

Professor Georg Sverdrup

Thy Kingdom Come

Missionary Meditations and Sermons

Edited by

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Editorial and Project Disclaimer

This volume is an independent scholarly and technical project and is not affiliated with or endorsed by any church body, academic institution, or organization.

The texts presented herein are historical documents. English translations and editorial materials are provided for educational and research purposes only. They do not claim doctrinal, ecclesiastical, or institutional authority. The original source texts remain definitive.

The English translations in this volume were generated primarily through artificial intelligence-based language tools operating under detailed scholarly instructions. These translations were subsequently reviewed, evaluated, and corrected through an independent secondary AI process for semantic, theological, and stylistic fidelity to the original Norwegian sources. Editorial responsibility in the present edition is limited to methodological design, critical oversight, and presentation; the original source texts remain authoritative.

Please see `DISCLAIMER.txt` for further details regarding scope, methodology, and limitations.

Editorial Sigla.—

Notes marked “—Ed.” originate with Andreas Helland, editor of the 1910 volume.

Notes marked “— Present Ed.” indicate editorial responsibility in the present edition.

Translator’s Note on Scriptural Infrastructure and KJV Influence

A persistent methodological difficulty underlying the present volume must be stated explicitly: the Danish–Lutheran biblical tradition presupposed by the source texts does not possess a full, historically corresponding English counterpart. The Old Testament of the Danish Church (1819) and the Authorized Revision of the New Testament (1871) together form a coherent confessional and rhetorical scriptural register that differs in significant respects from the English King James Version, particularly in matters of verbal aspect, tense orientation, and missionary futurity. No complete English Bible translated directly and consistently from this Danish tradition presently exists.

As a result, the present translations necessarily operate within a structural constraint. While the project intentionally adopts a policy of formal equivalence oriented toward Danish–Lutheran semantics and theology, extended biblical quotations and densely scriptural passages in English inevitably risk absorbing syntactic, idiomatic, or phrasal elements from the King James Bible. This phenomenon should be understood not as a conscious theological harmonization toward the KJV tradition, but as a form of linguistic “bleeding through”

arising from the absence of an established English sacred register corresponding to the Danish Bible used by the original authors.

In other words, the AI is not merely translating Danish theological prose into English; they are translating prose that already presupposes a biblical language which English does not, in a strict sense, possess. Where English biblical diction is required at scale, the King James Version remains the dominant inherited idiom available to English readers, and its influence cannot be entirely neutralized without the creation of an entirely new English translation of the Danish Bible itself.

Accordingly, instances of residual KJV phrasing should be read as provisional accommodations to this infrastructural gap rather than as corrections, normalizations, or theological realignments. The Danish–Lutheran Scriptures remain normative for interpretation and intent; the English renderings remain approximations constrained by the limits of the target language. This tension is openly acknowledged and left visible, not concealed, in order to preserve historical honesty and scholarly transparency.

The present volume therefore does not claim to resolve this difficulty, but to document it faithfully. Any future project seeking to eliminate such interference would necessarily require the prior production of a comprehensive English translation of the Danish Bible (1819/1871), capable of supplying a stable, non-KJV biblical register for use in historical and theological translation work.

Forward

With the present volume, the publication of Professor Georg Sverdrup's Selected Collected Writings is brought to its conclusion, in accordance with the plan that was laid when this work was begun nearly four years ago. It may therefore be fitting here to offer a very brief overview of the course of this undertaking.

When Professor Sverdrup, on the 31st of May 1907, after but a single day of illness, was taken away from the field of labor, there was felt—beside the bitter loss occasioned by his death—something deeply sorrowful in the fact that he had not been granted more time for literary pursuits. For he had, though in part already weary, entertained the thought that little by little he might withdraw from the active, enlightening life of the people, in order to devote his final years to the task of arranging and working through the material he possessed, and also of presenting a coherent exposition of the Christian congregation. But God willed it otherwise. For us who yet live, this will always be felt as a great and irreparable loss; yet the Lord knoweth His works, and knoweth that they are the wisest and the best.

When, approximately a year after Professor Sverdrup's death, the undersigned received requests—both from his son, Professor George Sverdrup, Jr., and from other friends—to undertake the publication of his literary remains, the first question concerned the gathering together of all material that might be found. And it is a dear duty to me here to express my sincere thanks to the many who, with goodwill and self-sacrifice, assisted me in this work. After some months of searching, I had assembled approximately six hundred and fifty titles, and had reason to believe that I had secured at least the very greater part. — I have not, however, included here the author's reflections and sermons in "Luthersk" from the years 1884–1890. — When the work of selection was concluded, the entire body of material became the property of the library of Augsburg Seminary.

From this mass of titles there was to be made a selection which could, at the same time, represent the greater part of the material at hand. The limitation thus imposed also came to determine the choice of a common title, which, in a satisfactory manner, contains within itself a self-contradiction: Selected Collected Writings. The work, as it now lies before the reader, comprises approximately four hundred titles.

It was no easy matter, and that it has not always satisfied me, I readily admit. A particular difficulty was also occasioned by the fact that, owing to circumstances, it did not become possible for me to arrive at a final decision concerning the entire selection before publication was begun.

As regards the publication and arrangement otherwise, I had, of course, no directions from the author himself by which to guide me. The only thing I knew was that, in his time, when Pastor O. B. Kristiansen arranged a separate edition of the articles in *The Free Church Fellowship*, he had expressed the wish that attention should be drawn to the dates at which these articles were written, and that they should be reproduced without alterations. This rule I also have followed. In this respect I refer to what I stated in the preface to the first volume, namely, "that no alterations have been made except those of a purely orthographical and typographical nature." For I have considered it right, so far as possible, to employ the linguistic form which the author himself used in the last years before his death. Thus all plural verb forms have been removed, and so forth. On the other hand, I do not consider it advisable that, in a work such as this, principled alterations should be undertaken. There may arise the question whether a particular treatise should be included or not; but there can be no question of altering a man's words, when one no longer has any opportunity of discovering how he himself, in such a case, would have altered them.

By the brief notices with which I have accompanied the various sections, I have sought to provide a faithful picture of the historical circumstances under which the articles came into being. The very limited space which these notices necessarily had at their disposal has, of course, made it unavoidable that they are in many respects highly incomplete. Yet it is my hope that they will at least be of some use, and that in no case will they serve as an obstacle to the understanding of Professor Sverdrup's work.

The present volume contains, as will be seen, essentially missionary reading. I am convinced that the friends of mission will rejoice that the author's reflections on mission are now made available in collected form. Yet I regret that an entire series of sermons and religious meditations could not be given a place within the framework of this work. It is my hope that provision will in due time be made for their publication.

It is to be hoped that the personal and subject index found at the conclusion of this volume, despite all its imperfections, will be of some use to those who in earnest desire to take up the study of Professor Sverdrup's writings. The preparation of such an index has its difficulties, which it is impossible for a man without practice therein fully to overcome, especially when the necessary time for the execution of the work is lacking.

The last time Professor Sverdrup delivered lectures on that part of Christian dogmatics which treats of the congregation, he based these upon a series of "dogmatic paragraphs," which he dictated for the students. Through an oversight these were not included in Volume II, on the Congregation, and are therefore published in this volume (pp. XIII–XVI) as a Supplement.

The brief, concise, and pregnant manner of expression in these paragraphs finds its sufficient explanation in the circumstance that they formed the basic outlines for a longer series of lectures.

In 1892 an agreement was reached with the Norwegian Missionary Society to the effect that the Norwegian Lutherans in America should receive their mission field as their own mission field. (See Volume I, pp. 225 ff.) Professor Sverdrup and Pastor P. A. Rasmussen had been chosen to travel to Norway in order to attend the General Assembly in Stavanger, with the purpose of having this matter advanced. From many statements by Professor Sverdrup—several of which are found in Volume IV of the present work—one will understand how the interest of mission, notwithstanding differences of preference in other respects, drew these two men together. Professor Sverdrup was unable to travel to the General Assembly. But on the 12th of July, 1892, he received from Pastor Rasmussen a brief telegram, a facsimile of which is included in this volume, reporting that the Norwegian Lutherans in America had received as their mission field the region stretching from St. Augustine southward, comprising the two Zanolff tribes and the heathen peoples dwelling south of these. It is known to the editor that Professor Sverdrup regarded this telegram as a treasure, which he valued highly.

In conclusion, only this further word: It is my hope that Professor Sverdrup's collected writings may eventually come to include also a seventh volume. I have envisioned that this should contain, first, a biographical sketch of the author, together with a characterization of his view of life and his fundamental Christian convictions. Next, a selection of letters. There undoubtedly exist not a few such hitherto unknown letters of considerable interest which those closest to Professor Sverdrup have been permitted to receive from him. A suitable selection would be of exceedingly great interest also to the general public. And should there still be room for more, in order to give this volume the same size as the others, there yet remains various material which ought to be published. I hope that there may be found men who are willing to undertake the not easy labor which the publication of a volume with the content here indicated would entail.

Finally, I wish to extend my sincere thanks to all who in various ways have shown their interest in this work. In particular it is a heartfelt need for me to thank Forretnings Boghandel and its manager, Mr. O. A. Sain, who not only made it possible for this relatively large and costly work to be published, but who has also shown me personally an unfailing goodwill and accommodation, which in a significant degree has lightened the labor of publication.

May Professor Sverdrup's collected writings thus become a blessing, as their author himself is.

Augsburg Seminary, the 31st of May, 1912.

Andreas Helland.

Dogmatic Paragraphs on the Congregation

§ 1. To treat the doctrine of the Congregation after the doctrine of the Means of Grace, in such a way that the Congregation would be “the society of men among whom the Means of Grace have had their intended effect” (Communio), does not correspond to the Trinitarian recognition of the coming-into-being of the Congregation, nor does it accord with the individual Christian’s experience of how he himself has been incorporated into the Congregation.

§ 2. The Congregation came into being through a divine act which is part of God’s revelation among men and belongs to the eternal counsel of salvation, which had in view the restoration of the human race from its fall. This divine act consists in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit¹ into the hearts of Jesus’ disciples at the first (Jewish) Feast of Pentecost after Christ’s Ascension. The signs which accompanied the outpouring of the Spirit are such as reveal the nature of the Spirit’s activity and what it proclaims. The storm signifies the mighty power; the tongues of fire, the heavenly light; the foreign tongues, the spread among all peoples.

§ 3. The divine visitation which the outpouring of the Spirit brings upon Jesus’ believing disciples is, according to Jesus’ promise in the Gospel of John, chapters 14–17, the Gospel of Luke 24:49, and Acts 1:4–8, and according to the Trinitarian consciousness of the Spirit’s operation: new, divine life, and new, spiritual light, joined with the corresponding power for action and impulse to bear witness. Grace—the divine life which in its essence is love—and the spiritual light which is truth, proceed from the exalted and transfigured Jesus Christ, with whom the Spirit unites the believing disciples, so that they become His body, and He their Head.

§ 4. The Congregation is therefore, for Trinitarian recognition, a new creation, a new race which once more bears the image of God; yet not a new bodily human race alongside the old, but a renewal of the old race through the forgiveness of sins and the life of the Holy Spirit in the hearts, so that this society lives the renewed human life within the outward conditions of the fallen race, surrounded by sin in the flesh and in the world, and with temporal death as the regular, though not unavoidable, exit from the present world.

§ 5. The congregation, which consists of those who have received the Holy Spirit, consolidates its outward form, reveals itself, and shows itself active and capable of inner and outer growth through the use of the gifts of grace and the means of grace. All have received the same Spirit, but not therefore precisely the same gifts; and thus there arise several different spheres of activity in the congregation through such persons as God has endowed with gifts, and whom the congregation has received through its recognition of those gifts. Of all activity in

¹In the authors’ manuscript there stands “sending forth,” which may perhaps be a scribal error. — Ed.

the congregation, the use of the means of grace—the Word and the Sacraments—is the most significant and, under all historical conditions, necessary for the preservation and growth of the congregation; for which reason also those gifts of grace that qualify for the administration of the means of grace, and quite especially for the proclamation of God’s Word, are those which the congregation esteems most highly and cultivates with special oversight.

§ 6. The activity of the Spirit toward the inner and outer growth of the congregation thus takes place through the gifts of grace and the means of grace; and since order and coherence are required in the congregation’s work within its own midst and in and for the surrounding world, there follows therefrom, of necessity, the organization of the congregation, in order that the work may become as effective as possible and that all members of the congregation may find their place therein.

§ 7. The relation of the means of grace to the congregation consists in this: that through the Word faith in Jesus Christ is created and preserved; through Baptism the believers are received into a communion of life with Jesus Christ, and thereby into His body, the congregation; and through the Lord’s Supper this communion of life between the Lord and the congregation is maintained and preserved.

§ 8. The relation of the congregation to the means of grace consists in this: that the congregation administers them through men whom it elects thereto; in this election the congregation seeks to find those men whom the Lord Himself has equipped with the gifts that are especially required for the proclamation of the Word and the spiritual guidance of the congregation. The inward call to this work thus consists essentially in the gift of grace from God, whereas the outward call consists in the congregation’s election to labor in the specific field. Since no difference of rank takes place among the members of the congregation, neither can the congregation’s election or ordination bring about any such difference, inasmuch as the matter concerns only the distribution of the work among the persons set thereto. The less, therefore, Scripture ascribes to the pastors any rule over the congregation, the more it holds true that all in the congregation are bound to the obedience of faith toward the Lord’s Word.

§ 9. From these outward conditions of the congregation it follows that from the one first congregation there arise many congregations, which nevertheless all together constitute only the one Trinitarian communion on earth that began with the sending of the Holy Spirit; which communion is therefore also in the New Testament called by the same name as the individual congregation (*ekklesia*, namely), whereas we frequently give it the name Church (from *kyrialke*, an adjective with the implied *ekklesia*, meaning “belonging to the Lord”).

This new name, however, must not lead us to the thought that thereby there should be designated a communion which stood above the congregation or possessed a nature different from it.

§ 10. This Christian communion on earth is, despite its division into many congregations, despite the various and in part mutually conflicting confessions, despite the many different ecclesiastical organizations, despite the theological controversies, nevertheless only one; for the unity consists (invisibly) in the one Spirit and the one Lord, together with all the spiritual properties that follow therefrom, and (visibly) in the one and the same Word of God, the one Baptism, the one Supper of the Lord, the common ecumenical confessions, and a multiplicity of lesser and less significant distinguishing marks. The pietistic division of which the history of the Church bears witness is that which occurred at the Reformation, when the opposition to the worldliness of the Church—an opposition which had been present with greater or lesser strength throughout the church history of antiquity and the Middle Ages—became so strong that it brought about a rupture which can only slowly be healed. Yet even this does not abolish the unity of the Church, since the Reformation itself has its roots precisely in the Christian foundation that was present within the Roman Church itself, albeit buried beneath the rubble of many human ordinances.

§ 11. The one Christian communion on earth is holy by reason of the indwelling and activity of the Holy Spirit within it, whereby the believing disciples of Jesus are sanctified in an ever more inward union with the Lord Jesus Christ, while those who have fallen away from the faith are, through the working of the Word and the Spirit upon their obstinate hearts, ripened for the final and unavoidable judgment. The holiness of the Church is therefore not annulled by the participation of hypocrites in the outward congregation.

§ 12. In the Apostolic Creed the Christians also confess faith in the catholicity of the Church, which consists in this, that the Holy Spirit works for the salvation and eternal blessedness of all human beings, and that this missionary activity does not cease until all who are willing to let themselves be saved have been saved, and thus the work of the Gospel and of the Spirit on earth has reached its perfect completion, in that the fallen human race has been restored from its fall, and those who, despite the offer of the Gospel, have resisted the Spirit and grace are excluded from the kingdom of God's eternal glory and from the redeemed human race.

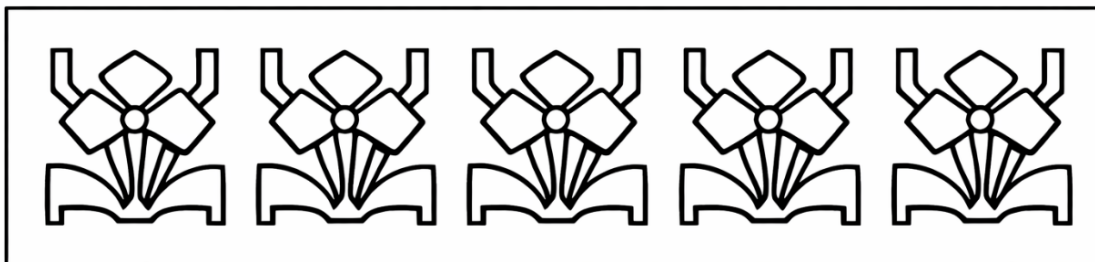
§ 13. The apostolicity of the Church, or the Christian conviction that the congregation remains the same as that which, in the period of New Testament revelation, was built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, rests upon the truth that the coming into being of the congregation, and the whole of its existence and history, are wrought and borne by

the Holy Spirit; and it is recognized by this, that the congregation preserves its agreement with the holy New Testament Scripture, which is the complete and reliable testimony to the nature and reality of the congregation from the very beginning.

§ 14. Since the Church came into being through the outpouring of the Spirit into the hearts of Jesus' Jewish disciples, and since these received from Jesus the command to make all nations his disciples, it became unavoidable that already in apostolic times the question should be raised and decided whether the Church was only a form of the Jewish religious community modified by faith in the true Messiah, and whether therefore the Church was bound by the Law that had been given to the Jews, so that the Church could be recognized only by the observance of Jewish customs and ceremonies. And through the struggle which the resolution of this question required, there was secured for the Christian faith the great result that the Church is a new community, dependent solely upon faith in Jesus Christ and upon the new creation which consists in the Spirit's communication of the new life, so that none of the signs and symbols, customs and ceremonies of the Jewish Law are binding upon the Church, nor, consequently, necessary for salvation. This glorious victory over all demands for the observance of the Law has for the Church in all ages the abiding significance that it is impossible to bind it by such regulations, laws, customs, ceremonies, and the like, as are devised by men, and to make these, or their observance, marks of the one true Church.

§ 15. The question whether the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven is the same as the Church must, in the first place, be answered to the effect that the Church can be the Kingdom of God only upon the earth; and, in the second place, that even when we speak only of the Kingdom of God here upon earth or in the present world, the concept of the Kingdom of God is nevertheless wider than the concept of the Church, inasmuch as it includes not only the life of the Spirit in the hearts, which is the inmost essence of the Church, but also the preparatory and preserving divine government and guidance of the human race, and indeed also the manifold effects of divine revelation in the Gospel outside of and alongside the Church, in the life of the human intellect, in art, science, literature, forms of state, and the like; just as also the great secular transformations which take place in the world, and especially in the historical course of mankind through the coming of Christ, belong under the concept of the Kingdom of God. The relation between the Church and the Kingdom of God upon earth must therefore be determined thus, that the Church is the central life-stream in the Kingdom of God upon earth, alongside of which there are perceived divine workings of Spirit and power which indeed belong to the Kingdom of God, but nevertheless do not serve for the salvation of those who are affected by them, unless they become means to draw them to the Son and to his body, which is the Church. The course of the Church is brought to

its close and fulfillment by the return of Christ and the final judgment, when the Kingdom of Glory, with its rest and blessedness, takes the place of the Church's labor, struggle, and tribulation.



1 Missionary Meditations

The following Missionary Meditations were in their time published in the Lutheran Free Church's mission periodical, "Gaaseren," whose first editor was Professor Sverdrup. It lay greatly upon his heart to lay a good foundation for missionary interest and missionary labor within the home congregation. Therefore he built, with unfailing faithfulness, upon the Word of God. It may therefore with certainty be said that these meditations contain much true missionary wisdom. For this reason, and in the hope that they may prove a welcome addition to the not overly large selection of sound missionary reading both for home and congregation, they are now issued together. In this edition they have been arranged according to the sequence in which the texts employed are found in the Bible.—Ed.

1.1 Be thou a Blessing!

When the Lord said to Abraham: Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will shew thee! And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and be thou a blessing! Gen. 12:1–2.

Abraham is the father of believers, and his faith and walk are for us all an example upon which we are to fix our eyes. All that is said concerning Abraham's calling and obedience therefore has its application to all Christians.

In truth there are only two ways in which a human being can live. And according as he lives in the one way or in the other, his life becomes either a curse or a blessing. It depends upon the heart, from which life proceeds. As Jesus says: A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt.

Now there is, of course, no earnest man or woman who desires to live a life unto curse for himself and for others. When we set ourselves to lay out a plan for our life, we surely do not

resolve to live unto curse. And yet there are many, many people who deceive themselves at this point. They live heedlessly according to their own desire and inclination, which Scripture calls to live after the flesh; and they do not consider that they “reap corruption of the flesh,” both for themselves and for others. They do not take the matter seriously, but imagine that they can live a self-seeking, worldly, and vain life, and then by a few alms to the poor or some gifts to the mission still become a blessing to other people, even though they themselves should become a curse.

But it cannot be so; there is no true blessing in such a life. A worldly and fleshly person cannot, by a few so-called “good works,” restore anything of the harm he does among men by his worldly manner of life and his corrupted disposition. With such people it goes as Jesus says of the Pharisees: they are like whited sepulchres, which outwardly indeed appear beautiful, but within are full of dead men’s bones and of all uncleanness; or they are “like the graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them.”

Therefore it will not do to preach among men and say: Be a blessing! be a blessing! if one does not at the same time show them how they themselves may receive blessing. First we must receive, and then we can give. Without this, all becomes nothing but preaching of the Law, without power to bring forth anything but bondage. For it is the power of the Law that it “gendereth to bondage.” But the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir of the promise unto blessing for the nations; no, the son of the freewoman is the heir; in him shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

It is not altogether free from error that there is a certain misdirection in our work for the heathen mission at this point. There is so much talk of mission offerings, and relatively so little talk of a missionary mind. Hence there easily creeps in the false notion that in the heathen mission one may be a blessing with one’s money, even though one continues unto curse with one’s fleshly life. But if we are to “be a blessing” like Abraham, it is also necessary that we ourselves receive blessing from God. And this is the chief matter, because it is the beginning and the foundation, without which it is impossible to be a blessing.

How, then, can our heart and our life be blessed by God?

This is the question for us all; for only when we ourselves are blessed can we also be a blessing. Only when we become good can we do good; it avails nothing to demand good works from evil men.

We have said that Abraham is our pattern in his faith. And in Abraham’s life and walk we can see the true nature and manner of faith. We cannot be Abraham’s children and at the same time possess a faith that takes shape in a manner different from Abraham’s. But if, in

Abraham, faith so ordered itself that he both lost and gained, both forfeited and received, both let go and was given—then in a like manner it must go with us, if we are to become true children of Abraham and thus a blessing among men.

Abraham had to leave his land and his kindred and his father's house, and go to the land which the Lord would show him.

This is the true beginning for us all who would walk in the footsteps of Abraham and become real and genuine friends of missions. We must bid farewell to the world and to all that is our own. Without the break with the old, there is no room for the new being of faith. The old worldly and fleshly being consists in loving the world and loving oneself, in craving perishable and earthly things and seeking one's own—one's own honor, advantage, and pleasure. This has nothing to do with faith; for faith is a sure conviction of things not seen. Faith occupies itself with the invisible and eternal things. Therefore there is also no salvation or eternal life to be found in visible and earthly things; for the visible things are perishable, and the world passeth away with its lust.

If, then, anyone would belong to Christ and have a share in the kingdom of God and His righteousness, he must bid farewell to the world and to himself, leave all things, and seek salvation by grace alone for Jesus' sake. All our boasting and all our glory, all our delight and all our merit are gone, when we come naked and poor, wretched and miserable, to the Cross, to receive the forgiveness of sins, and through the narrow gate enter upon the difficult way that leadeth unto life.

Thus we set out with Abraham toward the "unknown land," and set our longing upon that which is above in heaven, not upon that which is on the earth. This is faith. And it is well-pleasing unto God when the heart no longer clings to anything earthly, but opens itself toward heaven and toward the spiritual things which the Gospel bears with it: righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Yea, there is joy in heaven when a soul that was on the point of sinking into the cold waves of sin and death lays hold of the lifeboat from heaven in a living faith and dares all upon the Lord's word.

He who thus believes is blessed together with the believing Abraham. And it is precisely this that matters. It is not the first thing to be a blessing; the first thing is to become blessed. All newly converted souls indeed have this in common with one another, that they are eager to be a blessing to others at once, without delay. And it is surely the Spirit of God who works this zeal and longing. Yet not all the newly converted take time to prove themselves, whether they have indeed received the blessing.

Pause therefore here for a little while. The Lord says to Abraham: I will bless thee—and be

thou a blessing. Behold, this is the right order; do not run past it! Think of Peter, who said to the lame man at the gate of the temple: Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee. There are surely some who attempt to give what they do not have. Wait until thou hast received the blessing, before thou seekest to give it.

What then is the blessing that we must receive before we can be a blessing to others? What else can it be than the grace in Christ—the grace which grants forgiveness of sins and makes all things new? Then indeed the old is passed away, when all our sins are forgiven and forgotten, yea, cast into the depths of the sea by God’s merciful grace, and peace is bestowed upon us undisturbed. And then indeed all things have become new, when the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. For how wholly and entirely does not the love of God transform all things in and for a human being! How different does it appear in the heart when it is full of love; how different does it appear all around us when we behold men and life in the light of God’s love. Yea, truly all things are new then—whether it be our nearest ones, or our friends, or our enemies, our countrymen or distant heathen peoples; yea, all is so entirely transformed when God shows it to us in the light of His love.

Then also does a human being become a blessing to his fellow men. Then the light is kindled, and it shines for those who are in the house. And then it is no longer a servile bondage of forced works to spread light and peace and joy among men through God’s Gospel. Nay, it is a great joy of heart to be able to accomplish something for the cause of God’s kingdom on earth, so that ever more may come to taste the peace and the joy in Jesus Christ.

Be a blessing!—this is among the new commandments of which John speaks, which are not grievous, those that are given to the children, but not to the slaves. For God Himself gives the love; and if we truly love, then the commandment is already fulfilled. For he who loves, not with word only, neither with the tongue alone, but in deed and in truth, is already a blessing.

Let us follow in the footsteps of Abraham’s faith; then shall God bless us with true love, and we shall become a blessing also for the heathen peoples. For the mission to the heathen is a work of love, unto which God has called us and equipped us by His own Holy Ghost.

“Gaaseren,” 1901, pp. 194–197.

1.2 The Firm Foundation

In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. Gen. 22:18.

Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. Gal. 3:16.

The mission rests upon a firm and unshakable foundation, upon God's faithful promise, which was spoken to Abraham and his Seed. Deep is this foundation laid; for the promise that was given to Abraham is grounded in that counsel of salvation which God purposed within Himself before the foundation of the world was laid, and which He revealed in the fulness of time in His own Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Long has this foundation already been tested in the history of mankind, without failing or being moved. For the promise was given to Abraham in that most ancient time when the nations were divided, and the Lord suffered them to walk in their own ways after the stubbornness of their evil hearts. The nations turned away from the living God and made themselves idols; they changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Yet God forgot not the nations; He determined for them appointed times and the bounds of their habitation, that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him and find Him. And He also gave the promise to Abraham, that it should, through his lineage, in the people of Israel, and in the fulness of time, meet the need of the Gentile nations, when in the day of their distress they cried unto their idols and received no answer.

Through the two thousand years from Abraham unto Christ the Lord's promise stood as a star shining in the darkness upon Israel's heaven. Storms passed by, and clouds obscured it; yet the star was the same, and when the clouds were gone, it shone again with the same calm and clear light. What the promise had spoken concerning blessing for the nations in Abraham's Seed was repeated and unfolded by the prophets, and ever more strongly and clearly did the divine counsel step forth, the nearer it drew toward the day of its fulfillment.

And the promised Seed of Abraham, who should be for a blessing unto all nations, came—Jesus Christ. The blessed kingdom of grace was founded by His death and resurrection. The middle wall of partition, which stood barring the way between Jews and Gentiles, was broken down. The Name was sent forth; the Gospel, in the very mother tongue of the nations, was laid near to their hearts and called them unto repentance and faith.

Since then the kingdom of God has spread from people to people, and the promise to Abraham is fulfilled continually from day to day. It is God's eternal thought of peace with mankind that is being realized through the work of His Spirit and of His Church in the Gospel. For these are the days in which "the Spirit and the Bride say, Come! and let him that heareth say, Come!" God's Church and each individual believer are "God's fellow workers" in bringing

forward that glorious day when the Gospel shall sound from sea to sea, among all peoples, unto the ends of the earth.

In this manner the Seed of Abraham becomes a blessing unto all nations. For there is no greater gift that can be rendered to the nations than the Gospel, which is a savour of life unto life for every one that believeth, and the kingdom of God, which is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Also in our missionary work in Madagascar it is the chief matter to build with full confidence upon this tried, divine promise. It has stood its test now for nearly four thousand years, since the day it was given to Abraham. It has proved its truth despite all the objections of unbelief and the mockery of men. Christ's suffering shall have its reward, and His resurrection from the dead shall prove its victorious power. We may labor in perfect security, if we build our missionary work upon the immovable rock of the promise.

It is therefore the first greeting which our missionary journal desires to bring to its readers: Believe the promise, hold fast to it! Let all labor for the salvation of the Gentiles rest upon it. Only thus does the work become a work of God, in which His children are His instruments, whom He employs in His service for the salvation of souls. And only thus may we be fully assured that the work shall succeed, since it stands fast: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed"—and this seed of Abraham is Jesus Christ, who in and through His Gospel comes to souls as the Bread from heaven that giveth life unto the world.

Brethren and Sisters! it is a great and glorious calling to have a share in the work of the fulfillment of God's counsel of salvation in the world. God will take us into His service as His fellow workers, that the Gospel may reach unto the ends of the earth. Eternal life and blessedness, and a fullness of blessings that follow therewith, the Lord will through His Church spread abroad over the earth among the wandering Gentiles. Us He calls to be His instruments. Shall we not all be obedient to His call and take up the work He entrusts to us with strength and zeal?

The Lord grant that none of those who have experienced the power of Christ's death upon their heart may stand idle and inactive, when the Lord calls to manly deed and vigorous labor!

"Gaaseren," 1900, pp. 2–4.

1.3 Seed With Tears

They that sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy. They go forth and weep, bearing the seed that they scatter; they shall come home with shouts of joy, bearing their sheaves. Psalm 126:5–6.

These two verses of the Psalm lay down, simply and powerfully, the law for all spiritual life upon earth—most assuredly also for the work of missions. Yet we find it so difficult to appropriate this law that, although we hear it often and say it frequently—that seed sown in tears brings a harvest of joy—we are nevertheless each time equally discouraged and fainthearted when sorrow and distress press tears from our eyes.

It ought not to be so. Or does the farmer lose heart when the heavens darken over the newly sown field? When the clouds gather and stand like a threatening wall, when the storm breaks loose and sweeps on mighty wings across the fields? When the rain drips from heaven, first drop by drop, then thicker and thicker, until it pours down like a flood? Is it then that the farmer trembles with fear and thinks that all his labor has been in vain, that nothing but famine awaits him and his household? Ah no. He may indeed keep himself sheltered on the day of the storm, but through the window he gazes out, and his heart quivers with joy when he sees that the seed is being thoroughly soaked by the rain of heaven. Then he says with David: “Thou hast visited the earth and watered it; thou greatly enrichest it; the river of God is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly, thou settlest the furrows thereof: thou makest it soft with showers, thou blessest the springing thereof.”

As rain in the spring, so are sorrow and tears in the work of God’s Kingdom. Therefore, just as the farmer fears the clear sky and the unceasing sunshine once the seed has come into the ground, so also those who labor in God’s Kingdom ought to fear it when the beginning is bright and clear and everything succeeds at the first word. Deep must the ground be broken, and sore must suffering be endured, before golden fruit crowns the labor in God’s Kingdom.

All spiritual life among us, the whole blessed harvest of God’s Kingdom upon the great, broad field of the people and within the small, poor hearts of men, is altogether formed from the seed of pain which Jesus laid down through His suffering and death. All salvation for souls is a fruit of the heavy sufferings of Jesus Christ. As the psalmist says: “What Thou hast ploughed with such heaviness has become for us a harvest of joy.” It looked dark indeed, and it was immeasurable pain for Jesus when He was to become the grain of wheat that must be cast into the earth and die. “With strong crying and tears,” Scripture says, He offered up prayers and humble supplications in Gethsemane unto Him who was able to save Him

from death. “And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly: and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” In such torment and tears Jesus became the seed-corn that was to bear life and blessedness for a lost race of mankind. But because He poured out His soul unto death and held nothing back from any suffering, therefore God has given Him glory and exaltation and made Him a Savior for a multitude which no man can number, who shall eternally praise His Name, because He suffered and strove and conquered in the anguish of death.

And as it is with Jesus and the salvation that is in Him—that the great harvest of joy has come forth from the great sowing of suffering—so it is also with each and every one of us who now praise God for salvation and life. We did not win salvation in bliss and gladness. Experience shows far more the truth of that word which the Lord speaks: Woe unto you that laugh now, for ye shall mourn and weep. From the sowing of laughter and bliss there grows bitter sorrow and everlasting torment.

Neither did we win salvation by labor and toil, by vigorous struggle and glittering crowns of victory. It availed nothing unto salvation that much work was done and much was renounced and even much was prayed, so long as our own power was not broken and our own strength not shattered. The Christian life does not begin with the victory of the natural powers, but with their total defeat. And it is a day of weeping and sorrow when a strong man is bowed to his knees by sorrow for sin and by consciousness of guilt. Yet it is a good day, because it is the springtime—the day of spiritual spring—on which the living seed of God’s Word sinks deep into the soil of the heart and finds a well-prepared place where it may grow.

Far otherwise are the evil days for a man when all seems light and joy, when fortune smiles and wealth increases, and the smile of self-satisfaction spreads across a fat face. These are the days of spiritual drought, when spiritual life withers away and disappears, and a man ripens for the fire.

There must be spiritual humility of heart in order to receive the help of God’s grace and love; there must be brokenness in order to experience God’s healing. Therefore every Christian has a thorough experience of this precious word: They that sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy.

But notwithstanding that we have these things so clear and incontrovertible to our consciousness; notwithstanding that we see it so plainly, both in the whole laying of the foundation of salvation through Jesus, and in the individual soul’s experience of salvation, that only those who begin with weeping can complete their course with joy—yet it is nevertheless so difficult to reconcile ourselves to this, that the Law is the same also for all true labour in the

Kingdom of God. It must begin with birth-pain and travail, if it is to attain unto the power of life and the joy that follows therefrom.

This applies not least to the work of Gentile missions. For it is nothing other than to lay the grain of wheat, Jesus Christ, into new soil, where it had not previously been sown. It is nothing other than that new life is created in the hearts of lost sinners through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Can this take place without pain? Can it happen without a rain of tears?

No, of that there can be no question. Suffering must come; both the Christians who bear the Gospel out to the Gentiles, and the Gentiles who receive the Gospel among themselves, must suffer distress and tribulation, if the Kingdom of God is truly to be planted in new ground. He who preaches Christ among the Gentiles must suffer; for he is a warrior who advances against the devil's strong fortresses. The Gentiles among whom the Kingdom of God is planted must suffer; for their strength is broken and their dominion taken from them, when the idols are overthrown and Christ is enthroned among them.

When Paul was called to be apostle to the Gentiles, the Lord says of him: "He is to me a chosen vessel, to bear my Name before Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for my Name's sake." And was it not abundantly fulfilled in Paul, that which was spoken concerning suffering? Hear how he himself bears witness thereto, when, as he says, he "speaks in foolishness":

I have laboured more abundantly, received more stripes, been imprisoned more often, been oft in peril of death. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned; thrice I suffered shipwreck; a night and a day have I been in the deep. In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils from my own countrymen, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in labour and toil, often in watchings, in hunger and thirst, often in fastings, in cold and nakedness; beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the pressure of concern for all the congregations.

And the Gentiles among whom the Gospel was first spread—what shall we say of them and of their suffering? These bleeding congregations on the one hand, how unspeakably must they not have suffered year after year, century after century? If the Church was founded by the death of the Saviour, then surely its roots were watered with the blood of martyrs. Bloody was the dawn of the congregation, and tear-bedewed were its tender shoots. No wonder that it grew quickly and flourished well and spread far and wide.

—And on the other hand, who can portray or paint the sufferings of those who set themselves

against the Gospel? The Roman Empire and its heathenism sank into ruin under the most violent and dreadful tribulations. It is not possible to defy the Lord and His goodness without judgment coming; for where the carcase is, there will the vultures be gathered together.

And in the most recent times we have the example of China. The world studies with horror the scenes which China's latest mission history sets before us. Blood and tears moisten page after page of this history. Missionaries and native Christians—tortured, abused, beaten to death—until their number and their agonies call to mind the terrors of the ancient persecutions of the Christians. And heathen Chinese—slaughtered, burned in their houses, beheaded, driven to suicide; thousands and yet thousands of them have become the prey of death because of the conflict between darkness and light.

But just as the Roman Empire was permeated by the Gospel through many and long tribulations, so it shall now go with the Chinese Empire. Its walls are burst and fallen, and the Gospel of Christ can no longer be kept out. The seed is already growing in many places, and the harvest will come richly blessed through the tribulations. Much yet remains to be suffered; but the outcome is sure; for they that sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy.

It is therefore right to hope for good when one suffers evil in the work of God's kingdom. And what is said of all such work applies also to our little mission work in Madagascar. It has had its tribulations, and many tears have flowed also over this work. Sorrow and distress have followed it and follow it still. But that is no reason to lose heart. It must have its springtime with showers and storms over the seed. We must grieve over our losses, but we must be bold in our work and in our tribulations; for it is the Lord's way.

Now we go and weep, bearing the seed which we scatter; let us be faithful therein. That is the right way to sow. Only that which is sown in this manner will bear good fruit. Therefore, while we suffer, let us be glad in hope; for the day comes when he that sowed with tears shall come home with shouts of joy, bearing his sheaves.

“Gaaseren,” 1902, pp. 33–37.

1.4 The Worth of the Mission

“The little one shall become a thousand, and the small one a mighty nation; I, the LORD, will hasten it in its time.” Isa. 60:22.

There are many who think that the mission to the heathen goes forward but slowly. And they make use of this as an excuse for their own sloth and indifference. Properly, this very circumstance—that it goes slowly—ought rather to have the effect upon them that they

labored with so much the greater zeal; but they take it in an altogether different manner and suppose that, when it goes so slowly, the whole work is of no consequence; it never truly advances in any case. At times some of these secret opponents of the mission deal quite foolishly with their contemplation of its slow progress and assert that it is simply an impossibility that the heathen should be converted; for, say they, there are born each year many more heathen than are baptized from among them; therefore the number of heathen increases far more rapidly than the number of heathen Christians, and thus it goes according to the old rule, that when he who goes before moves faster than he who follows after, the latter cannot overtake the former.

This objection against the mission to the heathen is at present very much in fashion and does great harm by dulling and blunting spiritual interest. It is therefore salutary to consider it and to see how much it truly amounts to.

Viewed from one side, a Christian will at once perceive that it is altogether wrong to listen to such talk. For so long as there is even one heathen who turns to God and has his soul saved through faith in Jesus Christ, so long is there yield enough from the mission to the heathen, even if it were to cost far more in human lives and money than it now costs. Or is not a soul worth more than “the whole world”? If God’s Son gave His life for us, why should not we give our life for Him?

But it is not the intent and promise of the mission merely that now and then a single heathen soul should be saved through the preaching of the Gospel. It is truly promised that the Kingdom of God shall be spread from sea to sea, wherever men dwell, and that the peoples, the nations, shall be received into it and find salvation and peace. All readers of the Bible know that such are the promises, and such also is the Lord’s command concerning the work which He desires to have carried out by His disciples. Therefore there lies in this manner of speech a temptation of unbelief: It avails nothing to engage in mission, for the heathen peoples increase more rapidly than the congregation. For the Lord has promised that the Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached unto all nations, and that the Gentiles shall glorify God for His mercy’s sake. If anyone therefore says that it is impossible to Christianize the peoples, he makes God a liar and denies the faithfulness of His promise.

The work of missions therefore aims not merely at gaining a soul saved here or there, but at gathering congregations of converted Gentiles who carry on the same ministry with the Word and the Sacraments as is now common in the so-called Christian lands. And it is this latter aim which unbelief holds to be impossible according to statistical calculations.

But God’s way of reckoning is not as the way of men. When the scoffers come with their

reckoning of time and say, Where is the promise of His coming? then He answers: But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. — And when the scoffers come with their statistics and censuses and say, It goes too slowly; the Kingdom of God will never reach unto the ends of the earth; then the Lord answers: The little one shall become a thousand, and the small one a mighty nation; I, the Lord, will hasten it in its time.

In other words, human calculations and human statistics do not accord with the Lord's way of advancing His work. At times it sounds to us as though the Lord's way and manner were precisely the opposite of our own.

Take, for example, Jesus' manner of working in His last days.

When His following began to grow, and many joined themselves to Him; when He began to become "popular" through mighty works and authoritative power of His words; when the crowds grew great and would have made Him king—then He not only withdrew and vanished from the enthusiastic multitude, but He even returned to the people and spoke "hard words" to them, so that they turned away from Him and would follow Him no longer. And so strong did this movement away from Jesus become that He even asked the Twelve: Will ye also go away?—and yet He was fully resolved upon this, to "draw all unto Himself." And in order to accomplish this, He thus drove all from Him, in that He went so deeply into shame and suffering that none were with Him and none dared to follow Him; "they all forsook Him, and fled," says Mark. But Jesus went into humiliation and suffering and death alone, that He might become the grain of wheat which falls into the earth and dies, that it may bear much fruit. And when He then rose from the dead and ascended into heaven and sent the Spirit upon the disciples, then the multitude grew in wondrous wise according to the Lord's good pleasure, and the prophetic word was fulfilled which says: The little one shall become a thousand, and the small one a mighty nation; I the LORD will hasten it in its time.

This is the Lord's way. He does not always increase the strength of His host by adding; often He multiplies its power by taking away. Who does not remember Gideon's army of two and thirty thousand men, of whom the LORD said: The people that are with thee are too many? And they were not few enough until they were but a mere three hundred men; then the victory was theirs.

This manner of the Lord's working has revealed itself again and again in the history of missions. He lets His servants labor long; He wearies them; He lets them die upon the mission field without seeing visible results by human measure. But when the seed has vanished into the earth and been moistened with tears, at times with blood, then it sprouts; and one day

there comes shoot upon shoot and blade upon blade, and the whole field grows green at once, so that it is a wonder before our eyes of life and nourishment.

It is not one mission, but it is well-nigh all missions, that have this experience: that the first beginning was small, poor, almost despairing. It seemed impossible to reach the hearts of the people. They would hear with the ears, none—or almost none—with the heart. Year after year passed; no change showed itself. Hope was awakened and again extinguished. When then all patience was on the point of breaking, the turning came: one soul sought the Lord until it found Him as its Savior; the first heathen was baptized. And from that hour, things changed. One came, and again another; many, and still more, came and sought salvation in that atonement which is in Jesus Christ. And the little one became a thousand, and the small one a mighty nation.

Concerning the Livingstone Mission in Central Africa it is related that it required six years of labor before a single heathen was baptized. When it was nine years old, it had nine baptized, believing members of the congregation. Now it is twenty-seven years old, and more than fifteen hundred have been baptized, and there are thousands in instruction for baptism.

And from other mission fields there come reports of the same kind. How then can it be said that it is impossible for Christianity to overcome heathenism? If it goes slowly in the beginning, it goes all the faster once it has gained momentum. Those who reckon that more heathens are born than are baptized—what good it their reckoning when the fire of revival begins to burn, as now in Madagascar, and the Lord burns up both heathenism and the reckonings?

There is only the one thing that matters: faith. It holds fast to the divine promise; it goes straight forward with its gaze fixed upon the shining star of the promise, and whether one predicts for it good or ill, it is steadfast in its purpose. When the Lord's hour comes, then it goes in every place and among every heathen people as He Himself has said: The little one shall become a thousand, and the small one a mighty nation; I, the Lord, will hasten it in its time.

“Basleren,” 1902, pp. 97–100.

1.5 A Year of Grace from the Lord

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim

the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn. Isa. 61:1–2.

There cannot be the Spirit of God in a human being without there arising life and labor—most especially that labor which is portrayed in the two foregoing verses of the sixty-first chapter of the prophet Isaiah. And this, indeed, is precisely what is called missionary work.

But now it is also thus: no human being can be a Christian, and no society or fellowship can be a congregation, unless it has the Spirit of God. For no one is a Christian who does not have faith; yet no one has faith unless it is wrought by the Holy Spirit; and no fellowship is the Body of Christ, which is the congregation, unless by the Holy Spirit it is united with the Head, who is Christ.

If, therefore, anyone confesses himself to be a Christian, or if a gathering of people confesses itself to be a congregation, then let them reflect upon their calling and their task. The prophet Isaiah here paints it gloriously, both for the individual and for the congregation.

Begin with the beginning! In all things this is important, but most of all in Christian matters. What is required is to be able to say in truth: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD hath anointed me.”

Have we the Spirit of the Lord GOD? Are we anointed of the Lord? For only he has the Spirit of the Lord who is anointed of the Lord. In this respect it is true: of thyself thou canst take nothing; all thou canst receive from God. And again: it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.

Therefore it is not for us a question of new resolutions and new promises on New Year’s Day. It is a question of the Spirit of God and the power of God. And we cannot put this question away from us by saying that we cannot reach so high or grasp so far, that it is impossible to attain unto the Spirit of God. For the Spirit of God is given freely and without price from God. Yea, more than this: the Spirit of God works upon our hearts in order to enter in, knocks at the door of the heart to have it opened. We can receive the Spirit of God if we open to him and give him room.

If we have used Christmas and the Christmas Gospel rightly, then it should be so with us now at the New Year that we could in truth say: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD hath anointed me.” For no other means are required in order to receive the Spirit from God than precisely that blessed Gospel of the Savior who is born in Bethlehem. There is Spirit to be received at Christ’s manger. Hast thou been with the shepherds in Bethlehem and seen “this thing which is come to pass”? Hast thou, with the aged Simeon

in the temple, “taken the child into thine arms”? Then thou hast also experienced what “the unspeakable gift of God” is, and thou hast been laid hold of by God’s love toward poor human beings, and hast learned to praise the Lord, who in his Son has given us eternal life.

But then thou hast received the Spirit from God. Then thou art anointed of the Lord. For this anointing is precisely the love of God poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who is given unto us.

Hast thou then truly this Anointing from God? Doth this Fire burn in thy heart? Hast thou received a coal of fire upon thy tongue, so that thou canst praise God and speak of all His great works?

Perhaps thou sayest, No. And perhaps thou addest, that thou hast no thought of becoming either preacher or missionary, and therefore hast no need of such a gift of the Spirit? But thou art mistaken, if thou thinkest this to be any excuse, as though the Spirit of God were appointed only for some Christians and not for others. Thou must have the Spirit of God, if thou wilt be saved. Thou must have the Spirit, if thou wilt belong to the Lord. Thou must have the Spirit, if thou wilt be blessed and receive the crown of life. Thou knowest indeed that there are differences of gifts of grace, but the Spirit is the same. All Christians must have the Spirit; for “as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” The Spirit is the pledge of our redemption, and only they who have the pledge shall be able to attain the eternal redemption.

If therefore there be any who still have not the Spirit of the Lord of lords, for him the true New Year hath not yet begun. He is not fit to perform the work that belongeth to the anointed. He can receive no better counsel than this: Make haste to get oil in thy lamp! Thou mayest perhaps hold it in thy hand, but it shineth not; nor can it be made to burn, though thou shake it and apply a spark to it; there is no oil. Therefore make haste to go to the Lord in the Word, that thou mayest receive of His Spirit; then shalt thou have a light unto thy path and a lamp unto thy foot, that thou thyself mayest walk in the light; and then shalt thou also be able to lift the light on high, that it may become for others a benefit and a joy.

First and above all, therefore, we pray for this: that all our readers will sincerely prove themselves, whether they indeed are new men, led by the Spirit of God, who walk in the light and have fellowship one with another, and not with one another only, but also with the Father and the Son. Then shall we also experience this, that the year shall become unto us a new year of grace from the Lord, and from day to day the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, shall cleanse us from all sin.

Thus comes the Call. For the Spirit is a spiritual driving power which unceasingly urges forward the cause of the Kingdom of God and takes into His service all those whose hearts He fills with the love of God. If we are driven by the Spirit of God, then the love of Christ constrains us to go where the Lord sends us, and to perform what He commands us.

And if we are to sum up all that the Lord commands us in a single word, then it is this: Mission. For this, at least for our part, is what we mean by Mission, as Isaiah says: “to preach good tidings unto the meek; to bind up the brokenhearted; to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn.”

Yes, you will say, but this is the work of Jesus that is here described! Yes, it is; but are not the followers of Jesus to do the works of Jesus? Most certainly; He says it Himself: Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto My Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in My Name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

There is a real and living connection between Jesus and His believers. He sits at the right hand of the Father in glory, and His disciples are here below on earth in the Church militant; but the Spirit ascends, and the Spirit of God is sent down, and with the Spirit there follows light and power to do the work of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ upon the earth.

The New Year which we celebrate reminds us in a special way of this one thing which in truth comprehends all: “to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” This means first and foremost that now is the time to preach the Gospel upon the earth; and so long as the Gospel is preached, and as often as it is preached, it shall sound with the voice of a mighty trumpet among the peoples: Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation! Yes, precisely now; for the Gospel is preached precisely when God wills, and precisely where God wills. And He wills nothing else thereby than to save sinners and to make them citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Therefore we dare so boldly to proclaim the Year of Grace also this year. For still there is time, and still there is room for all who hear the Gospel to be saved and made blessed, to come home to the Father’s house, to become guests at the great Supper and at the wedding table of the King’s Son.

And precisely now the opportunity is so good and the doors so open, that it would be a fearful responsibility not to make use of the opportunity. Already missionaries are able to go forth, already the languages of the peoples are known and the Bible translated into their mother tongues. Truly it is high time that we awake and go forward with might against Satan’s

strongholds and the fortresses of darkness. The Lord calls upon His host and commands it to go forth into the battle for the Kingdom of Light and for the cause of peace. What else are we Christians for, if not to follow the Lord's call and to spread His Kingdom and His Gospel? Is not this our calling, is not this our task? At home and abroad it is the salvation of souls, eternal life, glory with God, which is the goal of every Christian's life and labor.

Dear brothers and sisters! Pray the Lord for the Spirit, that He may in truth come upon us to drive us to proclaim the Year of Grace for poor heathen. They sit in bonds and imprisonment, under the oppressive yoke of heathendom; it is a blessed work to proclaim liberty to these captives of death and the opening of the prison to those bound by Satan. Therefore be with us with renewed earnestness, with greater steadfastness and perseverance! Let no day in the new year pass by without thought of the mission, without prayer for it! If we truly become a missionary people by the mighty assistance of God's Spirit, not by the strength of our own resolutions, then we ourselves shall be blessed by the Lord, and He Himself will set us to be a blessing upon the earth.

Our life is not long, and the fleeting years remind us of the accounting we must soon render, from time into eternity. Would it not be good to make use of the few fleeting days we have for labor for the eternal Kingdom which is never shaken, the Kingdom of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Basleren,” 1902, pp. 1–5.

1.6 The way of the Lord

And all the trees of the field shall know that I the LORD have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the LORD have spoken and have done it. Ezekiel 17:24.

This word of Ezekiel is a prophecy concerning the way of the LORD with the Messiah and the salvation that is in Him.

The Messiah was “a tender shoot from the topmost twig of the lofty cedar,” as Ezekiel expresses it. The lofty cedar is a designation of the house of David, and its uppermost twig is an image of the last descendants of the royal line. This tender shoot, says Ezekiel, the LORD planted upon the high mountain of Israel; and it bore branches and brought forth fruit and became a glorious cedar, in which the birds of heaven found their dwelling.

It came to pass contrary to all expectation. The LORD brought down the high and exalted the low; for emperors fell, and kingdoms were overthrown; yet the lowly man from Nazareth,

the despised shoot from the stem of Jesse, founded the kingdom which stands for ever, and of which there shall be no end. Thus the LORD willed it to be; for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of the LORD. He takes pleasure in choosing that which is nothing, in order to put to shame that which is something.

Therefore He whom scoffers called “the carpenter’s son” has received a greater kingdom than any other, and from day to day the kingdom advances and makes men blessed children of God.

And as it was with the Messiah, so it is with His people. As with Jesus, so with His Church. She too was as an scorned offshoot and a stumbling stone in the eyes of the world, when she stood forsaken by all in a hostile world that surrounded her on every side. Yet the LORD, who had ascended into heaven from her, had not forsaken her. And when the world would trample down the Church, slay her with the sword, burn her with fire, destroy her at any cost, then this word of the LORD sounded in her midst:

Fear not, O Israel: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour.

Once again it has proved true that the Lord maketh the high tree low and the low tree high; for the great and mighty societies of men have fallen, but the Lord has spread abroad and exalted His lowly congregation, so that from Jerusalem it has come even unto the uttermost ends of the earth.

And as with the congregation, so also with the individual. In the case of the poor, wretched sinner who is saved by grace alone, it is shown most gloriously that the Lord is He who maketh the dry tree green, while He maketh a green tree dry. For many a false Pharisee, who had no need of a physician, has become the prey of death, while sinners and publicans have received life through the faith of the Son of God.

Verily, God is a wondrous God, and His judgments are unsearchable, and His ways past finding out!

When therefore we ask whether the Lord has any use for us in the service of His kingdom, in its victorious course over the earth, we ought to note this, both for our comfort and for our humiliation, that this is a question not of whether we are great enough, but whether we are small enough; not of whether we are rich enough, but whether we are poor enough.

For the Lord cannot use others as His true servants and instruments than those who are so incapable in themselves that they will receive the sufficiency which is of God, which He gives by His Spirit. Only when the Lord Himself is allowed to fashion His instrument does the instrument become fit for His work. True it is that the Lord also uses the rebellious and proud powers of the world in His service; but it is against their will, and therefore they are used as bondservants, and “the bondservant abideth not in the house forever.” No, the Lord’s true handmaiden is His little congregation, His small believing children. They are small enough that the Lord can use them; were they great, they would glory in themselves and exalt their own name instead of the Lord’s.

This wondrous way of the Lord also gives us hope for our mission and for the heathen among whom the Lord has set us to labor. Verily, in our corner of the vineyard there grows only a low tree. So dead and dry is the heathen people to whom the Lord has sent us. Is it therefore in vain to labor? Yes, if we do our own work with our own power, then it is indeed beforehand certain that we labor in vain and can accomplish nothing. But the arm of the Lord is not shortened, and His hands have not become powerless. He can still make “a dry tree green,” and He will do it. Let us only “longing after the Lord, abide in the Lord our Savior.” For He is still the same and still walks the same wondrous way.

Only patience on our part! Listen not to the many unbelieving voices that sound around us, and perhaps even within us: There is nothing to be done in South Madagascar; the climate is so deadly, the people stand so low, it is of no use. Indeed it is of use; for the Lord will make “a low tree high,” that His name may be honored and made known among the peoples. Already we have seen the great works of the Lord on our mission field, and the Lord will yet further reveal Himself gloriously. Let us continue in prayer and faith, and the Lord shall yet create life out of the dead and build His congregation also in the darkest regions of Madagascar, to which He has sent us with the light of the Gospel.

— “Basleren,” 1902, pp. 129–131