



A
BLUMHARDT
READER



Thy Kingdom Come

EDITED BY VERNARD ELLER

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Everyone must concede
that the kingdom of God
comes not through logical concepts
but through surprises.

CHRISTOPH FRIEDRICH BLUMHARDT

The subject of my doctoral study was Søren Kierkegaard, the nineteenth-century Danish thinker. In the course of that research I came across Emil Brunner’s testimony to the effect that the best predecessors of Neo-Orthodoxy were “two great figures of Pietism—Chr. Blumhardt, in Boll, and Kierkegaard.” The strange pairing stuck in my mind: the name I had never heard along with the one heard all over the place. Were these two to be considered equals?

It was, then, in 1966 I discovered some of Blumhardt’s work, namely, the 1963 Plough Publishing House translation of Lejeune’s *Christoph Blumhardt and His Message*. Since that time it has been my magnificent obsession (well, *one* of my magnificent obsessions) to get more of the work of the Blumhardts—father and son—known in larger circles of Christian theologians and laity.

The Plough Publishing House is the publishing arm of that longstanding Christian community commonly known as the Bruderhof. My interest in the Blumhardts immediately got me into contact with these dedicated and friendly people, resulting in two different visits to their headquarters and archives at Woodcrest, Rifton, New York.

Out of longstanding interest and through connections with descendants of the Blumhardts, the Bruderhof has been largely responsible for keeping the Blumhardt tradition alive in this country. These people regularly use readings from

the Blumhardts in their worship and meditation. They are responsible for virtually all of the translation and publication of Blumhardt material in English and hold the largest collection of Blumhardt materials outside Germany.

Gottlieben Blumhardt, daughter of Christoph Blumhardt, devoted the last years of her life to collecting the works of her father and grandfather. It was this effort that made possible the German publication of a great deal of Blumhardt material during the past decade.

It is too little to say that the Bruderhof has been *helpful* in connection with this book. Without the Bruderhof archives, Johann Christoph Arnold (the Plough publisher), and the anonymous members who did the first draft translation of much of the material herein, this book simply would not have been possible. I want to take the opportunity to express my profound gratitude to the community and to all the individual members who have lent themselves to *our* magnificent obsession.

The search for a publisher to take on the book and competent translators to get the Blumhardts' German into English has been a long-drawn and many-directioned one. The publishers, of course, have now come down to one and the translators to four or five of us; but along the way, a whole host of well-wishers and moral supporters did their bit to keep the obsession alive. For a while it almost amounted to the establishment of an underground Blunhardt society; my file of correspondence is several inches thick.

One sort of support came from several different book editors—none of whom were able to sell their houses on the

book idea but who did give personal encouragement to the project. There *could* be enough Blumhardt books to have given one to each, I am sorry that did not happen; but I am grateful for their having made the big try.

Some of the people now to be named are since deceased, and others have moved from the institution with which they are here associated. Many of the contacts were made through the Bruderhof rather than directly with me. But one way or another, to one degree or another, there have been expressions of support from the following.

From Germany, Karl Barth (via a letter written by his secretary, Eberhard Busch); Eduard Heimann (a long-time colleague Paul Tillich); Gottlieben Blumhardt (daughter of Christoph Blumhardt); Margrit Hönig (granddaughter of Christoph Blumhardt); and Christine Ragaz (daughter of the Swiss theologian, Leonhard Ragaz).

From this side of the ocean, Markus Barth (Pittsburgh Theological Seminary); James Smart (Union Theological Seminary); James Luther Adams (Harvard Divinity School), who also offered to speak for his deceased friend, Paul Tillich; Franklin Littell (Temple University); Harvey Cox (Harvard Divinity School); Martin Marty (University of Chicago Divinity School); and H. Martin Rumscheidt (Atlantic School of Theology).

Recommendations of this caliber convinced me that the project represented an essential contribution and thus kept

me at it through the years. I am grateful to all these people.

Because of my own obvious inadequacy in the German language, I have had to have the help of those who could perform at least the first step toward an acceptable translation. These people will be named at the point in the book where they made their contributions: but here I want to take public notice of the time, effort, and skill they have given and express heartfelt gratitude for it.

Finally, I want to recognize and thank (without naming) all the relatives, colleagues, friends, and some new acquaintances who have constituted a general support group for the project and for me in the project. Among these certainly are to be included Eerdmans Publishing Company and all the people there.

Vernard Eller
La Verne, CA
January 1980

INTRODUCTION

In this introduction there are two things I want to do and one I do not want to do. The not doing of the one will be the most difficult.

But, in the first place, no matter how sore the temptation, I am going to try not to do anything in the way of *introducing* the Blumhardts' thought—whether describing it, characterizing it, explaining it, or commenting upon it. Once I start that, there would be no end. I prefer to devote the space to letting them introduce their thought for themselves—which is what this whole book is about.

Besides, these two are fully capable of introducing their own thought. Perhaps every word of theirs recorded here originated as oral discourse delivered informally before a lay audience. The Blumhardts may be the theologians who least need a third party to analyze and “explain” them. If their own words fail to inform, enlighten, or move the reader, there are no words of mine that could reverse the situation.

Besides attempting not to introduce the Blumhardts' thought, I intend to present a whole collection of facts purposed to show the sort of influence the Blumhardts have had upon modern Christian thought. The hope is that this will arouse within the reader the question, “Why have I not heard of them before?” thus exciting him to do something about it, namely, read the remainder of the book. Finally, then, I will offer brief biographical sketches of the two men.

The two Blumhardts, Johann Christoph (1805-80) and Christoph Friedrich (1842-1919), were father and son. Their careers—much more pastoral than theological in character—focused upon the son’s succeeding his father as leader of what might be called a Christian retreat center that the father had established at Bad Boll in southwestern Germany. The thought of the two men shows enough continuity and agreement that it can be treated as one “theology.”

We already have noted that Emil Brunner identified Christoph Blumhardt and Kierkegaard as the two greatest predecessors of the Neo-Orthodox movement. Karl Barth also said enough to indicate that he would agree with the opinion. And, independently, both Leonhard Ragaz and Theodor Haecker had made the same pairing and showed interest in it. Brunner’s father had as much as been converted by the younger Blumhardt, which certainly made Emil’s own relationship to Blumhardt much more than a sheerly intellectual one.

Eduard Thurneysen, Barth’s long-time pastor-partner, visited Bad Boll and studied under Blumhardt as early as 1904. And it was he who subsequently introduced Barth to Bad Boll and to Blumhardt. In 1926, Thurneysen published a small book *Introducing Blumhardtian thought*; and he quoted the Blumhardts at some length in his books on pastoral care. Over a period of thirty years, Barth wrote three different essays on the Blumhardts and gave them major notice both in *Church Dogmatics* and in other of his works.

Barth's chosen touchstone for his own theology, "Jesus Is Victor," is a motto from Father Blumhardt. In Gerhard Sauter's doctoral study of the Blumhardts (the normative scholarly analysis of their thought), there is a major section entitled, "Considerations Regarding the Relationship of Christoph Blumhardt to Karl Barth."

James Luther Adams has testified to Paul Tillich's interest in what Adams calls "the religious-socialist element In Blumhardt"—although I think it would be fair to say that this social concern is about the only element of commonality between Blumhardt's theology and Tillich's.

When I was a seminary student, the book that set the direction of my understanding of Scripture for time to come was Oscar Cullmann's *Christ In Time*. More than a decade later, upon discovering the Blumhardts, I was convinced I had found a forerunner of the *Heilgeschichte* (Salvation-history) idea. When I met Cullmann, I put it to him whether he was familiar with the work the Blumhardts and had been influenced by it. His face lit up like a Christmas tree. "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes," he said.

I had not discovered that, in his published works, Dietrich Bonhoeffer ever mentioned the Blumhardts; but I had suspicions nevertheless. When the opportunity presented itself, I asked Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer's confidant and biographer. He assured me that Bonhoeffer had been well familiar with Blumhardtian thought and strongly influenced by it. This is confirmed in Gerhard Sauter's study. Although

it does not include a separate section on Bonhoeffer, that book, at a number of points. In passing and in one passage of several pages, does rather conclusively demonstrate how several of Bonhoeffer's most important concepts tie back into the Blumhardts.

Even so, the fact that Gerhard Sauter is a recognized theologian in his own right and the fact that he has done this major study of the Blumhardts—these things have the effect of bringing the Blumhardtian influence directly into the present generation of German theologians with their “theology of hope,” “political theology,” and “liberation theology.”

Karl Barth had called Blumhardt's a “theology of hope” long before Jürgen Moltmann was even born (in 1967, Moltmann published a book of that title to launch at least something of a movement). Moltmann is aware of the connection. As editor of the sourcebook, *The Beginnings of Dialectic Theology*, he chose one of Barth's Blumhardt essays for inclusion. And in personal conversation he was quick to confess his debt to the Blumhardts. There is no knowing how many more of the so-called “younger” German theologians would be ready to confess the same.

Finally, my own “best” theologians include not only Kierkegaard and the Blumhardts but also the contemporary French maverick, Jacques Ellul. Ellul has mentioned and quoted the Blumhardts a few times in his works. There are many of his ideas that *could* be attributed to Blumhardtian Influences—although, most often, these probably came via

and His Message. Almost the first half of that book is given to Lejeune's introduction, the remainder of the volume presenting nineteen selected talks and sermons from the younger Blumhardt. Also important is *Action in Waiting*, a slight volume incorporating Barth's first essay on Blumhardt (1916) and one of Christoph Blumhardt's crucial sermons, "Joy in the Lord." Then there is a pocket-sized book, *Evening Prayers for Every Day of the Year*, compiled after his death from spontaneous prayers the younger Blumhardt used at Bad Boll. There is next a slim, 31-page paperback, *Now Is Eternity*, something of a random sampler of very brief "sayings" from both of the Blumhardts. And finally, there has just appeared a beautiful little 58-page paperback, *Thoughts About Children*, compiling material from both Blumhardts on the topic.

"So why haven't we heard about the Blumhardts before?" Partly because so little material is available in English; and because what is available has come from small, private presses. "But why have other publishers failed to pick up on the Blumhardts?" My best guess in that regard is that, because the Blumhardt impact naturally came with the younger Blumhardt's maturity, death, and the generation of thinkers who continued the tradition from that point. and because that point itself coincided with the First World War, the war itself prevented the Blumhardt reputation from jumping either the English Channel or the Atlantic Ocean at the time it normally would have. Then, later was too late: why publish the works of the Blumhardts when no one knows who

years at Möttlingen, the pressures toward churchly conformity became so constrictive that Blumhardt gave up his pastorate and, for all intents and purposes, formal connection with the Reformed Church. He moved a short distance away to Bad Boll, where he purchased a vacant resort hotel and made it into something of a retreat center, a place to which people could have recourse for periods of rest, meditation, study, and pastoral counsel—and a place where Blumhardt was free to operate according to God's leading.

He continued this ministry until his death in 1880, the testimony of his life perhaps best being summed up in a hymn with which he had been inspired at Möttlingen and which remained popular in Blumhardt circles:

Jesus is victorious Lord
Who conquers all his foes;
Jesus 'tis unto whose feet
The whole wide world soon goes;
Jesus 'tis who comes in might,
Leads us from darkness into light.

Son Christoph (Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt 1842-1919) was born at Möttlingen in 1842, at the very time his father was becoming involved in the struggle with Gottlieb's demons. As his father had done before him, he took university training pointing toward a Reformed pastorate. However, he became disillusioned with the church and theology and so decided simply to return home to Bad Boll and act as a helper there. Upon his father's death, then, he took over as housefather and continued the work until his own

According to our customary false way of thinking, the kingdom of God must give way to our happiness. With many people the words of the Savior already have been altered to read: “Seek first your own blessedness, and all those things shall be added unto you.” This is something very deceptive, although I know that for me to say so will rub many people the wrong way. They love *themselves*; and if only they know that they are safe, they don’t much care about the rest of the world—or at most, only so much as to say to others, “See to it that *you* also get yourself saved, and then I will be happy!” With this little error, my friends, our fellowship with the Father is destroyed. We are like children always coming to our parents demanding candy, pop, and ice cream instead of being concerned about the wishes of our parents, honoring them with fidelity and hard work, in which case our food would come as a matter of course.

The goal of all God’s effort is that finally he will be a God whom we will be able to see on earth, a God who will make the earth his footstool, where Jesus will be Lord over all men and where they, in him, once more will be integrated into God’s creation.

What do I care about a God of the sort whose being must be demonstrated? The dear Lord came from heaven and *spoke*; had he not done so, even the philosophers could not have found him. Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Schelling—why, they would all still be heathen if he had not spoken his word on Mt. Sinai. I almost burst sometimes when our modern culture sets classical learning over the Bible. Why, everybody would still be ignorant were it not for the Bible and its God who there speaks upon earth.

God lets us meet him in Christ; and in the days of the apostles when there was talk of faith, of being true until death, everyone who belonged to the body of Christ knew what course his faithfulness would take. Something came over these people, something to which none of them had given thought and which none of them would have been able to explain. Suddenly they found themselves part of a history that proceeded of itself and in which such wonderful powers were discovered that the inevitable impression was: “These powers are stronger than the whole world.”

In this situation people had a perfectly clear picture of what God is. There was no need to look up to heaven; the occurrences took place on *earth*; they were bound up with naming the name of Jesus.

He is the glory of God upon earth and the glory of man in heaven. Just as God was blotted out on earth, so also was man blotted out in heaven. Now Jesus comes as the one he is; and God lives upon the earth. Then Jesus is again with the Father in heaven; and humanity lives there in him. Now before God there gleams something of the humanity that was dead—it is the glory of mankind in heaven before God through Jesus.

This is the man Jesus Christ; he is fixed in the creation where his true nature is grounded. As the creation is a work of God, so Jesus the Son is a work of God in the whole of creation. He is far above all angels and all powers of God that drive the world. The highest messengers of God, the life elements and life powers, serve him. He is in the creation, and it must go as he goes. One must understand this tremendous magnitude of Jesus Christ in order to believe that he still is able to help us men.

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." That is true; nevertheless, it remains night as long as men are unaware of the fact and as long as Jesus is not known universally. We are in the night. That people have believed it to be day simply because Jesus was born, died, and rose again is the greatest error of Christendom. With that error we have been in the darkest night for nineteen hundred years, thinking that everything was complete and good.

If anyone remains stuck in the history we have had until now and thinks to find a solution there, he is a terribly small person...Yet it is already something worthwhile if in these matters even a few people open their eyes to what is righteous, eternal, and true and thus make a firm resolution, "There must be a change!" To that degree, they are able to rise above the history of their time. And this will not have been done in vain; on the contrary, It will lead toward what we call the kingdom of God.

SOCIAL REDEMPTION

Is Social Democracy that which rightly should be demanded? Or is it rather—because it so energetically pursues "the state of the future" —that which, as so many assume, should by all means be opposed by every citizen and churchman?

A person must indeed be blind if he cannot see that, during the entire century since the French Revolution, there have arisen movements of ever increasing consequence directed toward a new ordering of society. Where is there a country that has not been agitated by socialistic ideas? It is one impulse, one forward-striving spirit, which seeks this new social order. No one can avoid this movement. Church and state must grant people freedom in this regard. We have lived in a century of revolution and rapid change and are living in the midst of radical movements—and this is in accord with the will of God!

We want the life of Jesus Christ to be seen completely pure and clean, to be seen alone ruling upon earth. We don't want it to be mixed with earthly arts and the things of earth; we want it to be pure Christ.

Yet this is why Christ is so hidden. He will not be on earth as a human power. Christ will not be mixed in among men as a great man among the great. What we call great is not great to God. Those things which outwardly make such an impression, which seem so heroic, which so impress us in an earthly sense—those don't impress God at all. And that is why we must take care that *we* do not become mixed.

As Christ shows himself completely pure, as he alone stands before us as the Spirit of Life, so should we Christians also remain pure and clean, not mixing ourselves with the things of our time. Every age brings forward earthly interests, and each century has its particular character. One can become part of that and also lead a satisfactory life in it; but such is not the life of God which Christ is building upon earth. That is something entirely new, which will finally conquer all that is earthly and lead to the coming of a new heaven and a new earth.

And so the life we have today must still be one of fighting and struggling for the divine. But it is a life which has great promise in it. What is hidden at present, hidden with Christ in God, finally shall be revealed. Christ, the life-bearer, the truth-bearer, who has been hidden in God for thousands of years, finally shall become clear to all eyes.

THE COMING OF CHRIST

“Behold, I am coming soon!” (Rev. 22:7). This word concerns the coming of our Lord and King, Jesus Christ. The word itself permeates the whole of his earthly and super-earthly life, and it may seem too high for our understanding to reach. There are few who can grasp it in its spiritual meaning so that it can play a natural part in their self-understanding and in their living for God. Yet we must recognize that the significance of the life of Jesus and his disciples depends upon the fulfillment of these words. Those people built upon them as a firm ground by which the results of their activity would be guaranteed. But also, all the later disciples of Jesus who carry in their hearts the kingdom of God on earth as the goal of the Christian community are directed by these words to hope for the future return of their Lord. Without that, it is useless to hope that the community of God, his justice and truth, will come upon earth.

“Behold, I am coming soon!” This saying divides the history of the Christian community into two periods: first, the foretime, and then, the time of the actual kingdom of God. The Savior himself is the beginning, the Alpha, and the end, the Omega. With the coming of the Savior in the flesh, the foretime has begun; all people should know this, for they are living in it. In this time we have the gospel, “the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith” (Rom. 1:16).

God sends us all sorts of powers, all sorts of helpers, both corporeal and spiritual; and all these messengers of God are personal in nature. Under God's command, there are an endless number of powers which can surround us and accompany us; and they are most various.

For a long time we have fought against darkness. The devil, death, and hell would have us in terror. We have been in many difficulties, and many times have not seen a way through. But God has reached out his right hand to us in Jesus Christ; and for many years he has protected us and given us victory. But today there appears another fight for us, namely, the fight against people who do not want to accept the truth. Yet more dangerous than the invisible powers of darkness is the visible power of men, those who falsely administer the power of God, who misuse the Spirit in their flesh and so put God's honor to shame through their cunning. More dangerous than the deceptions of the world are deceptions in the name of Christianity.

We experience many things which are not at all meant to be shared with others. Regarding experiences connected with the kingdom of God, it is not the main thing that others know about them except, perhaps, that others might live on the fruit of an individual's experience of the kingdom. But the private experiences of Jesus and the apostles, as those of the prophets of the Old Testament, are for the

“Having Christianity” is nothing difficult. Concerning one “Christianity”—for there are several varieties—a person can hardly *avoid* it; he comes into it simply by being born, and it causes him no great trouble to stay in. It might cause him a bit of trouble actually to live it out; but whoever wants to can do so blithely.

Yet there is another sort of Christianity that is to be *enclosed within the heart*—this one called “the rule of God upon the earth.” It is to be so enclosed in the heart that one knows for a certainty, “It *will* come to be!” And that Christianity many times will make us anxious and sorrowful.

It seems right to me that the Lord Jesus should have said, in effect, “Children, it is on the very turf of Christianity and the following of Jesus that there will be the most lies, the most power plays of darkness trying to destroy us.”

It isn’t pretty but is nevertheless true that, on the spot where the Highest and Holiest is fighting for our eternity, *there* is taking place the most deception and error. And it is all the more dangerous that it is precisely there that error takes on the appearance of truth, because words can play so important a role. It always has been dangerous, in the area of the religious life and the following of Jesus, that words have meant so much. Yet words don’t produce anything all that important; only *actions* are truly creative. And unless God leads his people into *action*—people whose only purpose is to follow—then nothing will go forward.

THE INVISIBLE BATTLEFIELD

Because our human world displays increasing activity in its resistance to God, there is a battle. It is a battle taking place primarily in inwardness, in the invisible life-impulses of man. However, the expectation is that, once the invisible has been swept clear of all hindrance, then visible change also can show itself in clear and true manifestations of life... If, through the stirring and moving of their lives toward the truth, the people of God achieve victory over this unjust and untrue interior existence, then the outward—as far as this age will allow—can immediately be formed as new, true, and eternal.

There is a battle taking place outside of human society. There is a battle taking place in the spiritual regions surrounding us. There is, on the one side, the bright, clear light of God which presses toward people, allowing them to lift themselves from the ground to experience new spiritual development time and again, to come, time and again, to moral growth and achievement—all of this being the great and mighty working of the good in the midst of humanity... And on the other side, there is always the enemy of the good and of mankind, the enemy of God and his people.

No cursing, no ill will, no contempt ever should be heard from our mouths; this is the new—perhaps brand-new—attitude that can work inconspicuously in our time. We have been prohibited from heaping hatred on our enemies, even when we have been totally misunderstood. Today it is *this* enemy-loving Jesus who has become great, in whom we are able to bear all enmity with hearts full of blessing.

DANGER OF DEGENERACY

*Areas in which Blumhardt's thought might become distorted
among his followers. — V.E.*

BEING QUIET OR QUIETISM?

The hope derived from the light of the Holy Spirit also has its reverse side, namely, that we come alive and recognize that the hope itself is alive with possibilities for us—possibilities, we should say, that lie in God, certainly, but in the creation as well. There are people who think nothing more is possible than what they can see with their half-dead eyes. Thus, when they hope, it is a feeble matter, because they always think, “We can’t do anything at all; everything must come down from heaven.”

It is different with those who know true hope; they become active on their own. How can I hope for a new heaven and a new earth in which justice dwells, how can I hope out of the strength of the Spirit, unless I am conducting myself in such a way that something more just, something better, can be created on earth? For everything God does must happen through us. It would be wrong for us to do nothing at all. As soon as God lays some promise in our hearts—and he has laid it in our hearts that things shall be better—in his doing this, there also comes a certain strength: “Now begin! The hope is there; so you can begin!”

We are convinced that in this time, when everything is being ruined and broken, inconspicuous seeds of the kingdom of God yet are being planted in the world. These seeds, which come from God himself, will not rot under the debris of the present day world but will much more truly, while the old is being rolled out of the way, grow upwards to serve as a transfiguration of the name “Jesus” to “The Christ of the World.”

Therefore, let as much torment and grief take root here and there among people as will, we will not despair but rather look to the future with courage, not letting ourselves become dependent upon this or that law or human order but letting ourselves be dependent upon Jesus, the light of the world. He will live and conquer until the entire creation glistens with his light to the glory of God, until our race of men who have ever been lost finally find the path which alone will lead them to the goal, to the destiny which, as sons of God, they have in creation.

CONCLUSION

*We in the final battle stand,
Where Life and Death are fighting.
Remain, then, under God's command,
If wrong you would be righting.
The world, the old, is overthrown;
And Jesus' kingdom, it alone,
Arises from the ruins.*

Regehr arranged his selections in the chronological order of their original delivery; I have chosen, instead, to form them into a somewhat logical sequence. In the interest of including as much of Blumhardt's thought as possible, I also have taken the liberty to condense and to excerpt where that seemed helpful.

Regehr made his selections from the four-volume collection of the works of the younger Blumhardt, *Christoph Blumhardt: Eine Auswahl aus seinen Predigten, Andachten und Schriften [CFBL], herausgegeben von R. Lejeune* (Rotapfel Verlag, 1925-37). Each selection in Part 2 includes a reference that identifies each piece as to source and date and indicates what sort of editing has been done. — V.E.

“I am making all things new!” This was the main source of power for Jesus as long as he was on earth. This is the source of power and might which arises in us again and again through the Spirit of Christ, so that we may not keep on working foolishly with externals, but may be inspired to hope that all things will indeed become new. What to us is the world with all its evils if we have become strong in the Spirit of God? Who can name anything that could make us afraid if we are strong in the Spirit of God? When we have become new, then we conquer all things.

CFBL 4:71-76 (#9). Evening worship of September 18, 1909, abridged.

Many try in their wretchedness to create some kind of religion to assure their happiness after death. Be happy in love right now, from this day forward. Begin to love! Love one another! Boll would become a paradise in one year's time if everyone here had this love of God in his heart. This needs to be grasped. Receive the full love of God, and you will be separated from your sins. There is no longer anything that condemns, because you yourselves have left the old, have become new persons, new creatures. All things have become new!

We need not wait for some special event; there is enough of blessedness now, because the love of God is effective in creating blessedness. Much creative work takes place now, because the living word is present, reviving the person both inwardly and outwardly. Suddenly someone says, "I was dead and have become alive again!" A sick person says, "I have become perfectly happy; I don't know where my sickness went to!" One lying at the point of death breathes again and does not die; an insane person is cured.

Oh, you have no inkling how many creative works take place simply because of this love of God! People are planted upon new foundations for living, foundations that have been present all along, though unused. Everything necessary is present already; but it becomes effective only where Jesus is and where one understands the love of God in Jesus.

As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. (Ezek. 34:12)

Expressions similar to this one from Ezekiel appear frequently in the Holy Scripture; and these words contain the great thought of God that must be heard and understood among men. The thought of God always is this: No one is to remain lost. God regards everything that we would call lost as his possession.

With Abraham and even earlier, nothing was ever given up. It is not as though God settled for Abraham when Abraham believed in him. Certainly not! Always, God sees beyond Abraham—and at Abraham's expense! Abraham is not to gain at the expense of the world; but Abraham is to suffer for the benefit of the world. At Abraham's expense, God looks toward all the generations of earth. Israel is called, not that God might have a people in whom he can take pleasure, but that through this people he might reach the nations, the masses of mankind which are his sheep. At Israel's expense, God goes out to the nations, and in this same great thought of God, Jesus Christ enters the world, coming into the flesh. It is not that God will settle for a dear Son and a few disciples serving him. No, at the expense of Jesus and his disciples, God is again looking to the nations. Jesus himself says: "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold.

