

THE DESCENT OF CHRIST INTO HADES.

A CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN PROFESSOR FRANZ
DELITZSCH AND PROFESSOR VON HOFMANN.

[PROFESSOR VOLEK, of Dorpat, has published¹ the remarkable series of letters on theological subjects which passed between Professors Delitzsch and Von Hofmann, while they were colleagues at Erlangen between 1859 and 1863. The letters deal with a wide variety of topics, and the views of the writers are often in sharp antagonism; but the tone throughout is one of courtesy and affection. It was the wish of Delitzsch that the letters should be published; during his last illness he revised his own, striking out passages which referred to living theologians, and making other changes. The letters of Hofmann are left exactly as they were written. The most interesting part of the volume is that which deals with the descent of Christ into Hades, from which we make the following extracts. —*Editor* “*Expositor.*”]

DELITZSCH TO HOFMANN.

OUR theological discussion of yesterday evening is still running in my head. I took your *Schriftbeweis*, and read over once again the seventh section of the fifth doctrinal division, that which deals with the *descensus*. Towards the end you say: “We have said nothing as to the state of Jesus in death, except that it was a transition for Him into a

¹ *Theologische Briefe der Professoren Delitzsch und Von Hofmann, herausgegeben, bevorwortet und mit Registern versehen von D. Wilhelm Volek, ordentlichen Professor der Theologie an der Universität in Dorpat.* (Leipzig, 1891: Hinricks.)

communion with God, which was perfect as regards His whole nature. More than this Scripture does not tell us." This is a note which is struck more than once in your *Schriftbeweis*, and which, I frankly admit, always sounds to me discordant; for when I read that Scripture teaches "nothing further" or "nothing at all" as to this or that point, I am always sorry, first because it so greatly contradicts my desire as a man and a Christian; and, secondly, because it is counter to the impression of fulness of teaching, partly unfolded, partly meant for us to unfold, which Scripture always gives me. Our Lord's descent into Hades was, in your opinion, neither the lowest point of His humiliation nor the turning point of His glorification. Both of these you distinctly deny. It was only a transition, you think, to His transfiguration, and thus as closely related to His death as to His resurrection. But surely, if it was equally related to both, it must have been just as much the preparation for His resurrection as the completion of His death. Did it mean anything at all for Himself? If through death our Lord overcame him that had the power of death, and brought light and immortality to light through His resurrection, how can that which lies between, and is not His death itself, but His condition after death, have been only a transition and not also, considered in itself, an integral link in the chain of acts which formed the complete work of our redemption? If you reply that Scripture tells us nothing on the subject, I will concede that this is so, although such passages as 1 Peter iii. 19 and also Ephesians iv. 8-10 (cf. Col. ii. 15) appear to me to deal with the matter very definitely. If however we grant that these passages tell us no more than Acts ii. 24, still the duty is laid upon us as Christian thinkers of attempting, in the light which falls from the fact of Christ's death, on the one hand, and His resurrection, on the other, upon this other fact of His descent into Hades, which lies between

these opposite poles, to discover what is the significance of the descent into Hades in the work of salvation. It is in itself improbable that it was nothing more than the complement of His death. It is a transition, but in the sense of a *περιπέτεια*, a turning from *δέσις* to *λύσις*, against which the words of Peter in Acts ii. 24, which only give a brief summary of events, cannot possibly be urged in disproof. But even thus its significance is not exhausted. For the death of Christ is also the victory over death, and the resurrection is only the triumph. Therefore Christ's descent into Hades must have also been His victory over Hades; and for this reason the risen Lord carries the keys of Hades and of death, having triumphed over both.

It is true that the *descensus* none the less remains one of those mysteries of which least has been revealed. The remark in my *Biblical Psychology*, that 1 Peter iii. 19 was "clear as noonday" (a remark for which you reproach me, p. 473, and I blame you as little as I did my dear Von Zezschwitz in his work on the *descensus*) only meant that this passage is an *illustre testimonium* that the Lord did not enter Hades without proving Himself a conqueror over Hades. You understand it differently. I do not blame you, but I hope you will not charge me in the future as worshipping an idle *theologumenon* in my view of the *descensus*. For on the fact that my Lord and Saviour entered Hades I rest my hope that my path will not one day descend thither, just as His resurrection is a pledge to me that it will ascend to where He, the second David, has triumphantly ascended, and where He reigns at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

HOFMANN TO DELITZSCH.

YOU regret that I have nothing further to say as regards the state of our Lord in death, than that it was for Him the transition to a communion with God the Father, which was

perfect as regards His whole nature, and that I should find nothing further than this in the teaching of Scripture. This goes against your desire both as a man and a Christian, as do also similar remarks in other parts of my book, and my view is opposed to the impression of fulness of teaching, partly unfolded, partly meant for us to unfold, which Scripture makes upon you.

What fact within our knowledge did I set aside in the case before us when I used the sentence you mention? You think, above all, that when I say that the state of Jesus in death—for it is of that, and not of His descent into Hades, that I was writing—was as a transition to His glorification, equally related both to His death and to His resurrection, I admit more than the sentence you quote would imply. For it must have been a preparation for His resurrection, no less than the completion of His death. Certainly, in so far as His state in death was one into which He had entered by dying, like the human beings who had died before Him; and in so far, on the other hand, as the peculiar manner in which He was laid in the bonds of death (see my remarks on this point in my exposition of John xix. 34, 35) made His resurrection to a life of glory possible, and was indeed an introduction to it. Perhaps some minds may have a clearer idea or conception of the state of our Lord in death than I have attained. But do they gain any new material, any new knowledge, for faith to feed on? I scarcely think so. If I were writing a system of dogma, I should probably attempt to gain clearer views of the state of our Lord in death; but I should keep my conclusions strictly separate from the true material of a dogmatic system. To this belong only those facts of the history of redemption which, if proved false, would destroy the very foundations of my trust that through Christ I shall enter into loving fellowship with God.

Or must I discuss with you that which you do not find expressly considered in my writings as to the state of Christ

in death? You seem to think so, since you write that, if through death our Lord overcame him that had the power of death, and by His resurrection brought life and immortality to light, all that lay between must form an integral link in the chain of acts by which our salvation was secured. If this means that the Lord's state of death was *for us* (*ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν*), just as certainly as His death and resurrection, I of course agree with you. Only I do not find that any independent redemptive act took place during the time He remained in death, such as those of His death and His resurrection. That He did not only die, but entered into the state of all those who had departed this life from Adam onwards, and again that in this state of death He saw no corruption, but was reserved for His resurrection to a life of glory,—this has to do with my salvation, and my assurance of it. You think differently on this point. Speaking not of the state of Christ in death, but of His descent into Hades, you call the latter first of all the turning from *δέσις* to *λύσις*, and, secondly, His victory over Hades, as His death was the victory over death. I deny your first point, because the descent into Sheol was nothing more than His entrance into the company of those who were already dead; and you have no authority for taking Acts ii. 24 to mean more than that Jesus was in the bonds of death until, at His resurrection, the state of bondage in which death had not been able to hold Him came to an end. The sense of Romans x. 7 is just the same; for there the descent *εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον*, to bring Christ up from the dead, is placed in such a connexion with the ascent *εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν*, to bring Him down from thence, that it is evident we may say with equal truth, He was in Sheol or in a state of death, and His coming out of Sheol is just as much one with His resurrection from death to a life of glory as His coming from heaven is one with His entrance into the life of the flesh. Against your other point, that the descent of Jesus into Hades was

His victory over Hades, in the same way in which His death was His victory over death, I have nothing to object, if your meaning is that which the comparison implies. The connexion is the same as when we say that His incarnation is our redemption. As we should not have been redeemed if the incarnate Lord had not died, we should be still in our sins and a prey to death and Hades if He had not risen. His entrance into Hades is the victory over Hades, because He enters as one who is about to rise, and whom the Father therefore preserves against the power of death and against corruption. Because He was dead, and is alive, He calls Himself (Rev. i. 18) the holder of the keys of death and of Hades, and not because, after He had become alive, He entered into Hades.

I cannot therefore see what I lose in respect of the facts on which faith rests in comparison with those who, like you, maintain a descent of our Lord into Hades which was different from His entrance into the state of death. But have I overlooked any teaching which Scripture offers? I do not think so. I set aside Colossians ii. 15, because I do not see that it has anything to do with the matter in hand. I do not see that Ephesians iv. 5-10 is relevant either; if, however, we are to understand *κατέβη εἰς τὰ κατώτερα μέρη τῆς γῆς*, not of the descent of Christ from heaven to earth, but of His descent into Sheol, still the passage has nothing to do with the point in dispute, and certainly does not imply that the descent referred to was different from His entrance into a state of death. 1 Peter iii. 19 remains; and as regards that passage, I will wait until those who think they see in it a reference to the descent into Hades have discovered an explanation of *κηρύσσειν* which would not be contrary to the *analogia fidei*. I wait all the more calmly, because I consider there is quite as much to be said for my own interpretation, so far as language and connexion are concerned, as for the other.

Where then is the full scriptural teaching which I overlook? I recognise the wisdom of Him who gave us the Bible in its silence on all matters which it is not needful for our salvation, or for our understanding of the ground on which our salvation rests, that we should know. The *μυστήριον τῆς εὐσεβείας* is indeed great, and its greatness consists precisely in this, that it is the *μυστήριον τῆς εὐσεβείας*.

DELITZSCH TO HOFMANN.

As we have begun to discuss the dogma of the *descensus Christi ad inferos*, it seems to me that, in view of the importance of this doctrine, we should not break off our discussion too soon. Permit me then to lay before you my conviction on the subject in brief and aphoristic form, as I have only a short hour of leisure this evening for writing.

Heaven is the place in which God reveals Himself in the unveiled glory of love. All through the Old Testament writings He manifests Himself there to supernatural beings only. Heaven is entirely empty of human beings, except that perhaps a seer in his ecstasy may be borne thither for a moment.

How different is the case in the New Testament! The apocalyptic seer beholds a countless multitude of blessed human beings before the throne. The resurrection has not yet taken place: but those who have died in the Lord are already seen in heaven as spirits, and as spirits in a state of perfection. There is even now a heavenly *ecclesia triumphans*. It is the body of those who have passed away in Christ which remains in a state of death, not their spirit, or (what is essentially the same) their soul.

In the Old Testament body and soul returned to the earth, and both were bound with the bonds of death. In the New Testament, on the other hand, the body is indeed laid in the earth, but the soul takes its flight towards

heaven. That the soul of one who here on earth has passed from death to life should, after its separation from the body, continue in a state of death is, no matter how pleasant we may imagine that state to be, contrary to the teaching of Scripture. The body alone has as yet no share in everlasting life, but the soul enjoys the treasure which here below it carried in an earthen vessel.

The total transformation of the final state of humanity is the work of the Redeemer. He died that He might indeed overcome the prince of death. The state of believers after death stands in closest relation to the state of the dead Christ Himself. The words of Peter (Acts ii. 24), that God raised Him up, *λύσας τὰς ὀδύνας τοῦ θανάτου*, do not mean that the Lord continued in the pains or in the bonds of death up till the moment of His resurrection. How could that agree with His own words, "To-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise"? In paradise there can be no suffering of the pains of death, for it is the place of the blessed, although not heaven in the meaning we have given it above.

The resurrection of our Lord was the loosing of the bonds of death only as far as His body was concerned, although even His body had not seen corruption. But to His spirit or soul there happened that which has made it possible for us to live the life of blessed spirits between our death and resurrection. His spirit was at once snatched away from death, so that He descended into Hades, not as a dead, but as a living spirit, while yet His body rested in the grave, waiting for its resurrection. Hades had no power over Him. He tasted death, but not beyond the "it is finished." If He had tasted more deeply, His body must have seen corruption, like that of Lazarus. He was a prey to *שְׁחַת* in the sense of *שְׁאוֹל* (Hades) just as little as He was a prey to *שְׁחַת* in the sense of *שְׁחָה* (corruption). The words of David in Psalm xvi. 10 were fulfilled in Him in

the very sense in which they were meant by David. God did not leave His soul in Hades. But He descended into Hades, because His way to heaven of necessity led through the realm of Hades. Everywhere He established the new, while He fulfilled the old. And between His death and His resurrection He was in the state of one who, although He had not risen, was yet alive, that in all things He might have the pre-eminence. His descent into hell ended the reign of Hades for us, and created the blessed state of *πνεύματα δικαίων τετελειωμένων*, just as His resurrection is the foundation and the pledge of ours.

These remarks, which express my firm conviction, founded as I believe on Scripture, are only meant to give you an opportunity of expressing your views on matters in regard to which your position is not quite clear to me. To speak frankly, you appear to me to favour the view that our state after death is a kind of soul-sleep, and your teaching as to our Lord's descent into Hades seems to correspond with this. I should like to know how far you have been influenced in your views of the intermediate state by the glimpses given in the Apocalypse of heaven; in other words, whether we are agreed, that even now, when the resurrection is still in the future, there is in heaven a triumphant Church of blessed spirits, who not only rest under the wings of love, but are in fully conscious, active communion with the Lord and one another.

Do not be too brief in your reply to this, so that my doubts may be removed.

P.S.—Before sending you my letter this morning, permit me to remark, that those who have fallen asleep in faith may be called *νεκροί*, but, so to speak, *per zeugma*, because their body still awaits its resurrection. In the body they are dead, but in the spirit they live. Their spirits are be-

fore the throne, and serving God in His temple. There is no wilderness for our spirits between Egypt and Canaan. The words of the psalmist (cxv. 17) are no longer true in the New Testament in their original meaning, because our Lord descended into Hades, thus taking the first step towards His resurrection.

HOFMANN TO DELITZSCH.

I AM afraid we shall not come to an agreement on the subject of our Lord's descent into hell. I cannot conceive it to mean anything else than that our Lord יָרַד שְׁאֵלָה, which bears the same relation to the "descent" of those who died before Him, as His death bears to theirs. But you speak of Christ's descent as the first step to His resurrection; and of such a descent, which would be something altogether different from that of those who died before Him, I can find no trace in Scripture, nor can I understand how He could have died, and yet in dying not have entered into Sheol.

You escape from St. Peter's words (Acts ii. 24), which I quoted against your view, by asserting that if they imply that our Lord remained in the bonds of death until His resurrection, they would not accord with the promise He gave to the penitent thief. Allow me to point out, that, if this were so, the words would have no meaning at all. For the *σήμερον* of the promise would altogether exclude the idea of being bound in the bonds of death. The loosing of the bonds must in that case have taken place at the very moment when they were laid upon Him, and the word *κρατεῖσθαι* would be used in the sense of seizing, and not of holding fast. But how am I to understand your own opinion? After saying, that St. Peter's words cannot be taken to mean that our Lord continued in the bonds of death until His resurrection, you go on to remark, that His

resurrection *was* the loosing of these bonds, although only "as far as the body was concerned." If this is so, why might not St. Peter have meant that our Lord continued in the bonds of death until His resurrection, *i.e.* "as far as the body was concerned"?

You think then that Christ was in the bonds of death in the body only. His state after death would, according to this view, be a state of the body only, and He would not have died in the same sense in which other men die, whether those who fell asleep in faith before or after Him. For of the latter also we read, in Revelation xx. 4, that their souls become alive at the resurrection. These are the same souls that cry, "How long!" under the heavenly altar of burnt-offering (Rev. vi. 9).

As to whether I hold that those who have died in Christ are in a kind of soul-sleep, I need only point you to vol. iii., p. 182, of my *Schriftbeweis*. But my teaching with regard to the "descent into hell" has nothing to do with any opinion as to our state after death, but is founded, as I believe, on Holy Scripture, and is in strict correspondence with my conception of the history of our Lord Himself. I prefer accordingly to keep to the fact itself, without digressing to the question of our state after death.

I find that the Bible teaches that Christ, after He had become alive, whether with or without a body, descended into Hades. You however maintain that His spirit was delivered from death at the very moment of His dissolution, and that thus He entered Hades as a living being; He did not taste of death beyond the "it is finished," and was alive between His death and His resurrection. Do the words ἀπέθανεν καὶ ἔζησεν (Rom. xiv. 9) then represent two facts which occurred at the same moment? in His death did He pass into a state of life, by means of which His body also arose? Or do the words of Revelation ii. 8, ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς, καὶ ἔζησεν, mean, "He died in the body,

but was alive in the spirit"? Or are we to understand ἐξῆσεν in both cases as referring only to the resurrection of His body? If this is so, I wonder why Scripture always speaks only of the death and resurrection of our Lord, and ignores altogether the fact which is incomparably more important than His resurrection, *viz.* His becoming alive immediately after death. I should have thought that our Lord's work involved His entering into the same state after death into which our sin had delivered us, only that, as I said in a former letter, He was reserved for His resurrection, which implied a distinction of state not only for His soul, but also for His body. Setting aside this distinction, I imagine that the state of Jesus Christ in death was like that of the beggar Lazarus. What Abraham and Abraham's bosom were to Lazarus, that Christ was to the penitent thief; with Him he finds himself in paradise, although he is in the company of the dead, not only as regards the body, but as regards the soul. If Lazarus could be in Abraham's bosom and at the same time in the bonds of death, the place where Jesus was might be the place of the tree of life, although He also was in the bonds of death. For, as I said, His state in death bore an equal relation to His dying and to His rising again, without necessarily being on that account a death of the body and a life of the soul.

For the rest I refer you to my former letter, which you have not yet answered.

DELITZSCH TO HOFMANN.

You remind me of the letter you sent me before the last. I did not answer it, because I do not wish to carry on one campaign after another with you. If I understand your character rightly, you are not one to be driven from your position by the arguments of an opponent. But your

opponent's ideas lie hidden in your mind like seeds, and if you were to revise your system, you would accept much that you formerly denied. I am therefore content to be the sower, and not to strive after victory in a duel with you.

Still, if you like, I am quite willing to return to your previous letter. In any case, we cannot yet pass from the consideration of these matters to others. They are infinitely important in themselves, and the discussion of them occupies no less than three not inconsiderable portions of the three volumes of your work.

First of all, let me say a word as to that which you yourself admit to be an important distinction in our way of looking at the words of Scripture. To come back to this general point once more is for me a necessity of the heart, and appears even a sacred duty. You draw a radical distinction between the assumptions of Scripture teaching and the conclusions which are drawn from it, and Scripture teaching itself. I utterly disapprove of this distinction. It rests on scientific, but not on biblical grounds. For as Scripture, according to 2 Timothy iii. 16, is profitable in all its parts *πρὸς διδασκαλίαν*, it must be instructive in every part and provide material for instruction. But you make it your business to narrow the instructive material, and to represent that which lies on the one side and on the other as extra-biblical current assumption or self-evident deduction. Is it only my feelings, or is it Christian sense and Christian conscience, which this method wounds?

In all three portions of your *Schriftbeweis* you begin by making a *tabula rasa* of all that might be called Scripture teaching on the points concerned.

In vol. i., p. 490, where you go on to consider the subject of our state after death, you begin by saying, "Little as Scripture teaches us about what it is to die, it teaches no more about the state after death." My whole mind revolts against this assertion. For I know without Scripture what

is the outward appearance of death, but of its nature I know nothing except from the Scripture. And as to the condition which awaits the man who dies out of Christ, and which awaited those who died before Him, I should know absolutely nothing definite, were it not that Scripture taught me. The idea of Hades does indeed exist as a popular notion outside the range of the Bible, but I should have no assurance that this idea is not a delusion, were it not that Scripture taught me. The Bible teaches even where it only assumes and deduces. It teaches both where it confirms that which could be learned without it, and where it draws conclusions from its own premisses.

In vol. ii., p. 473, you strike the same note, and assert that Scripture contains no doctrine as to the descent of Christ into Hades. From the fact that the Lord died, and rose again on the third day, we may indeed conclude that in the meantime He was in a state of death. But should we know without Scripture how to conceive of this state of death? I mean (because I am now setting aside our difference of view) that He was ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ τῆς γῆς, *i.e.* in Hades, but that notwithstanding this He was in paradise. Further, should we know without Scripture that He did not enter into the company of the dead, without producing an effect upon them, and what this effect was? I refer to your remark on p. 492: that the opening of the way out of death, which was proclaimed by the earthquake which rent the rocks and opened graves, was accompanied by the actual resurrection of certain holy men.

In all this Scripture teaches that in the time between His death and His resurrection Jesus was not (as one might be tempted to gather from a onesided view of Luke xxiii. 43) caught away in spirit to God in heaven, but was in the kingdom of death, yet not without signs of His living power, which proclaimed Him the conqueror of Hades. From your own argument in the *Schriftbeweis*, although

the existing doctrinal material is greatly reduced in volume, it follows that, even for you, Scripture teaches much more than is contained in the colourless sentence with which you begin on p. 473. That sentence gains colour and definiteness from the passages of Scripture which you then examine. Supposing however that, even without the witness of Scripture, you could draw these conclusions for yourself, every one has not skill for such a *gnosis*. Scripture unfolds its premisses for the *νήπιοι*, and this unfolding teaches us truths which, rightly considered, extend far beyond anything we could gather for ourselves.

In vol. iii., p. 462, we have the old assertion: no teaching as to the state of those who have died in Christ. And at the close of this section you explain (p. 488):

“All that we find to have any bearing on this matter is mere *self-evident* deduction from the spiritual fact of the new birth and the historical fact of the second coming of Christ in its connexion with the natural event of death; and the entire distinction between the state of Old and New Testament believers after death, which has come before us in the passages expounded, rests solely on the fact that the New Testament believers enjoy a communion with God which is really a communion with the Man Jesus Christ, who has passed through death to God and has been glorified by His resurrection.”

I know, dear friend, your deep reverence for the word of God, but I could not blame any one not so well acquainted with you who should think the word “self-evident” showed a lack of that humility we owe to the word of God, and of the decorum we should maintain in dealing with it. In one of your former letters you said, that all those facts which we believe have become known to us by the evidence of Scripture. It is not otherwise with that fact which you call “self-evident.” The enlightened understanding recognises indeed that it must necessarily follow from the great principles of redemptive work. But Scripture itself draws the deduction, and in doing so gives us doctrinal teaching no less than when it reveals the great principles themselves.

All the more does it teach us when it reveals the state of New Testament believers after death, not merely in general, but in many side-circumstances which we may not gather into the general idea. What will be the place in which the departed spirits and souls abide under the protection of the communion of Christ? Will their state resemble slumber? or will they be fully conscious and active both towards God and towards other holy beings. How will they find temporary compensation for the body which is yet wanting to them? Will they remember their life on earth? Do they know of the events which transpire in the world? All these questions Scripture answers; and in the answer gives us teaching which we should receive all the more gratefully, because we now possess a much more certain knowledge of those matters which it concerns us to know, than if the answer were left to be discovered by our own understanding, which, even when enlightened, is still only too capable of error. And in all cases where the things of the world to come are mentioned under earthly forms (as, *e.g.*, Matthew xxvi. 29), or are presented to the view (as, *e.g.*, Revelation v. 11), I find disclosures which, although it is impossible for us to translate them into the super-sensual, may still be viewed as object-lessons, which tell us more than the keenest abstractions of our discursive thinking. For John, the greatest seer, is in truth also the greatest theologian.

I am aware that the danger peculiar to my disposition is to find more taught in Scripture than it actually teaches, although I take pains carefully to separate my own possibly erroneous ideas from the definite points of departure laid down in Scripture. But in your whole work you are flying away from doctrine; and since you strive to bring the actual teaching of the Bible on the same level with your whole doctrinal system, many a solid piece of scriptural instruction falls a prey to your constantly renewed genera-

lizations. For instance, the whole *hierarchia cælestis*—archangels, seraphim, cherubim, etc.—are gathered up by you into the general conception of a multiplicity of spirits which work in the manifold powers of the corporeal world ; while I, when I hear the apostle distinguish between ἄγγελοι, ἀρχαί, δυνάμεις, etc., gather, in spite of my incapacity to understand these lofty matters, that there must be graded classes of these heavenly spirits. And in all your writings you have such a tone of certainty, that it almost seems as if you thought it impossible that you might be wrong. I know that this certainty is the natural accompaniment of your keenness of insight, the results of which I admire in the immense extent of the ground you cover. But, apart from the fact of salvation, of which our own experience is a pledge and guarantee, we know only in part, and even your keenness sees only δι' ἐσόπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι ; and for this reason an admixture of scepticism, as I venture to think, would only serve to increase its value.

I draw a line here, for, instead of sending you the above as a separate letter, my criticism is going to hold you still longer. I know, even apart from this interchange of letters, that, along with that self-assurance which seems to me excessive, you have the gift of patiently enduring sharp opposition ; and from this it is clear, that your concern is for truth, and not for the fulfilment of your own opinions. In the letter before your last you say : “ It is on your own responsibility that you make Acts ii. 24 mean anything more than that Jesus was in the bonds of death until, at His resurrection, the bonds with which death had not been able to hold Him were loosed.” I answer, first, by referring to your own perfectly correct remark in vol. iii., p. 482, of your *Schriftbeweis* : “ According as the state of one who has died in Christ is considered in one or other con-

nexion (*i.e.* the spiritual or bodily) we find it distinguished as a state of life or death. The dead man is both with Christ in heaven and with the dead in Hades, as a disembodied *ego* with Christ, while his body remains in the kingdom of death." If I apply this to Christ, St. Peter's words, that God raised Him up, having loosed the bonds of death, are fully explained, by the assumption that, until His resurrection, He was in the bonds of death in the body, though not in the spirit.

I am quite willing to take upon myself the responsibility of thus limiting the sense of Acts ii. 24 (even in connexion with the quotation from the Psalms in ver. 27), for I am under the protection of an even more definite statement of St. Peter; *viz.* 1 Peter iii. 18-20. In proceeding to discuss this passage, I cannot conceal my pleasure, that your argument in the *Schriftbeweis* brings to light a great deal more scriptural teaching with reference to the *κατάβασις εἰς ᾄδου*, than your doctrine of the transitional character of the state of Christ in death might lead one to expect. For when you repeat these words of the creed in public worship every Sunday, "He descended into hell," the *benedictus* of pp. 489 and 491 of your work may come to mind in connexion with them: "Praise be to Him who through His descent turned Abraham's bosom into paradise, and in the midst of death revealed Himself to the dead as the Prince of life!" Relying on Luke xxiii. 43 and Matthew xxvii. 51-53, you also admit that Jesus did not enter Hades without effecting a change in Hades, and exercising His life-giving power upon the dead. I seem indeed to bring your inmost thoughts to light when I say, "The descent of the Redeemer made His exit from death possible; His resurrection made it actual; both together revealed it to the world."

When I consider how far we are agreed, I cannot share the hopeless view which is expressed at the beginning of your

last letter on this subject. In my judgment, the general root-idea of 1 Peter iii. 18-20, if we understand the passage as referring to the descent of the incarnate Lord, contains nothing to which you can object. I venture to go even further. If you could see your way to accept this passage as referring to the descent into Hades, you and I would be in a closer agreement than I have been able to form with Wiesinger, Von Zezschwitz, and Von Öttingen. For I cannot accept the Lutheran view—opposed to the Roman Catholic on this matter,—although it has the authority of Thomasius, and was sanctioned by an anathema of the Council of Constantinople in 381; viz. that the *reductio animæ et corporis* preceded the *descensus*, and that we should thus distinguish between two *descensus*, one being the natural consequence of death, and the other the prelude of resurrection. I prefer to adopt the view which obtains in the Greek Church, according to which the spirit (or soul) of Christ, personally united as it was with the Divine nature, is considered as the subject of *descensus*, and I agree with your remark on p. 474: “The words which follow ἐν ᾧ πορευθεὶς ἐκήρυξεν refer to a preaching on the part of Christ in which He used the medium of spirit rather than of flesh; and we are not told that He went and preached in the state which is indicated by the words ζωοποιηθεὶς πνεύματι.” I also quite agree with your preceding remark, on the antithesis θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρκὶ ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι; namely, that the life He had resumed, and which was now held under spiritual conditions, must be understood as belonging to the entire Man Jesus, both as regards His body and His soul. The ζωοποίησις which the apostle means would thus be one and the same with ἔγερσις and ἀνάστασις. I maintain only that our Lord, having descended into Hades, manifested Himself ἐν πνεύματι to the spirits in prison, and that (in Güder’s words) this spiritual (not yet bodily) self-manifestation is a point of special importance in the perfecting

process by which the Divine-human person of Christ attained the form of the *σῶμα τῆς δόξης* which alone was adequate for it. For I admit that you are right, in thinking that *ἐν ᾧ* relates more nearly to *ἐκήρυξεν* than to *πορευθείς*, since the words are not *πρὸς τὰ ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύματα*, but *τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν*. This *πορευθείς*, *i.e.* evidently *εἰς ᾄδου*, is equivalent to *καταβὰς εἰς ᾄδου*, and (as Thomasius has shown) the antithesis to *πορευθείς εἰς οὐρανόν* (ver. 22); for *ᾄδης* (*φυλακῆ*) and *οὐρανός* are polaric opposites.

You still maintain however that the apostle is speaking of Christ's preaching *before* His incarnation to the race that perished in the flood. In recommendation of this view it must certainly be granted that you do not hold it alone, for Wiesinger quotes a long list of expositors (p. 228) who maintained it also. And the problem as to why it was precisely the generation that perished in the flood that heard the preaching in Hades is solved by this theory simply because it is set aside altogether. That is the very purpose of the interpretation. It does not take the text of Scripture frankly as it stands. It cuts the knot; but the solution is altogether incredible, whether we consider the language or the subject matter.

When the apostle says, "Christ went and preached unto the spirits in prison," he means (unless we suppose that he makes use of language to conceal, rather than to explain his thought) (1) that Christ went to the abode of these spirits; and (2) that He preached to them on that very spot. And when he adds *ἀπειθήσασι ποτε ὅτε, κ.τ.λ.*, he describes these spirits more minutely, telling the cause of their imprisonment and the motive of the preaching that was addressed to them. The word *πότε* places their disobedience in a past lying on the other side of the *ἐκήρυξεν*: "the spirits in prison which in time past were disobedient," etc. It is true that *ἐκήρυξεν ἀπειθήσασι*, taken by itself, might mean, "He preached, but they did not obey"; but

the *πότε* makes it impossible to assume that the preaching and the refusal to obey occurred at the same time, in which case the word would have been *τότε*. The aorist participle undoubtedly takes a past-perfect meaning from the word *πότε*.

But if we look at the sense of the passage, it is equally impossible to consider the preaching as having been "a message of Christ during the 120 years of grace to the generation of the flood." Preaching is a personal action. But Jesus Christ is pre-existent in Old Testament history only in Jehovah the God of redemption, whose purpose it is to become incarnate, and in the angel of Jehovah, who, as a manifestation of God, is Himself a pre-revelation of the incarnation. This is the explanation of such sayings as that Isaiah saw Jesus Christ (chap. vi.), that the spirit of Christ was in the prophets; that Moses chose the shame of Christ rather than the treasures of Egypt; that Christ was the rock which followed Israel: for the rock, out of which Israel drank in the first and again in the fortieth year after the exodus, was, spiritually interpreted, the presence of the God of salvation, who is in truth צִוּר יִשְׂרָאֵל (אֱלֹהֵינוּ). You and I agree that Christ was *not* otherwise pre-existent in Old Testament history than in Jehovah, who had the incarnation already in view. Granting this, the interpretation that Christ, who was put to death in the flesh, but raised in the spirit, went in the spirit and preached to the spirits of those men who were alive in Noah's time, but who are now in prison, appears to me altogether unwarrantable. In the first place, it is strange that Christ should have been the subject of preaching which warned them of the impending judgment, but had no connexion with God's plan of salvation which was fulfilled in the future life of Christ. Next, Genesis vi. throws no light on the Christological idea of the apostle, is contrary to the universal rule, when Old Testament facts and sayings are referred

to Christ; there is not even a reference to a descent of Jehovah, which might explain *πορευθείς*. In the third place, we might have expected that in this mention of the preaching as the act of Christ, the human instrument would have been named; but, as if in direct defiance of this interpretation, Noah is only incidentally alluded to in ver. 20. And, lastly, the prophetic preaching of the Old Testament might be cited as that of the *πνεῦμα Χριστοῦ* witnessing to itself; but why the apostle should have gone so far as to look upon this Noachic preaching as the personal action of Christ *ἐν πνεύματι* is to my mind quite incomprehensible.

The question now arises, What was the nature of the preaching of Christ in Hades? Von Öttingen gives an answer to this question in his treatise *De Peccato in Spiritum Sanctum*, which is perhaps the wisest word he has said in this connexion: "Christus *κηρύσσω* non potest nisi se ipsum prædicare." There is here, so far as I see, no risking of the *analogia fidei*; for the reference is to men who died before Christ, and for whom, so far as they were capable of receiving salvation, the self-revelation of Christ in Hades did exactly the same thing that great deed of the resurrection of all who have fallen asleep in Christ does (according to a fine passage in *Weissagung und Erfüllung*) for the other great multitude of the dead.

The further question occurs, Why was it precisely the generation of the flood to whom Christ preached? I believe that you could answer this question better than I, if you would only seriously attempt to deal with it; for you are a master in the art of discovering and stating with precision the connexion of the chain of ideas. The apostle, as it seems to me, passes from discussing the Christian duty of willingness to confess and to suffer to speak of Christ, the great pattern of both. He points to Him who suffered the just for the unjust, and who did not neglect to preach, *i.e.* bear witness of Himself, even to the race who for their

stubborn disobedience perished in the flood; to Him who, after suffering death and descending into Hades, entered as the risen God-Man on a life of Divine glory in heaven, transcending even that of the angels. It seems to me that some such answer to the question why the generation of the flood, to which he refers elsewhere in his epistle, should be specially mentioned here. But even granting that these two questions must remain as insoluble riddles, to my mind there can be no doubt whatever that, to the mind of a candid expositor, the apostle's words can refer only to a proclamation of Himself made by Christ in the intermediate state, in Hades, and before His resurrection. In vers. 18-22 the apostle passes in review all the phases of the existence of our Lord, from His passion to His throne.