

# THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY.

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## Vale atque Ave.

Our readers, we are sure, will indulge us as we are employing the ancient *Ave atque Vale* in inverted order. Owing to the decision arrived at by the last convention of our synodical body, the THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY is now bidding its readers farewell, but it is a farewell which includes a cheerful, cordial *Auf Wiedersehen!* The resolution of Synod reads: "*Resolved, That Lehre und Wehre, the THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, and the Homiletisches Magazin be merged into one monthly.*" In keeping with this resolution of the organization to which the THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY belongs and which primarily it has sought to serve, our journal will now cease to have a separate existence; but it is hoped that, when the new journal appears next January, embodying the THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY and its older sisters, it will be found to have a wider range of usefulness than any one of the three magazines mentioned had in the past. *Unitis viribus!* was the motto in the minds of the delegates when they voted for the resolution merging our three theological magazines. May, under the kind dispensation of God, the fond hope which inspired the action of Synod be fully realized! That the policy of the new journal will be the same as that of our papers in the past, that the earnest endeavor of the editors will be to set forth and defend the teachings of the Word of God as promulgated in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, does not need any special emphasis. It will not be amiss to state here the conviction that the splendid work done by the two men who gave most generously of their time and talents for the success of the MONTHLY and its predecessor, the *Theological Quarterly*, Dr. W. H. T. Dau and Dr. A. L. Graebner, will not be forgotten. The new journal will bear the title *Concordia Theological Monthly* and will cost \$3.50 a year. In conclusion, journals such as ours come and go, but *Verbum Dei manet in aeternum.*

A.

## Studies in First Peter.

### The Christian Hope.

1 Pet. 1, 3—9.

Peter has been called the Apostle of Hope. That appellation is certainly justified. Not only do his letters breathe the spirit of serene peace and holy joy, but there are found in them distinct and jubilant references to the hope which fills the hearts of the believers and buoys them up in the trials of this life. It is my intention to attempt to set forth the great thoughts which are contained in one of the *loci classici* of this doctrine, 1 Pet. 1, 3—9.

When in the first century of our era the Christian religion came upon the scene, the world was full of pessimism. The official heathen religions had no hope to offer to their devotees. Their great singers and thinkers, when looking into the future, all sounded a note of sadness. And thus it had been, though the emphasis had not been so marked, from time immemorial. What a drab and cheerless existence, for instance, is Homer, in the 11th Book of the *Odyssey*, ascribing to the departed, who are dwelling, as he says, in an *ἀτερπὴς χῶρος*, a joyless place! Hence his lamentation that the universe presents a profound riddle, which we human beings cannot solve. Yes, if life ends in everlasting gloom and wretchedness, then one cannot understand why God took pleasure in creating us. The great tragic poets voice similar complaints. Thus Sophocles says: "Blessed is he who has never been born; the second-best boon is for the living hurriedly to depart thither whence he has come." Paganism had nothing to suggest to the weary and heavy laden except suicide. *Patet exitus!* It is true that some of the heathen sages spoke of the life to come in glowing terms, but they lacked all assurance. We may here recall one of the concluding statements of Tacitus in the biography of his father-in-law Agricola: "*Si quis piorum manibus locus, si, ut sapientibus placet, non cum corpore extinguuntur magnae animae, placide quiescas.*" (If there is any place for the spirits of the God-fearing, if, as the wise think, great souls are not blotted out together with the body, rest peacefully.) The great Roman historian could speak of the immortality of the soul only with an "if." Inscriptions on tombstones frequently read: "I was not and came into being; I was and no longer am existing. So much is true; whoever speaks differently is lying; for I shall not be." It got to be the fashion to drown the thought of death by riotous living. An old inscription on a tombstone says: "I was nothing and am nothing. You, who

are reading this, eat, drink, play, come." Cf. Uhlhorn, *Kampf des Christentums mit dem Heidentum*; Friedlaender, *Sittengeschichte Roms*; Cobern, *New Archeological Discoveries*. Stoicism, which was the dominant philosophy of the period, could recommend nothing but resignation. "It aimed at cherishing an insensibility which gave no real comfort and for which it offered no adequate motive. . . . Its marked characteristic was a despairing sadness, which became specially prominent in its most sincere adherents. Its favorite theme was the glorification of suicide, which wiser moralists had severely reprobated, but which many Stoics belauded as the one sure refuge against oppression and outrage." (Farrar, *Early Days of Christianity*.) The lower classes, living largely in a state of wretchedness and degradation, many, many of them being slaves, shared the views of their superiors. In whatever way they could, they tried to find their heaven on earth; as for the future, they stared into dark night. The situation, it is true, was different among the Jews, whose Sacred Scriptures contained promises of the Messiah and of redemption, comforting and strengthening human hearts. But, alas! these promises of God had largely been lost sight of. Religion to a great extent had gotten to be a mechanical thing, consisting in the observance of a number of rules and regulations; and a religion of works cannot be one of confident hope. Thus most people of that age, when thinking of the beyond, were harassed by uncertainty, gloom, and despair.

Into this dismal darkness came the Gospel of Jesus Christ, bringing a message of radiant hope. It was one of the great characteristics of the teachings of Jesus that it offered peace for the present time and happiness and joy with respect to the future. How strange this teaching must have sounded to the people of that age! Here there was something altogether different from what they had heard before. After a night of anxiety and terror a bright day began to dawn. Peter in glowing terms dwells on this part of the Christian teaching.

The apostle opens his discussion with these words: "Praised be God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to His abundant mercy, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, has regenerated us, so that we possess a living hope, an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, and preserved in the heavens for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." It is clear that Peter wishes to direct the attention of his readers to a glorious prospect opening up for them as they look ahead. They

are, he says, in possession of a hope. — A word or two about the concept of hope will not be amiss. Hope, we must remember, is not identical with faith, although closely related to it. 1 Cor. 13, 13 here comes to mind, where faith, hope, and love are distinguished from each other. Meusel's *Handlexikon* has some illuminating statements on this subject. It says (*sub voce Hoffnung*): "Hope at the same time is faith, and faith is hope. Cf. Heb. 11, 1, conviction concerning things hoped for. . . . The difference between hope and faith rests more on the respective objects than on the psychological acts involved. It is the same God-given power of the soul which believes and hopes, which by faith transports itself into the invisible and by hope into the future world, which in the former overcomes the antithesis between appearance and essence and in the latter the antithesis between the present and the future possession of a Christian, between his present situation and his ultimate destiny, and which in the former is the opposite of seeing, in the latter the opposite of enjoyment. Cf. 2 Cor. 5, 7 and Rom. 8, 14. . . . *Πίσις* is directed toward *δικαιοσύνη*, *ἐλπίς* toward *σωτηρία*. Faith prays the Fifth Petition, hope the Seventh Petition of the Lord's Prayer." In the same article, Melancthon is quoted as saying: "*Differunt autem fides et spes, quia fides in praesentia accipit remissionem peccatorum, sed spes est expectatio futurae liberationis.*"

The word hope in the Scriptures at times refers to the act of hoping; then again, by means of a figure of speech, it signifies the object hoped for. Bengel thinks that in our passage the latter meaning is intended; he explains the word as signifying *haereditas coelestis*. But evidently that view is incompatible with the immediate context, hope being termed live or living, a quality which we cannot well ascribe to the heavenly inheritance. Peter, it is true, is making mention of the estate which is prepared for us in heaven; but it must not be thought that he wishes to identify the two terms, hope and inheritance. He states that we have a hope and then adds that we have an inheritance awaiting us in heaven. The second expression supplements the first.

Peter's first concern is to emphasize that the hope of the Christian is something they entirely owe to God. Witness the doxology with which the passage begins. The Christians did not have this hope by nature; the second birth, regeneration, had to occur before they became possessors of it. That second birth, says Peter, was the work of God, who was induced to effect it, not by anything good in us, not by the faith which He saw would be living in us later on, not by good works which we had done or were to do in

the future, but solely by His mercy. If anybody is looking for a clear declaration setting forth the monergism of divine grace, here he has it. Pelagianism, ascribing to natural man the power to convert himself, and synergism, according to which man can in a measure assist the Holy Spirit in the work of regeneration, are both excluded.

With the advent of the new life, the creation of faith, Peter tells his readers, came hope. Where there is faith, there is hope. These two cannot be separated. The minute that the jailer in Philippi believed, his despair was gone, and sweet hope filled his soul. It is living, the apostle tells us. The antithesis would be vain, worthless, idle, having no prospect of fulfilment. Hence living here signifies that the hope of the Christian will not be disappointed.

We furthermore note the statement of the apostle that God has begotten us unto this lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Some commentators wish to connect the last words with ζῶσαν, living. The majority prefer to take it as modifying the participle ἀναγεννήσας, which is certainly the more natural way. But what does the apostle mean to say? In what respect did God regenerate us through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, so that we have become possessors of a living hope? Some say that the resurrection of Jesus is a *pledge* that we shall be blessed in eternity. My objection to that view is that Peter is not speaking of a pledge; he evidently is referring to the means of our regeneration. Note the *διὰ*. It seems clear that he here teaches us to view the resurrection of Christ as Paul views it, for instance, in Eph. 2, 5: "When we were dead in sins, God hath quickened us together with Christ." When Christ was raised, we, who believe in Him, were raised with Him, that is, through faith such a close connection is established between Him and us that we become partakers of what happened to Him. It is a marvelous doctrine, but about its Scripturalness there can be no doubt. Stoeckhardt, when discussing this great truth in his *Commentary on Ephesians*, says (p. 121): "Now, after His resurrection, Christ, even according to His human nature, according to His body, which He gave into death, has a divine spiritual existence, life, and being, or, which means the same thing, a glorified body and life. In this His divine, spiritual life we received a share when God raised us from spiritual death. Of course, for the first, this applies, not to our body, but to our spirit, to our moral nature. The new life of regeneration is life from the life of Christ." We can now see that faith inevitably includes hope. If faith means such an inti-

mate union with Jesus that we share in His life, which is one of unending, everlasting glory, then the conviction cannot be lacking in the Christian that glorious things lie ahead of him.

Peter, continuing, says: "to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading, preserved in the heavens for you." As stated before, the apostle here supplements what he has just said about our possessing a living hope through the regeneration wrought by God. He here mentions the object to which faith is directed. How beautifully does he expand the metaphor which he introduced when he spoke of God's begetting us again to a lively hope! The *Expositor's Greek New Testament* draws attention to this point, saying: "As God's sons, in virtue of their regeneration, they [the Christians] are God's heirs (Gal. 4, 7) and have a heavenly inheritance." And this inheritance is one of surpassing beauty and value; it is incorruptible, no harm can come to it, nothing can destroy it. It is undefiled, or undefilable; no vandal can mar its beauty. It is unfading; it is not like a pretty flower which we pick and which after a few hours is drooping and has to be discarded. The inheritance of God's children is like a wreath that is ever fresh, green, and attractive. Moreover, it is an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, says Peter. There is no danger that we shall be robbed of it; highwaymen, burglars, aye, all the experts of the underworld cannot lay hands on it. These words at the same time help us to apprehend the true nature of the inheritance Peter is speaking of, informing us that it is not an earthly object to be enjoyed during our present life, but that it is kept in the heavens. Thither we have to let our thoughts soar.

The idea may oppress the Christian that, while a magnificent inheritance is waiting for him in heaven which nowise can be lost, he may be lost to the inheritance. Peter reassures him on that point, saying in v. 5: "who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Our own strength, indeed, is not sufficient to keep us on the road leading to the coveted goal. But God's power is active in our behalf, working, it is true, not in irresistible fashion, but maintaining faith in us, so that we finally become possessors of the salvation which even now is ready to be revealed in the last time, namely, on the Day of Judgment.

Not more than a cursory glance at the remaining verses is here possible. Vv. 6—9 I translate thus: "In which time you will rejoice, being now, if need be, for a short time distressed by manifold trials in order that the approved character of your faith, more

precious than gold which perishes, but which is tried by the fire, may be found for praise and honor and glory in the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom you love although you do not see Him; and, believing on Him, even though now you are not beholding Him, you will rejoice with an unspeakable and glorified joy, attaining the end [goal] of your faith, the salvation of souls." Peter here by contrast, in the first place, dwells on the tribulations to which the Christians on earth are subject. There is a sharp antithesis between the "now" and the time at and after the revelation of Jesus Christ. For the present God's children must be willing to suffer. It is to be noted that Peter does not picture the life of the Christian in this world in seductive colors. He by no means hides from them the truth that, as Paul and Barnabas put it (Acts 14, 22), "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." In fact, it was the constant practise of the apostles to disillusion their hearers as to the life which awaited them here on earth after they had become believers. But these tribulations serve a good purpose, says Peter; they test our faith. And at that, they will last but a short time. The day of deliverance will come. Then songs of holy triumph will burst from the lips of God's children, when they will see Him in whom they now believe and whom they love, their dear Redeemer. The rejoicing will be such that we cannot adequately describe it. At the same time it will be glorified, all carnal, imperfect elements having been removed. When that day comes, the goal will have been reached, the conflict will be over, complete salvation will have been realized.

In looking back upon what Peter has here taught concerning the hope of the Christian, we see that he has focused everything on one point, namely, on the pure bliss which will be ours when we shall have entered the heavenly home. It is well to think of the expressions he has used: an incorruptible, undefiled, unfading inheritance, kept in the heavens, salvation ready to be revealed in the last time, praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ, the end or goal of faith, the salvation of souls. All these terms bid us look upward. There is not a hint in this passage that our hope as Christians is to fasten itself on something to be enjoyed here on earth.

As is well known, the Chiliasts are looking forward to a kingdom of Christ here on earth. It is true that they differ among themselves, and for that reason it is difficult to speak of Chiliasm in such a way that all advocates of it are described. A Chiliasm which has had many representatives, even in Lutheran circles, has

assumed that, while the Gentile Church of the present day is declining, our Lord will convert Israel, raise the martyrs, and with these two classes of people begin a glorious reign in Canaan. Satan at the beginning of this period will be bound, the Antichrist will be destroyed, the kingdom in Palestine will exert a marvelous influence on the rest of the world, bringing many people into the fold of the Good Shepherd. This happy period will last a thousand years. At its termination Satan will again be free. He will gather his forces, there will be a terrible battle, in which he will be utterly vanquished. This victory of Christ will be followed by the end of the world, the resurrection of all the dead who were not raised before, and the final Judgment. If this view were right, then we should be justified in looking forward to a period of joy, honor, and glory here on earth; then our hope quite correctly would be focused on something this world offers; and the view that only in heaven will our highest longing be realized would have to be abandoned. It is true that the Scriptures are quoted to support chiliastic notions. Rev. 20, 1—10 is supposed to be an impregnable citadel for the idea that Jesus in a visible manner will reign here on earth before Judgment Day for a thousand years. Rom. 11 is thought to teach clearly the conversion of the Jews as a nation before the end of the world. From the Old Testament many passages are cited to show that the views mentioned are Scriptural. One must admit that many people who defend the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures and wish to be faithful to every word in them are to be found in the camp of the Chiliasts. Of them we may say in the words of Paul that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. They disregard the sound hermeneutical principle of interpretation that we must by all means be guided by the clear passages of the Scriptures and that texts which are less clear, especially such as are couched in figurative language, must be interpreted in the light of the statements that are not metaphorical. Luther very correctly says that the old teachers use clear texts of the Bible to illumine those that are dark, while the Enthusiasts (*Schwaermer*) are using the dark texts to obscure those that are clear and plain. The passages mentioned, when interpreted according to sound hermeneutical rules, will all be found not to contain the sense which the Chiliasts find in them. Rev. 20 does not speak of the reign of Christ and His saints *here on earth*. The latter phrase is simply an addition made by the imagination of the Chiliasts. Rom. 11 does not speak of the conversion of all Israelites that ever lived or that will live at a certain time. According to



the context it uses the term "all Israel" (Rom. 11, 26) in the sense of the fulness of Israel, the elect in Israel. The Chiliasts overlook that one of the great points of St. Paul in the discussion, Rom. 9—11, is the distinction between the physical Israel and the true Israel, that is, the elect among the descendants of Abraham. (Cf. especially Rom. 9, 6 ff.)

The passages in the Old Testament which predict that God in the time of the new covenant will exalt His people Israel and send an era of peace and plenty on earth (Is. 2 and 11, Micah 4, and many other passages) have a spiritual meaning and have been fulfilled, or are being fulfilled, in the Church which Jesus has established. Let the reader think of the texts which say that in the coming of Christ God has visited His people and brought to pass His grand promises, that the kingdom of God is in existence on earth since Christ has appeared, Luke 16, 16; 17, 21, and that prophecies like Jer. 31, 31—34 are said to have been realized with the arrival of the new dispensation. (Cf. Heb. 8, 8 ff.) In addition, let him reflect on the description which Peter here gives, on the one hand, of the Christian hope, and on the other, of the life of the believers here on earth, and the groundlessness of the millennial notions will become evident to him.

One more remark seems necessary. The hope of the Christian, as pictured here by St. Peter, "entereth into that within the veil, whither the Forerunner is for us entered," Heb. 6, 19. 20; that is, it is centered on the home and the glories above. There can be no doubt that it is otherworldly. The tendency of many Christians to-day is to cast the anchor of their hope into the sand of the present world. The modern mind spurns the longing for the peace of paradise and finds its delight in the social gospel, which endeavors to improve conditions here on earth. Now, whatever view one may take of the social gospel, it is certain that the apostles did not teach it. While they emphasized love for our suffering fellow-men and the earnest endeavor to aid all whom we can, they unceasingly pointed upward to the inheritance reserved in heaven. And that the contemplation of these treasures in the beyond did not paralyze their activity, history abundantly testifies. Stalker in his beautiful discourse on hope (*The Seven Cardinal Virtues*) says: "The world is too much with us, and it is so real to our apprehension that the other world appears shadowy. The hope laid up in heaven does not captivate us much. Why is this? Perhaps it is because we take our profession of religion too easily; we are too afraid of giving offense; we provoke no opposition; we do not take up the cross

and follow Jesus. The result is that we are comfortable and unmolested. But we pay the penalty of our comfort. Our spirits grow gross and vulgar, and our hope loses its intensity. When Christians were sacrificing everything in this world for Christ, the world to come was exceedingly credible and delightful, and I have no doubt the day may come when, Christians being persecuted for their faith, the hope of heaven will again be as great and pure as ever." May the second-last verse of the Bible accurately describe our sentiments: "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Amen.

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