

Chapter I

God the Creator

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker
of heaven and earth.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Gen. 1:1.)

*He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of
all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and
on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions
or principalities or authorities—all things were created
through him and for him. He is before all things, and
in him all things hold together. (Col. 1:15-17.)*

You are perhaps a little astonished that I am beginning this series of sermons on the Christian creed and have chosen for today a text so timeless and remote, when all our thoughts are imprisoned in the threatening events of these days. I owe you an explanation. First, it should be said that precisely in these days nothing is so important as this, that we stand fast in the faith. The storm has not yet reached us; we have received only a small wind from its periphery. The really difficult times may still lie before us; they will be difficult even if we ourselves remain exempt from conflict; they would be dreadfully difficult if we should be drawn into it. Either way, not only our economic but also our spiritual reserves, and above all our reserves of faith and love, will be required. We must lay up reserves of faith. That means we will have to

do everything in these days to strengthen ourselves out of God's Word and in prayer for the coming difficulties, to create, to collect heavenly treasures, so that we can hold out and do not fail in the days of greatest scarcity. As a soldier receives provisions before combat and checks whether he has everything that belongs to his equipment, so we also want to examine and obtain the equipment of our faith so that we have it when the need comes. We should, indeed, always do that; it is true of all days and even of so-called normal times that we do not live by bread alone but by every word from the mouth of God. But now we understand better than before how urgently necessary that is, how much faith is a question of existence, no, is in the last final *the* question of existence. This struggle is, indeed, really a war of faith. It is concerned not only with power and economic goods; rather, it is concerned with whether the proclamation of God's Word shall remain free, or whether Christendom and the Christian congregation must again crawl into the catacombs because the powers on earth are enemies of Christendom and all faith in God. There can also come again for the church times of hunger when one may preach, read the Bible, and pray together only in hiding places. Therefore, work while it is still day!

The second thing is this, that we, precisely when we reflect upon the ultimate questions of our faith, should come to the realization that at any time and also now they are the most contemporary. There drops from every one of the great words of the Bible a particularly clear light upon the events of time. We can understand what the issues are today only when we place ourselves at the highest height. We can recognize what God requires of us today and what he especially gives us today only when we reflect upon the deepest foundations of our faith. He who wants to build a solid house must lay his foundation deep. Superficial things, of which there are indeed enough, will not really be of service to us today. We want to build our house upon rock, upon God's own Word, upon Jesus Christ, and everything that can make God's Word great to us and Jesus Christ the center of our thinking and willing; that and that alone is now truly relevant to the times.

So we want to allow God's Word to speak to us today what it says about the creation and the Creator. The Old Testament begins with what is the beginning of all things. As the Word of the Creator is the beginning of all things, so it should also be the beginning and foundation of our faith. But so we may know from the outset who the

Creator is and where we can best recognize him, the New Testament tells us that this Creator is none other than the God who has disclosed his nature and his will in Jesus Christ. God the Creator and God the Redeemer are one. The Son of God, who is the eternal Word of God, is the personal plan of creation, the divine model of creation or the goal of creation. The beginning and the end of all things belong together. We can understand whither we are going only if we understand whence we have come, and we can understand whence we have come only if we understand whither we are going. The architect has a blueprint before he undertakes the construction. The goal lies before him before he allows the first spade to break ground. In God the beginning and the end are one. In this blueprint of God, which is Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God, we are included, every one of us. As God has a blueprint for the whole world, so he also has a blueprint for our life as part of the great plan. Our beginning and our destiny are in the hand of God.

Is it not something enormous to dare to believe that today? What so frightens us today is that godless powers are running wild. It seems as if everything has become meaningless. Everything that is worthwhile, everything for which we have worked, everything that has taken mankind thousands of years to build up, seems at present to be threatened. Nothing is left standing firm, and the end again seems to be nothingness, a life that is no longer worth living. Over against all this God now says to us in his Word: No, it is not so. What seems to be important from the viewpoint of the world is really not important. The great events of the world that frighten you are really not the final events. The present is not your destiny but only a hammer blow in God's great construction. You see only the foreground, which is terrifying. Keep your eye on the background, which is divine. The foreground is really small in comparison with the background, but it always seems larger to us because it is in front. To believe is to see the world's background. The faith of creation that the Word of God proclaims to us is this: behold the foundation of everything, and behold it in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the plan of the world. And then, if you really see that, you will no longer be frightened and no longer despair. Then you have faith.

And what do we need today more than faith? That solid faith that everything will still turn out well. We as Christians who believe in the Word of God have a proud and divinely rooted optimism. We know because God has spoken to us that, although the great world powers

would like to do whatever they please, God has control of all of them, that even when they think that they are making world history they are still nothing else than small chessmen who must move as God shifts them, that still in spite of all sorts of catastrophes God's world plan still goes on.

But what is the goal? the end? It is by the mercy of God that he has revealed to us the goal and end of everything as plainly as the beginning. The beginning of all things is: God spoke and it was. It was a slow development over billions of years, but it was at his bidding. And the end is: it will be, though through long historical developments, through countless catastrophes and new beginnings, but it will be: his Kingdom. For all that is created is created in him the Son. He is the divine design; he is the meaning of everything; he is the ultimate purpose and final goal of everything that happens.

Let us say it in a more personal way. God created man in his image. He created you and me to be like him, to be the mirror of his spirit, his love. The more you allow God to look upon you and in you, the more like him you become. God looks at you in Jesus Christ, and when you allow yourself to be seen by God in Jesus Christ you become like him. That is God's grace, that he looks at you and me in Jesus Christ, that he does not say to us, as we sometimes say to a man or at least think: I do not care to see you. That is his whole love, his mercy, his forgiveness. But it is also his will to perfect us, to cleanse us of all evil and to place his Holy Spirit in us. God's view, God's looking at us, is a creative looking. He wills that we at the appearance of Jesus Christ become like him. That is his building plan for you and me. Every man can reach the destiny of his creation, and that means his true humanity, only if he becomes like God, the image according to which he was created and the original image of which is Jesus Christ. And he can reach this likeness with God only if he allows himself to be seen by God in Jesus Christ. That is our Christian world outlook. It is no world outlook that we make; rather, it is God's looking at us and our looking at God in Jesus Christ.

In Jesus Christ we see two things: God the Father and ourselves as God wills to have us. That is the mystery of Jesus Christ, that he reveals to us these two things. He is therefore the first-born of all creatures. He is the goal of God's creation and he is at the same time the goal of our lives, the true God and the true man in one, the God-Man. We ought to be like him.

But we know that we are not what God created us to be, and we know why: because we do not allow God to look at us and do not allow ourselves to look at him; because we are always making our own views; because we live according to our own views; because we also have other views of ourselves and of our fellow men, and allow ourselves to be determined more by them than by the contemplation of God. We are other than what God wills to have us because we become godless through this looking away from God. With a mirror the important thing is what it reflects. The image in the mirror is not really in the mirror itself; it is outside the mirror. But the image in it is according to what it reflects. So we are. We are no longer God's images because we do not reflect God's face. What, then, do we reflect? One can say: we reflect the world, and we reflect ourselves. Instead of living by looking at God, we live by our world views. And instead of loving God who looks at us in love, we love ourselves. We thereby make the world and ourselves gods. We do that every day a number of times, even though in small ways and without knowing what is going on. Again and again we are in love with ourselves and the world instead of loving God with our whole heart. And from this self-love and world-love comes all evil. From it comes also all the terrible godlessness that we are experiencing at present. God is abolished; and man, his race, his nation, his power, his reason, and his economic system have been made gods. This godlessness is in the midst of us. But do not forget that it is also our godlessness. The present world crisis is the result of a long slow process of blood poisoning of the world. And there is no one who has not contributed his little drop of poison to it. These little drops of poison form a poisonous stream that then poisons the whole world anew. It is true that we will find the poison of godlessness concentrated in certain specific places, but this poison has come from the whole world, even from you and me. We also have contributed to the total godlessness that has come upon us today.

Is there, then, nothing that can be done? Is it simply that man is just perverted and remains perverted and therefore must again and again go to his own ruin? If there were nothing that could be done, then there would be no sense in preaching. It is just because there is something that can be done that there is a church, a Christianity, a Bible, and prayer. And there is something that can be done because God has done something. He does not allow man to turn away from him. He has come extra close to us so we can no longer shun him. But he has come

in order to look at us again and so we may look at him again. That is Jesus Christ. In him the image of God and therefore also the true Man has once again become visible to us. Now we can see God again just as he can see us. And in him who now sees God again something new takes place. The godlessness vanishes, and the image of God comes forth. The creation is restored. The goal of creation for man is not yet perfected but the goal begins to be seen. The image of God appears when we allow Jesus Christ to have an influence upon us. To let Jesus Christ influence us is what the Bible calls faith. We should allow Jesus Christ to cleanse us of evil and to place the love of God in us.

How does that actually take place? It happens as God wills it, right now in listening to the sermon. It happens also when one with faith allows the word of God to speak to him through the Holy Scriptures. It happens when we allow what we have read to move our hearts just as the photographer moves the fluid over the plate until the picture comes forth. It happens when we lay everything we experience before God in prayer so he may bless or cleanse it. It happens when we take the time to allow God to speak to us and when we take the time to speak to him.

It also happens when we take the trouble to love our neighbor as Christ loves us, as God loves us in Jesus Christ. That we forgive those against whom we bear some grudge, that we love those who have in some way made it difficult for us, that we do not condemn one who goes some particular way that we may think is completely wrong and would not take ourselves. That we are, above all, there when he needs us, that we take the trouble to discover where a hidden need is, where there is one waiting for us, where there is one who needs a friendly word and a helping hand from us.

But how does all this alter world events? It changes things first of all because there is then at least one place in God's creation that is not destroyed but is preserved as it should be. Life has meaning. For what is it that gives meaning to life if not humanity? And what is the origin of love if not the love of God for us? Wherever that takes place, there is what is right. And where that happens, it is like a light in the dark, a fire in the cold world, an oasis in the desert of godlessness and of destruction. This oasis can be larger or smaller. It can be only as large as your house, or it can be as large as your neighborhood or your city. Or there may be so many oases in our city and in our nation that they will give the vision to the whole city and even to the whole nation. That is the meaning of the Christian life. Even today. We do