



with an Afterword by
Karl Barth

Action in
Waiting

**Christoph
Blumhardt**

Acclaim for *Action in Waiting*

Rodney Clapp, author, *A Peculiar People*

Pulse-quickening...In plain but vibrant language, Blumhardt reminds us that personal peace is merely the wrapping paper of a greater, even more magnificent gift: confidence in the coming of God's kingdom.

Clark Pinnock, author, *The Flame of Love*

Blumhardt is filled with hope about the power of God to transform the world in concrete ways...His is a holy optimism grounded not in human prowess but in the triumphant grace of God.

Donald G. Bloesch, author, *Wellsprings of Renewal*

The modern church needs to hear this social prophet. Here is a summons to act in confidence and courage in the firm expectation that God's kingdom is at hand.

Robert Webber, author, *People of the Truth*

Proclaims a message that is indispensable for post-modern Christianity: Jesus is victor over all the powers and we, the people of God, are called to live out the politics radically.

Vernard Eller, author, *Christian Anarchy*

Blumhardt believes that God can make "all" things new. He challenges us to participate in this newness and devote ourselves to it.

Dale W. Brown, author, *Biblical Pacifism*

Blumhardt represents a wonderful union of eschatology and ethics with his focus on the coming and breaking in of the kingdom of righteousness, justice, love, and peace.

John Miller, *Mennonite Quarterly Review*

One feels these words were shaped for the hour in which we are all living. We have scholars and theologians, but we are almost totally lacking in authentic witnesses to the coming of God's kingdom.

William Dyrness, author, *Let the Earth Rejoice*

Reading Christoph Blumhardt is like drinking from a pure, cold, mountain stream. It is just the tonic we frantic post-moderns need...I always knew what an impact Blumhardt had made on Karl Barth, but after reading him I know why.

Eugene H. Peterson, author, *Subversive Spirituality*

On a landscape increasingly (and depressingly) eroded by world-accommodating strategies and programs, Blumhardt stands as a stark and commanding figure on the horizon. His life and writings are adrenalin for faltering and compromised followers of Jesus.

Stanley Hauerwas, co-author, *Resident Aliens*

That Barth saw Blumhardt's significance is surely not accidental. Who else besides Barth is so unrelenting in their attack on religion? Who else reminds us that Christianity is about the worship and service of a strange God indeed? Who else uses the language of faith so straightforwardly and without apology? The fact that Plough has now made Blumhardt's work available is itself, as Barth would have put it, "a hastening that waits."

Action in Waiting

Christoph Blumhardt

Foreword by Rodney Clapp

Afterword by Karl Barth

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Foreword

A prominent pastor of our day concludes one of his books with these words:

I'm enjoying God these days. He answers my prayers. He empowers me. He gives me insights from his Word. He guides my life. He gives me loving relationships. He has wonderful things in store for me.

"I," "my," "me," "me," "me." Is this what the kingdom of God come in Christ is about? God catering to and pampering individual Christians? Is God's rule centered on "me" and "mine"? And on an inner life of insights and guidance set off from the vicissitudes of the world? If so, then I can only sound alarm and paraphrase the apostle Paul – then we Christians are "of all people most to be pitied" (1 Cor. 15:19).

I write these words at the end of a week in which two Arkansas schoolchildren, ages eleven and thirteen, have gunned down classmates and a teacher with high-powered rifles. Darkness bears down on us in many other ways: deepening poverty in American cities and rural areas, ongoing and desperate racial tensions, climbing teenage suicide rates, and dozens of other profound human problems. Suffering and crisis are not confined to the United States, of course. The Middle East daily stays just a gesture or two away from lethal violence.

The former Slovakian republics stagger barely, if at all, toward some kind of healing after a decade of barbarities. South Africa and other African nations attempt bold experiments in reconciliation and democracy, while all witnessing, knowing how precarious such experiments are, hold their breath. Meanwhile the entire globe wants most to follow North America in its wanton accumulation, its wasteful fashions, and the grossest elements of its popular culture.

Abortion and infanticide. Ecological destruction. Hatred and misunderstanding between the sexes. Scientific hubris. The legalization of euthanasia, as respect for the elderly dwindles. A global economy built and sustained on such inanities as “he who dies with the most toys wins.” Skyrocketing rates of state murder known as capital punishment. The lingering threat of nuclear annihilation.

The world cannot save itself. And despite the fact that so many churches in comfortable middle- and upper-class circumstances now so proclaim it, the gospel heralding God’s kingdom is not focused on the inner serenity of materially comfortable individuals. The world needs so much more than that. And the kingdom of God is so much grander, so much more exciting and challenging than that.

This is something an odd German pastor and some-

time politician named Christoph Blumhardt knew very well. And this is why I have read the words of Blumhardt (and his father) with so much appreciation and encouragement. It is also why I have commended the Blumhardts to so many friends. (I have a box of Vernard Eller's *Thy Kingdom Come: A Blumhardt Reader*, from which I eagerly distribute copies to houseguests, hosts, workmates, and other potential converts.) It is, at last, why I consider it such a privilege to commend this wonderful new collection of some of Christoph Blumhardt's finest sermons.

Both Blumhardts were servants of the common folk. Their words are simple, straightforward, often bereft of the subtlety we rightly find in many great doctors of the church. Yet the Blumhardts rediscovered the kingdom of God, the victory of Jesus Christ narrated in the Bible, freshly and fully. They did not crowd it out of the precincts of earth exclusively into those of heaven, did not confine it to boundaries drawn by churches liberal or evangelical or Catholic, did not delay all actual change of the world by it until Christ's return.

So if you read further into these pages you will find Christoph Blumhardt declaring the expansiveness of the kingdom: "When I await the Lord, my waiting is for the whole world, of which I am a part." You will find him railing against the privatistic reduction of the

kingdom's power to individual salvation: "We have been much more concerned with being saved than with seeing the kingdom of God. If we want our salvation first, and then the kingdom of God, there will never be any light on earth. No! We will not think of our salvation. We will not seek our own good first! We want to be servants! We want to seek God's salvation, God's glory, God's kingdom!" You will find his bracing expectation that the world will change, however fitfully and incompletely, through the witness of God's people: "Today we cry, 'Oh, to be saved! Oh, to be saved!' But God says, 'I do not need you in heaven, I have enough saved ones here. I need workers, people who get things done on earth. First serve me there.' If we Christians simply relate all the words of scripture to our precious little selves without stopping to consider whether the conditions of our life and of our world are right – then it is our fault if nothing new breaks into our lives."

Blessedly, and surely partly through the direct and indirect influence of the Blumhardts, we live in a day when a host of biblical scholars and theologians are reading the Bible anew and appreciating both the centrality of the kingdom to the gospel, and the full-orbed social, political, and cultural (as well as "private" and "personal") inbreaking impact of that kingdom. This is in many ways a more Jewish reading of Scripture – and remember, Jesus and his apostles were Jews. In the early days of the church, non-Christianized Jews argued quite

legitimately that if the world has not been changed, then the genuine Messiah has not come. After all, the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others said that with the kingdom's advent would come the cessation of war, the routing of famine and pestilence, the end of enmity between humanity and the rest of creation.

True enough, now as in the early days of the church there are still wars, hunger, sickness, and wild beasts. But the apostles and fathers of the church did not, as many Christians today are wont, reject the Jewish premise and utterly spiritualize the kingdom. Instead, on the one hand they recognized and admitted that the kingdom had not yet come in its fullness and finality, and would not until the return of Christ. And on the other hand, to cite just one contemporary scholar, Gerhard Lohfink, they proclaimed that “the Messiah has come and that the world has in fact changed. It has been transformed *in the Messiah's people*, which lives in accord with the law of Christ.” Or, to resort again to the exhilarating words of Christoph Blumhardt:

When Jesus speaks, it is a social matter, a matter for humanity. What Jesus did was to found the cause of God on earth, in order to establish a new society which finally is to include all nations – in contrast to the societies we have made, societies where not even true families can be formed; where fathers do not know how to care for their children; where

friendships are formed and torn apart; in short, where everyone lives in heartache. Faced with this wretched social order, Jesus wants to build a new one. His word to us is this: “You belong to God and not to these man-made societies.”

Now that is a glorious and pulse-quickenning vision, beckoning us to an adventure worth a lifetime’s dedication and commitment. In focusing on the salvation of “our precious little selves,” we have rendered the gospel so small, made God’s kingdom so puny. Christoph Blumhardt, in plain language vibrant with eloquence only because it is so Spirit-filled, reminds us that personal peace, though not a bad thing, is merely the wrapping paper and not the magnificent gift itself. Dare I, dare we, dare the church on behalf of the world, pray for a confidence in the kingdom as vital and comprehensive as this man’s?

It is frightening. It would change us and would once again, as in the days when the Word (and thus the kingdom) became flesh, “turn the world upside down” (Acts 17:6).

God grant us the courage so to pray and wait, and in the action of our waiting, so to live.

Rodney Clapp
Lent, 1998

Introduction

Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt (1842–1919) was an original. There is no one quite like him. He is not easy to characterize – theologically, politically, or otherwise. He was at home nowhere – he belonged neither to church circles nor to secular ones. He was an embarrassment to Christians and non-Christians alike. He seemed to challenge and disconcert everyone. And yet he possessed a strange confidence in God’s history; a confidence that inspired hope in many, and continues to do so even today.

Blumhardt possessed no theories and certainly no “theology.” Without founding a school or wanting to attract disciples, he pointed in a direction that had a striking influence on those who came after him. He was behind two movements that accepted him as one of their forerunners without having any direct contact with them: Religious Socialism (in Switzerland and Germany) and Dialectical (“Crisis”) Theology. His ideas had seminal influence on Leonhard Ragaz, Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and more recently on Harvey Cox, Jacques Ellul, and Jürgen Moltmann – theological giants among whom he would most certainly feel a stranger.

There are movements today like the rapidly growing

Vineyard Church that seize Blumhardt and his father as two of their most cherished witnesses – forerunners of today’s outbreak of signs and wonders. In Blumhardt we have a demonstration of kingdom power combined with repentance, a power that has become commonplace among many charismatic and Pentecostal movements.

Despite his legacy, Blumhardt is relatively unknown – especially in America. This is, for instance, his only book currently in print in English. True, efforts have been made in the past to make him better known. But without much effect. Unlike some of his contemporaries – Charles Finney or William Booth, for example – Blumhardt is known only to a very few.

In a piece written for *The Christian Century* in 1969, Vernard Eller suggests that part of the reason for Blumhardt’s obscurity is that his message was neither literary nor scholarly enough to quote from. In his book *Thy Kingdom Come: A Blumhardt Reader* (Eerdmans, 1980), Eller attempted to rectify this. Unfortunately, the book never received much attention.

But there is perhaps a more basic reason. To begin with, Blumhardt’s life was a provocation. He also expressed his ideas in impressive and unconventional phrases. His message excited both shock and indignation, for it went against the currents of both the church and the world. He represented something quite different from what we generally understand by Christianity. As Johannes Harder once wrote, “Anyone who wants

to fit Blumhardt into the history of theology might place him into an appendix to Gottfried Arnold's *History of Heresy*."

It was Blumhardt's conviction that the greatest of all dangers to human progress was "Christianity" – Sunday religion that separated material existence from the spiritual and that erected rituals and practices of self-seeking, self-satisfying, other-worldly piousness instead of practical works of righteousness.

Blumhardt didn't care about matters of religion and church, of worship services and dogma, not even of inner peace and personal redemption. For him, faith was a matter of the coming of God's kingdom, of God's victory over darkness and death here and now. His vision of God's righteousness on earth was an unconditional and all-embracing one: God's love reconciles the world, liberates suffering, heals economic and social need – in short, it renews the earth.

To many people, Blumhardt's message sounded dangerously worldly, even irreverent. In fact, the established church of his day retaliated by casting suspicion on him, and slandering and maligning him. His message touched a nerve that is still raw today.

Blumhardt's aim, however, was never to attack. What ruled his whole thinking was the kingdom of God – the creative reign of Christ's peace and justice on earth. This kingdom is neither a formal constitution nor an ideal. It is a movement that belongs to the future but

impinges upon the present. It is humankind's truest history, and will be demonstrably victorious in the end. It confronts everything that has ever been thought, planned, or built; it opposes all institutions, monuments, and ideologies. It always seeks the different, the new, and encompasses the whole of life.

Such a broad view of God's redemptive work pushes hard against the boundaries of traditional Christianity. And this could well be the real reason why Blumhardt's thought, though seminally forceful among an important few, has never had broad appeal.

We will return to this theme of the kingdom. Before we do, however, we must understand how concrete, how living this reign of God was for Blumhardt. Blumhardt was no visionary. His thought grew from his experience, not from theology. God's kingdom was something living for him, not an abstraction. It filled his being with the vividness of direct personal experience.

To appreciate this one must turn to Blumhardt's father, Johann Christoph (1805–1880). Blumhardt's father was the minister of Möttlingen, a small town at the edge of the Black Forest. His work followed the same course as that of any rural pastor until he came in touch with a girl by the name of Gottliebin Dittus. Gottliebin suffered from an illness perhaps similar to demonic possession as described in the New Testament. For months Father Blumhardt watched with distress the

increasing suffering and torment of this young woman. Feeling something dark at work in her, he finally took up the fight with the power of darkness. In the year in which his son Christoph was born, in 1842, he exclaimed: “We have seen enough of what the devil can do. Let us now see the power of the Lord Jesus.” The fight against the demonic stronghold commenced and lasted two years. The dark power was finally broken and conquered, and the evil spirit driven out. Gottlieb was completely healed of all bodily and spiritual misery. The fight ended in victory with the words from her lips, “Jesus is victor! Jesus is victor!”

As a consequence of this victory a movement of repentance swelled, taking hold of Blumhardt’s whole parish and extending to the neighboring towns and villages. From all sides people streamed to Father Blumhardt. The inbreaking of kingdom power transformed the entire village of Möttlingen. There were healings, confessions, conversions. Marriages were saved, enemies reconciled. A strange new manifestation of God’s world took sway. From this time on, Father Blumhardt’s rallying cry was “Jesus is victor!” It was in this strangely moved world that his son Christoph grew up.

For a number of reasons, opposition to Blumhardt’s father gradually increased, particularly from other ministers and the state church authorities. Local clergy complained about the flight of their parishioners to

Blumhardt. Soon the parsonage could not accommodate the numbers of people who were beginning to stream to him. He thus began to look for a place where there would be both more room and greater freedom. When Christoph was only ten, the family moved to Bad Boll, a complex of large buildings which had been developed as a spa around a sulfur water spring. This became a kind of retreat center, a place to which people could have recourse for periods of rest, meditation, study, and pastoral counsel – and a place where the father Blumhardt was free to operate according to God’s leading.

The father Blumhardt spent the rest of his life in Bad Boll, and his son spent most of his adult life there. Thousands came to his father to experience the healing and strengthening of Christ’s victory. This was Christoph’s experience and his foundation. It is no surprise that the amazing experiences of his father engraved themselves indelibly upon Christoph’s soul, compelling him forward along the same path.

In Bad Boll, the young Christoph found himself in the midst of a stream of people seeking help, coming from all classes, nationalities, and countries, and in the midst of the work of his father’s constant, fervent struggle for God’s kingdom. In time he felt called to the ministry himself, and after some years he was per-

mitted to support his father as an assistant. When his father called him to Bad Boll as his helper, however, he only wanted to make himself useful around the house in the most menial ways; perhaps as a cook's helper. For some reason he lacked his father's certainty. He had yet to personally take up the fight that his father had undertaken. But the death of Gottliebin Dittus, in 1872, became a turning point for him and the entire household at Bad Boll. It drove everybody to a fresh experience of deep repentance, releasing in Christoph a renewed confidence in God's call. His father's last words, spoken on his deathbed in 1880, commissioned Christoph to carry on: "I give you a blessing for victory."

Blumhardt undertook his father's work in deep humility. Equipped with his father's spirit, he too experienced great demonstrations of the Spirit and of power. But Blumhardt could not stop at these happenings. For him, the gospel proved to be full of life, and this bade him to go other ways than his father. It was not long before he was out of the church entirely. His exit was in part due to his own wish, and in part due to the wish of the church authorities. Eventually, and with much struggle, he broke with all the outward forms of church life, clerical robe and all. Theology, religious factions, and even the different confessions all meant the same thing to him: all were based on human symbols, ar-

rangements, and pride – the flesh.

Blumhardt also became frustrated with the constant attention people placed on healing. As happened in the time of Jesus, “miracles” became the main thing for many people in Bad Boll. He consciously fought against this. He was determined to keep Bad Boll from becoming an institution for faith healing. “There is a lie that turns everything in the direction of exploiting the mercy and grace of God in such a way that the Savior then becomes our servant,” he once wrote in a letter to someone asking for his help. For Blumhardt, the conquest of sickness was subservient to God’s kingdom. “To be cleansed is more important than to be healed.”

It wasn’t until Blumhardt was causing a sensation on his mission journeys in Germany and Switzerland that he came to seriously question the whole direction of his work. After his return from Berlin in March of 1888, Blumhardt not only retired from his public preaching activity, but his healing of sickness also receded. He felt misunderstood by those who flocked to him: “I am terribly sorry that people say I am a famous preacher. I don’t want to be a speaker before you. I am no speaker at all, nor do I want to be one. I want to be a man of experience. I do not merely want these things to be spoken about. I want to stand before you as a witness!”

He believed that possessing a heart for God’s cause was the surest sign of God’s kingdom, not numbers or

healings. For Blumhardt, God's love carried not only the burdens of individuals, but also of those bound in the shackles of poverty. In time, Blumhardt's whole heart was opened to the wretchedness and sin of the world. A burning desire arose within him for God's justice, and this led him to a deeper awareness of the misery, the poverty, and the inequity around him in Germany and in the world. Because of this, he sensed God's voice in the new movements of protest and revolt – against injustice, capitalism, against war. He saw longings of hope in the great social movements of his day. “The struggle of millions in our time is not a coincidence. It is related to the struggle of the apostles – these are signs of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

In the prophets, even pagan peoples like the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians, and heathen kings like Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus were in God's service. Blumhardt began to wonder why a socialist movement that aimed to help humanity couldn't also serve as an instrument in God's hand. Despite socialism's foibles and shortcomings, Blumhardt believed that Christ was surely hidden in it.

Still following in his father's footsteps, Blumhardt concerned himself more and more with the reality of present-day society. He finally left the “conventicle” in Bad Boll and went into the streets to support the labor movement, which was making itself heard. Bad Boll

would cease to be a “place of sermons,” in order to become a “place for true life.” Blumhardt stood virtually alone among people in the churches in this feeling for the need of the masses. When he joined the Social Democrats (and acted as their elected representative to the Württemberg parliament from 1900–1906) it was as though he was under banishment. He was asked to renounce his position as a pastor in the state of Württemberg. The organized churches marked him as an outcast. Blumhardt accepted this as a freeing: “State and church are no soil for the fire of God.”

However, Blumhardt’s outlook did not hang on the hopes of socialism alone in these years. All that moved in the masses, as well as in nature, came under the light of the kingdom. Blumhardt saw plenty of signs in science and the economy that could be received as messengers of a future epoch of tremendous change. He endeavored to read the signs of the times and was convinced that Christ wanted to break into the world situation to free those gripped by its degenerative powers.

Blumhardt’s spiritual radicalism meant a social commitment. If God’s kingdom penetrated all of creation, then so should our witness: “The kingdom of God is taking on colossal dimensions these days. We have to come out of our little rooms, out of our isolation. The kingdom comes into the streets, where the poorest live, the outcasts, the miserable. There the kingdom of God

comes. It extends into the heavens and into hell, and to all peoples.”

This kingdom is anything but religion. It is certainly not Christianity. Blumhardt believed that the prophets and Jesus wanted a new world; the rulership of God over all reality. In his view, heaven and personal salvation were not the aim of history. God is not concerned that we get into heaven; rather, heaven must come down to earth. “Many people long and yearn for heaven; they stretch out toward heaven. I would like to tell them: Let your minds reach to the heights that we can already perceive on earth. Down here is where Jesus appeared, not above in the invisible world. Here on earth he wants to appear again and again. Here on earth we may find him.”

The idea that God is only in heaven and that the application of the gospel was only for the inner life was disastrous, according to Blumhardt. Not our blessedness first, but the kingdom of God. Not our profit (here or hereafter), but the honor of God. Or, as Leonhard Ragaz once put it in summarizing Blumhardt’s thought, “From religion to God’s kingdom, from the church to a redeemed world, from *me* to God.” This all-encompassing vision ultimately led Blumhardt back to Bad Boll.

Blumhardt was never really a politician. Only by circumstance was he forced into formally joining the Social Democratic party. Originally he did not even want to become a regular party member. Though re-

ceived with open arms, in the long run he did not find the party to be ground in which a witness to the gospel could have full effect. He said: "The social movement as we see it today still belongs to the world that will pass. It does not contain the fellowship of men as it will one day come through God's spirit." Therefore, after his first term he was led back through a long, serious illness into the peace of Bad Boll. In 1917 Blumhardt suffered a stroke; he died peacefully two years later, on August 2, 1919.

Blumhardt was unrelenting in his fight against churchiness – against dogmatic, institutional, and pious Christianity – precisely because he was consumed with the coming reign of God. For him, this gospel of the kingdom opposes all religiousness. It demands a fundamental change, a revolution of life. Jesus was no teacher of doctrine, no divine example of heavenly virtue. He both taught and lived out God's new world. He was the initiator of a new age; a new society where God's justice and healing is established. His final coming is but a completion of what he has begun. His death sealed the fight against the powers of the old world, his resurrection was the victorious dawning of the new world – the beginning of a new epoch in history, a new morning of creation – and his return is its consummation.

Despite misunderstanding, despite much opposition, Blumhardt was a man of unwavering hope. For him

the gospel was the good tidings of the future day of Christ. “The Savior is coming!” What mattered to him, in the end, was *God’s* coming kingdom; a reality not to be confused with any human philosophy of progress. This kingdom is not self-created human betterment. It is certainly for the world, but not from it. Neither political endeavors nor Christian piety will bring in the kingdom. “Not through our faith, through our prayer nor our piety, but through the deeds of God will the future city of God be revealed.”

This did not mean that those who await Christ’s future should just place their hands in their laps and do nothing. Far from it! The powers of the future are already here, and God’s people must live in these powers, responding to them, letting them grow. In this sense, according to Blumhardt, our deepest service is to wait for God’s action. We must both wait for and hurry toward the coming of Christ. In spite of all necessary activity on our part, we must trust that in our strivings God’s kingdom will overcome every obstacle.

From this expectation, Blumhardt believed that a people of Christ should gradually be gathered – gathered to wait, gathered to live together in the powers of the future. “God always wants to have a place, a community, which belongs genuinely to him, so that God’s being can dwell there. God needs such a place from where he can work for the rest of the world. There must

be a place on the earth, a Zion, from where the sun of God's kingdom shines forth." In Christ, the old creation is to yield to the new as the night yields to the dawning day.

This "waiting" involves a kind of double movement. As Vernard Eller explains: "We are to give ourselves completely to the cause of the kingdom, do everything in our power to help the world toward that goal. At the same time, however, we are to remain calm and patient, unperturbed even if our efforts show no signs of success. Far from being inactivity, this sort of waiting is itself a tremendously strong and creative action in the very hastening of the kingdom."

As one hears the message of Blumhardt, there is a sense that truth is being served in a timeless way. Perhaps this is because for Blumhardt, Jesus is rising now; Jesus is victorious now; the kingdom of God is breaking in now! The fabric of God's kingdom-vision spans time and brings together unlikely witnesses who have been blessed to see the Real despite the illusions of their day.

One such visionary of our time has been Archbishop Oscar Romero, whose death from an assassin's bullet in 1980 crowned a life of service to El Salvador's poor. Like Blumhardt, Romero had the grace to see what God is doing now. What Romero expresses poetically in his prayer, Blumhardt expresses in passionate prose. The kingdom that Romero challenges his people to embrace

is the same rulership that so powerfully gripped Blumhardt. When one sets the prayer of the modern martyr side by side with the passion of one so sorely misunderstood, there steps out in stark relief a timeless and united Christian vision. The kingdom of God is at hand. We must fight *and* wait for it in the singular act of concrete expectation.

Hence our choice of a prayer attributed to Oscar Romero (see p. xxx) as the leitmotif for this collection of essays. In one sense, what we have here is but a sampler. Neither the breadth of Blumhardt's thought nor the depth of Romero's prayer can be fully expressed in a short volume like this one. However, we hope that the spirit and longing of each can. Blumhardt was gripped by the reality of the coming of God's kingdom on this earth, here and now. Romero understood, like Blumhardt, that this kingdom was yet beyond our efforts, always lying beyond us. For both, however, God's kingdom ignited a burning expectancy of living faith; a faith that both works and waits, helps God and hopes in him. May Blumhardt's vision and Romero's prayer inspire in the reader such deeds of hope. At the dawn of a new millennium, we surely need more of them.

Charles Moore

May 1998

The Prayer of Oscar Romero

It helps now and then to step back and take the long view.

The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts; it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.

Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.

No prayer fully expresses our faith.

No confession brings perfection, no pastoral visit brings wholeness.

No program accomplishes the church's mission.

No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about:

We plant the seeds that one day will grow.

We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further

development.

We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.

This enables us to do something and to do it very well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders – ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own.

Amen.

Step back and take

the long view.

**Oscar
Romero**

Seek first God's kingdom
and his righteousness,
and all these things will
be given to you as well.

Matthew 6:33

1

Seeking the Kingdom

The history of Jesus' life is the history of God's kingdom then and now. Some people have been shaken and gripped by this. But for many people today the kingdom of God has drifted out of sight. People are stirred by many issues; the outward life makes great demands on them. More than at any other time, it would seem, man raises himself powerfully in his human search and progress. It is as though the whole world wanted to offer us its strength, saying, "Use me. Become great, become strong, become rich, creative, active – take everything into your own hands!" Powers that earlier times hardly dreamed of are now opened

up for us. Everyone finds himself in a position to make use of these new inventions and these new powers for his own purposes. Our whole society seems to depend on this. If we were to shut our eyes to these things, we would lag behind and finally perish in our earthly life. There is a spirit of intellectual accomplishment that pushes the concern for God's kingdom to the side.

A tremendous misunderstanding has come about with regard to God's kingdom. Much has been said about the church. Much has been said about the teachings that are preserved in the church, about the various denominations that have become a sacred good within the body of Christianity. Too much emphasis has been placed on forms by which we express ourselves as Christians. Thus today we cannot deny that many people no longer really find the living qualities that our Father in heaven wanted to give us in Jesus Christ. They have neither seen nor experienced the life that comes from God, and so they are in a fix. On the one hand they cannot deny that they too need God, God's word, God's revelation, in their hearts. On the other hand they no longer quite believe in the means through which God's word is being proclaimed, and thus many of them no longer know what to do with themselves in regard to God's kingdom. Their hearts hunger and thirst; they are aware that something of God's eternity and truth

should be revealed in us, but they don't quite know what to do about it.

Because of all this we must begin to speak of God's kingdom in a new way. In spite of present-day conditions where much of the church and of Christian fellowship is almost dead, we can speak of God's kingdom to men and women of our time. The kingdom of God is and was and will be the rulership of justice, of order, of power, of authority, of all that is of God, over creation. This is what moves those of us who seek, and this must come more fully into being. And unless our lives are molded according to this rulership, we shall always remain dissatisfied. We may enjoy modern conveniences, but the reality of eternal things will be smothered unless the reign of God's truth and justice dawns as the light of life.

Yet this very fact causes great discord as soon as it is pointed out. Millions of people are "Christians" in all peace and comfort from their childhood on until they are laid in the grave. They are satisfied with what is said about God, and it does not make them feel uncomfortable in any way. Religion is taken as part of one's life; one accepts it such as it is. This causes no conflict – at the most an argument here or there about the interpretation of this or that teaching, but these arguments are futile. A new conflict arises as soon as we feel urged to

For many people, God's kingdom has drifted out of sight.

proclaim the kingdom of God as something living. And this is what I want to do today. I don't just want to edify you. I want to proclaim to you what God has put into my heart: God's kingdom is a living reality, a rulership that impacts the here and now and even today is at hand – closer at hand than we may think. The intervention of the living God is more powerful today than many believe. God wants to manifest himself as the one who is something and who *does* something now. He alone is the one with whom we should joyfully concern ourselves.

In speaking of God's kingdom, we proclaim that Jesus Christ is not dead. He is not merely someone who appeared two thousand years ago, to be viewed as a personality of the past about whom we retain certain recollections and teachings. No, just as Jesus lived two thousand years ago, he lives today. He wants to triumph in our midst for the honor of God. He wants to live among us so that our reverence for the Father in heaven may grow and deepen. We must come before God and in the weakness and poverty of our natures raise our eyes to him with a sigh in our hearts, saying, "My Father, my Father, I too want to be your child!" Then we may believe with life-giving strength: Jesus lives, he will help me, he is victor. Whoever I may be, his name can be sanctified in me and his rulership can enter in, so

that his will may be done in me just as it is done in heaven!

I wish, my friends, that I could place in your hearts the living power of God. I wish that I could help you understand that this power makes us completely new. It can overcome much of our misery, even in our physical life. God's living power seeks us out and wants to show us – despite the entanglements of life – clear, true values that can ennoble us.

In the realm of our own human nature, however, there is more resistance to God's truth than people believe. And in human society, in all the influences to which we are exposed, there lies a grave hindrance to the living power of Christ, and this hindrance is also greater than people suspect. Often I find that when I speak of God, of Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, everyone agrees with me. Nobody gets annoyed. The conflict begins, however, as soon as I take a firm stand and say, "I have experienced who Jesus is. I have looked into the living power, into the kingdom of our God, which even today wants to take hold of us. I tell you that even now the truth and the life-power of our God is at work. I declare to you that even now the truth of God's kingdom comes visibly to this earth. We do not have to wait until we lay ourselves down to die and be buried. Here and now we can hear with our ears, see with our

eyes, who Jesus is, who the life-giving spirit is. It is the same today as at the time of the apostles. It is not a question of this or that church, of this or that teaching, but only of Jesus Christ himself (John 14:6). We have to come to terms with him!”

For me this is the one and only direction. Yet if I say this, people react and argue. “Who is this arrogant person? How can anyone say such things today? Aren’t the Bible and the existing denominations enough for us? This is superstition and exaggeration!” So there is a conflict, but it kindles a light in many hearts, a light of hope, a light of strength, a light from the heights beyond this earth. For nothing can give us more strength than the certainty that Jesus lives and acts and that he is not an empty word or a mere teaching. Nothing gives more strength than the knowledge that Jesus is in our midst (Matt. 18:20). We must believe this, so that his life may become true in us, so that his spirit may purify us.

What then does it mean to believe? There is much dispute about belief; but woe to us and our arguments about faith! Isn’t it something quite simple, something every child can understand? My friends, if Jesus truly lives, if he is king of kings, then you must no longer take anything into your own hands. You must deny yourself in all things that are God’s. You must be a dying person, one who in things of God says, “I can do

nothing. None but Jesus has the right to show us divine matters!” In this way alone do we honor this king.

If God’s kingdom is important to you, then you need not think you have to be anything important. Rather, you should place yourself at Jesus’ feet, thinking, I am a weak human being, but Jesus lives, Jesus is victor. I will give myself to him, and I will turn everything over to him so that nothing can rule over me but he alone.

This is faith. If we believe in Jesus Christ, then we must stand firm. It will be of no use to you to have heard someone speak, to believe in a doctrine, or to sacrifice yourselves to some good cause. All this will be of no avail.

Therefore I would like to call out into the world, “Die, that Jesus may live!” (Gal. 2:20) In other words, do not attach any importance to what is false, to what is opposed to truth. Jesus Christ is the Lord. Raise your fists against all that comes from the flesh, from the deceitfulness of your own thinking. What is false shall be called false. Do it for the sake of God your Savior! What is wrong shall die and die again, and die so that it no longer counts for anything. Then we shall be amazed at how much is possible through his rulership.

If God’s kingdom is important to you, then you do not have to be anything important.

The kingdom
is not only beyond
our efforts; it is even
beyond our vision.

**Oscar
Romero**

And he who sat
upon the throne said,
“Behold, I make all things new.”
Also he said, “Write this,
for these words are
trustworthy and true.”

Revelation 21:5

2

I Make All Things New

The greatest word that crowns all others is this: “I make all things new!” This is of special support and comfort when we realize how quickly everything passes away and becomes dust and ashes. All things new! God cannot tolerate what is corrupt and destructive but wants to change it. Of course we enter into new life only through repentance (Acts 2:37–38). Sadly, many people think of all sorts of things around them that need to change and not at all of themselves. Or they would like to have only certain things change so as to

be able to carry on more comfortably. We should be deeply humiliated to realize that there actually is nothing that must not also become new, especially ourselves. If I were to take a close look at each one of you – all of you must become new!

This is how things are, my friends. A darkness has come over Christianity in regard to this very matter of renewal. We are so easily contented and so quickly satisfied with a Christianity that makes us only a little more decent. That is all people want. And yet if one takes a look at it one must say, “This cannot be all.” Not just a little taste of something new, but all things new, in yourselves first and foremost. How long have we been sitting around here; how long are we being preached to; how long have we let ourselves be admonished again and again! And still there is no breakthrough to something new. It could make one die of grief to see how little has actually happened. So much that is new lies before us, and still there are so few results; it is always at our doorstep, and still it will not come in.

This could depress us very much. Instead, it should unite us in repentance. But why then don't we turn around? Why do we not receive strength against sin? Why is it that so little happens? “Jesus Christ, our Savior, have mercy on us!” Shouldn't this be our cry?

There are so many proud Christians; yet they have nothing to be proud of. They are intoxicated by their

piety, and each one thinks that he is the one, that he's got it, that his group is it. This is true for each one of us. Unless this changes, we will perish; we might as well join in the stream of death. Then you will see how in all their customs and practices people trudge along at the same old monotonous pace, till finally they are laid in the grave. Dirt is thrown over them, and everyone goes back home and continues living just as dully and superficially as before.

Therefore, turn to God! God does not say, "Perhaps, if possible, under certain circumstances, I will make things new; I have to think it over." He says straight out, "I make all things new." This promise belongs to our time. It is ready for anyone who wants to become new, who is ready to give up his possessions, who does not push his own person into the foreground and does not love his own life. Just try it! Go completely into repentance and then fully into faith. Even if only a few become new, it will still be something. And finally all things shall be made new.

In facing the judgments that have come upon the earth and that may yet come over us, we can lean upon this promise in faith. You know very well how things are. Murderous weapons are ready. The powers of darkness have risen and want to drive things to the point where the earth becomes a pool of blood. Must there be war and rumors of war forever? If we cannot pray

If we cannot pray for God to hold back warring armies, then it is a mockery to believe he can make all things new.

for the time to come when God's almighty arm will hold back warring armies, then it is a mockery to believe that God makes all things new.

Of course if everything is to be made new, then something must break in, not coming from us but from heaven. A new deed of God must happen; something living and real from Jesus must break into the physical world. It must become visible enough to show that the almighty God really *is*, and in such a way that he will not let himself be pushed to the side. But too many people just don't believe that God does something from above. They might say, "He guides the destinies of the nations," but then everything gets labeled as being from God, even when it is the Evil One who does it. The time must come when we pray that the threatening dangers to God's creation will be averted and our prayer will be answered.

There are many things that threaten us. Even if war does not break out, millions of people lose their lives all over the world through all kinds of trials: storms, landslides, explosions, earthquakes, epidemics, all kinds of accidents. At the same time there is an enormous amount of sickness of body and soul. How much sighing there still is in hospitals, how much misery in the mental institutions. And how many are being killed, some slowly, through envy, through hatred, through maliciousness of people towards each other. Just think

Every family must be prepared to have their peace suddenly disturbed.

of all the people murdered in one year. It doesn't even take guns; people are perishing anyway.

Every family must be prepared for something to happen suddenly that will disturb its peace. Then we have to believe and pray that the judgments may be turned away. If God keeps his word, we can stand up against anything, especially if we ourselves are already living in what is new (1 John 5:3–5). Arise and go to meet what is new. Pray for it. Beg for it. The whole world will yet be renewed through the almighty power of God.

This alone is what Jesus Christ wants. For this reason he is the firstborn from the dead. For this Christ was born, for this he died and arose, for this he is sitting at God's right hand. Go to meet this renewal so that it may come! This is what we must believe; this is how we must see what is before us.

When the divine comes, look out. Then we shall pass through judgment, through fire. Then we shall have to be purified, to become gold, not wood. Then we must become completely true, just as what is in heaven is true, just as the Lord Jesus is whole and true and all the angels are true and God himself is true (Heb. 6:13–18). So you also must become true. This is what new means. And this new thing is not something unheard-of. It is at our doorstep; it is already on the earth. Whoever has had a little to do with the Savior always sees something new.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

What is at stake is the truth. This truth must become a new reality. It is not a matter of new teachings, new laws, new institutions. True, Christianity has made many teachings and laws and institutions in the name of Jesus. Yet this is not the truth Christ speaks of. The truth to which we must open our ears is the new reality the Son of Man brings to the world. It is the message that God now creates a new reality on the earth, beginning among his people, and later in the whole creation. Heaven and earth will be renewed in this new reality (2 Pet. 3:12–13).

Too many of us live in the old reality, which completely occupies all our senses. It is the old story of perishing, of wasting away, and behind it lies a mighty darkness: death. We live and die. Nature lives and then dies. Sin enters into life. There are failures; people go wrong. In Jesus, however, a new reality appears, a reality that is opposed to the world's history. Something new begins alongside the old.

The old reality does not suddenly disappear; it continues alongside the new. Yet in Jesus a new history begins, a new working of God (1 John 2:8). True, God has always been present in the old, and the Spirit has worked upon it throughout the ages. But now, yes now, something new has begun in Christ. God has meant it to be like that from the very beginning, but death still

has its dominion. Even in the lives of the believing, death makes itself felt. This death was particularly strong when Jesus appeared, this darkness caused by the law, this deadliness of human teachings. Death's power is so strong that Jesus had to struggle greatly in order to make people see that in him something completely different had come, a new history.

This history is to be revealed in each individual person. It must become evident in you, in me, in all of us. Now something new is possible. Unless we place ourselves within this truth, we can accomplish nothing. This is no dogma; it is not just a new word. It is the Word that has power. It is the living person of Jesus Christ, in whom humanity's new history dawns and in whom history culminates. Are you living in the reality of Jesus Christ? Have you placed yourself under the authority that has been given to him for you and for all people? Can you really grasp this? Can you accept it? Can you take it into your life? Can you let it guide your whole life, even in the midst of the deepest suffering?

Unless you do this you have no business striving after the kingdom of God. For what is God's kingdom anyway? Certainly not Christian causes or institutions. God's kingdom is the power of God. It is the rulership of God. God's kingdom is the revelation of the divine life here on earth, the birth of new hearts, new minds,

**What
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old ruts?**

new feelings, new possibilities. This is God's kingdom. Yet who can grasp what God's rule means? Who can grasp what God is at all?

To fully understand this we must acknowledge that Jesus has come from God. He is the light that shines throughout the centuries (John 1:9). Only by him can it be said, "Can any of you convict me of sin?" Jesus has come from God to triumph over death. Jesus Christ has come into our midst as one of us so that death can be conquered. He has laid the foundation for a completely new life, a new order. In him we can become completely different men and women in the very depth of our beings.

This is the power, the true nature of God's kingdom. Of what use is our Christianity if we keep falling back into death and if darkness continues to dominate our lives? What use is our faith in Christ if everything goes on in the old ruts? We are in a bad way if the power of sin continues to work in us. Then our Christianity, our belief and worship of God, is of little value. Facts must become visible, facts of life, of new life, new strength, new joy. We no longer live under the rulership of death, nor under its power of sin. We live in the reality of the true life that comes from God.

Two currents are now running alongside and in opposite directions, one to the other. Sin wants to rule. It wants to reach its goal; it wants to wreak destruction

wherever it can. Against this current, however, runs the movement of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Life. He leads us into something completely beyond ourselves. Even death can be overcome. Even if we still have to die, he promises, "Whoever believes in me shall not see death, even though he die." What greater promise could be said to us than this? If we can hear these words and realize them, then even the history of the nations will be renewed.

In Christ a new day has dawned. It has come into the past, and it will come into the future. It is the eternity of God. For Christ is the one who rose from the dead. And because he is risen, it is he alone who matters. We do not want to cling to what is human, not even to those who are religious or godly. Everything must come from the ruler, from Christ the Lord. He alone is victorious. He alone pierces through the powers of sin and death, both in the world and in our own hearts. No human being, no human movement can do it. Not even the best will achieve it. But there is a new possibility. God can rule the world again. This possibility must live in our hearts. Then the true Christ will be with us, he who came to make all things new.

We accomplish in
our lifetime only
a tiny fraction
of the magnificent
enterprise that is
God's work.

**Oscar
Romero**

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds...

Let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Hebrews 10:23–25

3

Get Busy and Wait!

Christ is the beginning and the end of God's kingdom. Therefore we can say with all confidence and certainty, "The Savior will come again!" He is bound to complete his work, and it is our task simply to be servants until his return, to be in the service of him who is coming. We are, as it were, to represent by our lives the coming of Jesus Christ. We must not, therefore, be so concerned and active, or make such tremendous efforts, as though we were able to achieve the victory of good on this earth. This, of course, we are quite

incapable of doing. Only the Lord Jesus can bring it about, he who came a first time and is going to come again a second time. He will complete it – not we. If we are loyally and firmly set upon this – “He will come again” – then the gospel of the kingdom will become personal and living to us. We must never separate this gospel from Christ’s person. Without his personal presence no talking about the gospel, no talking about his coming kingdom is of any value at all.

So we must be prepared for the coming of Jesus Christ, which is not only something in the future but a present reality in those who wait for it in their hearts. We are to be servants watching for his return. Not that we get everything nicely arranged for ourselves, but we can and we must postpone our main concerns until he comes.

His servants have a twofold task: they are to wait for him in the sense of being active and doing something, and they are to be stewards. The waiting for the Savior involves a personal relationship to him as to a living person, making the gospel living and relevant. There are many people who are always waiting for something new in Christianity, as if something could be achieved through a new faith or a new church. We leave all that alone. We hold fast to the promise of a personal Savior, whom God will send as he has sent him before. And we know that we as persons are quite unable to lead a faithful life unless our Savior is personally with us.

All our strength, all our intellect, and all our feelings, however living and active they may be, will all pass away. We are living in a time of dying (1 Cor. 7:31). We do not want to hide from it. Our powers are declining. Our thinking is becoming feeble, and all our emotions, however lively they may be, will pass away. The law of death envelops everything we do and think and feel. But now a law of life breaks into all this dying, and it is the Lord Jesus himself. He is the one who lives forever, who rose from the dead, who keeps in touch with us from the world beyond, who sends us the Spirit, so that in the midst of our dying we may live and may ever again receive something fresh and living through his gift, through his presence, through his coming.

Far from expecting his coming as something to be realized only at the end of time, we must have the vision of the coming Savior always here and now in our lives. Jesus will come again for sure. His Day is approaching, and in the meantime, as I experienced him once, so may I experience him again and again. As the gospel is life and consolation for me, it can come again. It disappears, but it returns. Jesus will never let you down. If he has once begun something within you, then that will always come again, and if you hold on to it, it will shine as a light for you so that you may be joyful even in the most bitter tribulation – yes, even right unto death (Phil. 1:6). Never let go of the thought, he will

Christ's coming is not for the end of time, but for the here and now.

come again! For this makes you into a servant. His earthly life is by no means lost forever – no, his life on earth is being continued, and by directing our whole heart and all our senses to it, by waiting for him and receiving, we may become servants of his life on earth.

Those who wait open their hearts to him when he comes and knocks (Rev. 3:20). Jesus is alive. No matter how sad things may be, and when we are grieving on the earth for the people we most love and who perhaps will be taken from us, our deepest longing must be for the coming of Christ. The Lord Jesus occupies the highest position (Col. 1:15–18). He is more important than anything else. And though we be surrounded by sickness, need, and death, none of this is important; none of this may fill our hearts. No. He, the living one, is coming! He is highest of all, and quite certainly he is coming! For this we want to live, for this we are ready to go through suffering and fear, for this we want to fight unto death: he is coming! This stands firm and certain for us, and in this light we want to live as long as we are on this earth.

Now the servant's task does not consist in merely waiting and doing nothing. Rather it is a matter of practicing stewardship. Good stewardship means looking after the servants, that is, those who are in our care. And if only our hearts and minds were big enough, I would say that all the people on earth are entrusted to

The whole world is embraced by God's love. No one is excluded, not even atheists.

our care (Gal. 6:9–10). The servants of Christ are to stretch out their hands to each other and to all people as they look toward the coming of the Savior. Many people think that Christ's second coming means a dreadful judgment, when unbelievers will be cast into hell and believers will be saved. No, when Jesus comes, he wants to find his servants prepared to receive him as a Savior, a helper who comes into the world not in order to judge and condemn, but rather to redeem and to make whole, because this is what God created him for. Ever since Jesus' first coming, the whole world is embraced by the love of God. No one is excluded, not even the atheists. They are all embraced by God's love, and, through us, they are God's household. They, too, can do something. We can see in our time how people are doing much good on the earth, so that lives are made easier. We meet with all sorts of kindness on earth, through people's help, through God's larger household that is in the care of his servants.

Woe to us, therefore, if we start to judge, if we condemn, if we abandon all hope for this world for which Jesus Christ has come, for which he suffered and died, for which he rose again, and for which he will truly come again.

So you must be a steward – not a lazy servant who simply waits, but a diligent steward. There is much to be done. All around you there are lives entrusted to

your care, people with whom you have been led together. They are perhaps still very worldly: your own family, maybe, or perhaps your next door neighbor. We need to see even nations as “households of God” and love them as the Father in heaven loves them. Our goodwill and good wishes must go out to them, just as the Father in heaven does nothing but good to all people. “He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matt. 5:45). We want to be concerned that powers of redemption may go out from the Savior to many, many people, even if we cannot understand it, even if we have to wait for a long time. But one day the doors will burst open. Hearts will be freed. And new peace and new joy will descend upon the earth.

I am frequently saddened to hear and see how so many people who call themselves Christians, and often even real Christians, cannot bring themselves to wish good to all people as they wish it for themselves. How few are filled with God’s gift of forgiveness! Instead most set themselves apart by setting themselves above others. But if we are awaiting the Savior, then we are awaiting the forgiveness of the world’s sins, not just our own (1 John 2:2).

Unless the urge to forgive, to want the Savior for all people, wells up in our hearts, we are not true servants. Although we might know of God’s will toward love,

toward mercy, toward forgiveness, we nevertheless fail to do his will because the love of God does not fully govern our lives. For this we will be punished. For if we do not stand fully in the love of God and in his forgiveness, if the eyes with which we look out into the world are not good and kind, if we cease to hold on to the others in love, then God will no longer hold on to us either, and we will find ourselves with the unbelievers, regardless of whether we have spoken pious words or not (Matt. 6:14–15). God is not interested in words but reality. And the actual reality of a Christian life consists in forgiveness and in wishing the whole world well, however grim it may look. Even if war or bloodshed comes, God is greater. He carries out his will. In the end, sin will cease. In the end, it is justice and truth and the love of God that will come to us.

I cannot live for one single hour without thinking: Come, Lord Jesus! And if all of us together can come to thinking that thought – even when there is trouble in your home and in your heart – then we shall be as one, and it will be granted us to go on experiencing the powers of God as a witness to the coming one. The marvelous strength of God, such as we experience it in our sufferings and in our dying and really in everything, will become a testimony to the power of God. And to that end we remind ourselves that our Savior will return. Will it happen in the first watch or in the second? We do not

We are waiting for the forgiveness of the world's sins, not just our own.

ask how and when. At any moment he can enter. So let us partake of his divine power, and when we do we will have experienced something of his future.

There is not much value in any help we may receive from God outside the context of Jesus' coming. Among others, too, help is being rendered here and there. But where this has no relation to the coming Savior, it is of a merely passing character. When, however, it becomes related to Jesus Christ, the living one, he who is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega, who is and was and will come, then all help given to us becomes a part of eternity within us (Rev. 1:5-8). Then all such help that we receive makes us partakers of life eternal. For it is true: if we were to receive no help from God, our faith would be a poor thing.

But we can think of so many instances of his coming to us that it would be a real shame to say, "We have lost eternity; we cannot live with God." No, we are full of God's experience. Each day brings us something new, and we are allowed again and again to experience a great deal both in our own lives and in the lives of others, both in living and in dying. Yes, in dying we have seen much of the Savior's coming. The eyes of many people light up in their last hour because the Savior is on the way. Hence we feel full of comfort and joy, and unceasingly the refrain sings within us: Jesus will return; his Day is approaching! This song must surround and envelop our

lives with its holy sounds so that we may gain increasing confidence and strength.

Let us be united and strong, for the task given us by Jesus is not too great for us. It is not beyond our strength to carry it through. We may make mistakes. Without knowing it, we may do things that deserve the hand of discipline. But God is merciful. He has made us his servants, and we want to remain his servants. For it is as his servants that we go to meet that great and mighty day of Christ. It will yet come to the whole world, the day of Christ, which will reveal to us the character of God and will fill us even more with eternal joy.

Nothing we do is complete,
which is another way of saying
that the kingdom always
lies beyond us.

**Oscar
Romero**

No one knows
about the day or hour,
not even the angels in heaven,
nor the Son, but only the Father.
As it was in the days of Noah,
so it will be at the coming of the
Son of Man... Therefore,
keep watch, because you do
not know on what day
your Lord will come.

Matthew 24:36–42

4

The Savior Is Coming Now

Many times the Savior calls out to us, “Watch! Be ready!” Here the call is especially to “watch for my coming, for my future!” With this call Jesus gives us a task. If we fulfill this task – to watch for his fu-

ture – it is as though his future is coming into our present time. By our watching, God’s future comes closer. It makes itself felt in our whole being, in our whole life. We cannot be swallowed up by the present, for we are bound to the future. We experience the future already in our time. Again and again new life is given; something opens up a way for us. And each time it is a piece of Jesus Christ’s future.

Christ’s future is not one single point in an absolute remoteness for which we are to wait, a mere coming event. This is hardly thinkable, for we would probably all go to sleep over it. Christ’s future is now, or it is not at all. It must become an experience of every individual believer and for every congregation. God’s deed through Jesus Christ must be your experience, today and tomorrow and every day.

The Savior is coming. He is not sitting on some celestial throne, resting somewhere in eternity, waiting for some particular time before he acts or a certain moment when he will suddenly plunge in. The coming of the Savior runs like a thread throughout history, through God’s working in the world (Matt. 28:20). If this thread is not to break, then Jesus must always be coming. Often there are times of storm and thunder, of sorrow and suffering. Yet just when we think we cannot go on, new ways open before us. And there indeed will come a time

when our waiting and watching, which has prepared the coming of the Lord, will be consummated.

I have fat volumes about the second coming of Christ and many people have told me to study them. Ah! I get so tired of this! Half of them I do not understand; I am too stupid. The authors make lengthy calculations and come to the most remarkable conclusions. One must really force oneself to understand these speculations. Again and again I have to think, O God, if this is your future coming, I don't get it! As far as I am concerned, all this can sink in the Rhine River, if I can only unite all people in just this one point: to expect something from God.

We should not talk too much about the second coming of Christ. We are not allowed to know how it is all going to happen. The interpretations of the book of Revelation spoil everything! They spoil everything. Take this idea to heart: When a person finds something of God in the Bible, he should act like a hamster: carry it quickly into his storeroom and not to the public. It is our quiet hope that he will come.

So then, watch. Watch, and be joyful. Even though fear may overcome you, watch. Something of the Savior's future will enter into your life. I have often experienced this in the way I have been led. There is always a way out. Even when I have felt I could not go

Christ's future is not merely a coming event. It is now, or it is not at all.

on, God has opened a new way. Then one can continue. Then we have a portion of Christ's future in our midst. We depend on this coming of the Savior. All our thinking and living comes to life by the very fact that we are allowed to expect such great things, things that will finally lead to true life.

In our day there are many people who hope for the good. They refuse to believe that things will just go on and on as they are or that humanity will not reach any goal. Any hope for improvement, any belief that better days will come for the world, any striving towards better times, are a proof and a result of this one hope that we who believe firmly express by the words, "The Savior is coming!"

We should and can be ever alert and watchful. Jesus Christ's future has to become your personal experience. Whenever you experience protection and remarkable help, whenever you are led on new ways and see others being so led, you should think, "This is a piece of Christ's future." There is a special atmosphere in Christ's coming. All kinds of signs, all kinds of proofs of God's help, are visible. However poor we may be, however weak we may feel, we want to continue hoping and watching. A time will come when you will be allowed to act unhindered. That is a piece of Christ's future. All this remains a mystery of God.

**The
Savior is
coming.
He is not
sitting
on some
celestial
throne.**

The Savior is coming! He is on the way to you, to me, to us all, in all circumstances of our lives. Even when things are as they were in Noah's time, even if the whole world apparently is concerned with nothing but earthly things, with eating and drinking, with marrying and giving in marriage, we should not give up. We must be a living presence at all times. Our faith must be alive – a light of hope, a light in the midst of an indifferent world. It must be a light even in the midst of all the wonders of this world. We expect greater things than new technologies and inventions. We expect the overcoming of the powers of evil, of all the sin that still prevails. We expect the victory over all the misery that binds so many people, over all the evil and hostile powers that seek to torment us. This is our expectation. And this certainty will far surpass any apparent triumphs that the world flaunts through the work of its own hands.

In this expectation we will not become weary. In all our activities, we must live in Jesus Christ's future. Yes, there will always be some who complain, who want things to be different, who always think of the good old days and want to have them back. They are quite wrong, but they torment themselves and others as well. Away with the old! It is Christ's future we want!

The future of Jesus Christ must become a living reality in the experience of every Christian, in fact, for any-

one who longs for a different way. Your life must therefore be a piece of Jesus Christ's future, your life and also your death. Our dying should not lead into death but into life. Even in our last moments Christ's future must touch us. The dying must exclaim, "The Savior is coming!" Sinners, upon their awakening and repenting, must confess, "The Savior is coming!" In this way we will be watching. I know of no other way to do it. In our own lives, right into the present, we have to experience his coming. This is the reality of Jesus Christ.

This watching is a part of our life, of our faith, of our service to God. The Savior urges us seriously to "watch, watch, watch!" as though he wanted to lay a foundation for it in our hearts, in our whole lives. It is as though he were always waiting and asking, "How can I come closer to this person, to that person? How can I meet this one who is waiting for me? How can I go to meet many at a time, so that again and again new victories are given? What can I do to make the call, 'Jesus lives, Jesus is victor!' heard throughout Christendom, throughout the whole world?" For in our watching we think not only of our own lives. We are watching for the whole world. We are thinking of the world that is still in darkness.

Do not fall, therefore, into the darkness of indifference, but watch! Your own hour will come – be prepared for it. Watch! Never lose heart. The Savior often

comes in the most difficult hour, in the most unhappy times. Watch, for the Savior is on the way! Watch for the world too. Do not give the world up as though it were lost for all eternity. It is true that the Savior's future brings separation. A judgment already lies in the fact that one person can come to faith while another remains outside for the time being. But this should not trouble us. The future of Jesus Christ is and will be a great and powerful help. All eyes will be opened (Phil. 2:9-11). Then people will weep and wail when they see how wrong they were; but their tears must contain the truth of Jesus Christ's future, of the Savior's coming, if the many are to receive help.

We who have faith live in the future of Jesus Christ. Never shall we be able to say that the Savior has not come, that we have experienced nothing of Jesus Christ's future. This certainty is our joy; it is the wellspring of our Christian life. Let us remain in this joyful certainty every day of our lives. Let it fill our days, today and tomorrow. It will not abandon us. The fact that we are allowed to say, "The Savior is coming!" is like a surging tide of God's spirit. This tide will never end; it will continue to carry us forward, to lead us and strengthen us in all our thoughts and endeavors, in our whole life.

Therefore watch! Watch, all of you! Let each one be a fighter for Christ's future, a servant of the coming Savior. Give yourselves over to him, and let your hearts be prepared. Then Jesus Christ can come to you, into

If only we could unite on this one point: to expect something from God.

your house, into your hearts, into your lives. Never forget this: Watch! The Savior is coming!

No statement says
all that could be said.

No prayer fully
expresses our faith.

**Oscar
Romero**

I am the Alpha and
the Omega, the beginning
and the ending, says the Lord,
who is, and who was, and
who is to come, the Almighty.

Revelation 1:8

5

Is God Still Dead?

A little while ago I was reading Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Zarathustra had been staying in his cave in the mountains for years, reflecting about himself, and then he came out and wanted to leave that lonely place and go to the people again. And as he was coming down from the mountains, the first person he met was an old hermit. The hermit warned him not to go to the people and asked him what made him want to do a thing like that. "I love the people," Zarathustra told him. And the hermit said, "It was my love for people that ruined my life; that's what made me a hermit. I

love God now, not people.” They finished their talk and separated. And when Zarathustra was left alone thinking about it, he was amazed, and said to himself, “Who would have believed it! This good old man has never heard – that God is dead!”

It made me shudder all over. And it’s actually true – God is dead! Of course he isn’t really dead, but in the lives of people he is dead. Nobody gets very excited if you say “God”; that is one of the most boring things in the world. When a rabbit jumps up in a field, everybody calls out, “A rabbit!” and shows a certain interest. But for most people God is irrelevant. He is dead.

There is another way God is dead: our civilization simply doesn’t need God anymore. What good is God when you are on the train? The man at the controls, it is his job to get me to Stuttgart. The conductor can groan, the fireman can break his back, the engineer can worry, but isn’t it all the same to me? I just sit there on the train. That is why we can be so crude and ruthless about enjoying everything these modern times offer us; we do not need God. Science and technology do not need God. They are succeeding quite well without him! Hence the words, “They will look on him whom they have pierced” – killed, that is. God is dead, murdered. Nietzsche experienced more truth in his wrought-up nerves than all the boring Christians, who don’t have a serious thought left for God! God is of no real impor-

tance, even for people with religion, because religion has become more important than God. Though people get into tremendous arguments about religious questions, all the time God is dead. And it is perfectly all right with them if he is dead, because then they can do what they like. That is another trait of our times, people want to be able to do whatever pops into their heads or feels good at the moment.

But that is just it: God in Christ is not dead, he still is the Alpha and the Omega. And everything in between is chaos, not just a spiritual alienation in which people don't know where life is going, but real chaos. Men and women are meant to share in the work for the end, for God's kingdom on earth, but they won't share. And so the madness goes on. This would be an eternal chaos except that Jesus came, and then a few followed him. But these few aren't the religious people, the ones that look out for their own salvation, those who just join in on religion for the good it will do them. No, Jesus' followers are people who put their lives at stake (Matt. 10:38). They are born of God, and they fight for God and for the earth. The church has no use for them, because the church wants to maintain itself as it is.

Nietzsche said, "God is dead," and he is right. But we say, "God is alive!" We don't want a good life, either in this one or in the other one. All we want is to know that God is alive. I don't want a minute of easy happiness

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until this earth knows that God is alive! We must bow down under the living God and weep aloud for having killed him up to now. We are born for trouble, born for battle. Shame on us Christians who are always wanting to have it nice and soft, with a bit of God in our lives! We've got to fight until we're dead, or we aren't worth Christ's name. God calls out to us, "Share in my business!" and we are fooling ourselves unless we do this.

Abraham was told, "Come and take part," and there was no question. He did not ask, "Yes, but what will happen to me?" Anyone who asks that question is excluded and can't be a sharer. Only people who want to share in God's work, who want to get to the Omega and set the keystone in the creation, know the reality of God. The keystone is spirit, spirit in flesh and blood. We have to join this spirit again and again so that God's ending can come – the kingdom of God on earth.

This is what makes prophets; they don't fit into any Christian mold. Every prophet damns the Christians with their smooth and easy ways. The easy going is over and done with. When the prophets arrive they take drastic measures because they partake in God's interest.

Jesus is here on earth. You have to make a mental about-face, or you can't join in the work. Purely religious emotions, wanting to save our own skin – that's a measly business. You read what the prophets and apostles say. When did they ever think about saving their own

Purely religious emotions – that's a measly business.

skins? They went into death, into trouble and anxiety and suffering, into everything, because they were men who shared in the work with God (2 Cor. 4:7–12).

It hurts me to see so few who want to go into the fight. They come to me and pour out their worries. One wants me to pray for his headache, another for her soul, and both want little trouble, they want a salve so that nothing hurts. Nothing is meant to hurt anymore! But the chaos won't be beaten back without trouble and suffering and a fight to death. For the children of God there is nothing but fighting, nothing but standing firm and holding the standard for the rights of our God against everything that won't bow down under him (2 Cor. 10:1–6). And anything that doesn't come from God is of Satan – even if it happens to be a Peter who blocks the path of Jesus.

What we have to do now is to share God's work in the Spirit. Our little bit of Christianity won't save us from the terrible times when millions of people will be wiped out, unless God has people who share in the work for his kingdom. God's people are meant to do nothing else on earth but live and work and fight for the kingdom. "The kingdom is coming!" That was the way the disciples of Jesus Christ were. And this cry, "The kingdom is coming!" is actually the gospel. Unless there is an end to the earth's chaos, it is pure imagination to think that we have progressed or moved forward. Our

civilization is a sham. We haven't made any real progress. Only when God's kingdom comes is there progress for mankind.

“I am the beginning and the end,’ says the Lord.” Do we believe that? Believing is one thing, but getting down to living it out – that is something else. Let each one of us be earnest with himself and get off his soft bed. Even if it costs you your life, go right in, into the thick of the fight! Jesus is alive, and Jesus is victor, and he has given us our part to carry out.

But as we do our part, let us not forget that what finally matters is God's deeds, not ours. “With God we shall do valiantly!” (Ps. 108:13) This was said by David, who went to war without putting his trust in weapons. Sad to say, our faith does not bring about such deeds. The only kind of deed of God we know is something like founding an institution without the necessary money. If, after energetic begging, the money comes in, we call this a deed of God! This, and other things like it, are all that we know. These, however, are our deeds, not the deeds of God. They are all right, but we have to admit that they are but a makeshift solution until God comes and intervenes. To hope for deeds of the kingdom – that is faith. We must be beggars in the kingdom of God and not go away from the door until we have been given something from God. And we really need drastic deeds of God.

In this respect the game seems to be up today. God is simply not a reality for us anymore. Even in my own calling I scarcely ever bring about the living consciousness of God that I would really like people to have. True, I inspire many people, I give lofty thoughts to many people, but still something is missing, something that seems to have disappeared from our time. Human beings stand there, bleak and bare. The devout have lost their salt.

The greatest deeds of God are not those that happen to sick people. These are not so important. It is much more important that we see things happening to the healthy, that we see changes in people's lives and in the state of the world. What kind of deed is from God? I would say, for example, it is when guns are no longer fired in war. Do you think this could be possible? Such a thought seems to make everybody chuckle! But did not deeds like this take place in Israel? (Josh. 5:13–6:27). Similar deeds are what we need today more than anything else so that everything is taken completely out of our hands and put into the hands of the living one. Of course, when something does come from God it will come at the right time and in God's way. What is necessary is that God's reality enters again into our lives.

This is what is lacking. God is not a reality for us. No other time has had so little of God. It is quite extraordinary. There is more religion than ever before,

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thing else.**

yet our hearts are much less filled with God. But we can be filled with such a joy that we can turn over a new leaf and so become genuine people, a changed people. To this end we want to be beggars. This will not come about through outward deeds but through something that happens from God and his kingdom. When this has been experienced, we have gained everything. Without it, God remains dead.

No confession
brings perfection,
no pastoral visit
brings wholeness.

**Oscar
Romero**

Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”
So Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom... When he saw the crowds, he began to teach them, saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit... Blessed are those who mourn.”

Matthew 4:17–5:16

6

The Kingdom Is at Hand!

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke about the kingdom of heaven, and he was filled with a mighty spirit, the spirit of the rule of God. It raised a storm amongst his listeners when he said: “Repent! Become quite a different person! Everything must change. The kingdom of heaven is at hand!” That is, leave all your

preoccupations, give up all that has influenced you till now, and give up every power that has gripped you. A new kind of power is taking over. A new monarch is on the throne. A new king has assumed his reign. You shall have a new Lord over you. The old is passing away and a new time is coming.

It must have been a powerful spirit in Jesus that made the people shout, as with one voice, "What is that?" This spirit made them believe him and trust themselves to the Man from whom came the message for which many had been waiting: "That is he! That is the one through whom the almighty God is bringing in a new rulership, a new kingdom – that is he!" (John 6:14–15)

Although Christ spoke only of human matters, what he said was not at all acceptable to the earthly authorities. What he said was natural enough, yet it was much more. His teaching was not against human nature, but it did bring something of the divine into human affairs, something heavenly into the natural world. Indeed, it was as if earth would become paradise. People ate bread in the wilderness, where there had been none, and in place of sickness, health was given. Even those who had died were given new life. Joy came in all its fullness where there had been suffering and mourning.

All this took place in the most commonplace experiences of human life. No thrones were demolished, no special parties formed, no statues were erected –

everyone continued in his own house and his own place. But everyone, especially the poorest, had access now to something quite other, something from heaven, from God himself. When the kingdom of heaven comes close to us we experience something totally new. Into the life of each individual something amazingly alive comes. God's will is for life, for what is good, free, genuine, eternal.

This is how the kingdom announces itself: the rulership of God is not visible through words alone, nor does it emerge from a different religious understanding, but it consists in deed and in truth (John 3:21). People become different because they are now living under a different rulership. This rulership is not a human government but the authority that comes from heaven into our hearts. And since it proclaims life, we are for life. Since this divine dominion rules by righteousness, we become righteous. In Jesus Christ, the Son sent by God, life on earth becomes fundamentally new. Such transformation does not come from your own efforts as you imagine. No, it comes through the strength and grace of God. The deeds of God come to us and a new world is built up through the strength and sheer joy in life: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand! Rise up and get going – away with all other dominion. Let God be your Lord!" This is what it means.

God is not looking for heroic figures. He is looking for those who live from their hearts.

Is this still true for today? Sadly, almost two thousand years have passed and the world is still asleep. Instead of the reign of God, a Christian religion has been established. In the course of time it has become accepted that there is but one God, the Father; one Lord, Jesus Christ. Right up to this day, the Creator is recognized – and that is good. But the world is still sleeping under a canopy. Under this or that beautiful church roof every kind of dominion, other than God's, has crept in. Today we are subservient to many different authorities. Some of us are directed in one way, others in another, and each of us tend to “believe” accordingly. There are also religious empires: Catholic, Protestant, Lutheran, Methodist – in short, every possible denomination. But where is the reign of God?

There are also demonic empires: dominions of death; the rulership of avarice, which is rooted in money; and then all the need and poverty – yes the need – which drives people to greed and envy and fear. And so we stand again before the question: “Is the kingdom of heaven imminent?” Can we dare to say today, “Be on the watch, all of you! The kingdom is really on the way”? It has not come in nineteen hundred years; truly, it is proclaimed in the gospel, promised by God. But here we are again, subject to so many alien powers, all of them worthless compared with the rulership of God. Will it come one day?

“Yes! The kingdom will indeed come! Watch for it!” How dare I say this? Is it foolhardy of me to say this? No! I am completely certain of it, absolutely sure. Now is the time when we have to say, “Watch out, everyone! A new reign is about to begin.” God’s rule will dissolve all other authorities, even those we have so far taken to be good. But don’t be afraid; the kingdom of heaven is coming! In today’s decisive time, amid so much disharmony, dejection, commotion, where the urge is to put oneself first and in the center, to take the lead, to push agendas through, and for each party or group to be pitted against the other, each wanting to be in control – just in this day the kingdom of heaven is again drawing near. Today God wants to rule, and he is already making a beginning. Doubtless, in the time of Jesus it was a matter for derision when he said, “It is beginning today!” Today too, many people mock any proclamation that Jesus will establish his kingdom – but many also understand. Yes indeed, today is again a decisive hour! We must be equipped for the rulership of God, and this will not disgrace us.

We should love nothing more than to fulfill the justice of God, not in church services (which often attract people as honey attracts flies), but rather in our daily lives, wherever we are. That is when we have to work zealously for the commandments of God and his truth, yes, his rights; there we must show our hunger and thirst

for righteousness; there we must prove whether or not we want God. We cannot prove that in our churches but must do it outside, in the fields, in business, in daily life, in your family – you husband, you wife, and you children. Together, we have to look out for the rights of God. You should be very fearful lest you neglect anything in the pursuit of righteousness – that is the condition.

Therefore, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” Be awake to the thought. Yes, today we must seize the opportunity for God’s rulership. God’s mighty hand can reach into our lives and we shall be different people – swept out of our old selves and living in a new time! We must gather together again. Who will come under God’s rulership – who?

God is not looking for heroic figures – wonderful people – who captivate others with their charisma. It must have been quite baffling to the educated world when Jesus pronounced, “Blessed are the poor in spirit” – blessed are the uneducated, those who do not try to understand everything with their intellect! Blessed are they who do not have to impress others by showing how smart they are. Blessed are they who are not always theorizing about spiritual things. What Jesus is saying is that it is the day laborers who are blessed, those who live from hand to mouth and yet are skilled with their hoe or pickax. Blessed are the farm workers with

True wisdom is found in the streets, not in palaces and lecture halls.

their plow, who can't think much about anything except how best to do their work. Blessed are the craftsmen who create their handicraft and work hard to finish it on time but do not have time to read many books. Blessed are all such people whom we label uneducated – for these people are taught by God.

The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these, those who are poor in spirit – for it is these who understand God, for they live according to their hearts. The others live according to their heads and thus cannot be used. They are too concerned about what might happen and don't leave the Father freedom to act. Therefore, those people are blessed who remain as children toward the Father in everything life brings them and do not set themselves up to be superior, as though the good fortune of the world lay in that. Praise God that true wisdom is to be found upon the streets and not in palaces and lecture halls (1 Cor. 1:18–25). God does not despise the humble, the insignificant, the poor. He sees the divine image in the simplest people; he sees the ardor of their hunger and thirst after righteousness. He sees the suffering of each one. He sees the broken ones who through their weakness have become humble, pure of heart, and merciful, and who do not make their hearts into a desert. He sees those who are sick with longing for the Savior's will. The Father sees the wearied work-

ers, who are oppressed, working by the sweat of their brows. He sees everyone and accepts them all. To such as these the kingdom draws near.

How good it is that the rulership of God does not depend on the flaunted abilities of a few people who are at the top. No, his rulership first seeks out the sick, the poor, the abandoned. God's blessing is not a matter of improving the surroundings and decorating the houses of those who already have it made. This is why each person must become poor and remain so, so that it can never be said to anyone: "First you must acquire this or that, or else we can't make use of you!" In God's kingdom only one thing is required: a complete turn-about. If you are wealthy, let go of those ridiculous possessions! Say to yourself, "I will not let my money rule me. I won't envy those who have much. I want only the lordship of God!" If you are poor, turn completely away from your poverty. "I won't let cares and sorrows rule me. I want God to rule also in my greatest suffering. God will help me again. I will remain under his leadership."

So when you hear about God's kingdom, be true to it; that is the only thing required of us. Be faithful. Where alien influences creep in – away with them – we want God alone! Let nothing else have dominion; everything depends on this. Do not work yourselves up with worry. Your sinfulness, your worst qualities, your

circumstance will be overcome when you become aware of how false the world is and how you have played along with it, and how the pure rule of God wants to break in. Then you can say: "Away with all else. Here the one pure Spirit rules!" Everything depends on that.

Be faithful in your grief, in your hungering and thirsting for righteousness. Only be true to your Father in heaven (Matt. 5:38–48). Be merciful to those who persecute you, those who revile you. No swearword can hurt you. Let there be nothing else within your heart, in your suffering, in your poverty, in your affliction, or your care. Simply remain faithful to God's rulership and help others to do the same. Be compassionate toward others who are in need. Be meek with those who are malicious. If others try to pick a quarrel with you, make peace with them. Let nothing come from a false leading. Most of all, "Repent! Believe in the kingdom of heaven." We must prepare ourselves for this; be true to yourself, and be true to others. Then we can conquer the world, and all at once God's kingdom will come to us!

This kingdom – what does it consist of? In the first place, of comfort and suffering. When we are sinking in our need, which is still going on, however ghastly it is at the moment, this word of comfort penetrates and prevails: "God is indeed our Father and he will care for us!" That is the kingdom of heaven. That is also a great miracle. It cannot come about through words – there

How good it is that the rulership of God does not depend on the flaunted abilities of a few!

is no comfort for anyone in mere words! But the kingdom of heaven comes to comfort our sorrow. It comes to us sinners to bring us to righteousness. And it comes thus, so that the earthly kingdom also is brought into God's hand and into the hands of his people. It comes in mercy for the merciful, it brings peace to the peacemakers. It comes for the pure of heart so that they may see God as he is. All these are fragments of the kingdom of heaven. We may expect them today in faith.

In every misfortune, in each sin we commit, in all hunger and thirst, our longing is for the kingdom to break in. We believe in it, and we never want to lose it: "Father in heaven, we belong to you – we want to belong to nothing but your kingdom! It will be there for the poor, the burdened ones, the sinners, the sick, those who are oppressed, the poorest of the poor! It must be there for them, if only we believe and hold fast to it and never let it be taken from us. It must be visible today to everyone who believes in the name of Jesus the Christ!" Then the kingdom of heaven will come, and the deeds of the kingdom will be performed. Then it will be manifested to every heart; and finally it will also become visible throughout the world. Then it will manifest itself against the powers of darkness, against sin and death, against all violence and every false authority. This is how the kingdom of heaven will be established in every detail.

Those who cling to the past, who hold on to the wisdom of this world and to each human insight, are of no use. We must become whole, and we must never cease to entreat, "Father in heaven, we give ourselves up to you completely. We want to be your people." Who knows but that then this horrific need that has descended upon our earth might be averted? But if in our own cities there are so many who are so severely downtrodden, should we then just set up a howl and lament it? No, we must cry out, "Come, we want to help one another. We want to reach out to each one and relieve each special need. We want to join with you to become one people serving God. We want to take your hand and entreat God together that his kingdom shall dwell among us, that it shall become more established in our midst so that in actual deed and truth we can say, 'Here – here we have the deeds of God. Here we have not merely good people; here Jesus Christ is at work!'"

Thus we want to become salt, we want to be a light! We do not question that we are sinners; but God has called us, and we are determined to be ready. God must come to our help so that all other influences can be blotted out of our hearts, so that we shall become like the peacemakers, the merciful, the meek ones, standing true under God's rulership, throwing out everything that does not belong to it and rejoicing in adversity

because of it. We shall thus come to know God's strength, God's majesty, God's consoling power, the first fruits of the heavenly kingdom. Then we shall become joyful that we have heard the call: "Repent, for the kingdom is at hand!"

No program accomplishes
the church's mission.

**Oscar
Romero**

Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.” The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them.

Matthew 21:1-6

7

Jesus Needs You – Not Your Religion

It is no good to prepare ourselves to receive God’s coming by casting longing eyes to heaven, expecting something extraordinary to come from there and catch the attention of the whole world. It is only by actually standing up and fighting for the Lord that we can truly prepare ourselves for his coming. We are only prepared

when we are determined, heart and soul here on earth, to becoming true disciples who, with the coming spirit of the Lord, want to set things right in accordance with God's truth and justice. We must not indulge in exalted spiritual feelings or in all kinds of speculations about the coming of Christ with the idea that this is the way to meet the Lord. It is better to think of how you can go to meet Christ now, on earth, and how you can be at his service with things as they are now.

This story shows how simple this can be: Two disciples are sent to fetch a donkey for Jesus to ride upon. They do this, and because they do it without thinking about it, they are servants in God's kingdom. After the owner of the donkey asks, "What are you doing? That donkey is mine," and they answer him, "Let us be, the Lord and Master has need of it," the owner does not stop to think about it, but out of respect to Jesus he surrenders the donkey to the Master. In so doing, he becomes a servant of God's kingdom because he does what is asked of him at the moment – the only true help to the Savior on earth.

We must write this deeply on our hearts. Consequently I say again, keep away from a lot of religious feelings. We must stand on the ground when the Savior comes and not float up into the air. Nowadays, unfortunately, many things are done with the idea that the more spiritual and otherworldly we are, the better.

But it is just the other way round. The more we learn to seek truth and to act on it as far as possible in the situation in which God has placed us, even if that be in the dirt of the most perverted people and institutions, the better it is. For the Savior does not want to come as an idea but as a reality, wherever people live and struggle (Matt. 18:20). It is here that we must make way for him; and how can we do this except by acting in accordance with his nature and will? And his nature is simple, true, and genuine.

Every person who is waiting for Jesus can receive a distinct impression of what is right and good (Rom. 2:12–16). Perhaps he may feel that one or the other habit he has cannot be pleasing to God. If he stops it and changes, then he is making way for the one who comes. When our hearts are set on this practical kind of waiting, God will surely guide us every step of the way. In fact, all sincere followers of Jesus will be given so much practical work to do that – if you will permit me to say so – they will hardly have time for long devotions or for sitting in church (James 1:27).

It is the task of Jesus' disciples to put the nature of Jesus into action. This fact is generally not understood, since Jesus has been called a founder of a new religion. But that is not God's word to the world. His aim was never to give us a new religion in order that we might

We must stand on the ground and not float into the air.

live a bit more decently – in that case Moses and his law would have sufficed.

With Jesus' simple command to the disciples the Savior is saying, "Don't make a religion out of me! That which I bring from God is not a religion, for all religions are rigid. They don't want to move forward, they don't intend to change. They set up shrines, they institute museums, they set up councils, and because of all this they are a stumbling block to the world." As a matter of fact – to be quite frank – our religions are a hindrance not only to the world but to the history of humanity.

Nothing is more dangerous to the advancement of God's kingdom than religion: for it is what makes us heathens. But this is what Christianity has become. Do you not know that it is possible to kill Christ with such Christianity! After all, what is more important – Christianity or Christ? And I'll say even more: we can kill Christ with the Bible! Which is greater: the Bible or Christ? Yes, we can even kill Christ with our prayer. When we approach God with our prayers full of self-love and self-satisfaction, when the aim of our prayers is to make our world great, our prayers are in vain.

The Savior will not allow himself to become petrified in religion. That is why the Savior told the story of the ten virgins, some of whom were wise and others not (Matt. 25:1–13). With this, he says, "There are some who make a religion out of me, a cozy haven, a state of

**The
Savior is
saying:
"Don't
make a
religion
out of
me!"**

bliss. It is the others who will be the living Christians, always open to change, always seeking something new, until the entire world stands there renewed.” So ask yourselves: are you ready to go for it, or aren’t you?

Dear friends, we must grasp how important it is to surrender ourselves completely. There is so much Christianity in which hearts are not subjugated, so much religiosity that leaves people just as they were before. The way to serve Jesus, to go to meet God, has not yet been understood. People think they do this with churches, sermons, and worship meetings, but it is not done in this way. This way of doing things has become so rooted in us that it costs a tremendous effort to turn around and find again what will really prepare the way for the kingdom of God.

When Jesus speaks it is always a social matter, a matter for humanity. What Jesus did was to found the cause of God on earth, in order to establish a new society that finally is to include all nations – in contrast to the societies we have made, societies where not even true families can be formed; where fathers do not know how to care for their children; where friendships are formed and torn apart; in short, where everyone lives in heartache. Faced with this wretched social order, Jesus wants to build a new one. His word to us is this: “You belong to God and not to these man-made societies.”

Recently I read a little book by a Russian clergyman

in which he says that we need neither churches nor cathedrals – a barn will do just as well. This, however, is beside the point. Jesus is not the founder of a new religion; he renews life. We must love the word of God spoken to humankind; and if we are to love it, we must first understand that this word is much greater than the Bible. It cannot be chained, written down as if set in cement. When God's word is frozen, even the best Christians are able to justify their hate toward their fellowmen, even killing them and vehemently separating themselves from them. No! God's word is a word that binds, and yet it is a word of freedom.

As free people, your only loyalty is to God, and your duty is to work so that God enters into this miserable, lost, cursed society. Now compare this word of God with our Christianity. Today there are Christians who believe that they will (after death or at Jesus' return) fly with the Savior to heaven and then laugh at those left behind. I find it incomprehensible that those who call themselves devout consider themselves better than others or exempt from God's judgment. This kind of religion is false because it separates me from other human beings. I will have nothing to do with that! Jesus entered right into the human condition in all its ugliness. He united with people. He did not separate himself from us. In the same way I want to come alongside the lowest people in hell and not separate myself. I want to

**Nothing
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see who is finally deemed righteous, and whether Jesus is not greater than our righteousness.

Do not be offended, then, if I say that people today think of the kingdom of God as much too supernatural and as something completely foreign to our human condition. They think that some day something will come down from heaven that will change everything all at once as if by magic, and that in the meantime it is all right to let life go on as it is, so long as we attend to our religious duties. Things have gone so far that you can meet extremely religious people living in horribly untrue and unjust circumstances, and they don't even lift a finger to change anything. Their faith might one day have to be called a fraud. You know well that to such the Savior comes like a thief (1 Thess. 5:1–2). Yet the Savior also comes like a conqueror.

Therefore, if we would put right what we can in ourselves because Jesus lives in us, and if we would work only for the good, then the way for him would be properly prepared. Even if much remains that, in the end, only he can put right, we will show that we are people who are not simply waiting for their salvation in a self-centered, self-loving way, but who rather are consumed by eagerness to smooth the way for God, even if it is only in a very small way.

Yes, everything – I tell you everything – that is and

comes from God's kingdom must first be prepared on earth. This must become more and more practical so that in the end it can be tangibly grasped. We must make an effort for him where we live, where we work, so that in all we do we do it for the sake of God. Then we won't have to concern ourselves about whether the Savior will return tomorrow or in a thousand years. We will already live for his coming. The kingdom of God becomes our cause and is revealed to us in life more and more clearly and surely, because with this attitude we are able to experience something from God.

So let everyone consider: How can I show obedience in some way, out of love to Jesus the Lord? Yes, *today* how can I show obedience? There is always great joy in heaven whenever someone does something for God. It can be quite a small thing, but it shows whenever one thinks only of being obedient, obedient to any true word that strikes the heart. All heaven is eager for such disciples. We have enough people who pray, who attend meetings and services. And more than enough people who argue about what they believe to be right or wrong. But of doers, heaven has not enough! There are not enough people who grasp that in the first place it is not knowledge, or doctrine, or preaching, that is lacking. What is lacking is right living, and this will only come about when people together take up a more truthful

and genuine attitude for the sake of God.

This must be our attitude. An enthusiasm must burn in us, not merely to pick up some spiritual refreshment, but to do something for Christ, something that is right and true before him and his authority. Let us go at it enthusiastically, dear friends. This is the way we will go to meet God's kingdom. Oh, if I could only make that clear to all who read this! So much depends upon the disciples of Jesus being inwardly so disposed that a rich spring of living, of active life, flows from them through which their whole being, always under control, can flourish until the moment when they can belong wholly and completely to the Lord.

Unfortunately this matter of being disciples is a difficult thing, which is why Jesus had so few of them (Matt. 7:21–27). Anyone who cannot follow a command, a word that comes to him in truth, will not find the kingdom. You will not come into the kingdom unless you obey! The most harmful thing to the kingdom of God is that so few want to be obedient. Instead, everyone cultivates his own special brand of spirituality. There are now a thousand expressions of spirituality: in short, every kind of piety. But where is the person who will obey God's simple command when it comes to him in truth and submit to it? Where is the person who will allow himself to be thrown

**Christianity
can kill
Christ.
So can
the Bible.**

into the gutter for God and Jesus and yet remain true, like Peter? Such a person knows in his heart, “Jesus is the way! I will follow him for death or life! Even though this goes against all my thoughts and feelings, Jesus is victor! I will stay with him.”

I tell you, Jesus will come as a conqueror and will strike you down without mercy unless you are obedient people, in spite of all your hopes for God’s kingdom (Rev. 3:1–3). Even if you are weak, it doesn’t matter as long as you can say, “I will follow! I will follow! I will follow! Wherever I see truth, I will go straight to it and not pause to consider. I will serve Jesus for the sake of God!” Only in this way will there be a circle of disciples around Jesus upon whom he can depend. He doesn’t need strong people, nor so-called confident, bold, trained, or courageous people who push things ahead in the world. He needs people who are broken, who fear lest they become disobedient to his command. Those are the people he needs, for they are servants. All the others who have a manufactured piety and feel themselves so secure in it, are for the most part hardly usable as servants. But those who fear and tremble, those who are shaken and shocked by the word of truth yet joyfully say yes and take action – these are his people.

Therefore we must learn to surrender ourselves in a very simple, practical way, and go at it with zeal: “I will surrender myself; I will keep God’s cause uppermost in

my heart so that it may come to be on earth.” We want to live in such a way that here on this earthly plane something visible may happen that will bring honor to God.

May God grant that we grasp this and are confident in it. It is so easy and simple and clear that any child can understand it. Let everyone, in his own place, become obedient. Listen! Listen, children, when something that is right is said to you, and be eager to do it. You, young men and young women, if you know that something is right, do it! You older ones, men and women, if you see that something is right, do it! And anyone else among us, sick or healthy, high or low, impoverished or not – if you know that something is right, then do it! Don’t think too long about it. Just consider: is it right, or not? If it is right, go at it. Then you will find Christ.

No set of goals
and objectives
includes everything.

**Oscar
Romero**

What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?

By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?...

The death Jesus died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:1–11

8

The New Life

The apostle Paul writes about a new condition of life. This idea is foreign to us now. What do we know of death? We are always trying to preserve our life, fretting over earthly things and filling our hearts with the desires of this life – this same life that already contains the worms that are a sign of our corruption. And yet things should have changed by now with us

Christians in that we should reign as kings in life, and death should no longer dominate everything. The Lord Jesus brings this about. He has made it possible for a new condition of life to begin in us.

Previously, as the apostle says elsewhere, death became king through Adam's sin to the damnation of all (Rom. 5:12). They died and could not be helped. No help existed. The Lord could temporarily protect and shelter a few through the promise, but in reality all people were subject to the law of death. Death was king and the only power on earth. But now, through Christ, a new life has come into being. Because of his deed, life will now rule. Now by a word of justice everyone shall be released from damnation to enter into life. Our whole being will be immersed in this, and we ourselves shall rule over life (Rom. 8:1-2).

At first sight it looks as though Jesus has done everything, arranged everything. Now everybody may receive grace and be able to live in God's grace. Shall we go on sinning now, since everything is so easy and Christ has done everything for us? Can we sit back and relax, thinking, "God be praised and thanked, the Savior is very loving, he saves me. He saves me! Of course, I am still a terrible sinner, but the Savior saves me through grace!" So people lie around and live like everybody else, without thinking that Christ's righteousness should cause us to set things right. We must go into the new condi-

tion of life with our whole being – not just skim around it, comforting ourselves that everything is now all right, that Jesus has made everything right and will prepare everything for us. No! We must move into the newness of life with our whole being and really have living soil under our feet. There is no other way if we understand the Savior rightly, and that is what baptism means. Baptism is nothing less than an event that allows us to partake of Christ's death so that we may live with him and enter into the new life. Baptism is there for us to die to sin and to be buried in the flesh with Christ so that we too may enter into the resurrection of Jesus. Just as he was awakened from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too are to begin a new life.

Thus the death of Jesus Christ, or the dying to our selfish nature, is transmitted to us by the Savior by means of baptism. This should grip us so that our whole being responds with a yes. I no longer have to worry about this life of sin. I can strive for something different! "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17)

We must become filled with zeal, with joy and gratitude, gladly enduring anything, however hard, in order to be free of death and of this life in the midst of death. Then the powers of the resurrection come closer to us; then Christ really becomes the risen one, and a new life comes into being. Not the kind of life we have been

Everybody wants to be saved, but who has any real desire for a new life?

This is what we are about:

We plant the seeds
that one day will grow.

**Oscar
Romero**

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.

Galatians 6:14–16

9

Forget Yourself for God

The Lord of Creation, the God of the nations, has other people than us. We Christians are not exactly the most important and best in the world! We are only one group, but there are also others (John 10:16). It is very kind of God to include us among them. We

We water seeds
already planted,
knowing that they hold
future promise.

**Oscar
Romero**

See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a tested stone, a precious corner-
stone for a sure foundation;
the one who trusts
will never be dismayed.

Isaiah 28:16

10

God Is Seeking a Zion

Whenever God's cause on earth is about to leap forward, God always creates a Zion. That means a community of people who live a distinct life and keep an open heart and mind for God's working and speaking. There has never been any illumination from God given to the world without such a reality. Laws that are right in themselves become living and true only in connection with such a Zion. Without a Zion we wither and die away. Thus many doctrines produce something relatively good only as long as they are alive in hearts that seek God and form a Zion. But if this Zion ceases,

We lay foundations that
will need further development.

We provide yeast that produces
effects far beyond our capabilities.

**Oscar
Romero**

When Jesus saw the young man's mother, his heart went out to her, and he said, "Don't cry." Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him to his mother.

Luke 7:11-15

11

Not Words, but Deeds

What can we do with a story like this one, where Jesus brings a dead man back to life? What do we do with this when we hear that ten thousand cholera victims are buried in a common grave? And how much more of the miseries of death do we now experience? Where has a dead person ever been raised? So what are we to make of this story? And who among those who believe in Jesus can really find the courage to take an event such as is described here so seriously that

We cannot do everything,
and there is a sense of liberation
in realizing that.

**Oscar
Romero**

I want to know Christ
and the power of his resurrection
and the fellowship of his sufferings,
becoming like him in his death,
and so, somehow, to attain to the
resurrection from the dead.

Philippians 3:10–11

12

Christ Is Rising

Only when we have personally encountered Christ have we entered into a new world. We must actually come to Christ, and not just through the motions of coming to him, reading about him in the Bible and saying, “He is a fine teacher, and he says such good and beautiful things; I am going to try hard to do them, and I’m going to stick with him. He’s a good man, or even God’s Son.” We can do all that and this might well make us a certain kind of good Christian. But more than that has to happen. Our hearts and minds have to be lifted

This enables us
to do something and
to do it very well.

**Oscar
Romero**

I will bless the Lord at all times,
his praise will always be on my lips.
My soul will boast in the Lord;
let the afflicted hear and rejoice.
Glorify the Lord with me;
let us exalt his name together.

Psalm 34:1-3

13

What Do You Stand For?

I will bless the Lord at all times,” exclaims the psalmist. These words from scripture are not just pleasant, pious words to be recited in ease and comfort. For Israel, this verse was a battle cry born out of need and temptation: “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them... The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing” (Ps. 34:7-9).

It may be incomplete,
but it is a beginning,
a step along the way, an
opportunity for God's
grace to enter and
do the rest.

**Oscar
Romero**

Be dressed for action
and have your lamps lit;
be like those who are waiting
for their master to return
from the wedding banquet,
so that they may open
the door for him as soon
as he comes and knocks.

Luke 12:35–36

14

Get Ready for Action

You must not be surprised if our hearts are not exactly lit in regard to the coming of God. To us it is like a treasure whose value is appreciated by only a few and in which most people take only a passing interest. Of course, there are many today who sigh to heaven, “Savior, come now!” But they are not sighing for the sake of God’s kingdom. They cry out like this only when they are in trouble and want God to help them. And they don’t know of any help that is more effective than

We may never see the
end results, but that is
the difference between
the master builder
and the worker.

**Oscar
Romero**

The Jews gathered around Jesus, saying,
“How long will you keep us in suspense?
If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”
Jesus answered, “I did tell you, but you
do not believe. The miracles I do in
my father’s name speak for me, but
you do not believe because you are not
my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice;
I know them, and they follow me.”

John 10:22–30

15

Don’t Push – Surrender!

In the kingdom of God impatience can make people blind and lead them tragically astray. All the good things that we strive for and hope for from God can be taken away from us when we give in to this failing and are impatient.

We are workers,
not master builders –
ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of
a future not our own.

**Oscar
Romero**

Because of the oppression of the
poor and the groaning of the needy,
I will now arise,” says the Lord.
“I will protect them from those
who malign them.”

Psalm 12:5

16

The Power of God

The Lord promises that he will arise on behalf of the poor and the needy. How? That is always a puzzle. But here we have it: “God will do it. The poor and the needy are before me and I must help them.” But now, how will he do it?

A lot can be said in answer to this question. The faithless say, “Oh, yes, even in our misery he can bless us – and after all, there is eternity.” But in this way not a single need is overcome, not a single tear is dried. And this business of eternity – honestly, I don’t quite trust it when people console me with hopes of eternity. If I

Amen

Rejoice in the Lord always.

I will say it again: Rejoice!

Let your gentleness be evident to all.

The Lord is near...And the peace
of God, which transcends all
understanding, will guard your hearts
and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:4-9

17

Rejoice in the Lord

We should rejoice in the Lord. But why? We must have a reason, not just in theory but in reality. We must have something concrete in which to rejoice, not in just anything, but in Christ. It is not that all other joys should be taken away from us, but these are not the joys that last. All those things that take place on this earth, making us happy for the moment, are very short-lived. Whatever earthly joys there may be are piecemeal, and joyful moods fill our hearts only

Afterword

by Karl Barth

I must post a warning for those from theological circles, as well as for those who think only politically. You might have the misfortune to lay aside this book, discontented and disappointed after browsing through it a few times. We cannot read it as we are prone to read other books and articles. Blumhardt puts forward no guiding principles. He produces no historical and psychological conclusions. He speaks neither politics nor theology. There is no speculative probing into problems, or drawing conclusions, or building systems. He refutes nobody, and nobody needs to feel refuted by him, but he does not concur with anybody else's views either. He pins down neither himself nor anyone else with precise principles.

In fact, Blumhardt does not expound a particular point of view. Rather, he lets us experience the echo that the Bible aroused within him every day. He does not want to say anything brilliant, set off any fireworks, or strike any blow: he simply tells us the divine truth in the world as it meets him. I suspect that he would have quite a few things to say about the conflicts and prob-

From *Der Freie Schweitzer Arbeiter*, September 1916, in response to Blumhardt's *Morgen-Andachten*.

