

## **Eberhard Arnold**

# Salt and Light

Living the Sermon on the Mount

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## **Preface**

**Eberhard Arnold (1883–1935)** was widely sought after during his lifetime as a public speaker and publisher in his native Germany. During his studies (he completed his doctoral dissertation on Nietzsche in 1909), he was active in the revival movement then sweeping the country's universities and became national secretary of the Christian Student Union.

Like thousands of young Europeans in the turbulent years that followed the First World War, Arnold and his wife, Emmy von Hollander, were disillusioned by the failure of the establishment, especially the churches, to provide meaningful answers to the problems of the day. In their seeking, they were influenced particularly by Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. In 1920, inspired by the early Christian congregations described in the Book of Acts, they founded an intentional community (now known as the Bruderhof) near Frankfurt.

Salt and Light is a collection of Arnold's articles, talks, and lectures on the Sermon on the Mount from 1915 to 1935, compiled in German by his wife Emmy after his death. She wrote out the text, decorated it with calligraphy, and bound it by hand. This new edition

follows the first English edition of 1967 and an abridged version from 1998; we have reworked these earlier translations, reinstated the final two chapters, and added Bible references.

Arnold grappled with the implications of the Sermon on the Mount throughout his life, and his adherence to its demands bore practical fruit in a community that is still alive and growing. Although he was addressing a Germany in political and social ferment, his words are not bound to time or place and will speak (we hope) to today's reader with the same force they exerted on his original audience. In the spirit of the apostle James, who exhorted his readers to be not mere hearers of the Word. but doers, these readings represent a call to action.

> Christopher Zimmerman 2025

## Introduction

Scot McKnight

For fifty years, I have been entranced by the Sermon on the Mount, a text that rebukes, restores, and revives my faith. It calls me back to read it again and again. It centers my theology and my attempts to live it out. It flips the American script and beckons me to a way of life no one, apart from Jesus, has yet fully lived. The Sermon on the Mount is a deep well filled with the best of Jesus' teachings. But it does not comfort. It does not say to us, "It is well with my soul." It says, "Follow me, follow the Jesus of the cross." It stirs. It provokes. It excites the imagination to a new way of life. It calls us to the kingdom of God, and as Eberhard Arnold writes in this wonderful collection of pieces about the Sermon on the Mount, "The kingdom of God is absolute. Its love is unconditional. Its social justice is perfect."

This sermon was born when Jesus took a stand on a hill in Galilee and spoke up so all could hear. In so doing, he spoke against the ways of those who found his crowds potentially dangerous, dangerous enough to foment a riot or a rebellion or a revolution. It turns out there was no danger of them rioting, but time has told us it was indeed a revolution that Jesus was setting in motion that day – a revolution of the moral imagination.

As a college sophomore at a bookstore in downtown Grand Rapids, I bought a copy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship*. I don't now recall why. I suspect one of my teachers or pastors had mentioned him. I read the book and was captivated. It was a firehose blowing me away, but it was more than that: it was an encounter with a new worldview – the worldview of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. It broke my fundamentalist past apart. It left me in pieces that would take decades to put back together. Bonhoeffer taught me to read the Sermon on the Mount, so I began reading it. Between my first and second years in seminary I spent the entire summer examining nothing but the Beatitudes.

Blessed. I was intrigued by the meaning of the word "blessed" in the Bible. I examined the term in the Old. Testament and in the Jewish sources I had access to. The background clarifies its meaning for Jesus' Beatitudes, but no English translation, least of all "happy," captures its meaning. The term evokes the God who blesses, and it touches on a relationship of grace with God that begins now but will not be complete until the kingdom fully comes. Yet to be blessed by God remains in important senses conditional. Those who are blessed are marked by behaviors that belong to the kingdom, such as peacemaking and being merciful to others. The virtues at work in those who are blessed are relational virtues springing from a redeemed character: the pure in heart, those who mourn, the poor in spirit, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. As Arnold writes, in these Beatitudes Jesus "discerned the nature of those who had God's righteousness." Finally, the term "blessed" evokes a powerful contrast and even more:

a total reversal. Those blessed were not on the top of the social ladder in Galilee or Judea. They were instead mostly from the lower classes, even the margins. But they were promised that all things would be made right. This did not mean flipping power from the rich to the poor, so the poor could be just as imperialistic as those before them. No, the reversal here is a reversal of justice: injustice defeated, justice established.

This can only happen in community. The Beatitudes of Jesus toss the gracious waters of God's ultimate approval on people. Kingdom people. People committed to one another in the kingdom coalition Jesus formed and still is forming. Throughout his biography of Arnold, *Against the Wind*, Markus Baum shows how following Jesus with others in community was a central concern in Arnold's life.

Righteousness. Later I became entranced by the meaning of the word "righteousness" in the Sermon on the Mount. Blessed are those who long for righteousness and those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Jesus tells his disciples they are to possess a righteousness that far outstrips that of the Pharisees and scribes. Not because theirs was legalistic or picayune. No, what made the difference was following Jesus and his way of interpreting the Law of Moses.¹

<sup>1</sup> I'm confident if Arnold were writing today he'd be more sensitive to the implications of some of his descriptions of Judaism and the Pharisees. He couldn't have imagined the ways National Socialism would later turn such characterizations against the Jews. Since then, Christian writers have become more aware of the impact of our words for our Jewish sisters and brothers. Certainly, Arnold would agree that Jesus' righteousness was not anti-Jewish but a way of observance unlike some and like others. The Jewishness of Jesus is most visible in the Sermon on the Mount.

Righteousness describes how followers of Jesus are generous with their resources, and it especially describes the central vision of their way of life. Jesus says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," and in so doing, the blessings of God will come your way - not as a life of luxury but as a life blessed by God. As such, in true Jewish fashion, the term "righteousness" describes behavior, practices, and a way of life – a way of observing the Torah of Moses with Jesus as the rabbi, Jesus as Lord, Jesus as Messiah, Jesus as Savior. It is a mistake to think that what Jesus is referring to in the Sermon on the Mount is some kind of imputed righteousness. Followers of Jesus would have to wait until Paul to hear that teaching. In Jesus' day and in Jesus' way, righteousness was doing the right thing at the right time. It was going the way of Jesus when other ways were on offer.

Love. I am struck how often Arnold sees love in the Sermon on the Mount. The term "love" appears but five times, one of which is quoting the Old Testament, but the love of Jesus infuses every passage. If Jesus' followers had heard in synagogues that they were to love their neighbors but detest the Romans, which is probably what "enemies" means, they were now ordered by the Lord of Love to love their enemies and pray even for those who persecuted them. Loving only those who love us is ungodlike, because God loves all. For Jesus, perfection is acting like God in loving all persons. The importance of love in the Sermon on the Mount becomes clear later in the Gospel when Jesus, who is presented here as the new Moses, is asked which of Moses' commandments is the fairest of them all.

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His answer is twofold: love God, and love others as we love ourselves. If that's the Jesus way to read the Law of Moses, then all of the Sermon on the Mount is an exposition of love. As Arnold encapsulates it, "This is the secret of the attitude that knows and recognizes but one law: perfect, pure, true love, manifested in all areas of life."

But what is love? We need to develop the discipline of refraining from using modern dictionaries to define Jesus' words. Rather, we should look to God's revelation in Jesus himself to define love. Love for Jesus is a rugged, affective commitment to another person that involves presence (being with someone), advocacy (being for someone), and mutual formation into the way of Jesus. Jesus called disciples to be with him; he shielded them; he spoke for them; he mentored them; and he showed them how to live a life of love in the kingdom coalition he was forming. Eberhard Arnold understood the challenge of Jesus this way:

It is an either-or decision. Either we are dependent on God and love him and become people of love, with a heart turned toward others – one that has overcome the disposition to kill or to injure or to rob anyone of their livelihood, and one that is free of impurity and the filth that drags love into the dirt. Or we are people of mammon who, in every relationship, calculate how much we may earn, what advantages we might gain, how we can become successful, how to enlarge our property, how to make our living more secure, how we can overcome financial need by accumulating more money. This hardens our hearts and destroys any yearning for God and his love, and corrupts the deepest urges of love in our own hearts.

Mammon. From his first sermon in Nazareth to the care he showed his mother with his dying breath, Jesus cared for the poor. His gospel was for them; he blessed them, and he called his followers to give to the poor. The flipside of this song was his warning to the rich. He knew that the lure of money and wealth stifled the gospel he preached. We should not be surprised, then, that in the Sermon on the Mount he tells his disciples that they can only serve one master - either God or mammon. And he instructs them not to let mammon and resources and provisions dominate their hearts. Rather, they are to seek the kingdom of God and God's justice and righteousness. In so doing, they will discover a new kind of flourishing. Such a life, one of farming, building, creativity, generosity, and hospitality, has always marked the Anabaptist vision that Arnold came to embrace. In this vision, all creation witnesses to the provisions of God. Mammon chokes; Jesus' way of life sets us free. A life that is anti-mammon can only be lived through mutual commitment with others. The anti-mammon life is shared because sharing breaks the hold of mammon.

Evangelism. Few people realize how evangelistic the Sermon on the Mount is. Not evangelism in the classic evangelical or revivalist or megachurch sense, but in the Jesus sense. The Sermon is set up by Matthew 4:23–25, which informs the reader that Jesus ministered throughout Galilee, doing three things: teaching in the synagogues, declaring the gospel of the kingdom, and healing anyone with any problem. That opener is repeated in nearly identical language at the end of Matthew's ninth chapter: teaching, preaching, and healing.

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In between those bookends, Matthew locates the Sermon on the Mount and ten stories of healing that summon people to follow Jesus. This long section in Matthew's Gospel, unfortunately broken up by chapter and verse divisions when reading to oneself, presents Jesus to audiences who, throughout the centuries, have mostly heard the Gospel read aloud. Through it, they are being summoned to see Jesus and to hear Jesus and to render a decision about Jesus.

The Sermon on the Mount, it must be maintained, is Jesus' own form of evangelism. *Hear me out*, he says. *What do you think of my vision?* he asks. *Do you want to follow me?* That's evangelism. This way of evangelism is a summons to see who he is and to render a decision about whether or not one wants to follow him.

Jesus, Arnold claims, "lives in the prophetic truth which knows that law and society can be transformed only through the religious and moral renewal of the spiritual life." Like Jesus' unparalleled sermon, the talks and essays collected in *Salt and Light* point the way to this renewal and transformation. I hope you will be as unsettled and encouraged as I have been.

## The Sermon on the Mount

**Seeing the crowds,** he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

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You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden underfoot by men.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

You have heard that it was said to the men of old, "You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment." But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, "You fool!" shall be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Make friends quickly with your accuser, while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser

hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison; truly, I say to you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny.

You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery." But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

It was also said, "Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce." But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Again you have heard that it was said to the men of old, "You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn." But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply "Yes" or "No"; anything more than this comes from evil.

You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with

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him two miles. Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you.

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this:

Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
And forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors;
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if

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your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.

Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day.

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the

speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.

Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man of you, if his son asks him for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him? So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.

Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits.

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Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers."

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise person who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish person who built his house upon the sand; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it.

And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

Matthew 5, 6, 7 (RSV)

### **Not a New Law**

What is our position on the Sermon on the Mount? Is it really the way we are called to follow? It seems fundamentally important to me that our community should think deeply about this question, since the Sermon on the Mount is the first step on the path of discipleship. I feel that we need to revisit this first step again, and that we need to be fully united in our understanding of it. Because once we fully grasp the Sermon on the Mount, then – if we really believe it – nothing can frighten us: neither our own self-recognition, nor financial threats, nor the frailty of our community or its composition. And then we will be adequate to the situation, just as we are, with all of our weaknesses.

When we were beginning to walk this path [of communal living], the Sermon on the Mount shook us so powerfully that I simply cannot describe it. It spoke to me and encouraged me with tremendous force and depth. To me, the most vital content of the Sermon on the Mount is the essence of salt, the warming blaze of

<sup>&</sup>quot;Not a New Law" is based on a talk Arnold gave on October 27, 1935, a month before his death, to members of the Bruderhof, the community that he and his wife, Emmy, had founded in 1920. As with the other chapters in this book that derive from oral presentations, this one is based on a shorthand transcription.

light, the nature of the city community, and the life-power of the tree (Matt. 5:13–16; 7:15–20).

The central tenets of the Sermon on the Mount make it very plain that it is not a new set of laws – the dedication demanded here does not take the form of a new moral assignment. Instead, it is a matter of forgiveness. This is where Christ is found – in the essence of salt's strength, and the light and warmth of the Holy Spirit. This is where the inner light is found, and the clarity of the inner eye (Matt. 6:22–23), and the vitality found in the tree that bears good fruit. This is where the community's character as a city on a hill – a light for the whole world – is to be found. And this is how we need to grasp it: not as high-tension moralism, nor as an ethical demand, but as the revelation of God's real power in human life.

Only if we take our devotion to God seriously – only if God enters us as the strength of light, the strength of the tree, the elemental energy which alone makes new life possible – will we be capable of living the new life. That is what is decisive.

If, as Tolstoyans do, we were to interpret the Sermon on the Mount as five new commandments, we would be entirely off the mark.¹ No, the clarity of the law is made even more pointed here – Jesus says so (Matt. 5:17–20). And his demands cannot be watered down. In fact, he shows us that instead of being weakened by their entrance into the stream of world history, his demands are infinitely sharpened.

Of course, these are only five examples – five hundred or five thousand could just as easily be given – of the formidable effect of this essence of light,

<sup>1</sup> Arnold is referring to Leo Tolstoy's 1884 book *My Religion*, in which he compares Jesus' teachings to Moses' Ten Commandments.

and of the living power of this mighty fruit-bearing tree. They reveal how God works in Christ. The fulfillment of the law means that this justice and righteousness² is better than that of all the scholars and theologians. What is presented here is completely different; it cannot be attained at all by means of moral intentions, ideas, and concepts. Instead, it offers a whole new way of meeting these demands – the organic way. It is authentic, pulsing life. Just as light shines, just as salt sears, just as a flame flares up, and as sap runs in a tree, so does this life spring from God. It is life, life, life!

I want to say that there is no point whatsoever in our being together if we do not share this primal life in the sense of the Sermon on the Mount.

<sup>2</sup> Here and throughout his work, Arnold uses Gerechtigkeit, a word that can be translated as either "justice" or "righteousness," or both, depending on the context.

# **Becoming Truly Human**

It has been said that we want to become truly human and dedicate ourselves to all people, which is right. And it has been pointed out that the way to become truly human is shown most clearly in the life of Jesus Christ and his Sermon on the Mount. There has been talk of how love is needed – love for all human beings. And it has been said that people have no trouble feeling at home among children, because with them love simply exists, without any special purpose.

If we are ready to continually reconsider what it means to become truly human, and come to a common understanding of this; if we can unite in finding a genuine attitude of service toward all people and the suffering of all people; if we can find unity in what Jesus said and how he lived; if we can agree that Jesus' character is made clear in the Sermon on the Mount; if we are resolved that his love is the only power we need, and that this love is revealed in the childlike spirit – then we actually no longer need to ask who is good and what kind of spirit leads to a life like this. We

<sup>&</sup>quot;Becoming Truly Human" is based on a talk Arnold gave on September 22, 1935. He was addressing several questions from his audience, though these are no longer extant.

will simply come close to one another whenever we talk about these things.

When the Sermon on the Mount dawned on me, which happened several years ago, at the end of the war, so many deep and fundamental things became clear to me that it is impossible to express them in a few words. Nor would there be any sense in enumerating them. It is much better to read the Sermon on the Mount itself, and I would be glad if each one of us read it tonight. But I would like to say something about what impressed me so deeply and influenced me so decisively at the time that I still think about it day and night.

What Jesus means by justice and righteousness or goodness and love in the Sermon on the Mount is something quite different from the moral teaching and piety and dogmatism of theologians and moralists (Matt. 5:20). Why is it so different? Jesus tells us when he speaks about the tree, the salt, the light, and the city. And when he speaks about these things (Matt. 5:13–16; 7:15–20), he is speaking about God and his Spirit. If we don't want to hear the word "God," we can talk about light; or we could talk about salt, or a tree. What is the strength of a tree, the strength that brings forth fruit? What is the clarity that causes each tree to bear its particular fruit? And where does the strength to do this come from?

In this connection, Jesus says, "Beware of the Pharisees and theologians; beware of the false moralists whose actions do not correspond to their words (Matt. 23:2–3). You will know the tree by its fruit." (Matt. 7:20) And when Jesus speaks about the salt, he says to those who live by his Spirit, "You are the salt of the earth!" (Matt. 5:13) What does Jesus mean by salt? He is talking about the nature, the character, the essence, the element

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of a thing. If you don't want to hear about God, fine. But at least think of the nature, the element, the character, the essence of the only thing that can save the world. It is an elixir, and obviously not an elixir of the devil. It is the salt of the earth, the only element that can transform the earth's total corruption and ruination into its rebirth.

What is this element? Jesus refers to it in the first words of the Sermon on the Mount, and immediately afterward, he describes it as salt. In these opening words, he says what people are like when they have the Spirit of Jesus Christ; what they will be like when they belong to the kingdom of God, and to God's future. What good does it do for me to tell you this? You yourselves need to read these words. They need to be born in your hearts and come alive and burn there, because it is the heart that Jesus is talking about.

Blessed are those who have a heart for others. Blessed are those who love – who love and build up unity everywhere. Blessed are those who stand with the poor; blessed are those who are themselves poor (Luke 6:20). Blessed are those who know that they are beggars in the presence of the Spirit (Matt. 5:3). Blessed are those who are so poor that they hunger and thirst (Luke 6:21; Matt. 5:6) – for the justice and righteousness of the heart, of love, and of peacemaking in unity (Matt. 5:9).

These are the people who carry the pain of the world on their hearts (Matt. 5:4), who carry its suffering in their innermost being. They do not think about themselves, because their hearts are directed wholly toward others. Yet these people are misunderstood and persecuted by others, since they love justice and righteousness, and do not participate in any injustice (Matt. 5:10). Because they do not take part in this, they are the salt of the

earth. They do not take part in the unrighteousness of mammon (Matt. 6:24). They do not have wealth or savings accounts or anything else in the bank; they have nothing invested in houses or land – nothing to resort to when the need arises (Matt. 8:20). They have no capital.

Do not gather riches on this earth; instead, gather the fortune that consists of love. Let your whole fortune be love, so that wherever you go hearts will be opened to you because of your love (Matt. 6:19–21). You will encounter hatred because of your righteousness; you will be persecuted and hounded to death for not taking part in injustice. But you will be received with great love in the shacks whose doors are open to you, and you will be taken in because you bring love into them (Matt. 10:5–15).

This is your treasure and your wealth. It will free you of all worry. It will bring you close to nature. You will live with the flowers and the birds, and you will no longer worry about your clothing or food, because you will be a companion of the birds that find the food they need, and a friend of the flowers, which are clothed more beautifully than the vainest man or woman (Matt. 6:25–34).

All this is the character of salt, and of light (Matt. 5:14). What is light? Do we need to refer to God to understand it? Light provides complete brightness and clarity. But the light we are talking about here is not a harsh or cold one. It is the glowing light of the hearth and the lamp, the light of a circle of torches, the warmth that streams from the windows of houses where brotherhood can be found. It is the light of truth that lives in love: the light of love that rejoices in truth and justice, righteousness and purity. As such, it is not

the depressing, dark, gloomy love of emotional passion that results in oppression. It is the love that illuminates faith and brings clarity to all things. Light is similar to salt in this way, and the greatest resemblance is that salt consumes itself, just as a burning torch or candle consumes itself.

In the Sermon on the Mount, which is a proclamation of love, Jesus speaks about adultery, and notes that it can also take the form of thoughts and feelings (Matt. 5:27–28). Adultery signifies the breaking of a faithful relationship – one of truthful, responsible love. Light and salt work in such a way as to overcome such things. The same is true when people give each other their word, offering the deepest and greatest assurances and swearing the most solemn oaths in order to be believed. Jesus says, "It is precisely by doing this that you prove you cannot be trusted. Simply say yes or no. Be completely true." (Matt. 5:33–37)

People think they should love their friends – those who show them love in return. But Jesus says, "The love I give you is this: Love your enemies (Matt. 5:44), and you will never kill anyone or even offend anyone again (Matt. 5:21–22). You will never kill souls or injure hearts, because you will live in absolute love, and this love will become so complete that you will not go to court against anyone (Matt. 5:25). If someone wants to take your coat, you will take off your jacket and give it away as well. And if someone demands one hour of work from you, you will do two (Matt. 5:40–41). And it will be like this in all things. Your life will have a kind of completeness, even if you never become a saint (Matt. 5:48). It will consist in this secret: You will be very weak, and you will make many mistakes; you will

be very clumsy and poor in spirit, and hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matt. 5:3, 6). You will not be perfect. But love will be in you, and this is the gate and the road (Matt. 7:13–14). Whatever you desire for yourself, desire for others as well. And whatever you expect from others, give the same to them (Matt. 7:12). This is the way."

We do not need to talk about the deepest, ultimate realities contained in the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus speaks about the kingdom of God, forgiveness of sin, the holy name, God's will, redemption and liberation from evil, and the daily bread that comes as a gift from God (Matt. 6:9–13). We may not understand all of this. But there is one thing we can definitely understand: There is nothing greater than love. There is nothing more holy than love. There is nothing truer than love, and nothing more real than love. So let us hand our lives over to love and seal the bond of love.

# Salt and Light

**The nature of salt** is saltiness, or it is nothing. The essence of salt is its action. By itself, it has no purpose. Salt is there for the sake of the whole (Matt. 5:13).

Whoever receives God's life and grasps the nature of the future in Iesus will take on the character of salt. Iesus is concerned with what is essential. He wants nothing but the ultimate reality. For him, that is always the important question. And so he never demands of anyone an attitude that does not correspond to that person's real inner situation. Christ looks at his friends and sees people who have his Spirit, who breathe his life. The powers of the future world are at work in them. Unconditional love – the essence of true justice, righteousness, and unstained purity – is revealed in their lives. So is the coming kingdom, which encompasses the whole earth and belongs to God. The true character of this kingdom is opposed to all rottenness and decay; it combats death and therefore everything that is flabby, slack, and soft.

Death can be delayed by the use of salt; we know that doctors can postpone death and revive or maintain

This chapter, "Salt and Light," was first published as an article in the periodical *Das Neue Werk* in November 1920.

the regenerative power of an organ by injecting salt. The injustice of the world – sin itself – is the disease of the world's soul, a deadly one. The mission of a true comrade of the kingdom is to be the salt of the earth and, as such, to stem the world's injustice and unrighteousness and keep it from dying and decomposing.

True, the world will have to perish in order to be born again (John 12:24; Rom. 6:5). But as long as the salt of the earth remains salt, it will stand against the final manifestation of evil, acting as the power that will one day renew the earth and humankind. If the church were to lose its salt, it would no longer be the church, but would succumb to the forces of death and dying in the world. It would have to be stamped out. For as Jesus puts it, if salt becomes tasteless, what can it be added to? It is no longer useful, and can only be trodden underfoot (Matt. 5:13).

By its nature, salt is something entirely different from the food that it makes palatable. That is why we cannot demand or expect the present age to act as salt, or turn into it. But the presence of Jesus among his comrades of the kingdom is a constant reminder to the world that without salt, it will die. Just as food is bland and unpalatable without salt, so is the world without the church. And while humankind cannot attempt to act as its own salt, it can recognize the character of death and decay and how these need to be combated, if it looks at the effects of salt. The church is to be a corrective placed before humanity as a goal for it to live up to.

Because of salt, what would otherwise decay and be useful only as fertilizer is given a reason to live. It can awaken and live. Salt has this power only as long as it remains distinct from the surrounding mass – as long as it does not itself fall into decay. If it becomes insipid

and tasteless, it can only be spat out (Rev. 3:16). The salt of the earth is found only where God is, where the better justice and righteousness of the future kingdom is lived out and where the powers of the future world bring forth organic growth. Salt is only present where the superior, living energy of God's love has taken effect. God himself is the creative Spirit who overcomes decay, the living Spirit who raises the dead, whose power of life never wanes. He is the God of miracles, who can bring about new birth out of the most corrupt and degenerate mass, banishing nausea and disgust and giving rise to delight and joy.

God's power, which continually wells up from the depths of being to flood the whole of life, is superior to all endeavors that stem from a rotten morality, a corroded bourgeois civility, and hypocritical social conventions. There is strength in God's salty words. Here is found an austere courage, a manliness that does not swim with the stream and does not decay along with the decaying. Here is simplicity and brevity of expression, the sort of unvarnished truthfulness that would be deadly to both speaker and listener, were it not for the love with which it is delivered. Here is a love that cannot kill, a love that avoids harming one's neighbor, just as one avoids harming oneself (Matt. 22:39). Here, too, is the determination to pluck out the useless eye so that the whole body is not infected and cast into darkness (Matt. 5:29). Here are loyalty and trustworthiness that never grow old, whose word stands forever. Here is freedom from all external circumstances and all that is not essential, a freedom that is ready to sacrifice all possessions and any amount of time, because its essence is love - love for one's enemies and adversaries as well as for one's brothers and sisters and friends (Matt. 5:43-48). Here is the better justice and righteousness that spells freedom from earthly treasures (Matt. 6:19-21), freedom from the anxieties and worries associated with material possessions (Matt. 6:25-24), and a childlike joy in light and color and in God himself and all that he is and gives.

This life, which comes from God, is the only salt that can truly counteract the spirit of the world – the only salt that is death's mortal enemy. But salt can be nothing other than salt – and whoever has the Spirit of Jesus acts as salt without even needing to think about it. A person who wants to act as salt without becoming salt from the root, from God, is on a fool's errand. Christ therefore expresses his deepest vision of essential reality without making the slightest demand – without asking for anything that is not already in keeping with the innate strength given to human beings. He simply says, "You are the salt of the earth . . . you are the light of the world." (Matt. 5:13–14)

This salt, this life, is a light that must be kindled with fire; without fire, it cannot be expected or forced to shed light. Dark Neptune will never turn of its own accord into a brilliant sun; neither can the cold reflective light of the moon be transformed into midday warmth. All the same, pitch-black coal can be transformed into a radiant fire, so that a whole household can gather around it for warmth. But the coal must first be ignited; it has to be burned (and ultimately reduced to ashes) in order to give off light and provide warmth.

A candle, too, must consume itself to give light to the inhabitants of a house. In so doing, it does more: it serves the intimate unity of the household, because its life consists in dying. To spare a candle is to prevent it from shedding light. And concealing or covering it up is equally wrong (Matt. 5:15). Rob it of the open air it needs to burn and shine, and it will quickly go out. It will cease to be a source of light.

The character of the people of Jesus is light – brightness and warmth. As the old life is consumed, it produces a life-giving strength. Shameful deeds can live only in the dark. Brightness always leads to clarity and frankness, to simplicity and purity, to genuineness and truth. Wherever Jesus' influence makes people truly human, their life takes on these things. They will shine into the darkness of the world around them, and that light will unmask everything that is spurious and untrue, and everything that seeks to remain hidden.

And yet the light that Jesus kindles is never exhausted simply in making a situation clear. Cold light has no part to play in the kingdom of God. Intelligent reasoning, insightful analysis, systematic clarity of thought, and sharpness of differentiation – even these do not produce the light that Jesus is referring to. And using our powers of reason to try to think like God, where previously we had thought only in our own way, is no help here either. What matters is living in God's heart and from God's heart. The brightness of his being, like that of the sun, is inseparably joined to warmth that quickens and awakens life. His illumination is the love that builds community, the unifying joy that flows from the soul's fervor and seeks expression in deeds – deeds that never destroy but only edify.

As sunlight flashes forth, it generates life on the earth, making it germinate and bear fruit everywhere. Those who live in the daylight belong to life; they can find their way in the sunlight. The night is dead, because it is cold and dark (John 11:9–10). And yet even in the life of the light and sun there is a dying. Because our life moves between day and night, our nature can

only take on the characteristic of resurrection by dying (Matt. 16:25).

Again, a light cannot radiate brightness and heat without consuming itself. And the greatest of all human beings was the one who suffered a most violent death in order to give off light. It was from the cross of Jesus that the light of the world went forth, after which he rose from the grave and sent his disciples to all peoples – to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Only those who, with the crucified one, experience the world's suffering and guilt in themselves, along with their own sin and forgiveness, are able to serve the world with the power of light that belongs to the risen one.

The light we are referring to here is Christ himself. It is the fire of judgment that sweeps over us and consumes the old, corrupt life, to lead us who are crucified with the risen one into a radiant life. This is because there is only one who is the light of the world and shines on all people who come into this world (John 1:4-9). He himself was all light. He was not entangled in any untruthfulness or impurity, lovelessness or greed. To push the false light of our own life or thinking into the foreground, wanting to shine without letting ourselves be burned up and consumed in Christ, is to fall for a glaring illusion. Because no human being can teach us what light is. To give oneself to the earth like the sun gives of its own abundance can never be successful; it is not something a human can achieve. As Hölderlin puts it in his "Empedocles" – words we ought to be mindful of:

O beauteous sun! human beings did not instruct me; it was my holy heart compelled me immortally to love immortals, drove me to you, to you. I could not find a thing more godly, lambent light! And as you refuse

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to hoard your life within the compass of the day as selflessly you rid yourself of all your golden plenitude, thus I, belonging to the best of souls – to you – was happy to bestow all that I possessed on mortals. Openly, not timidly, I gave my heart as you give yours to earnest earth, the fateful one, ah!

The sun not only consumes itself; it even directs our gaze away from itself to the life it illuminates and impregnates. Thus we speak of the sun shining on hills, woods, or fields when they are glowing with its light. The city on the hill gives off light for all who desire to see it (Matt. 5:14), but no one would notice it unless the sun shone on it. Whatever the sun shines on takes on its radiance. Everything the sun casts its light and warmth on becomes organically alive; everything awakened by light and warmth results in the organic union of individual living beings. Wherever there is life, there is symbiosis and community.

Again, a light on a candlestick has the power to gather an entire household around it. How much more is the city on the hill a shining beacon of life and community! It reflects organic unity in its economy and management, community of work, unity of faith, and joy. Its towers can be seen from far away as emblems of civic freedom, tokens of its communality, symbols of fellowship in faith. Such a city is not built to be hidden, to exist in isolation. Its open gates reflect the outgoing joy of hearts that are open to everyone.

With Jesus, nothing is hidden in a corner; he does not want anything to be concealed. His light is an all-inclusive life force that belongs to everyone. This force aims

<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843), *The Death of Empedocles*, trans. David Farrell Krell (SUNY Press. 2008), 126.

to affect all relationships of life in the same way that the sun shines on the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:45). God does good to enemy and friend alike. God is there for everybody and everything. The task of his salt and his light, the task of a city on a hill, is to serve all people, to be there for everyone.

There is no area of life that can remain unaffected by this salt and light, and no sphere of responsibility in public life, including economics and politics, from which the city on the hill should remain aloof. Nowhere can the poison of decay be allowed to set in and not be counteracted by salt. Nothing abominable can be allowed to lurk in the dark without the light scaring away the horrors of night. The icy, deadly breath of hatred or coldness of heart can never take full possession of this earth so long as the warm love of Christ, who sheds light everywhere, is not removed from it.

And still, the secret of salt's action and of radiating warmth lies in unmixed austerity and clarity. The responsibility that God's city on the hill bears for the remotest spheres of life is completely different from the responsibility that these distant spheres bear themselves. The city on the hill has a certain freedom, a character of community that defines it and which it cannot yield to any earthly kingdom – to any city, church, political party, or any other organization of this age. It serves the whole of life without letting itself be enslaved or emasculated. It combats all suffering, injustice, and unrighteousness without succumbing to suffering and without becoming unjust or unrighteous itself. The city on the hill must remain salt and light, because the seed of the future age is hidden within it.

### **Happiness**

**One of Tesus'** chief concerns was to show his friends and all who listened to him the character of the world order to come and and what its people will be like. At that time, as today, people yearned for a new order – within their own being, but at the same time in terms of the political and economic conditions of entire systems and nations. People longed for the new kingdom of justice and righteousness the ancient prophets had spoken of. They knew from these men of old, and felt with the certainty of their own religious consciences, that the justice of the prophesied future state must be a social justice. And they believed that this social justice must be so closely aligned with God's love and grace as to be identical with both. In God's heart, justice and righteousness dwell so close to grace that the movement of heart they signify is one and the same.

Then Jesus came, and he disclosed this very justice and righteousness to his listeners, both in the depths of its nature and in its practical consequences. He showed them that the justice and righteousness of the future

<sup>\* &</sup>quot;Happiness" was first published as an article in the 1920/21 issue of *Das Neue Werk*. Note that the words Arnold uses for "happiness" (*Seligkeit*) and "happy" (*selig*) also connote "blessedness" and "blessed," and the words cover both senses in German.

kingdom needed to be completely different from the moralism of the pious and holy men who seemed to feel that they were the only ones who represented goodness (Matt. 5:20). Through his own nature, and with his own clear words, Jesus made it plain that the justice and righteousness that God carries out is a living, growing power that develops organically within us, as a process that takes place in accordance with the sacred laws of life.

Because of this, Jesus could not stand in front of a crowd and give them commands about the right way to conduct themselves. He approached them in a very different way. In spirit and in truth, he discerned the nature of those who had God's righteousness (John 4:23–24) and presented their character to others in this way: they are happy – blissful – and blessed – because they see God, because the kingdom of the future belongs to them, because they shall inherit the earth and be comforted and satisfied, and because, as sons and daughters of God, they shall obtain mercy (Matt. 5:3–8).

Because Jesus' own nature radiated the organic unity of all these traits of this spirit of the future, it was impossible for anyone to try to take any one of his sayings out of its context and promulgate it as a separate law. And if anyone should do this today – for example, to hold up pacifism or purity of heart or any other moral or political demand by itself and proclaim it to be key to a new societal order – they are on the wrong track. Certainly, it is not possible to take part in God's kingdom without purity of heart, or without taking a decisive stand for peace; but unless a good tree is planted, good fruit cannot be harvested (Matt. 7:17-18). Unless the change we seek extends to all areas, it is a lost cause to try to emulate Christ in one respect only.

The Beatitudes cannot be pulled apart. They portray the heart of the comrade of the kingdom, a heart whose veins cannot be cut and separated. After all, the Beatitudes begin and end with the same promise of possessing the kingdom of heaven. And each opens with the same acknowledgement of blessedness and happiness.

The disposition expressed in the Beatitudes is comprised of poverty, neediness, longing, hunger, and thirst. At the same time, it includes generous wealth, love and kindness, a readiness to give, an energetic dedication to peacemaking, and the overcoming of all resistance. It reflects a heart of purity, cleanness, and sincerity that allows its bearer to see God. The people of the Beatitudes are people of vision – inner vision – people who see what is essential. They bear the world's suffering. They know themselves to be destitute in the face of the Spirit. They do not see any justice or righteousness in themselves. Yet they perceive justice and righteousness, and see with eyes of the Spirit, and therefore they hunger and thirst and are full of longing. This is not the happiness of satiety, nor the pleasure of gratified desire. Here a deeper happiness is disclosed - the kind that is given to eyes and hearts that have been opened. Openness to God and his riches, along with everything else that he constantly gives, can only be found where people again and again know themselves to be poor and empty, thirsty and hungry.

Richness in God and poverty of self; oneness with God along with an insatiable hunger for him; undivided resolve of the heart, and tenderness of the soul; the justice and righteousness of God's love, alongside the ability to suffer over injustice and unrighteousness – these always belong together. This is the essence

of true religious experience. Wherever there is religious satiety and moral complacency, wherever the selfrighteousness of political achievements or other good works is to be found, wherever anyone feels rich or triumphant, there will be no room for the happiness of the comrades of the kingdom. But wherever Jesus has been accepted as a guide on the simple road of discipleship, there too will be found those who know the happiness of God's kingdom and who believe in the righteousness of God's future. Their hearts are fixed undividedly on the Spirit and the justice of complete love, and they feel each injury of injustice in themselves and around them. They feel the poverty of spirit in their own lives and in all humankind. But they still look to the justice and righteousness of God's kingdom, and they feel comforted by the certainty that love will one day conquer the earth.

As such, the people of the Beatitudes are both poor and rich at the same time, because they are people of faith – people who have nothing in themselves and yet possess everything in God. In spite of their failings, they are people who venture, over and over again, to make the invisible real and who take nothing away from the unconditional nature of God's love. Just as they themselves receive mercy, they pour out mercy on all who are in need. They stand on the side of poverty and suffering, on the side of all who suffer injustice and unrighteousness, and are ready to be persecuted with them for the sake of justice and righteousness. They know that they cannot traverse the world without struggle. They know that the slander of their opponents will fall on them like a hailstorm. But they rejoice in this hardship (Matt. 5:11-12) and they remain peacemakers who overcome opposition everywhere, and everywhere conquer enmity through love. The people of the Beatitudes are the people of love. They live from God's heart and are at home in his heart. They are the ones whom the law of the Spirit of life has set free from the mechanical law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2). They are the ones whom no power can separate from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:38–39).

The most remarkable mystery of these people, however, is that everywhere they go, they perceive the same seed of God, see the same light gleaming, and feel the same warm radiance. Wherever people break down under the weight of the world's suffering, wherever hearts feel their own poverty and long for the Spirit, wherever the ardent revolutionary desire for social justice arises, wherever the passionate protest against war and bloodshed rings out, wherever people are persecuted because of their pacifism or socialism, wherever pure hearts and genuine compassion are to be found – there they see God at work, there they hear his footsteps in history, there they see the approach of his kingdom, and there they anticipate the eternal bliss to come.

There is no other way to prepare inwardly for the coming kingdom than the one way Jesus shows us here (Matt. 7:13–14). If we want to embark on this path, we can do nothing else but admit, without qualification and without embellishment, our own poverty of spirit. Once we recognize hunger and thirst for the justice and righteousness of complete love as the most essential thing, everything else will disappear and become as utter nothingness for us, and that will open our hearts for what God alone can give.

# The Nature of the New Justice

**The Sermon on the Mount** shows us Jesus' heart. It reveals his actual will. And the great decisions it confronts us with are brought close to us by its historical context: by the fact that it was delivered to a large crowd, including Jesus' disciples, as they thronged around him, and that he was speaking at a public gathering and addressing his words to the people (Matt. 5:1–2).

Jesus always has *all* people in mind. But the ones he is concerned with first are those who are his disciples – or on the way to becoming his followers. He knows that all people are poor and empty, but he brings happiness and wealth especially to these, because they see and feel their poverty and are open to what he promises. For the Sermon on the Mount is not a set of laws that demand a moral effort or exertion; it seeks a vacuum and presupposes that complete emptiness and inner poverty that has nothing to show for itself and can achieve nothing by itself.

<sup>&</sup>quot;The Nature of the New Justice" was first published in *Das Neue Werk* in 1922. It was based on a talk Arnold gave at a conference held at Sannerz, his community, that Easter.

The blessings Jesus brings – the Beatitudes, as recorded in Luke – are given without qualification: "Blessed are the poor! Happy are they who hunger and thirst! Blessed are they who mourn! Blessed are they who are persecuted!" There is no hint here of a specialized religious calling; instead, the comrades of the kingdom are recognized by the simple fact that they are poor, that they hunger and thirst, that they bear suffering, and that they are despised and maligned (Luke 6:20–23).

But Luke cannot leave unsaid the words directed to the opposite side: "Woe to you who are rich! Woe to you who are full! Woe to you who laugh! Woe to you when people say only good things about you!" (Luke 6:24–26) This "Woe!" applies wherever anything is held as a possession, as something that deserves recognition, something of substance, or even something that is merely admirable. For wherever this is the case, the basic condition necessary for the kingdom – emptiness of self – is lacking.

In Matthew this utter poverty is disclosed as poverty of spirit; that is, an emptiness in matters of the spirit, of religion, morals, and wisdom. It implies a mourning for everything of the world and for what is in oneself. It denotes mourning for individuals, and for the conditions of the world as a whole; for individual and collective guilt; for material need and for the deepest need of the soul. The persecution Jesus mentions in this connection is shown to be contempt for justice – that justice which is free of moralism and is most hated by those who want to be seen as righteous and whose wealth consists not only of possessions but of moral correctness and goodness and religion (Matt. 5:3–12).

The nature of this other justice is a central concern of the Sermon on the Mount. This justice is blissfulness in poverty. It is the mystery that has to do with a change of heart, of that radical change proclaimed by John, the last prophet of the first Judaism (Matt. 3:2). He foretold the new order of things which all the prophets of old envisioned. He saw this justice as something that would come down to the earth, descending from heaven – as the decisive approach of God. He proclaimed God as the bringer of justice for all people and all things; God as joy for the individual, God as the bringer of fellowship to all. It was for the sake of this justice of the future, which is nothing but God himself, that Jesus allowed himself to be immersed – a virtual descent into a watery grave, in which the present life on earth is condemned to death and forever subsumed.1

The entire Sermon on the Mount shows us what the characteristics of this new justice are in terms of gifts given by the future – promises made by God himself. The God of these good gifts is the God of creation, and of the ultimate mystery of life, the origin of procreation and of all that lives and grows. This justice cannot exist at all in the context of human goodness and achievement – in the context of humanity as we see it today. It appeared only once in the course of human history: in Jesus, the so-called Son of Man. It is present today in him too – in the risen one – where his Spirit is active, working as the power of the Creator and the God of resurrection.

The Sermon on the Mount, then, shows us the character of Jesus himself and therefore the character

<sup>1</sup> Here and elsewhere, Arnold describes baptism with an early Christian metaphor: as the immersion of the "old Adam" in a "watery grave."

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of his kingdom and the essence of his Spirit. Here there is no self-awareness with regard to human goodness or nobility, no claims to this or that right, and no resistance between people (Matt. 5:38–42). Here God's love is given as strength and joy, because here having nothing means having everything.

The wisdom of the Sermon on the Mount can be revealed only to those who know something of reverence for the Creator, who sense that all powers of body and soul in the life of natural, organic growth are an outright gift from God and utterly dependent on him. The maintenance of God's creation can never be regarded as dependent on the effort of humans – as a more or less profitable field for activity. And the building up of a new creation in Christ's Spirit has nothing to do with the efforts of contemporary individuals or by humankind as a whole. Jesus does not say, "You ought to be salt and light; you should turn yourselves into a city on the hill!" Instead, he recognizes that the formation of the new creation is a being and a becoming that simply evolves and derives from the Creator. You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world (Matt. 5:13–14). Salt is simply salt, or it is less than dung – it is dirt fit only to be thrown away. Light simply burns and shines and warms. If it does not do this, it is not light. Light, like salt, achieves its purpose by consuming itself. Here we are concerned with a giving up of one's own life (Matt. 16:24-26), which inherently produces happiness. The task of true love – of self-effacing, blissful devotion – this is the essence of Jesus and his kingdom.

Only out of such love can fellowship arise. Just as a medieval town lets its cathedral – landmark of freedom

and of common faith, and fruit of common work – be seen from afar, so too, the new life that comes over people from God carries on its activity openly and in unity with all.

It is just as impossible to create such fellowship as it is to produce a tree in a factory. The building up of the church as a community – and its very inception, brought about by the spirit of community – is an action of God that is just as free and independent of human effort as the creation of a tree and its fruit. As the tree is, so is the fruit (Matt. 7:17–19). Here, creation's law of growth and life is placed in opposition to human endeavors, just as in the Letter to the Romans the law of the Spirit of life is juxtaposed with the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2). Here, living creation takes the place of dead weight.

What humans can never accomplish, God does. His creative Spirit is the secret of the law of life, for God is a God of what is living, not of death (Matt. 22:32). The resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate revelation of this law of life. And his Sermon on the Mount can be grasped only where reverence for the Creator and the creation is overwhelmed by the Spirit of the resurrection, where Jesus' power proves him to be the Son of God, through the Spirit of consecration that emanates from the resurrection (Rom. 1:3–4). Without this, the Sermon on the Mount remains an impossibility, a utopia, an unwholesome fantasy, nonsense, self-deception, or madness.

The seed died and lay hidden in the soil; only its arising out of death and bursting forth promised fruits for all (John 12:24). The life that spreads from here is a gift that seeks to embrace everything living – a gift of life, and the mortal enemy of death. In this sphere there

can be no killing; there can be no hatred toward others, in whom slumbers the same germ of divine life; there can be no insisting on any human cause, since none can be equated with life itself. Liberating love alone can be the fulfillment of this life, because only the love that lifts one out of the human sphere—love such as God has—can truly affirm and bestow its gifts on all that is living. Only God has the perfect life that sends his sun to shine on all—on sinners and the righteous, on the just and the unjust, on seekers of God and blasphemers of God (Matt. 5:45). This is what makes his justice so thoroughly different from that of all the moralists and theologians, which always and everywhere find it necessary to emphasize boundaries and differences, solid walls and closed doors.

God's heart is mercy; that is, love to all. It wants justice in external things, just as it wants mercy on the soul, because it is the soul of all mercy. Thus Luke closes his words about the attitude of the comrades of the kingdom with the simplest practical watchword: Love! Be merciful from your hearts! Hold on to nothing for yourselves. Do not judge. Do not seek faults in others. Give to all, even to your enemies (Luke 6:27–42).

This attitude means reconciling; it means not resisting; it means giving up all rights. It demands an ever-increasing expenditure of time and strength and life, even if the first step of giving oneself has provoked nothing but antipathy or hostility. The deepest reason for this is the positive, creative, constructive drive of this love, which opposition will only energize and stimulate to greater efforts. Wherever antagonism or hostility appears, the impulse to dedication is strengthened.

Neighbors and enemies – these two are the only classes of beings with whom there can be a living relationship. Nowhere does any other love exist but love to one's neighbor, and love to one's enemies. Jesus' witness embraces both with equal power. To him, the love of one's neighbor is equated with the love of God (Matt. 22:34–40) and is simultaneously and inseparably bound up with unconditional love of one's enemy (Matt. 5:43–48).

This love, which arises from God alone, overflows toward both sides; and it is this love which is proclaimed in the Sermon on the Mount. Whether toward neighbors or enemies, it must prove itself as faithfulness and truthfulness. So too in marriage, which is symbolic of the unity of two in creative power. In the plain vows of a simple, truthful yes or no, this love is shown to be a carrier of the same faithfulness and truth – in the joy of human relations, but just as much in the struggles they bring.

Those who dare to live by this spirit will find that they are always standing anew before the infinite and boundless. They may tremble as if in front of a bottomless abyss, because on this way, things as they are do not afford a foothold anywhere. And yet their lungs fill up over and over again with an endless supply of purity and strength, because the air this spirit brings them is the eternal breath of God – God himself as Spirit. Then again, it threatens at times to burst them, because human lungs cannot contain the infinite. Here we are, at all times, both condemned and pardoned, both poverty-stricken and excessively rich, both killed and awakened (2 Cor. 6:8–10).

Here the laws of antipathy, sympathy, and elective affinity yield;2 here economic problems do not call a halt. Here we no longer find some people more valuable and others more unfit. Here everything that is loud and conspicuous comes to a stop; germinating life is always hidden life, and proceeds and unfolds in silence. Like the harmony, soundless to us, of the cherubim and the galaxies in their eternal worship of God, so too our prayers belong to what is most hidden and chaste in the life that comes from God. The Father seeks life in what is hidden. The remote mountain, the uninhabited steppe, and the closed chamber are the places of final decision (Matt. 6:6). Because of this, our most secluded hours will be brief and filled with clarity, in contrast to those marked by a mass of words, by noise and hubbub (Matt. 6:7). The simple content of our prayers can, after all, circle only around these things: the kingdom of God on earth, our doing of his will; the transformation of all our relationships by God; the granting of daily bread for all; forgiveness and protection (Matt. 6:9-13).

The Sermon on the Mount stands in the midst of that prophetic context in which the message of Jesus merges with that of John the Baptist: change yourselves fundamentally, because the kingdom of God is approaching (Matt. 3:2). What he desires for us is protection in the hour of temptation – that shattering, catastrophic revolution which is to come over the whole earth. Out of the urgency of this hour, a final decision – one that results in a new attitude to life – must be made: a decision for

<sup>2 &</sup>quot;Elective affinity" is a phrase coined by Goethe and later used by Max Weber to describe the coming together or "marriage" of different cultural, religious, or social forms – or personalities – under specific circumstances, for mutually beneficial reasons. Arnold implies, here and elsewhere in his writings, that true community transcends such limited bonds – it is all-inclusive and welcomes all.

voluntary poverty, as the matter-of-fact expression of trust and devotion to God.

Here it makes no difference what kind of riches we have. Regardless, the same command applies: Gather nothing for yourselves! Recognize only one treasure – the treasure of heaven. Admit only one object as the focus of your longing. Either your heart will be set on material things, or your inward eye will be directed toward that which is entirely different – to what is eternal. Here any dividedness of heart means darkening and judgment. You cannot serve God and money at the same time. Again, it is the heart alone that is decisive here. Consequently, any worry about possessions and material things arises from the same anti-divine spirit of mammon as the accumulating of wealth (Matt. 6:19–24).

To embrace the life given by God is to be liberated from both worry and possessions. Just as the birds and flowers around us are cared for, so in the new creation there will be abundance of food and clothing – that is, wherever trust in God recognizes his kingdom as the first and the last priority, as the only thing that matters. Everything else will follow as a matter of course; anyone whose heart is turned toward the future kingdom will no longer be limited or controlled by earthly concerns (Matt. 6:25–33).

Here a simple rule of life naturally arises which can help us on along the way: Never burden yourselves with a view that reaches across long periods of time; always live one day at a time (Matt. 6:34). If you can live like this, you will be like children, like birds and flowers, for whom each day is a whole lifetime, and for whom each day unfolds new joy and new hope. Every day may have brought you new shadows and new nightfall. Every day you may have broken down again in guilt and failure.

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Every day may have shown you your helplessness a thousand times, in the face of the life described in the Sermon on the Mount. Yet each new day brings new sun, new air, new grace.

Live like this, and your trust will grow – trust in God and trust in those in whom God works. Jesus encourages all who obey him to continually renew their life of prayer, and their belief. He promises that when we ask, we shall be given (Matt. 7:7–8), that whoever knocks will have the door opened, allowing entrance into a new realm – as if through an open gate that leads into a big garden. God's garden has an open door. It may be narrow, but it is open to all (Matt. 7:13–14).

As for the object of our asking and believing and waiting and daring, Luke says that it is the Spirit! If even evil people give their children good food, he says, how much more can we rely on God to give us what we need: the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13). Everything that is contained in the Sermon on the Mount is achieved by this spirit. It is the lamb's nature as opposed to that of the wolf. Only out of this matterless matter does God's new creation arise – does that rebirth take place that turns wolves into lambs and transforms the horrors of predacious human society into God's realm of peace.

All the more, however, we cannot allow ourselves to be deceived by signs and gestures, by busyness and bustle. Jesus wants us to be always on our guard against being deceived by soft, lamb-like words, while the unbroken nature of the wolf, whose characteristic mark is the grasping, rapacious will, lies in ambush (Matt. 7:15). It is a matter here of distinguishing spirits – of not giving what is holy to dogs and swine, though never judging (1 Cor. 12:10; Matt. 7:6; Matt. 7:1). Whenever we

judge, whenever we hand down a verdict, we destroy trust, because we stand on a higher step than the one we have condemned. In fact, no one has the right to do this. Only God judges in such a way that he saves. We humans all sit on the same bench; we are all in the same boat.

The Sermon on the Mount judges us all, since it discloses the evil fruits by which the evil tree is recognized (Matt. 7:17). No plan, however well intentioned, no formulation of truth, however correct, can belie this fact. Only where the good fruit of the good deed is revealed – the carrying out of God's justice, and the love that flows from the heart and embraces all people – only there is the new life that is one with the Sermon on the Mount. Wherever these words of Jesus become life and action, there arises the solid building of God that cannot be destroyed even in the final catastrophe. Wherever they do not bear fruit, we will be left with the only thing we can ever expect of human efforts – a heap of rubble (Matt. 7:24–27).

# Human Goodness and God's Spirit

**Until Jesus appeared,** the greatest goodness humans could bring before God was their moral endeavors – strenuous efforts made according to ethical systems in order to attain an ideal goal, or to scrupulously obey commands and prohibitions by repressing and stifling contrary inclinations. Sometimes people even made ecstatic attempts to mortify themselves by denying life itself. By concentrating all their human powers, they sought to make a laborious ascent – or perhaps a frantic charge – up a mountain where the light would not be obscured or the air polluted.

Jesus brings a justice and righteousness that is far better than that offered by any of these human strivings, because his justice is different in every sense from that of the law and the prophets (Matt. 5:17–20). Certainly, the law contains a revelation of God's essence and will, and Jesus does not wish to undo or obscure the incorruptible clarity of this revelation in any way. If anyone were to presume to act in opposition to God's clear and definite will in a manner that confuses and breaks

<sup>&</sup>quot;Human Goodness and God's Spirit" was first published as an article in *Das Neue Werk* in 1920.

down his moral commands and prohibitions, that would constitute a sin against that holiness which God has laid in the human conscience. And if we were to lose this, we would no longer have any refuge or security against the sinister powers of untruth and mendacity, of hatred and greed, and these would hound us from one situation to another until finally, having no support, we would fall prey to death.

The fact is that not one letter of God's ethical commands and moral prohibitions will be canceled for us until the essential thing hidden behind these laws has been revealed and represented, and taken on flesh and life. For these express the holy "thou shalt" of our inner calling, the holy "must" of our inner destiny; they express the absolute that exists in the human soul. Those who belong to the growing number who try nowadays to declare one after the other of God's laws null and void, and then reject them, will be poorly prepared for God's kingdom.

Until the decisive hour when the Word became flesh and reality in Jesus (John 1:14), God chose an almost petrifying form – a demanding and forbidding tone – to express the essence of his holiness. After all, there was no entity that could embody his essence in a more living form and with the same unbroken clarity. The purity of his will had to fall back on the letter of the Mosaic tablets because there was no heart in which it could find unfeigned living expression.

Wherever the plain truth and purity of Jesus' heart has not yet taken root today, wherever the generous love of his Spirit, which knows no greed, has not found its place among us, the law must take over to stop everything from being destroyed. The state, with its violence, and the law, with its statute books, are a necessary safety

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valve for the inorganic witches' brew of a chaotic populace. Just as excessive steam can burst a boiler (and then disperse into nothingness), so the opposing disconnected elements of society will burst apart, fragmenting and ruining everything, unless the ironclad sheath of governmental force with the safety valves of its laws holds firm.

A completely different situation arises wherever people are gripped by God's love. Then they grow toward one another and become organs of a mysterious unity, of a mystical body that, ruled by a spirit of unity, is of one heart and one soul (1 Cor. 12:13). Here the need for force and coercion, for law and moral striving, is done away with, because the Spirit, which the law expressed imperfectly, has come to rule. The better and wholly other righteousness that Jesus brought is goodness of heart, organic strength from God. Working through the soul, it embraces all of human existence. It is the justice of humankind's future; it no longer needs to take into account the mutual restraints (and subsequent injuries) that belong to our current circumstances, as determined by the law.

This new justice is unconquerable because it is born of God's goodness. It cannot be weakened or altered, since it is the manifestation of a life energy that seeks to unfold everywhere and to be applied to every area of life. This justice *is* goodness, because God is good. His goodness is love; his justice reveals all the powers of his love. Any attempt to be as good as this on the basis of legal regulations, moral principles, or traditions is doomed to failure from the outset; such a justice can never lead to burgeoning life. It never leads to anything more than laborious efforts, like forcing oneself to fit into armor that is too small, or into patterns that do not naturally spring from life.

The scribes and the Pharisees had ironclad convictions, moral direction, and firm will. They were better than their reputation; they were upright, devout figures who commanded respect, men who felt deeply their responsibility to their people in terms of ethics and religion. But they lacked the free spirit that blows from God (John 3:8). They did not have the gift of life from God, the life that is compelled to grow and bear fruit simply because it is there. They were not filled with the Holy Spirit. They lacked God himself.

God cannot be imitated. His power can never be replaced by anything. His nature cannot be duplicated. As for us, we cannot compel ourselves to love. We cannot artificially manufacture the first works of the first love. No intelligent reflection, no moral resolution or effort of will can produce the warmth of heart that is of God. In Jesus, however, the law is replaced by the living warmth of God's love. He overcame morals and moralism by something better – by God's own life, which the law only foreshadowed (Heb. 10:1). Wherever he lives, active love takes the place of dead moralism.

Jesus brings a completely different justice and righteousness to bear. He brings God's goodness with him wherever he goes, because he brings God himself—the God who encompasses everything and does not tolerate anything isolated; the living God who wants nothing but life; the God of riches whose wealth consists in giving; the God of radiating light and flooding warmth. Only those who lose themselves in God can take part in this new justice and righteousness. Only where God himself lives and works does the justice and righteousness of his warmly pulsing heart take the place of the stony tablets of the law.

## Away from Compromise and Shadow

It is not by chance that a discussion has arisen in our periodical about compromise and about the shadow with which one must come to terms, because it is there everywhere and at all times. Dormant behind this lies the fundamental riddle of life – the problem of evil and death, which concerns all serious-minded people again and again. Evil and death are so oppressive that goodness and life constantly threaten to succumb to them. In all the circles of the larger movement our readers are in touch with, that slackening of purpose – that avoidance of the either-or, as represented by Heinrich Euler and his friends – has spread in a frightening way.

<sup>&</sup>quot;Away from Compromise and Shadow" was first published as an article in *Die Wegwarte* in 1925. In it, Arnold responded to fellow writers in the magazine – notably Heinrich Euler and Max Dressler – who had argued that in today's world, discipleship would always entail some level of compromise.

<sup>1</sup> The "movement" Arnold is referring to here and elsewhere in this book is the Christian wing of the German Youth Movement, a collective term for a wide variety of loose associations of young people that sought for societal renewal in the first two decades of the twentieth century, before the rise of fascism. Common goals included social and economic equality, the revitalization of arts and crafts and traditional agricultural methods, educational reform, and the formation of cooperatives and communes.

Initially, the movement at large was awakened by the coming light and turned away from compromise with today's darkness. It was clear to those who belonged to it that there can be no compromise with evil. The word "compromise" has its origin in the language of law, and means a mutual settlement between contending parties. Well and good – it belongs there, wherever there is legal conflict. It is a settlement between opposing parties who are both fighting for, say, the same property, or it is the agreement on which a court of arbitration insists.

We, however, are concerned with the question of striving for a better justice and righteousness – that of the all-giving heart of Jesus as reflected in his Sermon on the Mount – in the place of this highest form of justice from the point of view of the law. This means that, when faced with the threat of a legal battle, we who want to follow the path of life and love will be ready to give up everything, and allow our opponents to take everything away from us, rather than compromise (Matt. 5:38–42). And we will not be subjecting ourselves to hard demands made on futile efforts; rather, we will be met by assurances of the deepest powers and given opportunities for overflowing joy and love.

The news of the new life is this: bringing joy precludes murder; love hates no one; truth brooks no compromise with deceit; the heart can remain pure only by making no concessions. For the Father of Jesus, who gives all, enters no mutual settlement with mammon, least of all in a heart that belongs to him. In short, if we truly have joy in life, and love for all people, we will not tolerate any compromise with death, any concession to loveless indifference or murderous injustice and brutality, because the way of love reaches

out to all people, touches all things, and transforms every situation. This is the essence of the new life, the message of the kingdom, the meaning of Jesus' teachings. Here is his heart.

Every movement that comes from God will be concerned with this way of life. And whenever such a living movement of hearts dies, this way will be deserted. The process of dying reaches the final stage of death when we give up our wrestling with death, when we abandon the struggle for life and surrender, unresisting, to the shadow of death. This is the natural dying that threatens every movement, slipping into Philistinism and mediocrity, and away from the struggle to which Jesus has called us.

The fact that people try to live simultaneously on the basis of the law and on the basis of grace; that a life of nonviolence in this age is regarded as a fiction and fantasy even though Jesus himself went this way; that people fight against every uncompromising stance and then congratulate themselves for having stood up against legalism and fanaticism; that they want to say an unqualified yes to every sphere of earthly life; that they are in fact infatuated with the shadow of evil and take pains to show that one can never get rid of it, and that it basically makes no difference whether there is more or less compromise – all this shows how far they have strayed from the way.

Max Dressler shows us a salient point of the new life: that healing can come about only by experiencing love in the form of full forgiveness of sin, and that in this state, the legalistic "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" cease to be. This cannot be emphasized strongly enough. And yet it is disconcerting that he meanwhile fails to draw the only possible consequence for practical life from the

experience of this love: that he who is forgiven much, must love much (Luke 7:47). As it is put elsewhere, "How can we love God, whom we do not see, if we do not love the brother whom we see?" (1 John 4:20)

Yes, there is only one way, the way of love, the love that comes from forgiveness and has its essence in forgiveness. And this way is absolute discipleship of Jesus, a way that allows for no compromise with all that is loveless in our times. Of course, this does not mean that if we are gripped by love we will never make compromises; rather, it means that the love which has gripped us can make no compromises. If we nevertheless fall for evil, this is a result of our own weakness of character. But whenever love takes hold of us again and fills us with its glowing warmth, we once more set our eyes on the highest goal and live again in accordance with the word of Jesus – that is, in the power of his perfect love and nothing else.

As the First Letter of John plainly puts it, "Whoever claims to be without sin is a liar." (1 John 1:8) John tells us this to keep us from falling into sin. But he goes on to say that if we do sin, we have an advocate who expiates sin (1 John 2:1–2), and that whoever abides in him will not sin. If someone does sin, that person, in sinning, has not seen him or known him (1 John 3:6). "We know that we belong to God, and the whole world lives in evil." (1 John 5:19)

Those who defend sin show, by virtue of this attitude, that they have strayed from recognizing Jesus; in speaking this way, they show that they have neither seen nor recognized him.

It makes a great deal of difference whether the evil we are speaking of lies before us, as something that we are tempted to commit, or in our past, so that we can leave it and forget it. For Paul, it was essential to leave everything behind and to turn and race headlong toward the goal with his eyes set on nothing else (Phil. 2:12–14). Of course, he never claimed that he wasn't guilty of anything – this was always clear to him, and he testified to the fact. Yet he argued that the forgiveness Christ brings means complete liberation. Because of this, Paul saw himself as a fighter who fought in full armor against all evil, and even death itself (Eph. 6:11–17).

Uncompromising love has nothing to do with softness or flabbiness, nothing to do with an attitude of resignation. On the contrary, it will make us so resolute that we will take up a spiritual fight against every power that is opposed to peace and love (Eph. 6:12). In this fight it will be out of the question to injure or kill a fellow human being, for the simple reason that no human capacity for discernment can fairly judge who is ultimately evil—who must be rejected or forfeited or killed. All the more, this fight of the spirits must be waged first and foremost within each person against everything we recognize there to be inimical or injurious to life, hostile to human fellowship, or directed against God.

If I am truly permeated with life and gripped by love, I will be a fighter to the point of shedding my blood. I will never be hard toward my fellow humans, though it may be felt as hardness when, in the passion of glowing love, I exuberantly take up the struggle against the evil I contend with in myself and those around me, and in the public square. On the one hand, my fight will be a completely private matter – one that informs my personal decisions in a deep mutual relationship between me and God alone – on the other, it will also be a public matter, because it will demand that I take

a determined stand in opposition to all unjust human conditions as they are, in the public sphere no less than in private life.

My attitude, if I am such a fighter, will be erroneously regarded as moralistic or even legalistic. And
yet the ethic that drives my conduct toward my fellow
human beings, and my attitude to all societal endeavors
and institutions, will remain clearly defined by its
content – defined, that is, by its goal, which is God's
kingdom – and by the character of the Son of Man
and his comrades of the kingdom; by the truth of love,
and by the will of God's heart. This will is the life of
complete love, the attitude of the future world; it is the
perfection of God in which we must attempt to live,
because there is no other real life.

All of which brings us to the age-old topic of perfection and sinlessness. It is obvious enough that in the here and now, as we are, there is no sinless state. But the way people everywhere speak nowadays about the necessity of evil and about our common bondage in guilt unquestionably leads to something like consent to involvement in guilt. People ironically dismiss the world peace to which the prophets witnessed, the elimination of government proclaimed in John's Revelation (Rev. 17–18), and the overcoming of the present social order by brotherhood in church community; they dismiss the communal life which should be - and again and again has been – the self-evident expression of true love. In dismissing all these things, these people clearly show that in all these critical spheres, they no longer really want to take a stand against evil. They would rather avoid the great either-or that Jesus confronts us with: God or mammon (Matt. 6:24).

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No wonder we have lost the clarity with which Jesus challenged us to clearly say yes or no: never something between the two, and never no when we mean yes, or vice versa (Matt. 5:37). Everywhere these days, people are turning from the way of Jesus, weakly accepting our paradoxical situation in relation to God – all they seem able to do is to say yes and no at the same time to everything. This is what we have to fight against.

A leader in our dying youth movement who tends to dissolve its decisiveness with speculative paradoxes once called out at one of our meetings, "Surely you don't mean to wage a general campaign against all evil?" My response? Yes, this is exactly what it is all about! This is the reason that Jesus came to the world, and this is why he called us to follow him, and sent us out – so that we would take up and carry on this campaign in every field and in all things. He came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). As the Son of God, he is light, and in him there is no darkness (1 John 1:5).

## Against Bloodshed and Violence

**Again and again** in the life of a nation, between nations, and in the struggle between social classes, we experience violent outbursts of accumulated tensions and conflicts. These outbursts reveal the existing state of mutual exploitation and oppression, and not least of all, the savage instincts of chaotic, covetous passions. Volcanic eruptions of inordinate bloodlust, followed by merciless countermeasures, have intensified in certain quarters and spread to such an extent that it is necessary to say a clear word here.

Others may see their task in the upholding of law and order by murderous means; others may believe they are called to fight for the proletariat, for a future of justice and peace, with bloodstained fists, if necessary; others may regard their own race as a holy shrine and declare war on another. Our life is filled with a content that has deeper roots. A life task has been entrusted to us which looks further ahead. The mystery of life has been revealed to us. It has dawned upon us, because Christ

<sup>&</sup>quot;Against Bloodshed and Violence" was first published as an article in *Das Neue Werk* in April 1921. It was written in the context of widespread political unrest across Germany.

means everything to us. We feel united with the whole church of Christ, in which no group or individual can live in isolation from the rest. Both the one and the other are members of the one living organism whose spirit, head, and heart is the coming Christ (1 Cor. 12:12–13; Eph. 5:23). This is why the testimony of our life is nothing but the essence of his life (Gal. 2:20). He discloses the mystery of life to us when he points to the birds in the air, and to the flowers of the field (Matt. 6:26–29), when he expects good fruits only from the healthy tree (Matt. 6:17–18), and when he reveals to us the heart of a Father who sends his rain and sunshine on both the good and the bad (Matt. 5:45).

Life is growth and development. Life is the unfolding of love. Killing has nothing to do with life. It belongs to the realm of death. Violence and coercion do not belong to growth but to its stifling. The witness that has been entrusted to us is to live only for what serves and builds up life. It makes no difference whether our progress appears to be evolutionary or revolutionary. It is both at the same time – a matter of development and upheaval – because what is alive always wants to cast off that which is dying. Living means giving and bestowing whatever awakens life. Yet neither evolution nor revolution can ever fully eradicate the deepest roots of world suffering: universal guilt, and the lethal poison of evil, of hatred, covetous lust, depravity, and killing.

The new birth Jesus spoke of is brought about by organic life. It springs from the same God who is at work in all that is living. Yet in order for it to bring about a new beginning, it must also bring about a tearing down and away – a toppling of the old. It is a painful liberation, this new birth. But every individual, and humankind collectively, is in need of it.

We believe in the new birth of a life filled with light from God. We believe in the future of love and in the constructive fellowship of human beings. We believe in the peace of the kingdom that God will bring and institute on this earth. This faith is not a matter of playing with a future shape of things that exists only in our imaginations. No, the same God who will bring about this future gives us his heart and his Spirit today. His name is I Am Who I Am (Exod. 3:14). His nature is the same now as it will reveal itself to be in the future (Heb. 13:8).

God revealed his heart in Jesus. He gave his Spirit by giving us Christ's presence among us. In his church, the embodiment of Christ's life, he lives the life of Jesus again and again. This church is the hidden living seed of the future kingdom. But the characteristic spirit of this kingdom – peace and love – has been entrusted to the church even now. Therefore, it practices justice and righteousness and nurtures joy, in this world and in the present age.

And so we speak up in protest against bloodshed and violence in the context of this life-witness, no matter from which side these powers of death may come. Our witness and our will for peace, for love at any cost, even at the cost of our own lives, has never been more necessary than it is today. There are those who reproach us for speaking about nonviolence, conscientious objection, nonresistance, and following Jesus in the power of his radiating love, which precludes all violence and makes it impossible for us to inflict any kind of injury on others. They say these questions are not as urgent as we make them out to be. But they are the ones who are in error – they are completely mistaken, in fact, if they think these topics are not highly relevant today. On the

contrary, these issues are more urgent today than they ever were, and it will eventually become evident to all that to persevere in an attitude of loyal, unconditional love requires the utmost bravery. It requires manly courage and the readiness to die.

Jesus knew that he would never be able to conquer the earth spirit by greater violence, but only by greater love. This is why he resisted and overcame the temptation to seize power over the kingdoms of this world (Matt. 4:8-10). He proclaimed the rulership of God, which is of the present and of the future at the same time. And God's will was present in his life – in his deeds, his words, and his suffering. This is why, in the Sermon on the Mount, he speaks of people who are strong in love, of peacemakers, of the people of the heart who will inherit the land and possess the earth, people to whom the kingdom of God belongs (Matt. 5:3-11). He took up the ancient proclamations of peace and justice which belong to the future kingdom of God. He intensified the crucial command, "Thou shalt not kill," which rules out the taking of life in every instance, since it is the original sacrilege against life; he showed that any cruel treatment, any brutal violation of a person's inner life, falls under the same prohibition, and that anything that injures body and soul is as wrong as actually killing someone (Matt. 5:3-11).

It is a matter of deepest regret, therefore, that so many serious-minded Christians today do not share this simple and clear witness of Jesus and early Christianity, which living, biblically grounded churches and movements in other centuries represented and proclaimed so strongly. These took an unwavering attitude and declared that participation in war and in any military

profession are irreconcilable with the calling of Christianity. Certainly, that does not rule out the need for police forces, for example. Their service is more ethical than the competition of two business concerns in which only one is able to survive. But what we are concerned with here is a completely different question – the nature of the mission and testimony of Christ, the question of the church and the task it has been commissioned to do.

We do not deny the existence of great evil and sin, and we do not deny that one day the world will end. But we do not believe in the ultimate power of evil; we believe that God's realm is the final reality, and we believe in the rebirth of the earth and of humankind. This faith is not evolutionism, a belief in the inevitable ascent to ever greater, more visible perfection. On the contrary, we believe in the growth of the divine seed in the conscience, in the Spirit of Christ that leads to the rebirth of the individual, and in the fellowship of the church. But we also believe in the necessity of upheaval, the unavoidability of world catastrophe and world judgment in war, revolution, and all the other horrors of the end times, because we believe in the collapse of the depraved and degenerate world of compulsion and coercion.

This faith expects everything from God alone. It is certain, however, that God's seed and God's light are even at work in people – that he reveals his heart and his future kingdom in the church of Christ. Yes, it is true that the tension between the powers of Christ and of the Antichrist is also present. It can be found everywhere, also in the midst of the Christian church. And this tension will only become stronger the more radically we hold on to faith in absolute love and in what is coming in the future. But faith does not fear the collision

between spiritual forces; rather, it expects and even longs for this conflict, because it knows the end must come at last, and after it a completely new world.

It is an error to think that Jesus only wanted to feed the hungry soul. Jesus concerned himself just as much with the human body. He proclaimed the same message of the future world order of peace and justice that we find in John the Baptist and the prophets of the Old Testament, just as surely and determinedly as he proclaimed the rebirth of the individual.

Because we know there are many today who no longer respond to biblical language, or are not yet able to do so, we must find new ways to share this message, as often as this is given to us. This is why we close this confession of our faith with Hermann Hesse's thought on the word of life, "Thou shalt not kill":

We are not yet humans; we are still on our way to humanity. Every pupil of Lao Tzu, every disciple of Jesus, every follower of Francis of Assisi, was further ahead, much further ahead, than the laws and reasonings of present-day civilization. Yet the sentence "Thou shalt not kill" has been honored faithfully and obeyed by thousands of people for thousands of years. There has always been a minority of well-meaning people who had faith in the future, who obeyed laws which are not listed in any worldly book of statutes. As soldiers they showed compassion and respected their enemies, or steadfastly refused to kill and hate when ordered to do so, suffering imprisonment and torture for this.

To appreciate these people and what they did, and to overcome doubts about us animals becoming human one day, we must live in faith. We must consider thoughts to be just as valuable as bullets or coins. The "practical" person is always wrong. The future, the idea, faith, is always right, because the power that feeds the world comes from this engine and no other.

And we who believe in the future will raise the ancient demand again and again: "Thou shalt not kill." It is the basic demand of all progress, of becoming human.

We kill at every step, not only in wars, riots, and executions. We kill when we close our eyes to poverty, suffering, and shame. For the consistent socialist all property is theft. In the same way, all disrespect for life, all hardheartedness, all indifference, all contempt is nothing else than killing in the eyes of the consistent believer of our kind. And it is possible to kill not only what exists in the present, but also what belongs to the future. With just a little witty skepticism, one can kill a good deal of the future in a young person. Life is waiting everywhere, the future is flowering everywhere, but we only see a small part of it and step on much of it with our feet. We kill with every step.

This is why, above all, every one of us has a personal task to do. This task is not to help advance the whole of humanity a little; it is not to work for the improvement of some institution, nor to abolish one or the other particular kind of killing. All this is good, and necessary too. But the most important task for me and you, my fellow human being, is this: to take a step forward, in our own personal lives, from animal to human.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hermann Hesse, in his magazine Vivos Voco, March 1919.

## The Better Righteousness

**In the Sermon on the Mount,** Jesus portrays the essential character of his kingdom (Matt. 5:20). Here the inner nature of the comrades of the kingdom finds its definitive form. Here is the new ethic of a better righteousness, founded on a unique experience of God.

The old morality, described by Jesus as the "right-eousness of the scribes and Pharisees," is an outward one brought about by legalism and the coercion of society, church, and state. The better righteousness, by contrast, shows that its nature is inner freedom. Independent of outward circumstances, this better righteousness allows nothing and no one to impose on it conditions which direct its life from outside. For this reason it is in opposition to mammonistic servility and builds alone upon God and fellowship with him.

The character of true comrades of the kingdom differs so sharply from that of other people that it can be compared only with the nature of the Father in heaven. "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matt. 5:48)

<sup>&</sup>quot;The Better Righteousness" was first published as an article in *Mitteilungen zur Förderung einer deutschen christlichen Studentenbewegung* (Contributions to the promotion of a German Christian student movement) in April 1919.

God is the wellspring of life; he is the life-giving Spirit and overflowing love. It is only by means of the new birth – by this Spirit of the Father – that we can become his children and gain his character. Both Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and his conversation with Nicodemus (Matt. 5–7; John 3:1–21) proclaim this mystery and lead us into community with God – into the unity of the soul with its Creator.

The new life Jesus presents in the Sermon on the Mount can be attained only through that fundamental experience Paul calls the liberation from the old man and the gift of the new (Eph. 4:22–24). Jesus himself is the new man, the second Adam, the giver of life who leads us from the death of the old nature into the warm, powerful life that characterizes a new humanity (1 Cor. 15:45). In fellowship with him we take on the nature of salt, which overcomes the decay of death. In him we reflect the light that sheds life-giving warmth and guiding clarity. In him we gain the new nature whose life core is God himself—the nature of the Holy Spirit and of love.

The Sermon on the Mount brings home to us the right relationship to the Father in prayer and gives us deep trust and confidence in him (Matt. 6:9–13). Jesus is the door, the narrow gateway that leads us into this life of nearness and fellowship with God (Matt. 7:13–14; John 14:6). He frees us from the vanity and arrogance that are the underlying attitude of people who are pious and moral in their own strength. When we stand face to face with Jesus, we recognize our neediness and become beggars before God. Therefore, it is an essential mark of the new righteousness that we long for him, that our thirst for him is unquenchable, and that our hunger for righteousness never ceases.

The paradox of this deepest experience of the new life in God is precisely that the awareness of utter neediness is combined with clear decision of will and genuine singleness of heart. For while the righteousness of the moralist by its very nature remains under pressure and compulsion, the better righteousness of Jesus is marked by spontaneity.

The deeds of this better righteousness come from a life energy whose innermost nature presses to be put into action. Thus Jesus' parable of the good tree and its good fruit and the rotten tree and its bad fruit will always remain indispensable images by which we learn to distinguish the better justice from the worse (Matt. 7:15–20). Only those deeds which come unforced and unintended from our inner nature ought to be regarded as good fruit. Our lives can be said to be lived according to the better righteousness only when they bring forth this good fruit: a conduct that shows this righteousness to be completely different from any other.

The better righteousness brought by Jesus springs from fellowship with God, from the direct encounter of the soul whose life is in God. Its whole attitude reveals the Father's nature. God cannot lie, and the new justice is simple truthfulness that seeks in all things the genuine expression of its true nature. The moralistic attitude dominant in the world, the assertion of force and of rights, are now replaced by love that calls no halt, even in the face of the enemy. It is a love whose nature will not be swayed by any move of any opponent.

Love reveals itself here as a vital power, a better and stronger force that overcomes even the degeneration of an unhealthy love life, and so demonstrates purity of thought and fidelity. Because the newly won life is built on the mercy we have experienced, the love it carries with it is capable of a compassion that embraces the suffering of the whole world. Its mercy is shown both in its capacity to bear burdens patiently and in the active power by which it promotes life and establishes justice.

God's will is peace and justice. Only those who actually do his will are within the sphere of the new kingdom. The new life Jesus brings shows itself in deeds that seek love's peace and love's justice for all people. We are deceiving ourselves if we think that the old righteousness of might and of standing on rights is the wiser form of conduct. Jesus compares anyone who does not act according to the better righteousness to a foolish person whose house is built on a poor foundation, and must therefore eventually collapse. Only if we hear and do what Jesus says can we be compared to the wise person who builds his house upon a rock (Matt. 7:24–27).

### God or Mammon

**Jesus said,** "No one can serve two masters; either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and look down on the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." (Matt. 6:24)

One of the greatest things in this great time is that the war has opened the eyes of many to see that becoming absorbed in outward things and the pursuit of money is incompatible with higher purposes and goals, and that the great dynamic struggle Jesus spoke of between the forces of God and mammon is still going on today.

Mamona was the Aramaic word for wealth, and it was behind this wealth that Jesus saw the true power of Satan. The latter had said to Jesus himself, "I will give you all this if you will fall down and adore me." (Matt. 4:9) We cannot devote ourselves to a life of outward ease and pleasure without the value that we assign to these material things becoming the predominant force in our lives. The service of mammon always contains a kind of reverence or secret worship of things – a clinging

<sup>&</sup>quot;God or Mammon" is abridged from an article originally published in *Der Warheitszeuge* (Witness for Truth) in July 1915, about a year after the outbreak of the First World War.

to them and a love for them that denotes a simultaneous abandonment of God.

Every attempt to combine servitude to God and to mammon will end in failure. This is why Jesus calls us to be single-hearted; to love God alone and cleave to him, and to despise mammon. God and money are the two masters between whom we must choose; they are two opposite poles, as far as living and striving goes, and cannot be reconciled. No wonder that already in the earliest Christian era, certain scholars (for instance, Gregory of Nyssa) interpreted "mammon" as a name of the devil Beelzebub. Others, including Nicholas of Lyra, interpreted it as the name of a demon particularly connected with money in Satan's realm.

Here is the great antithesis. On the one side is the inclination toward bodily ease, material well-being, comfort, and pleasure. This is, ironically enough, a poverty-stricken stance, one that seeks only what can be demanded and hoarded from life and wants to obtain the greatest possible gain, enjoyment, and leisure. Anyone who cherishes the comfortable life will assign a high value to material goods, and whoever is transfixed by the worth of things will be dominated by their power.

Those who live like this naturally value wealth as well, and yet they remain in poverty, as slaves, because they want to take and only to take. They do not possess that abundance of life which makes people want only to give and bestow. It is this grasping behavior that constitutes service to mammon. When people ask, "What can you give me, life?" they reveal an attitude that centers on wants and wishes and rights; its goal in all work remains payment and profit.

It is simply a fact that service to mammon, in which profit and advantage, pleasure and enjoyment are the goal of life, is an outstanding characteristic of the way countless people think and live today. And honesty compels us to further recognize that in the majority of people, whether rich or poor, striving for money and property, benefits and advantages, sensual comforts and material "happiness" represses every other ambition. Even among believers, love of money shows itself to be an ever-present danger. It is an ancient one, too, and threatened even the original community of the first Christians (Acts 5:1–11).

Nothing but the overcoming and mastery of self can bring about the destruction of the false life of debasement lived in service to mammon; only this can lead to a higher, true life. This deeper recognition has been witnessed to even outside the ranks of Christians. Zoroaster, for example, says, "Consume yourself in your own flame; how else can you become new, if not by first turning to ashes?" And as Goethe writes in *Faust*:

As long as you do not have This "die and live again," You will remain a sorry guest Upon a gloomy earth.

How is it possible to "re-become," as the medieval mystic Eckhart put it; or how to "de-self oneself," as Goethe worded it, when we are bound and fettered – when we are enslaved to mammon? And how can one enter a strong man's house and steal his goods, unless one first binds the strong man (Matt. 12:29)? When a strong, fully armed man guards a dwelling, the goods inside it are safe; but when a stronger man comes and conquers him, his armor will be taken away, and the

spoils divided (Luke 11:21–22). Jesus is the stronger man; indeed, he has already overcome, disarmed, and bound the other (Col. 2:15).

The cross is the triumph over the house of mammon built and guarded by the devil. The victory of the cross is deliverance from the sin of serving mammon, from death in a debased life. "And Christ died for all, so that the living might live no longer for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again." (2 Cor. 5:15) "Now if we have died with Christ, we believe we will also live with him." (Rom. 6:8) Therefore, "Set your hearts on what is above, not on what is here on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." (Col. 3:2–3)

## The Fight Against Mammon

**If life is love**, and love means fellowship; if all living things in their common association breed, nurture, and spread new life; if all living things are thus moving toward unity and freedom – if all this is true, then the question arises: How is it possible that death, destruction, mutual dispossession, and murder are rampant in the world today?

In the world we know – the epoch we live in – there is not only one power at work, the power of love and life that leads to association and to the fellowship of all things. There is also another power at work. This power is the opposite principle: it is death, which destroys life; it is the power of separation and destruction that bursts asunder every bond of love. This power kills, murders, enslaves, and severs. It is a poison that sickens and corrupts. It isolates; it is the power of covetousness and egomania. These forces attack the roots of all that holds life together at its core. Their aim is to destroy the coherence of all living things. Alongside

<sup>&</sup>quot;The Fight Against Mammon" is based on material from a lecture series given by Arnold from October 1923 to January 1924 under the heading "The God Mammon."

the constructive power, alongside creative energy, that which kills, murders, enslaves, and severs is also at work.

Tension between opposites is the reality of human life. Whenever we look for a way to consecrate our lives, whenever a longing for devotion arises in us, whenever people seek religion, they are faced with this either-or, with the question of God or mammon.

But it is an error to think that everything religious engenders unity, and that everything irreligious belongs to the other side. To depict the truth of the matter in a deeper sense, one would have to draw a very different dividing line, one that cuts right across the religious and the nonreligious.

Everything that goes by the name of religion is related to a power that carries on its activity independently of us humans. And yet it must still be asked whether all relationships relate to the same center or essential content. With many who call themselves Christians and confess to the name of Jesus Christ, it is questionable whether their religion has anything to do with God, the Father of the Messiah, and his coming kingdom. In fact, one must ask if their religion is not really that of the antigod. Isn't religion, including Christianity, permeated by demonic powers of the abyss that have brought about the disintegration of all human solidarity? Is the great world organization that names itself after Christ not serving a god other than the God and Father whom Jesus confessed, the God of a totally different order? Hasn't the world church, which in practice has sided with wealth and protected it, sanctified mammon, christened warships, and blessed soldiers going into war, in essence denied him whom it confesses with words? And isn't the Christian state, despised as it

is by the Hindus and Chinese, not the most anti-divine institution that ever existed? Isn't it clear that a government that protects privilege and wealth as well as the organized church is diametrically opposed to the future that God will bring about when Jesus establishes his order of justice?

Here we are faced with a most revolutionary question: whether that supposedly greatest and holiest thing – reverence for church and state – does not contain within it homage to Satan; whether the justification for large landed properties is not intrinsically Satanism; and whether this Satanism has not led to the acme of covetousness – the murderous slaughter of fellow human beings. Can this Moloch possibly be identical with the God and Father of Jesus Christ? Only from the spirit of mammon do wars arise, and also purchasable love – the defiling of bodies on the street. You cannot serve God and mammon (Matt. 6:24).

It is relatively unknown that early Christianity recognized in all sharpness that the religiosity of the present world epoch is actually hostile to God. The message brought into the world by the first witnesses of the Christ was the message of a completely different kingdom, built on the transvaluation of all values.¹ The first Christians bore witness to this message of the totally new order to come, calling it the message wrapped in mystery, concealed from those who are lost, since their minds have been clouded, and their eyes blinded, by the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4).

In opposition to the God of the beginning and the end – the God of the future who will establish the

<sup>1</sup> The phrase "transvaluation of all values" is from Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*.

coming kingdom of Jesus Christ, with its justice, unity, and love – stands the interim god, the god of this age. This god is the spirit of this world, the earth spirit, brought close to us today in modern literature.<sup>2</sup> This god of greed, of murderous possessiveness, of grasping and holding, is the spirit of this world. By contrast, the first witnesses of Jesus testify that in receiving him, we have not received the spirit of this world, but the Spirit that searches the depths of God, the Spirit that none can know unless they are known by him (1 Cor. 2:10–12).

**Nobody can serve** two masters; therefore no one can serve both God and mammon. Jesus defined with utmost sharpness the nature of this mammon spirit. He unmasked the religiousness of the propertied classes and showed how those who live in this sphere worship a spirit of death and murder. It is through this spirit that wars break out; through this spirit lust becomes a tool of commerce. Through the possessive will of this spirit, murder and deceit become commonplace and humdrum.

Jesus called Satan the murderer from the beginning, the leader of unclean spirits (John 8:44). That is mammon's nature. It is not only actual wars that signify this spirit, but also the desperation that daily drives hungry children and unemployed men into villages, only to be chased out again by farmers with their dogs.<sup>3</sup> We have become used to countless people being

<sup>2</sup> The silent film *Erdgeist* (Earth Spirit), based on Frank Wedekind's play of the same title, was released in the same year Arnold was writing.

<sup>3</sup> The years following the end of World War I in Germany had been marked by hyperinflation, widespread unemployment, malnutrition, and scenes like the one Arnold describes here.

crushed through our affluence, just as one might take a bedbug and squash it. We have stopped agonizing over the people right around us who are destroyed because of our wealth, like vermin trapped by a rat catcher.

Even a blind person can see that we have reached a historic juncture where the flowering of the mammon spirit spells incessant death – the death of hundreds and thousands of people. It is because of the deceitful powers inherent in this spirit that it is possible for big business to predominate as it does. Just as we experienced during the war that lying belongs to murder, as its twin, and just as it is impossible to wage a war without a basic level of mendacity – in the same way, a capitalistic society can be maintained only by lying, by duping the public.

This lie is impossible to adequately describe; we cannot go into greater detail here. As individuals, we each bear a responsibility to delve into these economic questions ourselves, taking pains to enquire into the murderous effects of mammon and its rule. If we really turned our attention to the problem, if we saw how common and widespread injustice is —without the world's conscience being aroused by it, let alone rising up against it — we would instantly realize the real situation. In a single flash of recognition, we would see that capitalism by its very nature involves injustice, and that recognition would be enough to set off an uprising against the greatest deception of humankind in world history.

We are a long way from such a revolt. There will always be rich and poor – this is the thinking even in the most pious circles, and even among many working people. People argue that when a person with a fortune in gold at his disposal is able to give work and livelihood

to a large number of people, then one should simply accept the situation and be glad that such an energetic personality exists. But this view ignores the impossibility of amassing such a fortune – meaning, at the same time, such power – without injuring, depriving, and cheating one's fellow humans and destroying their lives. This faulty argument fails to see that since big business is concentrated in just a few hands, the decision of one person can steer thousands and hundreds of thousands toward certain ruin through unemployment – and this is happening today.

Why do these facts remain hidden from us? How is it possible that people are constantly cheated of justice and that we remain blind to it? It is because we ourselves are also under the rule of this god.

Mammon is money ruling over people. Subjected to the dominion of money ourselves, we lack the strength to rebel against its rule. Whenever life is dependent on income and finances, that is mammon. And because we are dependent in precisely this way – because our personal lives are broken by our enslavement to mammon – we are not in a position to apply the lever that lifts the locked door off its hinges. And yet we are able to recognize that money is the real enemy of God.

God or mammon. Money or spirit. This is the question. As spirit, God is the foundation of our deepest relationships, the innermost fellowship of everything that is alive. All people have an ongoing mutual relationship with other people; no one lives in true isolation. All are interrelated somehow—in groups, families, classes, professions; in nations, states, churches, and all kinds of associations. But these are not their only connections; simply by virtue of being human, they are

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also interrelated in a much deeper way, as members of the great, growing communion of humankind.

God can grant us the richest relationships imaginable, relationships of love between person and person, spirit and spirit, heart and heart – relationships that lead to organic, constructive fellowship. But there is a devilish means of robbing even the most spiritual relationship of God, and switching off the flow of love, as it were, from heart to heart. That means is money.

Money is the objectification of all human relationships. Money redirects relationships until finally the only value left is money. Property and money are the means used by the satanic power to destroy our highest goals in life. This fact makes itself felt more and more as money becomes a commodity in itself instead of a means of barter; in the end, all we have left is money itself: money as power. Money acquires significance because so many people are connected with each other solely through it, with no trace of any deeper relationships. Money basically excludes all true fellowship. Banking takes its place.

Money and love are mutually exclusive; money is the opposite of love, just as the sexual defilement of bodies is the opposite of love; just as killing in war is the radical opposite of giving life; just as lying is the opposite of telling the truth.

When mammon rules, it rules soul and spirit. It would be impossible for big business to have such power to enslave and murder, except for the dominion exerted by the mammon spirit. Under this dominion the possessive will is stronger than the will to community; the struggle for survival expressed in mutual readiness to kill is stronger than the urge to love, stronger than the

spirit of mutual help; destructive powers are stronger than constructive ones; matter is stronger than spirit; things and circumstances count for more than God; self-assertion is stronger than the spirit of solidarity that brings about fellowship. Instead of setting people in motion and inspiring them to work in a creative way for the life of fellowship, the mammon spirit has engendered an enslavement and scorn of the soul that has made us more subject to circumstance than religious people have ever been subject to God. Because of this reality, everything concerning the god of mammon becomes a thoroughly religious question. In truth, this spirit – the spirit of lying, impurity, and murder – is the spirit of weakness and death.

**Jesus declared war** on this spirit. He conquered it by overwhelming it; by healing victims of sickness and decay with his power. Jesus, the prince of life, declared himself the enemy of death. He lived among us to take away death's power and to destroy it, as the devil's work (1 John 3:8). Here death is overcome by the Spirit of life that proceeds from Christ and brings about the fellowship of all living things. Christ was so conscious of this that he exclaimed, "Now is the judgment of this world; now the prince of this world will be cast out" (John 12:31) And the Holy Spirit convinces us that this prince has been defeated (John 16:11).

We are now compelled to ask how Jesus conducted this fight. Did he not say, "Make friends for yourselves through unjust mammon" (Luke 16:9)? Did he not say, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's" (Matt. 22:21)? How can we reconcile these commands with these other

words of his: "Do not lay up treasures for yourselves on earth" (Matt. 6:19), "Woe to you who are rich; woe to you who are full" (Luke 6:24-25), and, "If someone sues you for your coat, give him your cloak as well" (Matt. 5:40)?

To examine each separate saying would lead us too far afield. It must suffice to recognize the sum total of Jesus' stand. As soon as we side with him, we will be ready to give up mammon, to declare war on it, and to overcome its power in our lives. When our inmost eye has opened to the vision of Christ's light, our eyes will stop yielding to mammon's beck and call (Matt. 6:22-23). Once our hearts are set on the new future and on the hope that God will establish a new kingdom, we will no longer want to amass property. We will strive only for this one thing and turn our backs on everything else. We will live for the future - for the freedom and unity and peace of all humankind. Then the saying, "Make friends for yourselves through unjust mammon," will be truly fulfilled – because in giving away our money, we will gain the love of friends who will have fellowship with us forever.

When that pure-minded rich youth, who was not aware of having done anything wrong, came to Jesus, Jesus loved him at first sight and asked him whether he loved God and his neighbor. The youth thought he had done as he ought in every way. "Good," said Jesus, "If this is really so, then what you must do now is to make this love real. Go and sell everything you have, give it to the poor, and come with me" (Matt. 19:16–21).

When Jesus entered the temple, the god he encountered was not his God, but mammon – the god of cattle and cattle dealers, banks and bankers. And Jesus made a whip, not to strike people, but to forcibly overturn

the tables and show his contempt for money by dashing it to the floor. He testified that the temple should not belong to mammon but to God (Matt. 21:12–13). And when a trickster showed him a piece of money, the coin of the emperor, the head of the state, and asked him what to do with it, he answered that we should give to Satan what belongs to Satan: "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God" (Matt. 22:21).4

When the itinerant disciples needed someone to keep and manage their common purse, it was Judas who was chosen – Judas, whom Jesus knew would become his betrayer (John 12:6). The murderer from the beginning was thus exposed in the very company of Jesus' disciples (John 8:44). And he met his end as every murderer must. He disclosed the secret of Jesus' messiahship by revealing him who, when asked by the political and religious authorities, "Are you the Messiah, the son of the Highest?" stood his ground and answered, "I am; you shall see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:61–62). Jesus was put to death on the basis of this revolutionary confession.

**After this dramatic attack** on the mammonistic order, the Spirit-born community was seemingly destroyed, since its leader had been killed and eliminated. Among religious and irreligious people alike, the power of money seemed to triumph; the will of mammon and of death seemed to have gained the upper hand.

<sup>4 &</sup>quot;Give to Satan what belongs to Satan" is Arnold's addition and equates the rule of the state with that of Satan.

Yet through the very execution of the leader of this new order, through the grave itself, life won out. From the downtrodden people of Judea, young men and women gathered and waited together for something new (Acts 1:13–14) – for the spirit of love, order, and freedom that they knew to be the Spirit of God's kingdom. And the Spirit came upon them (Acts 2:1–4) and formed a church, a fellowship of work and goods, in which everything belonged to all, and all were active to the full extent of their varied powers and gifts (Acts 2:43–47).

And yet even this fellowship succumbed to the deadly process that destroys life. Just as individuals die, so this church also died. But over the course of centuries, new church communities arose. Time and again, small communities were formed in which men and women together declared war on mammon and together took upon themselves the poverty of generosity. In actual fact, by choosing such poverty, they went the way of true wealth. People filled with this urge of love can be found through the centuries. We hear their voices, we join hands with them across the passage of time. We feel a kinship of faith with them – faith for the future.

God has demonstrated that he is not dead, but the mammon spirit has shown, time and again, that it too is always at work. In Jesus, God waged a crucial war against death, but he is still waging this war; he is not yet God over all things (1 Cor. 15:28). He is the God who is on the way, the God whose final proof that he lives will be handed down only when his final kingdom dawns – when history reaches the goal of all goals. He is the end where everything finds its fulfillment. He is the protest against all that kills; he is the rebuke to

everything that lusts and grasps and robs. He is the conqueror who will clear out every last den of thieves (Matt. 21:13), who will bring judgment over all who covet possessions and property – over all the perversions of humankind.

**Looking back through** human history, we find that simple communism existed among primitive peoples. In later periods the revolutionary struggle of the spirit against materialism continued as a vital concern. And we who witness the appalling results of capitalism today stand at the point where the uprising against capitalism begins. The goal is to overcome private property, that is, socialization, and there is no doubt that we are moving toward this goal.

In this goal we stand on the same side as the socialists, communists, anarchists, and other revolutionaries. We belong with them and they with us. "He who is not against me is on my side; and he who is not on my side is against me" (Luke 9:50; 11:23). These words of Jesus hold true for us.

There are two ways, both committed to the fight against mammon. One is the way of socialism and communism. The other way is the new way of communal work and fellowship in things spiritual and material; it is a voluntary, independent gathering of people who are free of private property and capital. This way is the organic growth of the germ cell, the way of the seed that sprouts even in a stony field. Here and there a little shoot of green shows through. After a few days have passed, and sun and rain have kissed these shoots, you can lie on the ground and observe a great field of living grass blades; a few weeks later, you will

see a whole field of flourishing life. Though weeds and stones remain, the young crop will break through. What the individual blade cannot achieve, the whole field can. The time for reaping is approaching; pray that laborers may be sent out into the harvest (Matt. 9:37–38).

Before the harvest, however, the wheat and the weeds cannot be separated. To engage in a bloody revolution, whereby the servants of mammon would be hanged from the lampposts, leaving only those who follow the way of community, would have nothing to do with the way of Jesus. He would surely say, "You should have waited until harvest time; you have torn out wheat and left weeds standing" (Matt. 13:24-30). There are still covetous voices who argue that it is now their turn to assert their rights - and take away those of others. We cannot put our trust in such claims. They lack the spirit to which we must witness through Christ. If mammon passes into the hands of others through bloody revolution, and we hear of people being shot by a Bolshevist government because they have witnessed to the unity of all people, we take our stand with these victims.

We can have no part in violent revolution. Whichever side sheds blood is on the side of the father of lies (John 8:44). People are deceiving themselves if they think they can overcome mammon by arming themselves, relying on the same spirit of the abyss as mammon itself. The new can only be born of the new. You cannot use poison to get rid of poison. Life can only be born of life. Love can only be born of love. Community can arise only out of the will for community.

Our way to the goal is the communal way of brotherliness, where, as we walk, we will meet other small bands of people, ready to be merged in the one goal, to belong to the one future.

Already now we can live in the power of this future. Already now we can shape our lives in the presence of the coming God, and in accordance with his kingdom. The victory of the Spirit is already manifest through the church community. The kingdom of love, free of mammon, is approaching this earth; it is very close. And so we must change our thinking radically – we must change radically, so that we are ready for the order of things to come.

Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you. Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure during the last days. Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have nourished your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous one, who does not resist you.

Be patient, therefore, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. (James 5:1–7)

# Mammon and the Living God

**Many centuries ago,** the Persian prophet Zoroaster handed down this simple threefold watchword as a guide for living: truth, purity, and work on the land.

This ancient thinker recognized, however, that there is another force opposing the great current of strength that arises from this trinity; in fact, there are always two opposing powers at work in the world. Zoroaster was the first prophet to express this recognition so powerfully outside Judaic prophecy. The opposing powers he speaks of are not inseparably divided worlds, however – this world versus the one to come, or spirit versus matter, as modern dualistic thinking might assume. Instead, he sees these powers as two poles that exist in tension and challenge each other: good and evil, life and death, light and darkness, obscurity and clarity, the contrast between day and night. He wants to expose this struggle in all its might.

<sup>&</sup>quot;Mammon and the Living God" is based on Arnold's own revisions of a lecture he gave on October 18, 1924, in the small mining town of Lichtenstein in Saxony to a predominantly working-class audience that was generally hostile to the Christianity of the institutional churches.

Of course, it is already apparent in nature: every evening, when the sun sets; every night, when it grows darker and darker until the moon conquers the deep-blue darkness of the starry heavens; every morning, when Venus rises to herald the coming of the sun, and the new day is born out of night; every time we witness the birth and death of light, perhaps in particular when we watch the waning moon as it turns to white-gray ash, and then to a dusky new moon, which still gleams and eventually becomes, over and over again, a radiant full moon – all this points to the marvelous mystery of the victory won by light over darkness, and by good over evil.

Zoroaster's own words, as handed down to this day, give us a clear view of his thinking.<sup>1</sup>

God creates spirit, spirit gives truth, truth gives freedom, and freedom gives faith. God says: I will be with you.
And there are you, born of selfishness, spirits of evil and prophets thereof, and you, the first among them – glittering lies! Your deeds are the same; they are known in all the earth's regions. You have your power by flattering friends, lulling them by pleasant things, and so they tire of working on themselves and stagger away from God and from his duty.

You call this life? Of true life this is death! With your worldliness you rob souls of eternity.

<sup>1</sup> Arnold quotes Paul Eberhardt's free translation in *Das Rufen des Zarathushtra / Die Gathas des Awesta: Ein Versuch ihren Sinn zu geben* (Diederichs, 1913), 15–18, 11–14. For a more recent scholarly version, see Helmut Humbach and Pallan Ichaporia, *The Heritage of Zarathustra: A New Translation of His Gāthās* (Winter, 1994). The hymns in question are Yasna 32 and 31:11–21.

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But this is what evil wants: it wants annihilation. On a thousand pathways it lurks; You alone, God, know them all.
The better and the evil shall end; then what was truly good shall emerge.
Even the wisest among us cannot judge.
Even the holiest has his sins.
God alone knows what is right.

I only know that something in my heart is smothered by the teaching of these; that my longing for goodness is gradually choked, and yet I cry for redemption.

This is why I call him a false teacher, who defiles what is deepest for me, who corrupts my earth for me, and hinders me from looking up to heaven; who makes the clever merely cunning, teaching them only temporal gain, and striking down those who desire more. Yet they themselves live on the want of others, cheating others of their wages, and by their actions misleading more and more to do likewise.

Did not all the prophets speak from hearts as troubled as mine? Did not the same anger flare up in them against the horde which denied the earth – open to all – to others, by laws and verdicts, as if by a sorcerous spell?

Make the earth free again for us; it is the victim of madmen now. Clergy and nobility hem life in, but with life we shall triumph.

For our life is more than eating and drinking; it is justice, which prevails in heaven and earth. From God we draw our strength; who will stand against us?

Lord, give me strength in my efforts; do not forsake me! You know that I cry out like this only because I love all people.

And yet – behold!
A din of voices arises, chaos of sound.
There are yet those who remember you;
they cling to you loyally and call out to you.
Others forget what you gave them;
they leave you and cry treason.
But to those who still waver,
thoughts move from one to the other,
whispering in secrecy.

Alas, Lord, I am in the midst of them; therefore I ask you:
How is it to be, now and for all the future?
Is the good that is done, and the evil, written down as in a book for a final reckoning? This I ask you: How shall it not be forgotten that the wicked are aided in doing violence; that people feed themselves by pillaging others, and animals, and the land?

This I ask you: whether in goodness there really is a possibility for action; whether cunning is not the thing which really counts in this world. Yes, O my God, does this not appear the only way to reach the goal?

At sight of this world I would often cry out: Can it really be that truth is the better, when there is so much lying; and must I not join in their howling?

God, do not forsake me.

Make me strong in this trial; give me strength.

Down with you, O rebellious thought;
the sword at your throat!

For look well: Does this bring inward peace
over home and community,
over country and world?

Is the deepest life healed
by craving for outward things?

Only they who know from which source life springs can draw from the eternal well, and only this refreshment is true comfort. Sparks once flew, and there will be a flame again. The better and the evil, two sticks that rub each other; but the fire is good, only good!

Step here or there, be smoke or flame, be crushed, suffocating in smoke, be raised up in flames!

There are you, yours is the choice!

But know that you do not choose between God and the evil one.

As long as you still have to choose you know nothing of him yet.

For God is higher and deeper; and God gives constantly a world which never perishes, the secure peace of truth, the peace of the divine spirit.

Whoever tries to take in these ancient lines will feel what a tremendous struggle comes to expression in them, and that any superficial differentiation between people becomes impossible. Despite conventional assumptions to the contrary, spiritual people – religious idealists or devout believers – cannot be grouped on one side, while materialists, in the sense of those concerned with outward things, are placed on the other. Certainly, such a distinction might carry a psychological significance, but it does not touch the heart of the matter. Basically, it misses the point.

The great struggle that goes on everywhere and at all times takes place in the heart of every person—in every materialist just as much as in every idealistic or religious person. It is a struggle that goes on in human-kind generally and individually, and we cannot say that the good people are on one side and the bad people on the other. It is not true that the religious life is good while the materialist life is bad. The important thing is to discern where materialistic thinking puts its faith, and where religious life finds its god—where the spirit of each is found, and what each values.

**In religion** as well as in atheism there is an antigod whom we can worship. The early Christians were convinced that there is a god in this world who is not the God of Jesus Christ. There is a god of godless, worldly religion, in opposition to the life Jesus led; a god of the present era, in opposition to God's future and God's eternity.

The nature of this antigod is work without soul, business without love, machinery without spirit,

possessiveness without mutual aid; it is lust instead of joy, destruction of competitors, and the idolization of private property obtained through fraud and deception. This god is not a god of goodness. He is not the God of love. He is not a god of fellowship. He is not the God of the future, not the Father of Jesus, not the one who will bring about the coming order of justice. No, he is an interim god of the present age of history. He is not a god of loftiness and light, but a god of the abyss, a spirit of darkness. He is a fiend of enormous power who corrupts everything, brings death, and is the embodiment of evil.

This mighty demon of our age cannot simply be identified with superstition. Superstition is part of his nature, but only a part. True, he embodies superstitious belief in the power of numbers and days; in the power of fear and of outward things; superstitious belief in the autonomous sovereign power of every isolated area of life and domain of influence. Yet his power extends far beyond these spheres. Not only does this anti-divine spirit create the superstitious notion that makes a soldier wear an amulet around his neck so that while killing, he will not be killed himself. Not only does it result in specific conjuring charms to be used in exorcising spirits while the user is possessed by these same spirits. This demonic, satanic, evil power operates even in the most religious places – often precisely where religion puts on its best appearance and its most pious mask.

According to the writings of the early Christians, the god of this world epoch has blinded the minds of those who cannot believe, and who thus perish (2 Cor. 4:4); it has corrupted their vision so that they are no longer able to see what really matters or to grasp the message of the future, of liberation, of humankind's coming unity, of the coming of God. The spirit of this world epoch is

not of God; therefore it cannot see the purity and truth of God's future. It cannot recognize the depths of the divine, even if it is eager to penetrate the depths and to understand them. It is concerned with the deep secrets of Satan; it wants to know evil by actual experience; it seeks friendship with death and its weapons; it seeks to explore every vice and passion. It is the deadly spirit of paralyzing intoxication and suggestion that results in the illusion of power without the strength of true power. It is a spirit that brings weakness, whose power ironically spells weakening. This power is described in the Gospels, where Jesus laid his hand upon a woman suffering from a nervous disease that had crippled and weakened her (Luke 13:10-13). Jesus said of this woman that Satan had bound her, and that she must be set free from these bonds (Luke 13:16).

This spirit of darkness is the spirit of weakness, death, disintegration, and murder. Many of us know its effects from our own personal lives. The experience of being redeemed and liberated from this spirit makes us much more deeply aware of the deadly atmosphere from which we have escaped. Therefore the early Christian writer says the following about the former existence of those who have since been freed and brought to life: "We were dead through trespasses following the course of this world epoch, the prince who has power in our atmosphere, the spirit that is at work in the people of disobedience" (Eph. 2:1–2). Not until the spell is already breaking can we glimpse how powerfully the atmosphere of this spirit controls us and holds us in its grip.

As it is, most of us are so closely and firmly bound up with this spirit that we are incapable of discerning its dangerous nature. That is, we do not have the perspective necessary to recognize and evaluate its character

clearly. And so we need the guidance of a serene, pure spirit of truth. One of this spirit's characteristics, for instance, is the spirit of fads and fashions, not only of the moment, but of the entire epoch we have been placed in and exist in. This spirit will be fully unmasked and overcome only when the new age to come puts an end to this one, with all its covetousness.

Already, though, the resplendent star of the world's coming dawn has risen. Jesus, the leader of the coming age, has declared open warfare on this spirit. Zoroaster, the ancient Persian – and after him, even more deeply and clearly, the prophets of pre-Christian Judaism – fore-told the mighty struggle that Jesus was to inaugurate. They painted in all the colors of faith their glowing optimism for the radiant future of this victory of good over evil. Of course, victory presupposes battle and the clear demarcation of the opposing front lines. Jesus spoke of this same struggle, with the same certainty of victory, when he said, "You cannot serve two masters. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24). He places mammon in opposition to God, as an antigod.

We cannot really understand the term "mammon" unless we know the other names by which Jesus exposes the nature of this god. Jesus calls him the "murderer from the beginning" and "the father of lies" (John 8:44), and refers to his emissaries as "unclean spirits" (Matt. 10:1) Like Zoroaster, Jesus demands truth, purity, and love. The other spirit stands in opposition to this trinity. Its nature is mammonism, its trade is murder, its character lying, its countenance impurity.

To the moralist, these four traits are completely different things that have nothing to do with each

other. Yet to anyone who sees more deeply, there is no fundamental difference between them. Mammonism is covetous will, the will to seize, possess, and enjoy. The impure and murderous spirit is also a covetous will, out to corrupt the life of others through possession and pleasure, and for the sake of possession and pleasure. It does this either through the suggestion that the other life is obstructing one's own possession and pleasure, or else by inducing the intoxication of lust, by which the hedonist enhances and intensifies his own life and increases his own power while corrupting the life of another, which he then seizes and possesses for his own pleasure. A person then becomes a murderer by the same covetous will that governs mammon. Lying – the expression of spineless character, the fraud of a life that is disunited within itself – is also a consequence of the same covetous will.

One simply cannot bring anything into fellowship with a covetous will. Yet we must live in fellowship; we are dependent on associating with others as long as we want to participate in life. And if we are possessed by the covetous, murderous spirit of mammonism and unbridled sexual lust, we will have to tell lies every time we are together with other people.

We have to tell lies in business, in the effort to hide the greed of our mammonism, the selfishness of our endeavors, and the materialistic motives of our human contacts. We are forced to show ourselves differently from what we are, since no fellow human would associate with a money-hungry beast of prey. No one wants anything to do with a hyena that lives off the corpses of others. So the filthy wolf must don the white fleece of the lamb (Matt. 7:15), the sly hyena must put on the sheep's mask of the solid citizen, and the old fox has to

feign innocence. Business chicanery must be carried out in the most inoffensive-looking way.

Lying also serves this purpose in the wars of the nations, and in revolutions and every form of class war. The weapons of truth and clarity cannot possibly be used to defend covetousness and selfishness or bring them to victory. This dishonest state of affairs proves more clearly than anything else that trust and unselfishness are indispensable, that dedication and the will to fellowship are absolutely necessary in all of life's activities. People need to at least pretend they have ethical, sociable motives just to be able to survive. In reality these motives, which are good, if weak, are usually combined in an unclarified, dirty mixture with the purely selfish push for power and craving for pleasure.

This is the only explanation for the "honest" appearance of the businessman who destroys his competitors and takes advantage of his clients. It is the only explanation for the highly moral motivation behind the destruction brought about by every war, including every civil war, and for every ruthless act of a state that deliberately dispossesses and harms another nation. It alone explains the patronizing exploitation, oppression, and starvation of employees by their employers. For the perceptive, this lying makes the clearest case for the truth it attempts to simulate.

The same is true of the impure spirits that arise everywhere out of the deep abyss of covetousness. Impurity is impure in its lying nature. Unfaithfulness in sex relations is the profoundest and meanest deception imaginable. It is the killing of the soul by deceit and trickery. Nowhere is there so much lying as in "love," where real love is feigned for the sake of enjoying, abusing, and corrupting without restraint.

All this shows clearly that these apparently different designations – mammon, lying, murder, and impurity – disclose one and the same spirit, one and the same "god." Once we have recognized this and look at the reality around us, we will be amazed by the enormous power this god possesses in the world. And we will be more deeply shaken by the words of Jesus summoning us to battle: No one can serve two masters. You cannot serve God and mammon. This has great significance. It means that we must not accumulate wealth on earth (Matt. 6:19); that we must sell all that we have and give to the poor; that we must follow a completely different path – the way of Jesus (Matt. 19:21).

At times it seems impossible to break these chains. Wealth works as a curse because it stands in the way of liberation. It is an affliction because it burdens. It is a woe because it satiates but cannot fulfill. "Woe to you who are rich, woe to you who are full" (Luke 6:24-25). "Blessed are you who are poor" (Luke 6:20). Property kills friendship and motivates injustice. There must be a great turning point, when friendship will be won by giving away mammon, when fellowship will be found by turning away from injustice. "Make friends for yourselves through unjust mammon" (Luke 16:9). Win the friendship of hearts by giving away and surrendering all the goods of mammon you may own. Go the new way, the way of community given by the Spirit. Enter into fellowship with others. Seek the unity which, coming from God, penetrates both the soul and material things. Turn away from mammon! Turn to God!

**On hearing the word** "mammon," we may first think simply of money. And indeed, money, tangible money

that we can hold in our hand, is the most characteristic symbol of mammonism. Mammon means wealth, first and foremost; it means placing a high value on money; it entails the converting of human relationships into material values.

All human beings live in relationship to one another. Children are always born from a mother. Father, mother, brothers, and sisters guide them into life. At school they grow up in the companionship of their classmates. Later, young people enter relationships of work with fellow workers. They are given an ever-widening view and understanding of their responsibilities in life, of how to build up a common life in the fellowship of service with other people.

Love enters the life of the young person. In the experience of great joy, of deep happiness, two people become one in faithfulness, sharing their lives and material possessions. In them and through them the tremendous coming-into-being of life and community begins a new cycle.

Just as it is in the lives of individuals, so it is in the life of nations, collective classes, and other great social units: nothing exists alone, by itself. No age, no century, not even an instant in time, stands by itself; everything is related to something else. The more living the relationships are, the fuller and richer life is.

Naturally, relationships can also be marked by opposition, or even strife. And strife, too, is a living relationship. Sometimes an honest adversary is the best friend. We often come closer to each other's hearts in an open, clear fight than in an indifferent, superficial, and fleeting relationship.

"Love your enemies" (Matt. 5:44). This is not only an enormous demand. It also powerfully embraces

and joyfully affirms the lives closest to us in the most personal way. Except for my friends, my enemies are closest to me. It is with them that I have to come to terms most frequently, in my thoughts and actions, but most of all in my emotions. Hence it is in relation to my enemies, no less than to my friends, that I have to prove the strength of my innermost feelings. I cannot be indifferent to them; I must concern myself with them in the most intensive way. Since I cannot avoid doing this, the question is this: What spirit will make this activity most fruitful? What will yield the most living relationship? The best one, in reality the only possible one, is the spirit of love. Only in love can my relationship to an enemy be fruitful. As Schiller puts it, "When I hate, I rob myself of something, but when I love I become richer by the object of my love."

Life is relationship and reciprocity. It is a matter of constantly giving and receiving, continually coming and going, always reaching out to one another, and daily working hand in hand. As human beings, we are called to a fellowship of feeling, a fellowship of work that must endure. We are called to a fellowship of emotion and will, of knowledge and creative work, of faith and hope, of deep heart-to-heart bonds. We are called to the fellowship of life.

But here is money – the mightiest power in the present world system – which stifles and obstructs this fellowship. Everything that might otherwise be animated by living interchange, devoted service, and mutual help becomes a thing, a coin, a piece of paper. Not that the invention of money as such is evil. What is evil is the way this dust swallows up what is living in our spirits, and therefore what is alive in the connections between us. This, then, is the satanic nature of money:

that in our lives we have financial relationships to one another, which are no longer personal relationships – no longer a fellowship of faith and life.

In our civilization, we see people buy and pay for one another. A person's strength is literally paid for and consumed. There is no fellowship between such people. Because of money, people are no longer valued and treated as people, but valued and treated as commodities. It is hardly surprising, then, that in the traffic of goods there is even less of a living relationship between those who produce and sell the goods and those who receive and use them. Products are received and paid for without concern for those who produce or sell them. Personal labor and services rendered are reduced to money, and we often don't know or care about the work involved, who it was done by, or what they were paid for it.

Because of money, people forget the entire exchange of work done and service rendered. What takes its place in our mutual relationships is a materializing, a converting of the spirit of fellowship into something that is no longer fellowship but its opposite. The result is the soul-killing custom of buying, receiving money for services, employing, and paying for labor without any community between receiver and giver. Wherever and whenever this happens, we have fallen prey to mammon, to Satan. All these business and labor relations, impersonal and devoid of spirit, are built essentially and principally on money. They are mammonism. In this we see a truly ghastly development in our present-day civilization.

Today it is practically impossible for an employer in a giant factory to have real connection with all his employees and to carry them on his heart, even though he has a clearly defined labor relationship with them expressed in terms of money. With the shareholders in a joint stock company this becomes absolutely impossible. Here the mutual relationship of investors with those who actually do the work they benefit from has been completely eliminated. Shareholders, company panels, boards of directors, and management – all these are set in the way of any relationship between investor and worker. No one is responsible in a personal sense for what happens to the worker. Shareholders can always refer to the management and board of directors, or vice versa; there is no way for the workers to establish a relationship with their employers. Any real connection has been displaced by the inaccessible stock company and its drive for efficiency.

Here we see the roots of the soullessness of modern industry. This can be seen most clearly in the book-keeping system, where cash account and payroll statistics are all that really matters. Here money alone – a number – counts; hence the working human being, too, counts only as a number – a payroll number, a profit statistic. Everything personal, everything that creates fellowship, has been eliminated from the process of production. This is characteristic of the whole machine system. The soul is not admitted into the factory. It is handed over at the time clock. In return, the worker receives a number from the time clock and has to function as part of the huge machine. The human's work is controlled by machines and instruments, and in this way the production schedule is enforced.

The much-admired Henry Ford has achieved the highest levels of success in this soul-killing enslavement to dead machinery, enslavement to the principle of automatic profit on investment. This industrial magnate has robbed work of its soul, of any mental or

technical accomplishment, to such an extent that most operations in his industrial plants can be performed by workers without any training at all. Only a fraction of his workers are allowed to put even a little thinking or skill of their own into these famous Ford cars. The great majority spend their working hours as little more than soulless slaves, sacrificed to capitalist profits and condemned to a humdrum existence.

Another widespread system, called Taylorism after its American inventor, is equally soul-destroying.<sup>2</sup> In order to make the highest possible profits, the whole work program is painstakingly and rigidly regulated by precise rules and norms. Not even the slightest stirring of a personal impulse toward free decision can slip through this tight mesh during the strictly controlled work hours.

Anyone who gives this subject some thought can surely find hundreds of other examples, in all spheres of life, of how money and profit kill the soul and make fellowship in work more and more impossible. We will recognize in the most diverse instances that money, originally intended as a means of exchange, a harmless facility in the mutual exchange of services and the fruits of labor, has turned into the accursed mammon. Mammon, symbolized by money, has become the all-subduing power agent. It works in the covetousness that clings to money; in judging things by money, thus devaluing the soul; and in transforming human relationships into something material, into money, which prevents and annuls all heart-to-heart relations between people.

This is why we need the counterexample of Francis of Assisi, with his voluntary poverty and his complete relinquishment of money, in our present age of

A work management system devised by Frederick Taylor (1856–1915).

large-scale capitalism. Strangely enough, many people react with indignation to those who, for the sake of love and freedom, refuse to touch money. But their very reaction shows us that the deluding power of money can be abolished only by taking such a step, as Francis did, into the economically impossible. Certainly, both money and the rejection of money are but symbols, though powerful ones, for something more real and essential.

Mammon is not merely the same as money or private property, though it is true that these are overcome by the Spirit. The God of the coming kingdom of love is not found by simply doing without money or having common property, although he will bring about these things too. Mammon is a force in communism as well as in capitalism. According to the old-school Marxist and many of the dispossessed, the need for food, clothing, housing – everything economic – is the mainspring of history, the only force that drives people. In the struggle for existence, they say, the class war of the have-nots against the haves must be waged to the end; our whole life is a material one and arises automatically out of this basic urge to exist, out of the instincts of selfpreservation and reproduction. This way of thinking reflects mammonism. If we build our mutual relationships solely on the requirements of food, clothing, shelter, and sex, we are again basing these relationships on a materializing of the spirit.

Yet the protest that arises from Marxism contains a deep truth, because the essence of what this movement for social democracy strives for is not merely an economic interpretation of history. It is not just a matter of materialism, nor "surplus value" (the difference between wages paid a worker and the value of his work). Nor is it the idea of automatic transition from

capitalism to socialist state enterprise via trusts, and certainly not the idea of a collective economy as such. No, the ultimate driving force of this movement is faith in a future of justice, faith in the victory of light, faith in a fellowship among people that will extend to material things as well as spiritual things, because it will embrace everything. The ultimate force that hides behind Marxist materialism is the revolt of the spirit, even if in the name of matter; it is a universal mass attack on the mammonism of those "spiritual" people who have spiritual words on their lips but material gain in their hearts.

And yet in the propertied classes, too, the materializing of relationships through money can be overcome, by hearts united in fraternal love, administering goods justly for the benefit of all. Faith in the future – in the ultimate future of justice – can be alive among capitalists as it can be alive in materialistic socialists; for it can live in the heart of anyone who seeks love and believes in a just future. Once we sense this, then we can be convinced, like Zoroaster, that there is a power of good which is stronger at all times and in all places than the force of mammonism.

In our world this faith seems impossible. And it is shaking to consider that even in Zoroaster's verses, he expresses doubt—he wonders whether evil and cunning will not after all gain the upper hand. But again and again he fights through to faith—to the conviction that ultimately, the spirit with the greatest power must triumph. The greatest power is the light, which is truth and purity and active dedication. The greatest power is love.

**The certainty of love** is the prophetic hope of early Christianity and the Old Testament (John 4:24). God is

creative power. God is the Spirit. God is love (1 John 4:8). God is truth and clarity (John 14:5). This God is the God of the future. This God has a goal on this earth, and this goal means justice and peace; it means the overcoming of mammonism, the spirit of deceit, murder, and impurity. God's future is the victory of truth and purity; it is the victory of the creative spirit of justice and love over unjust mammon.

Jesus took up the fight against this spirit of mammon in the certain faith that he was the victor who would vanquish this mighty, dark spirit. However, we must get rid of an old misunderstanding: the idea that the kingdom Jesus proclaimed is purely otherworldly; that his intention was to one day make good in heaven everything that is and will always remain bad on earth. If we believed this, we would have to become people of the otherworld, the hereafter, people who long above all for the hour of death, like Trappist monks who lie down daily in their coffins so as to be reminded of their mortality and adequately prepared for dying. To such people, dying becomes their true liberation, and death the redeemer, giving them the final kiss of freedom from the shackles of their shameful earthly existence. To them, death means being lifted out of this accursed bodily life, this pseudo-reality, into a paradise of spirits and pure, bodiless joys.

This concept is widespread not only in Buddhism but also in Christianity. It must be emphatically rejected. What I said earlier about the teachings of Zoroaster must be affirmed just as strongly, yet in a different way, for Jesus: that the great division between God and the devil is not the division between the life here and the life beyond, between matter and spirit, between corporeality and incorporeality. On the contrary, this division

runs right through all spirits and all bodies, through all eternities and all times. In every house both spirits are at work in full force. In every human being, both powers are at work; both forces operate in every age, and in every moment of history, including this one now.

The decisive question is this alone: In what way will the Spirit of God, which is the Spirit of life, come to rule in each person, in each moment of time, in each body, and hence throughout the whole earth? And how will mammon, the earth spirit of covetous will and injustice that now rules our sphere, be conquered and eliminated?

Mammonism exterminates the fellowship of all that is living. It is the enemy of life. It is death. The kiss of death is not the kiss of the liberator. It is the pestilential breath of the ravager. Death is the last enemy to be conquered (1 Cor. 15:26). It is not a beloved brother to be fondly embraced. It is an enemy to be trampled underfoot. Whatever leads to death, whatever displaces people and pushes them out of life and living fellowship in mutual dedication, whatever ruins health and beauty in life, is of the devil.

**Brothers and sisters**, love the earth. Brothers and sisters, be true to the earth, and do not believe those seducers who look so longingly at the world beyond that they cast suspicion on this world. Jesus is the greatest friend of the earth – Jesus, who again and again, in the original spirit of Judaism, proclaimed love for this earth, love for the soil, love for the land. Blessed are the peacemakers, he said. They shall have the land (Matt 5:9, 5).

In Zoroaster's writing we find the combination of truth, purity, and work on the land, made as a basic

demand and promise. In Jesus and the prophets of Judaism we find a proclamation of God's coming kingdom that testifies to the same miracle of "spirit and land" that comes from God. God, whose Spirit is love and justice, purity and truth, will come to this earth; his creative rulership will burst in upon this planet and bring about a new time. This earth shall become a garden of justice and joy, of truth and purity in mutual relationships, and then a life of true God-ordained joy will begin on this planet. The earth shall be conquered for a new kingdom, a new order, a new unity, a new joy in true community.

This is the message Jesus brings. And he gives us the certitude that this message can be believed today, and moreover, that we can live in accordance with it today. This kingdom of the new order that comes from God should be the first and last thing you seek (Matt. 6:33). Seek God's future, God's coming. All other things, the things on which the spirit of mammon wants to construct life, should not concern you. What you need for your outward, day-to-day life will be given to you at the right time. What matters is the new order, the creating and transforming of all things and all circumstances. When new people are begotten of the Spirit, when they are born anew into the new life from God (John 3:1–8), they will tread underfoot the unjust devil of mammon, murder, lying, and impurity (Rom. 16:20). As free men and women they will stride forth into the new life. Already now they can and must proclaim and live in the new kingdom.

It is not a matter of some future utopia flashing infinitely far off. On the contrary, the certainty of this future is already a power now, in the present. This God who will bring the future onto this earth lives today.

The Spirit, who will bring about the unity of all people, is alive today. This unity is already a reality. Mammon is overcome because of the power that has appeared in Christ. Whoever believes in his coming and in the victory of his Spirit – very simply, whoever believes in Christ – can experience his power here and now, and can make a decision of faith here and now to renounce unjust mammon, to let his own covetous will die, to stop telling lies, to stop taking part in murderous acts and desiring what is impure.

The secret of this fellowship of faith in the future is that it is happy in love without being covetous in lust. And the mystery of this expectation of the future is that already now it puts to work the love for all people which slumbers in every human heart. This love is transformed into action in simple work on the land, work with the soil, in field and garden, though also in every other form of manual and mental labor.

The same divine spark lives in every human being. Schiller jubilantly describes it when, in his "Ode to Joy," he writes of the brotherly love that will embrace the millions who people the whole world. From the starry firmament, he writes, from the eternal Father of all love, the Spirit of the future will descend and embrace all people with that love which takes shape in deeds – in devoted, steady work – and fulfills life in sacrificing itself.

This is something so simple, so clear, and so plain. It is joy in everything that lives. Anyone who can rejoice in fellow living beings, who can have joy in people, in their spirit and in their lives, and in community – anyone who feels joy in mutual relationships of trust and inner fellowship – can experience what love is.

Anyone who cannot feel joy cannot live. Love is born of joy. Love and the justice of love only dwell where there is joy. The spirit of joy is what we need to overcome the gloomy spirit of covetousness, the spirit of unjust mammon and its hate that kills. Such joy can be found only if we have faith, only if we believe that the earth and its people have a future, because they are from God. Hope must rise anew, the great hope which is ultimately certainty.

Once, during a public meeting of socialists, independents, and communists, the speakers challenged the worn-out, tired workers to close ranks once more in solidarity with their union. Then someone asked, "What is the use of such a call for common action – for the heroic courage needed to throw off the deadening weight of exhaustion in the face of certain defeat, unless this question is first answered: Is faith in a just future still alive in the proletariat – the faith that the unjust distribution of life's basic necessities will be overcome. and a just and peaceful fellowship of work will arise? Only if this faith is alive can we talk about solidarity. If it is not alive, there will be none." Everyone present had to admit that this was the crucial question. Interestingly enough, they felt that though this faith was flagging - though it had been wounded and weakened in the working class - it could never be completely extinguished. All agreed that this faith would not die.

This inner certainty is something that ought to unite the most divergent political factions, as well as the most deeply divided Christian and non-Christian ones, however sharply and openly they may emphasize their differences. It is the conviction that everything must and shall be completely different; that whatever is bad, whatever destroys community, whatever shatters trust and cleaves things asunder and destroys and annihilates, will be overcome and eradicated; and that in its place, the joy of love and the fellowship of justice will be victorious.

This faith is not something purely spiritual that helps us to acquiesce to unjust conditions. It is the strength of a reality that encompasses material things just as much as those of the mind and spirit. This faith is ultimate reality. It is from God – the God without whom there is no reality because he is the working cause of all reality; he himself is creative life. This faith is the certainty that unjust, murderous, divisive mammon will be overcome by the loving, living, and all-uniting God.

The distribution of land and work and goods should be in harmony with the justice of the God who lets the sun shine and the rain fall on the just and unjust alike (Matt. 5:45). As Jesus so simply puts it, this love gives itself to all. And he calls us to this love: Whatever you want people to do for you, do the same for everyone else (Matt. 7:12). Fight to obtain for your fellow human beings – your brothers and sisters – the same things that you need for your own health and well-being to be able to do for humankind the task entrusted to you.

Let us unite. Let us be one. Let us go to all people. Together let us win community in all things for all people. To become human we must be brothers and sisters; to become brothers and sisters we must become human. To become a community we need to come alive. There is only one living brotherhood – brotherhood through faith. And there is only one faith – the faith that believes in everything that overcomes death. This faith is faith in the living God.

## The Decision

**One of the most dangerous** and widespread errors in Christian circles today is the belief that everything religious comes from God. Christ and the apostles of the early church discerned otherwise and revealed abysses that most people who call themselves Christians have no inkling of.

The apostles argued that there is a god of this world, and that this god is completely different from God the Father of Jesus Christ. They spoke of a god who does mischief in the hearts of unbelievers, blinding their senses and their eyes so that they cannot perceive the brightness of the gospel as the true message from God and his Son (2 Cor. 4:4). And they identified him as the spirit that rules this world and possesses it (John 12:31).

A contemporary drama, frighteningly bestial and true, portrays this earth spirit as the devil of sensuality, the mammon spirit of this earth. In essence, this strikes at the heart of the matter. Much of what we call Christian is in fact anti-Christian; much of what we call divine is anti-divine; much of what we deem religious is

As with chapter 11, "The Decision" is based on a talk from a series of lectures that Arnold gave between October 1923 and January 1924 under the general heading "The God Mammon."

religious precisely in the sense of this other spirit that is opposed to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Jesus' teachings, he characterizes and unmasks the nature of this earth spirit – the prince of this world – with glorious lucidity and vividness. First, he calls him the father of lies from the beginning; second, he calls him the murderer from the beginning; third, he calls him mammon; and fourth, he describes him in his uncleanness as the spirit of impurity (John 8:44). In these four designations lies the ultimate antithesis, which the devil desperately tries to keep hidden: that he is not the father of Jesus, who is the truth; he is the father of deceit. And it is important for us to recognize that wherever deceit dominates, religious untruthfulness prevails, and that, far from having anything to do with Jesus and God, we are dealing here with the god of the world – with the spirit that controls the children of unbelief, who is Satan, the prince of the abyss.

Lying in any form comes from below, and most terrifying of all is the religious lie. It discloses the nature of hell. Closely allied with this lie is man's disposition to murder. Think of the World War and how the newspapers covered the war, or think of the revolutionary struggles after it, and the way the press covered them, and you will see that everywhere the spirit of lying and a murderous disposition are indissolubly bound to one another. They are of the devil.

**Every spirit** that is intent on killing people also comes from below. And every spirit that untruthfully belittles the opponent, that is silent about the good in his nature and exaggerates the bad, comes from the same. So does the spirit of impurity, which, as wars and revolutions

have shown us, is connected just as inseparably with these other evils. Let us be clear about this: that unchastity is also inseparably bound up with lying and the spirit of murder and crime.

I have been made constantly aware of this truth through the tragic experiences of people I have come to know over the years. For example, I know an army officer who is a devastated man, close to madness. His problem was this: he could not break ties with his mistress yet lived in constant fear of this woman because of shared guilt in what they had done – they had arranged for an abortion to prevent disclosure of their affair. And yet he was fully aware that she could betray him at any time, and ruin him. Because of the murder of unborn life that he had on his conscience, he felt forced to drag along with him the unbearable burden of his secrets. Fear of public prosecution forced him to continue in this lying life until he was a ruined man.

As I have noted before, these three hellish forces – lying, impurity, and murder – which generate such a sinister power in our age, are comprised in a greater fourth power, commonly overlooked: the spirit of mammon. Without the spirit of mammon there would be no war. In the grip of this spirit, love can be purchased and bodies corrupted and thrown into the gutter. Because of mammon, lying is found everywhere, carried to the greatest extremes – in the way people deceive each other in business matters, in interactions between the classes, and in dialogue and diplomacy between nations. Mammon is domination by money, dependence on material income and on financial circumstances. Mammon is the overriding relationship to money and property.

People live in mutual relationships all the time. They never live alone, but always in groups, families, tribes, and nations, ultimately as one single, great mass that extends around the globe. Between them there are the most varied relationships. There are relationships created by God between people, rich heart-to-heart bonds of love, leading to the organic building up of fellowship and community. However, wherever property and money are deemed more important, such connections are broken and destroyed in the most diabolical ways.

It is money that materializes human relationships. It has grown from a means of barter to a commodity, a possession in itself. It has gained importance because people must have contact with others but do not want to come close to one another, since they believe heart-to-heart relationships to be impossible.

As a power, money, which reduces everything to a materialistic level and leaves no space for genuine fellowship, is the polar opposite of love. Just as sexual defilement is the opposite of love, so is the spirit of murder its opposite, and lying too. Under its spell, the will to possess is stronger than the will to fellowship, and the struggle to survive stronger than the urge to love.

The spirit of mammon is the control of human beings by things instead of by love. It is dependence on circumstances and conditions instead of dependence on God. It hardens the heart in egoism; it comes from self-love instead of from the spirit that lives for others and gives itself for others.

**This is why** it is impossible to serve God and mammon at the same time. It is an either-or decision. Either we are dependent on God and love him and become people

of love, with a heart turned toward others – one that has overcome the disposition to kill or to injure or to rob anyone of their livelihood, and one that is free of impurity and the filth that drags love into the dirt. Or we are people of mammon who, in every relationship, calculate how much we may earn, what advantages we might gain, how we can become successful, how to enlarge our property, how to make our living more secure, how we can overcome financial need by accumulating more money. This hardens our hearts and destroys any yearning for God and his love, and corrupts the deepest urges of love in our hearts, including the love of man for woman and woman for man.

This great either-or, then, is the ultimate choice in each person's life. It is the decision between hell and heaven; between the Creator with his Holy Spirit of love and the degenerate creature in his defiled body and his ultimate corruption. It is a matter of deciding for God or the devil.

Once a wealthy young man came to Jesus (Matt. 19:16–26; Mark 10:17–27). Jesus saw, in the heart of this young man, a deep longing for the good and pure, and surely loved him at first sight. He seems to have been a man of noble character and trustworthy morals, a man who had a religious upbringing and who wanted to learn from Jesus. And so he asked Jesus, "Teacher, what good things must I do so that I may win eternal life?" After the young man claimed that he had never killed anyone, committed adultery, stolen, or given false witness, that he had always honored father and mother and loved his neighbor as himself, Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go and sell what you possess, give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and then come and follow me."

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The young man, when he heard this, went away sorrowfully, because he had many possessions. And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I tell you, a rich man will find it hard to enter the kingdom of heaven. Indeed, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter God's kingdom." When his disciples heard this, we are told, they were astonished and said, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

The rich young man clearly believed that he loved his neighbor as himself. But Jesus wanted to lead him deeper – to have him examine whether it was really true that he loved his neighbor as himself. He valued his property and the ease and comfort of his outward existence. Now the Lord said to him, "You say you love your neighbor as yourself; let me tell you how you can be perfect. If you really love your neighbor as yourself, you will wish for him the same as you wish for yourself – the same luxury and comfort given to you. If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have, give it to the poor, and then follow me." This is why the young man went away sorrowful: Jesus had pointed out to him the untruth of his claim. He did not love his neighbor as himself.

Jesus loved this man and wanted to win him. He really wanted him as a disciple, and perhaps he would have become a personality of outstanding significance like John, James, or Paul. But he could not free himself from his servitude to material things. To this young man, mammon meant more than God. The spirit from the abyss – of dependence on outward circumstances – was worth more to him than the Spirit from the heights – of dependence on God.

This story is of exceptional importance for our time. Of course, it does not mean that everyone should now be obliged by law to sell their investments, dispose of their goods, give up their business ventures, and then divide the money among the poor of the city. Yet Jesus shows by a thoroughly clear, irrefutable example that conversion to Jesus and to God must mean full and radical separation from mammon, from money.

The point here is not whether we give up our property. The point is that we do no less in any area of life than what is demanded here: that we surrender our money and our life so completely to God that we are ready, whether today or tomorrow, to sell our fields and our goods, to give up our livelihoods and investments and savings, to give our everything to the Lord and to the poor. The important thing is that we turn radically and completely away from money and its influence; that money no longer dictates the course of our lives; and that we devote ourselves fully, with all our income and assets and talents, to the service of God. The important thing is that mammon does not regulate our relationships with other people, but that we turn our backs on it completely, ordering our lives only by love – by the spirit of love that God creates in us.

**There are historical examples** we can benefit from. Francis of Assisi came from a wealthy family but fell under the influence of Jesus and realized that he was vacillating between love for God and love for money, between love for his neighbor and love for himself. Then one day he went into the woods and there, in a lonely chapel, he heard the story of the rich young man and was converted to God. He returned home, gave his fine

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clothes away, and sold his goods and his horses. Then, dressed like a simple peasant, he traveled on foot from village to village and town to town, preaching the good news of Jesus and performing loving deeds.

There are God-given examples in modern times, too, such as the story of Rachoff, a young man in Russia.1 He too was from a wealthy family. From childhood on, God would not let him go, and neither would several deep encounters he had with Jesus. One day the story of the rich young man and his decision struck Rachoff very personally, and he sold everything he had and left his home, going on foot from village to village. Wherever he went, he lived in the love of God. He did not hold long sermons, but sought to serve people in practical ways, in the spirit of Christ. Where a poor woman was ill, he would help her. Where a yard was dirty, he would clean it up. He was beloved and revered in every district he passed through. But the cross came to him too. The Spirit urged him to protest the lies of the pious and the powerful, and so, despite working with wonderful effect, he was eventually silenced – thrown into prison, and tortured there until he collapsed. And yet the witness of this man still has an influence today: a simple call to actually walk the path of discipleship, serving others with devoted love and always turning from mammon to God.

On a more personal note, I know of a wealthy businessman who owned factories and had millions at his disposal, but was so unpretentious that he wore the same suits and overcoat for years, to the point that they were so threadbare they drew attention. This man

<sup>1</sup> The story Arnold is referring to was published in a book by Karl Josef Friedrich, *Die arme Schwester der Kaiserin*, in 1919. For an English translation, see "The Case of Rachoff" in *Easter Stories* (Plough, 2015).

kept his enterprises and did not give away his property all at once, but instead of using his wealth for himself, he conscientiously administered every penny of it in service to others, according to the spirit of Christ and his gospel.

God gives us examples like these so that we may see what the real difference between mammon and God is, and what it means to decide against mammon (Matt. 6:19–20, 33–34) and turn to God.

**It would be** a great mistake to think that only those who control large sums of money are in danger of serving mammon. Jesus shows us that there are in fact two forms of mammonism and that, despite differing circumstances, the orientation of the heart is similar in both. One person expresses a mammonistic spirit by accumulating wealth, while the next shows the same dependence on material things and servitude to them through worry and concern. As long as gray worry rules in our homes, the Spirit of Jesus does not yet prevail there. As long as gray worry spreads its shadows over us like a spell, we have not been freed from its gloom – the sun of Jesus Christ and the love of the Father have not dawned in our hearts and our lives. And as long as we are imprisoned in this way, we are on the side of mammon and not of God.

After a talk I gave, an unhappy young woman approached me. She had had a good position in Berlin. Then a seducer promised her a much better life in Hamburg and talked her into moving there. Once she had moved, he demanded money from her salary, but she was unable to find work, so he abandoned her. Now her

heart was wracked with worry about survival, and soon she was defiling herself by selling her body every night.

It is worry that produces class hatred in us.<sup>2</sup> It is worry that causes us to grit our teeth and clench our fists whenever we see an expensive car passing by. It is worry that allows a feeling of triumph to secretly arise in our hearts when the blood of the wealthy is shed, that calls forth hatred and envy and generates murderous feelings in us. It is worry that entices us into lying in so much of what we do, whether we are rich or poor, whether we are greedy and money-hungry or full of worry, dependence, and fear.

If we are not at ease in God's fatherly arms – if we have not come home to God – we remain the purchased slaves of the prince of this world, the spirit of the abyss, mammon, the father of lies, the murderer from the beginning and his impure spirit. There is only one way of deliverance from this power: to seek God's kingdom and his righteousness first, and to believe, as we are promised, that all the rest shall be ours as well (Matt. 6:33). "Believe in God and believe in me," Jesus says (John 14:1). Believe that God is greater than all money, all outward circumstances. Believe that God can look after you as he cares for the flowers in the field and the birds on the roofs. Believe that God can clothe you in splendor (Matt. 6:26–29), since he loves you and all people as the crown of his creation (Ps. 8:5). Believe that God wants to redeem you from outward troubles, and from inner ones too – from worry and fear.

I once experienced God's wonderful help in a time of serious financial need. My wife and I have from time to time told the story with amusement: how a maid

<sup>2</sup> Arnold is addressing a predominantly working-class audience.

overheard me praying alone, "God, send us . . ." - and I named a certain sum of money. The maid told her family that the Arnolds were on the point of bankruptcy – that she had heard Dr. Arnold praying for money, and that there would probably be something about it in the papers before long. However, nothing appeared in the press; God sent us the money we needed. We have experienced this often; that is, God has repeatedly provided us with what we needed for ourselves and our work, without us having to turn to other people for help. In this way we learned that God does really care for us as he cares for the birds and the flowers. Every one of us can have this experience, can learn this secret. It only depends on daring to make the plunge into the freedom of the living God and the kingdom of God that Jesus revealed. His kingly rulership in our hearts – that is the freedom we need.

**Mammon will never** be overcome by diabolical means – by deceit and murder. We are glad that revolutionary movements protest against the capitalistic spirit; we are glad for every protest against demonic mammonism. But at the same time we feel a deep pain, because it cannot be denied that in so many revolutionary movements, there is a degree of enslavement to the same spirit of mammon, in the form of killing and lying and other expressions of violence and impurity.

There is only one way of finding deliverance from the spirit of mammon, from the devil of impurity and lying and murder, and that is through Jesus Christ. He overcame the abyss on his cross. He founded the kingdom of God. He drove out demons through the Spirit of God,

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and by doing so he proved that God's kingdom has come to us (Matt. 12:28). Those who accept Jesus today, who receive the Spirit of Jesus in their hearts, will find that all evil spirits flee from them. Such acceptance depends, very simply, on this question: Is there a spirit stronger than the spirit of lying? Is there a spirit stronger than the spirit of impurity, the spirit of hate, the spirit of mammon? This is the question that decides our destiny – our hell or heaven – for time and eternity.

We are here to simply and plainly witness to a reality: There is a spirit that is in fact stronger than the spirit of lying, stronger than the spirit of impurity, stronger than the spirit of hate, stronger than the spirit of mammon – the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Those who receive him into their hearts and become one with him in their souls can conquer every force of darkness. They are assured victory over all demonic powers.

One day, Jesus will come again in might and power and establish his kingdom on this earth, driving out the spirit of mammon from every human heart – from the entire earth – with authority. This is our hope. And we may already today experience God's kingdom as justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. "The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." (2 Cor. 3:17)

# **Resistance by Surrender**

As foretold by the prophets, every government and all powers of world economics are bound to fight with the most deadly violence against the perfect expression of peace in Jesus Christ and his church. In this way, the character of unconditional peace shines out more strongly and clearly than ever and delivers up the peace bearers, unarmed, to the flaming sword of the enemy. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, the most powerful prophecy of the kingdom of peace, stands for the will to peace with its resistance unto death – any death. Against the peace-disrupting power of the whole world it sets the passive resistance of the cross: the cross versus the sword!

The cross is the radicalism of love. The peace of the Sermon on the Mount tackles everything at the root. Out of love it gives away the last remnants of property, down to jacket and shirt, and gives every bit of working strength to the community spirit of absolute unity. As often as love demands it, this peace sacrifices itself and goes serenely twice the distance and gives twice the working time required (Matt. 5:40–42).

<sup>&</sup>quot;Resistance by Surrender" is a compilation of passages from Arnold's book *Innenland* (Inner Land). First published in 1914, it was heavily revised by the author in 1918 and again in 1934–35.

Without pause, the church of peace conducts an active and creative general strike against all the surrounding injustice of outward unpeace. In this break with the status quo, Jesus recognizes no claims justified by law. He does not allow his church to carry on any lawsuit or to sit in judgment in any court of law (Matt. 7:1–5). He demands that the church should drop or interrupt its religious worship whenever brothers need to be reconciled, whenever the genuineness of brotherly unity is in question. He places the restoring and maintaining of the unity of love over and against the insincere cult of disunited piety (Matt. 5:23–26).

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives an absolute mandate never to resist the power of evil. Only thus can evil be turned to good. Jesus' will to love would rather be struck twice than counter with even one blow (Matt. 5:39).

Love matters more than anything else. Love allows no other feelings to come in. In marriage, too, love keeps faith and fights against any separation or divorce (Matt. 5:27–32). Because it is forgiveness, love governs private prayer (Matt. 6:6). As complete reconciliation, this absolute and all-embracing will to love determines our attitude to society (to our enemy as well – yes, particularly to him [Matt. 5:43–48]). Love does not take the slightest part in hostilities, strife, or war, nor can it ever return curses and hate, hurt and enmity – neither in the individual nor in the community.

Love is not influenced by any hostile power. No change of circumstance can change the attitude of Jesus and his followers; he does nothing but love, make peace, wish and ask for good, and work good deeds. Where the peace of Jesus Christ dwells, war dies out, weapons are melted down, and hostility vanishes. Love has become boundless in Jesus; it has achieved absolute sovereignty.

Here at last the justice and righteousness begun in the prophets becomes complete reality. The righteousness of Jesus Christ is better than that of all moralists and theologians (Matt. 5:20) and of all socialists, communists, and pacifists, for in it flows the life-sap of the living planting of a future of perfect peace. Here the salt of the divine inner nature is at work in strength. Here the light of God's heart streams out as the beacon of the city-church whose towers proclaim freedom, unity, and dedication (Matt. 5:13–17).

Here what people want for themselves, they want for everyone (Matt. 7:12). Here no one lays up private possessions, and people's hearts (Matt. 6:19–34) are not cold with icy fear for their own existence or how to make ends meet. Here the peace of love reigns.

In this city-church, all citizens gather with one goal in mind: God's will and God's rule, God's heart and God's nature (Matt. 6:10). No one is in opposition to another here and no one is condemned. Here no one is coerced, no one is despised, and no one is violated. And yet love rules as truth, and the nature of people's inmost hearts is recognized by the fruits, by deeds (Matt. 7:15–20).

Here everybody knows well that such a determined common will provokes the sharpest opposition from the surrounding world. Perfect unity, which gathers and binds, is seen as a provocation. People view it as enmity toward humankind and the nation, an infuriating exclusiveness. It makes all those resentful who, like most people, feel that they are neither able nor willing to accept the call to such complete community. So a clash is inevitable. No one can escape it.

This living community of hearts, this combining of goods and working strength, stands out in absolute contrast to the attitude of the whole world. This is bound to cause resentment, especially in those whose ideals drive them to violent action for which they want support. For in this community of love every hostile act is rejected, whatever the circumstances and however weighty the reasons. Any participation in warlike action, police activity, or law proceedings is out of the question, however justified it may seem on the grounds of protecting the good. This community of peace has nothing in common with violent revolt, however necessary it may seem in the name of suppressed justice. The very fact that such a life exists, symbolizing the kingdom of peace and love, challenges all (both right and left) who regard government by force as the primary duty of the hour.

**God is unchangeable.** His name is I Am Who I Am (Exod. 3:14). His heart embraces everything and remains the same for everyone. It was revealed in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is today and forever the same as he was in all his words and deeds. He is here and now the same as he will reveal himself to be in his kingdom (Heb. 13:18).

His words of love point to the same way for all things. What he said for the future members of his kingdom holds good for all his disciples at all times. Everything he said for his disciples' instruction belongs together, just as the sap belongs to the tree, the savor to the salt, and the flame to the candle.

For this reason, what Jesus said about marriage (Matt. 5:27–32) must not be isolated from any other saying in the Sermon on the Mount. In marriage, Jesus represented the will to love as the will to unity. But he represented it just as much in not having property, not bearing arms, not insisting on rights, being free from a judging spirit (Matt. 7:1–5), being forgiving, and loving one's enemies (Matt. 6:12–15).

Poverty born of love is a protection from a bad conscience because it guards against injustice, as Jesus the son of Sirach says in the Book of Ecclesiasticus (Ecclus. 20:21). Perfect love strides on to voluntary poverty because it cannot keep for itself anything that a neighbor needs (Matt. 19:21). Perfect love does away with weapons because it has given up self-preservation and has nothing to do with revenge. It remains steadfast and for conscience's sake bears evil and injustice (1 Pet. 3:14). It keeps in mind the Sermon on the Mount and knows that this attitude is God's greatest gift because it reveals his heart. The love that conquers everything is revealed by a firmness that is not upheld by weapons.

Love gives up all possessions. Like the elders of the early church, those who guard the mystery of faith in a pure conscience remain free from involvement in any legal or hostile action. Christ's justice conducts no lawsuits (1 Cor. 6:1–11). It does not carry on a middleman's business or any business that is to the disadvantage of another. It foregoes all its own advantage, it sacrifices every privilege, and it never defends a right. Christ's justice never sits on a jury, never deprives anyone of freedom, and never passes a death sentence. It knows no enemies and fights no one. It does not go to war with any nation or kill any human being.

And yet when this justice is at work, it is justice in its most active form, peace in its most energetic form, and constructiveness in its most effective form. The sum total of all we are commanded to do is to love: to love with a pure heart (1 Tim. 1:5), a clear conscience, and a genuine faith. In order for perfect love to flow freely, Jesus showed the conscience the way of responsible community in God. This is the essential nature of his kingdom and his church.

## Salt and Light

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The way of Jesus is the way of love – of agape (1 Cor. 13).¹ His love tolerates no unclarity. This kind of love is unique. It gives a very definite direction. It is a way, and this way is very clearly marked out. In the experience of God's love, Jesus Christ leads us up to the purest and loftiest peaks of willpower, clear recognition, and a strength of heart that is joy (Neh. 8:10). He does not do this for our sake. He wants us to pass on the streams of this power of love that is poured into our hearts (Rom. 5:5). These streams are meant to flood the earth. They are meant to conquer the land. They are meant to reveal God's heart and establish God's glory.

God's glory is his heart, and his heart is love. It devotes itself to all people in the joy of giving. God's glory is love. Love is his justice. When our seeking for the kingdom of God and his justice is single and undivided, such a love for all people is kindled in us that everything we want for ourselves we want for everyone (Matt. 6:33). That is the only justice, the only righteousness, when we give our lives for love.

**Only the whole Christ** for the whole of our life transforms and renews everything. Half of Jesus for half of our life is a lie and a delusion. The Spirit of Life tolerates no choosing of principles or elements of faith such as a self-willed spirit selects from God's truth. Truth is indivisible. Christ does not let himself be dissected. Those who do not take the same attitude as Jesus in everything have rejected Jesus. Not even the most ingenious explanation for their halfheartedness protects them from the words: "He who is not with me is against me" (Matt. 12:30).

<sup>1</sup> A Greek term for love common in the New Testament, *agape* implies the love of God, as contrasted with *philia* (brotherly love) and *eros* (erotic love).

Those who want to hear, read, or experience one or the other specific thing about Christ yet use weakening interpretations to wipe out what seems impossible will come to grief no matter how Christian the edifice of their life seems. Therefore Jesus must say that all those who hear the words of his Sermon on the Mount without doing them are like those who build on shifting sand. Their building is lost from the start. At the first attack of hostile forces, it gives way (Matt. 7:24–27).

**The whole Christ** wants us wholly. He loves decision. He loves his enemies more than his halfhearted friends. He hates those who falsify him even more than those who are diametrically opposed to him. He abhors what is lukewarm and a colorless gray (Rev. 3:16), the twilight, and the pious talk that blurs and mixes everything and commits itself to nothing. All this he sweeps away when he draws near (Matt. 7:21–23).

Jesus comes to us as he is. He enters into us with his entire word. He reveals himself to our hearts as a coherent whole. In his coming, we experience the full power of his love and the whole force of his life. Everything else is deception and lies. Jesus Christ draws near to no one in a few fleeting impressions. Either he brings the whole kingdom of God forever, or he gives nothing. Only those prepared to receive him completely and forever can experience him. They are given the secret of God's kingdom. To all others Jesus cloaks himself in unrecognizable parables. Whoever holds aloof from complete surrender hears parables without understanding them (Matt. 13:12–14). He has eyes to see and sees nothing. He has ears to hear and understands

nothing. Whoever does not want the whole loses the little he thinks he has (Matt. 13:11–14).

**True life is** the all-embracing consciousness that sees deeply into the essential nature of things and, at the same time, far and wide into the distance. It bears the suffering of the world. It hungers after justice and righteousness, for it has heart and is heart. It is God's heart.

**Jesus, who revealed** the heart of God, knows that the future is dedicated to it. From now on, all those who, in Christ, believe in the future of God's heart are dedicated to the absolute will of peace.

Thus for the deeply longing hearts of Jesus' inner circle, the first petitions of the Lord's Prayer show the old covenant's prophecy of peace endowed with new and final perfection: Thy name! Thy will! Thy kingdom!

**The dawn of the new age** lights up the invisible city of peace. The hidden land of community appears. In the Holy Spirit of the church, the New Jerusalem comes down from above (Rev. 21:9–27). Only the perfect city without a temple has done away with cultic religion. In this city, community life is the temple of peace, the temple of the great King.

The church bears the seven lamps (Exod. 25:31–40; Rev. 1:12–13) of the Sabbath of peace, on which human works shall rest forever because the mighty, silent works of God have begun (Heb. 4:9–10). The city of peace and joy reveals the radiant brightness of the new creation. The old order has passed away. The new order comes into force. Everything becomes new (Rev. 21:4–5).

**In the church**, the world of today can see the image of the city of peace. It is the signpost to the future, and everyone will see it. No corner on earth is to be left in darkness; the light, held aloft, floods into all rooms. The city of light sends out bearers of light (Matt. 5:14–16). Community in the city on the hill and constant traveling for the sake of mission are identical.

**This new birth** is the narrow gate to the kingdom of peace (Matt. 7:13–14). Inner peace is seized hold of as liberation, freedom from the gloom of sin, and redemption from the curse. In this birth, we come into the new world and see the kingdom of God (John 3:1–8).

The more keenly we feel the contrast between our weakness and helplessness on the one hand and the power and glory on the other as the contrast between man and God, the more powerfully does all that is new show itself. God's cause takes the place of man and his misery.

The peace of the coming kingdom brings with it forgiveness for division and sin, and harmony with God's power of love. All energies formerly squandered by the will are from now on directed toward God and his kingdom in a new, previously unknown clarity. As in war we felt more strongly the blessings of peace, so peace of heart depends on the intensity of its contrast to sin, disharmony, feebleness, and disruptedness. Life can arise only in this tension between our torn and feeble state and the energy of God's peace.

**The focal point** of this new people is the new fireplace of the new church; around it a communal settlement

arises once more. Around the radiant fire of the Holy Spirit, the spiritual temple is built up as a tangible house of God (Eph. 2:18–22): the city on the hill, whose light streams out over all lands. Her place of worship is on fire with the Spirit; she shines forth in the truth (John 4:23–24).

The fire of the Holy Spirit brings the church above – the glorified ones who have witnessed with their blood (Rev. 6:9) – down to the band of believers gathered round Christ's throne of fire (Rev. 4:5; 7:9). In this flame of the Spirit, there is living unity between those who have gone before and those who remain on earth (1 Thess. 4:13–18). The unanimity of the people gathered to full community in the house of God is the unity of the church above that dwells in perfect light (Heb. 12:22–23), inaccessible to the mortal life of our darkened earth.

From the city above, the fire of love descends and takes the leadership. Coming from the Spirit's perfect unity, it leads the body of believers in all its weakness not only to community of goods – food, land, and everything else – and to community of work: it leads them to pass on this flame through hospitality and fiery mission, serving as messengers to all people on earth. From the kingdom of light, the unity of the church becomes a message of peace for the whole world.

**The secret of the city** on the hill is the Spirit. There is no city below except through the Spirit's one way of unity with the city above; outside of this there is no church. God's city-church lives only in the mountain air of her eternal hill. Her citizenship and her politics are in heaven. She expects everything from heaven (Phil. 3:20) and is governed from there.

# The Spirit That Overcomes

**There are people** who, in spite of their most earnest efforts to reach the subjective goal of religious orthodoxy, are not yet overwhelmed by the Spirit of Jesus Christ. These people do not belong to his fellowship or to its mission. Try as they might to help themselves by loving other people and attending to their own salvation, they do not belong to God's kingdom. This is a painful fact, but it is the truth.

Only those who, by the imparting of God's grace, have actually received the divine Spirit, which is wholly different from every human spirit, belong to God's kingdom and to the church community of Christ. This Spirit does not strive for itself – and those who bear it are not focused on their own holiness, their own salvation. It does not try to make itself out to be good. It is a spirit that recognizes and honors God and God's interest alone.

This is a mystery that Jesus expressed firstly in his parables, though also in the Sermon on the Mount, where he spoke more directly and literally about what

<sup>&</sup>quot;The Spirit That Overcomes" is based on a talk Arnold held on October 22, 1933, at a time when his community was under increasing pressure from the National Socialist government.

it is that counts. The Sermon on the Mount shows us a tree that God plants (Matt. 7:15–20); the sap in the tree, which our blood cannot produce; a salt that we cannot manufacture, but whose nature is given by God. It shows us a light that we cannot kindle; an essence that comes to us (Matt. 5:13–14) not from our own human resources, but from the fount of God's being alone.

The Sermon on the Mount contains a mystery that has often been completely misunderstood, even by its advocates. Take Tolstoy, for example. Despite his interpretation, this is no new set of laws – five new commandments to take the place of the old ten.¹ What is revealed here is a new tree, a new light, a new salt, a new essence – God's heart, which was revealed to humankind in Jesus Christ and attains dominion in his coming kingdom.

The Lord's Prayer is a central focus of the new light at the heart of this mystery (Matt. 6:9–13) – the prayer that his kingdom come, that his rule break in, that his being be revealed and honored in his name, and that his will be done. And there is more: the request for daily bread, both spiritual and temporal, for the forgiveness of sin, and for the redemption of the whole world from the devil's might. There is the seeking of protection in the hour of temptation that is to come over the earth. This is the call to God contained in the Sermon on the Mount, and in fact, it encapsulates everything contained in the gospel.

But there is also a demand for human action and human decision set into the middle of the Sermon on the Mount: Your inner eye must change (Matt. 6:22–23)! That is, the vision of your most hidden being must be altered. Until now you have only been seeing cross-eyed.

<sup>1</sup> Leo Tolstoy, My Religion (1884).

Your inner eye has been looking in all directions at once. Conflicting desires and concerns animate you at every moment, and you have never been capable of concentrating on one single thing, and being true to this one thing. But now your fields of vision must become concentric; your inner eye must become focused. You must become completely resolute, set on one, and only one, thing: God's kingdom and his justice.

Thus you must not own property (Matt. 6:19-21). You must not gather wealth, for that would divert your eye from God's rule and his justice. But you must not have worries either – about your livelihood, food, clothing, and shelter, or about more petty things. These must never make you their slave (Matt. 6:25-34). You must not be the sort of people who are tyrannized by gray Dame Care.<sup>2</sup> Freedom from possessiveness is the necessary demand of the one pure Spirit that seeks God's rulership and its justice and nothing else. Gripped by it, you will be so free from worry over material things that you will be like the flowers of the fields, which do nothing for themselves, but simply bloom as part of God's creation - so free that you will become like the birds of the air, which receive their nourishment from the creation, neither planting nor sowing, plowing nor tilling.

Only those who completely immerse themselves in God are capable of finding this freedom from possessiveness and from the spirit of worry. And when they do, they will also become free from bondage to the conditions and circumstances that prevail today. For them it makes no difference what ruling this or that court agrees on and hands down, for they do not turn to the law for their answers. For them the words "Do not

<sup>2</sup> Arnold is alluding here to Frau Sorge, a character who personifies worry in Hermann Sudermann's 1887 novel by that name.

judge!" are a decision against all juridical institutions (Matt. 7:1). They would sooner take off their coat and shirt than instigate a quarrel over any material thing (Matt 5:38-42). They would give up their nighttime hours – their sleep – rather than refuse a request to accompany someone or lend a helping hand. They will go out of their way to meet an opponent or enemy, whether real or perceived – so set are they on preventing a single spark of hostility or judgment to lodge in their hearts and catch fire there. And it is clear to them that a concentrated, single-hearted focus leaves no allowance for exaggerated promises, and certainly no swearing of oaths, including those sworn before government authorities (Matt. 5:33-37). They prize the simple, plain truthfulness that says what is necessary without idle phrases or rhetoric and says nothing less, but also nothing more, than that.

This spirit gives the clarity that makes it impossible for hostility and enmity to arise here in the region of God's kingdom. Here there is love for all opponents. Here is love that wins others over, perfect love. Here is the love that, through the inward glow of the heart, draws everything into its sphere. Here evil is combated not by resisting it forcibly, but instead by not allowing evil's principles and practices to find their way into life's struggle. Here evil is countered by means of good, through love (Rom. 12:21).

It follows that in the sphere of human love as well, full clarity must rule. Here no unfaithfulness in human relationships can be tolerated (Matt. 5:27–30). Here no greed for variety prompted by lustful desires can be allowed to take root. Anything that makes the covetous eye wander is recognized for what it is – sin – and done away with. Instead, that singleness of heart is

proven which is expressed by the unity of two in a Christ-centered marriage. This is the secret of the attitude that knows only one law: perfect, pure, true love, manifested in all areas of life.

For this very reason Jesus, in his Sermon on the Mount, distinguishes in the sharpest way between different spirits. His attitude has nothing of the softmindedness that could say yes to everything (or no to everything). It is a clear yes to the only important thing – God's kingdom and his justice – and therefore a clear no to all other endeavors. Test the spirits (1 John 4:1)! By their works, by their fruits, you will recognize them (Matt. 7:15–20). It is not what people say or assert but the deeds they produce that determine the spirit dwelling in them. It is what they actually do that discloses the cause they serve.

Two creatures show us the crucial contrast here. The wolf shows us the cunning of a predator. The lamb shows us how members of the flock gather together and stand side by side in solidarity, ready to be sacrificed. All works must be tested as to whether they demonstrate the nature of the beast of prey, which lusts and lacerates and wants to possess and kill, or the nature of the lamb that stands with others, ready for sacrifice. The lamb's nature knows what serves the whole flock.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus sums up the call to follow the narrow path through the narrow gate with this watchword (Matt 7:12–14): Treat others as you wish them to treat you. Strive to attain for all people whatever you strive to obtain for yourselves, whether in terms of physical necessities for living, or the needs of your soul and spirit. That is the narrow path and gate. In whatever you do, think of all. Whatever you achieve, achieve for all. That alone is the way of Jesus Christ.

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What is decisive here is to act according to these words. If you do not, your life will topple in ruins. But if you do, you are building on rock (Matt. 7:24). You will live from the sap of the tree of life – from God, from the Spirit of Jesus Christ. This is the way we are called to go.

Let us not become anxious! Let us not be cowardly! Let us not slacken our efforts, but be courageous. With courage, let us take reality as it is: that as human children here on earth, we are bound to be dogged by numerous imperfections, shortcomings, and weaknesses, and to lack gifts in every possible area. Anyone who knows anything at all about human life must realize that, objectively speaking, it cannot be otherwise.

The first thing, then, that we must understand, is that we cannot make superhuman demands of one another. That would be unfair. It would lead to a legalistic, moralistic state of affairs whereby those who have the gift of organization and order push aside and despise those who do not. This evil spirit of hostility and arrogance is the greatest enemy; we must reject it and banish it from our midst. We must gain the humility – the courage – to be small, knowing that if a person has more gifts in one area, he probably has fewer in another. We need to be able to bear one another in love and in daily forgiveness. Otherwise community is impossible. No group of people will ever come together with gifts so perfectly attuned that no conflicts due to human weakness arise. There is no such community on this earth.

That is the first thing. But the second is equally important. We must never lose our faith as a result of our sober insight into these conditions, because that would mean losing everything. It is our faith that the Holy

Spirit, which penetrates our innermost beings, also wants to bring what is outward and material under its rule. It is our faith that the boundary between the one and the other cannot be found in the distinction between spirit and matter, or between depth of faith and practical work. Instead, we believe that this dividing line passes through the spiritual as well as the material, through the economy and finance as well as through Christianity and piety.

It is our faith that material objects and work arrangements can be fully mastered by the innermost spirit of perfect peace and unity – in the sense of the Spirit, though with the limitation I mentioned before, the one caused by our lack of human gifts. Yet as far as the Spirit itself is concerned, as far as God is concerned, this penetration is complete. To the extent that we believe the Spirit and allow it to work in us, the building up of the cause of Christ so that it can serve as many people as possible, and all material concerns connected to this, will be complete. To the extent that the Holy Spirit rules in our work as in our lives, the church will give a true picture of God's kingdom, including the outward aspect of material things and work relationships. Only to the extent that human peculiarities, the curse of stubbornness and other regrettable weaknesses, and a lack of gifts plague us – only insofar as these come to the fore – will the picture be imperfect.

It is just as Paul puts it in the seventh chapter of the Letter to the Romans: Who will set me free from this body of death? I am not able to do what I would so much like to do. And again and again, I do the evil I do not want to do at all (Rom. 7:24, 18–19). In myself as a human being I can find no good. But after the seventh chapter comes the eighth; and here we read that there can be no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom.

8:1). No judgment can be carried out on them, because that which is born of God overcomes the world (1 John 5:4). The law of life that comes from the Spirit in Christ Jesus has set me free from the natural law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2).

According to this eighth chapter, then, there is a situation in which the Spirit of life overcomes and rules and has control of earthly and material nature, which is subject to the natural law of death. We must believe in this. But it can take place only through the spirit of humility and love, for that is the Spirit of Jesus Christ. It can take place only if we, together with groaning creation, direct our sight toward the end, so that the dazzling splendor of the throne of God's kingdom is seen, so that the redemption and deliverance of the children of God shines out over the whole of creation (Rom. 8:19–23). And this is just why the church is instituted: to dare to take part in this future world now – so that what will be perfect in the future world of God's realm may now begin.

The same apostle says this again in a different passage: that God's kingdom consists in justice, peace, and joy already now, through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). The will to perfect love depends on this faith – faith that the Holy Spirit will, in spite of our human weakness, work to fill our hearts with glowing love and penetrate and conquer and form all working materials, and all human relationships, and all creative powers of work.

In short, the first secret of the Sermon on the Mount, the singleness of the inner eye, the simplicity of the concentric vision (Matt. 6:22–23), must become manifest in practical life. This is why we ought to strive for simplicity in everything, as much as is humanly possible. Simplicity of form, clarity of conduct, poverty

as liberation from the gathering up and storing of treasures – this is the goal. The more plainly and simply we give shape to our work, and the more plainly its lines can be seen, the more clearly will we be able to offer a picture of God's kingdom and its deepest meaning.

Again, material things cannot be allowed to tyrannize us, or we will be lost. We must place them in the hands of the Holy Spirit; then all objects will fit together in such a way as to show a picture of ultimate simplicity and harmony. Then we will be in a position whereby we can serve even more people, and more faithfully care for objects in this sacred sense of love, and devote their use to all those still to come.

Jesus prayed not only for those who were entrusted to him, but also for all those who were still to be won in the future by the word of the apostles (John 17:20). Thus our daily work must be undertaken in such a way that everything we do is a prayer, a loving prayer for all those who might come to the church even years from now, through the witness of our work, and be provided by the church with shelter, clothing, and food. In everything we do, love must lead us to do this: whatever you expect for yourselves from the community, do the same for everyone else, including the many people who are yet to come in the future (Matt. 7:12)!

Whenever we are newly gathered together in the full unanimity of this simple, loving spirit, all conflicts among us will be resolved. Then we will be able to greet one another in peace and unity with courage and joy. And we will not need to fear political persecution either. If the profound joy of our deepest unity fills our hearts, we will not be afraid of anyone. The reverence of perfect love drives out the fear of others. Whoever fears God fears no man. Perfect love drives out fear (1 John 4:18).

## The Present Experience of the Future Kingdom

**Jesus' work grew** out of the activity of John the Baptist – John's prophetic proclamation of a future realm of social justice, God's kingdom, which shall be realized on this earth (Matt. 3:1-2). Like all prophets, he sought to pave the way for the new world and the new conditions he envisioned by transforming hearts and deeds. His call to repentance demanded no less than a revolution of the inner and outer life; it required removing the obstacles of personal and social wrong that keep individuals away from God's kingdom. He insisted on immediate and complete transformation, because he felt this kingdom was near. What mattered to John the Baptist was real fruits, the right results of repentance (Matt. 3:7–10). What he demanded was a simple, plain morality. Whenever people asked him what they should do now, he pointedly described the absolute nature of surrender as the only way to social justice. In this he anticipated the teachings of Jesus, who said, "If someone

<sup>&</sup>quot;The Present Experience of the Future Kingdom" first appeared as an article in *Das Neue Werk* in 1919. Based on a talk Arnold held at a conference of Christian university students at Pentecost 1919, it anticipates the establishment of his community at Sannerz, which took place the following year.

has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and if he has food, let him do likewise (Luke 3:11).

But when entire crowds thronged to his baptism to find forgiveness and renewal, John indicated that it was another person who would bring the transforming, sanctifying Spirit (Matt. 3:11), without which the new conditions he preached would not take root. This was the longed-for Messiah, the just peacemaker and king of a new kingdom. The greatest event in John the Baptist's life was his recognition and acknowledgment that this longed-for Messiah had finally appeared – in Jesus.

Jesus took up John's message, literally. If it is true that John was concerned with the future state of God on earth, it cannot be disputed that this was the case with Jesus too. He too was animated by the nearness of God's kingdom. Everything he had to say was closely related to the revolution in earthly conditions that he expected from God.

But Jesus baptized in the Spirit. If we let his words work on us directly we are gripped by a refreshing wind that penetrates every pore. He brings a new domain of life, a strength and a joy we never knew before. This is why Jesus had to respond to Nicodemus's unasked question concerning God's kingdom by saying, "What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit," and, "Anyone who is not born of water and the Spirit cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:6, 5). Jesus declares that it is impossible to gain the right vision for the future kingdom without such a rebirth. In this, as in all other things, he lives in the prophetic truth which knows that law and society can be transformed only through the religious and moral renewal of the spiritual life.

Jesus explains far more clearly and in greater depth than all the prophets the traits of the Spirit, without which we cannot gain inner renewal or achieve a new state here on earth. In the Sermon on the Mount he gives in detail the inner substance and program of his proclamation: "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand!" (Matt. 4:17)

We know that in the Beatitudes Christ blesses the poor, the suffering, the merciful, the meek, and the loving – all of whom will possess the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:3–12). Yet few people consider what shape this earthly kingdom is to take in accordance with the will of the preacher on the mount. How seldom do people see what is required when only those who give their lives solely to longing and working for peace and justice are called blessed! Are there more than a handful of people who realize the ethical implications of this?

We realize that the absolute will for peace and the absolute justice of love cannot be demanded by any moral law. There are few people who would dare to impose such demands on themselves or on others. And who could hold to them? Yet no one was less moralistic and legalistic than Jesus (Matt. 5:17). The new justice – better than, and different from, moralism and coercion – will penetrate the world like salt and light in free, spontaneous action (Matt. 5:13–14). Without this divine spontaneity, the light would go dark and the salt insipid, and unconditional love would no longer guide our lives. But God's kingdom is the kingdom of love in the purest sense of the word. Its ethic knows of no exceptions or qualifications, because love is free energy and cannot be held back.

<sup>1</sup> Arnold's use of the word "state" here and elsewhere is meant to emphasize that the future kingdom of God is indeed a government on earth in which God will rule and govern every facet of life.

The Spirit of God's kingdom brings about such liberation from murderous impulses that people who are gripped by it cannot injure the dignity of any other human being, or remain unreconciled with anyone (Matt. 5:21–26). This perfect love and respect for others begins in the personal life, as faithfulness in relationships – above all, in marriage (Matt. 5:27–32). This love knows no weapons but its own: the readiness to meet others all the way, and to joyfully dedicate oneself to them. That is why the love of Jesus allows itself to be struck on both cheeks, and why it gives away the second coat too when someone begs for the first (Matt. 5:38–42). This love is a love to neighbor and enemy alike; it is a love of unrestricted charity that blesses others unconditionally (Matt. 5:33–48).

This love is the air into which Jesus immerses his friends so completely that they no longer breathe any other. It is the fresh wind of truthfulness, honesty, and genuineness, of simplicity and uprightness. It has no part in the sultry atmosphere of unhealthy emotionalism and pathological self-reflection. That is why Jesus hates the sensational and seeks to be unobtrusive in all his actions. He loves to be simple, concise, and brief in his communing with God and in his dealings with people.

It is not hard to see the difference this would make in society and in the life of the individual. The spirit of love represented by Jesus stands in sharpest opposition to the spirit of mammon and its will to power. He gives a clear alternative in his command, "Do not lay up treasures on earth for yourselves. . . . You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 5:19–21, 24) Only with the heart's firm resolve for God and the soul's self-discipline in pursuit of this highest goal can we expect liberation from self-concern and from dependence of every kind. Only if the justice of God's future state is our first and our last

longing will we be truly free – free from worry and from the degenerate trappings of the self-centered life (Matt. 6:25–34).

To experience this justice means to be flooded with love. It creates such a sensitivity for the inner and outer needs of our fellow human beings that we have to do good to them just as we would have them do good to us. "Whatever you wish others would do to you, do to them" (Matt. 7:12).

This short address by Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount, though generally known to Christians, has remained completely unrecognized by most of them. It offers a sweeping outline of the characteristics of that inner life which alone can give rise to a true social life among people – the society of God's future state. The secret of this address is the secret of God's kingdom, and as such it can be revealed only in God himself. The future kingdom can be hoped for, expected, and taken hold of only in communion with God – in organic union with him. The prayer in this sermon is, fittingly, what we call the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9–13).

It is extraordinarily dishonest to pray daily that this kingdom should come, and that God's will should be done on earth as in heaven, and at the same time to try to deny that Jesus expected us to actually live according to the ethic this prayer demands – that we are to put it into practice here on earth. Whoever asks for the absolute rulership of God to come down on earth must believe in his will and be wholeheartedly resolved to carry it out. Anyone who argues that the Sermon on the Mount is impractical and weakens its moral obligations should be mindful of its concluding words, "Not everyone who calls me 'Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father in heaven" (Matt. 7:21).

There are some who contend that in his parables of the kingdom Jesus warped the message of the Sermon on the Mount; that later in his ministry he no longer spoke of a future state but only of God's kingdom as a present sphere of influence. But to attempt to place these two things in opposition to each other is to misjudge their crucial content. Such people try to reconcile the contradictions of Jesus' parables in such a way that the absolute character of the future is different from God's working in the present, which they consider to be relatively weak and adaptable. Jesus, however, speaks in parables because only these paradoxical pictures are able to contain and convey the absolute as the basic premise of God's kingdom.

The kingdom of God is absolute. Its love is unconditional. Its social justice is perfect. Its ethic is direct and straightforward. We are surrounded everywhere by the relative, the imperfect, the conditional, and that which accommodates itself to circumstances. But whoever lives, like Jesus, utterly in the absolute, the unconditional, and the perfect possesses God and his kingdom in the present. That is why Jesus testified about himself, saying that in his person, the kingdom of God had arrived among us (Luke 11:20). Because his experience of the absolute was unfeigned, his life was free of the relativities of his environment. What he was in himself, and what he possessed, had a forming and transforming effect on his environment.

That is why reports of healings are such an essential component of the picture of Jesus. And it is why, when he sent out his disciples as missionaries, he described these things – the healing of the sick, the driving out of demons, and the raising of the dead – as the evidence that would prove the genuineness of their message that

the kingdom of God was at hand. It is also why he told them to take only the simplest gear with them, to the point that they were basically penniless (Matt. 10:1–15).

Faith in the absoluteness of God's will for the present is identical with the expectation of his kingdom. The same intensity of inner experience belongs to both. The two are interdependent to such a degree that the future expectation of perfect justice is given through the present attitude of absolute love, and vice versa. However, as in all genuine experiences of the eternal, this can never be a matter of defining the future in terms of computable periods of time. What the Spirit brings about is a reaching across all spaces, a "being one" in the Spirit with the God-given future that leaves no feeling of distance in time whatsoever.

Like scattered seed, this experience brings forth, quite spontaneously, the corresponding attitude of perfect love (Matt. 13:3–23). The restricting forces of worry and of wealth – of the antigod, mammon – are the real enemy of spontaneous life. But they can choke it only if the will is open to this hostile influence. Since this is a matter of the subtlest spiritual process, particularly in its initial stages, it is impossible to determine in every instance where the Spirit is quietly unfolding its influence. Useless and good plants must therefore grow together until the harvest (Matt. 13:24–30).

Like every organic growing thing, the kingdom of God begins as a tiny seed (Matt. 13:31–32). Yet the more it unfolds, the more joy and help it is able to give. The life of a person who belongs to Jesus is one of unreserved love and devotion, of single-hearted work for peace and social justice; it influences the world at large, as leaven works in a lump of dough (Matt. 13:33). Yet leaven can only do this if it remains unadulterated and

keeps its full strength. The new life is like a precious pearl, or a buried treasure of immense value, that can only be attained by those who give up everything else for it (Matt. 13:44–46).

This absolute spirit of the Sermon on the Mount is the only thing that makes it possible to experience the kingdom of God. In the parable of the talents, in which a master entrusts funds to his servants, the unity between present experience and the future state is shown very clearly. Those who have been diligent and done their work in the world with the power granted to them by the divine Spirit, without hiding or concealing it, will be put in charge of broad regions of the future state (Matt. 25:14–30; Luke 19:11–27).

The kingdom of God is not of this world – the world as it is today (John 18:36). And yet it is turned to the world, for the world, and is set on exerting the strongest influence possible on it and, in the end, transforming it completely. Jesus sends his people out to work among other people, to be effective in the world, just as Jesus himself was sent into the world (John 17:18). Their task and their actions cannot be different from his own – to bring aid and deliverance for soul and body, spiritually but also practically and economically. Like Jesus they have to represent the message of the future kingdom, to heal and to help people in all their suffering and torment.

Not unlike Jesus, his followers must overcome the temptation to obtain bread by the devil's means or to conquer political realms in contradiction to God's Spirit (Matt. 4:1–11). They are sent out defenseless, like sheep among murderous wolves (Matt. 10:16), and they have nothing to do with the wolf's way of fighting. Their only weapon is the Holy Spirit and its love. In obedience to the word of their Lord, they sheath their swords (Matt.

26:52). They sense that the Spirit that was in Jesus is the mightiest of all powers, one that no other power can resist. They do not want to forget the Spirit, whose children they are. And since he who sent them never desires to destroy life but only to save it (John 10:10), they too will never call for destructive fire to rain down on people and cities (Luke 9:54–55). The only fire Jesus kindled is the fire of love. There is nothing he desires more than that this warming light and fire should be spread over the whole earth.

But Jesus knew what kind of resistance had to be faced and overcome before the victory could be won in the realm of the Holy Spirit – the victory without which nothing can be won in the lower spheres of government and economics. The absolute can only be won by totality. The life of God can only be won by unbroken firmness of will. This is why we need to abhor the entire old, degenerate life to gain the new, genuine life. This is why we must hate even father and mother, wife and child, and above all, our own life wherever it wants to disturb and destroy the new life (Luke 14:26). This is why Jesus advises the young man who came to him to sell all his possessions, to follow him, and to live for the poor (Matt. 19:16-22). This is why he himself did not even own a place to sleep (Matt. 8:20), and why he told his friends to sell what they had and to do the works of justice. (Luke 12:33) "Whoever does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33).

To regard this as a negation of the earthly or material is to misjudge the real and essential. Jesus is emphasizing the fact that the ownership or accumulation of earthly goods can never be life or give life. He makes it abundantly clear that in order to find true happiness on earth we must beware of the love of money in

every form. He juxtaposes the gathering of treasures with becoming rich in God (Matt. 6:19–21). He points out that even the greatest harvest stored in the largest new barns cannot benefit us if we lose our lives (Luke 12:16–21). God gives us each day we are allowed to live. And God will fill each with the rich content of love, once we learn to acquire his riches.

Money, which Jesus calls unjust mammon even in this context, has only one advantage: to make friends through the love that shares it and gives it away, and in this way wins over new converts to the love that can never perish (Luke 16:9). But let us be clear: only love can bring forth love. Love is the only true wealth of life; it alone can make us fully alive. This is why only those who have surrendered and overcome selfishness – those who give up their lives – really gain life. And this is why Jesus calls love for God the greatest love, and sees it wherever we love our neighbor as much as we love ourselves (Matt. 22:34–40). Those who do not have this love lack the most important thing, the only thing which is truly life-giving, however much piety they may show: they lack a sense of justice; they lack mercy and faithfulness.

But whoever lives in the Spirit draws the kingdom of God into the present. Where the Spirit is alive, as it is in Jesus, the kingdom of God rushes in – it literally takes the place by storm (Matt. 11:12). It reveals itself as good news for the poor, as liberation for the oppressed and enslaved, the imprisoned and the downtrodden. It reveals the overturning of class-based societal antagonisms to such a degree that the poor and the incapacitated are invited instead of the wealthy or one's relatives (Matt. 22:9–10), and the greatest love and justice are bestowed on social outcasts. Just as Jesus shows compassion first and foremost to the sick and to sinners, so also those

who have his Holy Spirit will feel drawn in their hearts to those who are victims of discrimination and prejudice, no matter the reason – whether on account of their own guilt or that of others. Those who experience this justice, which is born of love, will never feel like benefactors; they will not distribute their alms condescendingly, but as men and women who recognize one common calling, both for themselves and for all people: to become truly human.

Jesus indicates that such people will not be conscious of the charitable and Christlike character of their lives. They will live for the hungry and the thirsty, for the homeless and naked, for the sick and the imprisoned. Yet they will not know what they have done until they are told, "Whatever you have done to one of these, the least of my brothers and sisters, you have done to me" (Matt. 25:40). A life like this, conformed to Jesus, will be so thoroughly steeped in the spirit of brotherliness that no one will strive for position, but only for the simplest way of serving and helping others. And this service is for all people. Whoever lies on the side of the road, whoever is in any kind of need, is my neighbor, to whom I can and should give my aid (Luke 10:25–37).

In a special way, one's enemy is this person. My enemies are often neighbors who have either suffered because of me or attracted misfortune because of their hostile nature. According to Jesus, however, these adversaries especially deserve love. Their resistance will never be overcome except by genuine, cordial affection – by good deeds that flow from charitable intentions and take the form of practical service, or by honest intercession. That is why Jesus suggests that antagonism ought to be overcome at its outset, by obliging the enemy in

every way possible and offering every potential means of settlement before things have reached the state of a lawsuit, let alone war (Matt. 5:23–26).

A life of this nature is only possible if we can become young, spontaneous, and trusting – again and again. Only a life born out of unconstrained feeling, out of the genuine childlike sensitivity that wants to love all people, the way children do, can be capable of such an attitude. We can become one with God only through this same childlike trust; this is why Jesus said, "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will never be able to enter it" (Mark 10:15). Yes, the kingdom of God belongs to the young and the childlike (Matt. 19:14).

Youth is stormy. Young people love the absolute and the true, the genuine and the spontaneous. Young people are surely those revolutionaries Jesus refers to when he says that the kingdom of God must be seized by force, and that the violent will bear it away (Matt. 11:12).

The kingdom of God rushes in wherever it is given room. Imagine a person who has been buried alive in a collapsed mine or avalanche. In the foul, trapped air, he pries open whatever gap he can to allow the fresh air to stream in. In such a moment, thus liberated, who would not feel completely at one with the other world he longs for, even though he cannot yet step out into it? In the same way, we who are in the prison of the present moment will be overwhelmed by, and united with, the powers of eternity as soon as we dare to draw in the eternal and the absolute, the divine and the perfect toward ourselves.

## The Joyful News of the Kingdom

When we feel too weak to do what we are called to do, what we lack is the love of Christ, the love that is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). This love has none of the unclarity of human thinking and feeling; there is nothing unclear in the direction of its will.

What this love of Jesus is – its character – can be plainly seen by examining his life. The power of this life, sealed by the Holy Spirit through his death and resurrection (Rom. 1:4), was poured out on the first church in Jerusalem (Acts 2:33). This was prophesied: that the Spirit would recall the words of Jesus, shed light on his life (John 14:26), reveal the future, and convict the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8, 12). Sin was revealed as not believing in Jesus. Righteousness was revealed by the Holy Spirit as pertaining to the fact that Jesus has assumed God's throne and will bring about the reign of the eternal kingdom. Judgment was revealed through the prince of this world being convicted by the love of Jesus Christ (John 16:9-11). This prince is the spirit of the age, who rules all peoples, the spirit of might who is named a liar and murderer

<sup>&</sup>quot;The Joyful News of the Kingdom" is based on a talk Arnold gave on May 4, 1934.

from the beginning (John 8:44). He was not judged by a mighty act of power performed by God's Son, but simply by the revelation of Jesus, who proved himself, in life and death, as the most perfect exemplar of love.

Whoever takes Jesus' side will be free from the earth spirit that is judged. Whoever wants to follow the latter yields to falsehood, deceit, and unfaithfulness, and will be judged along with the earth spirit. Whoever wants to follow Jesus does not accept destruction, the work of the devil.

Wherever the church of Jesus truly is, there the Holy Spirit reigns as the revelation of Jesus Christ and discloses his future. All this and more has already been revealed through the outpouring of the Spirit and made clear through everything in Jesus' life, because what he did, like what he said, revealed perfect love. Firstly, it is evident that Jesus represents the perfect love of God. Everything he did was born out of this love. Because of this he received the baptism of John, consecrating himself to death, and then announced, "The kingdom of God is at hand!" (Mark 1:9, 15)

Even before this, his love of God was victorious in the threefold temptation he withstood. The tempter had challenged him to take possession of all the world's thrones by allying himself with the spirit of lying and impurity. The same tempter challenged him to proclaim his own greatness by manifesting his supremacy over the laws of nature; he wanted Jesus to prove that he was God's Son by defying the law of gravity in the presence of onlookers. And he wanted Jesus to make himself popular by using the weapon of a demagogue – an abundance of bread for the people (Matt. 4:3–11).

But Jesus loved God, his Father, above all else. He drove Satan off and inaugurated God's kingdom, not by

ruling the kingdoms of the world, nor by winning over humankind, but only by the power of his love for God. "Be gone, Satan!" he said. "You shall serve God alone." Also, "People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from God's loving heart."

This is the word he was to proclaim: that God alone will reign, and that we should prepare ourselves for this. There may be mighty events in human history, but none half as significant as the coming of God. When God's kingdom comes, that will be real history; then something will really happen.

Here is the crucial thing: Love him. Change yourselves and your lives. Everything must be turned upside down. Change your thinking. Believe the joyful news that God is near. Repent. Believe in the good news.

Jesus did not only proclaim this good news in parables. He also stated, in the clearest and plainest way possible, that God is coming – that his reign is approaching. As the Gospel of John says, in its account of Nicodemus, a person must be renewed in such a way that he or she starts life all over again, like a baby. That is, the individual must be reborn. A completely new beginning has to be made. But rebirth is only meaningful in the sense of being born anew for God's kingdom. It is not possible to enter the kingdom without being born again, and the only thing that counts is God's kingdom (John 3:1–6).

The nature of rebirth is portrayed in Matthew's Gospel. The Sermon on the Mount shows how the new life that follows rebirth brings a justice and righteousness that cannot be compared with any moral theology, and which outshines every other such ideal (Matt. 5:20). This new justice and righteousness is God's doing. It is a fruit of the outpouring of his Spirit, the source of the coming

light, and the saltiness of salt (Matt. 5:13–14). It is essence and power; vivid aliveness; freedom in movement. This new righteousness is life born of God. And yet, we must become desperately poor in order to find it (Matt. 5:3). We must first take the world's suffering upon ourselves; we must seek peace where there is no peace (Matt. 5:9); we must hunger and thirst for goodness and love, and be ready to sacrifice ourselves, even to the point of death, for righteousness' sake. Then we will know and experience God himself – God's heart (Matt. 5:10).

This is where the knowledge of God's kingdom begins. Here enemies are loved (Matt. 5:44), people give away the last of their possessions, and violence is not repaid with violence (Matt. 5:38–39). Here is fidelity and purity. Here is the better righteousness (Matt. 5:27–32); here a complete love is revealed, an everlasting, faithful love.

**You should be perfect** in your conduct, as the Father is perfect (Matt. 5:48). There is no perfection other than that of love. So be aware of the things that thwart this love: property and worry! Where wealth is heaped up while others shiver and go hungry, there is no love. So gather no wealth for yourselves (Matt. 6:19). Worriers are building their lives on mammon too. So do not worry. Look at the birds and flowers. Believe in the loving Father who provides everything (Matt. 6:25–34).

What you need is an undivided heart, an eye focused on God alone (Matt. 6:22–23). The heart is like an inner eye; and like the eye, it is always seeking a focus. Let its focus be solely on God. Then you will have no wealth and no worry. You will call on God in prayer, trusting in his love, pleading for his reign, the doing of his will, and the honoring of his name. This will become your

daily bread. And it will free you from temptation and evil. Call on God like this (Matt. 6:9–13).

Do not judge people; love them (Matt. 7:1). Don't divulge the holiest things in your heart to those who are not open or ready to hear them (Matt. 7:6). But don't judge them either, for that is a sin against love. God's love is greater than your condemnation. Only God knows the depths of another person's heart. Treat every person as you would want to be treated yourself (Matt. 7:12), and provide for others as you want God to provide for you. All that you expect for yourselves, do for others, without exception. You should not set limits to the good deeds you do. After all, God loves all people, no matter what they are like.

Truth expressed in loving action – this is the narrow gate, the entry into God's kingdom, the only true reality in your life (Matt. 7:13–14). Love others as you love yourselves, for the love of God (Matt. 22:37–40). As you take care of yourselves in body, soul, and spirit, be sure to do the same for others. Only then will you find the gate to the kingdom of God.

Even if very few take this path, do not be deterred. Disruptive spirits will turn up. Recognize false prophets by their acts and by their predatory nature (Matt. 7:15–20). True prophets can be recognized by their love – by their readiness to lay down their lives for others, whom they love as brothers and sisters (John 15:13). This is the lamb's nature.

Jesus disclosed the character of this new way of life – this entirely new structure that nothing can topple (Matt. 7:24–25). This was how he proclaimed the truth everywhere.

It was not long before formidable hostility arose. Because his opponents used their cunning to entrap him with theological arguments, he soon began to restrict himself to speaking in parables (Matt. 10:1–15). These were meant to veil the truth from those intrusive and insolent people who only wanted to hear him so they could refute what they heard. To hearts that were open, he disclosed the entire mystery of the kingdom of God (Matt. 13:10–17). The ultimate meaning of his message concerning God's kingdom is revealed in the parables of the wedding and the banquet (Matt. 22:1–14; Luke 14:15–24), both of which symbolize the communion of many souls who come together to share what is entrusted to them by God.

God's kingdom consists in doing. This is why Jesus tells the story of the workers in the vineyard (Matt. 21:28–32). The point is that one of them says yes with his actions, even though he has said no with his lips. What matters is that the seed is sown and can germinate and grow under the blessing of heaven. This depends on the sower (Matt. 13:3–9). Only through such preparation can the kingdom of love, unity, and work be attained.

The new substance of the new kingdom cannot be patched onto the old garment of the old order (Matt. 9:16). Everything must be given away for the one jewel, the pearl of great price (Matt. 13:44). The only path to God's kingdom is to sell everything and leave it all behind (Luke 14:33).

Like yeast in bread dough, the kingdom must be worked into the whole fabric of human life (Matt. 13:33). Like a seed, it will crack open and grow, and eventually find its significance as a tree beneath which everything can live (Matt. 13:31–32). And even if the enemy scatters counterfeit plants – weeds among the good seed – we are not to use force to root them out. Both are to be left growing until the harvest (Matt. 13:24–30).

The character of the comrades of God's kingdom must reflect the kingdom itself: strong like a rock, and fruitful like a healthy tree (Matt. 7:15–20). Their nature is the love and joy shown in the parable of the banquet and the wedding garment. It is also the character of inner preparedness that we see in the parable of the virgins (Matt. 25:1–13). It is tenacity and persistence, perseverance and patience. It is faithfulness and vigilance, too, as in the parable of the loyal steward and slave (Luke 12:42–48). This is the character of active, persevering love, which is absent where people devote their energies to pursuing a life of comfort and luxury for themselves, as we see in the parable of the rich man (Luke 12:16–21).

This character is first and foremost that of a humble heart that is free of self-importance and selfsufficiency – the humility that allows the man in the temple to cry out, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner!" (Luke 18:9-14) It is the heart that goes out to look for the sheep that has strayed (Luke 15:3-7), that welcomes the prodigal son back into the household (Luke 15:11-32), and that seeks to bring as many people as possible into community with God before the door is finally closed (2 Peter 3:9). Here is the true pasture, the true flock, the true fold, and the true Shepherd. This is where real community is found. Love for the individual and the whole – this is love for God. It is a mystery whose entirety can also be summed up by the picture of the cultivation of a vineyard – individuals are the branches of a vine, and the main trunk and rootstock are Christ and his Holy Spirit (John 15:1-6).

Once again, Christ's summing up of ultimate truth always takes place in opposition to false prophecy. His love admits no evil, but always rejects it and fights it. Indeed, he cries out a sevenfold "Woe!" and proclaims the catastrophe of God's judgment on all who betray and forsake him (Matt. 23:13–36). Because of these

words, he was arrested and executed as an enemy of the people, an enemy of the best state and the best church.

Everything that Jesus said, he did. His life was love in practice, above all in gathering his twelve disciples, and then the seventy, and sending them out (Matt. 10:1–15; Luke 10:1–12). This is where he showed his ability to bear burdens and his capacity for community: in the way he not only taught his followers but actually stayed with them and shared life with them completely. The Gospels provide a written record of the daily teachings in which he related and explained everything in many different ways. As it says at the end of the Gospel of John, Jesus did many more things – so many that if they were all written down, the world could not hold all the books that would have to be written (John 21:25).

The deeds Jesus performed while among his disciples and companions proved his love in body, soul, and spirit. They were actions that demonstrated what life will be like when God's kingdom comes. Driving out demons, healing sicknesses, raising the dead – all these relate to conquering the spirit of death and welcoming (Matt. 8:1-4) God's reign. Jesus healed people of leprosy and skin diseases. He healed the blind (Matt. 20:29–34), cured women of their (Matt. 9:20-22) sickness, healed the paralyzed (Matt. 9:1–8), and helped the man with the withered arm (Matt. 12:10–13). He took away fevers (Matt. 8:14–15), made the deaf and mute man speak and hear (Mark 7:32-37), straightened a woman who was bent over, and raised people who had not only died but begun decaying (Luke 13:11–13). Among those he raised from death were Lazarus (John 11:38-44; Luke 7:12-15; Matt. 9:18-26), the young man at Nain, and the little daughter of Jairus.

Along with all this, Jesus proved God's love in his lordship over the elements . He fed the four thousand

and then the five thousand (Matt. 14:13–21; 15:32–38). He calmed the storm (Matt. 8:23–27). As a sign of his joy in the joy of others, he transformed water into wine (John 2:1–11).

In all these things, he showed that even if external healing is the symbol and sign of something greater, something more fundamental, it is also a demonstration of how, at the end of time, our bodies will also belong to the realm of love. Matter is not excluded from God's kingdom and his rule.

At the same time, God's love turns toward the inner life, so as to prepare the soul for his kingdom. He says, "Go, and do not sin anymore!" (John 5:14; 8:11) By healing both externally and internally, Jesus demonstrated his authority to forgive (Matt. 9:6). Forgiveness is the removal of evil and sickness, so that both are done with. And healing is a symbol of forgiveness, a sign that the power of evil has been taken away. This is why the resurrection from the dead had to happen. Jesus had to demonstrate that God is a God of unconquerable life (Heb. 7:16); that death is the last enemy and must be defeated so that God can reign (1 Cor. 15:26–28).

God is life because God is love (1 John 4:8). God is love because he is life. He is resurrection. Through Jesus' rising from the dead, he was revealed as the eternally living one, who is present now in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. To experience the outpouring of the Spirit is to experience the fulfilling of the words, "Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). The King of the kingdom and the Spirit of the church are one. Jesus is present in his whole authority wherever the Holy Spirit's love is at work. This is the certainty of the gospel.

## God and the Future of Humanity

We are not yet human beings, and this is not yet humanity. But within us lives the demand that we need to become such, and attain our promised humanity. This demand is absolute. It cannot be twisted. It cannot be weakened. It cannot be relativized into something conditional. It cannot be adapted according to circumstances. It cannot be changed. It simply is what it is: the necessity of becoming truly human, so that humanity can be united. The certainty of this demand burns with unmediated force. It cannot be conveyed from one person to another through persuasive powers, or through lectures, nor can it be imposed or transmitted by a pastor or priest. It does not tolerate intermediaries.

This certainty lives in the human heart. It comes from the conscience, the most certain of all certainties. And the conscience of the individual seeks oneness with the collective conscience of the whole. It tends toward the solidarity of all people in all things, toward the future community that embraces all people in the

<sup>&</sup>quot;God and the Future of Humanity" is based on the last lecture in a series of five that Arnold gave in October 1924 in Lichtenstein, Saxony; it has been lightly condensed.

peace, justice, and righteousness of the coming era. Admittedly, in the present context, even the noblest things among us are not fully formed. At best they are only weak suggestions, parables of the goodness we all strive for. Even the most virtuous human being is an allusion to what alone is perfect – to that for which we are destined to live.

Humanity is like a prism. Each human being makes up a tiny sliver in the endlessly evolving spectrum of color that is God's light refracted into humanity. In Christ, this light appeared in its clearest brightness and purity. Each shade in the human spectrum is found in him. The light that produces this spectrum comes from God, just as the sun produces the white light that, when refracted, forms the colors in a rainbow.

The light is God (1 John 1:5). The nascent community of the coming era also includes the entire spectrum, with the play of all its colors. The crowning of this convergence of colors in mutual service is best expressed by the word "harmony." Harmony is wholeness in multiplicity, unity in variety, oneness in rich diversity. This is the very essence of life – this harmony of sounds and colors. Our goal is that this world regains its original harmony. Whatever we may know about the human body and other organisms, or about the astronomical rhythms of the heavens, or about the progression of history is merely an intimation of this harmony that points to what is truly significant, which is infinitely more than, and completely different from, everything else.

A picture is never the object that it represents. But it announces the object it depicts. So too, the future era we are moving toward in history is not in itself this final thing. Whatever we experience today of humankind's promised unity is not yet perfection; it is not itself the consummation. It is a parable of what is to come. And yet the greatest attainment in human history is the unfolding of the parable of what is eternal in time. That which is to come over the earth as a new age, which we see coming with unmitigated certainty, and which we perceive to be the inexorable moral and religious demand of the moment, is a decisive parable of that eternal and infinite harmony that will one day encompass all humanity, all spheres, and all epochs.

All our talk about God is nothing but stammering. The charges made against the use of the word "God" in our time are partially justified. So is the contention that speaking the name of God is blasphemy.¹ This argument has a divine justification. What we say about God, what we think about God, what we call divine, the way we abuse the name of God in our preaching is actually all blasphemy. The very claim or presumption to speak about God (which I stand guilty of here) is an enormous burden for the weak shoulders of a human being. Clearly, everything we express about God is not God. Whatever we say about God comes no closer to God than the dust on a street can come to the farthest star.

And yet when we are gripped by this God whom we cannot adequately describe, when we are seized by his majesty, by the tremendous fact of his coming, by his intervention in history and the physical world, then we

<sup>1</sup> Karl Barth, for example, asserts that blasphemy is "when we suppose that we can . . . speak and hear of God – without being scandalized." Epistle to the Romans, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (Oxford University Press, 1933), 280.

cannot be silent. Woe to us if we were to withhold the proclamation of such things (Matt. 10:32–33)!

Down through the ages, the tidings of God have emerged over and over again. But the religious history of concepts and ideas pertaining to God cannot be confused with God himself, and the development of a vocabulary that describes the feelings humans have about God does not necessarily express that which only God himself can be. He is the unchangeable; his name is "I am who I am" (Exod. 3:14) The concepts we have of him, the thoughts we entertain about him, the feelings impressed on us by him are changeable and pass, but God remains. God is never in question. But everything we say and think about God, everything we profess to know or feel about God – all this is what is questionable; this is where the question mark belongs.

And yet in all our human stammering about God, going back thousands of years, God himself is at work. After all, we human beings can only speak in parables. And even the profoundest heralds of eternal truth have always spoken in images – not, of course, images invented by themselves, but images of the realities of heaven and earth. Only through these illustrative parables can the divine be sensed. There is no faith without vision and action; vision and action are the language of faith. Whatever people may say or write in sermons and books about the things of faith has vitality only insofar as their truths are alive and present. Conversely, there is nothing more degraded than the preaching of hollow words that are neither animated by a vision nor backed up by action.

An intuitive awareness of last things can be found throughout the history of humanity. But ultimately, God cannot be perceived by anything other than actually doing his will. We cannot perceive God through the reading of books, the attainment of higher education, or any other means of trying to approach his mystery. Reflection, study, feeling – they are never enough. God can only be known by becoming one with him, in action and in truth.

Between beings of spirit there is only one kind of mutual recognition: that of becoming one with one another. We can externally know the physical things we encounter, things not filled with spirit. But beings of spirit cannot be known externally, from a distance, or without participation. It is the same with getting to know a fellow human being: as long as we remain unfamiliar and distant and hostile, we will grow no closer. As long as mistrust and rejection act as walls between us, it is impossible to discover the other person's essence. Not until we become one with another person's innermost spirit and will can we know them as a brother or sister. And this cannot happen until we unite with what is best in them by surrendering our own will. The history of intuitions about God is a history of this knowing through becoming one - but it is a trembling, hesitating, growing recognition, continually in danger of being lost.

**Among primitive peoples** during the Ice Age and Stone Age, we see how, in gathering around a burning, warming fire – or in funeral and burial rites – there developed a sense of God; that surrender to this spirit of the universe, often in the form of sacrifice, was the essence of the veneration of God.

"Mana," African peoples said of objects and natural phenomena in which they sensed a superior force.<sup>2</sup> Mana, the power of an inexplicable energy in all things. Mana, the mystery of the sky and its constellations, the mystery of fire and flowing water; mana, the mystery of thunder and lightning; mana, the mystery of physical magnetism and erotic attraction; mana, the mystery of birth and the mystery of all mysteries. There was a name for the sense of God among various indigenous peoples – a term by which they expressed their apprehension of God and their reverence for him.

"Totem," they said of animals who seemed emblematic of a particular capacity for unity and mutual service emanating from the mysterious, all-pervading, omnipotent power of creation – a force we might call social instinct. They recognized this force, for they themselves were living communally, sharing labor, materials, and land, and hunting the forests and tilling the fields together.

"Taboo," said primitive man, and was afraid, his back trembling with icy shudders as he sensed God's power in all the mighty elements of nature. Taboos arose out of fear and reverence; they signified the bowing of the human heart in the presence of a greater, overwhelming power.

Anyone who appreciates simplicity can sense the power of the image of the divine that flashes across these primitive archetypes – one that is no less powerful than images we may encounter in theological articulations of the concept of God. The real, critical danger to

<sup>2</sup> Here and in the following passages, Arnold conflates concepts unique to different cultures. At the time, observations European ethnographers made of one group were commonly generalized across other societies.

religious life – one that we are just as likely to meet in the most highly developed church as among prehistoric peoples – is the idolizing of God's power in things: the fetish as idolization of the sacred. It doesn't make any difference whether this object is an animal, or carried like the eucharistic host in a golden vessel, or whether it is a holy building with holy walls; whether this object is hidden in a grove of trees or on a mountain, or in the magical powers ascribed to the priests of this or that religion. It doesn't make any difference whether we are talking about icons or crucifixes, rosaries or amulets, or primitive idols. And it doesn't make any difference whether the fetish is associated with communalism or hierarchy, with a national church or a sect; whether it is an altar, a table, a bench, a book, or an instrument.

The idolizing of objects proves to be the prime danger of the religious life, as it is in mammonism. As soon as idolization has set in – as soon as an object or group of objects displaces the all-embracing God – then, though people still speak of God, their god has in fact become a devil.

**Among the Babylonians,** the first civilization we encounter in the human history of our globe, we find the tension between the true God, with his all-inclusive spirit of community, and that demonic spirit of idolization carried to extremes. We can read in the Old Testament, in the Psalms, about Yahweh, the Lord of hosts who rules over the spirits and holds the stars in his hands, and who sends forth the spirits that inhabit these stars – angels – as messengers and servants and ministering spirits (Ps. 104:4). This faith in the God who rules the astronomical spheres and who will also rule

over this earth is the faith of the Babylonians too. Their highest god is the God of heaven, the ruler of the stars.

But God does not yet reign on this earth as he rules in the heavens. Our world is plagued by formidable hosts of demons who travel among the nations armed with the most violent and sinister powers. Again and again, night descends and hangs over our planet. And yet it must also be said that, again and again, the stars break through the darkness of this night. Again and again, the God of heaven who sits in the heavenly heights and reigns there among the remotest fixed stars, is attacked by encroaching darkness in the menacing sign of the dragon. And yet in every such oppressive night, the radiant planets rise, led by Venus and Mars.

These wandering orbs travel the light path of the zodiac. They wing through the sky with flaming torches, constantly proving anew the victory of light over darkness as a holy symbol, a magnificent representation of the victory that belongs to the eternal and living God. The moon rises with them, too, and runs its course. It offers the same symbolic representation of the coming of light that is shown by the heavenly courses of the planets. Out of the ashes of its darkness at the time of the new moon, it arises again and again as the waxing moon, until it triumphs as a full moon.

The sun is an even more powerful sign of the victory of light. When the night is at its deepest and coldest, the morning star precedes the sun, and then the sun appears – the victory of God's eternal light over the darkness. Thus, with every night watch and with every morning of a new day, the Babylonians received renewed certainty that the God who lives in the heavens will also bring his reign of light to the earth.

We know the story of the magi from the East (Matt. 2:1–12). This story is undoubtedly historical. It contains keys to the entire Babylonian culture. These men had seen a new star shining in the darkness of the heavens, in a very specific place in the sky – a star of unprecedented brightness, the sudden appearance of a new birth in the world.

Because of ancient libraries that are thought to have been compiled some five to six millennia ago, our knowledge of the wisdom of the Babylonians is quite accurate today. Tablets of clay and brick found near Nineveh, each one and a half to two centimeters thick, make up a series of tomes, each containing some one hundred of these tablets. Thousands of these books have been found in the last twenty years, and scholars have been assiduously trying to decipher them. From these we know that Babylon's astronomers sought to map the known earth geographically, in accordance with the positions of the stars. Just as we can imagine a vertical line from a given point on the ceiling to another point on the floor of the same room, so too the sages strove to link certain points in the heavens to ones on earth to determine geographical and astronomical distances.

The three magi saw a unique new star shining. In their ancient wisdom, they were certain that the decisive Son of Man, who was to bring about a new era of love and unity, had been born. Translating the star's position in the sky to its corresponding position on earth, they boldly declared that he had been born in Judea. They believed that everything would depend on this birth, for all the future. Specifically, they declared that at the end of time, a kingdom of peace, justice, and righteousness would come over this earth; and that

unity or oneness, as described by a circle (a geometric shape which, according to Babylonian belief, rules the heavens), would one day be manifest on this earth, too, in the form of community.

**Among the Egyptians,** whose culture comes into the light of our historical investigation somewhat later, we find a different expression of the same spirit. While the Babylonians felt it was their duty to the world above to represent God's heavenly rulership over the earth, the Egyptians, who saw themselves as the people of the underworld, saw it as their task to proclaim the rulership of the same God over the world of the dead.

For his part, the great Babylonian king wore a dark blue cloak signifying the heavens, carefully embroidered with silver constellations. Dressed in this manner, he purported to represent the future majestic reign of God. As such, he was also the high priest of the Babylonian religion. It was on the same grounds – out of a belief that he was preparing the future reign of the coming God on this earth – that the king oversaw the erection of huge buildings and the undertaking of enormous military campaigns. The bigger his temple – the higher the tower soared – the prouder he felt in his awareness of being a forerunner of the God who would come from heaven to conquer earth for the world of stars (Gen. 11:1–9).

Here, in all its vividness, we see the titanic arrogance and religious hubris of human beings – the way a human king assumes God's place, and how humans construct a temple not to worship the God of earth and heaven but to compete with him.

In Egypt we find the inverse: the cultural and religious representation of the underworld. And yet

the Pharaoh, too, felt that he was the representative of God. Bordered on the west by the desert, where the Egyptians built their graves – and where, given the dry heat, embalming was as good as unnecessary, Egypt was a land that looked westward, and it was the west her people revered. Astrologically, they saw themselves as having been assigned its horizon – the underworld and the realm of the dead, where the sun, moon, and planets descend.

Just as the east, the place where the sun rises, was the symbol of destiny in Babylon, so in Egypt it was the west, the region of its setting. And just as Babylon's towers strove to reach the heights of the astronomical heavens, so in Egypt the pyramids – those mighty graves of the Pharaohs – arose as eternal monuments to the depths.

Behind these concepts of the Egyptians lies a conviction that even the world of the dead is ruled by the God of life, and that life will ultimately triumph over death. Despite their joy in the setting of the sun, they looked forward to the resurrection of the dead.

There were Pharaohs in Tel el-Amarna who translated this certainty into a wonderful message of faith in the one and only true God, as described in their sun hymns. For them, the daily conquest of night by the illuminating and life-filled power of this radiant sun that we cannot live without was also a sign of the peace and goodness that belong to the God who encompasses all things, and thus can only be one.

Yet here too we see the idolizing of faith. After all, the Pharaohs believed in this resurrection only for themselves. Only they, the priest kings, would triumph over death and attain, through the powers of resurrection, rulership in the underworld, so as to be carried up

out of it into the astronomical heavens. Not until a later historical period, when Egyptian religion underwent a complete transformation, did another idea begin to emerge and grow: that every human, no matter how modest his or her grave, has a right to believe in eternal life, and to attain it.

Here we see how the power of other revelations had already broken through into Egypt from other regions and civilizations through the influence of the Medes and the Persians, among others. Zoroaster, along with Muhammad and other prophets of the Arab world, would subsequently draw on this wealth of impressions from Babylonian and Egyptian civilization, and receive words of truth and wisdom leading beyond these.

Zoroaster deserves special attention here: Zoroaster, who never for a moment gave himself up to any illusion about the fact that this earth exists in tremendous tension between good and evil; Zoroaster, who, in spite of the seemingly equal powers of light and darkness in the present world, could never lose faith that the light would triumph completely; Zoroaster, who saw in the courses of moon and sun the symbolic, astronomical representation of this victory; Zoroaster, who heard the call of the eternal voice, which seized his inmost heart and drove him forward:

There is a voice in you, a holy spirit.
There is a thinking, speaking, and acting, as if you stood in God's presence itself.
There you have blessed eternity, and heaven and earth lie stretched at your feet.
Listen to this voice, say what it tells you to say, do what it commands you, and you will know truth. But know this: truth's pulsing heart is God.

Yes, God, you are the calling of this voice, you, the same inside and out; creating the earth around me, adorning it with lovely meadows. You only ask, Is it good? Then you give it being. This is what separates the better person from the worse: listening to this voice.

Here is the crossroads of the spirits; nothing counts in this place — not poverty, nor wealth or power. Help the good, stamp out the bad — the voice, this holy spirit, does not lie. And when it sees evil around it, it speaks a thunderous No!

One day it will be a blazing flame, where all reality becomes truth.

Then it will separate the good from the evil; it will consume them in flames and rise up as light. Today it is still kind and gentle in warning us. So hear!<sup>3</sup>

In the first period of his activity, Muhammad adopted this prophetic vision of the future in a similar way. Consciously following the Jewish prophets and Jesus of Nazareth, and at the same time strongly influenced by the religious cultures of Babylon and Egypt, he set himself the task of energetically overcoming evil. Thus, he initially cultivated a withdrawal into solitude, and out of this asceticism he inscribed on his banner the struggle for justice, righteousness, and the earth.

Like Zoroaster, Muhammad demanded that people apply truth and purity, justice and righteousness to

<sup>3</sup> Paul Eberhardt, *Das Rufen des Zarathushtra*, 48–49. The hymn is Yasna 47.

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the distribution of land and to work on the land. For a good half of his active time, he lived according to this prophetic proclamation. But then a change came. The power of sensuality – first in his love for a nine-year-old, and then for other girls and women – made him its captive. Ambition for success and lust for power through political conquest and through armed force and bloodshed – all temptations that Jesus fought off in his own struggle with Satan (Matt. 4:1–11) – were Muhammad's downfall. As in every other religious epoch, we are confronted with the fruits of the idolization of religion – of humanity's bent for self-deification.

**And now, to the Bible.** Here we see the same progression, despite the fact that people do not always recognize the Israelite prophets of old as harbingers of the social revolution of all things, the conquest of the land, and the winning of the earth for a kingdom of justice and righteousness, and for the establishment of community among all people. Indeed, it is rarely acknowledged that these prophets prophesied all this in the most definite and comprehensive way. Religious instruction often treats their contribution – that is, the application of God's kingdom to the life of the people, to the nations, and to earthly things - as a regrettable deviation of Jewish superstition, as if pure, true prophecy should point to the purely spiritual realm of righteousness, with no application to things and times. Yet if justice and righteousness cannot be proved with regard to matter, they remain unreal, and are therefore not justice or righteousness at all, but injustice and unrighteousness. The spirit they represent is thus made wholly ineffective – worse, it is made into a demon.

In sharp contrast to this empty argument, it was the conviction of the Jewish prophets that the Spirit would be poured out over this earth; that sons and daughters of the earth would speak and work in the Spirit; that all social strata of earth's inhabitants, gripped by this Spirit, would proclaim and live out the practical, active love by which justice and righteousness are made to apply to all things (Joel 2:28–29). When all people on earth are united as brothers and sisters in this Spirit, the cultivation of the undreamed-of fertility of earth's fields will open up a new civilization and transform the city as well, and bring peace and life and community to all people. This was the faith of the prophets for the earth and for humanity.

The crucial element in this faith is the clear knowledge that this revolution of all things, this creative, new ordering of all earthly conditions, can come only from God. He alone is the power of creation and new creation. Each new era of plants, each new era of animals, and the era of humanity that followed them on this planet broke forth through the force of the infinite, vast Prime Cause. So too, this new, creative action will break forth out of the same source of power, which is inaccessible to us and which our research cannot fathom, and bring on a new era of justice, righteousness, and peace. Just as we could never have made creation, we cannot create a new creation. Nor would the natural evolutionary development of things and people, if it could be left to itself, ever bring about a new kingdom of peace and justice. A different power is needed for this, and that is the same power that brought the stars and planets into being out of the primordial nebula. It is the same power that formed Earth's crust from its glowing internal body; that took the waters above and the waters of the depths and separated them on this crust; the same power that

allowed the first, simplest living organisms to arise on sea and land; and the same power that called animals and people into being.

It is this very same power that will bring about a new age of justice, righteousness, and peace. We are not this power. We cannot renew conditions on earth, nor can we renew the human race and make it good. The prophetic proclamation of the coming God is one of intervention through his power, of a peace that he will bring, of a justice and righteousness that he ordains; and it carries the demand for humanity to become wholly new, with faith in God as its sole and final faith.

**God is the future** of humankind, even as he is its origin. And so he approaches us with demands and a promise: Plow new territory; break new ground! Away with your old hearts of stone! Receive new hearts of flesh and blood, stirred and filled with life and feeling (Ezek. 11:19–20). Let the Spirit come over you like rain over the sunbaked desert, dried hard and cracked and fissured in its hardness (Isa. 44:3). Let the Spirit, God himself, give life to your dead bones, for you are in fact near death, if not actually dead already (Ezek. 37:1–14). Let the Spirit enter them, or they will remain so.

Humanity must turn around. What good are all its religious exercises, all its worship services, all its pious songs, if God's will is not done, if hands are steeped in blood (Isa. 1:11–17; Amos 5:21–24)? What is the meaning of all their faith if injustice is done to the oppressed as casually and naturally as people drink a glass of water? What is the sense of professing a belief in God if not even a finger is lifted at the death of countless children and poor people?

Change completely! Turn around! Become different; become real human beings. Believe in God. Give your life to God. This is the call of the prophets, and its ultimate and only purpose is to impart the knowledge of God. He breaks into our world like lightning in the night. He changes the earth and transforms humanity. This change is the goal of all repentance. His reign over everything is the only purpose of all inner change.

In John, the last prophet to appear among the Jews, we see this message attain its utmost simplicity and greatness. John was an ascetic. He rejected the clothing of civilized people. He left the city and went into uncultivated nature. There was no need for him to seek people; people sought him - in large numbers they went out to him. Out there in the wilderness, where there were no temples or palaces, no houses or fields, he told them the plain truth – the truth of all the prophets that had preceded him: Change radically! The turning of all things is near. A new order of creation is approaching. That which currently rules the world will soon be abolished. Something completely different will govern this world. God is coming, and his reign is at hand (Matt. 3:1–10)! As we know, this cost John his head, because he spoke truth to power and interfered in the personal life of Israel's most influential despot (Matt. 14:1–12).

Jesus joined John – two friends, two hard fighters for the truth. First Jesus took up John's message as his own – his call was the same: "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand" (Matt. 4:17). But he said more. "Believe in the good news – the message of joy!" And from then on, John deferred to him, acknowledging Jesus as the possessor of the secret of the message (Matt. 3:11–12), and pointing to him as the one who counts. What Jesus brought was not only a message but the reality: who

God is, what his future is like, and what the way to it looks like. God was the message, and God the ultimate, living reality.

Jesus doesn't believe in a god who wreaks unhappiness and wickedness – death and demons and harmful bacteria, crime and injustice and unrighteousness. On the contrary, he confesses the God who eliminates all these things. He knows that the dreadful force of evil prevails in this world. But he knows more: that it will be eliminated, that everything will be made completely new. Victory over evil is the central task of his life; the purpose of his mission is to overthrow earth's current tyrant, strip him of his power, occupy and claim his land for God, and destroy his works – to see to it that the satanic realm present in the current state of the world does not endure.

This means that a power will come over the earth that is different from everything currently at play – a power that promises the most radical reordering of all things, political and social, cultural and agricultural, ethnographical and geographical. The revaluation of all things is the substance of Jesus' message. His will is always centered on this one thing: to let God's reign break in. Everything else on this earth must perish, until no one prevails on earth but God. Then he whom the earth has only blasphemed until now will become the only power that is consecrated. Then his will can be done on earth, as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:9–10). Yes, Jesus describes the new order as something that comes from heaven; there it already rules, in the unity of space we call the universe and in the circling course of the stars, as light and life, as harmony of spirit and matter, as justice, righteousness, and peace. All this will reign on this earth as well! That heaven comes on earth.

that the kingdom of earth becomes the kingdom of heaven – that is the goal.

All the parables of the kingdom of heaven point to this. Consider, for example, the one about the ruler who leaves on a journey and hands his realm over to his underlings, entrusting a certain part of the whole to each of them so they can administer it (Matt. 25:14–30). It is their duty to work with the property entrusted to them in accordance with the conditions of his return. When he comes, he will call them all to account and find out whether they have used what was entrusted to them to work with in accordance with his will. Then he will hold a festive communal meal – a wedding party (Matt. 22:1–14; Luke 14:15–24), his symbol of creation, community, and joy in life – uniting all those determined and able to administer the earth according to his wishes and to permeate it with his Spirit.

They will possess the earth, the land. In the Sermon on the Mount, those concise but pregnant words about the character of God's people of the future, Jesus discloses this innermost meaning of his message in a deep way: he addresses all those who realize what they need, and he calls them happy – all those who want nothing but justice and righteousness; who strive for peace; who are full of love; who are determined, undivided, and pure (Matt. 5:3–12). He sends these people out as salt, which stops decomposition, and as light, which shines into darkness and overcomes it (Matt. 5:13–14).

Unless you change so radically that you start life all over again, like a newborn baby, you cannot take part in this new order (John 3:3–5). You can never kill again, nor serve the purpose of violence. And this rejection does not only exclude the taking of another person's life, in a war or revolution, for example. It also means that

you will not resist others or appeal to your rights when people harass you and try to rob you of your goods and even your life (Matt. 5:38–42). And it applies to your heart, too, meaning that you can never again despise or degrade anyone, indulge in anger or hold a grudge against anyone, or take revenge on someone (Matt. 5:21–26). The character of the people of the future consists in reconciliation and community in all things.

The purity of faithfulness in marriage is a physical reality that symbolizes God's love and goodness. Jesus declares that if the covetous will for property and influence rears its head in you, or if covetous lust for sexual possession flares up in you, even if only as a thought, a look, a gesture, it would be better to tear out your eye and cut off your hand, so as to be able to live free of these things, than to deteriorate with your limbs intact (Matt. 5:27–30).

Strive to be real and genuine in all things, as God desires. The people of the future are simple and faithful, open and trustworthy. They keep their word once it is given, in love and marriage as in all other dealings. Let your speech be reliable and simple: say yes when a yes is required, without being evasive, and no when a no is needed (Matt. 5:31–37).

Your manner should be plain, your words concise. And be as fully committed in your deeds as in your words. Perhaps you have believed until now that people may defend themselves, that it is allowable to hit someone back in self-defense; that it is their right to lay claim to everything due them, and to sue when this right is disputed. Jesus, however, offers a new way. He says that if someone sues you for your coat, you are to give him your jacket as well (Matt. 5:38–42). Once you begin to put love into practice, you will not be able

to hold back anything for yourself. Give to all who ask you for anything. Your genuine love for all people will make it impossible for you to love possessions, and your attachment to these will fall away.

This love cannot stop anywhere; it cannot be limited to those who are close to you. It will grow into a love for those who are far away, and even into love for your enemies.

All this is a matter of God – of becoming one with the Father in heaven, and one with his will (Matt. 5:48). He lets his sun shine on the wicked and the good, on those who blaspheme him as well as on those who love him (Matt. 5:45). And just as God works in secret, so you too will live in modesty, simplicity, and anonymity. Those who broadcast their good deeds or perform them in public do not belong to the people of the future. Those who put their relationship with God on display, who let others see and admire their decisions and meditations, have lost the best part of their life.

Only those who carry out God's basic laws of truthfulness, conciseness, and factual clarity – who simply do what needs to be done and say only what needs to be said – will be counted among the people of the future (Matt. 6:1–8). All the rest are hypocrites.

Acting with the greatest simplicity in everything, and abstaining from excessive physical pleasures (including those connected with the instincts of self-preservation and reproduction) so as to be able to live completely and undividedly in dedicated love for everyone and everything: these qualities mark the people of the future. They do not behave sourly or hang their heads in false holiness; they are radiantly happy, their eyes shining with the knowledge that the essence of love is joy.

This path can only be walked with an undivided will. Anyone who is half-hearted, or who craves the illusion of wealth, cannot embark on this path. Nor is it open to those who, in poverty, succumb to worry and envy, desiring possessions they do not have. No one can serve two masters. You cannot serve God and mammon (Matt. 6:24). You cannot serve God while at the same time being consumed with money, either for your mere existence or in order to accrue wealth. You cannot serve God and live in worry. You can only know and love God when everything you long for – your innermost drive, your entire will, and all the practical work you undertake – is oriented to the one single thing. This one thing is the coming kingdom, the coming upheaval of all things, and the love of justice and righteousness for all people – that is, the future reign of God and his will. Strive only for this - for God's sovereignty over all things. Seek to live only that life which would be considered good under his rulership. Whatever you need in order to do this will be given to you (Matt. 6:25-34).

Those who are struck and gripped by God in this way will no longer be able to assess another person's character or circumstances or mode of life as any worse than the things in themselves that obstruct the attainment of true life. There is no more judging here (Matt. 7:1–5). The gravity of our own antagonism toward God and the indissoluble link between our personal guilt and the collective guilt shared with the rest of humanity will preclude the misplaced condemnation of others just as much as they preclude that other, related pitfall: superficial, pious conduct and verbosity. What is holy must be protected from the shameless clutch of desecrating hands (Matt. 7:6). The holy cannot be profaned. Faith and love cannot become meaningless talk; when they

do, it is a reminder that even the best things can be corrupted.

Tremble, then, when you are told to knock at the door of truth and to live according to it (Matt. 7:7–11). Prepare to pass through an exceedingly narrow door (Matt. 7:13–14), and to walk on a perilous ridge.<sup>4</sup> Leave everything outside and below. Narrow, winding, stony, and precipitous, the ascent leads past one abyss after another. And you will see, looking down from the distant heights, that most basic demand for daily living: whatever you would like to receive from others, give to them (Matt. 7:12). Whatever necessities of life you work for and strive to get for yourselves, whatever you feel you need to properly construct a good life – see that these are made available to all people! Do for everyone what you want for yourselves.

The predatory nature, the killing nature, appears in the desire for acquiring and clinging to possessions. But not in the people of the future! They do not merely say, "Lord, Lord," but also act in his Spirit, in tune with his will (Matt. 7:21–23). Diligent in their work, they surrender themselves daily to the will of love – to putting his love into practice. They know that anyone who plays an active part in unrighteousness, in social injustice, whether in professional work, in the public sector, or privately, even in the smallest personal circle, will be rejected by Jesus as someone he has never had anything to do with (Matt 25:41–46).

<sup>4</sup> This evokes Martin Buber's use of the same metaphor – a narrow ridge as that dangerous but fruitful space where genuine human interaction and understanding can occur. The two men corresponded and met in person several times and held one another in mutual esteem.

#### Salt and Light

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Jesus therefore sums up his prophetic characterization of the people of God with a metaphor for decision (Matt. 7:24–27). Either we erect the building of our life on a sandy, shifting surface – on uplifting feelings, pious rituals, clever theories, or empty words, whether political or religious – and the structure is sure to go down in a horrifying catastrophe. Or we build our lives on a solid foundation – one that, like a stone fortress, seems to grow right out of the rock it is erected on. Then let come what will. The storms of the times might pass over us; everything we consider a necessity today might be taken away from us. Enmity and unjust judgment might take us unawares. But it will be impossible to destroy the building of such a life, because it is nothing but the simple doing of what God wants and what God is.

Only those who trustingly do the will of the Father in heaven, who with all their actions put their trust in the God who comes from the heavens, will be able to find their way into God's new order. This life of trust is like the living growth of a tree (Matt. 7:15–20), like the essential strength of salt, like the radiating warmth of the light that sacrifices itself as it shines (Matt. 5:13–14). These are the fundamental secrets of the Sermon on the Mount. Only a living tree can bear fruit. Where the tree is, there is the fruit. As the fruit is, so is the tree.

# The Jesus of the Four Gospels

It has become clear to us that, as a community of brothers and sisters and as a renewal of the original Christian church in Jerusalem, we must hold to Jesus. It is of utmost importance that we place the Jesus of the four Gospels, the son of Mary who was executed under Pontius Pilate, at the center of our faith and our life, and that we keep to him. This Jesus has become completely unknown. His words have been distorted and disfigured, his work weakened. All the more, we must rediscover this Jesus and hold him up in front of the whole world.

We cannot live our common life in any other way. It must be oriented to the life, word, and work of Jesus. We are commissioned in this task by the love of Christ poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). This love, free of the unclarity of human thought or feeling, was manifested perfectly and unmistakably in Jesus' life. Christ's life was sealed as the revelation of God's heart by his death and resurrection (John 6:27). And through the Holy Spirit the power of his

<sup>&</sup>quot;The Jesus of the Four Gospels" is based on a talk Arnold gave on May 13, 1934.

life was poured out on the first church in Jerusalem (Acts. 2:1–4). Through the Holy Spirit, this seal on Jesus' life was communicated to the church so that it might follow him and carry his life into the world.

Jesus promised that the Spirit would remind the church of everything he had said during his lifetime (John 14:26). Within the church, the Spirit would continue to show his life in the clearest light, and through it reveal the future of God's kingdom. Further, through the mission of the church, the Spirit would convict and convince the world in regard to sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8–11).

Certainly, Jesus also said that these things – sin, righteousness, and judgment – are revealed in himself. Sin is revealed by the Holy Spirit as the absence of belief in him. Righteousness is revealed in the fact that Jesus occupies God's throne and promises to bring to earth the same reign of justice and righteousness that dwells there. And judgment is to be revealed when the prince of this world – the spirit of the age that rules everywhere in every soul who does not believe – is judged by Jesus. But the prince of this world is not judged with a show of force in which legions of angels confront Satan. No, he is judged by the perfect love of Christ, revealed on the cross. Jesus won the victory over Satan not because he was more powerful and violent, but because he was better and more loving.

Jesus was revealed as the best and most loving person who could ever be known. In his living and in his dying, the goodness and love of God's heart was unveiled in a way it could never have been revealed in any other place or time. Ever since, whoever takes Jesus' side and is gripped by his Spirit remains free from the judgment pronounced on the spirit of this world and age. But

those who follow that spirit will find themselves subject to the judgment that must befall the prince of the abyss. Those who follow the injustice and unrighteousness of mammon, and the falseness and unfaithfulness of its deceitful spirit, must be judged, just as the prince of this world is judged.

Those who follow Jesus and believe in him, however, have left the destructive fury of the devil's works. They will not be judged, because they have already been judged by the Spirit of the church, a judgment that constantly takes place in their hearts and lives, and works on them as they seek to shed their old humanity. This is judgment in the sense of grace and healing, judgment as a gift given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, judgment as a means of renewal. Wherever the true church of Christ is found, the outpouring of his Spirit will be found too, for the Holy Spirit will rule there. And wherever the Holy Spirit reigns, it will reign as the direct revelation of Jesus Christ and his future to the gathered believers.

What the outpouring of the Holy Spirit reveals in the church was, of course, already revealed by Jesus' actual life, and the Spirit cannot add anything to this content. Jesus remains the same forever: yesterday, as the Son of Mary; today, as manifested to his church by the Holy Spirit; and tomorrow, when he will take up and establish his rule as the King of God's kingdom (Heb. 13:8).

And through all his actions and in all his words, his life reveals the ultimate mystery of God as perfect love. He himself was and is the perfection of love: perfect love for God, but also, because love can only spring from its source, the perfect love that comes from God. "And this is love: not that we loved God first, but that he loved us, by sending his Son to us" (1 John 4:10).

The life and actions of Jesus bring this love of God directly to us; out of this love came everything Jesus said and did. His acceptance of baptism by John, for example, shows that he wanted to consecrate himself and fulfill the perfect justice and righteousness of God out of love for God, even to the point of his sacrificial death on the cross. And when he went out among the people, he proclaimed the one and only thing that moved his heart and shaped his message: "The kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:14–15). It is a matter of God and his importance. He alone will rule. He alone will conquer all things and bring everything under his sway. The kingdom of God has come near.

Before Jesus emerged to proclaim this message, he had to fight the prince of this world (Matt. 4:1–11). His love for God proved victorious in the face of Satan's threefold temptation. The spirit of the earth, being the prince of this world, offered him the conquest of all the world's thrones, and all its great nations, if only he would unite with the spirit of mammon, of deceit and impurity and mass murder. Had he done so, he could have avoided the long, arduous way of the cross and resurrection, the outpouring of the Spirit that led to the founding of the church, and the last judgment. The whole world could have been taken over immediately with Jesus as regent for the prince of this world.

The tempter went further and demanded that Jesus proclaim his own greatness by demonstrating his supremacy over the laws of nature and triumphing over these laws in front of a crowd. Satan wanted him to use the weapon of demagoguery to win over the people by impressing them, and to further exploit the power of suggestion by giving them bread – by feeding the

hungry. He was to do all this by uniting with the spirit that opposed God.

But Jesus loved his Father more than anything. He was not interested in ruling any worldly kingdom. He was not interested in having the whole earth at his command. He was not interested in winning a following among the masses. He was not interested in winning people for himself. His only concern was to love God. And so he drove the tempter off: "Away with you, Satan! I will serve no one but God alone. People cannot live on bread alone – on food for the body. No, they depend even more on every word from the mouth of God – from God's breath and from his loving heart."

Jesus came to bring this truth to humanity – to represent the worshiping and honoring of God. The story of his temptation reminds us of the sinister dangers that prowl around each human heart, and in particular every heart that has been awakened to a higher call. This is why Jesus prefaced his proclamation, "The kingdom of God is at hand," with a call for people to repent (Matt. 4:17), to change their whole way of thinking, to turn their lives completely upside down – everything they had ever felt, thought, desired, and done – to prepare for the coming kingdom.

When the supreme event is imminent, all other events in the history of humanity mean nothing in comparison. Now God is coming to humanity. Now history is really starting. True, there has been a preparatory history. But it is only now that the real history begins, the history that determines everything, brings the end near, and changes all things. The kingdom of God is coming. Prepare yourselves. There is only one crucial task at hand: Love God! But of course, you must change so that you will be able to do this with your

whole hearts. Change your lives so that everything you do will be nothing but love for him. And change in such a way that this love for God is not just a personal matter of your hearts, but will mean for you the revolution of all things – the elimination of all injustice and unrighteousness, and the attainment of his lordship over all nations and all peoples.

As you do this, you will be constantly distracted by the powerful influence of the predator that prowls around you pretending to be an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14), claiming that everything will gradually become better if you follow his path. This is precisely why you need to change your thinking completely: so that you cannot succumb to this deceptive influence. You must be able to believe only in one message and fundamentally reject every other. You must believe in this one joyful truth: that God is near, and that his reign is breaking in. You cannot expect anything from any other source. Believe solely in this message, this news, this gospel!

Jesus did not only proclaim the gospel by calling for repentance. And despite his frequent reliance on parables, he did not only bring home his message with stories. Nor did he speak only with symbolic actions and miracles. He also presented the substance of this message in clear, unequivocal language, so that there would be no uncertainty about the fact that the kingdom of God is coming.

In his discussion with Nicodemus at the beginning of the Gospel of John, Jesus says that recognizing and beholding this kingdom, and becoming incorporated into it, is only possible if one undergoes a completely new beginning – that is, rebirth (John 3:1–8). When a child is born, a completely new being arrives, and we know nothing about this being except that he or she

is now here. This is exactly how every rebirth should be – the transformation that is necessary in order to behold and enter the kingdom of God. We must each be renewed in such a way that we begin our lives all over again, right from the start, like a newborn child.

But this new birth has a precise context. Just as a child is born into a family, people who truly experience rebirth will be born into the kingdom of God. Their new environment is that kingdom. What seems to be the most subjective thing is in fact an objective one.

In the Gospel of Matthew, the mystery of this new birth and the new world the reborn soul enters is depicted in the clearest way: with the Sermon on the Mount, which shows us the nature and character of the new life of those reborn into the kingdom of God. This new life entails a justice and righteousness that cannot be compared with any human morality, any social order, or any theology (Matt. 5:20). It reflects a justice and righteousness that is nothing but the good heart of God. It is something better than anything ever thought, felt, desired, or said by human beings, because it is God's own doing.

The new righteousness is the outpouring of God's Spirit. It is the essence of his innermost life, the flash of his coming light, the saltiness of salt (Matt. 5:13–14). It is the essence of what is essential, the most vital life, the freest movement and activity. It is pulsing life born from God, and thus is opposed to self-righteousness and human righteousness. These come from the self-confidence that stands on rights and makes demands; whereas divine justice – the new righteousness – begins with becoming a beggar, becoming poor and being judged. It begins where people yield their claims to possessions, rights, and privileges.

Further, the new justice begins by taking on the weight of the whole world's suffering. It begins where the suffering of the world lies heavily on the believing heart. Admittedly, human justice also knows something of compassion for the world, but this often turns into bloodthirsty hatred against those who cause suffering. Then it becomes injustice, because among the guilty—and in fact all humanity is guilty—it seeks to single out for blame the particularly guilty, and fights against these with fierce hatred.

The righteous justice of the new kingdom brought about by Jesus Christ places the all-embracing peace of God in the center, and displaces all unpeace and discord. It desires the goodness and love that has a heart for all people, including the guiltiest. It shows mercy to all people, even those who have sinned most severely against peace and justice. It reveals itself as the heart of God that is ready to sacrifice itself and die. This is the will that does not want to kill the guilty but rather to be killed for the guilty, so that they can regain innocence by grasping the value of this sacrifice of love. Once they recognize and experience God in this readiness for sacrifice, and once they are prepared to suffer death in the same way – for his kingdom – they too will be reborn for the kingdom of God.

At the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus opened the way for us to understand the kingdom of God. The rest then follows, as it must, out of this root, which is the innermost nature of God. Now enemies are loved (Matt. 5:43–48). Now, for love's sake, one surrenders one's last possessions, giving away even the last coat and the last shirt (Matt. 5:38–42). Now one does not repay violence with violence, nor resist evil by responding with evil. Here is faithfulness, and in

faithfulness purity, including in physical and emotional human relationships (Matt. 5:27–32). Here is the only good, the truly better righteousness; it is the revelation of perfect love, of eternal faithfulness in love, and therefore also in the inviolable marriage between two people. Here is perfection, as the Father himself is perfect, in words too – with nothing superfluous, but only clarity, concision, and truthfulness (Matt. 5:33–37). Here are the truthfulness and perfection that exist in love alone.

Jesus goes on to point out what thwarts and destroys love: it is mammon. You cannot serve God and mammon at the same time (Matt. 6:24). You cannot serve property and love at the same time. Nor can you trust in the power of love if you are simultaneously worrying over your means of existence (Matt. 6:25–34). Wherever wealth is accumulated, and wherever people hoard even the smallest amount of money for their own purposes while their brothers and sisters go hungry and cannot keep a roof over their heads, there is no love. This is why Jesus says we should not accumulate property, have nothing at all belonging to ourselves, and not lay aside earthly treasures or reserves (Matt. 6:19–21).

We are not to worry about our livelihood either. This fear about earning enough money is no different from the anxiety that drives the wealthy to maintain a bank account, an estate, or other assets. It is all a byproduct of reliance on mammon! Worry over money originates from the spirit of mammon just as surely as the love of gold and all that glitters. And so Jesus tells us not to worry. Learn from nature, he says, and love it because it is God's creation. Look at the birds and flowers. Believe in the loving Father who clothes and provides for them.

When they take root in the reborn, the justice and righteousness of the kingdom of God bear fruit as an

undivided heart, an eye focused on God alone (Matt. 6:22–23). If your inner eye is concentrated in this way, you will not accumulate wealth, nor will you be plagued by worries. Instead, you will grasp that to call on God is to do so trusting in his love. Calling on God means pleading for his reign and doing his will (Matt. 6:9–13). It means sanctifying his name. To have such communion with God is to be blessed with the gift of daily bread, spiritual as well as physical. And as the eye lights up the body, it will also give you a new, loving heart, free of temptation and evil. Call on God with this heart.

To love God means to love all people, because God loves all people, and his heart is directed toward all people. He is merciful to all and lets his sun shine and his rain fall on all alike (Matt. 5:45). This is why those who have undergone the new birth through the love of God will not and cannot judge anyone else (Matt. 7:1–5). Instead, they will have faith for all people. This is why Jesus says we are not to judge people but to love them. To judge someone means to pass a conclusive verdict on them. And we can never do that: love's hope for someone and faith's trust in them ensure that the way home to God is always open, that salvation is always available.

For the sake of the love of God, however, Jesus warns us against revealing the holiest things of our hearts to people who are not ready to receive them (Matt. 7:6) – that would not be true love for God but false love. Instead, he advises us to speak to people in accordance with their inner receptivity, allowing them to grasp what we are saying without betraying a single grain of the truth.

Both paths lead to sinning against the love of God: judging people, and indiscriminately sharing what is holy with souls who have not been awakened. In fact,

both offend not only the love of God but also the souls of the people in question. Therefore remember that God's love is always greater than your judgment and your opinion, and know that it is always purer and more inviolable than everything you call love.

God alone knows each human heart. He knows the hearts of the guilty and the innocent; he knows the innermost being of every soul. Pray for his Spirit, then, and in every interaction with others you will be given that wisdom which you could never receive from yourselves (Matt. 10:19–20).

Jesus has another piece of advice: Treat every person the way you would like them to treat you (Matt. 7:12). If you want God to care for you in body, soul, and spirit, then see to it that everyone has access to the same – to whatever you expect for yourself – without exception. This is the new justice and righteousness. Do not limit your good works to those you find congenial. God loves all people, no matter who they are or might be (Matt. 5:46–47). Therefore you too should love all people, with the love that comes from God, and do everything for them that you want done for yourself and those close to you.

Again, the justice and righteousness of the kingdom, which is better than that of all the moralists and theologians, encompasses everyone (Matt. 5:20). And the biblical advice to treat all people as you want them to treat you – this is the narrow gate you must go through (Matt. 7:13–14), or, to use another image, the narrow mountain trail that ascends to the city on the hill.

Admittedly, only a few dare to walk this path. Hostile spirits and violent powers will interfere and waylay you. Physical violence will not ultimately harm you, however, since it cannot kill your conscience or change

your will (Matt. 10:28). What is more dangerous is the false prophecy that joins forces with these hostile spirits and confuses the inner eye and its singular focus (Matt. 7:15–20). This is why it is necessary for you to recognize false prophecy. Above all, its behavior – its actions – will be the key to this: whether it takes sides with the predator or not. Everything that is connected with the predatory nature of mammon, with unfaithful passions, shedding blood, and dishonest profiteering in business, is false prophecy. Everything connected to the rapacious nature of collective egotism is false prophecy too.¹ Beware of the veiled nature of the predator and the false prophet.

The true prophets, on the other hand, can be recognized by the nature of their love. This love can be seen in the fact that ultimately they will lay down their life for others (John 15:13). This readiness – the willingness to sacrifice one's own physical life without injuring or offending any other life – is the mark of true prophecy.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus compared the character of the new way of life, and the new kingdom he will bring into being, to a new building – one that can neither collapse nor be damaged by any force in the world (Matt. 7:24–27). But that does not mean it will not be subjected to attack. After all, it was not long before hostile powers rose up against Jesus. His opponents closed in on him with cunning and sought to trap him with clever intellectual arguments. They sought to drive him to the point where they would have grounds for

<sup>1</sup> A coinage by the French anarchist philosopher Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–1865) describing the tendency of groups – couples, families, ethnic or religious groups, and whole nations – to act out of self-interest.

killing him, grounds that would be valid in the eyes of the people and the government. Here we see how even the falsest predatory prophets cannot allow evil to appear as such, but have to disguise it as goodness. That is why they sought a cause that would be sufficient to gain the support of the people and the government, and allow them to pronounce Jesus guilty and condemn him to death.

No wonder that more and more leading citizens, and increasing numbers of common people, rejected Jesus the longer he worked, especially after he sent out the twelve disciples and then the seventy, in both instances two by two and with impressive authority (Matt. 10:1–15; Luke 10:1–12). After they returned, without having won over the people of Israel, Jesus made a tremendous decision: he limited himself to speaking in parables. He did this to veil the truth and hide it from the obtrusive – to prevent what is holy from being handled and defiled by his detractors (Matt. 13:10-17). At the same time, he knew his parables would illuminate the truth all the more deeply for those who really wanted to hear. Those whose false hearts sought him out only so they could contradict him would run up against an impenetrable wall in these parables. And so it is, down to the present day. His parables cannot be explained away by theology, and certainly not by false prophecy.

To open hearts, however, a vision of the church and the ultimate meaning of the message of God's kingdom is disclosed. It is revealed first in the parables of unity, in particular those of the wedding – the deepest union possible between people – and the banquet – the most inclusive and yet most intimate form of fellowship among people (Matt. 22:1–14; Luke 14:15–24).

Consummate unity and the community of many people at one table – these describe the mystery of the

kingdom of God. But neither the wedding feast nor the banquet can be imagined without their connection to the King of God's kingdom, and the King's Son; and this reminds us that human community receives its value first and foremost from the fact that it is God who institutes the wedding and who invites people to the banquet.

Later parables of Jesus show us more: that unity does not consist only in the joy of union but also in the creative activity that leads to it. Thus he likens striving for the kingdom of God to working in a vineyard (Matt. 20:1–16), and in another parable tells the story of a laborer whose actions say yes even though his mouth says no (Matt. 21:28–32). Real unity and community are only present where work is undertaken together and shared, because love is action. As to what kind of action. Jesus shows us that it always leads to complete surrender, that it is directed toward the future, and that it is entirely dependent on the blessing of heaven. This is why he likens the kingdom (Matt. 13:1-13) of God to a sower, to a farmer who waits for the right weather (Mark 4:26-29), and to a field in which the grain is intermingled with weeds that are deceptively similar to it (Matt. 13:24-30).

Ultimately, readiness for God's kingdom takes the shape of work animated by united love, and at the same time, by the expectation and belief that God will bring all things to their completion. That is why the new cannot be patched onto the old garment of old religious and social aspirations (Matt. 9:16–17). On the contrary, everything must be given away for the one great jewel – the kingdom of God (Matt. 13:44). All earthly possessions must be sold and left behind, and every old aspiration and dream as well. This is the path we must walk if we are to reach the kingdom of God.

The decision to follow this path is very hard for people to make. At first, the kingdom simply works like yeast (Matt. 13:33). The bread is the world as a whole—all peoples and all humanity; and the yeast of truth becomes effective as it works in and among them. The kingdom of God is also like a small seed, which will one day become a tree but is still in the process of growing (Matt. 13:31–32). One day it will reveal itself as a great world ash tree (Rev. 22:2),² and all peoples will find shelter under it (Ezek. 17:23). At present it is only a small, seemingly insignificant seed. It is significant, however, in that it is alive and that its vitality is characteristic of God's ash—that all-encompassing tree under whose branches all will gather and unite, and settle and dwell together.

But this seed does not grow unopposed: a terrible, hostile power exists that imitates everything God allows to grow, sowing weeds among the pure seed (Matt. 13:24-30). A heart that faith has truly prepared will not be disquieted by this. It will not attempt to uproot the weeds. It allows both to grow side by side until the time of harvest, when God himself will intervene. A heart with such faith never allows itself to be enticed into resorting to violence, because Christ never uses the methods of Satan. It knows that Satan must be disarmed another way, in his innermost chamber, where he develops his secret power. This is the place of death and the place of sin, which is the weapon of death. The kingdom of Christ can never take into its own hands this weapon that Christ struck from Satan's hands. This kingdom rejects every means that involves violence and deceit. It is a kingdom of pure love; that is why it is destined for complete victory.

<sup>2</sup> Aside from the obvious biblical references at hand, Arnold draws here on an image from Norse mythology: the Weltesche – "World Ash" or Yggdrasil.

Christ's parables show clearly something that was already evident in the Sermon on the Mount: the character that the comrades of God's kingdom, the citizens of the city of God, need to have. Like rocks and trees, they must be unshakable in storms and floods; and like fertile trees, they must bear abundant fruit (Matt. 7:15–20): love and joy, unity and surrender, readiness and gathering for God's kingdom. If the tree is unfruitful, it will be felled (Matt. 3:10).

With regard to other parables: the comrades of the kingdom cannot be merciless like the unmerciful servant, or they will be removed from the household (Matt. 18:23–35). Whoever unlovingly pushes himself forward and tries to take the best place must be turned away too (Luke 14:7–11). Whoever is not willing to dress for the celebration must leave the banquet hall (Matt. 22:11–14). Whoever cannot show love to his or her fellow laborers and servants must be dismissed (Matt. 21:33–41).

The decisive thing is loving people and thus preparing oneself for the coming of God. We see this in the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1-13) - five were fully prepared, through the Spirit, but the other five were only half prepared, and lacked the Spirit. We see this in the persistence of the friend at the window, too (Luke 11:5-8), and in the pleading child (Luke 11:11–13). Being prepared means persisting in faithfulness, being watchful and constant in our calling. We see this in the stories (Matt. 24:45-51) of the faithful steward and servant (Luke 12:35-48), and in the administrators who are tasked with being faithful and alert in maintaining the things entrusted to them (Luke 19:11–27). We see it in the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30) - the entrusted goods that need to be utilized fully and faithfully.

Anyone who is not faithful and firm until the end will one day find the door closed. Everyone should know beforehand that the construction of a tower, or any similar undertaking, can only be seen through to completion when one stakes everything for it, when all one's powers are used to finish the building and to see the fight through to the end (Luke 14:26–33).

The nature of the citizens of the city of God consists in active, persevering love. Here no one favors his or her own well-being. The parable of poor Lazarus isn't about an exceptionally evil rich man – his fault was simply that he wanted to enjoy his own riches (Luke 16:19–31). He may have given alms to the poor, to the beggar lying on his front doorstep. And yet he could not enter the kingdom of God because he was so consumed with enjoying his wealth – and because he only gave away a very little bit of his surplus.

This would be impossible in the kingdom of God. There, the humble heart surrenders everything it has and is, and lets itself be redeemed from its own conceit, as we are shown in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9–14). Only the person who can say, "God, have mercy on me, a poor sinner," belongs to the kingdom. Someone who still thinks, "I'm so happy I'm not like that person," doesn't belong to God's kingdom any more than the foolish rich man who, when he had filled up all his barns, thought, "I had better build another barn." The same night, he was found dead (Luke 12:13–21).

There are still other lessons in the parables. Wealth, both in material things and in the sense of moral self-righteousness, closes the door to God's kingdom. This is shown in Christ's stories about the lost sheep, the prodigal son, and the missing coin that was sought without

success (Luke 15). The son who went astray and ended up destitute was the same one who eventually received the greater love when he returned, willing to surrender himself to his father, even if this meant taking the lowest place. The lost sheep, dirtier and weaker than the others, was sought out with special love and reinstated as part of the flock. More time was spent searching for the missing coin than all the rest, which remained safe in the cash box.

All this is said not to imply that the individual is to be valued above all else, but rather to remind us that even the one who is utterly lost—the dirtiest, the most isolated, the one who strays farthest—can still be brought back and welcomed into the community of the kingdom of God. All of them will be restored to its unity, and made useful once again for the greater good, before the door to the father's house, the sheep pen, or the chest is finally closed. Ultimately, it is not about the lost sheep, the lost son, or the lost piece of silver. What matters is the return to the pasture, the flock, and the shepherd. Then real community arises, and love, both for the individual and for the whole, is revealed as love for God.

The whole mystery of God's kingdom is like a planned landscape or a large garden where everything flourishes together in organic unity and concord and community. Or, to use another image, it is like a vine in which Christ, through the Holy Spirit, is the love, the power, and the binding force of life.

**To grasp the parables** is to understand why Jesus also warned his followers with the image of the splinter and the beam (Matt. 7:1–5). People always seem happy to tell others what they have done wrong – and it is

right to help one another. But such guidance can only be fruitful if the slab is removed from our own eye first, so that we can see to remove the splinter. We ourselves need to be purified if we are to attain the character of God's kingdom.

The love of Jesus is perfect love, and precisely because of this it is not a soft love. It rejects evil and fights it to the end, whether it is a matter of a beam or a splinter. That is why, after speaking in parables, Jesus attacks those hostile to him and proclaims his sevenfold "Woe!" (Matt. 23:1–36) over the false prophets. And that is why, in announcing such a dreadful judgment, he takes time to explain the catastrophe of the last days of this world (Matt. 24:1-28). His last discourses glow with the certainty that a terrible judgment of fire will come over this earth and its peoples because they do not want to be won by his love, but persist in their heartlessness and hostility toward God. It became evident through Jesus' life that this was the attitude people had. They eventually executed him as an enemy of the people, and of the best state and the best church.

Everything that Jesus said, he did as well. His entire life is one of love in action. Everything he proclaimed in the Sermon on the Mount and in his parables he put into practice by gathering his twelve disciples into a community of shared goods and an itinerant fellowship – a homeless common life. Later he did the same in sending out disciples who, as God's ambassadors, were to represent the full authority and the love of the kingdom of God in their mission (Matt. 10:1–15).

Jesus proved his sustaining power and his wondrous capacity for community in the way he endured alongside his disciples, who were often so foolish, right to the end – they fled while he was crucified. He proved it in

the way he led this community, faithfully instructing and teaching his disciples, passing on his truth to them until the end.

The four Gospels, which are the source of our understanding of Jesus' life, were written long after his death. But they were written as the outcome of his daily teachings and of the continuation of these teachings in the church. Stories of Jesus Christ were told and retold wherever the true church of Jesus gathered: among the early Christians, and later among the Waldensians, the Anabaptists, and many others.<sup>3</sup> Through this oral transmission of the stories of Jesus – through the joy of recounting who Jesus was, over and over again, and what he did and said – his truth was carried from heart to heart, and passed on from one generation to the next.

At the end of the Gospel of John, we are told that Jesus did so many things that if they were all written down, the world could not hold all the books that would have to be written (John 21:25). Still, those actions that were recorded show us the essence of his life and his authority clearly enough. And what he did within the circle of his companions was nothing other than what he spoke and proclaimed. It was an expression of the love that body, soul, and spirit all give themselves to. His actions proved the truth of everything he proclaimed.

**Christ's ability** to exorcise demons from human bodies, to drive out the devil by the finger of the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:20), was surely the most powerful

<sup>3</sup> The Waldensians, a pre-Protestant movement in twelfth-century France, emphasized simple living, biblical authority, and a faith guided directly by God. The Anabaptists, a group that arose in sixteenth-century Switzerland, were similar. They took as their model the Christianity of the early church.

demonstration of the fact that the reign of God's kingdom was present in him. So too, the healings of the sick show that death and its root in sin were eliminated with the coming of Jesus and the approach of God's kingdom, because the spirit of death is the greatest enemy of the spirit of life. Death is the last enemy of God.

This is why Jesus healed the sick. He healed people who suffered from life-threatening skin diseases and leprosy, and those who had lost their faculties – the blind and the deaf. He healed people who had lost their vitality because of disease, and paralytics who had lost the strength of their limbs. He healed a man with a withered arm, and people who suffered from fevers, including the mother-in-law of Peter, one of his disciples (Matt. 8:14–15). He made the deaf and mute hear and speak again. He restored stunted bodies and people who had waited, seemingly in vain, for a miracle. Once he healed someone (Luke 22:50–52) who had been injured by one of his own disciples. He healed people with dropsy (Luke 14:2) and people who were dying.

In all this, Jesus showed that the power of the devil is not a purely psychological matter. By healing the sick, Jesus revealed the devil as a power that infects and destroys – the body too. Wherever Jesus intervened, this destructive power was beaten back and bodies were restored for the glory of God and the holiness of his name.

Jesus could stop even in the face of death, the final enemy (1 Cor. 15:26), in light of which all sicknesses are nothing but pains that precede it. Death is the last weapon of satanic power. Therefore Jesus turned (Matt. 9:18–26; Luke 7:11–17) to people who had already died. He even took bodies that were already in a state of decay and raised them back to life (John 11:1–44). He touched

corpses, and they were awakened by his intervention. All this he did to prove the unconquerable power of life. Without resurrection, Christ's message would be null and void. That is why his power to raise people from the dead is a central aspect of his life and his gospel.

But Jesus does not stop with the things that concern human bodies. His actions go further. When he fed (Matt. 15:32–38; 14:13–21) the four thousand, and then the five thousand, as well as when he created wine at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1–11), he was still helping people in their bodies. He did the same with the miraculous catch of fish in the Lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1–11). But when he stilled the storm that raged over this same lake (Matt. 8:23–27), and when he made the fig tree wither (Matt. 21:18–22), he showed that every other element of creation, too, could be touched and transformed by his breath and by the approaching powers of his kingdom. That is, he showed that his lordship extends over every aspect of life on earth.

Every miracle Jesus performed in his full authority points toward the end of time and the beginning of God's kingdom. His actions anticipate a final miracle when God and his reign will approach, one that will take place in the nature of the first creation, too, to the bodies of people created and born. They show that the power of God's love is not directed toward the human soul and body alone, but just as much to the very structure of nature, to creation as a whole.

Certainly, what happens to each individual is still crucially important. But God is deeply interested in all creation, the entire nature of all worlds, so that they may all be included in the newness which is his kingdom. Yes, individuals have to stop doing evil when their bodies are healed. Christ's authority to forgive sins

and remove evil takes place at the individual level, and the healing that follows is rightly their own. The power of evil has to be cleared out of each human heart. But this does not happen so that each little soul can become wrapped up in its own salvation. No, God's goal is that they can become free from themselves for the great and mighty work that is coming to this earth and will take hold of everything as God's kingdom approaches.

When it arrives, the works of the devil will finally be destroyed for good. Creation, which was corrupted through the evil influence of Satan, will be restored to its full vitality, as God intended from the very beginning. Everything that is happening now is a sign and a symbol of what is to come when the invincible life of the second creation is revealed; when even death, the last enemy, is vanquished (1 Cor. 15:26); when God reigns as the creative Spirit of the new nature.

This mystery was revealed in Jesus himself, who rose and was revealed as the eternally living one. As the risen one, he is present in the church through the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. This pouring out is the fulfillment of the words, "I am with you always, till the end of the world. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt. 28:20, 18). Here, in the Holy Spirit, the King of the coming kingdom is present. The Spirit of the church is the presence of the King who conquers all worlds for God. The Holy Spirit, being the substance of life in the church, gives us certainty of the joyful news that Jesus is coming as King of the final kingdom.

As we are reminded in the last vision of the church in the Revelation of John, in which a voice from heaven reveals the end of the first resurrection, "Blessed and holy are those who partake in the first resurrection; over them the second death has no power" (Rev. 20:6).

# **Afterword**

Jürgen Moltmann

This book opens with the question, "How do we respond to the Sermon on the Mount?" – a question that must be asked by each new generation. Each generation must find its own answer to the call of Jesus. Yet throughout the centuries there is a fellowship of those who face the powerful challenge of the Sermon on the Mount without reservation, ready for unconditional discipleship. Among those who speak to us today are the Waldensians and Hussites, the Anabaptists and Quakers, and now Eberhard Arnold of the Bruderhof. On the way of Jesus, intervals of time lose their meaning; brothers and sisters of earlier days speak to us as if they were present today – which they are, if we listen to them and through their voices hear the voice of Jesus.

As I was reading Arnold's vision of the Sermon on the Mount and imagining the first Bruderhof – a lonely, impoverished little settlement in the Rhön hills – I was suddenly struck by the inseparable connection between Jesus' words and unconditional discipleship, between discipleship and the communal life of the Twelve, between the life of brotherly love and the expectation

of God's kingdom on earth. These things must never be separated.

Arnold shows us that the Sermon on the Mount is not a new moral law but a proclamation, a witness to the power of the coming kingdom and true life. The Beatitudes come before Jesus' new commandments. Before laying the yoke of discipleship upon us, Jesus fills our hearts with the powers of God's Spirit. Arnold shows us that following these commandments consistently is neither an ideal nor an ordeal, but a matter of course in the community of Jesus. In the community of Jesus, life becomes clear, simple, decisive, and unequivocal. Gone are the many doubts and compromises, the many half-truths and the half-heartedness. We can only love God with our whole heart and strength; we can follow Jesus only with undivided dedication – otherwise we are not following him at all.

Further, Arnold shows us that discipleship and community life belong together: they cannot be separated. It is from community life that we draw the strength for discipleship and courage to face the inevitable opposition. In discipleship we find our brothers and sisters of the communal life. The Bruderhof community proves that.

I ask myself what the state churches, still trying to lead a Christian life, can learn from such consistently Christian communities. First of all, we have to lay down our old prejudices and heretic-hunting. The Mennonites and Hutterites and related groups, of the past and of today, are not fanatic enthusiasts or narrow sectarians but genuine Christian communities. True, their existence represents a criticism of the life of Christians in the established churches. The answer will be to

begin learning from them. So I have been asking myself, how can the established institutional church become a living, communal church? How can our church parishes become communities of faith and of life? I believe that this is the way into the future, and I see more and more people going in that direction. We are not looking for the self-righteous Christian sect that despises the world, but for the open church of the coming kingdom of God. This church is open and welcomes everyone, like the Bruderhof does. It is open to the poor, the disabled, and the rejected, who find a refuge and new hope there, because they find Jesus.

Arnold places much emphasis on the realism of Christian hope: Christians do not hope for salvation for their souls in the hereafter, but pray, as Jesus bids us: "Thy kingdom come!" Arnold has often called this coming kingdom "God's future state." Like the New Testament, he speaks of "the heavenly city" and "the heavenly politeuma." He speaks of the kingdom that is to come to earth in political terms. That is very important to me: if I pray for the advent of this kingdom, I cannot abandon the earth to wars and ecological destruction and to those who hope for security by threatening such disasters. If I pray for the coming of God's kingdom, I cannot stand by while the environment and my fellow creatures are being annihilated through the progress of civilization and nuclear disasters. Praying for the coming of God's kingdom calls for a decisive resistance to the destruction of the earth. In his hope Arnold was as earthly, physical, and holistic as Christoph Blumhardt was.

Arnold once called the Bruderhof "a seed of God's kingdom." During the Nazi years this seed "died" like

the buried grain of seed the apostles speak of. But it has also borne—and is bearing—rich fruits, not the least of which is hope. The Bruderhof communities, like all faith-based communities and fellowships, are lights of hope in an age that sometimes looks very dark. May they no longer remain "hidden under a bushel," but be heeded more and more by the rest of us.

Tübingen, Germany, 1982

# Sources

The original German version of each article and talk translated in this book is available at EberhardArnold.com. Use the following archival numbers to locate them.

- 1. Not a New Law EA 495a
- 2. Becoming Human EA 481
- 3. Salt and Light EA 20/9
- 4. Happiness EA 20/8
- 5. The Nature of the New Justice EA 22/5
- 6. Human Goodness and God's Spirit EA 20/7
- 7. Away from Compromise and Shadow EA 25/8
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- 9. The Better Righteousness EA 19/14
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- 15. The Spirit That Overcomes EA 172
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- 17. The Joyful News of the Kingdom EA 225a
- 18. God and the Future of Humanity EA 19/15
- 19. The Jesus of the Four Gospels EA 227

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