



Experiencing God

Eberhard
ARNOLD

INNER
LAND
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Experiencing God

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Inner Land

A Guide into the Heart of the Gospel

■ □ □ □ □ The Inner Life

The Inner Life

The Heart

Soul and Spirit

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The Conscience and Its Witness

The Conscience and Its Restoration

□ □ ■ □ □ Experiencing God

The Experience of God

The Peace of God

□ □ □ ■ □ Fire and Spirit

Light and Fire

The Holy Spirit

□ □ □ □ ■ The Living Word

Volume 3

Experiencing God

Eberhard Arnold



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*Dedicated to my faithful
wife, Emmy Arnold*

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*When anyone is united to Christ, there is
a new world; the old order has gone, and a
new order has already begun.*

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NEB)

Preface

Born to an academic family in the Prussian city of Königsberg, Eberhard Arnold (1883–1935) received a doctorate in philosophy and became a sought-after writer and speaker in Germany. Yet like thousands of other young Europeans in the turbulent years following World War I, he and his wife, Emmy, were disillusioned by the failure of the establishment – especially the churches – to provide answers to the problems facing society.

In 1920, out of a desire to put into practice the teachings of Jesus, the Arnolds turned their backs on the privileges of middle-class life in Berlin and moved to the village of Sannerz with their five young children. There, with a handful of others, they started an intentional community on the basis of the Sermon on the Mount, drawing inspiration from the early Christians and the sixteenth-century Anabaptists. The community, which supported itself by agriculture and publishing, attracted thousands of visitors and eventually grew into the international movement known as the Bruderhof.

Eberhard Arnold's magnum opus, *Inner Land* absorbed his energies off and on for most of his adult life. Begun in the months before World War I, the first version of the book was published in 1914 as a patriotic pamphlet for German soldiers titled *War: A Call to Inwardness*. The first version to carry the title *Inner Land* appeared after the war in 1918; Arnold had extensively revised the text in light of his embrace of Christian pacifism. In 1932 Arnold began a new edit, reflecting the influence of religious socialism and his immersion in the writings of the sixteenth-century Radical Reformation, as well as his experiences living in the Sannerz community. Arnold continued to rework the book during the following three years, as he and the community became targets of increasing harassment as opponents of Nazism. The final text, on which this translation is based, was published in 1936. Arnold had died one year earlier as the result of a failed surgery.

This final version of *Inner Land* was not explicitly critical of the Nazi regime. Instead, it attacked the spirits that fed German society's support for Nazism: racism and bigotry, nationalistic fervor, hatred of political enemies, a desire for vengeance, and greed. At the same time, Arnold was not afraid to critique the evils of Bolshevism.

The chapter "Light and Fire," in particular, was a deliberate public statement at a decisive moment in Germany's history. Eberhard Arnold sent Hitler a copy on November 9, 1933. A week later the Gestapo raided the community and ransacked the author's study. After the raid, Eberhard Arnold had

two Bruderhof members pack the already printed signatures of *Inner Land* in watertight metal boxes and bury them at night on the hill behind the community for safekeeping. They later dug up *Inner Land* and smuggled it out of the country, publishing it in Lichtenstein after Eberhard Arnold's death. Emmy Arnold later fulfilled her husband's wish and added marginal Bible references. (Footnotes are added by the editors.)

At first glance, the focus of *Inner Land* seems to be the cultivation of the spiritual life. This would be misleading. Eberhard Arnold writes:

These are times of distress; they do not allow us to retreat just because we are willfully blind to the overwhelming urgency of the tasks that press upon human society. We cannot look for inner detachment in an inner and outer isolation. . . . The only thing that could justify withdrawing into the inner self to escape today's confusing, hectic whirl would be that fruitfulness is enriched by it. It is a question of gaining within, through unity with the eternal powers, that strength of character which is ready to be tested in the stream of the world.

Inner Land, then, calls us not to passivity, but to action. It invites us to discover the abundance of a life lived for God. It opens our eyes to the possibilities of that "inner land of the invisible" where "our spirit can find the roots of its strength." Only there, says Eberhard Arnold, will we find the clarity of vision we need to win the daily battle that is life.

The Editors

The Experience of God

Historical events must lead us to faith

The more shaking the historical events of a time period, the more necessary it is to recognize what spiritual power determines their course. Outward events as violent as those of our day call for an insight into this ultimate will and its aim. But the more agitated the times, the more temporary matters push to the fore. At such times of tension, a tangle of issues seems to prevent any clarity about the ultimate answer. Mounting pressure leads to emergency measures that seem imperative. Conditioned to the times, they are not able to turn the tide of need and distress. One attempt follows another, misery increases, and nothing can overcome it; people go under in the day-to-day struggle and lose all hope of a change.

Some think we have to give first place to patriotic ideas and the historic task laid on the nation. The longed-for freedom of the national community appears imperative at the moment, demanding that

everything else be subjected and sacrificed to this. Others, however, believe in a historical development to raise to power in every nation all those oppressed and exploited by competition and private enterprise; for a time they are to be given unlimited power. In comparison with both of these, the champions of liberty and freedom for the individual (with the consequent competition) retreat into the background. No state protection preserves them from their approaching insignificance. What falls almost completely by the wayside in the struggle for quickly-won power is this: in the end, a classless society based on justice and peace shall unite all extremes.

Not one of these three directions with their struggles and fluctuating hopes expects anything from the prophetic power of the Christ-proclamation. Those who stand in the middle between the first two extremes have no fear that their egotistical life might be shattered by the kingdom of God. And where individuals try to comply with the economic system, their consciences become too dull to be aware of how universal need and distress are. But to the right and to the left, people think more seriously. To the right, in contradiction to Christ, they want religion to uphold unconditionally the power structure they have fought for. Christian consciences are meant to surrender to it in willing submission; the conscience becomes the slave of political power. To the left, all they see in the Christian confession is their most hated opponent. All they know of Christianity is the social power of class privilege, which, also in contradiction to Christ, covers up social injustice with a hypocritical

mien and refers the tormented to a better world hereafter. The Christian conscience appears to represent the height of injustice and should be exterminated.

To all this, Christian confessions in general, apart from a few rare exceptions, have nothing to say. The prophetic clarity of intense and confident waiting for a final kingdom – a kingdom of loving community in God – has given way to feeble imitations. People no longer believe that the peace, justice, and brotherliness of the kingdom of God are a present reality that eclipses all other hopes of the future. And yet all these prospects of a better future are borrowed from and would not exist without the hopes of prophetic early Christianity. But not even the historical significance of early Christian prophecy is taken seriously. In practice, the general run of Christianity just accepts existing conditions of social order, or disorder, including any new ideas people come up with. The early Christian expectation is being forgotten. Because it is no longer seriously believed, it has, for present-day Christianity, lost the dynamic to overturn and transform everything.

Rom. 12:1–2

There are still those who point out seriously that God is quite other than man, quite other than all man of himself wants or does.¹ But there are very few who believe in this quite different God so truly that they see the approach of his reign and comprehend it. Only these very few lend a hand in faith so that a fundamental change that will affect

¹ Reference to the theologian Karl Barth, 1886–1968. In the following paragraphs, Arnold contrasts Barth's concept of the otherness of God (*totaliter aliter*) with pantheistic thought.

everyone and all conditions actually begins. The inner thinking born of faith in God's kingdom is completely other than the thinking of human religion: those with faith in God's kingdom approach everything with a certainty from God himself that the impossible can become possible, in outer circumstances just as much as in the innermost. This faith in God may be as small as a grain or seed, yet it will remove obstacles of the weightiest nature.

Luke 1:34–38

Matt. 17:20

Such faith lets what belongs to the future and to the beyond penetrate the present – this earth. Out of the strength it derives from this source, it sets to and gives everything shape and form. The believer has realized that to leave God in the world beyond is to deny Christ. For Christ has said and proved that God draws near, so near that everything has to be changed. “Change from the very foundation. For the reign of God has drawn near. Believe in these tidings of joy!” Yet Jesus knew that this triumphant joy would be accepted by only a very few. People are readier to place their faith in the autonomy of things than in the message of God that overturns everything. They experience things more forcibly than they experience God. They are idolaters, for they serve the creature more than the Creator.

Heb. 11:1–3

Mark 1:15

Matt. 22:14

Rom. 1:25

Here faith has to step in and unite our life with the creative power. This power alone remains superior to any created power.

God remains God, but we become his

God stands above all that happens. Only when we are one with God can our faith withstand all powers that storm it. It is not we who stand firm. Only God is invincible. In him alone is that

freedom of soul found that saves us from being enslaved, however mighty the enslaving power. God has drawn near. We can be in God. God wants to be known and experienced. Yet we quake before it. The experience of God is terrifying, because it discloses truth. Because God's light shows up our darkness, we are afraid of it.

John 3:19–21
Eph. 5:6–15

God begins – that is the end for man. When in fear and trembling we know God and are known by him, God is drawing near to us in person. When the Most High descends to us, the degraded, he tears away all cloaks and barriers. God is revealed only through this fearful experience. When we experience God, we appear before him as we are. As long as we shrink from being exposed for what we are, from God's unhindered recognition of us, we remain lost and helpless, overwhelmed by the superior power of the external world. As long as we submit to things as they are and remain their slaves, terror of God repels us and keeps us at a distance.

Exod. 15:11–16

God is indeed other than we are. It is true that in our unbelief, he is far removed. We have lost sight of his image. But it was not always like this and must not stay so. We were created once to be near to him. God began – that was the beginning for man. There was a time when God's drawing near did not spell terror. God's image was once entrusted to us so the Spirit would rule. This rule of God's Spirit was to be recognized among us as the creative power of unity, as love and community. We have forfeited all this. We have lost God. Only God himself could give us back what we have lost: himself and his image. In Jesus Christ he did this. In Jesus, God's heart

Gen. 1:27

Gen. 3

2**Cor** 5:16 has come into our midst once more. Once more it became clear in Jesus what kind of will and spirit God is. Jesus revealed afresh what purpose and what reality of unity and love live in God. He came to do the will of the Father. He brought the Father down to us. He carries out his decree. He and the Father are one. In Jesus, God is near once more. This message has to be believed.

John 7:17 When Jesus brings God near, God can be recognized as God, and men become men. God's approach changes us without us becoming God. We stand in terror before God who is quite other; even in the gift of his presence, one decisive thing remains unchanged: we cannot become God. We remain other than God. But God becomes man in

John 1:12-14 order to become our God. God begins – this is the new beginning for man as man. This experience of God in Christ is poles apart from any nature mysticism that deifies man. Such ideas are a delusion: they lead people to fancy they can merge into some humanistic conception of one divine All. For Jesus and his apostles, however, the living God is the other spirit who has to judge our spirit. As the Law and the Prophets testify, he is the good and the just, the pure and the holy one. But we are not good, not just, not pure, and not holy. God's nature is the opposite of our nature.

John 9:39 God is spirit and God is will in a way that we are not. He is the will of what is good and perfect. This we are not. Yet his judgment is our salvation. Out of the rubble of our degenerate lives he wants to salvage the life of the creation. God demolishes our nature as it is and with it the way we have

Matt. 5:3

lived and carried on. Out of these ruins, he wants to bring to light the human race as it originally was and is finally meant to be. We are lying under the mountain. The boulders are being blasted. The debris must be cleared away. The vein of gold cannot be laid bare unless the mountain is blasted. This freeing is love. The place for gold is in the sun; without the sun, gold is as black as coal. God is merciful to us in our poverty, for we are suffering under it, burdened by it, and buried in it in spirit and in will. He releases us from every need and supplies all we lack.

Matt. 11:28

As the will of a power that liberates and a gift that exposes our true nature, God has drawn near. He accomplishes this in Christ. He is the God of uniting love for people who without him are not free, not united, and not loving. He leads to a future that allows his will, as his Spirit, to rule over everything else. God's future wishes to rule over us here and now. Through this we will be transformed and made true. His kingdom of unity shall take possession of everything that has been disunited. Here is Christ: God remains God, we become people of God.

Matt. 6:10

Eph. 2:1-9

We cannot be merged with God as a drop is merged with the ocean or a spark with a sea of fire, for we are not part and parcel of his nature. He is not the bigger sea of life that encompasses our own small existence. There is no "we" between us and God. There is only "Thou." But there *is* this "Thou," and that is greater. God goes out to us, and a personal community between "Thou" and "thou" is the result.² It is a moral relationship of unity in

2 Reference to the ideas of Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, 1878-1965,

John 8:32 will and deed between God and man. Just this is so unspeakably great in Jesus Christ: unity becomes a reality in that the truth is unveiled. The light of truth shines on us in all its sharpness. When we experience God in Jesus Christ, we experience his nature as holiness – a holiness that judges our sin yet draws us into unity with him. God makes us conscious of our corrupt state as unholy unrighteousness yet leads everything to holy righteousness.

Because God is a creative spirit, he cannot let his works come to a standstill when he has brought us to realize with horror our own unrighteousness. It is quite a lot, even a great deal, to know ourselves condemned and absolutely opposed to God and hostile to him in our own nature, in our actions, and in all the relationships that condition what we do. But it is not enough, not nearly enough. First it has to become clear that we (with all we have and do) are absolutely different from God and his works, absolutely different from how he wants us to be. Then his Spirit, who makes all things new, insists that we with all our doings become at long last as God means us to be. Our own works have to stop in order for his work to begin in us and with us.

1 John 1:9
Ps. 32:5
1 Cor. 11:31–32

Whoever rejects faith in the intervention of God in his creation here and now as a mystical faith based on personal experience, whoever cannot believe that God makes himself known as a living God in the hearts and lives of those who receive him, has forgotten the gospel as Matthew, Mark, Luke, and, in a special way, John passed it on. Such

describing the relationship between a human being and God; see Buber, *Ich und Du*, 1923.

people deny the power of God as it was revealed in Jesus. Whoever wants to exalt the limited theological thinking of the human brain as the only faith to be experienced rejects unity with God and the works of love springing from faith, not only for our time and our contemporaries but also for the apostles of Jesus Christ and therefore Jesus himself. And whoever rejects Jesus rejects God, who sent him.

1 John 4:2–3

By bringing God near to us, by coming himself with power, Jesus exposed our smallness and hostility more clearly than all human dialectic can do. So one thing is and remains right about these theological reflections, something fundamental with regard to the Gospels: faced with God's greatness we become terrifyingly aware of our smallness. This absolute feebleness and smallness applies as much to our feeling, willing, and doing as to our thinking.

John 3:30–36

In God's light our baseness and smallness, our weakness and darkness, must constantly be exposed to him and to ourselves. We can appear before him only as we really are. In his presence, the last shreds of self-idolatry, self-redemption, and self-seeking vanish. His sunshine reveals our life as night. His clarity opens our darkened eyes to see the mountains of filth that bury us. His loving justice shows up the injustice of our rule with its mammonistic nature. His all-inclusive will for peace reveals the will to murder and the urge to set limits that characterize all our ideals. Whether they are based on individualism, patriotism, proletarianism, or any other "ism" makes little difference. God's truth and God's essential nature throw into

1 John 1:6–7

1 John 2:9–11

1 John 4:4–16

sharp relief the untruthfulness and insignificance of our lives, private and public.

God's judgment and forgiveness

The experience of God unites and divides at the same time. The deeper his love leads into community with his heart and into the brotherly uniting of people, the more sharply do we become aware of the absolute difference between our sin, which is separation, and his purity, which is unity. There is all the difference in the world between God and man. God wants unity without glossing over the differences.

Uniting with God is possible only through the radical destruction of all powers that oppose God, of everything in conflict with him or done in antagonism to him. Therefore, fundamental in any experience of God is the forgiveness and remission of sin. Forgiveness is the taking away of what is given up (that is, sin). When God unites, what is against him cannot be present. He wants absolute purity in uniting. Therefore everything that opposes purity must first be given up and then taken away. That is forgiveness. God's kingdom will not come without it.

Acts 26:18

Whoever accepts God in Jesus, or receives in Jesus the forgiveness and the works of God, embraces God himself directly. The faith of the heart embraces God, for God himself has gripped the heart. But God never divides himself when he gives himself to us. He gives himself completely. Acute consciousness of our utter insignificance, dividedness, and sinfulness makes it possible to accept the completely other and eternally indivisible

one. The believer is completely one with God, because God alone is complete and one. Faith is truth, for it holds to God. Because God is truth, our self-deception vanishes before him. The heart knows only too well: my small “I” has not been merged into the great “I.” Still less has this very small “I” become something great. Lightning from above has shown up the span: the human heart remains a very small “I,” and that very small “I” dedicates its will to God completely and worships the great “Thou” that gives itself to us in ineffable loving-kindness.

The believer does not surrender his feeble consciousness to the almighty Consciousness. In experiencing God, Christians are not seeking an opiate for their intelligence. They do not see in the Spirit of God a fading-out of human senses. But just as little do they presume to comprehend the Spirit of God through their powers of understanding. They do not believe they can know God through the insight of their own thinking. Believers do not presume to think they can grasp God through the intensity of their inner life, their emotions, or their willpower. Their faith places God’s greatness before them as something so inviolable that feeble human strength has no chance of touching him. All human efforts to achieve union with God are in vain. If faith were a human function, it would be nothing. It could have nothing but a human object; it could never grasp God.

At this point, however, God intervenes. The union so impossible for us ever to achieve takes place through his intervention. If the word “faith” is to keep its meaning, it must be a certainty about

2 Cor. 3:5 what God – not humans but really God – is and does. Faith belongs to God; it does not stem from us. It is God who gives us faith and brings it about. We are one with God only in that faith which is God’s affair.

In the soul, faith is expressed in a heart-to-heart relationship with others that God brings about. In this uniting of people through faith, God is the one who wills, the one at work. Faith is expressed in an active and effective love in outward circumstances and public life, but it is God at work. God is the loving and active one in these new works of ours.

John 15:5 We believe – and then we do what God is, wills, and works. Faith is something only God can give.
 John 6:27–28 Without God, faith is nothing. Wherever community is given through faith, its works are vital and effective because they are God’s works. Through faith, God’s power is revealed in human weakness, God’s greatness in human smallness.

God’s greatness confronts our smallness

Rom. 11:33–36 In every decisive experience, our insignificance is confronted with God’s greatness, our inadequacy with God’s mightiness, our incapacity with God’s power. This experience of God runs through the whole history of humankind: God’s supremacy overpowering human power. When we stand in reverence before God, our first, intuitive experience of him is of an almighty power before which all human strength is a mere nothing.
 Acts 9:1–9

1 Kings 19:13 Elijah and other early prophets veiled their heads in shuddering awe when God was about to draw near to them. The thought of seeing God

fills all genuine people with terror. In the time of the prophets, the sight of God cast the beholder to the ground and killed him. For all reverent ages, the mystery of God's greatness has been awesome beyond measure. Whenever an overpowering sense of this comes over us, all human powers are conquered, just as once the grim and powerful beast of chaos was cast down and conquered. We are bound to shake with terror whenever God draws near.

Exod. 33:20

Rev. 20:10

God's greatness, majesty, and might are beyond all our powers of imagination. If we were to see God, we would perish, because God is so far beyond our capacity to see him face to face. With whom could we compare God? How could we give a picture of this inconceivable greatness and power? God is unattainably great and glorious. The prophets know very well that beside him no other power can endure. His divine decree can never be fulfilled by anything human. No human power can stand before him. The life of God goes far beyond all boundaries of beginning and end. It towers immeasurably above all created things.

Ps. 22:27-31

God has power over all nations on earth. He gains authority over all human powers. He will eventually rule over all worlds. Such an overpowering greatness of majesty makes corresponding demands that are unspeakably serious. Those gripped by prophecy sense with awestruck reverence the inviolable and adamant nature of this overwhelming will. As Job had to lay his hand on his mouth, we have to be silent before the greatness of this power.

Job 40:4

We sense God's greatness in creation

The greatness and majesty of God is so overwhelming that the whole earth along with all humankind will become his footstool – the footstool on which God's foot rests. Under God's feet lies everything that is visible and invisible. In human eyes, creation is overwhelmingly great and supremely powerful, a shatteringly magnificent prospect through which God draws near to our small human hearts. In the childlike minds of primeval people, God is never confused with nature. The earliest beginnings of faith are far from deifying nature. But childlike people do not experience God's majesty and greatness without nature. They cannot disregard creation when they stand before the Creator. In the mysterious coherence of created worlds, we as believing creatures sense the might of the Creator, who gives all created things their greatness, life, coherence, and unity. In nature, we in our smallness have an intimation of God in his greatness.

Isa. 66:1

Rom. 1:19–20

Ps. 19

Ps. 104

Here we have to pause for a moment. In the rush of a life cut off from nature, we must remember – we must stop and take it in – how overwhelmingly God's power comes to meet us in nature. No scientific progress has changed this mighty fact. The whole history of humankind proves it. Through the great and visible creation, the infinitely greater and invisible nature of God dawns on our insignificance. Creation makes known the power and divinity of the Creator.

If we live on the land, the terrors of the powers of nature above all else bring us to quake before God's might. In earthquakes and volcanic eruptions,

huge mountains melt like wax beneath God's feet. Ps. 97:3-5
Thunder and lightning, storm and tempest, scorching desert wind and blazing fire are powerful signs of the awe-inspiring approach of his greatness. Whatever the mighty phenomena of nature, it is the greatness and majesty of God that shakes us. The created world has elemental power. But we sense that over and above it all stands God, the creator who is infinitely greater and mightier than the greatest powers of creation.

As God's creations, we quake before these superior forces, but no less before the tremendous mystery of life. Truly reverent people sense an ultimate mystery in all living things, aware that the living, creative Spirit must be greater than all created life. Full of wonder, they stand in awed reverence at the tree bursting with life, at the lively bubbling spring, under the light- and life-dispensing constellations of day and night, and in the midst of earth's fruitfulness and life. How great and powerfully alive God must be to create and sustain all this life! Every deeply shaken and moved heart is struck by the challenge that God, the great creator, must become undisputed sovereign over all this power and life.

God guides human history

In the midst of nature, human history also reveals the overwhelming power of God, both as violent, wrath-filled terrors and as the life-giving, uniting power of love. Awaking to a sense of this with trembling awe, we look back to the beginnings of human history. The profoundly mysterious beginning of Ps. 107

the human race comes from God. God also has the end of the human race in his hand. Without God, the end is shrouded from human eyes in the same darkness as the beginning.

The mystery of God the creator is experienced in all living things, but particularly in the life of human beings. It is the same in the middle as it is at the beginning and the end of the way: God is always drawing terrifyingly near when death and catastrophe break in, as in the destruction of the world in Gen. 6-7 the Flood or the division into nations at the peak of Gen. 11 Babel's civilization. In the history of humankind, as in the whole of nature, it is God who is breaking in with mighty power when people are shaken by terrifying events. When God's greatness strikes nations to the ground, empires and world powers are the instruments of his wrath. All the nations of the world must come to fall at the feet of the God of all worlds.

The Creator of the universe rules over all ages with his decree. In history as in nature, coherence of life, community of life, peace, unity, and life itself shall be revealed (in spite of all opposition) as God's nature and God's power. So God appears to the Jer. 31:10 prophetic eye as the leader and shepherd of history. He guides the history of humankind toward the one John 10:16 goal: that all nations are united in one fold.

Thus the people of Israel experienced God as the God of history in all world events, in all the whirlpools of international politics, and in the collapse of whole peoples. Only God the creator has right and might over all peoples. Whatever may happen, God is arising and claiming the world dominion that

is by right his alone. This creative Spirit must – by leading through terrors toward unity – become the God of the universe.

Deut. 32:39–43

As humankind develops, its dawning perception finds the same traces of God in history as in nature. When the conscious mind wins through to greater clarity, it turns to history. It cannot find peace until it has wrested the ultimate meaning from past and present events and those yet to come. To be clear, this awaking faith never confuses God and history (as if the course of events could be God himself), yet God is never experienced without history. Behind all the shattering events in history, awakening people sense God. Grippled by faith, they see God at work, intervening and ultimately determining everything, behind all the mysteriously tangled threads of history, behind every event, great or small. God is at work in all that happens. His majesty towers above all history.

Acts 17:24–31

On this way of faith, Jesus Christ shines out in prophecy and in the apostolic mission: Jesus, the decisive point of all history for the whole of creation! Through Christ, our eye of faith is opened. We see to what extent creation belongs to God and also how far it is estranged from God. And we acquire a discerning eye for history – to what extent it is God’s history and also how far it has turned from God and is hostile to him. Faith catches sight of the coming hour of decision. In Jesus Christ, prophetic truth becomes reality. Those illuminated by him see the approach of the kingdom of God as a historical event. The Creator breaks in upon his degenerate creation. The Lord of all worlds draws

Luke 2:34

near to history with all its devious ways. Jesus Christ intervenes in history and turns it into the history of the end time.

The end goes back to the beginning. The morning star of the new beginning appears. The secret of life is the sun of the future. God's aim is not the destruction of all things; his ultimate will is the resurrection of life. Resistant humankind must go through judgment, death, and collapse. In the fire of judgment, the beginning of the new shines out as the end of the old. Renewal and restoration are revealed as the goal of all that happens. The experience of God is resurrection from the dead.

The small world of the individual is meant to mirror the great world of God's history. To experience God means to give ourselves to the goal of his kingdom in such a way that we accept his death sentence and believe in his resurrection. Strength from the future comes to the believer. The Spirit of the coming Christ is at work and charges us now with the task of the future. In the reawakening of faith, the prophetic spirit works toward the establishment of God's kingdom. New life begins here at this given place and at this very moment. The nature of the coming kingdom is to be represented in the midst of the course of history here on this earth.

Through the experience of God, people living today will be drawn into the end history of creation. The fire baptism of God's judgment will raise the phoenix from the ashes. The dying of the old world announces the rising of the new. When the human heart is touched by God, it is close to death because new life is coming. Christ's death brings

resurrection. The false life, which bears the seeds of death within it, comes to an end. The life that rises in God begins and presses on to the future.

1 John 3:14

With Christ we too rise to new life

In Persian mysticism those who become sacrifices to the passion of love destroy their lives forever, as the dying moth surrenders to the singeing flame, leaving nothing but ashes. It is quite different in Christ. In his flame, no loving believer shall perish in silence. In Christ, the weaker life is not meant to lose itself in the stronger. The stronger has no wish to overpower the weaker and swallow it up. Christ kills the old in order to give life to the new. Self-will, which is sick unto death, must die. A renewed and transformed will shall come to life. The old will, already turned toward death, falls prey to it. The new will becomes free – to belong to the other life. It is roused in order to live. In God it is given strength to serve this life in deed and in truth.

2 Cor. 5:17

God's will is for our resurrection so that we can live to the full extent of our powers. Basic to the new life is its voluntary nature. Resurrection from death leads to a life of freedom. When this becomes a reality, it means that the greatest of tasks has been effectively assigned. Those who proclaim judgment and death without this commission of life turn God into a judge pronouncing the death sentence or into a cold, indifferent stranger. They have denied the living God. The life-giving Spirit of Jesus Christ does not allow himself to be relegated to a distance. In him, superabundant life, with all its powers of renewal through love, remains concentrated on

John 8:31–36

Acts 17:26–28 the earth and its inhabitants. God’s creative power, calling forth new life, draws near to all who want the life that is in God. This life is the worldwide rule of God.

John 3:8 The life-creating Spirit blows where he wills. He comes as he wills. He knows where he wants to go. Everywhere, he seeks out anyone with a determined faith who accepts no other spirit than this one and only Spirit of Life. To such he reveals himself as a power that breaks in across all distances. He proves himself as almighty power; our strength, in comparison, is nothing. It is not we who awaken him; he awakens us.

2 Cor. 4:7
1 Cor. 2:4–5

1 Cor. 3:11–15 In the face of his direct breaking-in, all human delusions must give way, vanquished by ultimate reality. Truth dispels all illusions. The sick and misguided spiritual life is cast aside. The self-serving psychophysical life, perishing without light or warmth, is overpowered. Selfish life, in and of itself already condemned to death, is destroyed in the consuming fire of God’s approach. Severed from the divine core of life, it was lost before it was abolished.

Rom. 8:6

Even though it had died long ago, the life of the individual in its own nature was still wrongly called life. The madness that makes an individual think in deathly stupor that he or she is “the only one” must be shattered. In morbid presumption, individuals who think they are “the only one” claim as their property what belongs to God. This self-conceit must die. The other life, God’s life, has to begin, in which individuals are freed from their own life and won for the greatness and power of God – received into the sphere of God’s power. What was dead wins community with life.

Inner rebirth brings outward change

Here, in this personal contact with God's life, an existence begins that encompasses everything. It cannot become sick and cannot pass away. The life that has its source in God puts its boundless energy to work in a practical way: all its members and powers come to life in the service of justice and righteousness. Then we are received into the sphere of God's kingdom. The nature of this kingdom is the rule of love. God's life is love. Divine love, which wants justice and righteousness first and foremost, brings forth in believers a social and moral life of perfect love. Those set free in this way experience a transformation: they come nearer and nearer to the perfect image of love's radiant power, the reflection of the Lord and Creator of life alone.

Rom. 6:19
1 Col. 1:12-13

Such an experience of God brings about a new birth that lifts us high above all deadening enslavement. This rebirth is the gateway into the kingdom of God. From a new relationship with God, an absolutely new energy and joy in life begins. The beginning of life is birth: new life begins with rebirth. Only in God can life, real life, life in its fullest sense begin. Life is free to unfold only where God has absolute rule. God is life. Because Jesus was one with God, he could and had to say, "I am the life." Because he fills us with his life, the fountainhead of strength, he had to say, "He that believes in me has life."

John 11:25
John 3:15-16

We are able to and should live his life because he sends his Spirit into our hearts and he himself, with the Father, makes his dwelling in us. Through his strength, we keep his word and do the deeds of his love. Whoever claims that he abides in him is

John 14:23

1 John 2:6 duty-bound to live as he lived. Because he brought God to us as working and unhampered life, Jesus alone can satisfy the hunger and thirst for living righteousness. Only Jesus, in his human existence, has put into action the vital energy that comes from perfect love. Only he can reveal God to us as life. Only Jesus, who is one with the Father and made the life of love a historical reality on earth, can disclose to us human beings the mystery and the power of life.

Through the power of the indwelling Spirit of God, by which Jesus drove out all other spirits, the rule of God has come to us. Through the life of Jesus, we shall know what it means to belong to the kingdom of God. How dare we speak of this kingdom if we are not prepared to live here and now, in deed and in truth, as Jesus lived, to place here and now all circumstances of our life under God's rule? When we pray for God's kingdom to come, we ought to stop and ask ourselves whether we are prepared, whether we want to accept and represent all the changes that God's rule involves.

Matt. 6:9-10

Jesus shows us that the kingdom of God means recognizing the absolute supremacy of the highest will, the will to love. The final kingdom is the perfect realization of the will of God, who is life and love. The unconditional nature of God's life and God's love will not let itself be restricted. God's will does not allow any other will to stand. The rule of love will not ally itself with anything that curtails love, restricts it, or limits it. God's rule will not tolerate any rival authority. The kingdom of God is power because it is the righteousness of God, the peace of Jesus Christ, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Rom. 14:17

For our day and age, God's rule can already begin in hearts where he and his peace reign because Christ has made his dwelling there. God has sent the Spirit of his Son into human hearts. That carries an obligation and an authority with it – all those gripped by this Spirit must drive all other spirits from every sphere of their life. The kingdom of God has power to make its spiritual laws valid, also for the outward form of human life. The righteousness valid in God's eyes rules so effectively through the Holy Spirit that it can build up social justice – spoken about by the prophets – in the entire surroundings of those who let their lives be governed by it. All spirits of human privilege and social injustice are cast out by the Holy Spirit.

Gal. 4:6

Peace ruling in people's hearts as God's unity enables them to become builders and bearers of outward peace. From the church of God as the center, the driving-out of all spirits of unpeace, war, and civil war, including the spirit of competition and private property, will take place. Joy in the love of God fills the believing heart with such overflowing joy that it must go out to all people in love. As recipients of this faith and joy, one after another shall be drawn into the circle of love and complete community. The spirit of the church is the spirit of justice, peace, and joy, for it is the spirit of the kingdom. It is the church of Jesus Christ that brings the kingdom of God down to earth here and now.

Eph. 2:20–22

The Spirit of God is a power working within our hearts, but this has outward consequences. The effect on society is to break off all existing relationships and build them up completely new. Whoever denies this betrays the innermost nature of this

Eph. 4:3–4 power, for the Spirit of Unity wants community in all things. He achieves unity among us because he brings us into unity with God. The oneness he brings about expresses itself in our lives in such a way that all the evil and unrighteousness in us is overcome through the goodness and love of God.

To every situation, such a spirit brings a superior power that is in God alone; it can never originate with people. The will of faith strengthens life for a flood of activity. This faith is the confident trust that radiates from hearts gripped by God. Love is poured out into a believing heart. This takes place through the Spirit, through the living and objective Spirit, who brings with him God's life and God's cause. Faith is something so clear and definite in content – in a personal way and in an objective way – that it cannot be separated either from the believing heart or from the object of faith. Christ himself is this faith, so that Paul declared: "I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me. For the life I live now in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me."

Rom. 5:5

Gal. 2:20

We are saved by grace

There is no other life of faith than that lived in the unity and community in which Christ lives. Faith lives in Christ. Before life can be restored and renewed, there must be an innermost relationship of unity; the believer is in Christ, and Christ is in him – that is the power that transforms the whole of life from within. Martin Luther³ expressed this mutual relationship between Christ and the

³ Martin Luther, 1483–1546, key figure in the Protestant Reformation.

individual heart in the most challenging way. He went through years of struggle, striving in vain after the righteousness of God with all kinds of human efforts; for this reason, his experience of God has such an unprecedented historical importance. The consciousness of sin that characterized him had thrown him into agony before the face of God, an agony so great and so severe that many cannot understand it today. Anyone who has lost the feeling of terror before God's might will never be able to understand this agony. And those who do not know Luther's distress can also not grasp his faith.

God seemed so full of wrath to Luther that he did not know which way to turn. He could find no consolation, either from within or from without. His agony of soul rose to such a pitch that it was infernal: no tongue could express it, no pen describe it. He felt he must perish utterly; he had to admit it. God's greatness and might threw him to the ground. Fear before God's justice crushed him. Only through the experience of love could help come to him. He experienced it in the righteousness that springs from grace. Luther understood "justification" (a word grown alien to us) to mean the experience of God whereby, through Christ, faith makes us "good" without our own efforts or works. Without this we cannot live before God, before ourselves, or before others.

Rom. 3:24

Rom. 12:1-2

The new element that put Luther's heart and life on a completely different foundation was the relationship of mutual exchange between him and Christ. He expressed it very briefly and to the point in a letter to his friend Georg Spenlein:

1 Cor. 2:2 Learn to know Christ, and him crucified. Learn to sing his praises and in your despair about yourself to say to him: “You, Lord Jesus, are my righteousness, but I am your sin. You have taken upon yourself what was mine and given me what was yours; you have accepted what you have not been and given me what I have not been.” . . . Learn from Christ himself how in accepting you he has made your sins his and his righteousness yours.⁴

Gal. 2:20 This mutual relationship, this receiving and giving of one to the other, is Luther’s understanding of the words: “I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me.” He understands with this confession that the bond between the believer and Christ is so complete that it is impossible to separate faith from Christ. Luther is convinced that in faith one can say with confidence: “I am Christ – everything he has is mine.” This certainty of being one with Christ is based on Christ’s surrender to us. Brought about by Christ, it lives in our surrender to him. Faith gives us everything we are and have. When this surrender takes place, it becomes the strongest willpower that can be brought into being in us. Our own will is never capable of it. To say about myself that I no longer live is possible only when my will has become one with Christ’s will to die. Everything I have ever been or experienced or achieved must die there where Christ gave up his spirit. Only from Christ’s grave is there resurrection of the free will.

1 John 4:19

The hours in which we come to this experience

⁴ Martin Luther to Georg Spenlein, a fellow Augustinian monk, April 8, 1516.

are hours spent, as it were, in the Black Tower.⁵ It is the loneliness of the Crucified One in his death that gives us freedom from our self-importance. It is the step taken by faith, into death and through the grave, that leads to certainty of life: Christ has accepted me in such a real way in his unity with me that he can say, “I am this poor sinner; that is, all his sin and death is my sin and my death.” In this unity in death, in spite of the most terrifying consciousness of sin, we become free from all sin. We have life in the Risen One.

What is new in this experience is that we have Christ in us and that he has taken our life upon himself. Our old life is taken away. Through his life, we share all that he is. Everything he possesses will in him be given to us. The same Jesus who said: “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me” gives us his authority. The same Christ who confesses his unsullied unity with the Father, who takes as his own the seat at the right hand of power, makes us become in him partakers of divinity. Because he has made us his brothers, the Son of Man, who is called the last Adam, has become *our life*. In Christ, the power of him who can give everything to everybody is in us. The throne of all worlds is his. His riches are infinite.

2 Pet. 1:4

Matt. 28:18

Matt. 26:64

It is often forgotten that Luther recognized as faith the taking hold of the precious and costly treasure itself – that is, Christ. Only Christ himself could give substance and content to Luther’s faith. Only Christ, “comprehended and dwelling in the

⁵ Reference to the tower of the Black Cloister in Wittenberg, where Luther experienced his agony and then the saving grace of God.

Eph. 3:17 heart in faith,” is righteousness. Here is no human definition of faith; it is simply a matter of Christ. Christ comes down to us and becomes our life. His coming is faith; what he does is faith. With all their understanding and good intentions and church services, the human forces of piety, wisdom, and religion have no faith. Their efforts to rise up to God are futile. That I believe in Christ means that he, Christ, has become one with me. It means that he abides in me. The life I have in faith is Christ himself.

This fact that Christ lives in me is what is new in my life. Where Christ is, the law that condemns is forever cancelled. Here is Christ, who condemns sin and throttles death! Where he is, everything that destroys life must withdraw. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” Christ is here! No power can sever us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus as long as he, the most powerful, is our Master. If I have lost Christ, there is no help, no consolation, and no counsel to be had anywhere. The terror of death is all I know. Life is dead without Christ. Only he is life. To be with Christ means life and peace within and without. The life of Christ is energy. God is dynamic power. Luther says expressly: “A believer has the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit will not permit a person to remain idle, but will put him to work and stir him up to the love of God, to patient suffering in affliction, to prayer, thanksgiving, to the habit of charity towards all men.”⁶ Here we must go beyond Luther, for he goes no further.

Rom. 8:35–39

John 7:38

⁶ Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (1535).

Christ's justice brings community

Christ living in me means he unfolds his powers in me. Christ wants his power of love to come alive in us with his will to serve and his abundance for giving to others. With all the diversity of his gifts, he wants to be at work in all those who have accepted him as their life. Christ living in us means a wealth of serving and working to be measured only by the need and distress confronting it. When the bowls of wrath are poured out over the world, when misery reaches unbearable heights, then a justice must be proclaimed and put into practice that will be mightier than the injustice over the entire world: all the punitive justice of judgment will be fulfilled in love.

Rev. 16

Through faith, Christ lets the justice and righteousness of God become our justice and righteousness. God's justice cries out to be revealed to all people as the goodness of love. Wherever this justice and righteousness is, anything to do with injustice or selfishness has to withdraw. God's greatness is revealed as the power of love. There is nothing greater than this. When Jesus Christ is the whole content of faith, this faith must be as active in his perfect love as he was. What Jesus accomplished has to be represented by the believer personally and in actual practice. The love born of faith is urged on by the consciousness that the unity of Jesus with the Father was so complete that he said, "What is mine is yours, and what is yours is mine." The unity of faith that binds the human heart to Christ is so completely clear that what Christ says to the believer, the believer also says: "Mine is yours, and yours is mine."

Gen. 15:6
Matt. 5:20

Phil. 2:1-11

John 17:10

Such community of complete sharing must reveal, out of each heart that has experienced it, the same essential nature and power in all things. A love that is active on behalf of all sees to it that there is everywhere a sharing of mine and yours in complete surrender, bringing everything unitedly to a common pool for the use of all. Then the believers, as those who

Acts 2–4 love each other, say to one another, “What is mine is yours. What is yours is mine.” The love of Christ impels them to act and live in this way. The justice and righteousness of a Christian is Christ and his life. The Holy Spirit urges toward the same good deeds that Jesus did. Those gripped by Jesus have, like him, a love that makes them let go of all privileges. When they confess that Christ is their life, like Christ they must choose voluntary poverty for the sake of love; like Christ they must sacrifice their life unconditionally for friends and for foes, with all they are and have.

2 Cor. 5:14
John 15:13
Matt. 28:18 Jesus was given all power and might. His love, therefore, must rule unconditionally and unhindered in the lives of those who are equipped with his authority. Then from the throne of power he puts his Spirit into their hearts and gives them his commission.

Matt. 10 This commission must fill the whole of life. It must transform all the circumstances and relationships of life in accordance with its objective demands.

We should not say that we believe in Christ and his kingdom or in unity and community with him if we do not sacrifice everything and share everything with one another, just as he did. We should not

claim that his goodness and his righteousness have become our goodness and our righteousness if we do not give ourselves to the poor and oppressed just as he gave everything to them. We cannot think we experience the Strong One, who exercises all authority at the right hand of power, if his works of justice and community do not come to reality in our lives through the Holy Spirit. If we have the faith that is Christ, the working of it must become obvious in works of perfect love. If Christ rules in us, his rule must go out from us into all lands. If his Spirit is in us, streams of this Spirit must transform all the land around us in accord with his promises about the coming kingdom.

Matt. 25:39-40

Gal. 5:6

We need constant spiritual renewal

For such deep-going and far-reaching changes to take place, we fickle and weak mortals need to be constantly renewed and deepened – all the more, the more we are threatened by increasing distractions and inhibitions. Indeed, at all times our inner experience needs renewal and deepening. Constant renewal belongs to the realm of the Spirit just as much as to the natural, physical life. When the sun is shining and our eyes can see the light, when the birds are singing and our ears can hear them, it is an actual reality only because our ears are not deaf, our eyes are not blind, and our spirit is not dulled. Above all, these experiences of our mind and spirit can be renewed only when something actually happens, when God's mighty power lets the sun rise again every day and lets the birds begin to sing afresh every year.

2 Cor. 4:16

1 Pet. 1:23 We are born again through the living Word of
 John 3:1–15 God and the blowing Spirit of Jesus Christ. The
 strength and power of God does not live in faint
 recollections. It is not at work in dead intellectual-
 ism. If our spirit is not to fall prey to death, the
 Word of Truth, which creates new life, must prove
 James 1:18 to be again and again a living power in our hearts.
 The Spirit of Life judges the thoughts and motives
 of our hearts; he wants to sever soul from spirit
 moment by moment so that we do not become
 subject to our emotional nature and unable to
 Heb. 4:12–13 perceive the living Spirit.

The Spirit of Truth is always ready to fill us anew
 and unite us in his church. Christ wants to confer his
 power and authority on his church so that through
 the Holy Spirit she can time and again win new
 victories over all other spirits. It is the work of the
 Spirit whenever the Word of God cuts our hearts to
 the quick and shows up all confusion in sharp relief.
 We need these experiences of the true life-giving
 Spirit even more than we need our daily bread.

In the strength of this truth, the Master over
 all spirits rejected the encroaching power of the
 tempter: “Man shall not live by bread alone but by
 Matt. 4:4 every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”
 If life is not to die out, we must accept God’s truth
 constantly and let ourselves be renewed by it. Jesus
 says therefore: “My food is to *do* the will of him who
 John 4:34 sent me.” God lives in deed and action. Our receiv-
 ing the Word of God again and again brings forth in
 us the strength of God’s life and God’s deeds from
 the heart of God.

In this sense, George Fox was right when he

began his great movement in 1647, saying that it was the Spirit, the inner Light, the inner Word, that was allimportant.⁷ The living Word is always waiting to be received into the innermost ground of our soul – to be grasped quite personally and so transformed into actual deeds. This is the only way we can be always steeled for the hardest battles, as John wrote to his church communities: “You are strong, the Word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.” We will abide in the Father and in the Son in all we do only when the direct witness of living truth abides in us and is constantly renewed.

1 John 2:14

John 15:4

Every experience of God is undeserved

From the beginning, the Word of God has led us in the atmosphere of grace. Every experience of God is an undeserved gift. By utterly exposing our incapacity and opposition to him, we have let ourselves be known by God. We have known him in the completely undeserved love he revealed by sacrificing his Son. We have known Jesus as the healing Savior of a life going to utter ruin. Through his death, we have received forgiveness and redemption from the heaviest burdens. Every time we experience God anew, we are led to a deeper consciousness of the deadly interrelationship of all guilt and to a deeper reverence for undeserved grace.

Eph. 2:8

The daily purification of our hearts helps us to see more and more clearly what separates us from God and to take vigorous measures to set it right. God is faithful and just, and when we are ready to

⁷ George Fox, 1624–1691, founder of the Society of Friends (Quakers).

take the consequences right to the end, he is prepared to forgive everything that disturbs his unity and purity. When we sin, we need the Advocate, who reconciles and unites. Through this Spirit, Christ the mediator wants to set in order all that causes disintegration and division – all that mars the unity of life. The work of reconciliation blots out guilt and sets free the guilty for life in God – it restores unity.

1 John 1:9

1 John 2:1–2

Heb. 12:24

No one can dispense with the renewal of this experience even for a moment. All the powers of the earth are constantly attacking community with God and the unity of his church. These are in danger of being broken up at any moment. The spirits of mammon, lying, unfaithfulness, and impurity besiege and storm the stronghold of God's community without respite. If we allow them even the smallest foothold in the outer fortress of our being, they concentrate their attack on the very center. Their concentrated fire tries to numb the heart and destroy the unity of life. The soul in our lifeblood is constantly exposed to their destructive rays. As soon as the darkness that surrounds us gains power over our stand in life, we lose community with God. We deliver up the lifeblood of our soul to impure powers. We are separated from God and his kingdom by a barrage of dark rays. We are without God and without community in this torn and divided world.

John 3:19

Eph. 5:8–11

Yet the light of unity outshines the darkness of decadence and ruin. We must follow the light. "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus

Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin.” The bright beams of God’s light are stronger than the dark radiation of destructive demonic powers. Light cannot be overcome by darkness, but faith and the life determined by it must be focused steadily on the light. Rays of darkness cannot capture anyone who is turned away from them. Such rays are active in the area of the will and aim at destroying it. If the will keeps free from their poison, the battle is won. The will that lives in the light repels the attacks of darkness. Light is victorious over darkness. The will is free.

1 John 1:7
Ps. 139:11–12
John 8:12
Ps. 90:8

Living in community takes living in the light for granted. The life given from God has a clarity and purity that leads to perfect unity of life. It overcomes all powers of destruction and disintegration. When we are at one with the soul of Jesus, with his blood and his life, the purity of his sacrifice sets us free from all impurity, and the powerful, unifying deed of his death sets us free from all disunity. This power brings a life that radiates the same brightness and glowing warmth as Jesus did and does. The light of Jesus Christ is the new life of perfect unity. Lack of community and opposition to community are darkness and coldness – turned away from the glowing light of Jesus. Isolation of soul and impurity of will are antagonistic to the life of Jesus. The will is impure and darkened when it mixes the clarity of Jesus’ life with other elements, when it offends the faithfulness of perfect love or the community of perfect unity, and when it denies the surrender of all belongings. It forsakes the light and chooses darkness when it becomes selfish, covetous, or

John 12:35–40

possessive. Every disunity and separation denies the power that radiates from the sacrificed life of Jesus.

In Christ's death our old life dies

In the spirit of the church, in which Jesus is among us here and now, he brings about a community that is united. Only where there is unity is the sacrificial life of Jesus actively at work. In his church we stand under the impact of the cross. The cross created our unity. The Spirit brings it. Without the witness of the blood of Jesus there is no witness of the Spirit of Christ. Unity is preceded by the abolition of disunity. The Spirit brings death to the fiend. In the power of Christ's death our old life dies and new life begins. Those who lie buried in the churchyard are no longer to be seen at the tavern, on their property, or carrying on their own affairs. They have been taken away from the busyness of their old selfish nature.

Those who, with Christ, are dead to all they own turn their backs on all influences of self-will and self-interest. They live in the strength of the sacrificed life of Jesus. In this strength, they sacrifice their own old life just as Jesus sacrificed his perfectly pure life. They are prepared for the same baptism of blood that poured over the body of Jesus. Those who believe in the executed Christ are prepared for death in the strength of an inner dying. If for the sake of truth it has to be, they are even prepared for death with the shame of public condemnation and execution. As a sign of this readiness they are lowered into the grave of Jesus: early Christian baptism is the symbol of the power of dying and the

power of resurrection. As a sign of the pouring-out of the Holy Spirit, baptism testifies to the break with things as they are and to the beginning of a new life. Unity in Jesus' death brings unity in God's life. It is only through sacrifice that we can find the courage to enter into the presence of God.

Rom. 6:3–11

Col. 2:12–13

Whoever has experienced God in the holiness of his love, brought close to us by Jesus, knows why Jesus died. God wants us always to be one with the soul of Jesus' blood, dying the death of Jesus, rising in the power of his resurrection, and living the words and life of Jesus. This takes place through the presence of Christ, that is, through the life-giving Spirit, and through Christ's love, poured out over us and filling our hearts. His love draws us into God's community through the Holy Spirit. Dead to everything that is evil and unjust, we live from now on for the good, in the justice and righteousness of perfect love.

2 Tim. 2:11

God by his very nature can never deprive himself of his moral character, of his goodness; he can never enter into community with evil. He cannot end his own existence. God is the good. He wants to conquer the world for the good. The good can live only where evil has died. Our whole nature, which is shot through and through with evil, has to undergo the death of Christ as a dying to evil, as our death. With the Crucified One, we suffer a death that frees us from all that makes community with God impossible. Delivered up to the judgment of Jesus' death, we become one with the heart of God in a new life: God breaks in. What is new begins. What is evil comes to a stop. What is good starts.

Gal. 2:20

God's heart is revealed in Jesus

The love of Jesus' heart has turned the judgment of God into redemption. Unity with him who was executed on the cross brings unity with his soul, with the very essence of his life. That means unclouded community with the living God. Community of life means victory over everything that has anything to do with sin and death. The death of Christ brings us to his resurrection. The powers of his sacrificed life bring us new life from God. This new life proves, through the working of the Holy Spirit in the resurrection, that Jesus Christ is the living Son of God. In the Son, the heart of God has come to us. The Spirit of God brings us his heart. We can perceive his hand and footsteps in nature and in world history. His heart is revealed in Jesus. And his heart is mightier than all his power.

1 John 5:4

John 3:16

1 Cor. 1:17–18

Rom. 12:1–2

John 1:29

Isa. 9:6

Thus the proclamation of the cross becomes a divine power; coming from the heart of God, it shows itself as the power for resurrection. Zinzendorf says his “rule and method” is “to make the glorious Lamb everything and to know no blessedness other than being with him and thanking him and being pleasing to him.”⁸ Zinzendorf is talking of the living sacrifice, which has its joy in the life and work of all-powerful love. The Lamb takes the rulership of God's kingdom on his shoulders because he bears the heart of God. If we accept the cross – come life, come death – we take hold of the risen Christ in the Crucified One. In him, we believe in the all-victorious power of love, which is God's heart. The

⁸ Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, 1700–1760, leader of the Moravian Church (Unitas Fratrum).

cross is revealed as the victorious power of perfect love. It leads to resurrection and to the lordship of God. Jesus Christ, as the revelation of God's love, is life risen out of death. His death overcomes all the powers of the world and all deadly forces. Unless we experience the readiness to die that characterized his love, we cannot experience his all-powerful life. Without him, nothing we can do has the power to withstand death and the devil. Only his divine life turns our actions into living work. Only the works of the living God are living. Perfect love as life that overflows is living work.

1 Cor. 13

We can sense things and experience them, we can move and be active, only as long as life is at work in us. There is no way of creating life apart from the power of life that is God, that is in Christ. When life flees, our eyes grow blind and our hands droop. Our ears stop hearing. Our spirit can no longer turn perceptions into experiences. Our will can no longer take on any work. In death there is neither strength nor activity. This power of life – this capacity to take in experiences – is decisive for being able to act or to create. Only God is life without any death. Only God's vital energy triumphs over death, degeneration, and decay. God rules over all spheres of life as creative life of infinite power.

Jesus cannot be dissected

The wider the circle of our experience, the more active and vital life becomes. The narrower our circle of experience, the more our life becomes stunted. The experience of God encompasses the

universality and totality of his almighty works. His creative Spirit is as extensive as it is intensive. Jesus wants to introduce us to the whole of the Almighty's domain. One question is decisive for a life lived in God: whether we want to accept the whole of God or nothing of him, whether we want to accept the whole Christ or only feeble reflections of his image. The faith that God brings into being encompasses the whole, or it is nothing.

Rev. 3:15-16

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

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

So Jesus commissions his ambassadors: "Teach them to keep to all I have commanded you."

Matt. 28:20

John 14:23

Whoever loves him keeps his word. Whoever

believes in him does everything he has said. But whoever ignores even a seemingly small part of his living commandments cannot receive Christ's life. Organic unity is the essence of the Living One. Jesus' life is indivisible. It withholds itself completely or gives itself completely. It is living unity. Those who want to cut Jesus into pieces and lay violent hands on his life are left with nothing but death in their hands.

Christ wants us to experience him as living and complete, standing in completeness at the center of living action. His life is integration and wholeness itself; his life tolerates no mixing with anything outside its sphere. Thus anything contrary to the unity of his life and its living task has to give way before him. True life fights against all unguenuine life. Where Christ unfolds his divine life, all other life is extinguished. No other love can exist beside his perfect love. With divine jealousy, he annihilates every other image – often a falsified Christ-image – that we set up beside him.

Over eight hundred years ago, Bernard of Clairvaux said about his experience of this, “When Jesus comes to me, or rather, when he enters into me, he comes . . . in love, and he is zealous for me with divine zeal.”⁹ 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, the twilight, and the pious talk that blurs and mixes everything and

⁹ Bernard of Clairvaux, 1091–1153, in *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, Sermon 69.6.20.

Matt. 7:21–23 commits itself to nothing. All this he sweeps away when he draws near.

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. 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. 13:12–14

The experience of Jesus Christ is either a confirmation or a delusion. It proves true by holding firmly and with enduring steadfastness to the very beginning, to the whole way, and to the final future of Jesus Christ. So it endures to the end. When Christ is recognized fully, the invincible love of the Spirit overflows with endless insight and knowledge. It fills life with the fruit of steadfast righteousness, for Christ, the whole Christ, is its righteousness.

Matt. 24:13

The experience of God gives strength

How we conduct our lives proves whether this experience of faith forms the basis of our lives. The Father of Jesus Christ is God the creator. Every

experience of God brings power to give life shape and form. Where it comes from God, a form of life takes shape in keeping with the complete picture of Jesus Christ and, therefore, with the kingdom of God. The weaker the life, the less able it is to give life shape and form. The difference between fleeting observations, which skim the surface, and experiences that go deep and remain steadfast can be seen in the power of their effect. Where God is at work, he goes into the depths while he reaches out into the distance. He is power at work giving life shape and form.

How many people travel in rushing vehicles from country to country, hastily skimming over the beauties of the whole world! Their eyes take a quick glance at everything. Yet nothing becomes a lasting experience. Their lives remain infinitely poorer than the lives of many of their neighbors who have never seen anything but the fields or woods outside their hometown, but for whom trees and flowers blossoming and fading or nature stirring in any way becomes a fruitful experience.

Those who go rushing by see nothing in the cities but the deceptive exterior of life. Their less esteemed neighbors, however, know deeply shaking realities in the joy of love, in daily work, and in the need of the world; they penetrate into all that life has to offer and to the very core of death too. 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

Matt. 5:4-7 God's heart.

In some people, the shattering experiences of worldwide need, of war, and of all the subsequent catastrophes have only blunted the conscience. Others, though, see with new eyes what was previously hidden: the present as it really is and the future as it truly shall be. The new vision transforms life and animates every action. Only those who take in fully the true nature of all things and all events have a true and enduring experience of life. Truth demands that the shattering experiences of God's *wrath* sweeping over the world today and making history touch our hearts to the quick and change our whole lives. But truth demands even more strongly that our hearts and lives are moved by the *love* that appeared in Christ Jesus as the heart of God.

1 John 4:10-12

No matter how much we may hear and read the words of Jesus and the story of his life, no matter how much we say about them according to the letter of the Bible, lifeless knowledge leads to destruction if the Spirit and essence of his love does not grip us and our whole life down to the last detail. The letter kills. The Spirit gives life.

2 Cor. 3:6

His life is love. If truth, as *the essence of love*, does not become all-determining in our lives, its power kills the conscience. Without love, the new life dies before it is born. Truth also has a deadly effect when its life-giving works are rejected. Whoever hardens his heart to the transforming power of its living nature will be killed by truth.

Matt 7:16

The effects of an experience show whether it has been significant or empty, whether it has awakened life or killed it. Every experience of the unfalsified

Christ brings energy that proves itself in actual life. The renewal of our mind and nature brings about a transformation. In this transformation we give up ourselves, and all we have, to serve God and his kingdom alone. The results prove whether we have experienced God or whether we have become entangled in the veil of maya.¹⁰ For God has a power of life and love that his creatures are never capable of. The experience of God brings a super-human love because it brings God's life. Love pours itself into the heart. The Holy Spirit transmits the divine power of this love.

Gal. 5:22

The experience of God means strength for action. There is no love that does not come to living expression in deeds. To experience God as a life of love is to experience strength. A freeing from all unjust, loveless, and self-willed activity liberates abundant powers, which then achieve fruitful works of love. The love of God is experienced in the innermost heart and unfolds toward the outside. The more faith increases in knowledge, experience, and strength, the more must we do the works of love. To experience God is to be overwhelmed by the power of love.

Eph. 4:13

The world situation today calls for the kind of dedication that lives in Christ alone, in the heart of the powerful God of Jesus Christ. Only a heart filled with the superior power of God's love will be able to check need and distress and alleviate suffering. Only in the strength of the omnipotent God can we carry the burden of historical responsibility laid on us today, a burden beyond all human

¹⁰ A concept in Hindu philosophy often translated as "illusion."

strength. The perfect strength of all-powerful love, surpassing every other power or greatness, is needed to penetrate our devastated world with God's rule and Christ's message.

In the midst of the escalating power of injustice, in the midst of today's widespread cruelty and coldness of heart, love must be revealed: a love that towers above all the mountains of earth; that shines out more clearly and brightly than all the stars of heaven; that is more powerful and mighty than the quaking of the earth and the eruption of all its volcanoes; that is greater than all world powers and ruling authorities; that works more powerfully on history than all catastrophes, wars, and revolutions; that is more alive than all life of the creation and its most powerful forces. Above all nature and throughout all history, love proves itself as the ultimate power of the Almighty, as the ultimate greatness of his heart, as the ultimate revelation of his Spirit.

1 Cor. 13:13

The experience of God is love – love that overcomes everything that withstands it. Love is the energy of the new creation. It is the Spirit of God's coming rule. Love is the one and only element in the new building-up. It is the herald of a new time. It is the organic strength of unity. It is the building-up of a new humankind. This love is put into practice by the unity found in the church of Jesus Christ. The building-up of the church means a gathering. Whoever does not gather with her scatters. Her life consists in uniting. Whoever does not take part in this uniting remains in death. In the midst of an age of decline, the life-bringing Spirit

Eph. 2:14–22

of Jesus Christ establishes the work of the church. In her, God is experienced in Christ. In the church of perfect love, the Spirit of God brings Christ's kingdom of perfect justice and righteousness down to the earth. The experience of God means the reign of God in the church of Jesus Christ.

