



**Hope
for
Europe**

**66 Theses
by
Thomas Schirrmacher**

**Forward by
Peter Regez**

VTR

**+++ Official Volume +++ Official
+++ Hope-21, Budapest +++
+ April 27–May 1, 2002 +**

Extract

Die Deutsche Bibliothek – CIP-Einheitsaufnahme

Ein Titeldatensatz für diese Publikation ist bei
Der Deutschen Bibliothek erhältlich.

ISBN 3-933372-48-8

© by Thomas Schirmacher and
Verlag für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft
Gogolstr. 33, 90475 Nürnberg, <http://www.vtr-online.de>

Stock Number: 860.243

Translation: Cambron Teupe
Cover Illustration: VTR
Layout: VTR
Printed by druckhaus köthen GmbH, 06351 Köthen, Germany

Dedicated to
Rudolf Diezel
Role model and a fatherly friend

„And now these three remain: faith, hope
and love. But the greatest of these is love.”
(1Corinthians 13:13)

„But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts:
and be ready always to give an answer to
every man that asketh you a reason of the
hope that is in you with meekness and
fear.”
(1Peter 3:15)

„For I know the plans I have for you, de-
clares the LORD, plans to prosper you and
not to harm you, plans to give you hope
and a future.”
(Jeremiah 29:11)

„Hope is to human existence what oxygen
is for the lungs. Without oxygen, the pa-
tient dies from asphyxiation. Without
hope, one suffers from the suffocation of
despair, the paralysis of one’s spiritual
vigor due to a feeling of nothingness, of
the absurdity of life.”
(Emil Brunner)

HOPE FOR EUROPE –

WHERE ARE THE THEOLOGIANs?

„Once upon a time several men were sitting in Holland, thinking about ways to stimulate spiritual renewal in Europe.“

No, this is not a fairy tale, it is a true story about events in 1993! The men were the General Secretary of the European Evangelical Alliance and several directors of various mission boards working in East and West Europe.

The issue was to find ways to combine the goals and possibilities of churches and non-denominational mission boards on a European level. We needed a joint title general enough that many groups could identify with it, but not so general that it lacked clear limits.

As we talked, God laid the three terms, FAITH, HOPE and LOVE (1Co 13) on our hearts. Faith is a term important to dedicated Christians but often considered too pious outside of church circles. Everybody talks and sings about Love, but often in a form which does all but honour God. Hope is in everyone's mouth in politics and in the economy. Where is hope for the Balkans, for our young people, for senior citizens?

And so the term **HOPE FOR EUROPE** – was coined.

Numerous discussions, initiatives and events were to follow in the years to come. Once a year, representatives of churches and organisations meet to discuss and plan. Christian programs for youth (yyy includes kinderarbeit), students, the family, the disabled, artists, women, businessmen, politicians, athletes and several others are there. Networks for prayer, missions, church planting- and growth, schools and training, economic aid to developing countries, and reconciliation also send delegates.

In the Spring of 2002, these groups plan to meet in Budapest to hold a congress under the Motto: Hope 21.

As we rejoiced over all of these promising initiatives, the leaders were reminded of the importance of a theological basis and a Biblical fundament for Christian hope.

How can we demonstrate the Biblical basis of our hope and affirm it towards engaged Christians as well as to non-believers? How can we assert our hopes to Members of Parliament, to businessmen or to mothers? How can we raise the flag of hope in a world drowning in hopelessness and pessimism?

We are thus very happy to present the propositions of Dr. Thomas Schirmacher. These statements combine our desire to open the treasury of Biblical hope for many, theologians and laymen, and to encourage them to think about the subject. During **HOPE 21**, a consultation will be held in which these propositions will be enhanced and extended.

Dr. Peter Regez

Chairman of the study group „Hope for Europe“, of the European Evangelical Alliance and of Lausanne Europe, as well as the International Missions Director of the Janz Team.

HOPE FOR EUROPE

66 PROPOSITIONS

WE NEED HOPE

„In my opinion, European integration offers immense opportunities for missions, both a gift and a duty given to our generation by the God of history. With His assistance and under his wise Providence, we can take advantage of these opportunities, if we make the right decisions today.“¹

The following study has been composed for Hope for Europe, a joint agenda of the European Evangelical Alliance and the European branch of the Lausanne Movement, and is intended to serve as the basis of the first consultation of its Theology Commission at the Hope21 Conference in Budapest.

The study investigates the usage of the concept of 'hope' in the Old² and New Testament and considers the significance of these texts for us today (The Scriptures will be cited.)

Each proposition will be thoroughly discussed from a biblical-theological point of view, and accompanied by an application relevant to our situation.

¹ Bernhard Knieß. „Die Chancen der europäischen Integration für die Mission“. *Evangelikale Missiologie* 16 (2000) 4: pp. 122-133, here p. 122. The article contains recent data and important incentives for Christians in Europe.

² The Old Testament uses four verbs and one noun derived from one of their roots to designate the concept we call 'hope'.

5. The Human Being cannot Live without Hope

Proposition: Hope is essential to man's being. „Hope is to human existence what oxygen is for the lungs. Without oxygen, the patient dies from asphyxiation. Without hope, one suffers from the suffocation of despair, the paralysis of one's spiritual vigor due to a feeling of nothingness, of the absurdity of life“ (Emil Brunner)³.

European civilisation has never doubted this fact, even though many have sought their hope elsewhere than in the Father of Jesus Christ. Plato defined hope as „the expectation of something good,“⁴ a definition of human existence. And what about the leftist philosopher Ernst Bloch, who wrote the influential book, 'The Principle Hope'⁵

The influence of hope can be seen in various European ideologies such as Marxism⁶ or National Socialism⁷. Faith in the future achievements of such world views gives them immense influence and motivates people to dedicate their lives to them. New Age, Islam, youth sects, and political party programs all derive their power from their visions of the future. The Bible is no exception, but only its revelation is truth, for the One Who inspired Scripture is the One Who makes the future.

Hope, part of the dignity of man – the image of God – is both a human right and a birthright which all men owe to all others. That right is only surrendered when the individual refuses to believe in

³ Emil Brunner. op. cit., p. 7.

⁴ Plato. Definitiones 416.

⁵ Ernst Bloch. Das Prinzip Hoffnung. 3 Vols. Suhrkamp: Frankfurt, 1982 (Original 1954-1959, several reprints); The Principle Hope. Blackwell: Oxford, 1986.

⁶ See Thomas and Christine Schirrmacher „Der Kommunismus als Lehre vom Tausendjährigen Reich“. Factum 11+12/1986: pp. 12-19 and Thomas Schirrmacher. Marxismus - Opium für das Volk?. Schwengeler: Berneck, 1990¹; VKW: Bonn, 1997².

⁷ See Thomas Schirrmacher. „Die Religion des Nationalsozialismus: 14 Dokumente“. Factum 11/1989: pp. 506-510; ders. „Adolf Hitler und kein Ende: Ausgewählte neuere Literatur zur Geschichte und Vorgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus“. Factum 6/1989: pp. 252-255; ders. 'Das göttliche Volkstum' und der 'Glaube an Deutschlands Größe und heilige Sendung': Hans Naumann im Nationalsozialismus“. 2 Vols. VKW: Bonn, 1992¹; 2000².

God. Every person has some conception of the future – in fact, according to the discipline of Comparative Religious Studies, every religion has some explanation of future world history.

Anyone alive can hope and should do so (Ecc 9:4), but the dead can no longer hope (Ecc 4:5-6) unless their faith in God permits them to hope for the resurrection from the dead.⁸

6. Tomorrow Depends on Today

Proposition: Our expectations or hopes of the future determine how we act today. The present of every human being depends on his expectations for the future.

The Bible gives us sufficient examples of concrete admonitions, comfort and commandments for the present derived from the promises for the future. If we claim to be able to do without expectations for the future, we deceive ourselves, for we then automatically accept the views of our society. Unfortunately many believers reflect the views of politicians and television more than biblical teaching. Our own pessimistic views of our own futures, the future of our church or of the world are also determined by certain views of the future, even though we cannot always define these ideas.

Since our views of the future play a significant role in our attitudes towards the immediate future, it is essential to ask whose view of reality is most accurate. When we fail to formulate concrete ideas, we leave the field to sects such as the Jehova's Witnesses, who bank on their special eschatological systems. In fact, once you understand their eschatology, you understand their doctrine. The same can be said for many of the strange splitter groups which exist in Evangelical camps as well. We must find definite answers to such movements, even though we need to tolerate a certain amount of variation.

Questions about the future depend on the central issues of the Christian faith, such as the Second Coming of Christ, the Last Judgment and the Resurrection of the Dead; issues inseparable

⁸ See the proposition on the resurrection.

from the nature and the office of Jesus. For this reason it is essential to distinguish between issues which the Bible clearly answers (that Jesus is coming back to judge all men), questions which Scripture answers only partially, and issues which Scripture ignores completely and which arise only when theologians insist on completing the system they have developed. Only such clarity in our teaching can stop the flood of false prophecy in Evangelical circles.

11. God does not only Give Hope; He is the Reason for our Hope

Proposition: God does not only give us something to hope for. He is Himself the essence of our hope. „But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you“ (Ps 39:7). The Psalms express this most clearly. „For you have been my hope, O Sovereign LORD, my confidence since my youth“ (Ps 71:5); „Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him“ (Ps 62:5); „Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God“ (Ps 146:5). The Psalmist often associates hope with godliness (Ps 33:18; 147:11; 62:6).

Only because we belong to God, and because He ‚belongs‘ to us, can we hope at all. „I say to myself, ‘The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him’“ (La 3:24). We ought to sense that our hope lies not in ourselves, our wonderful ideas or programs or in our efforts and our fervour, but in God, the Giver of such ideas and fervour. Because He is the basis, the goal and the content of our hope, our hope continues even in the heavenly fulfilment of all promises, for Paul says, „And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love“ (1Co 13:13), even when we see Jesus face to face (1Co 13:12).

15. God cannot be Replaced as the Basis of Hope, Publicly or in Secret, as in the Religion of Mammon

Proposition: Any hope not finally based in God must prove deceptive, for it relies on something that cannot guarantee and that will itself one day fail.

Let us take a look at Europe's love of money and take notice of the consequences false hopes have for everyday life. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, „No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money“ (Mt 6:24; See also Lk 16:13). Shortly before this, He had warned against spending our lives collecting treasures on earth, „For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also“ (Mt 6:21; See also Lk 12:34). This was no new law, for the Old Testament and the New both criticise ‚evil Mammon‘ (Lk 16:9; the Greek word means either ‚unjust‘ or ‚evil‘). The Bible protects private property (in the Ten Commandments, for example), bids us to work, and sometimes describes peace and prosperity as gifts of God, but when it emphasises that „the worker deserves his wages“ (Lk 10:7; See also 1Ti 5:18), that not only permits the labourer to enjoy his well-earned income, but also criticises those who fail to pay him for his work. James, the brother of Jesus, concurs: „Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty“ (Jas 5:4. See also 5:1-6 and Dt 24:15)⁹.

No one who serves Mammon, Jesus tells us, can serve God at the same time. The Bible considers the love of money to be the root of all evil (1Ti 6:10). Note that not money, but the love of money is the cause of further sin. Jesus' warning against Mammon has always played a significant role in Christian ethics. „On the basis of the

⁹ Karl Marx's accusation of the Bible is absurd. Scripture was never intended to serve as ‚opium for the people‘ to prevent them from criticising the powers that be. I know of no other holy scripture in any other religion that so harshly criticises rulers who gain wealth by unjust means and violence. In fact, Scripture condemns the unjust believer most of all. To be sure, many Christian bishops and church leaders have been guilty, but the Bible's social criticism is often directed against the religious leadership who oppress their own people and disregard the basis of their religion.

First Commandment, the antithesis between God and Mammon determined Luther's economic thought."¹⁰ A thorough investigation of Jesus' statements in the Sermon on the Mount demonstrates that they not only censure those who live only for Mammon (or, as Marx would say, for capital). Mammon has been raised to a religion, a rival to Biblical faith in God. Had Jesus not used the name of a heathen deity, we would understand this better. He could have said, that we should only have one God. We pray either to the God of the Bible or to 'Mammon', but, as we know, 'Mammon' refers not to a deity, but to wealth, money and capital. In Lk 16:13, Jesus repeats, „You cannot serve both God and Money (Greek. ‚Mammon‘)“, but a few verses earlier (Lk 16:9,11) he uses the term to describe the money used in business. The Religion of Mammon can thus replace faith in the God of the Bible. This was the factor that prevented the rich young ruler from following Jesus, for he loved his wealth more than God (Mt 19:16-30; Mk 10:17-31; Lk 18:18-30). The young man had kept all the commandments except the First; “You shall have no other gods before me.” Even though the religion of money has no gods, no priests, no temple (none that we would call temples), it is an a-theistic religion, one without God (Greek: ‘a’=without; ‘God’=‘theos’). Is Jesus comparing two things that are not comparable? Isn't God a religious issue and „Mammon“ a matter of economics, business and life style?

Religion is never a theoretical matter in the Bible. The question is not whether a movement, a philosophy or a life style considers itself a religion or not, but with the last instance which determines the values of our everyday lives in reality, not merely in theory. Above all, Scripture is concerned with hope and faith in the God of the Bible. The question is not whether we are convinced that God exists, but whether we hope existentially in Him. „You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that - and shudder“ (Jas 2:19). In both the Old Testament and the New, the word

¹⁰ Hans-Jürgen Prien. *Luthers Wirtschaftsethik*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1992, p. 221 (See the whole book on the significance of the Sermon on the Mount for Luther's economic ethics). See also the numerous references to Mammon in Luther's writings. *Martin Luthers Sämtliche Schriften*, ed. by Joh. Georg Walch. Vol. 23. Verlag der Lutherischen Buchhandlung H. Harms: Groß Oesingen, 1986 (Reprint from 1910²), Col 1130-1132.

„believe’ means ‚to trust, to depend on, to consider reliable’, which obviously includes hope. If we believe in God, we consider Him absolutely reliable, take all seriously that He has said and done as Creator and Saviour, and plan our lives according to His existence and His Law.

Religion is anything that competes with this Biblical hope and this faith. What do I rely on completely? What gives my life its fundamental meaning? What controls my heart? What determines my decisions? Who has the last word in my life? What is my final goal? What do I love most? How do I justify my desires?

Job once acknowledged God’s right to judge him „If I have put my trust in gold or said to pure gold, ‘You are my security’“ (Job 31:24). Although ‘hope’ and ‘trust’ are words that can only apply to God, we often use them to refer to disguised religions as Job’s admission shows. Proverbs repeat the idea: „Whoever trusts in his riches will fall“ (Pr 11:28). We could also say, „Whoever trusts in wealth ...“ Psalm 49:6 speaks of „those who trust in their wealth and boast of their great riches“ (See also Ps 52:7). The Bible frequently describes the religion of money with the same terms it uses to describe man’s relationship to God.

In 1Timothy 6:17, Paul exhorts the rich not to set their hope on wealth, „which is so uncertain,“ but in God. In Ephesians 5:3-5, he warns against greed, and in agreement with the Old Testament, adds, „for it is idolatry.“

16. The Battle against Pseudo-Hopes

Proposition: God will disappoint false hopes and wants us to expose them prophetically.

Speaking to God, Job says, „... you destroy man’s hope“ (Job 14:19). Even believers are sometimes led by God into absolutely hopeless situations, so that they learn to surrender any hopes except God Himself. Jeremia , author of Lamentations, cries out, „Why have you afflicted us so that we cannot be healed? We hoped for peace but no good has come, for a time of healing but there is only terror“ (Jer 14:19: see also 8:15).

For this reason, one of the Old Testament prophets' most important responsibilities was to repudiate pseudo-hopes, whether in the form of false gods, deceptive political alliances, deceitful promises of kings or the optimistic predictions of lying prophets. We must not depend on men (Jer 17:5; 48:13), on our own righteousness (Eze 33:13), on religious symbols such as the Temple (Jer 7:4), on idols (Hab 2:18), but only on God.

Europe's history has been shaped by false prophets like Hitler and Stalin, and by many other less-known deceivers. The prophetic unmasking of such deceptive hopes is one of the most important responsibilities of European churches and believers; a responsibility in which we have failed much too often.

22. Hope through the Cross

Proposition: God's most wonderful act, the basis of all true hope, was the death of Christ on the Cross of Golgotha, where he died on our behalf in order to defeat death, sin and the Devil, the mortal enemies of all hope. For this reason, there can be no hope for a new beginning without forgiveness.

The universal truth that hope for the future depends on forgiveness is just as true in specific cases. Only in forgiving each other, can we hope for a new beginning.

Islam, for example, has no doctrines of original sin or of sin as the destruction of man's relationship to God, of reconciliation or forgiveness. For Moslems reconciliation in private life or between nations is hard to achieve, for past wrongs can still be dug up centuries later.

Whether they believed in a reconciliatory God personally or not, Konrad Adenauer and Charles de Gaulle, as representatives of their nations, acted in the spirit of a civilisation deeply influenced by the Christian faith, when they reconciled Germany and France and decided to begin a new relationship in spite of the terrible injustices of the past. Islam has nothing comparable.

Europe's Churches and their believers must forgive each other and be reconciled, if Europe is to find new hope. European families must forgive each other and be reconciled, if Europe is to find new hope. Europe's

'races' and nations must forgive each other and be reconciled, if Europe is to find new hope and a good future. Above all, we must practice forgiveness towards Moslems. Some may have lived here all their lives and some have come recently, but their faith and their culture know nothing of forgiveness, of forgetting past injuries in order to come to terms with the present. Our testimony has no value to them as long as we do not practice forgiveness, and show them that forgiveness means leaving mistakes and sins of the past up to God. Do Christian marriages have hope based on forgiveness and reconciliation? Can a spirit of reconciliation and forgiveness be felt in our churches, so that we have authority and influence, or are we just as driven by tension, rumours, ancient feuds, mobbing and skirmishing, as other organisations are?

26. Our Hope is Founded on God's Oath

Proposition: We can only rely fully on God, because He has bound Himself by oath to His Covenant.

Unlike the God of Islam, God has sworn: „God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged“ (Heb 6:18).

Some say that swearing is only necessary when one wants to avoid telling the truth! But if we insist that it is unnecessary to swear, since we are always to tell the truth, we must explain why God, Who never lies, often swears oaths (for example Ge 22:16; Mic 7:20; Ex 6:8; Eze 20:5; Ps 95:11). Georg Giesen¹¹ has counted eighty-two oaths made by God in the Old Testament, 38% of all the oaths mentioned. Besides these, God made numerous oaths designated by other terms. God keeps His own commandment that all oaths must be sworn in His name, for „When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself“ (Heb 6:13).

¹¹ Georg Giesen. Die Wurzel sb' „schwören“: Eine semasiologische Studie zum Eid im Alten Testament. Bonner Biblische Beiträge 56. Peter Hanstein: Königstein, 1981.

God swears by Himself

Ge 22:16 and said, „I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son

Heb 6:13 When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself

Jer 44:26 But hear the word of the LORD, all Jews living in Egypt: ‘I swear by my great name,’ says the LORD, ‘that no one from Judah living anywhere in Egypt will ever again invoke my name or swear, „As surely as the Sovereign LORD lives.“

Am 6:8 The Sovereign LORD has sworn by himself-- the LORD God Almighty declares: „I abhor the pride of Jacob and detest his fortresses; I will deliver up the city and everything in it.“

Ex 32:13 Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: ‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.’”

Am 4:2 The Sovereign LORD has sworn by his holiness: „The time will surely come when you will be taken away with hooks, the last of you with fishhooks.

Dt 32:40 I lift my hand to heaven and declare: As surely as I live forever,

1Sa 2:30 „Therefore the LORD, the God of Israel, declares: ‘I promised that your house and your father’s house would minister before me forever.’ But now the LORD declares: ‘Far be it from me! Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained.

Ro 14:11 It is written: „‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.’”

„By myself I have sworn“ (Isa 45:23; Jer 22:5; 49:13).

„As surely as I live“ (Nu 14:21,28; Deu 32:40; Isa 49:18; Jer 22:24; 46:18; Eze 5:11; 14: 16,18,20; 16:48; 17:16,19; 18:3; 20:3,31,33; 33:11,27; 34:8; 35:1,6; Zep 2:9; Ro 14:11).

God's oath, in which He binds Himself to His covenant, is essential to the Christian faith. We often fail to recognise this, because we no longer understand the meaning of an oath, or because we are no longer aware of the vital differences between the God of the Bible and the gods of other religions. In Islam God is so absolute, sovereign and independent, that he would never commit himself absolutely to any human being, for that would make him subject to human judgement. Even when he promises, Allah retains the right to change his mind, without anyone being able or competent to condemn Him.

The God of the Judaeo-Christian tradition is equally absolute, sovereign and independent. No one could forbid Him to change His plans or force Him to keep His promises. Neither Mankind nor Creation confine God, but He Himself has bound Himself to His own word and has sworn in His own Name to keep it. God is faithful, and absolutely reliable. In contrast to Allah, His sovereignty expresses itself in the fact that no one can force Him to fulfil His plans, honour His oaths or keep His promises. In fact, He charges us to measure Him according to His own words and to 'take Him to court' (Isa 1:18; 41:1; 43:26; Mal 3:10), but Man will never find Him at fault.

God's faithfulness leads to trust, or, as we usually express it, to faith, which is one of the three most common descriptions (faith, love and hope; See Proposition 2) of our relationship to God – not by chance.

If God and Jesus Themselves swear more than anyone else, then the purpose of swearing cannot be to distinguish truth from untruth. God swears more than anyone else and the Bible's great men of faith follow His example. How can the truth of a statement be suspect, when God has spoken?¹² The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews

¹² Assuming that Jesus was defending the Old Testament view of swearing against the practice of the Scribes and Pharisees, who swore by everything except by God, then the Sermon on the Mount does not condemn all oaths, but only those forbidden

explains God's oath to Abraham with the following words: „Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.“ (Heb 6:16-18) The eternal reliability of God's decision thus lies in His oath, for it makes the covenant final and irrevocable. Not every statement made by God is irrevocable: how often has He repealed the judgement He had proclaimed, because the sinner repented! Judgements were only unavoidable, when God had proclaimed them under oath. Human oaths have the same meaning: the difference between a promise and an oath is, that a promise can be revoked under circumstances. An oath makes the difference between flirting and marriage, for marriage is a covenant made by oath.

Let us return to the reliability of divine hope. According to Hebrews 7:20-21, the Old Testament Levitical priesthood was not based on oath, whereas Jesus' eternal priesthood in the order of Melchizedek was based on the oath made by God in Psalm 110:4: „The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: „You are a priest forever, in the order of **Melchizedek**.“ Hebrews 7:20-22 tells us, „And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him: „The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: ‘You are a priest forever.’ „Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant (Heb 7,20-22). The Levitical priesthood could end, because God had not assured its eternal existence

in the Old Testament. In Matthew 5:34-35, Jesus is saying, „Do not swear at all by Heaven ... or by the earth.“ James 5:12 expresses the same idea: „swear neither by heaven nor by the earth.“ Properly translated, the texts should read: „But I say to you: You should not swear at all by heaven, for it is God's throne, nor by the earth, for it is His footstool, nor by Jerusalem, for she is the city of the great King, nor should you swear by your head, for you cannot make a single hair white or black. Let your speech be Yes, yes! or No, no! Anything more is from the Evil One“ (Mt 5:34-37).

by oath, but Jesus' priesthood will never cease, for its eternal validity has been sealed with an oath.

28. Hope is Founded on the Word of God

Proposition: Because God, Who is absolutely faithful, has bound Himself – in writing¹³ – His Word is the reliable basis of our hope.

The Psalmist confesses before men, „I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope“ (Ps 130:5), and to God, „May those who fear you rejoice when they see me, for I have put my hope in your word“ (Ps 119:74); „Do not snatch the word of truth from my mouth, for I have put my hope in your laws“ (Ps 119:43); „You are my refuge and my shield; I have put my hope in your word“ (Ps 119:114). After Jesus had achieved eternal life for us, Paul repeats this Old Testament truth in speaking of the faith and truth „... that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel.“

Let me repeat: Christians study the Bible in order to find hope for themselves, for their families, for their churches and for their society. „For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.“ (Ro 15:4)

European Christians must proclaim that churches and believers who reject God's word as unreliable or irrelevant rob not only themselves but all Europe of its only truly reliable hope. God does not require us to depend on some nebulous expectation, but has given us concrete promises in His written word. The deceptive hopes of critical theologians must be exposed in our continent more than anywhere else in the world. Many European

¹³ Article 1.1. of the Westminster Confession: „ ... therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his Church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagation of the truth and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church ... to commit the same wholly unto writing.“ G. I. Williamson. The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1964.

*churches despair, because they no longer know what they can hope for!
Without the Bible, they will never know!*

HOPE CHANGES OUR CONDUCT

30. True Hope Assumes that God is Omnipotent

Proposition: We have no true reason to hope, unless we believe and know that God has everything under control. True hope is based on the profession: „I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth.“

God is omnipotent

Job 42:2: „I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted.“

Jer 32:17: „Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.“

Ge 18:14: „Is anything too hard for the LORD?“

Mt 28:18: „All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.“

Isa 55:11: „So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.“

Job 36:22-23: „God is exalted in his power. Who is a teacher like him? Who has prescribed his ways for him, or said to him, ‘You have done wrong’?“

2Ch 14:11: „LORD, there is no one like you to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us, O LORD our God, for we rely on you.“

Ps 33:10-11: „The LORD foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever.“

God called ‚Omnipotent‘: Ge 17:1; 28:3; 43:14; 48:3; 49:25; Ex 6:3; Nu 24:4; Ru 1:20-21; Job 40:2 (some 30 times in the Book of Job); Ps 68:15; Ps 91:1; Isa 13:6; Eze 1:24; Rev 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7,14; 19:6,15; 21:22

Only when we believe this, can we assume that God will bring all to a good end. One example from the New Testament and one from the Old will have to suffice. David proclaims: „Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this“ (Ps 37:5). Paul rejoices, „And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ... For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord“ (Ro 8:28,38-39).

48. Hope in the Face of Religious and State Opposition

Proposition: The Revelation of St. John delivers a powerful message which has continually encouraged Christians in history. We should agree on this point, however we may interpret the details of Revelations. The Church does not expand through power, wealth or force, but only by Christ’s authority, the Word of God and prayer. Even when God permits the powers of religions and states to combine forces against the Church, and even when the Church seems to be lost, the false Church and the perverted State are only digging their own graves when they oppose the Church of Jesus. God even leads the powers of the world to fight with each other, so that the political powers destroy the religious opponents of the Church, just as the Beast of Revelation suddenly turns on the Whore of Babylon.

God’s Kingdom continues to grow in spite of all the religious, intellectual, economic and political powers of this world. Wasn’t this spiritual principle obvious in the Old Testament? Didn’t Jesus pro-

claim it in the Great Commission and in the promise that the very gates of Hell could not hinder the Kingdom of God?

Hasn't this principle been repeatedly verified in the history of the church? Where is the Roman Empire, where is Manichaeism, where are the wide-spread religions of antiquity who all hated Christianity, but now only interest historians? What happened to National Socialism or to the Communist World Revolution which began in Germany and Russia? Can we not learn from Revelations that the days of Islam, Esoterics and Materialism are also numbered, even if we have no idea when God's wise plan will be revealed?

49. We still have Hope, even in the Face of Impending Judgement

Proposition: Even when God has pronounced judgment, especially when He has pronounced judgment, we can hope.

Jonah was so sure that Nineveh was lost. God's pronouncement sounded as if God's decision was irrevocable: „Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned“ (Jnh 3:4), but there was an unspoken condition, which explains why Jonah had been sent to preach in the first place – „unless you repent and believe!“ The city's inhabitants heeded the warning, repented and glorified God, Who then had mercy in spite of His threat (Jnh 3:5-10).

In spite of his anger, Jonah knew that God often acts in this way: „I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God“ (Jnh 4:2). Jonah's complaints and despair were even pious and theologically based! He was „greatly displeased“ (Jnh 4:1) that God chose to forgive the Assyrians, although, as a good theologian, he should have realised that God also has mercy on the heathen, „That is why I was so quick to flee“ (Jnh 4:2). God provided Jonah with a vine, in order to „ease his discomfort, and when He let it wither, Jonah was miserable and wanted to die. Now God could show him how He felt about the lost in Nineveh (Jnh 4:7-11).

Referring to the book of Jona in his 'Homily on Repentance', the Church Father Chrysostomos emphasised that Christian preaching often seems to destroy hope, not in order to crush it, but only to point to the true hope only to be found in God.

God's unimaginable grace expresses itself in the fact that divine pronouncements of judgment are seldom confirmed by oath, which makes them irrevocable, but declarations of grace all the more. The Covenant with Noah, that He would never again judge the world in the same way (Ge 8:20-9:17), was confirmed by oath. In the history of Israel He does the same as Isaiah 54:9 declares: „To me this is like the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. So now I have sworn not to be angry with you, never to rebuke you again.“

50. In the Face of Impending Judgement, God Tests our Faith

Proposition: The church only preaches judgment, because we have hope. The threat of judgment provides us with unique opportunities to demonstrate our hope in prayer, words and deeds.

Job used the example of the tree, which seems to be dead and bare, an image frequently used by Old Testament prophets: „At least there is hope for a tree: If it is cut down, it will sprout again, and its new shoots will not fail“ (Job 14:7).

Proverbs 11:11 teaches that God may even spare a society for the sake of a few godly people: „Through the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is destroyed.“

Abraham's urgent prayer for Sodom and Gomorrah (Ge 18:6-33) demonstrates the significance that godly people can have in a godless society; God would have spared the cities, had He found ten righteous people in them (Ge 18:32,25).

In the end, our ungodly world is kept alive until the Second Coming of Christ because of the godly people still living in it, and because the Kingdom of God is growing, as Jesus shows in the parable of the wheat and the tares (Mt 13:24-30,36-42). The tares are permitted to grow, so that the wheat – the Kingdom of God – will survive. When the wheat has matured and has filled the earth, the weeds will be destroyed.

As important as it is to analyse society's problems according to the Law of God, Christians have only one way to renew politics and

society: „If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land“ (2Ch 7:14). The Church can then pray for Society and for the State. Let us hope that God will not declare to us: „I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none“ (Eze 22:30) as He did to Ezekiel.

Even when judgment seems inevitable, let us not spread panic, resignation and despair, but pray for our people as Abraham did.

Many have lost hope for Europe, because they see only signs of decline. Hope does not rely on visible reality, but reckons with God's intervention. When the first Christians brought hope to the Roman Empire, their situation was no better – on the contrary! Eastern Europe's recent history also reminds us that judgement can fall on antichristian powers in order to open the way for the Gospel!

HOPE FOR ALL AREAS OF LIFE

52. Reformation and Revival Mean Hope for the Church and for Society

Proposition: All reformations and revival movements have been driven by the hope of revival and renewal of the Church and of society.

All of the **Reformers** of the 16th century advocated the separation of Church and State, but at the same time, encouraged society to consciously build on Christian values and precepts. They were convinced that God wants to thoroughly renew the Church and the State as well as every individual. The idea that Luther, Calvin or any other of the Reformers were not interested in social issues, or that they had no hopes for this life, is absurd. All of them

wanted to renew society as well as the Church and worked for this goal by teaching people biblical values.

The fathers of **Pietism and the Revival Movements**, such as Philipp Jacob Spener, August Hermann Francke, Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley or George Whitefield not only discovered personal conversion, but also, motivated by their own personal renewal, worked to influence both the Church and Society for the good of the poor and the weak. All were transformed by their hopes and were thus often denounced as ‘revolutionaries’.

Philipp Jakob Spener’s Pietist reform program stimulated not only a flood of missionary activity, but also innumerable social institutions.¹⁴ August Hermann Francke alone founded or encouraged the creation of numerous orphanages, schools for the poor, pharmacies and hospitals. His ‘Realschule’ (Real school), a Pietist ‘invention’ provided children from poor or middle class families a ‘real’ education designed to prepare them for the realities of life. Protestant cloisters¹⁵ with their wide-spread aid to the poor, the elderly and the sick, hospitals, homes for the aged, and, in more recent times, rehabilitation centres for drug addicts are all integral parts of Pietist history! Pietist leaders continually developed programs and lists of demands for State and society and published papers to educate both the State and its citizens about the meaning of Christian values for society.

The fathers of almost all Christian denominations – the Church Fathers, Lutheran Reformers such as Luther and Melancthon, Reformed theologians such as Calvin, Bucer and Knox, Anglicans such as Cranmer, and the Fathers of Methodism, such as (Wesley, Whitefield) and the Baptists (especially in the US and in England)

¹⁴ See Helmuth Egelkraut. *Die Zukunftserwartung der pietistischen Väter. Theologie und Dienst* 53. Brunnen Verlag: Gießen, 1987; Philipp Jacob Spener. *Umkehr in die Zukunft: Reformprogramm des Pietismus: Pia desideria*. ed. by Erich Beyreuther. Brunnen: Gießen, 1975²; See also Martin Schmidt. „Spener’s ‘Pia Desideria’: Versuch einer theologischen Interpretation“, pp. 113-166 in: Martin Greschat (Ed.). *Zur neueren Pietismusforschung. Wege der Forschung CDXL*. Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt, 1977.

¹⁵ ‚Diakonissenmutterhäuser‘: Protestant institutions somewhat like Roman Catholic cloisters, in which ‚Deaconesses‘ vow to live in celibacy and to serve God.

assumed that Christians know righteous standards for society and will endeavour to realise their hopes through prayer, teaching, prophetic speaking and in action. The idea that Christians should completely withdraw from society, and that our personal hope has no consequences for society, is completely foreign to the confessions of any denomination!

European Christians must again begin to sow in hope, as the Reformers, Pietists, Revivalists and many others have done, and to work for distant goals, not only for the problems of the immediate future.

The individualism which has arisen in Europe and the West in the last 150 years has misled us to believe that our Christian faith is purely personal, that it has no social significance, and that it can even survive without fellowship in an organised church. This attitude engenders despair and robs Christians of hope. When we see no need to exert ourselves for others' sakes we will soon lose hope for ourselves as well. This individualism, not the Bible, and not Pietism, has caused so many believers to withdraw from family life, from business, politics and science, and to give up testifying Christian values in everyday life.

56. Biblical Hope in Opposition to the Deceptive Hope of Bourgeois Morality

Proposition: The Bible knows no neutral civil morality which makes work, industry, family, ownership or wealth, etc. absolute values, but only values which Man, as a part of Creation, has received from God, and which he uses in gratitude and dependence on God.

The book of Ecclesiastes demonstrates this most clearly. Some have accused its writer of being a godless pessimist. R. B. Y. Scott concludes that he must have been a rationalist, an agnostic, a pessimist and a fatalist,¹⁶ and that the ethical system of Ecclesiastes has no basis in divine commandments, for there are none.¹⁷ Since the writer simply accepts his fate all that is left to him is pleasure. The

¹⁶ R. B. Y. Scott. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes. Anchor Bible. Doubleday: Garden City (NY), 1965, p. 191. Scott does not intend his description to be a value judgment.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 192.

classical division of the book,¹⁸ however, contradicts this view very clearly, for the repeated theme of the enjoyment of earthly life in 2:24-26; 5:17-19; 8:15-17; 11:7-10 forms the conclusion of four major sections.¹⁹ Each thus ends with the exhortation to enjoy life completely and to live in the present not in a distant future. „The negative images form the beginning, the positive ones the conclusion of each description.“²⁰ The joys of life are expressly emphasised eight times (2:24-26; 3:11-14,22; 5:17-19; 8:15; 9:7-10; 11:7-10; see also 12:1). Words derived from the Hebrew root ‘smh’ (Joy, pleasure) appear 17 times. Joy is the synopsis of the book. „A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind“ (Ecc 2:24-26).

Recognising the Meaninglessness of Life leads to Joy

<i>Section</i>	<i>What is meaningless</i>	<i>Exhortation to Joy</i>
1:12-2,26	Human Labour	2:24-26
3:1-15	The uncertainty of the future	3:12 (11-14)
3:16-22	Injustice in the world	3:22
5:9-19	Striving for wealth	5:17 (17-19)
8:10-15	Unpunished evil	8:15

¹⁸ See Walter C. Kaiser. *Ecclesiastes: Total Life*. Everyman’s Bible Commentary. Moody Press: Chicago, 1979; and Addison G. Wright. „The Riddle of the Sphinx: The Structure of the Book of Qoheleth“, pp. 45-66 in: Roy B. Zuck (Ed.). *Reflecting with Solomon*. Baker Books: Grand Rapids (MI), 1994 [aus *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30 (1968), pp. 313-334].

¹⁹ Donald R. Glenn. „Der Prediger“. pp. 651-696 in: John F. Walvoord, Roy F. Zuck (Ed.). *Das Alte Testament erklärt und ausgelegt*. Vol. 2: 1. Könige - Hohelied. Hänssler: Neuhausen, 1991. p. 655 (English original: *Bible Knowledge Commentary Old and New Testament*, here *Ecclesiastes*).

²⁰ Hans Möller. *Alttestamentliche Bibelkunde*. Lutherische Buchhandlung: Groß Oesingen, 1989. p. 194.

9:1-10	The certainty of death	9:7-9
11:7-12:7	Old age and death	11:9-10; 12:1

How can the preacher move from pessimism to enjoyment so abruptly? Does he ignore the problems? No, he turns to God and realises that all is „from the hand of God“ (2:24-26). Circumstances which seem meaningless and hopeless to man become meaningful, when God, the Creator and Preserver, attracts our attention, and when we live a life pleasing to Him (2:26).

The purpose of Ecclesiastes is to point out the meaninglessness of labour, industry, family or possessions in themselves, without God, and to encourage man to receive these things as gifts from God, to use them under His guidance. As Donald R. Glenn has put it, Ecclesiastes expresses a valid criticism of modern secular humanism.²¹ Without God, „who can eat or find enjoyment?“ (2:25) „That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil-- this is the gift of God“ (3:13).

The idea of a neutral civil morality is not biblical. Things such as labour, industry, family, possessions or wealth are not values in themselves, but have value only as gifts from the hand of God, which man can use in gratitude and dependence on Him. The Book of Ecclesiastes smashes the value system of civil morality, but it resurrects again under the creator when it corresponds to God’s commandments. When people come to a living faith in Christ they cannot simply carry on with the same values as before, but must test them and let them be refined in the fire of Ecclesiastes, so that they are founded on God’s word and not on some civilised sense of ‘decency.’

It is not our responsibility to understand everything, to have considered all possible consequences and to comprehend the meaning of all things. Our responsibility is to live responsibly before God, to work, to enjoy and to form the world, as we have received it from the Creator, for even the things that seem burdensome and mean-

²¹ Donald R. Glenn. op. cit., p. 655.

ingless to us have come from God. „I have seen the burden God has laid on men“ (Ecc 3:10).

Civil morality shatters when work, possessions and family fail. For biblical morality, however, tragedy is not the end of life. Biblical morality offers hope not only for times of success and prosperity, as civil morality does, but its unlimited confidence in the Creator enables us to master suffering as well.

Ecclesiastes puts many biblical values into perspective; values which become dangerous when they take first place in our lives and replace God. The Preacher warns, „The increase from the land is taken by all; the king himself profits from the fields. Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless. As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them? The sleep of a labourer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep“ (5:10-12). Wealth can be positive and can be enjoyed, but not when it becomes the goal of life, or suppresses, or destroys the satisfaction given by labour. When things such as labour, family, possessions or wisdom become the only goals, and life loses its eternal perspective, life loses its meaning. „All man’s efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied“ (Pr 6:7).

58. Hope for Society

Proposition: Although personal salvation is the first and most important goal of our hope and of missions, we may set other goals as well. All other goals gain their significance from the hope of personal salvation.

The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 includes the exhortation to make disciples (learners). The first step in that direction is personal repentance – only individuals can be baptised – but as one individual after the other turns to Christ, whole nations are won. A high percentage of believers in a people does not contradict the notion of individual conversion.

Besides, conversion is not the end of renewal. The individual's new relationship to God is the beginning of renewal in himself, the family, the church, the economy, the state and society. All are to become disciples! Since Jesus tells his disciples to „make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you,“ the Great Commission means that Christians are to learn the entire spectrum of Biblical ethics, which will then transform the individual and his environment completely, so that, in the long run, sinful structures and visible injustice will be overcome.

The individual's peace with God, his personal salvation through Jesus' sacrifice of grace on the Cross is mission's first and most important goal, which determines all subsequent aims. In Matthew 16:26 Jesus says very clearly that the salvation of the soul is more important than anything else. „What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?“ Paul uses the same argument that both Jews and Greeks are lost in their sin, and that Jesus alone could achieve their salvation, before he introduces the subject of social, cultural and political ethics. „Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand“ (Ro 5:1-2a).

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus challenges Christians to let their light shine and to be the salt of the earth. Immediately after the Beatitudes, He uses these examples to show that believers do not live and work for themselves (Mt 5:13-16). He admonishes us to act before and for others: „Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven“ (vs. 16).

In failing to actively pursue the welfare of our society, we accept the standards of our environment. No one can live without standards and values. If we do not actively endeavour to introduce Christian values into our world, or if we believe that our standards do not apply to society, we must find our values elsewhere – probably in our society. Klaus Bockmühl, professor of Ethics once wrote, „The greatest danger for the 'lifeboat' or 'retreat' mentality is that its adherents continue to participate in the life of society

unquestioningly and often with the greatest success. Finding it empty of divine guidance, they have no choice but to buy and sell according to the local rules, and surrender all the more to the domination of the 'Prince of this world'."²²

59. Hope for the Family

Proposition: Missions and the message of hope begin in Christian churches and families, who teach the Word of God to the next generation through example, discipline and education.

We dare not give up the proclamation of God's Word to the unchurched, but the Christian family must not be overlooked either, for a healthy Christian family is the requirement for leadership in the New Testament Church (1Ti 3:4-5,12-13; Tit 1:6-7). When we relinquish our children to the State, we need not make any more effort to influence our churches, our economy, our society or our State, for we have given up the best method of changing them for the future.

Raising our children is the most important step towards imparting hope and social politics, because we are preparing human beings for life, teaching them basic values and the principles of social contact. God created the family so that the younger generation can learn biblical standards for the welfare of the whole society from their adult role models. Where else are people to learn to be considerate, not to envy, to help the weak or to praise others, if not at home? Let's not retreat from the areas of life that God has placed in our hands! Let us use the opportunities we have to influence education by founding Christian schools and by supporting Christian teachers in state schools.

Healthy families and Christian families are only possible as long as we insure that the areas left to us by society and the State are kept intact. If we want to preserve the family, we must support the efforts of Christians to influence our society, for our society determines to a large extent what the family can do. The destruction of

²² Klaus Bockmühl. *Theologie und Lebensführung: Gesammelte Aufsätze II*. TVG. Brunnen: Gießen, 1982, p. 131.

the family is driven by social forces, which can only be resisted when families begin to influence society for their own good. The attempts of Communist states to destroy the Christian family speak for themselves.

The modern family is losing its authority and its most important functions with only fragments of its earlier responsibilities for the economy, education and the welfare of society remaining. As the family abandons its essential roles, the workplace has been removed from the home, non-marital sexual relationships are being equated with marriage, the elderly, the ill and the disabled are segregated into 'homes'. Only when Christian values are revived, can family life and family responsibility again develop.

60. Hope for the Economy

Proposition: Since we were created with the need for hope to motivate our labour and our economic endeavours, our visions of the future largely determine our economic ethics.

Speaking of his missionary work, Paul wrote: „(and for this we labour and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, and especially of those who believe“ (1Ti 4:10) and „When the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest“ (1Co 9:10). Since missions is only one aspect of labour, he applies the same principles to the duties of the elders (1Ti 5:17-20; 1Co 9:9-18).

Although many Christians fail to understand the extensive social consequences of some biblical/Christian commandments, secular analysts realise that biblical principles have quite practical effects on the economy. Helmut Schoeck, professor of Sociology, writing on the Biblical condemnation of envy in the Ten Commandments and in the words of Jesus says, „The New Testament speaks almost always to the envious individual, and admonishes him to bear the disparity between himself and his neighbour with maturity and like a Christian. In Western society Christian ethics have protected and encouraged man's creative energies, and have made the extent of its achievements possible by constraining covetousness.“²³

²³ Helmut Schoeck. Der Neid und die Gesellschaft. Ullstein: Frankfurt, 1987.

Those who nourish envy surrender an essential teaching of the Christian faith and transform society into a horrible battlefield.

61. Hope for the Legal System

Proposition: Christian hope for God's comprehensive, incorruptible judgement encourages us to seek truth and justice here on earth, even though it can only be incomplete and is constantly threatened by wickedness and by human limitations.

Hope is always based on the expectation of justice, but without God, we learn from experience: „We look for justice, but find none; for deliverance“ (Isa 59:11). The believer knows, however, that: „But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope“ (Gal 5:5). However we interpret the Bible's teachings on the Last Judgement, whether we believe that justice will or even can be expected before that or not, any search for justice finds its significance and its dignity here.

The roots of the constitutional state lie in a variety of philosophical ideas, but its primary basis is the Scriptural doctrine of law. Any denial of this foundation submits justice to caprice.

The basic civil right to a fair process of law is an ancient principle found in both the Old and the New Testaments. The definition of law requires a just judge, and God is the prototype (See for example: Dt 10:17-18; Ps 7:9,12; 9:5; 50:6; 58:2-3; Ps 75:3,8). A fair judge is always acting in God's commission (2Ch 19:6-7). The magistrate must realise that God sees him and is on the side of the innocent: „To deny a man his rights before the Most High, to deprive a man of justice-- would not the Lord see such things?“ (La 3:35-36)

A verdict must be made without partiality (Dt 1:17; 2Ch 19:7; Pr 18:5; 24:23; Job 13:10; Col 3:25; Eph 6:9), for God is impartial (for example Dt 19:17-18). Only wicked judges practise partiality (Isa 3:9). Prejudice must not influence the verdict (1Ti 5:21), and the case must be investigated thoroughly (See for example, Dt 17:4).

Scripture thus forbids any double legal standard, such as one law for the nobility and another for the peasants. Even foreigners enjoyed the same legal rights as the Israelites under Old Testament

law (Ex 12:49). „Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favouritism to the great, but judge your neighbour fairly“ (Lev 19:15). God defends the rights of the poor and the destitute (Pr 29:7; 31:8). In fact the Bible assesses the justice of a nation by its treatment of the weak. The welfare of the ruling parties is no more significant than the condition of the helpless. Scripture does not judge by the state of the wealthy, who have money and the power to defend their rights, but the situation of the poor, the widows and the orphans in the legal system. „Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy“ (Pr 31:8-9). God, the Creator and Lord of mankind wishes us to treat each other like images of God and like created beings, not like animals.

There can be no justice without law, and without justice no state can please God. Not until the modern age a period of history moulded by Christian, biblical principles, were the mighty of the earth subjected to the law and to justice. The days when a King could claim, „I am the State!“²⁴ are fortunately over. Even the highest State officials, even the State itself, are subject to law, must obey the law, and can be sued and condemned when they do not. As Christians we have an important role to play, for without justice power becomes despotism. „Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people“ (Pr 24:34). The Church Father St. Augustine wrote: „What is the State but a gang of thieves, if there is no law? Gangs of thieves are nothing but small states.“²⁵ He illustrates his proposition with a clear example; asked by Alexander the Great how he dared to make the sea so dangerous, a pirate

²⁴ On Sept 7,1891, Kaiser Wilhelm II, in his boundless vanity, signed the Golden Book of the City of Munich with the words, „Suprema lex regis voluntas,“ („The highest law is the will of the king“). Gerhard Jaeckel. Die deutschen Kaiser. Weltbild Verlag: Augsburg, n. d. (Repr. of Urbes Verlag: Gräfelung), p. 188. The entry can be seen in Hans-Michael Körner. „'Na warte Wittelsbach!': Kaiser Wilhelm II. und das Königreich Bayern“, pp. 31-42 in: Hans Wilderotter, Klaus-D. Pohl (Ed.). Der letzte Kaiser: Wilhelm II. im Exil. Bertelsmann Lexikon Verlag: Gütersloh & Deutsches Historisches Museum Berlin, 1991, p. 37.

²⁵ Aurelius Augustinus. Vom Gottesstaat. Bd. 1. dtv-klassik. dtv: München, 1988³. p. 173 (Kapitel 4 „Reiche ohne Gerechtigkeit sind große Räuberbanden“ in Buch 4).

replied defiantly, „Just because I use a small ship you call me a robber. You do it with a fleet and call yourself emperor.“²⁶

As long as we deny the archetype of our impartial God, corruption and bribery will increase in Europe. Only few realise that this is the logical consequence of our surrender of Christian principles. „A wicked man accepts a bribe in secret to pervert the course of justice“ (Pr 17:23). In turning our back on God we give up the archetype of the fair judge, Whose absolute justice and integrity are the basis for any rejection of the perversion of justice. Doesn't the Old Testament continually describe Him as „the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes“ (Dt 10:17)? „Now let the fear of the LORD be upon you. Judge carefully, for with the LORD our God there is no injustice or partiality or bribery“ (2Ch 19:7).

It was an Evangelical Christian, inspired by his Christian hope, who uncovered the corruption rampant in the EC and forced the Commission to resign. Here we can see the immense consequences that honesty and biblical values in small things can have. His book on the experience is called 'Integrity for Europe'!²⁷ What a program! A drop in a bucket can be the beginning of an ocean!

62. Hope for Politicians

Proposition: Godly men in the Bible often held important positions as officials or rulers in their governments – why not in Europe?

Scripture tells us of many godly judges, kings and officials in Israel as well as in other states. God made Joseph the most powerful man in Egypt after Pharaoh and placed Daniel in high office in several empires. As queen, Esther was influential in the Persian empire and Nehemiah served as governor under a heathen ruler. Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, was converted; the King of Nineveh

²⁶ Ibid., p. 174.

²⁷ Paul van Buitenen. *Blowing the Whistle: Fraud in the European Commission*. Politico's Publ.: London, 2000; German: Paul van Buitenen. *Unbestechlich für Europa: Ein EU-Beamter kämpft gegen Mißwirtschaft und Korruption*. Brunnen: Gießen, 1999.

repented on hearing Jonah's message. Naaman, the right hand of the King of Syria, was converted by an Israelite maid and the prophet Elisha. All of these people retained their offices after their conversion. The New Testament tells us of numerous Roman soldiers and officers (for example Mt 8:5-13; 15:39; 27:54; Lk 7:2-9; 23:47; Ac 10:1-48) and of Dionysius (Ac 17:34), the mayor of Athens, who all became Christians, but did not have to surrender their offices as a result.

The New Testament provides the Christian officials of its day with clear, just precepts for their duties as tax collectors, soldiers or policemen. John the Baptist, for example, advises Roman officials: „Tax collectors also came to be baptized. „Teacher,“ they asked, „what should we do?“ „Don't collect any more than you are required to,“ he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, „And what should we do?“ He replied, „Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely-- be content with your pay“ (Lk 3:12-14; See also Lk 7:29). After his conversion, Zacchaeus, the tax collector, reimbursed the people he had cheated (Lk 19:1-10): „But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, „Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount“ “ (Lk 19:8; See also Ex 22:1).

Many Christians consider politics wicked by definition, but why be surprised that it is such a 'dirty' business when we fail to participate. Why should politicians be interested in God's standards when the Church encourages them to ignore them? As a matter of fact, even a good policy is a 'dirty' business, because politics' most important responsibility is to fight crime and wickedness. If God has given authority to the State it cannot be fundamentally wrong, just as parental authority is not basically wrong, even though ungodly parents misuse their power. Politics do not destroy character, they reveal it. If all godly people withdraw from political life we can only expect the ungodly to take their places.

We must learn that, although God intended Church and State to be two separate institutions, both have their divinely appointed responsibilities, and the values preached by the Church and ordained by God are valid for all of Creation. Individual Christians

do not make policies as representatives of the Church, but as citizens. The Church's duty is to teach godly principles to the government without forcing its ideas on the State or taking it over.

63. Hope for Peace

Proposition: Hope for visible peace in small matters and in major affairs grows from the invisible peace with God, for God wills a future in peace. „For I know the plans I have for you,“ declares the LORD, „plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future“ (Jer 29:11).

The individual's relationship to God determines his personal morality as well as his social ethics. In Romans Paul first demonstrates the lost condition of both Jews and Greeks and the necessity of salvation in Christ. In Chapter 5 he writes: „Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God“ (Ro 5:1-2). Only then does he begin to discuss personal (Ro 6-8), cultural (14-15) and political (13:1-7) ethics. The Book of Romans shows that our very personal faith has consequences for concrete issues of daily life such as work, the nation and the State. We cannot limit faith to our personal relationship to God and to the Church without cutting out large sections of the Book of Romans!

Since „fights and quarrels,“ including conflicts between believers, come from our desires (Jas 4:1-2), from our inner being, the only defence against them must come from within, from peace with God and with our fellow men. This peace, which begins in our hearts, must flow into our lives and fill it completely.

65. Hope for Churches

Proposition: Only churches who have hope for themselves can offer hope to Europe. We need leaders who practice and teach hope.

We must remember that God wills church growth, both as external church planting and as internal maturity; growth in numbers and

spiritual growth in the deep, personal love to God, to His Word and in the hope based on His limitless possibilities.

So many European churches have resigned themselves to the secularisation and esoterisation of our society. Many church leaders continue to sacrifice themselves in service, but have no perspective for the future. They administrate the state of affairs they have inherited, but have no message for the future and no vision of God's possibilities.

Europe needs leaders with hope. We must relinquish our intellectual, philosophical and theoretical theological training educational system and develop a new, vibrant, training program such as those used by Jesus or Paul. We need preparation which transforms practice by transforming thought and which confronts the relevant issues of our day. Only those who have real hope can teach it to a new generation of leaders.²⁸

66. There is Hope for Politics when the Church Repents

Proposition: Beginning with the biblical-reformational renewal of the individual, and moving forward through the renewal of the family, the Christian Church must first begin to renew the Reformation.

„For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God“ (1Pe 4:17)²⁹, for Paul's remark about the Jews, which agrees with the Old Testament, is just as valid for the Church: „As it is written: ‚God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you‘“ (Ro 2:24). The sins of Christians and of the Church are worse than those of the 'world': „If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and are

²⁸ See Thomas Schirrmacher. „Jesus as Master Educator and Trainer“. Training for Crosscultural Ministries (World Evangelical Fellowship) 2/2000: pp 1-4; „Paul and His Colleagues“. Training for Crosscultural Ministries (World Evangelical Fellowship) 3/2000: pp 6-8; „Ausbilden wie Jesus und Paulus“, pp. 7-43 in: Klaus W. Müller, Thomas Schirrmacher (Hg.). Ausbildung als missionarischer Auftrag. Referate der Jahrestagung 1999 des afem. edition afem - mission reports 7. Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft: Bonn, 1999.

²⁹ John Calvin emphasises this idea particularly. See Heinrich Berger. Calvins Geschichtsauffassung. Studien zur Dogmengeschichte und Systematischen Theologie 6. Zwingli Verlag: Zürich, 1956, p. 229.

again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them“ (2Pe 2:20.21).

Let us repeat: there is only one way to renew politics and our society. As important as it is to search the Law of God to determine what is going wrong, and to rediscover God’s way of doing things, we must begin with ourselves: „If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land“ (2Ch 7:14). Then we can begin to truly pray for our society and our governments. Let us hope that God will not say the same thing about us that He said about Israel: „I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none“ (Eze 22:30). „The authentic gospel must become visible in the transformed lives of men and women. As we proclaim the love of God we must be involved in loving service, as we preach the Kingdom of God we must be committed to its demands of justice and peace.“³⁰

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

³⁰ Das Manifest von Manila. Lausanner Bewegung - Deutscher Zweig: Stuttgart, 1996, p. 14 (paragraph 4); English text: www.gospelcom.net/lcwe/statements/manila.html (26.11.2001).

This book was published with the help
of the following two institutions:



Adenauerallee 11, 53111 Bonn, Germany

Fax: + 49 / (0)228 / 69 55 32, info@gebendehaende.de

<http://www.giving-hands.de>

Account for donations: No. 206 000 002, Bank number 370 800 40

Gebende Hände (Giving Hands) in Germany is a non-profit organisation helping poor and needy people in 40 countries of the world. Our intention is to help people to help themselves. The Christian community plays a major role here and even so we are not bound to a specific church we work through local churches all over the world, as well as with other relief organisations and state offices.

Martin Bucer Seminar

Bonn/Hamburg/Pforzheim

Friedrichstr. 38, 53111 Bonn, Germany

Doerriesweg 7, 22525 Hamburg, Germany

Fax 0228 / 965 038-9, info@bucer.de

<http://www.bucer.de>

Account for donations: IWG e.V.,

No. 613161804, Bank number 700 100 80



Martin Bucer Seminar offers theological education on all levels (Bible College, Master of Theology, Doctorate) for working people and fulltime staff like pastors and missionaries. Education is through Saturday Seminars, evening lessons, distance courses, selfstudy material and internships. We accept transfer credits from almost all other schools of theological training. Lectures are mainly in German, partly in English. A lot of the study material is available in English.