

Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt



Action *in* Waiting

With an Afterword by Karl Barth

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Acclaim

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

Clark Pinnock author, *The Flame of Love*

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

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Stanley Hauerwas co-author, *Resident Aliens*

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

Action in Waiting

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Action in Waiting

Christoph Blumhardt

Foreword by Rodney Clapp

Afterword by Karl Barth



The Plough Publishing House

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Foreword

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

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

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

I write these words at the end of a week in which two Arkansas schoolchildren, ages eleven and thirteen, have gunned down classmates and a teacher with high-powered rifles. Darkness bears down on us in many other ways: deepening poverty in American cities and rural areas, ongoing and desperate racial tensions, climbing teenage suicide rates, and dozens of other profound human problems. Suffering and crisis are not confined to the United States, of course. The Middle East daily stays just a gesture or two away from lethal violence. South Africa and other African nations attempt bold experiments in reconciliation and democracy, while all witnessing, knowing how precarious such experiments are, hold their breath. Meanwhile the entire globe wants most to follow North America in its wanton accumulation, its wasteful fashions, and the grossest elements of its popular culture.

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

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

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than that. And the kingdom of God is so much grander, so much more exciting and challenging than that.

This is something an odd German pastor and sometime politician named Christoph Blumhardt knew very well. And this is why I have read the words of Blumhardt (and his father) with so much appreciation and encouragement. It is also why I have commended the Blumhardts to so many friends. It is, at last, why I consider it such a privilege to commend this wonderful collection of some of Christoph Blumhardt's finest sermons.

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

So if you read further into these pages you will find Christoph Blumhardt declaring the expansiveness of the kingdom: "When I await the Lord, my waiting is for the whole world, of which I am a part." You will find him railing against the privatistic reduction of the kingdom's power to individual salvation: "We have been much more concerned with being saved than with seeing the kingdom of God. If we want our salvation first, and then the kingdom of God, there will never be any light on earth. No! We will not think of

our salvation. We will not seek our own good first! We want to be servants! We want to seek God's salvation, God's glory, God's kingdom!" You will find his bracing expectation that the world will change, however fitfully and incompletely, through the witness of God's people: "Today we cry, 'Oh, to be saved! Oh, to be saved!' But God says, 'I do not need you in heaven, I have enough saved ones here. I need workers, people who get things done on earth. First serve me there.' If we Christians simply relate all the words of scripture to our precious little selves without stopping to consider whether the conditions of our life and of our world are right – then it is our fault if nothing new breaks into our lives."

Blessedly, and surely partly through the direct and indirect influence of the Blumhardts, we live in a day when a host of biblical scholars and theologians are reading the Bible anew and appreciating both the centrality of the kingdom to the gospel, and the full-orbed social, political, and cultural (as well as "private" and "personal") inbreaking impact of that kingdom. This is in many ways a more Jewish reading of Scripture – and remember, Jesus and his apostles were Jews. In the early days of the church, non-Christianized Jews argued quite legitimately that if the world has not been changed, then the genuine Messiah has not come. After all, the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others said that with the kingdom's advent would come the cessation of war, the routing of famine and pestilence, the end of enmity between humanity and the rest of creation.

True enough, now as in the early days of the church there are still wars, hunger, sickness, and wild beasts. But the apos-

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

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

Now that is a glorious and pulse-quickenning vision, beckoning us to an adventure worth a lifetime’s dedication and commitment. In focusing on the salvation of “our precious little selves,” we have rendered the gospel so small, made God’s kingdom so puny. Christoph Blumhardt, in plain language vibrant with eloquence only because it is so Spirit-

filled, reminds us that personal peace, though not a bad thing, is merely the wrapping paper and not the magnificent gift itself. Dare I, dare we, dare the church on behalf of the world, pray for a confidence in the kingdom as vital and comprehensive as this man's?

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

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

Rodney Clapp
Lent, 1998

Introduction

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

Blumhardt possessed no theories and certainly no “theology.” Without founding a school or wanting to attract disciples, he pointed in a direction that had a striking influence on those who came after him. He was behind two movements that accepted him as one of their forerunners

without having any direct contact with them: Religious Socialism (in Switzerland and Germany) and Dialectical (“Crisis”) Theology. His ideas had seminal influence on Leonhard Ragaz, Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and more recently on Harvey Cox, Jacques Ellul, and Jürgen Moltmann – theological giants among whom he would most certainly feel a stranger.

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

Despite his legacy, Blumhardt is still relatively unknown, especially in America. True, efforts have been made in the past to make him better known, but without much effect. However, along with this volume, new editions of his works are becoming available in English, including a multivolume series that, when completed, will consist of the entire corpus of both the father and son Blumhardt. Nevertheless, unlike some of his contemporaries – Charles Finney or William Booth, for example – Blumhardt is known only to a very few.

In a piece written for *The Christian Century* in 1969, Vernard Eller suggests that part of the reason for Blumhardt’s obscurity is that his message was neither literary nor scholarly enough to quote from. In his book *Thy Kingdom Come: A Blumhardt Reader* (Eerdmans, 1980), Eller attempted to

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rectify this. Unfortunately, the book never received much attention.

But there is perhaps a more basic reason. To begin with, Blumhardt's life was a provocation. He also expressed his ideas in impressive and unconventional phrases. His message excited both shock and indignation, for it went against the currents of both the church and the world. He represented something quite different from what we generally understand by Christianity. As Johannes Harder once wrote, "Anyone who wants to fit Blumhardt into the history of theology might place him into an appendix to Gottfried Arnold's *History of Heresy*."

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

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

To many people, Blumhardt's message sounded dangerously worldly, even irreverent. In fact, the established church

of his day retaliated by casting suspicion on him, and slandering and maligning him. His message touched a nerve that is still raw today.

Blumhardt's aim, however, was never to attack. What ruled his whole thinking was the kingdom of God – the creative reign of Christ's peace and justice on earth. This kingdom is neither a formal constitution nor an ideal. It is a movement that belongs to the future but impinges upon the present. It is humankind's truest history, and will be demonstrably victorious in the end. It confronts everything that has ever been thought, planned, or built; it opposes all institutions, monuments, and ideologies. It always seeks the different, the new, and encompasses the whole of life.

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

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

To appreciate this one must turn to Blumhardt's father, Johann Christoph (1805–1880). Blumhardt's father was the minister of Möttingen, a small town at the edge of the

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Black Forest. His work followed the same course as that of any rural pastor until he came in touch with a girl by the name of Gottliebin Dittus. Gottliebin suffered from an illness perhaps similar to demonic possession as described in the New Testament. For months Father Blumhardt watched with distress the increasing suffering and torment of this young woman. Feeling something dark at work in her, he finally took up the fight with the power of darkness. In the year in which his son Christoph was born, in 1842, he exclaimed: "We have seen enough of what the devil can do. Let us now see the power of the Lord Jesus." The fight against the demonic stronghold commenced and lasted two years. The dark power was finally broken and conquered, and the evil spirit driven out. Gottliebin was completely healed of all bodily and spiritual misery. The fight ended in victory with the words from her lips, "Jesus is victor! Jesus is victor!"

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

For a number of reasons, opposition to Blumhardt's father gradually increased, particularly from other ministers and

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

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

In Bad Boll, the young Christoph found himself in the midst of a stream of people seeking help, coming from all classes, nationalities, and countries, and in the midst of the work of his father’s constant, fervent struggle for God’s kingdom. In time he felt called to the ministry himself, and after some years he was permitted to support his father as an assistant. When his father called him to Bad Boll as his helper, however, he only wanted to make himself useful around the house in the most menial ways; perhaps as a cook’s helper.

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For some reason he lacked his father's certainty. He had yet to personally take up the fight that his father had undertaken. But the death of Gottliebin Dittus, in 1872, became a turning point for him and the entire household at Bad Boll. It drove everybody to a fresh experience of deep repentance, releasing in Christoph a renewed confidence in God's call. His father's last words, spoken on his deathbed in 1880, commissioned Christoph to carry on: "I give you a blessing for victory."

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

Blumhardt also became frustrated with the constant attention people placed on healing. As happened in the time of Jesus, "miracles" became the main thing for many people in Bad Boll. He consciously fought against this. He was determined to keep Bad Boll from becoming an institution for faith healing. "There is a lie that turns everything in the direction of exploiting the mercy and grace of God in such a

way that the Savior then becomes our servant,” he once wrote in a letter to someone asking for his help. For Blumhardt, the conquest of sickness was subservient to God’s kingdom. “To be cleansed is more important than to be healed.”

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

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

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

Still following in his father's footsteps, Blumhardt concerned himself more and more with the reality of present-day society. He finally left the "conventicle" in Bad Boll and went into the streets to support the labor movement, which was making itself heard. Bad Boll would cease to be a "place of sermons," in order to become a "place for true life." Blumhardt stood virtually alone among people in the churches in this feeling for the need of the masses. When he joined the Social Democrats (and acted as their elected representative to the Württemberg parliament from 1900–1906) it was as though he was under banishment. He was asked to renounce his position as a pastor in the state of Württemberg. The organized churches marked him as an outcast. Blumhardt accepted this as a freeing: "State and church are no soil for the fire of God."

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

break into the world situation to free those gripped by its degenerative powers.

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

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

The idea that God is only in heaven and that the application of the gospel was only for the inner life was disastrous, according to Blumhardt. Not our blessedness first, but the kingdom of God. Not our profit (here or hereafter), but the honor of God. Or, as Leonhard Ragaz once put it in summarizing Blumhardt's thought, "From religion to God's

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kingdom, from the church to a redeemed world, from *me* to God.” This all-encompassing vision ultimately led Blumhardt back to Bad Boll.

Blumhardt was never really a politician. Only by circumstance was he forced into formally joining the Social Democratic party. Originally he did not even want to become a regular party member. Though received with open arms, in the long run he did not find the party to be ground in which a witness to the gospel could have full effect. He said: “The social movement as we see it today still belongs to the world that will pass. It does not contain the fellowship of men as it will one day come through God’s spirit.” Therefore, after his first term he was led back through a long, serious illness into the peace of Bad Boll. In 1917 Blumhardt suffered a stroke; he died peacefully two years later, on August 2, 1919.

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

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

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

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

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old creation is to yield to the new as the night yields to the dawning day.

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

As one hears the message of Blumhardt, there is a sense that truth is being served in a timeless way. Perhaps this is because for Blumhardt, Jesus is rising now; Jesus is victorious now; the kingdom of God is breaking in now! The fabric of God’s kingdom-vision spans time and brings together unlikely witnesses who have been blessed to see the Real despite the illusions of their day. Witnesses like Eberhard Arnold, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa, and Oscar Romero are just a few visionaries of our time who have had the grace to see what God is doing now. Out of the confusion and chaos of our time, there steps out in stark relief a timeless and united Christian vision. The kingdom of God is at hand. We must fight *and* wait for it in the singular act of concrete expectation.

Neither the breadth nor the depth of Blumhardt’s thought can be fully expressed in a short volume like this one. However, we hope that Blumhardt’s spirit and longing can. Blumhardt was gripped by the reality of the coming of God’s

kingdom on this earth, here and now. Yet he also understood that this kingdom was yet beyond our efforts, always lying beyond us. As such, God's kingdom ignites a burning expectancy of living faith; a faith that both works and waits, helps God and hopes in him. May Blumhardt's vision inspire in the reader such deeds of hope. We surely need more of them.

Charles Moore
February, 2012

XXX

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

Matthew 6:33

1

Seeking the Kingdom

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

shut our eyes to these things, we would lag behind and finally perish in our earthly life. There is a spirit of intellectual accomplishment that pushes the concern for God's kingdom to the side.

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

Because of all this we must begin to speak of God's kingdom in a new way. In spite of present-day conditions where much of the church and of Christian fellowship is almost dead, we can speak of God's kingdom to men and women of our time. The kingdom of God is and was and will be the rulership of justice, of order, of power, of authority, of

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all that is of God, over creation. This is what moves those of us who seek, and this must come more fully into being. And unless our lives are molded according to this rulership, we shall always remain dissatisfied. We may enjoy modern conveniences, but the reality of eternal things will be smothered unless the reign of God's truth and justice dawns as the light of life.

Yet this very fact causes great discord as soon as it is pointed out. Millions of people are "Christians" in all peace and comfort from their childhood on until they are laid in the grave. They are satisfied with what is said about God, and it does not make them feel uncomfortable in any way. Religion is taken as part of one's life; one accepts it such as it is. This causes no conflict – at the most an argument here or there about the interpretation of this or that teaching, but these arguments are futile. A new conflict arises as soon as we feel urged to proclaim the kingdom of God as something living. And this is what I want to do today. I don't just want to edify you. I want to proclaim to you what God has put into my heart: God's kingdom is a living reality, a rulership that impacts the here and now and even today is at hand – closer at hand than we may think. The intervention of the living God is more powerful today than many believe. God wants to manifest himself as the one who is something and who does something now. He alone is the one with whom we should joyfully concern ourselves.

In speaking of God's kingdom, we proclaim that Jesus Christ is not dead. He is not merely someone who appeared two thousand years ago, to be viewed as a personality of the

past about whom we retain certain recollections and teachings. No, just as Jesus lived two thousand years ago, he lives today. He wants to triumph in our midst for the honor of God. He wants to live among us so that our reverence for the Father in heaven may grow and deepen. We must come before God and in the weakness and poverty of our natures raise our eyes to him with a sigh in our hearts, saying, "My Father, my Father, I too want to be your child!" Then we may believe with life-giving strength: Jesus lives, he will help me, he is victor. Whoever I may be, his name can be sanctified in me and his rulership can enter in, so that his will may be done in me just as it is done in heaven!

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

In the realm of our own human nature, however, there is more resistance to God's truth than people believe. And in human society, in all the influences to which we are exposed, there lies a grave hindrance to the living power of Christ, and this hindrance is also greater than people suspect. Often I find that when I speak of God, of Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, everyone agrees with me. Nobody gets annoyed. The conflict begins, however, as soon as I take a firm stand and say, "I have experienced who Jesus is. I have looked into the living power, into the kingdom of our God, which even

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today wants to take hold of us. I tell you that even now the truth and the life-power of our God are at work. I declare to you that even now the truth of God's kingdom comes visibly to this earth. We do not have to wait until we lay ourselves down to die and be buried. Here and now we can hear with our ears, see with our eyes, who Jesus is, who the life-giving Spirit is. It is the same today as at the time of the apostles. It is not a question of this or that church, of this or that teaching, but only of Jesus Christ himself (John 14:6). We have to come to terms with him!"

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

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

You must be a dying person, one who in things of God says, "I can do nothing. None but Jesus has the right to show us divine matters!" In this way alone do we honor this king.

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

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

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

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