Section I

Ekklesia and Church

Introduction

The revelation of God in the Bible is a history. In the Old Testament God manifests Himself to His people through acts, and at the same time as He thus manifests Himself He creates His people for Himself. God communicates Himself to His people in the double sense that He manifests to them the mystery of His nature, and that He causes His people to share in His life. "I will be your God, and ye shall be my people." The message of the Prophets culminates in the promise of a new, final self-communication of God, a Messianic age, a Messianic reign, when God's being will be a perfect "God with us". Yet at the same time there appears another, enigmatic figure of the Last Times, the "Servant of God"[1] who takes upon himself the sin and guilt of his people and lets himself be broken by it. But that the Messiah might be identical with the Suffering Servant of God—this insight was not achieved by the Old Testament.

The New Testament is the glad tidings that this Messiah has appeared, that with Him the Messianic Age has drawn near, and that He as the Crucified is at the same time the Servant of God. Further, it is the witness to an act of God in history and to a new life which it initiates. This act of God which the New Testament proclaims is the coming of Jesus, the Christ, His reconciling Passion on the Cross and His Resurrection. Thus the witness of the New Testament is at the same time a witness to Jesus the Christ and to the new life of the people of God, the Ekklesia, the Messianic life in fellowship with God through the Holy Spirit.

This Christ was the theme of the second volume of our work. This last volume deals with His people and the new life, life in fellowship with God in the Holy Spirit and its consummation. How God chooses and creates a people for Himself, and is present in His people; this is its first theme, the doctrine of the Ekklesia.

1. The form of the *Ebed Yahweh* in the 53rd Chapter of Isaiah has indeed been interpreted in many ways. But unless we keep Jesus Christ in view, none is really satisfactory. Here the "Christological interpretation of the Old Testament" becomes a hermeneutic necessity.

Chapter 1

Church and Holy Spirit

(1) The Historical Representation[2] of the Past Self-Communication of God, The Church

We have just described the revelation of God in Jesus Christ as a historical event, as something which happened, at that time and at that place, for all men. Faith is first and foremost a relationship to this *factum perfectum,* to God's saving act in the past. "The Word *became* flesh", "God so *loved* the world, that He *gave* His only begotten Son", "When the fullness of the time *was come,* God *sent forth* His Son."

But how is it possible to know about this event which happened nineteen hundred years ago? How is it possible to participate in it? Past events come to us through historical transmission, *by paradosis* or *traditio.* But where we are dealing with the event which is God's self-communication, it cannot be a question of historical tradition in the generally acknowledged sense as historical information or tradition. The saving event cannot be historically transmitted in the same manner as common world events. The special manner in which the present is bound together with the past saving event, the bridge that spans the temporal abyss of nineteen hundred years, is the proclamation of the Church or the proclaiming Church. This is the character of transmission which is peculiar to this "fact".

The Church is in the first place merely the instrument, the bearer, of the proclamation. Everything that serves this proclamation is Church, and it is this function and nothing else which makes the Church the Church: a "proclaiming existence" as the historical continuum of the revelation. We must indeed bear in mind that this proclamation cannot be confined to words. This was why we said "proclaiming *existence*". It is not a mere matter of uttering words, but of passing on the life in which God has communicated Himself. Thus, before we define

1. *Translator's Note:* Here and in other passages in this book, this term is used in a special sense to be defined here. This is a fuller and richer sense than is normally given to the word "representation". The German word *Vergegenwärtigung* or *Selbst-vergegenwärtigung* which it translates has retained, in a way that the English term has not, the original rich significance of its components. Hence "representation" in this translation contains the twofold thought of "making present": (1) making contemporary in contrast with what is past, and (2) making personally present in contrast with what is absent.

the concept of the Church more exactly, we must regard as Church every form of historical life which has its origin in Jesus Christ and in which God's self-communication is continuously active. Not only as the bearer of the Word of Christ is the Church the "bridge", the continuum we spoke of, but also as the bearer of His Spirit and life, as He communicated Himself to His earliest Ekklesia. It is thus not only the instrument, the bearer of the Word of Christ, but at the same time the place of His self-representation and the instrument whereby this self-representation is transmitted.

This Church has indeed from its very beginning laid down a norm for this proclamation and this process of self-perpetuation, by setting up the Biblical "canon" as a criterion for proclamation and norm for all tradition. By so doing it has held fast to the unique event as such. The proclamation of the Apostles as a compact unity in contrast to all later proclamation, the spirit and life of the Ekklesia of primitive times in contrast to all later Church life, is meant to be the criterion according to which all future proclamation is to be shaped, and according to which all the future life of the Church is to be regulated. One can indeed say that even the canon, the Bible, is a form of Church tradition, since it was the Church that created it and set it up as a norm, so that the "scripture principle" would be included in the principle of tradition and founded on it. But it is just as correct to say that the Word of Christ and the Apostles created the Church and its tradition, and that only that tradition and proclamation, only that preaching existence of the Church which corresponds to this Word, is genuine Church tradition and genuine Church existence.

We have not yet come to the place for dealing with this question in the thorough manner that is requisite.[2] But the thought of this contrast of tradition and scripture which, without lessening the fundamental significance of tradition, was there from the very beginning and whose basis is the uniqueness of the event of revelation, should remind us at the very beginning of our doctrine of the Church that we have to do with a critical concept of tradition. On the other hand, the question of differentiating between what belongs to the Church in a narrower and direct sense and a wider and more indirect sense need not concern us further at this early stage. The Roman soldiers who carried their faith in Christ into the northern and eastern lands of Europe and there diffused it, in part without

2. See below, Ch. 3.

any "Church" support, rather in the manner of a contagion than in that of explicit mission, may yet be considered as instruments of the Church and bearers of its mission. In this sense the Church is everywhere present where men are apprehended and moved by Christ and infect others with this enthusiasm. In a later connection we shall have to deal expressly with this non-churchly form of the Church. We repeat: the Church is every form of historical life which has its origin in Jesus Christ and acknowledges in Him its foundation and supreme norm.

This reference to the tradition of the Church as the continuum which binds the unique historic event to the present at any particular time is, however, not the only thing that is necessary in order to answer the question, "How can the revelation of that time become revelation for us men of today?" The tradition of the Church is the *historical* mediation. But there must also be mediation of another, namely intra-personal, character in order to make the revelation of that time revelation for us today. "We must now see", begins the third book of Calvin's *Institutes*,

> in what way we become possessed of the blessings which God has bestowed on his only-begotten Son…. And the first thing to be attended to is that, so long as we are without Christ and separated from him, nothing which he suffered and did for the salvation of the human race is of the least benefit to us. To communicate to us the blessings, which he received from the Father, he must become ours and dwell in us. Accordingly, he is called our Head, and the first-born among many brethren, while, on the other hand, we are said to be ingrafted into him, and clothed with him, all which he possesses being, as I have said, nothing to us until we become one with him [*in unum coalescimus*]. And although it is true that we obtain this by faith, yet since we see that all do not indiscriminately embrace the offer of Christ which is made by the gospel, the very nature of the case teaches us to ascend higher, and inquire into the secret efficacy of the Spirit, to which it is owing that we enjoy Christ and all his blessings.[3]

A merely historical Christ and a merely historical knowledge of Him would be in fact a pitiful affair. Faith is a personal and immediate relationship to God. We must therefore ask: How is it possible that what then happened in Jesus Christ becomes present to us? How can we "become contemporaries with Christ" (Kierkegaard)? The answer to this question is the theme of the next section.

3. Calvin, *Institutes* III, 1, 1 (quoted from Beveridge's translation).

(2) God's Self-representation in Us Through the Holy Spirit[4]

(*a*) The revelation of God in Jesus Christ is a historical event, and faith is therefore in the first place a relationship to this event which happened at that place and time. It is dependent on this perfect tense, the reconciliation of the world in the Cross of Jesus Christ is the content of faith in Christ.

This historical element in the Christian faith is the stumbling-block both for the rationalistic and for the mystical man. These seek for the timeless eternal, the *nunc aeternum;* they wish for immediacy in their relation to God, an immediacy not dependent on anything historical. They regard the attachment of Christian faith to a past event as an imperfection, as a primitive mythological embarrassment which ought to be transcended, the confusion of the historical occasion (Jesus) with the eternal ground (the Christ principle), and over and above this a source of the uncertainty which infects everything historical. But the fact that they find this an offence is the sign that decisive issues are at stake. It is, in fact, no accident that man on his part seeks a relationship to God which shall be pure immediacy, and wishes to free himself from dependence on the historical. The historical element in faith points to the sore spot in human existence, to the gap which separates it from immediacy. The man who evades the historical Mediator does this because he neither will nor can see the brokenness of his own existence. The counterpart of unhistorical religion, religion without a Mediator, is the failure to recognize the radical character of the guilt of sin. It is an attempt to create a relationship with God which takes no account of the fact of guilt. "Philosophical faith" (Jaspers) and the mysticism of all nations and all ages speak also of redemption or reconciliation. But this redemption and reconciliation are not the removal of the *guilt* of sin, not the restoration of a broken fellowship, but the knowledge or experience of timeless unity, of an immediacy of relationship with God, which ignores what separates man from God.

The perfect tense of the saving fact of Christ corresponds exactly to the perfect tense of the damning fact: the Fall, the breach of the original fellowship with God. Were there no Fall, there would be no need of a historical revelation. In an unbroken order of Creation man would be permitted and able to

4. Cf. my book *Vom Werk des Heiligen Geistes* (On the Work of the Holy Spirit), 1935, in which faith is for the first time portrayed under the aspect of past, present and future.

have immediate intercourse with God, without the historical Mediator of reconciliation. The perfect tense of saving history is a cancellation of the breach, of the brokenness of fellowship with God. The saving event in Jesus Christ has the character of a *recapitulatio*; it is an event that reverses, that restores, that creates anew. The re-establishment of fellowship with God through the historical Mediator is at the same time the acknowledgment that previously fellowship with God was broken and destroyed. As the liquid in two communicating pipes always stands at an equal height, so the witness to the historical Mediator corresponds to the acknowledgment of the guilt of sin, and conversely, the evasion of the historical fact implies always the evasion of the guilt of sin. This twofold perfect tense is therefore the fundamental structure of the Christian faith.

(*b*) But this perfect tense does not cover everything that needs to be said. The belief that true religion, true fellowship with God, must be something contemporary, is certainly not wrong but on the contrary wholly true. Without prejudice to the relationship of faith to the past, it is always at the same time presence: it belongs to the present and is direct, immediate relationship to God. This also is a part of the central witness of the New Testament. The series of utterances referring to the accomplished act of reconciliation is paralleled by another series, expressing pure contemporaneity. "Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2: 20). "Abide in me, and I in you" (John 15: 4). "Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you?" (2 Cor. 13: 5). "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Eph. 3: 17). "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1: 27). "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (1 John 4: 16). Life in fellowship with God is *presence.* Faith is no mere memory of a past event, but life and activity in the presence of Him who creates anew and is Himself present in His gifts. To the question: "How can the perfect tense of saving history become the present experience of salvation and fellowship with God?" the scripture, and with it the Church, answers by referring to the Holy Spirit and His work in the hearts of the faithful and in the Christian community.

Have we therefore now the task of teaching about the Holy Spirit just because scripture does so? Such a biblicist procedure does not conform to the rule which we found as a criterion for our theological work and have followed hitherto. Further, a mere reproduction of Biblical statements about the Holy Spirit and His work is not possible, if only for the reason that

these are not so unanimous and clear as they would have to be to serve such a purpose. In so doing we would have almost entirely to exclude the Old Testament at the outset, for while it speaks much of the Holy Spirit, it only seldom and indistinctly does so in connection with the theme of the representation of the historical revelation. In it the Spirit of God is principally characterized as the creative power of God, as the breath of life in the creature, or again as what causes special, exceptional phenomena and astonishing demonstrations of power, and is immanent in them. Finally the Spirit inspires the revelatory language of the Prophets, but it is not His work to make men's hearts accessible to the prophetic Word. The word from St. John's Gospel is specially true of the Old Testament: "For the Holy Ghost was not yet given" (John 7: 39).

But even the utterances of the New Testament about the Holy Spirit are not of such a kind that we could summarize them in a "Doctrine of the Holy Spirit". A glance at the Concordance shows us that this most central concept does not occur at all in the sense indicated by us in many of the New Testament writings—as for example, in Matthew and Mark, in the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James and the Pastoral Epistles. A more exact comparison of the statements indicates that very diverse views of the nature and working of the Holy Spirit are to be found, which could only with violence be brought to one common denominator. A doctrine of the Holy Spirit built up on biblicist principles always rests therefore on a more or less unconscious self-deception, namely that one should attempt subsequently to support an already determined doctrine by Bible passages chosen more or less at random. An unprejudiced investigation of the New Testament shows that there is no one "Biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit". Quite apart from our objection to it in principle, the biblicist method turns out to be impossible.

On the other hand there is in certain quarters (Bultmann) a tendency to conceive of the concept "Holy Spirit" as one of the "mythical" elements in the New Testament, and therefore to exclude it as a concept unintelligible, and not only superfluous but also useless, for our theological thinking. We cannot evade this objection by simply appealing to the theology of the Reformers or the Confessions of Faith. Our task is rather to show why and how far, when we talk of the new life based on faith, we *must* speak of the Holy Spirit.

(*c*) Let us start from the objectively given fact of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, from the historic perfect tense

and the witness borne to it by the apostolic Word: "The Word became flesh"; "Jesus Christ crucified for us and risen". We assert as a fact of experience that this witness of scripture is believed by some, but not by others. This strange fact reminds us that it is anything but a matter of course that the Word of Christ should find credence. When we remember what we have learnt the nature of the natural man, the sinner, to be,[5] the question is inevitable: How can he, the sinful man, come to believe the Word of Jesus Christ? How can he who is entangled in his egocentricity and pride of intellect—and that means his sinfulness—allow this Word to be said to him as the Word of truth, as the Word of God? Can he then do anything but react to it by rejecting this gospel as "foolishness and a stumbling-block"? (1 Cor. 1: 23.) Can then sinful, autonomous man do anything, in face of this assault upon his autonomy, but resist it and assert his autonomy by making the counter-attack: "This message is senseless, contrary to all reason, and the judgment on me implied in it is unjust, an affront, which for the sake of my human dignity I cannot tolerate"? How can we expect that proud man should renounce this self-defence, when precisely self-defence and self-assertion are the sign of his condition as sinful man?

There are here only two possibilities: Either we believe that sinful man can himself achieve the penitence necessary for faith, this conversion and self-surrender. If so, then his sin cannot be so bad as we have hitherto claimed. Or else something from outside of him must penetrate within him to transform his unreadiness into readiness, his self-assertion and resistance into self-surrender and acceptance. In the first case, theological thought is involved in a self-contradiction. We believe man capable of acknowledging himself as a sinner, and at the same time we believe him able to achieve this knowledge himself, by which he would prove that he is not so bad a sinner after all.

The objection could be made: "This is a quibble, for it is precisely the operation of the Word which brings about this conversion in man." We do not need the intervention of yet a third power. The Word itself is powerful enough to bring a man from impenitence to penitence, to change his self-assertion and resistance to self-surrender and acceptance. It is not I that open my heart to the Word, it is the Word itself that opens my heart for itself. But now we see that the Word by no means does this in every case. Some continue to resist; they do not believe.

5. See my *Dogmatics* II, Ch. 3, "Man as Sinner".