

We do not look back to the birth of Christ as to the birth of a great man, to whom the world or some people is indebted for the disclosure of new powers of life and new goods of life, new knowledge or new ideals. Rather, we look back to his birth as to the event that divides the entire course of the world into two parts. Paul says that in Christ the new world, the world of God's reign, has broken in in the midst of time. Christ's birth, therefore, is nothing past as we otherwise speak about things that are past in history. Nor do his person and work continue to work in history in the way in which what is otherwise past continues to work, so that everyone feeds on their fruits and lives by their results, however he or she may personally stand with respect to them and whether he or she even knows anything about them. No, it is precisely not in this way that Christ's person and work continue to effect us. On the contrary, what Christ means he always means only because he puts to everyone the question of decision whether he or she is willing to recognize in his person the end of the old world and the beginning of the new one, and whether he or she is willing to participate in the new world through him. Therefore, unlike the work of great men, his work never passes into the ongoing stream of history, to be further developed, transformed, and enriched, but rather ever remains the same as it was: the end of the old and perishing and the breaking in of the new and imperishable (Das Verkündigte Wort: 295).