22:28 ("For dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations"), Psalm 45:7 ("A scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom"), and Psalm 145:11-13 ("They will tell of the glory of your kingdom...and the glorious splendor of your kingdom....Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom") speak so plainly about the messianic "kingdom of grace" that the exegete would have to be very clumsy, indeed, if he would try to refer to the world-rule of God as anything more than a suggestion in these passages.

And so we come back to the statement that the term "kingdom of God," when used in the Bible in its proper sense, occurs exclusively as a designation for the gracious creating, working, and ruling of God through the gospel and in behalf of the gospel. Never is it of primary concern as to which persons make up the "kingdom" in a derived sense as the subjects of a king.⁷ Whatever God has done, still does, and will do in order to carry out his saving purposes for mankind is according to the Scriptures the "kingdom of God." Since God himself with his overpowering strength is active in the gospel, all passages which have to do with the power and activity of the gospel speak directly of the "kingdom of God" or of God's kingly rule even when the expression itself is not to be found there.

The same thing pertains to the Savior Jesus Christ. Wherever the subject matter deals with his redeeming work, there God proclaims his gospel; and where the gospel is proclaimed, there is the kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit himself identifies these different things in this same way in the parallel passages found in Matthew 19:29, Mark 10:29, and Luke 22:29 ("Everyone who has left...for my sake...for me and for the gospel...for the kingdom of God"). When our Lord therefore says to his disciples: "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you" (Mk 4:11), "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you" (Lk 8:10), this means on the one hand, "You know the gospel"; but then this also means, "You know the mysterious, wondrous manner in which God is working in people for their salvation." Since the Lord speaks these words directly in his teaching of the parables, we must assume that this stereotyped introduction to the parables relates to the same thing. "This is what the kingdom of God is like....What shall we say the kingdom of God is like?...It is like a mustard seed...like yeast....What shall I compare the kingdom of God to?" (Mk 4:26-30; Lk 13:18; etc.). They declare that in the parables the active rule of God through the gospel is presented from various aspects, as, for example: "Concerning God's activity in the gospel this takes place as follows...."⁸

⁷ It must be remembered, of course, that God does not exercise his kingly rule in a vacuum. He rules in human hearts. His rule can never be divorced from the people who are the objects of his gracious, saving activity, as Luther emphasizes in his Small Catechism in his explanation of the Second Petition: "God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace we believe his holy Word and lead a godly life now on earth and forever in heaven" (ed.).

⁸ The expression "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven" are, of course, not completely identical. For our present study, however, there is no reason to call attention to the points of difference. In the references which concern us here the two expressions are

In completing this study it would be well to call attention to the unusual kind of expression frequently used by Luke when he refers to the kingdom of God as something which is *proclaimed*. Apart from all other considerations, the expression is quite instructive. To proclaim the kingdom of a king cannot mean, to begin with, to give all sorts of information about the geography, extent, productivity, and population of the kingdom. It means to explain how the king carries out his rule. Luke simply declares: "(Jesus) spoke to them about the kingdom of God" (Lk 9:11). At another time he says somewhat more solemnly: "Jesus sent them (the Twelve) out to preach (κηρύσσειν) the kingdom of God" (Lk 9:2). In both instances the Lord emphasizes that this proclaiming has to do with the rule of God. Already the whole situation itself, namely, that Jesus and his messengers self-evidently start from the concepts of the kingdom of God with which the Jews were quite familiar from Old Testament promises—thus from the gospel in its Old Testament context—points to the connection between the kingdom of God and the gospel. Added to this is the fact that Luke designates directly the preaching of the kingdom of God as gospel preaching. Thus we read in Luke 4:43, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to other towns also, because that is why I was sent"; in Luke 8:1, "Jesus traveled about....proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God"; in Luke 16:16, "...the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached"; in Acts 8:12, "But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized."

In all these references the correct understanding is clearly brought to light. The gospel proclaims the gracious rule of God, namely, that he has redeemed sinful mankind through his Son and now brings people to faith through the message concerning him. Consequently, the expression "kingdom of God" sums up everything that God does for the saving and blessing of mankind. Whoever correctly preaches the gospel proclaims this kingdom of God.

One can therefore also say that the kingdom of God comes to people or departs from them. Again, this way of speaking would be incomprehensible if the expression "kingdom of God" would serve primarily as a designation of persons who would serve as subjects of a kingdom controlled by God's power. But when the term "kingdom of God" is used in its proper sense as a ruling activity of God, and when one keeps in mind that this ruling activity of God is carried out primarily through the gospel, then those passages have a significant meaning.

On the basis of Old Testament prophecy the Jews waited for the coming of God's kingdom. They had indeed elicited out of this prophecy a false gospel and hoped that God would again establish the kingdom of Israel as a visible theocracy. When this hope was associated with the promised Messiah, this person was thought of as an earthly ruler who as a mighty hero by the power of God would gain political independence for his people. There were always a select few, however, who in the sure confidence of faith, if not always with clear understanding, waited for the kingdom of God as a spiritual redemption. This was said of Joseph of Arimathea, that he "was himself waiting for the kingdom of God" (Mk 15:43)—and the Evangelists seem to indicate that his confidence in this hope had not been completely destroyed through the death of Jesus. According to what has been already established, we can postulate that one can say the same of Joseph as can be said of Simeon, who "was himself waiting for the consolation of Israel" (Lk 2:25). The Pharisees, however, as well as the people whom they had deceived, together with the few remaining believers, understood immediately that Jesus was announcing that time to be at hand when God was about to carry out the work which he had announced from the time of the fall into sin. For them this word meant: "Now that gracious rule of God is going into motion which he for so long has promised to his people."

With these words Jesus was not referring primarily to himself. He is not the kingdom of God, but with him it comes. In other words, through him God works and accomplishes the fulfillment of his promises. Included in this is the fact that through the preaching of salvation hearts are turned to God, which is precisely what he wants to achieve through the proclamation of the gospel.

identical. One might add that the "kingdom of heaven" in the Bible (a favorite expression of Matthew) is never thought of in the sense of a group of people, clearly therefore not referring to the *church*. Moreover, the kingdom of heaven—and this is truly remarkable—has to do only with the gospel as an active instrument in the hand of God.

The kingdom of God comes with the gospel. In other words, wherever the gospel penetrates, there God creates and works for the saving of souls, accomplishing whatever he wants to create and work. When Jesus sent out the Seventy to preach, he included this statement among his instructions, "Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you'" (Lk 10:9). How so? Ah, but only and entirely in the preaching of the gospel which the disciples brought, through which also God wished to work true saving faith in its hearers. Whoever rejects this preaching rejects the kingdom of God. He withdraws himself from God's gracious activity. When the preaching of the gospel disappears from a certain place, the kingdom of God has ceased to exist in that place. God no longer rules there with his saving grace. Jesus directs his disciples to tell those who despise their message: "Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near" (Lk 10:11). Since we know that God manages his kingdom through the gospel, this word of the Lord says that the gospel, the efficacious preaching of grace, would be taken away from the Jews because of the hardness of their hearts and brought to the Gentiles—precisely the same thing which Paul and Barnabas declared to the Jews of Antioch in Pisidia: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles" (Ac 13:46).

What does Jesus therefore mean when he teaches us to pray, "Your kingdom come"? We have always recognized this petition as a mission prayer, and rightly so, for according to Jesus' purpose we should with these words have the following thoughts: O God, let your gracious working through the gospel spread out further—among ourselves and to all people on the earth.

All this is nothing else than saying: Dear Father, we pray, give us first Thy Word, that the Gospel may be preached properly. throughout the world; and secondly, that it be received in faith, and work and live in us, so that through the Word and the power of the Holy Ghost Thy kingdom may prevail among us, and the kingdom of the devil be put down, that lie may have no right or power over us, until at last it shall be utterly destroyed, and sin, death, and hell shall be exterminated, that we may live forever in perfect righteousness and blessedness.⁹

Furthermore, what does it mean when Jesus says, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Mt 6:33)? Certainly nothing else than this: Your first and foremost striving should be directed toward remaining under the powerful working of the gospel, in which God deals with you according to his righteousness which was won for you by Christ, and in which God works within you toward the salvation of your souls.

In the light of this knowledge the oft misunderstood and misapplied word of Jesus receives a proper meaning when he says to the scribe, "You are not far from the kingdom of God" (Mk 12:34). The idea has frequently been expressed that there was already to be found in the heart of this man such a change of mind that he, although not as yet fully converted, was in a state *approaching conversion*, closer than in the case of others. Some have quickly concluded from this that the conversion of a person occurs in a way whereby he gradually, step by step, is brought closer to the kingdom of God until he finally enters. One could set aside this conclusion simply by rejecting it as an unjustified generalization. We do not know what Jesus in his omniscience read in the heart of this man, and therefore we cannot conclude that under similar circumstances this same process would be repeated in the case of others. But Jesus does not say that this man was close to *conversion*; he was close to the kingdom of God! In the light of the clear passages which we have considered up to this point the Savior's words gain a meaning which in similar cases does become generally applicable. What would it have profited this man if Jesus had coolly diagnosed his case as follows: "You have certainly come pretty close to the kingdom of God, but you aren't in it yet." What the Lord really said, however, in a manner which the scribe from his Jewish orientation must have immediately understood, in no way applied to the subjective inclination of his heart. Jesus saw that the scribe spoke sensibly, not in thoughtless fanaticism blindly rejecting everything that did not fit his presuppositions. Jesus therefore speaks an *enticing, evangelical* word: "If you would only

⁹ Luther in his Large Catechism, *Concordia Triglotta*, 713, 54. Read the whole context, 51-53.

open your eyes and behold me in the right way, it would occur to you that you are not far away from the kingdom of God, but that in this very moment it is approaching you in me and in my word." By bringing this scribe to a clear understanding of his person, Jesus wanted to make him aware that God had led him to be with Jesus so that he could be saved.

Since God's gracious activity extends beyond this present time into the distant future, yes, into eternity, one can under certain circumstances also say of those already standing firm in the faith that they are either waiting for the kingdom of God or should be waiting for it. Again it should be stated that these passages do not allow the expression "kingdom of God" to designate God's place of activity; for this is always and in all circumstances the creature, whether entirely or to a greater or lesser degree. Kingdom of God, however, means the working and ruling of God! This is what Jesus means when he says: "I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom" (Mt 26:29). Or, as these words are recorded in Luke: "I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God....I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes" (Lk 22:16-18). Jesus does not thereby contradict his earlier assertion that the kingdom of God was already at hand. He rather had in mind the immediate series of events about to happen and which also belonged to the kingdom of God, whereby he according to the preordained counsel and foreknowledge of God would be given over into the hands of his enemies. Precisely through that which he would do and suffer the gracious rule of God for mankind would so mightily also begin. The emphasis does not lie upon a promise that he in some indefinite future would again eat bread and wine with them, even though this would have been a comforting thought to the disciples in the dark hours of the two days which followed. The Lord rather wants them in this time of difficult trial to be armed with the thought that whatever they were about to experience would actually occur under God's gracious rule and would not come about by accident. How concerned the Lord was that this idea should be conveyed to the disciples one sees in the fact that *before he revealed himself to the Emmaus disciples* he brought them to a clear understanding that Christ *must* suffer such things. That is where they recognized *God's kingdom*, that is to say, the *ruling activity of God*.

When this is understood, we also have the key to an understanding of Jesus' unusual words, "Some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power" (Mk 9:1). Here we must in no way infer that Christ in his humiliation perhaps mistakenly meant that the last day would arrive during the lifetime of those persons to whom he spoke. The magnificent revelation of God's rule on judgment day is but one part of his kingdom—that is to say, of his rule—which has begun with the exaltation of Jesus Christ at the right hand of the Father. The Lord's promise therefore refers to this, that some (whether many or few Jesus does not say) of his hearers would experience the beginning of the mighty ruling activity of the exalted one. Peter indeed expressed this understanding of God's kingdom coming with power when he declared on Pentecost, "Exalted to the right hand of God, he has...poured out what you now see and hear" (Ac 2:33).

Christ points even further into the future when he says, "When you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near" (Lk 21:31). The context clearly shows that the Lord is speaking here of his return to judgment. The children of God on earth will wait for this divine exercise of power in the confident hope that it will bring them the final deliverance from all evil. This is the springtime to which they look forward (Lk 21:29, a part of that kingly rule of God and of Christ which through God's promises certainly lies in the future).

It is precisely this part of the exercise of God's power which Paul clearly identifies: "In the presence of God and of Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his kingdom...." (1 Tm 4:1). At such time the kingdom of Christ will also be revealed, that is to say, not only his *right* as Ruler, but the actual display of his power, his working and ruling before the eyes of all people.

The Savior finally directs the attention of his disciples to this, that the mighty rule of God does not end in time, but as an eternal kingdom exists forever, "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of the Father" (Mt 13:43). In eternity they will stand under the same divine rule of the Father as here upon earth. Therein, and therein alone, lies the pledge of an unending, unceasing life of happiness which will be generated in them eternally by God himself. As the sun receives every light beam which it sends out only through the

powerful activity of God, so also will the beaming glory of the righteous be continuously given, created, and supplied to them.

Without further ado, it is clear that also in these passages this idea is basic, that God is guided in this activity by his grace, so that here also the proclamation of the kingdom of God and the gospel are one and the same thing. In this basic idea also lies the key to those passages, in which the preaching of the gospel is designated as a *service to the kingdom of God*. The words of Jesus in Matthew 13:52 fit in here: "He said to them, 'Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.'" Jesus knows teachers of the law who are *not* "instructed about the kingdom of heaven," no matter how well they might know their way around in the Scriptures and are acquainted with current dogmatics. They do not recognize the kingdom of God, namely, his rule in the gospel. That person, however, is a right kind of teacher of the law who knows the gospel as the power of God which alone creates and works the salvation of mankind. Such a teacher—this we get out of the context as the meaning which the Lord conveys—can by means of this new knowledge place his old knowledge of nature and human life into a proper relationship with the new understanding of the gospel; he can find similarities and draw comparisons of a proper land; in short, he can treasure not only the gospel itself, but also through his knowledge concerning God's activity can utilize all his knowledge about natural things in a good way. The *tertium comparationis* is therefore not the *faithfulness* with which such an "owner of the house" takes care of his family, but rather his ability to do his work of caretaking according to the will of God. The application to those who are servants of the Word follows of itself. They are caretakers of God in a very special calling. They strive to find all real success alone through the gospel, through which God carries out his kingly activity. They therefore participate in a real sense as co-workers of God (*συνεργοί*, 1 Cor 3:9) in his kingdom, in his gracious rule among the children of men. Undoubtedly, Paul also meant to direct his praise to his true companions in this sense when he declared, "These are the only Jews among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God" (Col 4:11).

The word of Christ applies here as well when he says, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Lk 9:62). In this passage the Lord's entire manner of speaking indicates immediately that we are not concerned here with a discipleship of Christ occurring in spirit and in faith. In such a case there is no one "more qualified" or "in a more suitable condition" than another. The man to whom the Lord speaks in this way had offered himself for *bodily* discipleship. He wanted to accompany the Lord as a disciple, and from the very outset he wanted to be prepared for every kind of service which this discipleship would require. From this man's request, however, first to be permitted to say goodbye to his family, the Lord could tell that things were not in order in his heart. He lacked the right single-mindedness which knows but one goal, a striving to serve the Lord. Whoever wants to be a worker in the kingdom of God—in the activity of God for the saving of sinners—who in this special sense wants to be a servant of the gospel dare not let himself be influenced by all sorts of side interests. Being a true co-laborer in the kingdom of God requires the entire person with all his thoughts and strivings.

One will not immediately want to condemn such a person as not having the right inner attitude of heart toward Christ. One will question, however, whether or not such a person has that frame of mind which could make him fit for "participation in the kingdom of God," in other words, in the direct, professional work of the gospel ministry.

II.

The first part of our study set forth that the term "kingdom" in its compound forms such as "kingdom of God," "kingdom of Christ," "kingdom of heaven," designates first and foremost the kingly rule of God itself, that is to say, the uninterrupted activity of God through which he accomplishes his firmly appointed goals. Our investigation revealed, moreover, that holy Scripture according to its evangelical character never directly restricts God's "kingdom" to the omnipotent rule of God with which he exercises total and constant control over all the laws of nature and the outward circumstances of people and angels, as much as this all certainly belongs

to God's βασιλεία. Rather, in the Scriptures the "kingdom of God" as *terminus technicus* designates that activity of God whereby he places the gospel in the world and through this gospel carries into effect his decree for the saving of his elect, as well as for the establishing, preserving, and glorifying of his congregation.

Whatever mankind in a mundane sense holds to be the great essentials of world government—the fixed, orderly working of the powers of nature, the constant, partly gradual/partly catastrophic changes in the earthly circumstances of individuals and of nations, in other words, that which the unbelieving world alone takes into account in its presentation of natural and world history—is according to Scripture, as a comfort to Christians, subject to the absolute dominion of God. Consequently, the entire magnificent rule of God in the world of nature, when compared with that activity of God which he carries out for the sake of the gospel, recedes so far into the background that the Bible refers to those "natural" things mentioned above as a part of the same divine activity. Whoever therefore wants to understand the statements of the Holy Scriptures concerning the kingdom of God dare never leave the real and primary meaning of those expressions out of consideration.

Since, however, the Scriptures undeniably use the expression "kingdom" also in a metonymical sense, we must for the sake of completing our overview of this term look at this derived figure of speech. In Part I of our study we mentioned the many passages in which the "kingdom" refers to a *place* to which people can come or to a *property* which they can possess. These must be considered. In this connection, in contrast to the Romanizing or Calvinistic view, we must of necessity emphasize that the term "kingdom" in this sense never designates something *material* or *outward*, but always refers alone to the spiritual gifts which the gospel imparts.

To begin with, we must again emphasize that the Holy Scriptures do not use the metonymy so familiar to us whereby we label as his "kingdom" the created things upon whom God as king works his influence in a specific way, specifically, the "church on earth." No one can dispute that this metonymy is justified. It is so familiar and expresses so clearly a correct idea that there is very little to argue about as to its use in church terminology. One dare not, however, carry this metonymy into the Scriptures, thereby determining the understanding of this or that passage. It is not an idiom of the Scriptures. The few passages which in my opinion could perhaps be cited as a counterargument to this claim, are Exodus 19:6, Revelation 1:6; 5:16, and possibly 1 Peter 2:9. The New Testament passages refer quite obviously to the Exodus event, and a comparison will lead to their correct understanding. God says through Moses: "You will be for me a kingdom of priests"...

(מַמְלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים). In Revelation we read: "And has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." Peter declares: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood." When one reads these statements, one after the other, which undoubtedly speak about the same thing, one can hardly conclude that Moses perhaps understands "kingdom" in the sense of "subjects of the king." The thought rather predominates concerning the persons referred to that the *priesthood* is considered to be the chief attribute, and to this is added the provision that the priests also have kingly rank and perform royal deeds. God designates these persons whom he has made priests as real "royal companions," not in the sense of subjects, but rather as comrades in his rule, who participate in his kingly activity. This could only then appear as a strong hyperbole if we according to our human way of looking at things would perhaps think exclusively of God's dominion in the universe. If we keep in mind, however, that the kingdom of God in the language of the Bible is his rule *through the gospel*, and that he has entrusted his spiritual priests with the proclamation of the gospel upon earth, nothing of the hyperbole remains. God has actually ordained his kingly gospel-activity upon the earth in such a way that it takes place through the service of his church!

Much less than in the above passages can one claim that Matthew 13:41 can be cited as metonymy for "kingdom of God = church," as this passage has often been mistakenly used. In that case according to the context ("the field is the world," v 38) one would absurdly have to consider the world as the kingdom of Christ, or else understand the concept "church" in such an external way that it would also include "everything that causes sin" and "all who do evil." Here, too, one can get the right sense immediately if the "kingdom of the Son of Man" is understood as Christ's rule through the gospel. For those people described as "weeds" the time will

come to an end in which the Son of Man as Savior will endeavor to influence them through his gospel and rule over them. Then they will be outside his "kingdom"; their time of grace will be over.

But now let us take up a consideration of the Scripture passages in which the expression "kingdom" is actually used in a metonymical sense. First of all we shall put together the passages in which the kingdom is designated as a *place* to which people can come. Thus concerning the *kingdom of heaven*: "the least (or greatest) in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:19; 11:11; 18:1); "to enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:20; 7:21; 18:3; 19:23); "to take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 8:11); "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 16:19); "to shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces" (Matthew 23:13). Concerning the *kingdom of God*: "the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you" (Mt 21:31); "to enter the kingdom of God with one eye" (Mk 9:47); "how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God" (Mk 10:23-25; Lk 18:24f); "least in the kingdom of God" (Lk 7:28); "when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God" (Lk 13:28); "people will come and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God" (Lk 13:29); "blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God" (Lk 14:15); "we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Ac 14:22); "to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory" (1 Th 2:12); "you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God" (2 Th 1:5). Concerning the *kingdom of Christ*: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Lk 23:42); "has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph 5:5); "brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves" (Col 1:13); "the Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom" (2 Tm 4:18); "a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pe 1:11).

For our purposes it is not necessary to fit each one of these passages in the continuity of thought lying before us. A consideration of a selection of these passages will suffice to show the correctness and the applicability of our interpretation. To begin with, we shall select as unique the word of the malefactor (Lk 23:42), which the Lord himself considered as correct and recognized as such. Jesus has thus come into his kingdom following his passion. This means naturally something quite different from that which is usually said about people entering into the kingdom of God—for this reason alone, because it is his kingdom into which he comes, one which rightfully belongs to him. The primary reason, however, for the fact that we are concerned here with a metonymy is really called forth alone through the verb ("come into") used by the malefactor. Perhaps the malefactor actually looked upon the process as though Jesus would be taken away from a place of suffering and transferred to another place, just as we quite easily could also think of the transference of the Lord from the state of humiliation into glory as a local, spatial process. Most likely, however, the malefactor as a Jew used this expression "kingdom" in a sense generally used by his own people. We therefore probably understand his word correctly if we interpret it directly to mean God's ruling activity as king. Accordingly, it would fit the meaning of the imploring criminal to paraphrase his words in this way: "Remember me when, after your suffering, you enter upon your divine ruling activity as king." By faith he clings to the truth that this Crucified One is in possession of an almighty power, which he will soon put into full use. And so the impression of a metonymy in this passage disappears entirely. "To come into his kingdom" means for Jews to enter upon his divine activity as ruler!

But what do those passages mean which say that ordinary human beings will come into God's kingdom and will sit in this kingdom? They quite obviously refer to a change which takes place in the case of sinners, who are referred to here. But this cannot refer to a *spatial* change, since in most cases where these passages occur the people remain exactly in the same local circumstances in which they formerly lived, and wherever a change of place seems to have been involved, upon closer examination this turns out not to have belonged essentially to their entering into the kingdom of God. Under such circumstances these passages already lose every possible appearance of being applied, for example, to participating outwardly in Christian church services or to joining a Christian congregation. Such an action according to God's plan may very well have brought a person physically closer to the kingdom of God as an *actus paedagogicus*, in so far as that person would be spatially placed under the preaching of the gospel. But no person through such outward, spatial proximity alone comes into God's kingdom. As far as place is concerned, he could stand so close to God's kingdom that others

could consider him as "a great one in the kingdom of God," and yet he could in fact be extremely far from God's kingdom.

This the Lord clearly indicates when he says of the rich that they will find it "very *difficult*" to *enter into* the kingdom of God. He emphasized this thought to such an extent that the disciples with some justification heard in these words the assertion that it was impossible for a rich person to enter into the kingdom of God and be saved. Everyone knows, of course, that it is certainly not impossible for well-to-do people to belong outwardly to those of a Christian confession, and that also among those who confess the faith there are those who out of deep earthly poverty become affluent without thereby stepping out of the ranks of church members. The reference in these passages is thus not at all a matter of change of locale.

Moreover, in many of these passages one must also consider that the kingdom of God is designated as a place to which the person referred to will first arrive at some future time "will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom" (2 Tm 4:18); "through many hardships...enter the kingdom of God" (Ac 14:22), and again in other passages as a place in which the believers *already now* sit together with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who long ago have departed this life and are no longer subject to circumstances of place as we know them (cf Mt 8:11 >). Thus the entrance into the kingdom of God and the state of being therein lies entirely outside the physical, bodily, spatial realm and has to do with place, time, and material things only in so far as we human beings cannot exist in any other way than in a spatial, temporal, and material manner.

From this comparison of the above passages we gain for the explanation of our metonymy not only this, that not everyone who hears the sound of the gospel has thereby already entered into the kingdom of God, although "kingdom of God" in its real sense designates God's rule through the gospel. We learn in addition also this, that the entrance into the kingdom of God does not specifically point to that process through which the sinner becomes a child of God. To enter into the kingdom of God does not mean to be "converted" or to be "born again." This should not be misunderstood as though conversion and rebirth have nothing to do with entering into God's kingdom. Jesus himself says: "Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Jn 3:3), and Paul declares that God has "brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves" (Col 1:13). Here we are incontrovertibly told that only those have entered into the kingdom of God who have done so through rebirth into a new, spiritual life. Whoever is "born again" is thereby and therefore in the kingdom of God. According to this passage of Scripture, the creative act by which God translates a sinner from death into life must have preceded the situation whereby someone is to be considered in the kingdom of God.

We can add to this the fact that the Lord occasionally describes the state of being in the kingdom of God with a metaphor: "to eat and to drink in his kingdom"; "to eat bread in the kingdom of God." To explain the entire sense of this metaphor is not our point in citing this passage; rather, in order to understand our metonymy of place we emphasize only this, that by means of this picture which he has selected Jesus designates the state of being in the kingdom of God as a known situation of enjoyment. The believer is not only born again; he also *knows* that he has become a child of God. He does not only *have* all treasures which Christ won for him, but he also *enjoys* them with an awareness of their possession. "We *know* that we have passed from death to life" (1 Jn 3:14); "I *know* whom I have believed" (2 Tm 1:12).

Thus we recognize that the metonymy which we are talking about is a *metonymia causae pro effectu*. The kingdom of God, the divine rule through the gospel, is the real cause. By virtue of this kingly rule a person is not only born again, but he is also made aware of his being brought under the gospel. Through the gospel God works continuously in his believers the certainty of faith, the consciously joyful partaking of those gifts which he bestows upon his people. To *be* in the kingdom of God therefore means that one through God's rule of grace also *knows* that one is under this rule of grace.

According to God's purpose this is the normal situation of those who have entered into his kingdom. They know and perceive in faith that they are under the gracious βασιλεία of God and of Christ. This knowing and perceiving originates through the gospel and is based on it. When under circumstances of temptation this perception appears to have become lost for a Christian, that does not arise through God's rule in the gospel, but always comes about because the Christian directs his eyes away from the gospel and upon himself and his own personal achievements—and thus begins to withdraw himself from the kingdom of God.

We shall now direct our consideration to a number of the passages referred to above. We wish thereby to note that the "kingdom of heaven" is not merely to be understood as "the hereafter" with its completed state of salvation. The term rather is a synonym for the "kingdom of God," the gracious rule of the heavenly king through his gospel. Christ declares, "Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:19). It will not do to use this passage somehow as a parallel for the enigmatic statement about the one "who is least in the kingdom of heaven" as being greater than John the Baptist (Mt 11:11). Most likely, in the second passage (Mt 11:11) the Lord means himself as the one "who is least." This likelihood, however, does not justify our carrying into the first passage (Mt 5:19) the thought that Jesus is the one who practices and teaches the law *perfectly*. In the one case Jesus refers to himself as "least" because of his deep humiliation into which he freely gave himself. In Matthew 5:19 Jesus calls that person "the least" who breaks but *one* commandment and rejects it!

But we have noted that those "are in the kingdom of heaven" who knowingly are under the influence of the gospel. The deciding factor here is what is meant by being "in the kingdom of heaven." Jesus teaches as follows: Whoever is under the influence of the gospel cannot think highly of anyone who breaks one of the commandments of God. For those who are "in the kingdom of heaven" it is self-evident from a gospel standpoint that they will have the deepest respect for all the words and commands of God. They will therefore through the power of the gospel prize those highly who live according to God's commandments and uphold these commandments as the perfectly valid norm for all children of God. The Lord immediately adds the concrete application: "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:20). One rather quickly interprets "the better righteousness" as the righteousness credited on account of Christ, and indeed this is the case because one perhaps automatically reads "enter into heaven." The Lord is speaking here, however, about the *kingdom* of heaven, that is to say, about his rule by means of the gospel, and one "enters into the kingdom of heaven" in so far as one is consciously placed under the power of the gospel. Jesus is not speaking here about how a sinner is rescued from damnation; rather, he is describing those who are already saved. As long as one deals with God's law as the Pharisees taught people to do, so long one has proof that one is not yet under the influence of the gospel. Whoever is to come into the kingdom of heaven must experience such a change that he from that time on takes a position toward God's law and its fulfillment which is totally different from that of the Pharisees, the arch-representatives of natural man.

How closely this understanding fits the intended sense of the Lord we see from the pericope in Matthew 18:1-4 (Mk 9:33-37; Lk 9:46-48). The disciples were arguing about who was "the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Jesus "called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.'"

Also in this passage the Lord says nothing about how a person is "changed." He does not supply information about the process of conversion, but rather about its immediate result, namely, that the person is then in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever still strives for rank and honor in the kingdom of heaven and wants to have a special advantage over others is not yet inside. In the kingdom of heaven, under the gospel-rule of God, such thoughts do not come into consideration at all. Whoever stands under this influence rejoices like a child, who recognizes his weakness and disability and therefore makes no claims to "greatness." "Greatness" in the kingdom of heaven consists in this, that one finds a childlike joy in being under the rule of the word of grace, and "the greatest" is unaware of his greatness—just like a child! Thus we also read here, as everywhere in Scripture, the strong disavowal of all reliance upon and all pride in one's own accomplishment. By means of such reliance and such pride the awareness of being in the kingdom of heaven is nullified. For that reason our thoughts turn immediately to that statement about tax collectors and prostitutes, who enter the kingdom of God before the self-righteous Pharisees—not because their accomplishments are more pleasing to God than those of the proud, but rather because pride, a reliance upon one's own strength and ability, excludes a joyful awareness of grace that has been received, while the penitent sinner experiences heartfelt joy over this awareness.

One other obstacle which in its final analysis really goes back to self-satisfaction and self-righteousness is mentioned by the Lord in the word concerning the rich, for whom it is hard to enter the kingdom of heaven (cf. Mt 19:23). In this case the hindrance takes on the form of a love of money or reliance on earthly possessions. "Rich" in the context of this passage is not a wealthy person whose possessions according to current standards are above average (Abraham would surely have been one of those!), but rather the type of person who lets his thoughts and desires be ruled by earthly goods, by mammon or by the deceitfulness of wealth. Whether a person's net worth runs into the millions or is limited to smaller sums does not come into consideration here. Whoever is ruled by those thoughts which the Scriptures refer to as greed has as little inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God as prostitutes, adulterers, and the like. His frame of mind excludes a confident trust in that grace by which a person attains the joyous certainty that he is in the kingdom of heaven.

We have always recognized the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" as the gospel. The statements of the Lord referring to these therefore belong at the point where we now are, since the keys are thought to be the means by which the kingdom of heaven becomes accessible as a place. Jesus gives Peter and his entire body of believers the gospel by the use of which sinners are brought into the kingdom of God—not in such a way, however, as though the possessors of the gospel could or should give permission to enter the kingdom of heaven according to their own discretion or decision. Where the gospel is used according to Christ's purpose, the Savior himself exercises his office with the aim of converting people to himself and working within them the confidence of faith that they are under his rule. Whoever has this confidence, to him the gospel has become "the key of the kingdom of heaven." This divine truth has indeed the opposite side for that person who despises it. Since Jesus alone by means of the gospel places sinners under his rule of grace, so the same gospel excludes those from the kingdom of heaven who refuse to place themselves under its influence. The preaching of grace assures every hearer that God has truly reconciled him to himself in Christ. At the same time the truth holds that "salvation is found in no one else" (Ac 4:12), and no person can find any other rescue.

Let us now also put those passages together in which the kingdom is referred to as a *possession* which a person can acquire. Accordingly, it is said of the kingdom of heaven: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:3); "...the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men take hold of it" (Mt 11:12); "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Mt 19:14). The last passage we recognize at once as parallel to Mark 10:14 and Luke 18:16, where we read "kingdom of God" instead of "kingdom of heaven." Other passages referring to the "kingdom of God" as a possession are: "Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it" (Mk 10:15 as well as Lk 18:17); "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Lk 6:20; *negative*: "The wicked...will not inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 6:9); "...flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 15:50); "...those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Ga 5:21); "...no immoral person...has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph 5:5).

It is immediately clear that this second group of metonymies leads us essentially to the same thoughts as those in which the kingdom of heaven is referred to as a place. These passages, too, do not speak about the manner in which people are placed into the right relationship with God's rule of grace in the gospel, and still less, however, about a physical, material possession. All these passages rather speak in their closest terms of reference about a *subjective* possession, faith's awareness that in the gospel one actually has the full grace and love of God in Jesus Christ. The distinguishing feature of the second group of metonymies (relating to possession) lies in this that they direct our thoughts involuntarily to those treasures which are procured for us under the gracious rule of Christ. Whenever Jesus speaks about eating and drinking in his kingdom, he draws for us the picture of a fully laden table, the manifold enjoyments of which are freely offered to us. The picture of an inheritance shows a possession of rich variety, whose individual treasures one gladly enjoys again and again in deeply satisfying contemplation. Whoever has been brought to a believing enjoyment of these precious gifts of the gospel, *has* the kingdom of heaven, *has* the kingdom of God in his possession as an inheritance he has received. Yet also here it pays to take a closer look at individual passages.

Because of certain similarities we shall take the two beatitudes together: "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:10); "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Lk 6:20). It is not completely unnecessary to call attention again to the fact that the Lord also here is *not* speaking about the way in which souls are saved from the curse of sin. He is rather describing those who have already been saved. "Blessed" is not used here, as Luther often uses it, for *gerettet* (saved); rather, as in all the beatitudes it is the exact translation of the Greek *μακάριος*, which we because of the Lutheran manner of speaking prefer to put into German as *glücklich*.¹⁰ The persecuted and the poor do not come into the kingdom of heaven because of persecution and poverty. Neither do they have a higher claim on the kingdom of heaven than others because of their state of persecution or poverty. Christ's words do not say this and do not therefore come into conflict with the divine teaching that nothing in or about a person—also nothing in his outward, earthly circumstances—contributes anything at all to bring him into a right relationship with God. Jesus gives assurance that those, who are "persecuted because of righteousness" as well as the "poor" to whom he refers, are *subjectively* blessed because they *have* or *possess* the kingdom of God. He does not say that they will first at some time or other attain possession of the kingdom.

Here we can but briefly refer to the definition of the words "righteousness" and "poor" in these passages. One dare not simply think of "righteousness" as "the imputed righteousness of Christ," although it is correct that those who are persecuted in such a manner have appropriated this righteousness to themselves. The beatitudes throughout actually describe something which the people addressed are or suffer or do. Therefore also the righteousness which in this case is ascribed to these people is to be understood as the righteousness evidenced in the life of believers. The situation Jesus is speaking of is therefore this that they are persecuted because of certain actions or because of their conduct, which is recognized as "righteous" through the enlightening of the Holy Spirit, that is to say, according to God's will. Persecution does not take away from them the blessed realization that they are under the gracious rule of their Lord. This possession of faith no persecutor can touch, simply because his attacks are only outward (cf. Ac 5:41). On the contrary, because such people are active for the sake of their faith through the power of the gospel according to the clearly known will of God, they recognize persecution which comes to them from godless people only as a further proof that they are under the kingly rule of their Savior.

The poor, whom the Lord calls "blessed," are not those who lack this or that earthly possession, who have less gold than others with whom they could compare themselves. In that sense riches and poverty are entirely relative concepts. Jesus means poverty, absolute poverty, which a person really does not possess. He means the poverty described by Paul when he presents Christians in an ideal manner as "having nothing, yet making many rich" (2 Cor 6:10), and as "those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep" (1 Cor 7:30). They have learned and are truly so minded that earthly possessions of any kind are really of no consequence for true happiness. This state of mind is the opposite of greed, by which the heart becomes chained to an earthly possession and becomes its slave. Whoever by God's grace has acquired this "poverty"—which is alien to the natural heart—that person Jesus praises as "blessed." Such people have the kingdom of God as their possession, for this attitude toward earthly goods can be taken only by such a person who is truly under the rule of the heavenly king and is conscious of his state of grace with God through faith. He can also feel hurt by some kind of earthly loss, and yet he is one of "those who mourn, as if they did not" (1 Cor 7:30).

The word concerning the little children to whom "the kingdom of heaven belongs" (Mt 19:14; Mk 10:14; Lk 18:16) does not mean that all little children will without exception be saved. Neither does it say that the little children of whom Jesus is speaking, namely, those "who believe" in him, receive a right to heavenly blessedness which they will take into their possession perhaps only in later years. Jesus, rather, says specifically that the kingdom of heaven "*belongs*" to them. Only this interpretation agrees with the additional statement that "whoever will not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." Not every little child receives

¹⁰ This is the same concept as expressed by the Hebrew word *אַשְׁרֵי*, e.g., Ps 1:1, where Luther beautifully translates: "*Wohl dem Menschen . . .*" In the English Bible there is the same difference between *σωτηρία* and *μακαρισμός*. For the former we use consistently "salvation," for the latter "blessedness."

the kingdom of God; certainly not those children to whom the gospel, the only means of God's gracious rule, has never been brought. But those children, who through the gospel (perhaps in baptism) receive the kingdom of God, receive it in simple faith in a way which does not reflect and reason out and try to reduce everything to logical, dogmatic formulas. In that respect the faith of little children is held before us older people as a model. The closer we come to this simple, childlike faith, the surer will be the blessed conviction that we are under the sure hand of our Lord, who saves us.

The recognition that the kingdom of heaven can only be metonymically designated as a possession brings us closer to an understanding of that dark statement: "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it" (Mt 11:14). We are convinced that our Lord never thought of the kingdom of heaven as something outwardly tangible and that he therefore here too is speaking of a spiritual laying hold of possessions. That is also apparent from the contextual reference to time. Between the days of John the Baptist and this declaration of Jesus there was no thought of an outward manifestation of a messianic kingdom; yet the Lord gives assurance that certain people have forcefully taken hold of the kingdom of heaven. Since he is not speaking about a false, nationalistic messianic hope, his words do not have the sense of a reproach. They belong to the authoritative respect which he pays to his forerunner John, whom he places as a messenger of God on a level with Moses and the prophets, and in some respects higher than all his predecessors. Thus the sense of this statement can only then be correctly understood if we consider it as a description of the actual results of John's preaching. Jesus found that in the case of some Jews (Jesus does not say in the case of many!) John's preaching awakened a stormy desire to come under the gracious influence of the Messiah to whom John pointed. They literally compelled Jesus to receive them, and whoever besieged and importuned Jesus in this way did not go away empty, but rather carried the assurance of his rescue, the possession of the kingdom of heaven, as a stolen booty along with him. Jesus does not use these strong expressions as though he is annoyed by this importunity, but rather with a certain inner joy, although this onslaught of aroused hearts brought with it great physical exertion for him (cf., e.g., Mk 3:20ff; 5:24-31). Dare we not by way of comparison think of a mother who scolds her rambunctious brood of little ones because of their obtrusiveness, but who certainly would not have it any other way? And as those children happily carry away the gifts which their mother gives them as booty which they have won, so also Jesus joyfully saw that there were among the people such souls who with the stormy hand of faith eagerly grasped the salvation which he so willingly gave them.

Let us now briefly look at those passages in which the *negative* thought is expressed, namely, that someone does *not* receive the kingdom of God as an inheritance or a possession. This judgment the Holy Ghost pronounces upon all those who live in the manifest works of their sinful nature (1 Cor 6:9; Ga 5:21; Eph 5:5). Let us not be misled by the use of the future tense ("will not inherit") to think that it is speaking about a possession in the world to come, so that the thought seems to be that for such people the time of grace is cut off and the possibility of salvation already past. Indeed, Scripture clearly teaches that whoever remains entangled in the works of his sinful nature to the end is eternally lost. This thought, however, is not in the foreground in the passages cited above. This is clear not only in the Ephesians passage, where Paul in a very similar presentation uses the present tense, but also because he adds immediately to the Corinthians passage: "And that is what some of you *were*. But you were...justified,..." His words concerning "the acts of the sinful nature" present us with basically the same facts as the statement of Jesus concerning the sin against the Holy Ghost, for which neither in this nor in the future world there is forgiveness. Jesus also does not say that people who are guilty of this sin cannot be converted and cannot eventually be saved. But he asserts that they will seek forgiveness in vain if they scornfully reject the one forgiveness which the Holy Ghost offers in the gospel. Whoever persists in coarse, manifest sins cannot possibly have in his heart a part of the kingdom of God or possess it as an inheritance in faith. We usually express this thought without a figure of speech when we say, "In the case of such sins saving faith cannot exist." The conscious possession of the kingdom of God, the realization of being under the gracious rule of the Savior, comes only through true, heartfelt faith; therefore unbelieving sinners, whose unbelief comes to light through their manifest behavior, have no part in this precious inheritance.

The final part of our presentation will aim to show that in the metonymical use of the expressions which we are discussing the Holy Scriptures never refer to outward, material conditions, goods, or treasures. They refer, rather, only to those gifts which are offered through the gospel. In other words: According to scriptural usage there never belong to the kingdom of God, in which we live by faith and which we thus possess, the outward circumstances under which we live here on earth—not family life, not life under the civil government, not even the outward fellowship which children of God establish among themselves in specific forms. The natural gifts of body and soul are not a part of this; neither are the subjective ones which are given with parts of the body and characteristics of the soul, nor objective things such as food, clothing, and shelter. All these things are, of course, in every respect under God's rule, and the supplying of such things is a part of the unlimited rule which Jesus Christ exercises, as the Scriptures abundantly emphasize. If we occasionally include also these things in the kingdom of God, in his βασιλεία, we are not thereby contradicting Scripture. But for God, who regards his *reputation as Savior (Heilandsruhm)* as his highest honor, who will give this to no one else, these wonderful immeasurable proofs of his power, humanly speaking, are valued as secondary things of lesser value. They are to some extent self-evident. Their glory fades entirely into the background over against the greatness of his plan of salvation as realized through the gospel. In fact, they recede so far into the background that only the latter is honored in his Holy Scriptures with the name of his kingdom. According to God's own presentation, the *possession* of his kingdom comes with those gifts only which the gospel offers and bestows.

We can be brief here; for if the kingdom of God comes only through the gospel, then only those things belong to its possession which the gospel bestows: righteousness, peace, joy in the Holy Ghost, the inner conversion of the human heart to the true fear of God, love for God, trust in God, and the like. It should be sufficient, therefore, for the correctness of this interpretation to refer to the words Jesus spoke to Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world,..." (Jn 18:36f). His kingdom, his kingly rule, does not originate out of earthly, outward circumstances ("is from another place"), is therefore not "of this world," and has as such absolutely nothing to do with this κόσμος; it does not occupy itself with worldly, i.e., physical, earthly, outward things. In these words Pilate immediately found the assurance that the rule of the Lord would not come into conflict with the activity of a worldly government. Indeed, Jesus can with divine right also call Pilate's attention to the fact that worldly authorities certainly cannot wheel and deal without restriction ("you would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above," Jn 19:11), and therein lay the claim, as we know, that Jesus himself also in this affair could speak a deciding word, for he also controls all outward things. But he does not refer to these outward things as his "kingdom"; this term he reserves for his working *through the truth*, i.e., through the gospel. Through the testimony of the truth, through the preaching of the gospel, he conducts his kingly office; through this truth he works among people whatever he wills. Now he continues, "Everyone on the side of truth listens to me" (Jn 18:37b). This means: "Whoever has won this truth for himself (or: whoever through the gospel has come to believe in me) listens to my voice; he stands under my control; he is ruled by the gospel; he is *in my kingdom*." This decides both the matter concerning the metonymy of place and also at the same time the metonymy of possession. That person receives the kingdom of God who appropriates the gospel to himself, who also "hears" it in the pregnant sense of the word as meant by Christ; he acquires it as a spiritual possession. Everything worldly is here excluded, particularly all that the earthly-minded fight about among themselves and for which they carry on bloody wars. No outward, worldly possession, no outward, earthly situation changes anything about this fact, that those who hear Jesus' voice possess his kingdom and live under him in his kingdom. With the cynical word, "What is truth?" Pilate let it be known that he indeed had no idea about what kind of truth Jesus meant, but at the same time he also recognized that it had to do only with spiritual and not with physical, material things and conditions, with which the rule of worldly government exclusively operates.

How far-reaching the correct application of this understanding is will become apparent through some references to certain antitheses. The venerable Andreas Osiander says correctly concerning the abovementioned word of Jesus that it is by itself fully sufficient to set aside the statements of the Roman church, which claims that the kingdom of Jesus Christ and of God is displayed in its outward organization. That belongs to the features of the true Antichrist. He has not only arrogated to himself the βασιλεία of Christ to rule over

consciences; he has not only to suit his own purpose slandered, rejected, and changed into the very opposite the means with which Christ rules his kingdom, the gospel; he has also consistently claimed that his outward rule is the true kingdom of God, and that only those who recognize him as a spiritual autocrat can be in God's kingdom. For the Antichrist an outward membership through the observance of outward rules and regulations, an outward "morality" without an inner change of heart, replaces that which Christ sets forth as the proper form of membership in his kingdom. Here the entire concept of the kingdom of God is externalized; of the fundamental principles as they are presented in Scripture not a single one remains in the Roman system. To be sure, also here Christ rules among his enemies. The liturgy of the Roman church contains the gospel, through which Christ exercises his rule in his kingdom. It continues also in the sacrament of baptism. For that reason we can assume that even in the Roman Church some souls live in and possess God's kingdom. But the Roman Church as such, as a system, as an outward structure, is outside this kingdom; in fact, it is the avowed enemy of the true rule of Christ.

The Roman Church, however, with its system has capitalized on one general trait of human nature and exploited this. Every person by nature strives in the same direction. That Jesus alone works and creates everything, that the kingdom truly belongs to him and is administered by him, that under this rule mankind can only receive and cannot contribute anything at all—this truth is so foreign to natural man that only a few Christians can grasp it fully and let it come to full expression in their religious views.

We find therefore even in our Lutheran Church frequent examples of an outward conception of the kingdom of God, in which human accomplishments also count for something. We indeed recognize that the kingdom of God is built up only there where through the gospel hearts are drawn to him and placed under his rule. But still it happens that we inadvertently describe the outward increase of our congregations, their organization, and their congregational activities as the building of the kingdom of God. We know theoretically that a local congregation is not as such, that is, not as a visible fellowship, a part of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, and that all Christian organizations in the world together, in so far as these can be recognized and counted, do not comprise the kingdom of Christ. In other words, we recognize theoretically that Christ's kingdom is invisible, a spiritual influence on hearts which we really cannot control. Yet we speak again and again of a visible church and attempt to establish membership in the kingdom of God by means of all sorts of outward criteria, e.g., by participation in public worship and the sacraments, by formal membership in a locally recognizable congregation, by the generosity and especially the honorable conduct of the church members. In short, we do not realize that we are making the kingdom of God an outward, worldly thing which is determined by legalistic forms instead of simply holding to this, that Jesus' kingdom is present where his gospel is proclaimed, because he rules over the hearts of people everywhere and always only by the gospel. In this matter too the old sinful nature continually clings to us, according to which we place human, outward accomplishments, at least surreptitiously, as of great importance alongside divine activity.

It should not remain unsaid that the present endeavor to bring together all Lutheran church bodies into one outward, possibly impressive union, and especially also the repugnant boasting about the accomplishments of our church, belong to the aforementioned weakness of the flesh. Fortunately, in our own circles it still can be said that we reject such worldly conceptions of Christ's kingdom as soon as we recognize them in their true form, and that this tendency of human weakness is again and again balanced by a strong emphasis on the truth that the kingdom of God comes to us only in the gospel.

Since the Reformed do not agree with Scripture in this teaching of the power of the gospel, they could also not resist the trend toward an externalization of the concept of the kingdom of God. In crass Calvinism the concept of the absolute sovereignty of God governs its entire doctrinal system, and consequently God must be made responsible for the presence of sin in general and for the actual origin of all individual sins. Since in this system the gospel is not permitted to be the almighty means of God's rule in his kingdom but merely a proclamation of divine truths, which, however, without a special influence of the Holy Spirit cannot work in a life-giving way on the human heart, the Calvinist places all the activities of God in the universe into one category whenever he expresses himself concerning the kingdom of God. For him, God's rule by the law and his rule by the gospel merge into one. He therefore imports the concept of the kingdom of God immediately into all

earthly relationships and so totally externalizes this that he can talk about the laws of this kingdom, about the conditions of entering this kingdom, yes, even about establishing a universal kingdom of God on earth.

According to this view *those* people possess the kingdom of God who eventually are able to compel all other people outwardly to observe certain "moral" limits, whose boundaries finally are set quite arbitrarily. This Calvinistic concept has permeated all Reformed denominations, and in our own country outside of the confessional Lutheran church it has become dominant. The kingdom of God is for them an outward thing, whose very existence can be brought about and maintained by force. According to reports, therefore, in these troubled emotional times from practically all sectarian pulpits one is told our entrance into the war (World War I) has been a religious necessity in order to defend the cause of the kingdom of God against its enemies and to help it toward victory. Through this religious misunderstanding, which as a law-activity only too easily arouses fanaticism, our freedom of religion is now endangered much more than through any other danger which threatens our people and country from without. Indeed, this confusion of concepts prevents our people from taking to heart the war's terrible preaching of repentance and from humbling themselves before the almighty God. Instead, a pharisaical self-presumption becomes clearly apparent, as though we, the Americans, are better people than our present enemies. Thus the false preaching about the kingdom of God here in our land as well as in all countries participating in the war again demonstrates the terrible truth of God's Word which declares, "You [O LORD] struck them, but they felt no pain; you crushed them, but they refused correction" (Jr 5:3).

May God preserve us from this mixing of spiritual and worldly thoughts about his kingdom, so that we are not misled as to his promise and give way to any sort of chiliastic hopes for the future which are not based on his Word. This crass chiliasm, which looks for a millennium in which the people of God will be favored with all conceivable earthly enjoyments, has many adherents among our people. Far greater, however, is the number of those who through the mixing of biblical thoughts with the most modern evolutionism have put together a wonderful picture of the future, that, namely, a time will come when people will finally work their way out of the morass of selfishness, so that then truly a universal love for one's neighbor, righteousness, and peace will reign on earth.

They have recovered a little from their initial immeasurable astonishment over the outbreak of the world conflict. They admit that civilized mankind has not as yet advanced quite as much as they had thought. They regard the war as the final flare-up of the battle of all against all and confidently expect that a peace will be achieved which will last forever. In their opinion that would be a *moral* victory. Although it appears almost impossible to stop the mighty stream of these false opinions, we, who by God's grace know the gospel of his kingdom better, cannot be excused from the obligation of opposing the general confusion of concepts with our testimony. If God so wills, this testimony will not be in vain. In any case, there is no other means to combat this error than the gospel.

Finally, we wish to note also the great comfort which can come to us out of our understanding of the truth. After we had been able to develop our church organization during such a long period of peace in our land of freedom, the Lutheran Church has overnight become *ecclesia pressa*. How that has come about need not be explored any further here. It is enough that we are experiencing difficulties and have reason to fear that the oppression in spite of its flagrant infringement of our constitutional rights and of all fairness could take on even more disagreeable forms. Since we must obey God rather than men, it is very possible that hostile fanaticism could bring about that our church life could be disrupted and outwardly destroyed. Would the Lutheran church then have ceased to exist? According to the Calvinistic view that Lutheranism is merely a "historical concept," and thus a name for an outward kind of existence, one would have to answer the question affirmatively. But if it is our conviction that Lutheranism is essentially a possession and a confession of the gospel of Christ, a spiritual treasure which is independent of external contingencies, and if we hold fast to the conviction that Lutherans who from the heart believe in the gospel are in the kingdom of God and possess this kingdom, that we also as *true* Lutherans are under the gracious rule of the Savior, then persecution may make us sad, and we may bewail the loss of many outward forms which we have come to love. But in all this we will live in joyful trust in the certainty that the goods and treasures which we as Lutherans possess in the kingdom of Christ and of God will

remain untouched by all outward troubles. No earthly enemy and no devil can touch the true possession we have by faith. Luther saw this and therefore sang:

And take they our life,
Goods, fame, child, and wife,
Let these all be gone,
They yet have nothing won;
The Kingdom ours remaineth!

May God keep us in this faith and thus in his kingdom. Amen!