

The Kingdom of God, The Highest Good

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INTRODUCTION*

[28] Amid all the distress surrounding the discipline of theology today, it is undoubtedly a heartening phenomenon that the science identified as Ethics seems to be enjoying an unheralded resurgence of interest, compared to former times. This does not mean, of course, that everything in this discipline is flourishing. Not all of the causes to which Ethics is indebted for this resurgence are heartwarming. The way in which people try to dislodge the firm foundations of this discipline, or seek to caricature and deny its eternal principles, is far from encouraging. But that people are curious about the moral life and attempt to clarify its nature, principle, and essence, do provide reasons for rejoicing and gratitude, I think.

Formerly, the discipline of Ethics received sparse attention, consisting mostly of explaining the doctrines of virtues and duties. Simply knowing what kind of persons we must be is inadequate,

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however, for realizing the moral good—the description of which is supplied by the doctrine of the virtues. Nor is it sufficient to know the duties or laws according to which we must pursue that moral good. We also need to understand those moral goods themselves according to their nature and essence, in their unity and interconnectedness, in order to realize them within and around us.

Perhaps the most influential theologian of the nineteenth century was Friedrich Schleiermacher, who was both deeply misunderstood and too highly esteemed.¹ Yet it was he who identified that above-mentioned flaw in the earlier view of Ethics and ensured a fixed place in this discipline for the “doctrine of virtues” (*Güterlehre*). In this way he contributed a complete revision and an enduring benefit to the discipline of Ethics.

[29] Add to this the fact that, formerly, people placed earthly and heavenly goods alongside each other and failed adequately to plumb the depths of their interrelationship, which is one of the most difficult problems that exists. People usually hesitated to include earthly goods in the realm of the moral, thereby running the risk of viewing the moral good only spiritualistically.

Our current age represents such a sharp opposition to that direction. People had been holding out hope for a future that was gloriously portrayed and eagerly believed, one that would make up for all our suffering. When it did not happen, they have been trying to recover their loss by bathing in the delights of the moment. The invisible, eternal goods—people had been waiting for them in vain for so long that they turned to the temporal and the visible for what they could give! The invoice for the difference, already charged to heaven’s account, has remained unpaid and has in fact turned out to be worthless. For a long time already people have been believing; now they want to see, indeed, to live and to enjoy themselves. And since the future is delivering nothing, the sooner the better, the more the better.

1. For evaluating our perspective regarding Schleiermacher, one might find the article written about him by Nesselmann in *Der Beweis des Glaubens* 5 (1869): 103–15, to be helpful.

That very challenging relationship between this life and the life to come, between earth and heaven, between the temporal and the eternal, the visible and the invisible—people have come to resolve this challenge most simply by insisting that one side of this relationship does not exist. In opposition to that materialist impulse of our age, though acknowledging the truth this monumental error contains, I shall proceed to share with you a glimpse of the glory of our catholic, Christian faith, as I speak to you about the Kingdom of God as the highest good.

The choice of this as my subject immediately offers me the significant advantage that I am standing at the heart of a concept that is genuinely biblical and specifically Christian. This notion could never have grown in pagan soil. All the elements that constitute this concept are absent in paganism. The value and significance of personality remains unknown and uncomprehended; the individual-personal has no unique purpose but appears as a mere means and instrument for the group. Thus the pagan worldview lacks the concept of humanity as a single interrelated organism and could never come up with the idea of a kingdom in which both the individual and the group would develop their full identities. Moreover, the religious moral life was tied most closely with political life and never attained independence. The ethical remained indistinguishable from and virtually bound to the physical, attaining no independent dominion, and appearing as merely a particular mode of the one, grand, all-encompassing process of nature. Just as on Mount Olympus, [30] fate exercised dominion over the gods, so too on earth the freedom of personality was bound by the chains of impersonal nature.

Consequently, the highest good was viewed variously as being either individualistic or communistic, either exclusively sensual or abstractly spiritual. The highest good was identified variously: with Aristotle, for example, as the happiness (*eudaimonia*) of the individual, or with the Stoics, as living according to nature, or with Epicurus as happiness experienced through desire. Even for the “spiritual” Plato, who delved so deeply into the essence of the good, the highest good consisted in being released from the senses and

being elevated to true, pure, ideal being, to be achieved under the reign of philosophy and realized in the State, wherein everything is common and the individual is completely subjected to the power of the group.

Basically none of the ancients got beyond a morality of utility and calculation. The notion of a Kingdom of God that fosters the development of both individual and community, that is both the content and the goal of world history, encompassing the whole earth and all nations, such an idea arose in neither head nor heart of any of the noblest of the pagans.²

The matter was different among Israel. Through divine revelation a “middle wall of separation” was erected between that people and the pagans in almost every area of life. Israel was the people of the Sabbath, the pagans were the people of the week. In art, science, statecraft, in everything belonging to the arena of culture, Israel was far inferior to many a pagan nation. But to her the words of God were entrusted. She knew the value and significance of personality, first of all of God’s personality, but then also that of his image, human beings. For that reason Israel kept in view first and foremost that dimension of a person whereby one would rest in and depend on God. By contrast, the pagans developed especially that dimension of human personality whereby one stood above and over against nature. But since true freedom lay in serving God alone, the freedom idolized by pagans had to result in bankruptcy. Israel’s destiny, by contrast, lay embedded in the requirement to be holy as God is holy. Israel was called to be a Kingdom of God, to constitute a theocracy wherein God’s will governed and directed everything. Amid Israel, the Kingdom of God was enclosed within the narrow boundaries of the national state. It was not a unique sphere alongside the state and alongside culture, but existed within them and included them, exercising dominion over all the rest. [31] In this way the Kingdom of God was particularistic, and it had to be in order to attain historical

2. Cf. Friedrich Überweg, *Geschichte der Philosophie in Das Altertum*, vol. 1, 5th ed. (Berlin: Max Heinze, 1876).

existence, in order not to be obscured or to hover as an abstract idea somewhere above history, in order genuinely to enter into the history of the human race.³ Only by means of that particularistic character could the Kingdom of God genuinely become, if I may put it this way, a “universal-historical Power” (*universal-geschichtliche Potenz*).

So from the very beginning, the Kingdom of God possessed a universal scope.

Israel’s God was the God of all peoples. The meaning of personality was familiar, which included the idea of a single humanity. Israel herself was fully aware of that very special calling to constitute a Kingdom of God, so much so that as the luxuriously chivalrous period of the judges was drawing to a close, the very serious question arose whether earthly kingship was compatible with theocracy. Samuel resolved this by making Israel’s kingship an instrument of God’s rule. But soon thereafter they became separate. Often kingship in Israel became an instrument for opposing theocracy. And to the extent that the national state and the Kingdom of God became disassociated and came to stand sharply in opposition to each other, in Israel’s history the Kingdom of God became disconnected from the national character and became more and more universal-human, purely ethical.

At that point, the most remarkable and heartwarming phenomenon appeared that had ever appeared in the history of the human race. In the tiny land of Palestine, closely surrounded on all sides by pagans, the gaze of Israel’s faithful ones looked toward the future, the last day, encompassing all the earth and all the peoples. Israel’s prophets, whose gaze looked far beyond the limits of the nation, contrary to every empirical proof and all outward evidence, strengthened by their expectation and the heroism of their faith, spoke of the ends of the earth one day being full of the knowledge of the Lord.

3. Cf. E. Riehm, “Der Missionsgedanke im Alten Testament,” in *Allgemeine Missions-Zeitschrift*, vol. 7, eds. Gustav Warneck and Julius Richter (October 1880), 453–65.

When after the Exile another attempt was launched to provide the Kingdom of God a visible form and a historical face, that attempt failed as well, and at that point prophecy ceased. But the Jewish people did not forget their calling, clinging anxiously to the once-spoken prophetic word, developing their expectation still further. In the apocalyptic, apocryphal literature of the Old Testament, an entire messianic dogmatics was developed. [32] Because it lacked prophetic animus and genuine understanding, its high and lofty ideal was packaged within national limitations, cast within sensate forms, and thereby defiled and materialized.⁴

Then the Elijah of the New Testament appeared proclaiming the approach of the Kingdom of Heaven. And then appeared the One in whom the Kingdom of God was fully present, who was its Founder, and from whom alone this Kingdom could expand and develop still further. In line with the prophets, Jesus removed the national, tight-fitting garment with which Judaism had clothed, indeed, had concealed, but—and let us not forget this—had also preserved such a glorious idea. For Jesus, the Kingdom of God was the purpose of all of his activity, the main content and central idea of his teaching, whose essence, expansion, development, and fulfillment were presented by him in the most variegated way, with and without parables. Moving outward from his own person, he established this Kingdom in the hearts of his disciples.

Initially, the Kingdom of God was realized in the church. But to the extent that this Kingdom entered into the world, the two became distinct. The contrast between church and world lost something of its sharpness. The Kingdom of God permeates the world and the world permeates the church. Its catholicizing impulse, however, surrenders neither term, and reconciles the tensions through a process of give and take, and where necessary, makes the ideal crystal clear in the face of the real.

4. Cf. Carl Wittichen, *De Idee des Reiches Gottes* (Göttingen: Dietrichsche Buchhandlung, 1872), 90–162; and Emil Schürer, *Lehrbuch der Neutestamentlichen Zeitgeschichte* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1874), 511–99.

By wedding itself to the state, the church distances itself from none of its former claims as it identifies itself with the Kingdom of God. According to the Roman Catholic perspective, the *regnum Christi* is identical to the *regnum pontificium*, and the earthly Kingdom of God is completely identical to the historical organization of the established Roman Catholic Church. In this way the Jewish theocracy is imitated in the church. Christianity is judaized and ethnicized.

In opposition to that organization, the Reformation registered its sharp and well-considered protest. Cleansing Christianity of its Jewish and pagan elements, the Reformers once again viewed the Kingdom of God in its ideal, spiritual, eternal character and declared in their distinction (not separation) between the visible and invisible church that here on earth the Kingdom of God can never be perfectly realized in a visible, historically-organized community. Nonetheless, it may be viewed as quite remarkable that, despite the prominent place occupied by the term *Kingdom of God* in Holy Scripture, especially in the prophetic books and in Jesus' teaching, this term nevertheless virtually disappeared from Protestant theology, [33] and gets replaced by the phrase *invisible church*. Without losing anything of the rich content contained in this idea, however, the phrase *Kingdom of God* cannot continue to be neglected. For that reason, I am going to try to present to you *the Kingdom of God as the highest good*, unfolding its content, which, on account of its richness, can be described only in its main features. To do that, I wish to give you as guideposts these four ideas:

1. The essence of the Kingdom of God
2. The Kingdom of God and the individual
3. The Kingdom of God and the community (family, state, church, culture)
4. The completion of the Kingdom of God

1. THE ESSENCE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

You all know the captivating idea of Pascal: “l’homme n’est qu’un roseau, le plus faible de la nature, mais c’est un roseau pensant” (“man is a reed, the weakest of nature, but he is a thinking reed”). Even, so Pascal continues, were the universe to slay man, he would be nobler than the entire cosmos, for he *knows* that he dies. So the cosmos exists to be known, understood, and dominated by man. Were you able to conceive of a world that always proceeded in its orbit without being able to deposit its image within human consciousness, the existence of such a world would be a non-existence like an eternal night, illuminated by no beam of light whatsoever.

But personality rises above the dark impulse of nature and dwells in the kingdom of light, of spirit, and of freedom. This is like the fanciful myth wherein Aphrodite emerges from the mist of the waves to bestow fertility and life upon the still and dead creation. Similarly, human personality rises above the world and bestows upon it the rays of enlightenment. And still, though he proceeds far beyond the world, man is not from the world. Yet he does not stand in relation to the world as a stranger, but belongs to the world, is related to the world, and is most intimately bound to the world with the strongest of bonds, by means of his own organism.

Even as the human personality, spiritual, invisible, and eternal in its essence, nevertheless requires the material body as the instrument of its activity and of its outward manifestation, so too the Kingdom of God as the highest good for humanity is indeed a kingdom that in its essence surpasses everything temporal and earthly. This in no way means, however, that the Kingdom of God therefore exists in enmity against [34] everything temporal and earthly, but much rather needs them as its instrument and is prepared to be an instrument for their sakes. At its core, in the depths of its being, the Kingdom of God is spiritual, eternal, invisible. It does not come with outward form (Luke 17:20), does not consist in food and drink (Romans 14:17), is invisible and intangible. For it is the Kingdom of Heaven, of heavenly origin. And

through heavenly, supernatural powers the Kingdom was established on earth, it is still being developed, and its future guided. But it is abstract and spiritual, though not simply a logical deduction lacking any reality. The contrast that to us is so familiar, between the sensual and the spiritual, is entirely foreign to Scripture. The Kingdom of God as the highest good consists in the unity, the inclusion, the totality of all moral goods, of earthly and heavenly, spiritual and physical, eternal and temporal goods.

The good can constitute a unity, and it does that automatically. By contrast, sin is unable to do that. Sin dissolves; sin “moves from forged unity into diversity”; sin propagates atomism and individualism to the extreme. Sin is a disorganizing power possessing no reason for existence and thus no purpose in itself. So sin can never have value as being inherently desirable, nor does it obligate anyone to follow. Sin is really unnecessary, absolute immorality, existing without a right to exist. Therefore sin can never establish an entity, a kingdom that proceeds from itself. It constitutes merely a kind of *contrat social* (social contract), because in no other way than as an organized power can sin attain its goal, which lies outside of it, namely, the destruction of the good, and only in this way can it break down the Kingdom of God. So when the Kingdom of God shall be perfected and no longer be exposed to the attacks of Satan, at that point the kingdom of sin will be split into pieces, all its elements destroyed, and it will turn against itself.

The good, however, constitutes a unity. Freed from the destructive power of sin, it automatically organizes. The good is at the same time the beautiful; it consists in perfect harmony. The Kingdom of God in its perfection is the unity of all moral goods.

Here on earth, however, all those goods are not yet one; here, holiness and redemption, virtue and happiness, spiritual and physical good do not yet coincide. More often here on earth the righteousness of the Kingdom of God is bound up with the cross, and through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Acts 14:22). Earthly goods, like wealth, honor, and prosperity, can even be impediments, as they were for the rich young man (Mark 10:23). For when, through sin, all these goods

lose their bond of unity, each of them coming to be separated in isolation from the others, [35] they thereby all the more easily become instruments of sin.

But in itself the Kingdom of God is not hostile toward all those goods. Rather, the Kingdom of God is independent from all of those externalities; it exists above them, enlists them as its instrument, and in so doing returns to them their original purpose. For this reason Jesus came with the demand: seek first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness, and all the rest is then not vain, unprofitable, and sinful, but will be added to you; added, for one who possesses the righteousness of the Kingdom of God will certainly inherit the earth.

That which constitutes the bond, the unity of all those goods, is spiritual in nature, namely, righteousness. It is the righteousness that consists precisely in each thing existing according to its own nature, receiving its proper place, and being complete in its nature and essence. To that righteousness everything is subordinated, but also to that righteousness everything owes the preservation and perfection of its essence. Just as within a human being, the personality is the highest, and the body must be its instrument, so too in the Kingdom of God everything earthly, temporal, and visible is subject to the spiritual and eternal. Since the spiritual and eternal, in order to exist in reality and not just in the mind or in the imagination, must always be personal, so too the Kingdom of God is a Kingdom of free personalities.⁵ There the personality of each is fully developed and answers to its purpose.

For the righteousness of the Kingdom of God consists in this, that a person may be fully a person, such that everything within a person may be subject to the person's spiritual, eternal essence. At the moment everything within a person is torn apart, and what should be together has been torn asunder. Understanding and heart, consciousness and will, inclination and power, feeling and

5. Cf. M. des Amorie van der Hoeven, *Over het wezen der godsdienst en hare betrekking tot het Staatsregt* (Amsterdam: P.N. van Kampen, 1854), 12.

imagination, flesh and spirit, these are all opposed to each other at the moment, and they compete with each other for primacy.

But in the Kingdom of God all of those are once again pure instruments of the personality, arranged in perfect order around the personality as its center. There the darkened natural life no longer exists, nor any unwitting impulse. Everything moves outward from the center of the personality and returns there. All powers exist in the full light of consciousness and are fully included in the will. All compulsion is excluded since it is a kingdom of the spirit and thus of freedom. In this kingdom the natural and the visible are placed completely under the perspective of the spiritual and eternal; the physical is a pure instrument of the ethical even as everything, including our own body, which belongs to our persons and yet is not identical to our persons, [36] stands completely in the service of our personality and is glorified precisely as an instrument of the dominion of the spirit.

So the Kingdom of God is a kingdom of free personalities where each personality has reached its full development. But it is a *kingdom* of free personalities who do not live separated from each other, like individuals, but who together constitute a kingdom and are bound to each other in the most complete and purest community. The Kingdom of God is not an aggregate of disparate components, nor even an entity bound together accidentally by a communal interest. It is not simply a *société*, a club, an association like those we see established everywhere nowadays. All those contemporary associations of men and women, boys and girls, or young people, formed as they are around various interests and for various purposes, owe their existence mostly, or at least partially, to the reigning individualism of our day.

But the Kingdom of God is a *kingdom*, the social kingdom par excellence where communal life obtains its highest development and its purest manifestation. It is the most original kingdom that exists, and earthly kingdoms, including the natural kingdom, are but a faint image and a weak likeness. It is an entity where the individual parts are built for each other and fit each other, bound together by the most intimate fellowship, dwelling together under

one higher authority which forms the law of this entity. So it is an organism whose totality not only precedes and transcends the individual parts but also simultaneously forms the basis, the condition, and the constitutive power of the parts. At the same time it is no Platonic State where the rights of the individual are sacrificed to those of the group. Rather, the opposite is the case. The Kingdom of God in fact maintains everyone's personality, securing its full-orbed development.

Even individuality is not thereby destroyed because it is not an imperfection but that which supplies the essence of each person and distinguishes one from the other.⁶ Without that individuality an organism would not even be able to exist. The Kingdom of God would cease being the most perfect, the most pure organism if the hand were no longer the hand, the eye no longer the eye, and each member of that organism were no longer itself. "If all were a single member, where would the body be?" (1 Cor. 12:19ff.; cf. Rom. 12:4ff.).

Precisely by means of the single shared life of the organism, the individual members of the organism are maintained and preserved in their differentiation and uniqueness. The Kingdom of God, therefore, is no lifeless, [37] petrified atomism, no bare uniformity, but a unity that includes and harmoniously incorporates an infinite multitude. Exactly for that reason the Kingdom of God is the highest, the most perfect community, because it guarantees to each one's personality the most completely well-rounded and richest development of its content. For the unity of an organism becomes the more harmonious, the more rich, and the more glorious to the degree that the multitude of parts increases.

For example, there is very little unity alongside very little diversity in a rock. Every rock looks like the others, and every piece of rock is just another rock. But we encounter unity amid increased diversity already with a plant. Still more with an animal. We see the most rich and most glorious unity amid diversity in a human being

6. Cf. Alexandre R. Vinet, "Sur l'individualité et l'individualisme" in *Mélanges* (Paris: Chez les éditeurs, 1869), 83–101.

in whom we see an incalculable diversity, an inexhaustible wealth of phenomena, an inexpressible fullness of capacities and gifts and powers. The entire world is recapitulated and represented within a human being. A human being is truly a microcosm. And yet that entire plethora of phenomena is harmoniously bound together and organically arranged in the personality, which itself is eternal and far surpasses that entire plethora, as it knows that wonderful organism by means of its consciousness and rules it by means of its will.⁷

So then, what the human being is for the world, that is what the Kingdom of God is for the human being. There the richest harmony rules together with the perfection of beauty. There the most glorious and purest unity reigns among the most inscrutable wealth and the most incalculable diversity.

Imagine it if you can: every member of that organism known as the Kingdom of God is genuinely a personality with a completeness of life developed fully in every aspect. That Kingdom itself is, in its totality, yet another personality formed along the same lines. For the personality is the most basic and original source of every system, *das Ursystem*, as Stahl calls it.⁸

The Kingdom itself is also an organic personality whose head is Christ and whose subjects constitute the body. Just as each personality has and must have an organism known as the body, so too the church is the body, the pure organism of Christ's divine-human personality, the pleroma, to use Paul's profound expression (Eph. 1:23), of him who fills all in all. Thus, the Kingdom of God is the reconciliation of both individualism and socialism, the fulfillment of the truth of both. It could even be said that in the Kingdom of God the individual exists for the sake of the whole even as the whole exists for the sake of the individual.⁹

7. Cf. the chapter, "le principe de l'excellence," in Paul Janet, *La Morale* (Paris: Ch. Delagrave, 1880), 55–85.

8. Friedrich J. Stahl, *Die Philosophie des Rechts*, vol. 1, 4th ed. (Heidelberg: J.C.B. Mohr), 500.

[38] In the community of the Kingdom of God, as we said, Christ is the head. The Kingdom of God is, then, a *Kingdom of Christ*. Apart from sin, the Kingdom of God would have existed among humanity from the very beginning and would have developed completely normally. Through sin, the Kingdom of God was disrupted, the various goods contained in the Kingdom were torn asunder, and the triad of the true, the good, and the beautiful was broken. God wanted to restore his Kingdom for which he supplied the shadow and preparation already in Israel's theocracy, and in the fullness of time he sent his Son to establish it upon earth. On account of sin, therefore, the Kingdom of God became a Kingdom of Christ. He was anointed King in that Kingdom, and he exercises its sovereignty until he has destroyed every dominion and every authority and power and has placed all his enemies under his feet (1 Cor. 15:24–25). That is how long he must reign as King.

So the Kingdom of God is a Kingdom that does not yet exist fully but is coming into fuller existence, a Kingdom that cannot expand and develop in any other way than through fierce conflict. For the single and absolutely authoritative demand is that of *righteousness*, the requirement of absolute perfection. It cannot abandon this demand without destroying itself so that nothing will enter that Kingdom that defiles and does detestable things and speaks lies (Rev. 21:27). Thus it is a militant kingdom, one that cannot simply incorporate something just as it is, but must conquer and wrest from the dominion of sin everything it embraces. Since it is spiritual in nature, however, it employs only spiritual weapons. For its expansion, the Kingdom of God recognizes no other authority than the almighty power of divine grace.

In this way the Kingdom of God possesses a redemptive and sanctifying character. Just as Christ is the Founder, so too he is the moving power of the Kingdom, and he determines the nature and the manner of its development. The incarnation of the Word, the all-dominating fact and fundamental principle of all science, is also

9. Hans Lassen Martensen, *Die Christliche Ethik Allgemeiner Theil*, 3rd ed. (Gotha: Besser, 1878), 259–303.

the source and continuing principle of the Kingdom of God. The incarnation indicates that the divine, the eternal, the invisible does not hover above us at an unreachable height (Rom. 10:6–8), but has entered into the human, the temporal, and the visible, and now appears to our eyes in no other way than physically—in human form and in a human manner.

This is also the leading principle that now determines the nature of the expansion of the Kingdom of God. What is genuinely human may never and nowhere be snuffed out or suppressed. Always and everywhere the genuinely human must be made an organ and instrument of the form in which the divine exists. The Kingdom of God awaits that unity, which we behold in Christ in an entirely unique manner, in every domain of human living and striving, in order to make each thing real according to its nature. [39] It seeks to do this, however, not like the Greeks for whom the divine disappeared into the human, nor like the followers of Buddha for whom the human is swallowed up in the divine. The unity of the Kingdom of God seeks to maintain both the essentiality and independence of the divine and the human so that the human may be a pure and unblemished instrument of the divine and the divine may manifest itself bodily in a completely human manner (Col. 2:9).

The incarnation itself teaches us that this is possible. The human itself is not sinful but has become the instrument of sin. The earth lies between hell and heaven. It is the land of relativity. Just as the earth is hardly the worst evil—hell—so too the highest good—the Kingdom of God—is not completely realized. Neither absolute evil nor absolute good is to be found anywhere on earth. Both principles exist on earth together and alongside one another. The two are intertwined, wrestling and contending against each other, but, contrary to what some try to tell us nowadays, they are never swallowed up into each other. Just as Peter was at one time the prize in the conflict between the praying Jesus and Satan, who wanted to sift him as wheat (Luke 22:31), in the same way there is a contest for the whole earth and all of humanity between Satan and Christ. The contest between those two personal powers—not

between merely abstract ideas or vague principles, but between both of those Kingdom heads and crown-wearers—lends to history its terribly tragic character. The question nevertheless is whether all that is human will share in Satan's disdain or in Christ's glory, whether this earth will belong to hell or to heaven, whether humanity will become demon or angel.

Viewing nothing human as foreign but as spiritual in nature, the Kingdom of God is universal, bound to no place or time, embracing the whole earth and everything human, independent of nation and country, of nationality and race, of language and culture. In Christ Jesus what is legitimate is only what has been created anew, with no exceptions. This is why the gospel of the Kingdom must be brought to all nations, to all creatures, not only to people but to the entire creation (Mark 16:15). The Kingdom of God extends as far as Christianity itself. It exists wherever Christ rules, wherever he dwells with his Spirit. Everything earthly, insofar as it is cleansed and consecrated through Christ, constitutes the Kingdom of God.¹⁰ Having entered history, having through Christ been made into a world historical power, yes, into the driving force of all history, the Kingdom expands and develops *vel nobis dormientibus* (even while we are sleeping). It proceeds quietly [40] and unobserved, more quickly than we perhaps might imagine, like the leaven that a woman takes and hides in three measures of flour until all of it is leavened (Matt. 13:33), or like a mustard seed, which “is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches” (Matt. 13:31).

As the Kingdom of Christ it is thus characterized as becoming, as unfolding, awaiting its completion. Then, when it is complete, when every opposition has been vanquished and the kingdom itself is completely sanctified, then Christ will return the sovereignty

10. Cf. Kloje, “Christenthum” in *Real-encyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche Christenthum*, ed. Johann Jakob Herzog, 22 vols. (Gotha: Rudolf Besser, 1854–1868), 2:674–81.

granted to him to the One who bestowed it, and will give the Kingdom without spot or wrinkle to his God and Father.

In this manner the Kingdom of God is thus, finally, a *Kingdom of God*. Christ does indeed remain the Head of the body through whom all the divine life is supplied from God to us in a human fashion, and in turn everything of ours, all that is human, glorifies God as a well-pleasing sacrifice consecrated to him. But the absolute sovereignty is then exercised by God himself, who is the Fountain and the Source of all sovereignty, the Lord of lords, the King of kings. The Kingdom of God is a *Kingdom*, the most noble and glorious kingdom imaginable. It is no imperium, for that makes us think of a world power and of tyrannical domination, but this is a Kingdom in which sovereignty rests upon the perfect power of the One who exercises it. In the Kingdom of God, God himself is the King-Sovereign. In this Kingdom he rules over a free people who serve him willingly and who find in that subjection precisely the source and the security of all their freedoms.

2. THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE INDIVIDUAL

That Kingdom, whose essence we have attempted to make known to you, is, as the unity of all moral goods, the highest good for each person, for every individual no matter who and what he may be. To all without distinction, the Kingdom comes with the intensely serious demand to surrender everything else on its behalf, even father and mother, sister and brother. For it is the pearl of great price which a merchant found and went out to sell everything he possessed so that he might purchase it (Matt. 13:44).

Nor is the human person a quickly passing developmental moment in [41] the grand process of nature. A human person exists not merely for the sake of something else, but a person's existence has value in itself. The human person possesses an inherent goal or purpose. For each person that purpose is to be always fully himself, that is, to be his personality. The goal of personal existence is simply to obey that law given us by God simultaneously as the law

of our own personality and as the law that continues to echo faintly in the human conscience. As we exist in the present we are bound on all sides by various attachments that are foreign to us. This law, resounding above nature, governs us more often than we think. Natural life occupies an extremely broad place within our existence. So extremely broad, in fact, that this natural life appropriates a third of our entire earthly life through our sleep, and thereby dooms our personality, our consciousness, and our will to inactivity.

Moreover—and this is the real slavery of our personal spiritual lives—in our conscious life we are also bound by that law in our members which engages in conflict against the law of our mind. Sin is the enemy of the personality to which it nevertheless owes the possibilities of its existence. Sin desires no self-consciousness and no freedom; sin hates both of these with a perfect hatred. It moves about in the dark recesses of life. The coercion of nature is the ideal form of the power with which sin desires to rule. For that reason sin hides us from ourselves; sin pretends and dissembles with us. Knowing oneself, after all, is the first step on the road to conversion.

By contrast, we all receive the demand that we always be fully self-conscious and genuinely free in order to live that spiritual eternal life that we lost through sin, in order that we be ruled by nothing else than the law of our own spiritual being which makes all the rest an instrument of our personality. Our calling is to take up this dark natural principle which we now carry within us, to expose it completely to the light of our consciousness, to peer through ourselves thoroughly, leaving nothing darkened within us. Our calling is that our entire being and essence be reflected in the mirror of our consciousness, and that we thus become like God, who is nothing but light and in whom is no darkness (1 John 1:5).

It comes down to this: making our personality the only cause of all our thinking and acting. We are called to embed our entire personality in every deed, in every thought, in order to do nothing un-self-consciously and arbitrarily, but to do everything with full consciousness and will, freely and morally.

This demand corresponds fully with that of the Kingdom of God and can be fulfilled only through the work of that Kingdom. Every other good that we pursue unconsciously and unintentionally [42] becomes ours only partially and can produce some benefit to us. By contrast, every labor for the Kingdom of God that is done without consciousness and will, without our entire personality, is impossible—at least vain and useless—for ourselves, and worse yet, it destroys us eternally.

In a certain sense everybody without distinction labors for the Kingdom of God, voluntarily or involuntarily, if not as an independent collaborator, then as a blind and will-less tool. For if we ourselves are unwilling to work for the Kingdom of God freely and without compulsion, then Almighty God will still use us as an unwilling instrument to do everything that his hand and his counsel had determined beforehand should happen. In this sense even Satan collaborates for the Kingdom of God. For just as the curse comes from evil,¹¹ going so far as to seek the good opportunity for sin, even so it is the privilege of the good to turn evil for good. But then once God has used us, God will treat us not as persons but as blind tools and cast us away from before his face. Just as the Kingdom of God is a kingdom of free personalities, even so it can be brought into existence within us only through our full personality with consciousness and will, or, as the Scripture puts it, with all our mind and will all our soul and with all our strength. But also in return, we are called to labor for that Kingdom with consciousness and will, to advance it freely and independently within and beyond us, to consecrate our entire lives to it. We are equipped to count everything in connection with this labor to be the source for tempering our will, for strengthening our consciousness, for doubling our strength, for expanding our spirit to the full range of our personality, and for laying up a treasure which neither moth nor rust can consume.

11. August Tholuck, *Die Lehre von der Sünde*, 8th ed. (Gotha: Perthes, 1862), 19.

Even as the Kingdom enlists our entire personality and all our strength, it also demands us *perpetually*. We are indeed still bound here on earth; we do not rule time but are often ruled by it. Nevertheless, the ideal that we must attempt to grasp is that we be free of time and that we distance ourselves from this freedom only as much as necessary in order to maintain our personality. God never grants us time off in order not to be what we are supposed to be. As someone who himself is working until now, he demands that we be like him in that respect and, like Christ, work as long as it is day. In itself, time is an empty form, without content and therefore “tedious.” But time is given to be filled with eternal content, and for this reason it always flows into eternity so that thereby time itself “contains eternity in every moment.” [43] After all, eternity is no intellectual deduction, no barren shape, no empty void, but precisely the opposite: eternity is time with an infinite, eternal content in every moment. God is working *all the time*; he fills every moment with eternal content and thus does everything in its time even as he sent his Son in the *fullness* of the times. Our time is genuinely full and filled only when we do not spend it on things that serve merely to pass the time but only when we fill time with laboring in work that is eternal and abiding. So we are called to work not for the food that perishes but for the food that endures unto eternal life (John 6:27). In summary, our time must be filled with work on behalf of the imperishable and immovable Kingdom of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

This is not to say, however, that we need to labor for that Kingdom of God apart from any earthly calling. To be sure, the Kingdom of God is not *of* the world, but it is nevertheless *in* the world. The Kingdom does not exist within the narrow confines of the inner closet, restricted to church and monastery. The Kingdom is not entirely “other worldly” but has been established by Christ upon earth and stands in a most intimate—yet for us in many respects inexplicable—relationship with this earthly life and is prepared by this life. Nevertheless, it is just as true that the Kingdom is not exhaustively present in this life, it is not merely “this worldly.” The Kingdom *is* and *becomes*.

The eternal Sabbath is not yet here, and yet we have a foretaste of it already now. At this point, however, Sunday and the rest of the week exist alongside each other. Our heavenly calling is not swallowed up in our earthly calling.

We must be on guard against both errors. On the one hand, our earthly calling may not be misunderstood on account of various ascetic, pietistic, and methodistic emphases, while, on the other hand, our heavenly calling may not be denied on account of theoretical or practical materialism. Our ideal continues to be that we exalt the other days of the week to the loftiness of the Sabbath and that we continually exercise our heavenly calling more and more in and amid our earthly calling.¹²

Our earthly calling is, after all, the temporal form of our heavenly calling. It is marked somewhat by the sentiment that “in order to be an angel, you must first be a fit human being.”¹³ Our earthly calling has been given to us, says Calvin,¹⁴ so that we may have a firm foundation and not be cast about hither and thither for our entire lives. By means of our earthly calling we form ourselves, therefore, with a view to developing our personality and preparing a pure instrument for it in our body and in all things earthly.

[44] It is a distinguishing feature of Christianity that it does not condemn any earthly calling in itself nor does it consider any earthly calling in itself to be in conflict with our heavenly calling. The Greeks viewed manual labor as something embarrassing and assigned it to their slaves. But Christianity recognizes no dualism of spirit and matter and views nothing as unclean in itself. A person who does not labor, who has no occupation, also has no calling, becomes deadweight for society and thereby disgraces his human

12. Martensen, *Die Christliche Ethik*, vol. 2 (Gotha: Besser, 1878), 352–64. Cf. also Luther’s reflections regarding our earthly vocation in Christoph Ernst Luthardt, *Die Ethik Luthers*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Dörffling und Franke, 1875), 71ff.

13. Johann Julius Baumann, *Handbuch der Moral, nebst Abriss der Rechtsphilosophie* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1879), 238.

14. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3.10.6.

nature. For only in an occupation can we demonstrate and develop what lives within us. Only in an occupation can we manifest ourselves, not only to others but also to ourselves. Only in this way do we learn to know ourselves, our strengths, our capacities, and thus obtain awareness of the content of our own personality. Only in this way can we become a full personality, fully human. Otherwise not only our physical powers but also our spiritual and moral powers suffocate and corrode within us.

However, we must devote every effort to choosing that earthly occupation in which the exercise of our heavenly calling is not hindered for us, for our individuality, and for our powers. For this demand abides, namely, to bring this life, its calling and its labor, into relationship with the eternal, to view all that is temporal and earthly *sub specie aeternitatis*. Otherwise, to echo Calvin once more, the components of our living will always lack symmetry.

Everything earthly must thus remain subservient to the Kingdom of Heaven. We must possess everything as though not possessing (1 Cor. 7:30) such that we are willing to surrender anything if it comes into conflict with the demand of the Kingdom of God.

In other words, everything may be our domain such that we possess it and rule over it so that it functions as the instrument of our personality. Every pursuit of more than we can rule over, more than we can actually make our domain, is immoral and conflicts with the Kingdom of God and its righteousness.

As soon as what is earthly possesses us and rules over us, whether goods or kindred, art or science, the demand must be repeated that Jesus gave to the rich young man: go, sell everything you own and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven (Matt. 19:21). For everything earthly has been given to us in order with it to cultivate our personality, in order to make it an instrument of God's Kingdom.

Indeed, everything comes down finally not to what we accomplish through our earthly work, for often the work we accomplish is broken to pieces before our eyes by God himself. But

the essential feature of all our labor that we perform under the sun is what we become through our work what our personality acquires by way of the consciousness, spirit, power, richness, and fullness of living. [45] That is what abides. That is never lost. That does not disappear like so many insignificant works of our hands. That is what we carry with us out of this world into the future world. That constitutes the works that follow us.

We are, finally, the totality of what we have ever willed, thought, felt, and done. The profit that we yield for ourselves in this way is profit for the Kingdom of God. Even a cup of cold water given to a disciple of Jesus receives a reward. God calls us to work in such a way that, amid all that we do, we should envision the eternal work that God desires to bring about through people, knowing that we cannot be lord and master of ourselves and of the earth in any other way than in subjection to him. And in that consciousness, working with all our powers as long as it is day, God calls us to subject all that is visible and temporal to ourselves in order then to consecrate it along with ourselves as a perfect sacrifice to God—even if our work space be ever so small and our occupation ever so nondescript. This is truly and essentially working for the Kingdom of God.

3. THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE COMMUNITY (FAMILY, STATE, CHURCH, CULTURE)

The Kingdom of God is the highest good not only for the individual but also for the whole of humanity. It is a communal project that can be realized only through united powers. It is the most universal good imaginable, and therefore also the destiny and goal of all those life spheres that exist in a society.

There are especially three of them: state, church, and culture. Each of these three develops the human personality in terms of a particular aspect. The state regulates mutual human relationships;

the church norms their relationship to God; and culture governs relationships with the cosmos or the world.

Rather than being an additional fourth life sphere alongside these, the household or family is the foundation and the model of these other three life spheres. The family possesses a religious-moral element in its piety, a juridical element in its parental authority and sibling affection, and an element of culture in family nurture. All three life spheres lie embedded within the family in a complex way, and each is connected to the family. Since the Kingdom of God consists of the totality of all goods, here on earth one finds its purest image and most faithful representation in the household family.

The Kingdom of God is the Father's house. Family relationships are applicable there as well. God places us in relationship to himself as children. [46] We are born of him and thus resemble him; only a child resembles the father. God is King, but at the same time Father of his people. Jesus called the subjects of this King the children of the Kingdom (Matt. 8:12 and 13:38). Christ is the oldest, the firstborn, among many brothers, and everyone who does the Father's will is Jesus' brother and sister and mother (Rom. 8:29; Matt. 12:50). For this reason the family will correspond to its design to the extent that it constitutes a Kingdom of God in miniature. For the Kingdom of God does not exist for the sake of the family, but, as is true of everything else, the family exists for the sake of the Kingdom of God. The husband is the image and the glory of God, head and priest of the family, as Christ is the head of the church (1 Cor. 11:7; Eph. 5:23). God gives us children so that we may form them into children of God. The relationships of family life have their reflection and standard in that communal life of a much higher order, found in the Kingdom of God. Should the demand of the Kingdom of God occasionally conflict with the duties of the family, such that the latter must yield (Matt. 10:37), anyone who leaves house or parents or brothers or wife or children for the sake of the Kingdom of God will receive back many times in this age and in the age to come eternal life (Luke 18:29).

In the family everything is yet undifferentiated. There we find a natural life that has not yet entirely transitioned into the free, ethical, personal life, but nonetheless is destined from that unconscious and involuntary identity to develop into complete independence and freedom.

State, church, and culture constitute those life spheres that have achieved independence in terms of those elements already present to a smaller or larger degree in the family. Let us consider for a moment the relationship of each of these three to the Kingdom of God.

First, something about the relationship of the church and the Kingdom of God.¹⁵

Religious life developed into its true essence and full independence for the first time within Christianity, becoming independent of civil and political life to which religion had always been closely associated among the Greeks and the Romans. Christ rendered religious life—faith in him—independent of changing earthly circumstances. Thus we see that Christianity established but one church as a single unique sphere alongside the state and culture. This occurred because faith in Christ is completely independent and develops a unique life that differs in specific ways from every other kind of life.

[47] Certainly Christianity is in the first place a religion, but not merely a religion. It is an entirely new life that can penetrate and enliven every life sphere and life form. Thus Christianity is not coextensive with the church. It is far too rich to allow itself to be pressed within its walls. Indeed, it would not be the true religion if it had no influence on the richly fulsome human life. Christianity

15. Cf. Johannes H. A. Ebrard, *Dogmatik*, vol. 2 (Konigsberg: Unzer, 1862), 388; U. Hauber, “Kirche” in *Real-Encyclopädie*, 7:561; Carl Immanuel Nitzsch, *System of Christian Doctrine*, trans. Robert Montgomery and John Hennen (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1849), 361ff.; Rich Adelb Lipsius, *Lehrbuch der evangelisch-protestantischen Dogmatik*, 2nd ed. (Braunschweig: Schwetschke, 1879), 763ff.; and Albrecht Ritschl, *Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*, vol. 3, 4th ed. (Bonn: A. Marcus, 1895), 270ff.

cannot be restricted to the church as an historical organization viewed as a visible community. For that reason we speak of a Christian society, of a Christian school. There is nothing human that cannot be called Christian. Everything within and outside the church that is enlivened and governed by Christ who exercises sovereignty over all things, constitutes and belongs to the Kingdom of God. For Rome, the church and the Kingdom of God are one. Thus, Rome's church views everything that does not flow from it and is not consecrated by it to be unholy and profane. But the Reformation recognized the life spheres outside the church in their independence. No Protestant church may denigrate the territory of human living outside the church as unclean or profane. Rather, we must accept the distinction between the church and the Kingdom of God. The church *already exists*; the Kingdom of God *is becoming*. The church is an historical, visible organization; the Kingdom of God is invisible and spiritual. The church was established for the first time by Christ to be a unique sphere for the cultivation of the Christian-religious life. The Kingdom of God has existed since the beginning of the world. The Kingdom of God was present already among Israel. It progresses secretly like leaven and does not—unlike the church—constitute a separate community over against the state and culture.

Far from losing anything of its significance by accepting this distinction, the church instead rises in value and fulfills its calling all the more when it understands that the church itself is not the Kingdom of God and cannot be the Kingdom of God, but is the means of preparing for the Kingdom of God and ensuring its arrival.

For apart from the historical organization, the power, and the activity of the church, Christianity would be unable to maintain itself, to find entrance, to be a power in history, and would dissolve into a collection of vague and rarefied notions.

That is the significance of the church, but its goal lies in part beyond itself, in the Kingdom of God. The church is not itself the Kingdom of God in its entirety, but the indispensable foundation of the Kingdom of God, the preeminent and best instrument of the

Kingdom of God, the earthly institution, the heart, the core, the living center of the Kingdom of God.

With that self-understanding the church aims to consecrate people to God, not only in their religious life but also, proceeding from that source, in their natural life, moral life, civic life, and political life. Sunday may not stand alongside the other days of the week but must sanctify them [48] and seek to lift them up to their highest purpose. The church is what she is supposed to be when she labors beyond herself and is not satisfied when people are pious on Sundays in church. Only then will the church—as the preserver and bearer of the noblest good of humanity, namely, the truth that is according to godliness—strive to bring that good into contact with all other moral goods and in this way advance the coming of that Kingdom of God, which, as the unity of all goods, does not destroy the good of the church but incorporates it within itself in its purified form.

Just as remarkable, in the second place, is the connection that exists between the state and the Kingdom of God. No matter how often the state misunderstands that connection or even denies it altogether, that may not induce us to muffle the protest that the state, which has been instituted by God, is not a necessary evil but a very real good. After the church, the state is indeed the greatest and richest good on earth. Only through the state is that community life required of human beings made possible wherein a person, for the first time, can develop his full personality.

Family, church, culture, all the various spheres of rich human living do not owe their origin and existence to the state—they possess a “sphere sovereignty”—but they do nonetheless owe to the state the possibility of their development. The state secures the full unfolding of human personality. The state, however, is not the highest good but finds its purpose and goal in the Kingdom of heaven. Anyone who misunderstands this will eventually end up denying the church her noblest calling and instead value the state itself, viewed as the creator of culture and caretaker of freedom and equality, as the initial realization of the Kingdom of God. And denying every connection of the state to the eternal, people will

view the state as the highest good and the highest purpose of humanity, as that which alone is worth living for.

Such a glorification of the state destroys the freedom and independence of human personality. The state develops only one dimension of human personality, namely, justice. The state is not, contrary to Rothe,¹⁶ the moral community, but merely one particular form of moral community. It consists of morality merely in the form of justice. The purely ethical lies beyond its domain. Therefore it must recognize and maintain the various life spheres of family, church, and culture, and so forth, in their independence.

Moreover, the state is always national and particular, an *Einzelstaat*, or individuated state. So it cannot be the highest, which is to say, universal good. [49] But the Kingdom of God is one and the same over all the earth. It knows no boundaries of land or nationality. Each state and each nation has its purpose and reason for existence in terms of that Kingdom. The Kingdom does not call the state to surrender its special, national calling. On the contrary, just as the individual person must not seek the Kingdom of God outside of but in his earthly vocation, so too the Kingdom of God does not demand that the state surrender its earthly calling, its own nationality, but demands precisely that the state permit the Kingdom of God to affect and to penetrate its people and its nation. Only in this way can the Kingdom of God come into existence. For this Kingdom is not a labor of these or those people, not even of one nation and of one state, but of all peoples and all states. It is the total task (*Gesamtaufgabe*) of the human race.

As we saw with the individual, so also each nation and every state makes its own contribution to that task and adds its own value, willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously. Thus the Kingdom of God does not vitiate the individuated state (*Einzelstaat*), the nationality and particular calling of a people, but purifies them and incorporates each individual state and nation as a particular instrument in the cooperation of the whole.

16. Richard Rothe, *Theologische Ethik*, vol. 2 (Wittenberg: Zimmermann, 1867), § 422–48.

When it understands its purpose in this way, the state maintains its true nature and labors for its own perfection. To be sure, the state cannot establish the Kingdom of God. The state is not redemptive. Nor may the state attempt to foster the free, moral, spiritual life. The state functions in terms of the law. But by holding that law in high esteem, by cultivating respect and reverence for the law, by upholding its majesty, by inculcating respect for the moral world order as the unconditionally valid moral order, the state can become a tutor unto Christ. In this sense the state can and indeed does have the calling to labor for the Kingdom of God. By providing space for the various life spheres to do their work, and by guaranteeing for each of its subjects the development of this full and variegated life of the personality, the state fulfills its own nature and works for that Kingdom, which itself is also a state wherein God Himself is the Lord and absolute King-Sovereign.

Thirdly, it remains for us yet to discuss the connection between culture and the Kingdom of God.

As with the state, so also with culture: before the Reformation they both existed in service to the church. The Reformation restored to culture its freedom and independence. The right of culture is expressed in the mandate: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen. 1:28; cf. Gen. 9:1–3). Culture exists because God bestowed on us the power to exercise rule over the earth. It is the communal calling of [50] the human race to make the world its own and to shape it as the property and instrument of personality. Humanity was given power to transform the entire treasury of created life forms, whether spiritual, moral, as well as natural, into a pure organism and to rule over it. That occurs in two ways: science and art. In order to rule over nature in the broadest sense, its essence, operation, pathways, and laws must be known. Here as well the saying is valid that only the truth makes one free. In ruling over nature, every form of arbitrariness is immoral and irrational. As Francis Bacon wrote, *Naturae non imperatur, nisi parendo* (we cannot command nature except by obeying her). Science

incorporates nature in the understanding, casts its image in our soul, and reproduces it through ourselves in thought and in word.

But knowledge is power. To know is to be able. In the most universal sense, art renders nature, as an instrument of our will, serviceable to a higher purpose and transforms it through us into a work of art, into a complete artistic organism.

For the third time in the history of the world, culture has become a power. First came the Hamite culture of Assyria, Babylon, and Phoenecia. Then followed the Japhethite culture of Greece and Rome, whose culture remains the foundation of our own and in philosophy, art, and jurisprudence still sets the standard for our own. Today, modern culture emancipates itself more and more from Christianity, denigrating the church to the status of maidservant and slave girl. To that extent modern culture also faces the judgment that came upon the Hamite and Japhethite cultures: destruction through debauchery and sensuality, worshiping genius and deifying the material, of which Babylon and Rome are the abiding symbols in Scripture.

From these considerations we see that culture can find its purpose and reason for existence only in the Kingdom of God. The lord of the earth is but the child of God. Idolizing the material and serving the flesh is the destination of all who acknowledge no master above themselves. For then nature is too powerful for us, and compels us to bow before its tremendous forces. But when by God's hand we are elevated above the material, then we are more powerful than the material, then we develop the material with our own hand and form it into an instrument of personality. Then culture is a deeply essential good, worthy not of our denigration but of our amazement.

Cult and culture ought then to be sisters, independent to be sure, but still sisters, bound to each other through love. And even though Martha, who represents the culture that is occupied with many things, may differ from Mary, who represents the cultus that has chosen the best portion, nevertheless the truth remains that Jesus loved them both.

The ideal is that the oppositions appearing everywhere—with the individual, the family, the state, the church, culture, and so forth, and whereby [51] each of these repeatedly interferes with the others—that all those oppositions gradually disappear and find their resolution in the unity of the Kingdom of God.

To the extent that each of these various life spheres answers more and more to its essential idea, it loses its sharpness and isolation from the others and prepares the way all the more the coming of the Kingdom of God. For that kingdom, since it is the highest good, destroys nothing but consecrates everything. It includes every good, a kingdom wherein all the moral good that is now spread throughout various spheres and comes into being in each sphere according to its nature and in its appropriate manner, is incorporated as purified and perfected. It is a kingdom wherein the human personality obtains its richest and most multiform manifestation, a community life of the highest order wherein all oppositions are reconciled and individual and community, state and church, cultus and culture are integrated in perfect harmony. It is a kingdom wherein the true, the good, and the beautiful are perfectly realized and have become one. In this Kingdom of God, full sovereignty is handed over to the Messiah, a sovereignty that had descended from him in the various life spheres and returns completely once more to God, who will be all in all.

So in spite of so much that seems to contradict it, do not deprive me of the idea that this Kingdom of God is the essential content, the core, and the purpose of all of world history. Let not my faith and my hope seep away whereby I acknowledge that the historical description initially summarized by Israel's prophets and set forth so profoundly and gloriously by Paul in his letter to the Romans will finally appear to be the true portrait, namely, that the history of the nations and of their states finds its principal idea and explanation to be the Kingdom of Heaven.

4. THE COMPLETION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

It might appear that up to this point I have lost sight of the tremendous opposition between the Kingdom of God and that of the world. It might seem as though I harbored the naïve notion that by means of mission and evangelism, by means of Christian philanthropy and anti-revolutionary politics, that opposition would gradually disappear and the world would slowly be won for the Kingdom of God. But that notion has no appeal to me. Even if the prophetic word of Scripture were not enough, then a glance around would be able to disabuse me of such illusions. Although God desires to expand his Kingdom on earth [52] through people, although our working for that kingdom remains our treasured calling and duty, although between our activity and the coming of the Kingdom of God there certainly and undeniably lies a close connection, the Kingdom of God is not purely a product of our moral activity. Even as it was established from beyond the world, and develops and expands by means of supernatural powers, so too the completion of the Kingdom of God is a supernatural act that occurs by means of divine cataclysmic intervention.¹⁷

Earthly history is not finished with the coming of the Kingdom of God, but it is interrupted by its completion. If history is not a process of nature, but genuine history and real action, a connected series of acts, then the wrestling such history displays to us must also reach a climax wherein the kingdom of Christ and that of Satan are arrayed so sharply against each other, as Christ and Antichrist fight for the final, decisive victory. The good ones become increasingly better, but the evil ones become increasingly worse. The completion of the Kingdom of God cannot occur any other way than after the absolute manifestation of the evil one, that is, the Antichrist. Nevertheless, that divine cataclysmic intervention will not occur without preparation and mediation (*Vermittelung*). Just as with everything God does, this occupies the primary focus when

17. Cf. Kling, "Eschatologie," in *Real-Encyclopädie*, 4:154–57, M. Ebrard, "Offenbarung Johannes" in *Real-Encyclopädie*, 10:574–90, and Lange, "Wiederkunft Christi," in *Real-Encyclopädie*, 18:126–32.

the time is “full.” The Kingdom of God cannot be completed before all the material is present from which the Kingdom of God will be constructed. All of the moral goods must first come into existence, all of the elect must be gathered together.¹⁸

The completion of the Kingdom of God or of the kingdom of Satan partially occurs for each individual immediately after death. This life is, by virtue of an indestructible connection, decisive for the life to come. Nevertheless, the situation that arises for each person at death is not only immutably decisive, but preliminary as well. The lot of the individual is determined definitively only in connection with the lot of the whole, only at the end of history in the universal judgment. Before then, here on earth and beyond this arena the contest continues between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, between life and death, light and darkness, spirit and flesh, Christ and Antichrist.

That conflict continues throughout all of history, from the moment when enmity was established between the two. The Kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world develop alongside and over against each other, the latter, however, in order time and again to be destroyed, but also time and again to be restored. History is a sequence of failed world kingdoms, [53] of kingdoms erected apart from God and in opposition to him, supported and built by human power. The Tower of Babel was the first failed attempt at constructing such a world kingdom. But time and again it was attempted, in the kingdoms of Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar, of Xerxes and Alexander, of the Roman emperors, all the way to the kingdom of Napoleon himself. Babel and Rome brought such a world kingdom to the pinnacle of development and therefore also to its deepest fall, and both have remained fixed symbols and types in the Christian church of the kingdom of the world.¹⁹

Israelite prophets, seers, and watchmen on Zion’s walls saw the signs of the times and explained them in the light of the Kingdom of

18. Rothe, *Theologische Ethik*, vol. 2, § 449–58, 559–601.

19. Chantepie de la Saussaye, *De Toekomst: Vier eschatologische voorlezingen* (Rotterdam: Wyt, 1868).

God. Their nation was small, their national influence was little, but the light of that kingdom supplied them with a world-encompassing and centuries-embracing view that extended further than any view ever obtained by the greatest wise men. In that same light of the Kingdom of heaven, that is, in the light of their prophecy, history must still be viewed, its riddles solved, its signs understood and explicated.

Scripture is the Book of the Kingdom of God, not a book for this or that people, for the individual only, but for all nations, for all of humanity. It is not a book for one age, but for all times. It is a Kingdom book. Just as the Kingdom of God develops not alongside and above history, but in and through world history, so too Scripture must not be abstracted, nor viewed by itself, nor isolated from everything. Rather, Scripture must be brought into relationship with all our living, with the living of the entire human race. And Scripture must be employed to explain all of human living.

The portrait and explanation of these world kingdoms in the light of the Kingdom of God reaches its climax, in the Old Testament, in Daniel's prophecy. There the world kingdom is portrayed with the image of a metal statue standing on feet of clay that was ground to dust by a hewn stone, symbolizing the Kingdom of God that will exist into eternity (Dan. 2). Elsewhere, in the seventh chapter, that world kingdom is portrayed for us as a beast from the depths that was slain and destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. By contrast, power and dominion and honor and the kingdom were given unto all eternity to the Son of Man who appeared on the clouds of heaven. This prophecy continued into the New Testament and is closely connected to the picture in John's Book of Revelation.

In the New Testament the universal expectation is that the princes and nations of the earth will once more array themselves against the Lord [54] and against his Anointed. Frightening times precede the coming of God's kingdom. Everything human—the state, the church, and culture—will once more offer themselves as instruments of Satan.

On such a basis this prince of the world will, as it were, constitute a surrogate of the three offices of Christ. He fashions for himself an instrument, namely, the state, the world kingdom presented by John with the image of the beast that rises from the sea, the vibrant world of nations—that is Satan’s kingly office (Rev. 13:1–10). He fashions for himself an instrument in the church, the apostate church, portrayed as Babylon, the great harlot sitting upon the scarlet beast that rises from the bottomless pit (Rev. 17)—that is Satan’s priestly office. Finally, he fashions false culture into an instrument of his activity, the beast that rises from the earth and the power of the world kingdom established by means of false arguments and great signs (Rev. 13:11ff.) and leading the spirits astray—that is Satan’s prophetic office.

The world kingdom comes to be concentrated, and finds its highest manifestation, in the Antichrist, the man of sin, in whom humanness has become diabolical, who sinks down into bestiality and, supported by the false church and the false culture, places himself in the temple of God, presenting himself as though he were God (2 Thess. 2).

But at the apex of its power, the world kingdom will also have reached the end point of its development. First, Babylon, the great city, falls (Rev. 14:8, 17:18). Deprived of the support of the false church, the world kingdom and the false prophet can no longer survive. Both are seized and thrown alive into the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20). Deprived of its human instruments and no longer able to work through people upon people, Satan himself is seized and bound for a thousand years. At that point the time has arrived of the so-called thousand-year kingdom.

In the period of the early Christians chiliast belief was universal, or at least widespread. Still more than with the opposition of Origen in the East, however, the opposition of Augustine in the West occasioned the fall of chiliasm when the place that the church occupied in the world changed. Instead of being persecuted, the church came to dominate society. Once Christians became contented with themselves and satisfied with the age in which they lived, they thought that the Kingdom of God had

been virtually realized among them. Chiliasm retreated to the sects which, because they came under persecution, continued fixing their hope on the future.

The Reformers and later Reformed were particularly less inclined toward this chiliast error (*error Chiliastarum*). But this could reverse. Belief in a thousand-year kingdom is held today by not a few as proof of incontestable orthodoxy. In any case, of all the loci in Christian dogmatics, Eschatology is one that has received the least consideration and development. [55] Frequently in this area a response of *non liquet* (Scripture does not say) must be given in place of a decisive answer.

Regardless of what one believes about the nature, duration, and timing of such a kingdom, chiliasm does contain a profoundly true element.²⁰ For with chiliasm, the Christian faith expresses the certainty and indubitable knowledge of its truthfulness and its ultimate triumph. Therein the Christian faith celebrates its apotheosis and develops its own philosophy of history. In the first century and still today, chiliasm was and is the first concession that the Kingdom of God would come not abruptly, not simply accompanied by a divine cataclysmic intervention, but also in part through and after an earthly preparation. It constitutes a transition between the “here” (*Diesseits*) and the “hereafter” (*Jenseits*). Irenaeus expressed the attractive idea that in the thousand-year kingdom believers would, by means of personal concourse with Christ, be prepared for beholding God. Chiliasm expresses the healthy expectation that Christianity will once again manifest its full blessing and bounty of its life, in spiritual, moral, and natural arenas. The social power and significance of Christianity must appear once more to the eyes of all the nations. After the preliminary victory of the anti-Christian powers within church, state, and culture, there will come a time of righteousness and peace. Nature is initially glorified, understood, and ruled. Peace will dwell even in the animal world (Isa. 11:6–9). On earth it will be a

20. Isaak August Dorner, *Geschichte der Lehre von der Person Christi*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart : Liesching, 1845), 1:232–46.

paradisaal situation, the last preparation, the richest harvest for the Kingdom of God, the great harvest from among Jews and pagans. Then Christianity will understand its world mission and fulfill its calling to purify the state from all ungodly and anti-godly power, to cleanse the church of all harlotry with the world, to purify culture from all vanity and false prophecy.

But this is not yet the end. One final critical contest must be waged. The anti-Christian powers are certainly bridled but not subdued. Satan will be unleashed. And at that time the question will be able to be put clearly: will this earth belong to God or to Satan? For or against the kingdom of God will then be the war cry accepted and acclaimed with consciousness and will by everyone.

While at the present time the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan still dwell alongside each other, the boundaries of both cannot be accurately distinguished by our eyes. But at that time, both will manifest themselves in their true form before the eyes of all. Every pretense will then fall away, every excuse will then be in vain. And when the kingdom of God makes itself known in its full glory, in its genuine essence, as the highest good, [56] then the kingdom of Satan will also display its true and naked form as the highest evil. At that point it will commence battle in conscious revolution, in public enmity against the Kingdom of God. That final wrestling will be fierce but brief, unspeakably intense and decisive for eternity.

Then I saw, writes John, a new heaven and a new earth. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying: behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them and they will be his people. Then the kingdom of God will be complete, the destination of history will have been reached. All things will be renewed, all oppositions reconciled. A new development will begin, no longer restrained by sin but progressing from virtue to virtue and from strength to strength. A new and eternal work awaits us there with which we will fill eternity but which we will perform without disturbance and without exhaustion; for each one's organism will stand completely in service to each one's personality. There will be no night, there will be no time. Even distances will disappear there

before the dominion of spirits. The Kingdom of God will be exalted above the limitations of time and space and will completely fulfill both time and space. The Kingdom of God will include everything in heaven and on earth. By the blood of the cross, Christ has reconciled all things to himself and thus to each other (Col. 1:20). Under him as the Head, everything will be gathered into one and recapitulated in him (Eph. 1:10). God himself will delight in the work accomplished by his hands, and when we behold it, the song will flow from our lips: every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. God himself is its Designer and Builder (Heb. 3:4; 11:10).