



Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt

the hidden christ

The **Hidden Christ:**

Taking the Gospel into the World

by Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt

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Introduction

Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt was an embarrassment to Christians and non-Christians alike. Though a Lutheran pastor in Bad Boll, Germany, he was not at home either in church or secular circles, where his views seemed to challenge and disconcert everyone. And yet he possessed a strange, infectious confidence in God's history.

Richard Wilhelm was one of many who were greatly influenced by Blumhardt's fiery conviction that the advancement of God's kingdom—its here-and-now actualization—must take precedence over all else. When Wilhelm set out on the difficult path of becoming a missionary in China he was already closely involved with Blumhardt. During his short service as an assistant pastor in Boll, Wilhelm had been deeply moved and gripped by this spirit-filled man of faith. He went on to marry Blumhardt's daughter Salome. So it was of special significance to Blumhardt that Wilhelm and his wife were sent to China. To him they were, above all, envoys of God's kingdom — a cause far greater than what was expected of missionaries.

In May 1899 the General Evangelical-Protestant Missionary Society (Far East) assigned Wilhelm the

territory of Kiaochow, on China's Yellow Sea. Under European duress, China had been forced to cede this area to Germany on a ninety-nine-year lease. As a missionary pastor in Tsingtao (fast becoming a flourishing colonial city), Wilhelm was assigned a threefold task: to be a pastor, spread Christianity among the Chinese, and promote understanding between China and Germany.

Thanks to Blumhardt's influence, however, Wilhelm viewed the Missionary Society, of which he was formally a part, as merely an outward instrument serving the higher purpose of God's kingdom. He was neither interested in traditional mission nor in representing Germany. He wanted something entirely new.

Blumhardt, for his part, felt a special responsibility for the work of his son-in-law, whom he had so obviously influenced. This motivated Blumhardt to write numerous letters—one hundred and twenty-three in all—to Wilhelm between 1898-1914. What follows are extracts, thematically arranged, from these letters. Full of hearty warmth, Blumhardt's words radiate a fatherly care, even as they voice a battle cry for authentic Christian witness.

Blumhardt's unwavering belief in the living Christ as Lord over all is the thread that runs through these letters. As Blumhardt saw it, Jesus claims the *whole*

world for his own, not just the Christian world. No one is separated from Christ—neither the “unchurched” nor the “heathen,” and especially not the oppressed. On the contrary, the will and purpose of the common person who strives for justice, and the insights and longings of non-Christian peoples, originate in the will of God himself.

What, then, was Wilhelm’s task in China? It was to carry into the world, particularly the non-Christian world, “the gospel of Jesus Christ, not the gospel of the Christians.”

In what follows the reader will discover more precisely the difference between these two gospels. Suffice it to say that the “gospel of the Christians” has little or nothing to do with the message of Christ. Jesus did not come to found churches, defined by doctrine or ritual, but to set in motion a movement of the Spirit that would encompass nations and lead to peace and social justice. For Blumhardt, the “gospel of Jesus Christ” has nothing to do with Christianity, Buddhism, or any other religion. “No longer religion against religion, but justice against sin, life against death.”

Blumhardt’s understanding of Christian witness flew in the face of the concept of mission held by typical mission societies. New ways had to be sought; the

thoughts printed here are a direct expression of that search for fresh paths.

His words lack polish. Blumhardt clearly writes from a passionately moved heart, hastily jotting down thoughts with little regard for the choice of words or the skillful marshalling of ideas. Theologically, too, there are many points over which one could take issue. But Blumhardt never claimed to be a systematic thinker. In fact, many central assertions seem to have no clear inner connection, and even a remarkable duality, especially with problems involving the institutional church and the Church of Christ, Christians and non-Christians, testimony by word and testimony by deed.

Nevertheless, the reader who knows what it means to stand one's ground in the stream of the world will find no manufactured truths, no artificial musings. For Blumhardt it was a matter of daring something in faith, of experimenting, and of finding new ways for God's kingdom to advance. His concern was that the gospel of Christ be brought to nations and peoples in a true way, opening instead of closing doors.

Influenced by Blumhardt's down-to-earth message, Richard Wilhelm focused his efforts on improving the Chinese standard of living. This included establishing

schools and developing hospitals. Conflicts with the Missionary Society were inevitable. Unlike his peers, Wilhelm was simply not interested in propagating the “Christian religion” among non-Christians. Like Blumhardt, he viewed the noble manifestations of other religions without prejudice, even with reverence for God’s work.

Admittedly, this sounds like the perfect recipe for syncretism, with Jesus’ truth reduced to just one of many manifestations of religious truth. It is clear from his letters, however, that Blumhardt emphasizes the gospel of the kingdom—the revelation of God—as the truth that fulfills all religion.

Blumhardt believed in the advancement of God’s new creation “beneath the surface, in quiet, hidden ways.” He held that in the midst of the storm and stress of world history, there have always been clearly recognizable signs of this clandestine advance. In an increasingly pluralistic world, the insights contained in these pages can help us see the signs that are visible today—provided we are willing to have our conventional ideas challenged, and our horizons broadened.

The Editors
2003

1. The Kingdom of God

The kingdom of God has little in common with the world's religions. God only reveals himself as the one, holy God through the deeds of the Spirit, which no amount of piety or learning can replace. Our hope lies in the fact that Jesus, the son of God, lives in the world, not above it, even if he remains inconspicuous.

The Risen One wants to draw people to himself, and so propaganda for a particular confession of faith is no concern of his. You must stand up and represent the gospel that shines for all people, no matter who they are.

Never forget that Jesus comes from and for the lowly; it is from their vantage point that he will illuminate the world. The expectation of redemption, the healing of societies and nations, the longing for God to bring about his heavenly kingdom on earth, the hope that the masters of capital will cease treating the masses as slaves—all this will unite us with the hearts of the humble and downtrodden. They will understand what

we mean by God's kingdom, even if they have never sought him.

As I see it, God's wrath sweeps over Christendom precisely because a proud European culture and pious Christianity has been pushed onto these people, while at the same time they are despised. To forget that all of us belong to God—whether people call us heathen or Christian—is nothing but hardheartedness and darkness and stems from a lying spirit. The whole of European civilization is tainted, much as the Romans were with their Caesars, regarding the rest of the world as dirt or as an opportunity for exploitation.

How can this go on? God must intervene and open our eyes; that is the only help I know of. The Ruler of this world should not be allowed any more victories. He has trampled emerging humankind into the muck a hundred times already. He must no longer be allowed to do this.



We can accomplish nothing for God's kingdom on the basis of human strength. All we can say is that "we are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty" (Luke 17:10). Jesus empowers the workers in his vineyard to overcome the world. It is not we who do it, but the Spirit, who acts in and through us and before whom all

other spirits must bow. This is what you will experience when hearts turn to you. See to it, then, that God alone works. God is like the sun that sends its rays everywhere, even into the grimmest places.

Whatever you do, don't deliver the work of God into the grasping clutches of religious or political institutions. We can only expect a victory over established "Christianity" through the movement of life and yearning in the masses. God will give us the hearts of the people, and then our false Christian idols will collapse.

Until now the intellectual and spiritual striving of religious leaders has left the material life of the people in the night of helplessness and sin. The world has been dragging along, with no shortage of intelligence, and just as much moral decay. But this is a new time! The spirit of truth, the righteousness of the kingdom, seeks to enter into material, political, social, and industrial life. God seeks to lay the foundation for genuine knowledge. Politics, and all that goes with it, must submit to the will of God.

God's kingdom takes hold of the earth. His way is to establish the practical, material side of life first; then spiritual life takes effect. This way puts power under our feet, without which our efforts at spiritual work can have no effect and only place us at the mercy of every wind that blows. A spiritual framework must come into

being, but it must come out of the natural life of the people; then the good news of God's rulership can be preached with a strength that puts it into practice.

I pray that the Chinese are led onto the right path—a free and godly path, not that of church or dogma. Then, with their own culture and tongue, they will be brought into the future unity of God's kingdom. For this reason, let the Chinese develop at their own pace in economic and political matters, according to the times we live in. Whatever is necessary from God will come of itself, without our meddling.

Your being a pastor will gradually become more and more irrelevant. Every prophet, every prophetically active person, will become “political,” for seeking the kingdom of God leads into the world of the people.¹ And if God gives you their hearts so that they trust you, then they will enter his kingdom, even without being called Christians. In fact, it is harder to lead people out of the swamp of our Christian churches than out of the barbarity of sin and unbelief. After all, so many Christians have become nothing more than whitewashed barbarians living in self-deception. So don't be afraid of being called a heathen among heathen, as long as you are living in harmony with the spirit of God.



You say that in China there exists the same confusion and helplessness as in many European countries. The masses cry out against oppression, but the government lies like an immovable gravestone over them. Everywhere there is human tyranny, which would rather massacre entire peoples than yield an inch.

The Prince of this World is the dominant force behind all government. And this is more distressing when governments claim to be on a Christian basis. Jesus and his spirit cannot rule because our human schemes maintain absolute control.

In view of the demonic forces behind the world's government, I do not expect that attempts to influence the Chinese government politically will achieve very much. Whoever really wants to save a distressed people will always be throttled by the powers that be. Nonetheless I am not opposed to your encouraging enlightened people to go into government work to undertake some sort of resistance. But they must be trustworthy and have the kind of authority that helps people obtain the freedom to organize themselves, at least economically.

Your main task, with God's help, is to train people in the schools and wherever else you have connections—people who represent God's truth and put the well-being of their neighbor above everything else. For this, of

course, we need the power of God's spirit. It must be like a new baptism—not from men, but from God. We must wait patiently for this power. We can only do what lies in front of us every day, often with much sighing, for it all seems in vain. Yet I believe that there is progress taking place quietly, and that a new time is being prepared.



In seeking God's kingdom and his justice, build on an economic foundation, not just a spiritual one. For it is on the material plane that Jesus is victorious on earth. The devil laughs up his sleeve at all our religious meetings and ideas. Religious communities that fail to be a corrective in everyday life and practical work will soon end in a fiasco, be they Buddhist, Catholic, or Pietist. There must be absolutely no Christian pretense, however religious it may appear, for religion deprives people of their true life. People need to be guided properly through practical work, not through the might of weapons or religion.

Some day, when God's kingdom conquers the earth, true piety will infuse hands-on activity and work. For unity between people can only come about on the foundation of communal life interests. Think more deeply about this. In God's kingdom, Christian churches are done for, since they are little more than

egotistical worlds of personal concerns and interests that keep people apart. The misery of the masses can only be alleviated by forming associations of people who live by the same spirit and freely lend practical help to each other. This, in the end, is the surest way to influence those in power. A people's community that accomplishes something on the practical level will gain respect and authority.

This may shock you, but our preaching must be such that people come away feeling that religious knowledge by itself is of no value—at least when it concerns the kingdom of God. People should learn how to be truly active, especially with their neighbors, and to see to it that all have what they need to live a fulfilled life. Any educated person can help you better than a theologian. It is a matter of concrete knowledge, not theology. We need to become capable of keeping the true goal in mind: the benefit of the people. That is the mind and spirit of Christ. This is what we mean by seeking first the kingdom of God.



Christ's power must permeate everything—and everyone—around you. The working of his spirit does not hinge on the efforts of one person alone, but rather on the preparation of a people and place as a sanctuary for

God. If you cannot find a footing in the Chinese nation—in the people themselves—then your house will be built on sand. You must be among the people so that ultimately you can dispense with patronage. Rather remain lowly than be honored by government officials or successful businessmen.

The only true and genuine work is hidden; it is a mystery. We must work with much effort and sweat, even when no one understands what we are doing. People only value outward success, which is deadly. They want to do everything according to their own ideas. Rather than fighting for the coming of God's reign, they try to attack and overcome the world, all in the name of Christ. This is nothing but spiritual arrogance.

The outward successes of your faithful labor may indeed show signs of God's blessing, but do not let this distract you. We are striving for something much greater. Something new is quietly being prepared, and this must be completed. We can help, but only if we remain faithfully at the place where God is at work. We are nothing. Those who listen to us will, in the end, be the poor and wretched, not the high and mighty. Yet I would not change places with any of the great on earth. So build only on the Rock, in order to be free of all those who seek power and influence.



In the kingdom of God one cannot go backward. Therefore, strive for God's kingdom with every drop of your blood. The work *you* or *I* do is incidental; we are only vessels of a spirit that awaits the future of God. Think about it: the kingdom of God within you—within faithful people—will be the starting point from which the Savior leads his cause to victory. In all your work you must hold firmly to the thought that the kingdom of God is on the way. This hope is our source of motivation for all our work; any progress we make stems from it.

This means that our practical activity should never be our chief concern. Everything in the world—including religions—appears to be powerful and successful. We, on the other hand, are weak and easily pushed into a corner. Yet who is on firmer ground?

God's kingdom works in strange ways. Where is there a church, congregation, race, nation, or even a single person manifesting the kingdom of God today? In earlier times people thought they saw it in the Protestant church, or in the Moravians, or in Pietism. Today the kingdom of God is astir under the surface and encompasses the development of entire nations; it spreads in new ways. This is beyond our understanding. But now, more than ever, we must proclaim, "The Lord is at

hand!" We are part of this, quietly and actively, through our faith and expectation. It is enough for us to know that God is weaving his design in the warp and weft of the world. His goal will be reached, not just for this or that person, but for everyone.

Where will the kingdom of God come from? Is not the entire history of the world a fulfillment of the promise? Are not bonds loosed, chains broken asunder? Who would have thought thirty years ago that new paths would open up for China's women, as well as for the men? Jesus lives, and he conquers more and more, although too many of us are unaware that he is behind it all. Of course, these developments do not of themselves represent a turning toward God, yet this practical liberation enables God's kingdom to break in among the people.

Only a very few people have a true and living hope for God's intervention. But now there is a movement of the Spirit that runs throughout the world. The world is experiencing an immense transformation, and everything is shaken up. And yet in the background there are quiet but powerful thoughts of peace, grace, and goodwill among people. God strides forward. The hidden Christ is at work. May you always have this before your eyes. We are in the background, but our prayers, our faith, and

our hope all play a part. Clearly, our lives should show that we must decrease, and he increase (John 3:30).

2. *Beyond Religion*

A movement of the Spirit will never come from religion—especially not from church rectories and parsonages. The institutional churches, in their so-called wisdom, use their authority to crush every free stirring of the Spirit, or at best to ignore it. *Not so abroad.* There you find joy in a gospel that respects human beings; a message that does not crush people but stems from God's character-building love.

Keep the kingdom of God in your heart, and it will bear fruit. Your experience in a foreign country will give the seed of that kingdom more freedom to germinate and grow. Only let us be true men alongside the man Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and humankind. Let us root out that middleman who has crept in between, so that we can approach every person not as clergy or priests, but as disciples and slaves of Christ. If you are to preach anything, preach the rulership of God, and do so despite the roaring and raging of the world.



It is such a struggle to escape the terrible constraints put on us by the churches and their foreign mission efforts. Pray for God to set us free. If through his grace the poor and the downtrodden flock to you, things will go forward of their own accord. You will find that there is power in the apostolic task among the working classes—I have never found such hungering for God anywhere else. Though their struggle to stay alive often leaves God sidelined, they are nonetheless guided by him and bear in their hearts hope for the world's redemption.

By all means feel free to minister to your fellow German Christians.² But do not shut out the Chinese! “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and the man who comes to me I will never turn away” (John 6:37). Those are the words of the living Savior. The worthless, despised, and downtrodden will come to you when you allow him to be with you.



The typical German view of Christianity is that we fight to carve out a path for the gospel, in the name of “vengeance” or “justice.” The inconsistency of today’s Christian church is as crass as at the time of the crusades, when people were “converted” at sword-point.

Protect the people who have yet to believe from the pious who condemn them. Don't look left or right, but follow after Christ, the Savior of all people.

It breaks my heart that there is so much murder. European Christians have brought a curse upon their own heads by murdering Chinese.³ Instead of healing the Chinese people, Christians are punishing them because they are not European. Judgment has come upon Christianity because it lacks the strength to love its enemies. The salt has lost its savor and is of no use.

All this goes to show how “civilized people” cannot understand Christ. Sadly, the missionary societies are no different. Businessmen, missionaries, soldiers—all in their way want to put people into their own pocket, instead of into God's hands. Furthermore, the numerous denominations, with all their different creeds and ideas, are one of the greatest hindrances to Christ. They fail to understand that in him, God has reconciled the whole world (2 Cor. 5:19-21).



I am very glad that you are befriending your Chinese neighbors, and I hope very much that you win their hearts. I am also glad that you are working with the sick and destitute. Even if many people's deeds are evil, God's fatherly hand will bring about good things again.

But no one should become Christian according to *our* formula. May God grant you the baptism that is in accord with his will, not ours, so that people become truly free and liberated. Whether they are called Christians or not is immaterial—despite what many churches seem to think.

Churches and sects create nothing but stumbling blocks and schisms by organizing congregations and baptisms. This is totally out of place in these last days of God's advancing kingdom. I actually wonder if there hasn't been a misunderstanding right from the beginning, when large groups were baptized. Perhaps when Peter said, "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water?" (Acts 10:47) after Cornelius had received the Spirit's baptism, he should simply have said, "Why bother with water at all when the Spirit is present?" Likewise, when Jesus said, "Go forth and make all nations my disciples; baptize people everywhere" (Matthew 28:19), it seems obvious to me that he was emphasizing the Spirit's baptism, not of getting people wet.

The communion you have with the Chinese, in the way Jesus intended, will lead people to trust you so that you in turn can teach them. It will bring about this real baptism—baptism of the Spirit. Perhaps later on a

further baptism will follow. But need it be a church baptism, a human baptism by water? I ask you to look upon all who come to you in trust as your sheep, or rather as Christ's, and to make no distinctions on the basis of water baptism. In fact, avoid having to choose whom you baptize. Let them all be entrusted to you; then God can increase and deepen his authority over wide areas, and millions will be able to discover the heavenly Father according to the Spirit given them. Then their idols will collapse of themselves.

Your aim should be to reach the people as a whole, not just those who want to be baptized. Unfortunately, today's missionaries prefer to pursue the stupid idea of establishing local churches—a glory to men for sure, but an insult to God—instead of bringing the gospel to the people. They prefer a false gospel that limits God to saving individuals, but not the world. My counsel is to go slowly, without a lot of words and without a lot of discussion of principles.

You are standing at a critical juncture in God's history, so don't fall into institutional ways of "organizing" church services or mission outposts. Believe me, as soon as you start to baptize you will attract flatterers and profit seekers, and God will withdraw his sheep. Strive to become Chinese with the Chinese, even if this leads to a separation from those who think along church lines.

Do you understand what I mean? God will open new doors and prepare new vessels, because the Spirit will not remain in old vessels.



Christianity's entire history shows what an error it is to rely on the sacraments. People are baptized, confirmed, blessed, consecrated at the altar, and then as if it were all nothing, they run off and join up with the nearest available blabbermouth and impostor. The sacraments are not glue to hold a community together. On the contrary, the more intensively they are promoted, the further we are from God's intervention.

As I see it, water baptism is a necessary evil. I personally long for some other means by which people can join Christ's body. No outward form can bring this about; it must be given by the Spirit. Those who place such importance on the outward symbol of baptism think they are superior to unbaptized people. People of the Spirit, however, rarely allow themselves to be baptized. You must see it as Jesus did, who even asked his disciples (who had all been baptized), "Do you wish to go away too?" (John 6:67) If you find it important to emphasize this one outward act, then people will surely rush to join you—but they will run off again just as quickly.

You and I know that the only way we can gain a broader vision is through faith. If God is restricted to gathering people through the means we have seen so far, then his kingdom is lost. Jesus is not a lifeless idol! He is life, and he is constantly moving forward from the old to the new. Critical times will come and everyone will be in danger of deserting the true Jesus. To be baptized a hundred times over will not prevent this. One must be of the same spirit as Jesus.

Recall how the apostles fought for the fledgling churches: it did not help them one bit that they baptized three thousand in one day. Far too many, in those first years, failed to remain faithful. Thus hard things had to be written, as in the Letter to the Hebrews (see Heb. 6). After Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) it should have already been clear that it is we, the baptizers, who are the guilty ones, and not those who were wrongly baptized.

Don't forget: "God so loved the world..." (John 3:16). It is actually a miracle that you can associate with unbelievers in the name of Christ without baptizing them. After all, the baptism of the churches amounts to hatred between Christians and the rest of humankind. God's spirit must flow from heaven down to earth without pious human help. His spirit compels people to do what is needed—even if they are not aware of doing

it—so that in the end they will say, “Lord, when have we served you?” (Matthew 25:37) Yes, even today there is a great deal of work going on for the kingdom of God outside of the church, and people are not aware of it.



Regarding the matter of baptism, take the spirit of what I have said—it should never be a matter of principle—and then act freely in individual cases. It seems to me that your situation is similar situation to the apostle Paul’s, to whom baptism was unimportant (1 Cor. 1:14-17). He left it to others. I am glad that you are doing the same. We must not despise conventional church practices, just as Jesus did not despise the custom of sacrifice, but our aim is to withdraw from the old world and step into the new. The time will come when God’s baptism is only in the Spirit.

In the meantime, it does not matter if you bless some individuals and consider them baptized, as long as they do not think this gives them the right to lord it over others. That is the main point I am driving at: it is not the outward practice *per se* that is harmful but the arrogance, pride, and separation from others that too often follow in its wake. In contrast, God’s baptism of the Spirit makes us brothers with all people. Be sure to

tell your listeners this when the opportunity arises. Then they can be baptized in God's name, by him.

It may happen that a Chinese convert comes to you and requests baptism. If he does this of his own accord and with pure motives, then follow the example of Jesus' disciples and baptize him. There is a difference between us going out and baptizing people and individuals coming to us with the desire to make public their allegiance to Christ. Still, our business is not to promote religious practices but to teach and love. People should know that we labor in the spirit of Christ and that we will never hinder anyone from joining another group.

To say it again: whatever you do, don't let baptism cause separation—the "holy" on one side, the "godless" on the other. Rather, let it be a quiet act of prayer. Allow yourself to be led quite freely. You are the only one who can know what is important at a given moment. I pray that you remain a messenger of God, proclaiming his love for the lost. His love belongs to the unbelieving just as much as it does to Christians.



Unless you establish a base among the people—outside of church and state and independent of these institutions of coercion—Christ's kingdom will never advance.

Sadly, what we have now is a massive human organization, without any divine support. Both the church and the state are riddled with gaping holes, and the people fall through. Nothing helps them.

European Christianity is in a terrible mess. The church is tolerated in the West only because it is the prop of the state. Together, they have become the “ruler of this world,” with God reduced to an ornament for those in control. No one raises any real protest. People cling desperately to the old, ruined world, while the ruling powers view a new world as a threat. Individual freedom is thrust aside, and only those who allow themselves to be molded like dough can keep their positions.

The main thing, then, is to find an opening for the Spirit. We must not represent a theology or a church; we simply need to draw near to people in the spirit of truth. God will lead you wisely, so that you do not need to pay homage to every Christian superstition. Future developments are not our concern—the future is in God’s hands, and developments will take place in his time. So take courage. The Prince of Peace will be victorious in China, Europe, and everywhere else!

Despite the miles between us, you and I are fighters in the same battle, since both of us are shackled by the Christian-demonic power and dominance of forms,

which suppress the spirit of the true gospel. The Christ of the kingdom is still being crucified. The Prince of this World is happy to have a “Christ” of the churches (those “temples built by human hands”) to help him subjugate the masses. We must overcome this lie by proclaiming the Word in patience and faith. It is good that time is on our side in this struggle; we need only hold out and remain true to what we have understood of God.

Don’t be surprised, however, that those who advocate the old methods resist our stance against organized Christianity. Our understanding of Jesus is contrary to conventional Christianity, and it will draw us into battles. Then we must be as wise as serpents and as guileless as doves.



Why is it so hard for people to imagine anyone coming to God without walking through church doors? If only we would realize that we are at a stage in God’s history when, through hearts yearning for freedom, God will reveal his justice. It will spell the end of human laws and rights, and people will know in their hearts what is right and what is wrong. God wants to bring this about. We, who bear his image, must learn what is required of us as true men and women. Religion has never supplied this and never will.

What, then, is the character of the Church? Certainly it is not a matter of being bound in uniformity through religious rites. The people of God's spirit are joined together in much the same manner as scientists whose love of knowledge and shared interests draw them together. Each brings his or her own unique experience and perspective, and works and studies in their own characteristic way, while always keeping in mind the efforts of all. This is how we too should function. Our goal is a united fellowship whose members appreciate and love one another, and place Jesus above all else.



I doubt many Christians ever really consider why they are Christians. So much gets preached besides the true gospel, which is that God wants to remake humanity, so that the *earth*—not just heaven—might be filled with his glory. But too many of us are content with a Christ of religion. Like pagans, we look for happiness after death. We relinquish the earth, we relinquish ourselves and other people. Our only interest is a blessed death, not the kingdom of God on earth.

If Christians think that people have to be like them in order to find consolation at the end of their lives, we must protest: No! There were plenty of people who died

consoled before Christ came. That is not why he came into the world. He came to create true men and true women. Right here, on this earth, God wants to see his truth, justice, and love glorified. Only when this happens will we prove ourselves to be fully human.

God seeks to redeem humanity. But this redemption is a far cry from human achievement. As long as there are people, there will always be great works. Certainly in our day much is being achieved, but the driving force is little more than self-interest.

Recently I heard about missionaries in Samoa. What they encountered is truly remarkable. People live there from day to day, almost without thinking, but joyful and happy. The land, the trees, belong to everyone, and no one has worries; they are content with one another. But now the mission wants to introduce private property. The Christians want to sell the land and teach the people how to compete and become ambitious for material gain, and thus wake them up so that European culture can more easily be established there. Human achievements are introduced as if the only things that mattered were the works of our European culture.

I say, leave the people alone! Let them flourish in their simplicity. They don't have to become Europeans; they don't have to be as untruthful as we are. For in spite

of all the splendor we are living in now, endless lies run through our society and weigh us down completely.

Yes, people should be helped—but God’s love in them is already far stronger than all our European lies! Our task is to “put on the new man” (Col. 3:9-11). If we can bring ourselves to do this, and if the boredom of our theology and our Christianity has not already killed us, we can become people enthusiastic for Jesus. If Christ alone is our light and life, then we can possibly be a little helpful. Religious talk is useless. Forming some kind of religious community where everyone sits together in a corner and prays and reads the Bible will not help anyone. No, work to get rid of the lies in the world. Help by endeavoring to live with a truthful heart, in the power of God’s truth.



No matter how it is done, all mission work is superfluous. I will put it even more strongly: current missionary work is dangerous, because it intrudes into everyday life and self-righteously attacks the morals and customs of the unbelieving. We western Christians have become the supreme moralists. But what do the “lost ones” really want? People of goodwill everywhere are occupied with the question, How shall we live our lives on this

earth? No wonder they don't expect any answer from religion. They even dread religion, for instead of giving strength to live, it discourages; instead of freeing, it binds.

Christianity is no different. Christians are not living witnesses to the power of the truth, which could, if God's rulership mattered to them, overcome such honorable moralities as Confucianism and Islam.

Today's churches are shot through with so many godless customs that they stand no higher in God's eyes than the heathen. "They fall short of the glory they should have before God" (Romans 3:23). Our quiet hope is that the unbelieving are not forever in their unbelief, nor the Christians forever in their Christianity. We look for something new—a life in God through the Christ's spirit.



Behind current missionary practices is a powerful organization. Within this organization there is a certain worship of God, albeit in a crushing, dogmatic form. The whole religious system, with its outward forms and lack of respect for different cultures, can be compared to a house all spick-and-span and ready for people to move into. It is a house of tranquil conscience; those who take up residence there feel quite content with themselves—and yet they incur God's judgment.

You, however, should rejoice because you have no such organization. You have only the gospel in your heart, which flees all the trivial disputes of churches. We do not say, “You must belong to *our* church.” Our hope is that people feel that they have a Father in heaven who will lead them to the truth of eternal life through knowing Christ. You are there in China with this gospel, and can almost be compared to one of the first Christians, just because you have not been incorporated into a state-recognized church. Again, rejoice! The first Christians remained neither Jews nor Greeks; they did not rely on church customs or traditions (Gal. 3: 26-28). They were regarded as outlaws. May it be the same with us!

It is true that everything born of the Spirit must have a visible body if it is to remain alive. But let us plead with God that our present work—which is free and unconstrained by rules—may be given an authentic visible expression. Our faith demands commitment and accountability. God’s people and our children must not just live for the moment, but must have something to hold on to, something to which they can remain faithful. Yet this is nothing we, as humans, can plan.

Keep this in mind as you think about starting an association. Such a group could be a small opening for God to work in the hearts of the Chinese people, but

only if it is closely knit and affords you the opportunity to witness to God's reign. Your utmost desire must be that hope for God's kingdom awakens in many hearts. An association such as this, in which the characteristics of Christ are alive, would in fact be a church. It would be God's house. Yet meetings and gatherings would arise spontaneously and would lay a foundation on which the spirit of God could continue building. May God grant you such an abundance of his spirit that those around you are gripped by Christ and his true nature.

3. God's All-Embracing Love

God's love tears down old divisions. No longer religion against religion, Christians against non-Christians, but justice against sin, life against death. His love embraces everyone. Therefore, every person you encounter should be your concern. Do not settle for less. The whole world must see the glory of God. I long to see you free to share in the gifts God gives the Chinese. This is our hope, but its fulfillment will have to be fought for.

God protects the oppressed. He will see to it that they receive his blessing. Today his spirit moves upright hearts everywhere, without asking what kind of a religion they cling to. Our task is to spread the gospel of Christ, not the gospel of Christians. Christ does not want separation. This is difficult for us to keep in mind. It is not easy to interact with sinners without yielding to the pressure of either compromising or distancing oneself. I hope, however, that we—you in China and I in Europe—will experience the all-embracing, creative power of Christ.

This is why I choose to stand on the side of the humble, working class. Tragically, the church has abandoned them to darkness. Yet this same church lives with this darkness, and in so doing absorbs the very same sinful principles that rule the world. Christians should serve, not rule. Their acts of violence make them worse than the so-called heathen.

The chief thing is to be an apostle of Jesus Christ, not an apostle of the European Christian world. Have patience, and whatever you do, stay clear of forming a party. Your work must embrace the whole, then your integrity will win you everyone's trust.



Awhile ago you sent me a brochure describing the dreadful history of the Chinese. Death and damnation certainly hold sway there—the work of “the murderer from the beginning.” It is no wonder you are hard put to find the right way. Nevertheless, I still sense a longing from the Chinese to escape all this death. Imperceptibly, Jesus can take hold of this longing. And he will do so—Jesus who came not to damn but to save (John 12:47).

It is true that certain Scripture passages cause difficulty. Yet the stern warnings of Jesus apply to the

devout, not to the unbelievers and sinners. In a similar same way, God's wrath as described in the Old Testament is directed only at those who were once close to God, but then dishonored him. The hard words of Jesus are meant for the upper ten thousand, not for the oppressed masses who are ignorant of his word (Luke 6:20ff). Our indignation should be turned against the Pharisees and scribes of our day—against parsons and bishops and the entire clerical regime. It is against these that the wrath of God is directed, not against the common people.

For centuries the Chinese have been exploited, ruled over, enslaved, and have had to fight for themselves. Governments and the establishment have persistently struck them down. Underneath, however, the oppressed remain people of character. It is to them that Jesus comes, and the high and mighty will tremble before the multitude that Jesus will gather. Stand firm in Christ, therefore, and be at peace with everyone as far as you are able. There is nothing you can do except to be there. But your presence will awaken deeds of God; and Jesus, the lion of Zion, will raise himself up, and through pure deeds the world will be conquered.



God will always call individuals to him, regardless of how people in general think and organize themselves.

He can cause life to flourish anywhere he chooses. That is why divine life can still blossom from the seedbed of the churches.

Be that as it may, we still need to devote ourselves to something brand new, something that opens a door and shows a way forward for entire peoples and nations. Once people are on the right path, they can acquire further understanding of divine things. The conversion of individuals is only a temporary measure. Individual conversion by itself risks the sin of pharisaism. A single baptized person can so easily flatter himself, thinking he or she is a special person, able to give someone a spiritual kick now and then.

We want to cast one net over all—over the good and evil, the righteous and unrighteous, poor and rich, Christian and non-Christian—and then leave it to God’s unifying spirit to change, sift, and direct hearts. This is what Jesus meant by “baptizing the people.” They will come like captives into the kingdom of God, though most likely they will not even notice what is happening to them. And then they will find life.

So guard against the insolence of Christians who have no consideration for cultural customs. These Christians should bow before Confucius, for it was Confucius who saw that reverence is the beginning of true worship.

Each of us should have this reverence, even for our enemies. Don't let the spirit of self-righteousness have the slightest chance of poisoning you, even from a distance. I no longer trust anyone who holds firmly to an ecclesiastical system, even the very best. They are all so spiritually proud, however much they manage to hide it.



I am glad your situation calls for action, not words. The teachings of Confucius, which promote a knowledge of the heart rather than a set of rules, seem to me to be as fitting a foundation for Christ and his kingdom as the Law of Moses. Confucianism even has the advantage of being more unified and consistent than the Law of Moses, which has been used to justify the ruthless murder of non-Jews. (Of course this is a gross misinterpretation of the Mosaic Law—the prophets were zealous for all nations, not just the Jews.)

Sadly, the ideas of wrath and damnation, which God is supposed to wreak on the godless, have spread among Christians. This is in direct contradiction to the love of God, which the New Testament so clearly teaches. In light of what we are up against, I regret that Paul (whose writings I treasure) expresses this idea of wrath in his letter to the Romans (Rom. 13:1-7). Countless rulers

have twisted his words to lend a Christian-religious backing for their use of the murderous sword. They go at it with relish.

We, however, must be careful to respect and acknowledge anyone (including the Chinese “heathen”) who is led by God, and whose reverence even for his enemies has become a quality of heart. Although I would like to hear more about the so-called “girl-murder” in China⁴—how widespread it is and the reasons for it—what I find fascinating is how the Chinese attempt to instill moral values through the family. They tackle the questions of life quite practically; moral laws are not simply airy precepts but are very down-to-earth, so that anyone can apply them.

Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matt. 5:17). When we come to a foreign land in the name of Jesus, we should thank God that a law already exists which can find fulfillment. Or do we think we have first to hammer the laws of Moses into people? This would be to stand above God, whose spirit has been at work long before we Christians showed up!

You should have no misgivings about upholding Chinese customs, especially those in which people show reverence for God’s working in their history—even if

God's name is left unspoken. Through concrete deeds and God's blessing, you are creating relationships built on truth. This will open eyes. You have an obligation to fulfill all law and justice, in whatever form it takes, just as Jesus did. This free action on your part will speak far louder than any sermon you could give. To the extent that you do this, reverence for the Father of all fathers, the Creator of everything good that is found among people, will increase. No one can honor God without honoring what is of God in people.



Conservatism of every stripe hinders and paralyzes everything. The Chinese are bound by this, just as much as Christians who are in the church's clutches. The Chinese are imprisoned by an inordinate veneration of the family and an overemphasis on superstitious customs. All this prevents them from experiencing any real change. In this sense, Confucianism seems to me to be a kind of church, controlling every mood of the soul, inducing anxiety, and hindering genuine progress. You will no doubt encounter great obstacles the more you draw close to people and move beyond superficial acquaintance.

Many missionaries feel this makes them right in

wanting to use Christianity to uproot the national character of the Chinese. But they will soon find out where that leads! If a nationalistic spirit is aroused, on either side, then all foreign elements will be swept away, and the Christians themselves will become enemies. Only those who act justly toward the people and represent their interests in the face of oppression will stand the test of Christ's love. You will have no easy time of it. For the present your work should only have a quiet influence.

Because you have not made our Western Christian customs compulsory, you have not aroused opposition, and this will work to your advantage. Continue to build on a Chinese foundation and avoid all religious provocation. My hope is that Christ quietly works and comforts, and that a difference of spirit between what you and others are trying to do can be clearly sensed. As you rightly point out, aggressive attempts at missionizing do not spring from the love of God, but from the spirit of business.

Take heart, and may God give his spirit to all you meet! Remember, they don't need to become "Christians." This designation need not come up at all. Whoever does the will of God is a child of the kingdom of heaven, whether he takes his cue from Confucius or from the Church Fathers (Rom. 2:12-16). Christ is the only one who

brings truth and life into people's lives. Everything is in his hands.

Every nation is equal before God. Before him, unbelievers count just as much as Christians. There is simply no way we can speak of “yellow devils,” as so many do today. People of all descriptions are entering God's kingdom. They are coming to Christ, but not to Christians. The vision of the Son of Man—representing compassion, social responsibility, and equality through the works of peace—is catching on among the so-called irreligious. Here is the entry point for Christ's spirit, which will encompass the whole earth.

The sign of the coming kingdom will be the true man, the true woman—not the Christian, Muslim, or Buddhist. Religious people can say what they like, but this will not hinder the burgeoning movement of people and nations toward a humanity that strives for higher goals. And though these goals may seem weak and incomplete, God will still protect and preserve them for a new future.



During my recent visit to Cairo, where I had to preach at the local mission house, I was made acutely aware of what a distortion it is to play Christianity like a trump card when we relate with Muslims, instead of simply

allowing the Savior to speak through us. Islam is not so absolutely closed that the spirit of God is unable to work there. Certainly, these people will never become European Christians—not that they would gain anything by it if they did.

There is something very impressive about the worship of Allah in the Islamic faith. Not only are there few religious forms, but there is a heartfelt devotion to Allah, even in the midst of misfortune and despite a strict moral code. As a religion, Islam has the kind of strength that is able to influence the actions of its followers. It is true that everything in Islam is quite rigid, which obscures the living, human, and personal love of our Father in heaven. Only Jesus, the Son of Man, can reveal this to them. But to the Muslim, European Christians appear immoral and irreligious—and not without some justification.

I also find the “Fox Movement” to be very interesting, bizarre as its rites may be.⁵ In many places around the world, movements such as this demonstrate the urge in countless hearts to be done with old forms and worn-out practices that have no consequence in daily life. Indeed, a common characteristic of all such movements is the search for practical means to better people’s physical condition. And even if this seeking remains on this lower level, God still speaks through

these movements and their attempts at change.

We are faced with a paradox: the gospel of God's coming kingdom seems to us a promise waiting future fulfillment, yet it must be lived out, here and now. We must be able to offer people something they can find nowhere else, and it must be something of practical value. So many rightly say, "If we had to rely on what pastors do for us, we would be in a bad way. We can't live from sermons. What we care about are actual improvements." In other words, what people want and need is a practical faith. Ah, the hopeless separation between religion and life!



The origin and development of what we call culture or civilization will remain a mystery. Why has it taken root in some countries and not others? Just as the source of all life—including all human life—remains hidden, so too the origin of developed culture with its higher urges.

In general, it may be stated that active spiritual and intellectual life come from God, whose spirit brings about human development. This happens all over the world. Without this, we would remain on the same level as animals. The development of culture, which manifests

itself differently according to place, indicates that we are intended to live on a higher plane. The essence of the Spirit's creation is to bring about material and spiritual history, rooted in a continual struggle for God's kingdom. I am sure the Chinese civilization is no different. It too began as a spiritual seed of God, which germinated in secret and now bursts forth into the outer, tangible world.

Take the Babylonians, Greeks, Romans, and Jews as examples: their culture did not stem from any motivation or act of will on their part. Rather, it lay in their subconscious and was brought to expression through individuals, who acted on the underlying feelings of the whole nation. Through their individual genius they may appear to be the creators of culture, yet in reality they were only the bearers or representatives of a creation that lies much deeper, without which these "great men" would never have amounted to anything.

God's plan is to lift us out of our animal-like existence into the life of the Spirit. A great deal of truth still has to be revealed—from non-Christian peoples as well—to show that from the beginning God has wanted to create something good and true wherever there is an opening far beyond our narrow boundaries.

I purposely do not refer to "revelation" when describing so-called high culture. Cultural manifestations in general

remain on a lower level, developing and growing and then dying off. When God reveals himself, however, something altogether different takes place: humankind recognizes its immortal nature, its eternal destiny. The truth shines through, and the temporal developments that once seemed all-important are cut down to size.

God's revelation bursts forth again and again as a pure ideal, in the midst of the most frightful confusion of events. "I am not of this world. You are of this world," Jesus said (John 8:23). God is, of course, in this world. What is transient and perishable—and alive for a time—is not possible without God. Yet it is not to be confused with the love that God puts into our hearts. We must, therefore, learn to distinguish between those active powers that produce culture or civilization, and divine revelation that leads to the recognition of God's love.



When you read about the past, what stands out is the way key events are expressed in merely human terms, with no thought for God's hand in history. These concepts of history often contradict the spirit of God. Thus the idea that God is vengeful who crushes his enemies comes up time and again, even in the Bible.

We are by nature very slow to comprehend the higher law of the Spirit. Seen from our vantage point today, a

great deal of what we know of earlier events and times appears wicked and wrong. This may be so. The human element in history, however, is only incidental. Therefore in recalling the past we must withhold judgment.

Instead of focusing on history in general, we should be looking for the points of light that have pierced, and do pierce, the dark night of human existence. God's spirit flares up repeatedly, albeit briefly and through imperfect instruments. With Moses, for instance, it was in the redeeming power and use of the Name: "the compassionate and gracious One, slow to anger" (Exodus 34:6). With David it was in forgiveness: "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven" (Psalm 32:1). With Elijah it was in the terrible struggle against powers of darkness.

Where there is revelation from God, social, political, or even religious rules and regulations are forgotten. Though God's revelation comes to us through people's lives, ultimately only Jesus brings about what is new and pure. Political and religious forms of life and cultural mores are constantly changing; they belong to what is human and transitory. Christ's true followers never feel obligated to follow them.

For this reason Confucius and Buddha are not revelations equal to Christ. A civilization like the Chinese—just as others in the course of human

history—strives only for a social order. Confucius offers nothing to quench our deepest thirst. A mere moral philosophy has no higher, enduring value; however significant it may be, it cannot lift us up to God.

Only Christ expresses God's nature clearly. Apart from him all our human efforts to change the structure of society will collapse as soon as outer circumstances change. "We must be redeemed from the curse of the law and enter into the freedom of the children of God" (Gal. 3:13). It is the Chinese law, like our high and mighty morality in Europe, which holds the people back. As my father wrote to me when I was young, "Our virtues have become our greatest sin." They hinder the living God from doing something new.

Although great and profound outer changes can occur quite apart from any revelation from God, there is nothing more wonderful than the indwelling Christ. When he is present, streams of living water flow out, bringing life to people. This is something that transcends human goodness. What God directs is never destroyed, even when nations suffer ruin. Only where Christ's love rules are human beings valued for who they are, and everything else—social institutions and customs—takes second place and even become quite unimportant.

The hidden Church of Jesus Christ, out of which something of God's future can come, remains and will never die. The lines of human ideals and Christ's kingdom run parallel. And the mantles of Confucianism and Christianity are in tatters. A new mantle is needed—made of God's pure love and the capacity to receive it.

4. The Task before Us

Never preach until you have forged a warm relationship with people and have won their trust. Don't be standoffish. "To the Jews I became a Jew, a Greek to the Greeks, that I might win some" (1 Cor. 9:20). Only then should you preach, but still with caution. For it is not our preaching but our life that must give people light. We do not need more preachers, only more of the Spirit.

How shall people ever gain any understanding of the kingdom of God if we speak to them of it before they have seen any evidence? Until now the only "kingdom" they have seen is one of hypocrisy, violence, and oppression. If you do not live in a different way and meet people on their own level, they will understand nothing of God.

With this in mind, do not rashly brush aside national customs. After all, what else is it when we European Christians decorate our Christmas trees, or light candles at a child's grave and sit there for hours remembering the dead? A new believer in Christ should first prove that

he or she is a child of God through his love, before offending others by abstaining from some cultural custom.

This is, of course, in contrast to common Christian conduct. Instead of building upon spirit and love, Christian churches spend their strength opposing outward customs. But did not Christ's apostles enter the Temple, and did not many of the first Christians eat food sacrificed to idols? Such customs will only cease when the Spirit has permeated everything—and this is naturally much harder than founding a sect that rejects a few customs and habits.

Therefore, stand shoulder to shoulder with the people, even at the risk of being regarded as an infidel. People whose hearts are in the right place will still come to you.



How can one gain a foothold in non-Christian countries today? Certainly not by founding a “mission station,” to use the language of missionaries. If you were to do this the message of Jesus would be seen as “foreign,” something imported from elsewhere, and not as something that springs from native soil (which it does). In your case, for example, any efforts to recruit will only put your calling on a human foundation and undermine the future of Christ in China.

God can send out his spirit and Word as far as he wants to from some small spot. There is certainly no need for you to be everywhere at once. God's thoughts and will can spread out like ripples from a single individual; and people can arrive at new thoughts and deeds on their own without there always having to be a pastor or missionary behind it. There is no telling where you would be if you were to follow the manner of thinking common to missionaries. Then the churches, especially in America, would be right in wanting to send a thousand missionaries to China, to convert the people within ten years. But that is sheer foolishness. Beware, then, of getting overly involved in activities that lead you to lean on the help of people whom God cannot use.

I will say it again: God's spirit can only work if you are with the people, as Jesus was when he healed so many. An abstract faith based on theology is impotent. We ourselves must be tangible expressions of the love and truth of God, seeking to bring light and life into the outer circumstances of life. But it will require far greater divine strength than is apparent today if you want God to prevail in this. There are far too many human spirits actively at work, each claiming to give the best advice.

There is a spirit among the pious that has no understanding of God's kingdom, so that many are even

annoyed to see it alive. Since it is active around you, it is sure to offend such people. Pay no attention. Just carry on, and let your deeds speak for you. If Jesus is not a living reality, giving birth to millions of deeds, then he is no greater than any other teacher. But he lives—he is the Rock on which we stand—and deeds born of his spirit will become the rocks upon which the errors of the world are shattered.



I often ponder over your situation, and how Christ can be brought to the people of China. It seems to me a head-on approach is fruitless; I would rather say Christ must come up behind people, so to speak. I feel that through Christ, God's rulership is taking hold in our day in such a way that we are unable to point out, "That is from Christ." Only at the end will we recognize that everything good that has been achieved has come from Christ and his spirit.

You can be sure that God already has a vast people in China. Your task is to remain in this great land and represent the gospel in its true sense. You are not just in Tsingtao—you are in all of China. For Christ is not just in a certain place, but in the whole country. You are not bringing a church, you are bringing the gospel. Hence,

for the present it does not much matter what you do—what matters is that you are *there*. Your life is hidden in Christ, so do not try and compete with the churches.

You will certainly dialog with the Europeans there, but in spirit you are in China, among the multitude of its people. Blessed are these poor—they *will* inherit the kingdom of heaven (Luke 6:20). If you speak in this way and of the love of God, even the German soldiers there will understand it. This will surely interest them far more than some catechism. Your words will have spice, and your preaching will have significance for everyone.

Be glad merely to stay in touch with the daily goings-on of the people around you. Don't try to have "religious" contact with them. They do not need to become Christians at first—perhaps never. As I have said many times, they may never call themselves Christians, but simply children of God.

Be glad that doors open to you because of your helplessness. The fewer people there are who want to "enlighten" the Chinese and order them around, the better. The spirit of God must come to meet you from the midst of the Chinese people themselves, and this will happen, because it is God's way. You are only a watchman. The people will come to recognize Christ through his spirit, and then theirs will be a true, divine Christianity, not a European one.



Today's missionaries to China make the grave mistake of acting like professors instructing students, while at the same time churches and Christian societies carry on like industrialists, measuring everything in terms of "success." We must do things differently and meet everyone on the same level, without criticism. Our task is to radiate divine love, teach by example, and respect all as fellow human beings. This will demand time and much patient prayer, but the Savior, as the Risen One, will open the doors.

Again, wait quietly; it will soon be clear to you what you must do. The true Christ must come, who addresses the questions of life. A true missionary should in the name of Jesus live and bring life, not religious debate. Genuine faith is built upon a people made alive by God, not the other way around.

For this reason don't study the people. Be natural and childlike with them and accept them as they are, but at the same time do not let them affect you wrongly. Have no agenda whatsoever. All of our human efforts and judging will only lead to complications. Be a joyful, carefree, single-minded young man. Be free in spirit, free in God, and free of human opinion. Unite with people as God leads them to you, no matter who they

are. The ninety-nine righteous ones will have to remain in the desert, for the Savior seeks the one lost sheep. Christ came into the flesh, and so the world will experience that. So be a servant, not a master.



Don't let yourself get entangled with other missionaries, but don't work against them either. Preach and speak in your own way, and do not inquire whether your people attend the meetings of the others. Sincere people realize what is true, and when all is said and done this is what they will trust. Make sure the spirit of Christ is alive in you, especially when you are among misguided Christians. Then you will discover what kind of people they are. They pray themselves into a frenzy, because this is the only way they can carry on mission work as they do. Normally any reasonable person would have too much common sense.

People who are obsessed with preaching are actually afraid of knowledge. Therefore, do not speak too early in public, otherwise you will run into a dragon. Should you eventually become Chinese to the Chinese and point unbelievers to God, God will open doors at the right time. For now it is important that you stay above water inwardly until those in the circle of Christians

there have recognized their spiritual poverty; for the kingdom of heaven only comes to the poor. Do not tolerate any quarrelling about dogma—it should not be a topic of conversation. Preach the gospel of the kingdom of God, not that of the church.



The gospel of Christ is eternally new. “Sing unto the Lord a new song.” Jesus comes to us as a man, and we must represent him. His work in us can only begin when we are one with him. So *be* a “savior” to the Chinese in all simplicity. Let love be the force that brings you together, conscious that “the life we now live is not our life, but the life which Christ lives in us” (Gal. 2:20). Those who call themselves Christians tend to respect only fellow Christians. They want to make people one of them before accepting them into their company. Jesus, however, is the sinner’s companion, and leaves everything else up to his Father in heaven.

You stand before God, and between you and God lies the Chinese world. Through your faith, allow God to work in the midst of all the confusion that exists. You yourself cannot wade in and do anything, but if you stand rightly among the sheep who have no shepherd, God will make headway. When Jesus speaks of “workers

in the harvest” (Matt. 9:36-38) he does not mean missionaries, but powers of God—angels, the Holy Spirit, or however else one wants to put it. The apostles only received and passed on the sheaves, in service to God.

This is how you should see your vocation. The unbelieving whose hearts God has readied will come to you. Receive them with patience and love. They will still be a long way from recognizing the truth, since this only comes after they feel accepted. They will feel accepted when, in God’s name, you count them as belonging to God even before they have recognized him and just because they came to you.



It is good that you are concerning yourself with the issue of the tariffs being demanded.⁶ In this way you are entering into the problems of practical life. Those who carry the kingdom of God in their hearts must also carry into politics the foundation of love and forbearance for all people, for politics shape the well-being or distress, the growth or decline, of the people. If the people of God do not accept stewardship for humanity in the humble things that lie at hand, how will they be able to communicate the Spirit that dwells within them?

Don't forget: preaching by itself results in fanaticism, with the world remaining forever in wickedness. This is why godless people take the earthly affairs of life in hand, leaving the children of truth and love to sigh in their self-made corners of the world—over which they ought to be exercising an influence. Therefore, quietly send the Governor a report with some practical tips from your own experience. Then things will develop by themselves.

Although many of the new laws made by the Chinese government are directed against Christians, it is only because of their insolent and shameless behavior. I warn you, then, against doing anything that could look like opposition (1 Peter 2:12). If our heart is solely on outward matters, we do not show the way of Jesus. We must be victorious in the spirit and in the higher freedom of the conscience, which stands above the world. Rights gained by force desert the way of the Spirit. We live for God's kingdom, not some earthly one.



Your marked tendency to exclude everything religious from the school you run sounds much too principled. I am afraid it will cause pain in heaven. It is quite right to say (as I myself have said many times) that the gospel is

proclaimed by what we do. But the gospel demands that we honor Jesus on earth. If we stay silent, how will *he* be honored? You need to help the Chinese realize that there is something better than all the wisdom of Confucius. You must speak out and express at every opportunity that we confess to Jesus Christ and to no other.

If you fail to offer any biblical instruction it will become more and more apparent to you that something is missing. To be sure, one needs to develop a proper framework for this instruction. It should be a kind of unveiling that unfolds the kingdom of God upon earth, using biblical stories. It should speak of the emergence of the one God of heaven and earth into the consciousness of certain individuals, whose way of life led to this revelation of God. These prophets witnessed God's glory and gave testimony to it. Beginning with the creation, and then turning to God's struggle with the idolatrous and superstitious ideas and tendencies of humanity, we can lead on through the history of Israel, making use of the most beautiful and purest passages from the Law and the Prophets.

Then, with Jesus, a more intimate glimpse of God opens up, and God the Almighty becomes the Father of all people. The Gospel now reads: You are not a result of chance, but you belong to God, the Father of all. Therein

lies the foundation for the new law of love. It is the forgiveness of sins and a love for all. Any morals you happen to teach must therefore be connected to Jesus' life, which is focused solely on God's kingdom.

Avoid turning the Bible into a historical curiosity. The scriptures have something meaningful to say to us about God and his will for the earth. Take the Old Testament account of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, for example: the essential point is the miracle that enabled the Israelites to become a people, and how particular prophets among them gave witness to God. The details are there in order to support this truth. Or, take the case of Lazarus in the New Testament. Here the central point is Jesus' claim: "I am the resurrection and the life." It is this momentous proclamation that frames the events surrounding Lazarus. The truth that Jesus has risen and is alive is the heart of what has to be said.

The greatest truth of the Bible is and remains that God sent Jesus. He is the one to whom the prophets point (1 Peter 1:10-12). This ultimately should be the focus of your work, be it in deed or word. We dare not be silent about the divine powers present in the person of Jesus, standing before us like great promises and bringing hope into our lives. The importance of Jesus must be gleaned from the entire Bible so that he is in the

center, always alive and decisive in all the changing circumstances of the world.



In the end, your task is not to influence people in a religious way but to produce good fruit, leading your friends to overcome their problems through learning to overcome themselves. Jesus wants to give life—genuine life under God. Religious feelings and opinions are unimportant. The world needs people of life, not pious hypocrites.

The kind of missionizing that pushes people into some kind of religious experience leads to nothing but great disappointment. We must reach out only through our presence, which should be as simple and clear as possible. Wait until God opens hearts. What *we* try to instill always falls to pieces. Do your duty as much as you are able—don't overdo it by attempting to achieve something great—and you will be inwardly strong before God.

We are not asked to do anything spectacular. We are entrusted with the task of quietly giving the light of Christ's spirit and God's love to a world of human need. No storm can extinguish this light, a light that no darkness can overcome.

Do your utmost to understand exactly the needs of

the Chinese and to learn how and where they can best be met. The principle of mutual understanding between people, with their different needs and circumstances, is what will put an end to national and religious rivalries and jealousies. Until now religions, with their different concepts of God, have been a source of division. But a faith that brings mutual respect will become a source of peace. This is why you must never engage in religious propaganda. Instead, regard every person as a child of God, equal to every other person and to ourselves. In this way true genuineness can come to expression in every student and person who comes to you.

In this sense, it is good that you are withdrawing more and more from the task of a parson or missionary. Such an office is not from God but from men. To do something in the name of a position is not at all the same as to do it in the name of Jesus. Therefore, always beware of the leaven of proselytizing. Remain on the same level with all. Changing hearts is not your business. God's spirit will do this according to his will, if only you stand rightly before him in your daily life.

Rejoice when, without any religious additions or trappings on your part, people feel from you something of Jesus, the Man of God's power. Yes, they can enter the kingdom of God without knowing how, only because they surrender themselves to the influence your work

has upon them. It is not your work, of course, but the work of God's spirit.

Millions are sighing, and Christ will come to them, bringing the kingdom of heaven. We must wait for God's time, being completely aware that our goal is to bring the world into God's hands, not ours. No one but Christ has a right to the world, to the honor of God the Father.

Postscript

Though Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt is relatively unknown today, in his lifetime (1842-1919) his impact was felt by thousands. Even so, he is not easy to characterize—theologically, politically, or otherwise.

Blumhardt possessed no “theology,” although he was behind two movements that accepted him as one of their forerunners without having any direct contact with him: Religious Socialism (in Switzerland and Germany) and Dialectical (“Crisis”) Theology. His ideas had seminal influence on the likes of Ragaz, Barth, Bonhoeffer, Ellul, and Moltmann. Today, there are “charismatic” movements that embrace Blumhardt and his father, Johann, because of the miraculous events that surrounded their ministries.

Blumhardt didn’t care about matters of religion and church. His focus, and indeed his definition of faith, was to live in expectation of God’s coming kingdom. For him, God’s victory over the world’s injustice was no

abstraction, but something living, to be strived for in everyday life. As a consequence, many found his message dangerously worldly, even irreverent. His critique of ecclesiastical and individualistic piety touched a nerve that is still raw today.

Blumhardt's aim, however, was never to attack, but to call people to Christ, whose power redeems everything. This grew out of his father's experience with a suffering and tormented young woman in his small parish at the edge of the Black Forest. His father's two-year fight against demonic possession ended when the evil spirit was driven out. The young woman exclaimed, "Jesus is victor! Jesus is victor!" With that as a rallying cry, a movement of repentance and healing swelled, taking hold of his father's parish and extending to the neighboring towns and villages. This stood as a backdrop to everything Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt experienced in the future.

When Blumhardt was ten, his family moved to Bad Boll, a complex of large buildings that had been developed as a spa (*"Bad"*) around a sulfur water spring. This became a kind of retreat center where thousands came in search of healing and rest. It was there that Blumhardt spent his adult life, free to operate according to God's leading.

Eventually, out of frustration with the constant attention people placed on healing, Blumhardt retired from public preaching. Instead, a burning desire arose within him for God's justice, which led him to a deeper awareness of the misery, poverty, and inequity around him in Germany and in the world. He began to sense God's voice in the new movements of protest and revolt—against capitalism, injustice, and war. Despite socialism's foibles and shortcomings, Blumhardt believed that Christ was surely hidden in it.

When by circumstance he was compelled to join the Social Democrats (he acted as their elected representative to the Württemberg parliament from 1900-1906) it was as though he was under banishment. He was asked to renounce his position as pastor in the state church, and marked as an outcast. But Blumhardt accepted this as a freeing: "State and church are no soil for the fire of God." Ironically, this same attitude eventually led Blumhardt away from official politics; he returned to Bad Boll after his first term in office.

Blumhardt believed that the prophets and Jesus wanted a new world: the rulership of God over all things. He rebelled against the idea that God was only in heaven and that the gospel applied only to the inner life.

Seen through Blumhardt's eyes, the gospel demands a

revolution of life. What matters is God's coming reign; a reality not to be confused with any human philosophy of progress or religious system—including Christianity. The fabric of God's kingdom spans time and place and brings together unlikely witnesses who have been blessed to see the Truth despite the illusions of their day.

As sole archivists of Blumhardt's writings in English, we affirm with him: "The kingdom of God is and was and will be the rulership of justice, of order, of power, of authority, of all that is of God, over creation. This is what moves those of us who seek, and this must come more fully into being. For unless our lives are molded according to God's rulership, we shall always remain dissatisfied."

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¹ Blumhardt makes a consistent distinction between political activity that stems from a consciously Christian framework, and political involvements bound to a state or political party. Blumhardt supports the former, not the latter.

² Early on in his work, and following the illness of Dr. Ernst Faber, Wilhelm, much against his will, was greatly occupied by the tasks of the German pastorate in Tsingtao.

³ It is not clear what Blumhardt is alluding to here. It may be the general human sacrifice of which the European powers were guilty through the advance of colonialism in China. It may also be that Blumhardt has concrete contemporary events in mind, such as the Boxer Rebellion (1900-1901), which began as a revolt against the ruling dynasty and which the Court in Peking managed to redirect against foreigners.

⁴ In traditional Chinese families the birth of boys was urgently desired for cultic reasons. Boys would guarantee the fulfillment of ancestor worship. Girls, on the other hand, had no significance for ancestor worship in their own family since after the obligatory marriage they belonged to the husband's clan. For this reason if parents were in economic distress, infant girls were frequently killed or abandoned.

⁵ The "Fox Movement" emphasized renunciation of alcohol, tobacco, and opium. Connected to it was a "fox-veneration," based on various superstitious customs of China. Its aim was a kind of hypnotic fox-possession enabling those who took part in it to break free from various addictive substances. Along with religious-suggestive efforts were a tendency toward anti-dynasty democracy, which gave the movement a decidedly political-revolutionary flavor.

⁶ We do not know the concrete reasons for Richard Wilhelm's interest in questions of tariffs. However, we do know that Blumhardt was intensely occupied with problems of taxation in his day. For instance, on January 31, 1901, he gave a speech to the provincial diet challenging the duty levied on grain, taking a position opposing the protectionist grain duties.