

## THE ONE GREAT THOUGHT OF GOD (Der eine große Gedanke Gottes)

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This article by August Pieper appeared in the *Theologische Quartalschrift* in October 1915. It was meant to be the first article in a series of three. The English translation of the second article in this series, *Die eine große Sünde*, “The One Great Sin,” appeared in *WLQ* in January 2014. It would appear that Professor Pieper never was able to complete the series. He intended to write *Die eine große Kraftwirkung Gottes*, “The One Great Mighty Work of God.” I have searched the *Quartalschrift* for it, but found no such article.

In this article Professor Pieper speaks to the fundamental issue in theology: the plan of salvation and its realization in Christ and his church. It is so easy to become involved with all the details and disputed issues in the study of theology that this vital doctrine is often removed from the spotlight. The forest is lost amidst the trees. Pieper places this issue before us and tells us beautifully what this means for the church.

*Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you.*

*Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.—*  
*Hebrews 13:7*

Jason D. Oakland

As long as there have been thinking men, there have also been thoughts about the final purpose of all events and of existence itself. We have an irresistible urge to use our reason to determine the essence, context, ultimate reason, and purpose of the world. From this urge arises philosophy, which is nothing more than a purposive, systematic contemplation about these final things.

Today’s monistic philosophy—as represented by the physiopsychologist Wundt and the materialists Haeckel and Ostwald—has removed the very concept of purpose or goal from its systems. The world doesn’t have a purpose. Everything that exists is eternal and necessary and is absolutely subject to the process of endless evolution, governed by the all-controlling and unbreakable law of causality that works unconsciously and without purpose. The concept of purpose is finally human and subjective. We humans, as desiring, wanting, and thinking persons have ends, purposes, intents, and plans. And we sub-

ordinate these instinctively but unjustifiably to the existence of events outside of ourselves. What we apprehend is really not intentional purpose, but rather regularly reoccurring workings of powers that are simply present and not to be identified any further.

This philosophy is not likely to be popular very long. First of all, because it is inconsistent. Whoever explains the concept of purpose as a projection of our personal consciousness then has to explain the concept of causality in the same way. Then causality is also purely subjective. We perceive neither cause nor effect, but rather processes that simply follow one after the other. First, the regular occurrence of one definite movement is followed by another definite movement (e.g., a ball at rest rolls from its place when struck by a ball in motion). This allows us to conclude that the movement of one ball is the cause of the second ball's movement. I do not see the cause. I only think it. It is an entirely subjective concept, which is not perceived in external experience, but I project it from within me into the occurrences outside of me.

Moreover, the very concepts, "purpose" and "cause," are actually not at all two different things, but one and the same thing viewed from two different poles.

This philosophy, as all do, makes the general mistake of applying to the problem only half of the human ability to perceive things, not the total ability. It works only with reason and sets aside emotion, intuition, and inner perception. It will decipher the secret of existence purely with mathematical axioms and logical arguments, as if existence consisted only of mathematical and logical relationships. However, the most important thing in the world is by no means an objective, lifeless, and heartless existence but one that is personal, feeling, and perceptive. Whether the world is round or has three-corners, whether it is made of lead or a spider's web, really doesn't matter. What truly matters above all is that we can laugh and have no reason to cry. As it stands, man is not just a calculator, but a sensitive soul. God has given him perception just as he has given him intellect, so that he may rightly understand and assess the world. Before the "master philosophers" recognize that fact, they might create for themselves (and for their kind), using only their intellectual calculations, either a great deal of intellectual entertainment or possibly a great headache, but they will not systematize a worldview that satisfies the average, natural man. We do not merely want something for our little heads which are already greatly overburdened, but above all else, we want something for our big hearts which cannot live without happiness.

Religious, moral consciousness belongs in the realm of inner perception. To a normal person, it is as proper and inalienable as the intellect. With the same necessity with which intellect says, "Two plus

two is four," and "an A is an A," spiritual consciousness says, "There is a God," and "You shall not kill." That the world sprang from the hand of a personal God cannot be reasoned with the intellect or deduced from natural experience. However, to the spiritual faculty of perception, "the heavens declare the glory of God and the skies proclaim the work of his hands" with an unmistakable voice and inescapable proof. The Pauline  $\gamma\nu\omega\sigma\tau\acute{o}\nu\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ <sup>1</sup> is given to a normal, natural man who views nature and her works with his senses—that ability is given by means of man's inborn capacity for emotional or spiritual response. Whoever claims to have no organ for religious perception deceives himself, or he is an abnormal person, as abnormal as those who add three and two and get seven. We do not conclude that there is a God first from the works of creation, but we perceive him directly from them. It is the same with the moral consciousness. With the command "You shall not steal," as with Kant's categorical imperative,<sup>2</sup> the awareness of a holy God, who speaks and supplies the command with a frightful emphasis, is given directly. We do not first need to deduce him from it as Kant does, as nothing is able, in and of itself, to be deduced from it. The concept of God, which lives in our religious, moral consciousness, is not an undefined, higher power over our life and the world, but a personal almighty, omniscient, holy God who is aware of himself, knows, feels, and wills, as we do, even if it is in his own way. Along with this, the concept of purpose is also given to the worldview of natural man. It is not a projection abstracted from our spiritual condition, but a direct consciousness, inseparably bound to the awareness of God. Therefore, the question "What should the world be?" is likewise as natural and as urgent as the question that goes with it "Where did it come from?" Whoever claims that existence is purposeless, claims that it is meaningless! This is a philosophy from which only self-destruction can practically follow. Where does such a meaningless life lead!

Nevertheless, if even sound reason now firmly insists that the world, and all that is in it, has a purpose, it still is not immediately possible to determine exactly what this purpose is. Indeed, it is clear from the opening words of Psalm 19 that natural man knows to some extent that the ultimate common purpose of all creation is the glorification of its Creator.<sup>3</sup> The heavens are preachers of God's glory, and there is no language or tongue in which one does not perceive their voice. The realization that every creature of God glorifies his power,

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<sup>1</sup>He is making a reference to Romans 1:18–2:10, especially v. 19.

<sup>2</sup>"Universal and unconditional moral command or obligation distinguished from hypothetical imperative, which is conditional and depends, e.g., on expediency, practical necessity, or desire."

<sup>3</sup>Psalm 19:1-4.

wisdom, and divine majesty is set forth to natural man by God in Job 38 and following.<sup>4</sup> And you can't take away from natural man the realization that creation is anthropocentric and that everything is directed to man and should serve him as the crown of creation. Even if you can't say that this realization is actually inborn, such a realization does come about from observing nature. Here, however, is where the understanding of the world's purpose in the natural man stops. No naïve realization, not even such a scientific philosophy, will ever find out what God has in mind for the particular details of the world, so that he will accomplish the well-being of mankind and his own glorification in the way that he wishes to be glorified and to make men happy. Still, the realization that the world was created to serve man and to glorify God suffers a strong bedevilment from the thousand evils which are contained in it. The course of the world, God's rule of the world, is still beyond comprehension to the Christian, even though he is informed of God's plan for the world. To natural man, all this is not merely incomprehensible, but it is also troublesome and foolish. He has no idea of the special purpose, the ultimate thought of God for the bliss of man and his own glorification. These things are first made known to us through the gospel.

The gospel has only one great exclusive content and subject, Christ. From beginning to end, Scripture is a witness to him. Not that it does not say, teach, and reveal in addition a thousand other things, but they all are connected to him in some way. They point to him as the central point. They testify to him as the one great achievement. They are declarations of his glory. Jesus Christ, the Son of God who became man, the Savior of sinners, is the Heart and Star, the one great Sun, the Alpha and Omega of God's revelation through the Holy Spirit. Of him, all the prophets, apostles, and inspired holy men of God testify. Indeed, Jesus Christ is the one great thought of God, revealed in the Word of God. Everything else revealed in the Word is only a mantle, or a halo around his head, only an armchair and footstool for his person, only clouds or radiance around his throne.

The thoughts of God are eternal thoughts. To him something does not just occur. To him something does not just fly by. He did not come to the thought of Christ by accident. Christ is the one great thought of God from eternity. Just as nothing is in the revealed Word that does not relate to Christ in some way, so there was and is nothing in the eternal thoughts of God that does not relate to him. Here we must not limit the concept of "thoughts" only to the strict sense. All feelings and desires, wishes and wills, plans and conclusions, impulses and movements in God also have Christ as their object and

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<sup>4</sup>Job 38-41.

focus. There is nothing more in the thoughts, feelings, and wishes of God—even in his *actions*—than Christ. Christ is the beginning, middle, and end of the ways of God. Everything in heaven and on earth was not only created through him but also for him, the visible and invisible, thrones and powers and rulers and authorities. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.<sup>5</sup> He is the head of all rulers and authorities that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.<sup>6</sup> God has placed absolutely everything under his feet. Without exception, all should serve him and give him glory as the Lord and Savior of all created beings, as the image of the invisible God. Everything that God has ever done, still does, or will do in the world relates to Christ. Everything that he has allowed and still allows in these rational and irrational creatures, in the small and the great, to the individual or among the nations, even the terrible World War of this present day, even allowing sin, the fall of the devil, and of man, yes even the condemnation of the godless—in short, all beings and happenings in this wide, wide world, every action and allowance of God—relates in some way to Christ as the beginning, middle, and end of every way of God.

However, Christ is not considered the goal of the thoughts and ways of God absolutely and in and of itself. The works, deeds, and things allowed by God do not stand only as a means to the end of Christ's glorification. Scripture nowhere says that God created the world or mankind, allowed sin, or pronounced judgment only to glorify Christ and himself through it. The prelapsarianism<sup>7</sup> of the Calvinists in the interest of the logical understanding of God's plan for the world revealed in Scripture has invented a purely human philosophy, Rationalism. It is not found in Scripture, and indeed it is entirely an ἀντίγραφον.<sup>8</sup> As to the scholastic question, whether sin was necessary for Christ's work of redemption or whether the Logos would have still become man without the Fall into sin, Scripture stands totally on the side of Anselm<sup>9</sup> and Thomas<sup>10</sup> and knows nothing of the subtlety<sup>11</sup> of Scotus.<sup>12</sup> God's

<sup>5</sup>Colossians 1:16-17.

<sup>6</sup>Philippians 2:10-11.

<sup>7</sup>View that predestination in which God determined to save some and damn others preceded creation and that God allowed the fall as a means of carrying out his purpose.

<sup>8</sup>"copy"

<sup>9</sup>Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109).

<sup>10</sup>Thomas Aquinas (1224/27–1274).

<sup>11</sup>The German word is "Tuftelei" which literally means "splitting hairs."

<sup>12</sup>John Duns Scotus (ca. 1265–ca.1308).

Son became man for the sake of sin in order to redeem the world from sin. God allowed sin to happen neither for the glorification of himself nor of Christ. Christ glorified himself through sin, with respect to sin which came into the world contrary to his will. He did not want it in order to glorify himself. If Scripture says that all things were created *in* Christ—*εἰς αὐτόν*, on the strength of him, for him—then this is a very wide and undefined relationship such as that of the means to an end. It is the relationship of the way to the goal. It says that God directed and pointed everything that he created and allowed, all his doings and control, to Christ and his glorification.

Certainly, a mystery exists here that we cannot uncover. We do not understand how Christ was able to be the goal of creation, the end of the thoughts and ways of God, and yet was without the addition of sin. We do not know how sin, which God did not want, could come into being, could enter into God's plan, or how and why he allowed it. Of this, one can say a lot but explain nothing. We stand here before the hidden God, who demands from us humility and modesty, not knowledge. On the other hand, absolutely nothing is to be removed from the *εἰς αὐτόν*. All things without exception, all doings of God and of men, all happenings, have their goal and end in the exalted Christ. He is the one great thought of God.

However, this was not only in his bare divine-human person and for himself alone! It was important to God to realize his work of art which was the personal union of the eternal Logos with the human nature in Christ. This is certainly great indeed. It was his pleasure that all the gifts, wisdom, and skill of God should dwell in him. He is God's perfect masterpiece, not only absolutely without blame, but endowed in Colossians with all the riches of God's glory, the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of every creature.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, in him, the man Jesus, all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.<sup>14</sup> The Word was not flesh from eternity. He became flesh in time, but in order to be and to remain flesh eternally. However, the thoughts of God do not come to an end with the realization of this mystery. Christ is the Lamb of God, who was slain, and therefore worthy to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise.<sup>15</sup> But, he was not slain, made alive, and exalted for his own sake. He is not merely a crowned martyr. Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, the Savior and Redeemer. He did not become the God-man, the servant of all servants, obedient to death on the cross for his own sake or for the sake of his honor, but

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<sup>13</sup>Colossians 1:15.

<sup>14</sup>Colossians 2:9.

<sup>15</sup>Revelation 5:12.

for the sake of another, for the sake of another person, for the sake of a sinner, for our sake.

This was the great thought of God. He would redeem the entire world, the entire fallen human race from death, from the devil, from corruption. Indeed, he would redeem every creature from servitude to a perishable essence into the excellent freedom of a child of God. He would reconcile heaven and earth and all that is in them and bring them peace through himself, through his blood, through his cross. This is the eternal thought of God, which he revealed in time: these two together become one, Christ the God-man, the Redeemer of the world, and the world redeemed by her Redeemer, the God-man, Christ. This is the inauguration of the ἀποκαταστάσις πάντων of which Peter speaks,<sup>16</sup> and the παλιγγενεσία of which the Lord speaks,<sup>17</sup> the perfected theocracy of which all the prophets prophesied, and the ἀνακεφαλαίωσις τῶν πάντων ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ which Paul adds in Ephesians as the goal of all the ways of God.<sup>18</sup> This is the thought of Christ's kingdom, which embraces all, brings salvation and peace to all, restores the **יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ** to the entire κτίσις, and transfigures all things in a heavenly way.

However, we said it is the inauguration, the setting things in motion, not the completed realization. The Prince of Peace's designed kingdom of peace is not yet realized in the scope in which it was conceived and intended by God—a thought, which we dare not combine with the essence and will of God. The kingdom of Christ comes in its full glory, but many will be excluded from it on account of their unbelief. For all eternity, there will be no conversion or salvation for the devil and the godless. They are and will ultimately remain excluded from grace and glory. Thus says the mouth of God, and we must allow it to stand.

This does not negate the above mentioned ἀνακεφαλαίωσις as the aim of all the thoughts of God. It really is a union into the whole. It really embraces τὰ πάντα, "all things," and it happens in Christ. It is a union in and under him. All explanations that omit one of these moments in any way violate these clear words. Christ is not only the head of the church, but in a very wide sense certainly, he is the head of all rulers and authorities, the head of all things. It means exactly what it says. God has placed him at his right hand in heaven over all rulers, power, might, authorities, and all that may be called such, not only in this world but also in the next, and he has placed all things under his feet. He is the Lord and Sovereign of all creation, even of the lost and the powers of hell.

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<sup>16</sup>Acts 3:21.

<sup>17</sup>Matthew 19:28.

<sup>18</sup>Ephesians 1:10.

However, “head” implies more than just Lord and Master. God is the Creator and Lord of all creatures, but Scripture never calls him their head. He is not their head in the full sense, because he does not take into himself any of their ways or nature in any sense. Such inclusion lies in the concept of head in contrast to the concept of Lord. The head of a family, of a platoon, or of a nation is a member of it, is a *primus inter pares*.<sup>19</sup> He is the first but also has something in common with the rest. Christ is the head of every creature because he has even this in common with them, that he is a creature of God—not as *Logos* of course, but as Jesus Christ, as Ambassador and Steward of God, as Incarnate One and Savior. He is the firstborn, not *vor*; as Luther translated, but *von* all creatures.<sup>20</sup> As such he can and should have the first place above all creation. He should be its head. Under him everything in heaven and on earth is connected and united to the whole. As the head among equals, he holds, carries, rules, and controls all creatures. They should and must (even unwillingly) honor him as their head and Lord and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.<sup>21</sup>

This connection and union of Christ and all creatures into an eternal kingdom is not the last thought of God. It is all at the same time the scaffolding of the temple, which he finally has to build. It is the stage for the play, which he will put on. It is the landscape for the paradise which he will fill. It is the temple, which should contain the Most Holy Place, which he will set up. It is the sea of clouds around the heavenly radiance here, which should shine forth into eternity, the mystery of all mysteries: *Christ and His Church*. This is the one, great, and the final thought of God. It embraces a glory, which no mouth can express.

Scripture describes this mystery to us with a variety of pictures. Christ is the Head of the church, and she is his body. The Lord and his church form a living organism. The sense of this picture is that between Christ and the church there is not just an external but also an internal *ἀνακεφαλαίωσις* of the church that takes place in and under him, a joining of *similar* elements into a whole. Of whatever kind is the Head, such will the body be. Understand that this similarity does not refer to the original, pre-incarnate essence of Christ. The church will certainly not share in the divine essence of Christ. This similarity does not refer only to the human nature of both, for indeed, depraved men who do not belong to the church of Christ also possess this. We can't dismiss this element of similarity entirely, especially not the “createdness” of both.

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<sup>19</sup>First among equals.

<sup>20</sup>Not *before*, but *of*.

<sup>21</sup>Philippians 2:11.



However, in the final and most particular sense, the element of similarity between Christ and the church according to Scripture is the Spirit and the spiritual, heavenly life which both receive. God poured out his Spirit on Christ because he is the Son of Man, the Redeemer, the Savior. He anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power without measure. The Lord first acquired the church for himself, as all of humanity, in his degradation and humiliation. In his exaltation, he received the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit for men, even for these rebels. He has poured out the Spirit on redeemed mankind, and through this outpouring he has created for himself a spiritual church, like-minded to himself through faith. He has poured out the Holy Spirit *richly* on us through the gospel, through baptism. By this, he made us similar to himself and with himself, the Head, which is entirely Spirit and spiritual. We are organically bound and attached to a complete spiritual body.

In this way, it is one and the same Spirit who lives in both Christ and the church. It is one and the same spiritual life which flows through both and organically binds one to the other. We are members of his body, of his spiritual flesh and bones. We are one body and one spirit, a spirit from his spirit. However, it is in a way that he is the Head and we are the members, the body. He has control in all things. He had the Spirit originally. He received it first and has it without measure. We, the church, have received it from him and in a pre-arranged measure, but nevertheless in a way that we are "the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."<sup>22</sup> From his, the Head's, fullness, spiritual life now flows in like manner through the entire body to all the members, connecting them all with him and one another. He adorns the individual members again in different ways, this member with that gift and another with a different particular gift of the Spirit to preparing them for a particular work in the whole body.

No one who does not have this spiritual life himself knows what it is. No description can help here. It must be experienced. It is a divine life, a life from God. However, it is not his essential life, the essence of God himself. We will not become gods through it. We remain creatures. It is a life created by God, which pulsates through Christ and his members, a life won by Christ, emanating from the Holy Spirit, bringing him as an inhabitant to our heart, a life from the Spirit and in the Spirit. This life is divine purity, righteousness, and holiness which have consumed all sin and impurity. It depicts us as holy and blameless without wrinkle or blemish. It is a life in consummated glory, ἔνδοξος.<sup>23</sup> It is a life in perfect love between the Head and members

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<sup>22</sup>Ephesians 1:23.

<sup>23</sup>Ephesians 5:27.

and between the members and each other. This life is perfect happiness, perfect bliss, because it is life in the most perfect and intimate communion with Christ, with the Holy Spirit, with God.

However, there are still two other forces in the union of Christ with the church. The Head rules, guides, and leads the body and its members, its thoughts, senses, and whole mind. It cares for them, protects, provides for, and preserves them. They have complete sufficiency in him. Finally, his lot is their lot. There is an inseparable connection to their eternal weal and woe. "Shall I fear, or could the Head rise and leave his members dead?"

In Scripture, there is a second, very frequently used picture of the connection between Christ and the church, that of the spiritual wedding, the church as the bride of Christ. Christ is the husband, she is the wife. He is the bridegroom, she is his bride. We see this picture in the Old Testament especially in Hosea, Psalm 45, and Song of Solomon, in the New Testament, in Paul, John the Baptist, and Revelation. The intimacy of this relationship was intended above all for the spiritual one-flesh relationship of Christ and the Church, in which the intimacy of mutual love and the felicitousness of these circumstances are especially emphasized. The other great thing in this picture is the beauty and glory on both sides. All the magnificence of this world is heaped on the bridal couple. He is the most excellent of men, and at his right hand is the royal bride in gold of Ophir; all glorious is the princess within her chamber; her gown is interwoven with gold,<sup>24</sup> with pure and beautiful silk, with the righteousness of the saints. All this is acquired for her and given to her to wear by the bridegroom. This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church<sup>25</sup>—the wedding of the Lamb.<sup>26</sup>

The most common picture in the Old Testament we find also at the very end of the New Testament in Revelation. It is the picture of the New Jerusalem, of the perfect and most excellent city whose Ruler, Sun, and Light is God and the Lamb.<sup>27</sup> It is a picture in which all the glorious aspects of this mystery of Christ and his church are summarized in this overarching concept: The dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear, etc. etc.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Psalm 45:2, 9, 13.

<sup>25</sup>Ephesians 5:32.

<sup>26</sup>Revelation 19:7.

<sup>27</sup>Revelation 21:23; 22:5.

<sup>28</sup>Revelation 21:3-4.

The one great thought of God is the realization of this mystery. If this is fulfilled, then the history of the world, the great deeds of God, and all his thoughts and plans have reached their aim and purpose.

It cannot be our task here to picture the glory of this. Scripture itself does this abundantly. Wherever the holy men of God speak about this highest of all things, their speech will turn to an ecstatic hymn, which will pull the garment of human speech this way and that, so that it nearly tears. So it is, with Paul in Ephesians and with John in Revelation. Their hearts wish to burst for joy, and they do not know how they might be able to compose in human words a song of all that the Spirit has placed before their eyes. This is the mystery which has given and still gives the church her most enthusiastic hymns,<sup>29</sup> her greatest sermons. Herein the greatest comfort lies, which carries away all temptations of a wounded conscience, all sorrow or need at such a time—which are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.<sup>30</sup> Truly we who are preachers and teachers of the divine Word have the greatest need for this comfort, this joy, this enthusiasm for our own lives before God, in the church, and in the world. This is the case because our own sin and weakness, the resistance and thanklessness from within our field of work, the daily workload, the secularization in the nature of our church, and the disruption of all human circumstances in the world, all want to dampen the spirit in us and make us give up hope. The joy that smiles out at us from this secret is doubly necessary for our preaching and care of souls. A discouraging, despondent, pessimistic word does not work either from the pulpit or outside of it. May the tone of our exultant praises, of our triumphant song of victory ring throughout all of our speaking and preaching, so the devil and the world won't steal the victory of the souls that hear us. What aspect of Christian life, and of ministry, is there that would not gain power and strengthening from the joy in this secret!

However, this takes us beyond our subject at this time. We are concerned especially with applying this subject first to the formal side of life in our ministry and to the degree of intensity with which we conduct our ministry.<sup>31</sup> We complain about the decline in the spiritual life of our people. This is a fact. However, in an article in this year's seminary catalog, we have already pointed out that this fact must cause us to examine ourselves to see if we are responsible for this decline. Are we the channels through which God will primarily route the streams of the

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<sup>29</sup>It should be noted that the phrase "most enthusiastic hymns" comes from *begeistertsten Hymnen*, not *schwärmerischen Hymnen*.

<sup>30</sup>Romans 8:18.

<sup>31</sup>He uses the word "Amt" here.

Spirit into our churches? Nine times out of ten this statement is true: as the shepherd goes, so go the sheep. If the gospel does not inspire us and take possession of us and move all of the powers of our body and soul to action, how can it use us to accomplish this in those who are in our charge? Luther's words in the Preface to the Small Catechism are so true, "How can they help but neglect it, if you sleep and remain silent?"<sup>32</sup> Without exception, if these words were applied to every one of us in their full sense or even in only half of their full sense, who among us, even if he were the most enthusiastic and industrious, would not beat his breast and declare himself guilty of laziness before God?

The great fault of today's world is the preoccupation with and the improper interest in any and all kinds of rubbish. As a rule, this is one of the main characteristics of children and immature young people. They have not yet discovered the great and important things in life from its thousand-fold diversity, and they will be pulled here and there by all kinds of gaudy things without finding satisfaction and rest anywhere. This is the signature of the children of this world, who have not yet thrown an anchor into a foundation which holds eternally. Therefore, they fly restlessly and flit from one blossom of this life to another like a butterfly. Their true happiness lies in the multiplicity and variety of realizations and sensations of worldly things, and therefore they cannot be satisfied by this world. Such is not the case with us Christians, however. We *have* found the foundation which holds our anchor forever. We have recognized the one great thing, the thing of sole importance in life. We have found peace in it, so that everything else is meaningless, utterly meaningless, and is of value only in so far as it is related to this one thing, Christ and his church. However, we forget and turn our attention again to all that which is used up under our hands, as if our happiness in this life depended on it. Indeed, this is even a hallmark among us, a characteristic of today's kind of pastors, professors, and teachers. We see a lack of concentration on this one great thing, the mystery of eternity: Christ and his church in its glorification. We have again gone too far astray in the world. We have gained too great an interest in the goods, honors, and pleasures of this transient life. We have a personal, earthly self-interest which no longer aligns itself with the interest in the one great thought of God but rather lays it aside. *Hic, hic haeret aqua.*<sup>33</sup> There, there lies the cancerous sore which feeds on the body of the church in our time.

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<sup>32</sup>Kolb, Robert and Timothy J. Wengert. *The Book of Concord*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000. p. 351.

<sup>33</sup>"Here, here water sticks." This is a Latin proverb and here is its German equivalent, although it is not one with which I am familiar. "Hier hängt (stockt) das Wasser (nämlich in der Wasseruhr)." This information was found on 25 April 2004 at [http://www.zitate.net/zitate\\_latein/latein2.html](http://www.zitate.net/zitate_latein/latein2.html).

Until we cure it, things will not go better for the church. We may take external action and make any new arrangements we want. Synodical union, the creation of new offices or the changing of old ones, auditing and financial control, an increase of teachers, an introduction of new collection methods, examples of all kinds of associations and "aids," providing means for amusement and entertainment, a systematization of every congregational and synodical household, indeed even all kinds of opportune sermons, chastisements, and scoldings against the lack of spiritual interest and the prevalent worldliness—these things are all good things in and of themselves. However, they are pure quackery as long as our interest is divided between Christ and the world, as long as we look to Canaan with one eye and look back to the fleshpots of Egypt with the other. *We must learn again to concentrate* on the one great thought of God: Christ and his church. Then, eyes will turn from the War in Europe and the murderous supply of munitions from our people to the enemy of Germany, from the lowness of our strength and the weakness of our physical stature, from the politics and poverty of our domestic surroundings, from all earthly things, from house and farm, from brother and sister, from father and mother, from wife and child. Nothing is more misunderstood by so many people than these rather strong, well known words of our Master, "Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple."<sup>34</sup> It is good to value these things according to their true worth and place them behind the one great important thing in the world, Christ and his church. "I have," said Zinzendorf,<sup>35</sup> "only *one* passion, Christ." We all must learn to speak in this way again.

For God himself has never had another thought. It is true, he has created a world of billions of beings and life that is so beautiful, so artful, so wonderfully superb. Even the best works of men are incompetence compared to it, indeed they are frankly ridiculous. Lord, how great and many are your works! You have ordered it all so wisely, and the earth is full of your goodness. However, none of this pleases him outside of Christ and his church. For it is only through him and in him and to him that he called these things into being, preserves them, and rules over them. What would they all be if they did not serve Christ and his church? They were not created for their own sake and have no significance of their own. God did not and does not want to realize thousands of independent thoughts, but only *one* great thought with thousands and millions of different trimmings and ornamentations. Therefore, he will shatter and destroy, curse and condemn all works of his hand that do not serve Christ and his church. He will create a new

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<sup>34</sup>Luke 14:33.

<sup>35</sup>Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700–60).

world in which every leaf and worm glorifies the heavenly Bridegroom and his Bride. The history of the world has no meaning outside of Christ and his church. Every cultural activity of the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Spaniards, French, English, Germans, every joy and sorrow, every struggle, battle, and the endless shedding of blood has been in vain to the extent that it has not stood in the service of the one great thought of God. It has only been the work and struggling of men. People have no other task than to serve the realization of the mystery: Christ and his church. Outside of this task, whatever has been undertaken and accomplished by men will all fall victim to corruption and condemnation. The international struggle at the present time together with the American supply of munitions and the millions of allied bonds, even with the final breaths of hundreds of thousands on the horrifying battlefields, with all the heroism and the self-sacrifice of the soldiers, with all the nameless woes and tears of their relatives, all of this makes absolutely no sense if no seed sprouts from it for the building and glorification of God's new city, which will be the dwelling of God with men. Only insofar as the creatures of the world and its history further the future kingdom of Christ and of God do they have any worth. Outside of Christ, they are meaningless and condemned. We must become alive again on the inside. God has only one great thought, which he wants to realize: Christ and his church! All other thoughts, senses, wishes, and doings of God only stand to serve the accomplishment of this idea. He does not have many different kinds of independent thoughts standing next to this one. He has only one great thought with which all others are connected in a uniform, organized way.

We also must be so disposed, in particular we servants of the Word. We must have only a single goal in mind: Christ and his church! Only this *one* thought in our thinking, sensing, meditating, planning, and doing day and night! All other thoughts and deeds are subordinated and subjected to this one! To this we are called. What should our ministry be then? We are servants of Christ and his church. We are God's helpers, co-workers in the realization of this one great idea of his. Truly, we are not servants of Christ and pastors or teachers in his church to plant our own paradise next to his or to build our kingdom at the same time as his. We are workers not in our own vineyard, but in his. We do not stand in our own employ, but in his.

Such a change of mind is certainly no easy task. It is said that one abandons everything in the heart and follows him, and the flesh will not and cannot do this. However, it is possible through his Spirit, whom he has richly promised to those who ask for him in faith. It steadfastly avails to show him and his glory which should also be our glory. Indeed, we must learn to bend our stiff knees in prayer. We must

not stop asking the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, to give us the Spirit of wisdom, to reveal him to us, and to enlighten the eyes of our understanding, so that we may recognize that which is the hope of our calling and the richness of his inheritance for his saints. God wants to and will do this in abundance. If even among us no father gives a seeking son a stone instead of bread or a scorpion instead of a fish, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!<sup>36</sup> The lead weight of our own interests, which makes us lazy, falls from our feet before the Holy Spirit, and we will be fitted with boots to carry the gospel of peace skillfully for which we were prepared.

Indeed it is a difficult task! The prospects for the fulfillment of it are small as far as one can judge. We have no other means to realize this secret of God than the Word, and the world will not listen to it. However, we will not give up hope and throw in the towel. It has been exceedingly difficult for God himself to bring his great thought to reality. To call the wonderful creation of the world into being was child's play for him. He spoke, and it happened. He commanded, and so there it stood. However, to accomplish the great thought of Christ and his church has been exceedingly painful for him. It cost him sweat, sweat like blood, even death, and the agony of hell for his Son. Should we not also want to work and sweat a little? The conversion of the sinner does not go according to an ordinary command. Paul speaks of "his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,"<sup>37</sup> and as such has given the church her head. The power, with which he has made us into the church of Christ, his body and bride, must go first through the humiliated and exalted Christ before it is able to break and win over our recalcitrant hearts. However, it has completed its work, and it will lead it through until the end. It is still effective and powerful today to destroy all powers which raise themselves above the recognition of Christ. Indeed, the gospel is truly the power of God even for the consummation of his mystery: Christ and his church. It accomplishes his purpose wherever he sends it, even still today, even in our weak mouths, through our poor preaching.

Oh that we would ardently and without ceasing ask and beg for the Holy Spirit, so that he would make the one great thought of God, the mystery: Christ and his church, powerful in us to an overflowing joy and indefatigable work for the accomplishment of the new Jerusalem, the dwelling of God with men!

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<sup>36</sup>Luke 11:11-13.

<sup>37</sup>Ephesians 1:19-21.