



A GUIDE TO HELP OBTAIN A DEEPER

UNDERSTANDING OF OUR FAITH AND BELIEFS

AS EXPERIENCED IN
'THE TENNANTS AND FAITH'
CONTAINED IN THE CURRENT CATECHISM

– THE OBJECT OF AN APOSTOLIC CHURCH –

The object of the Apostolic Church is to bring all to the Grace of JESUS CHRIST, to reconcile a people again to GOD, and to be led in Childlike faith by the HOLY GHOST to be prepared as a bride at His return in power and glory which is near at hand.

Revelation 22:12

“Behold I come quickly and my reward is with me.”

The Apostolic Church of Queensland was established in 1886 as part of the re-establishment which began in England in 1830. We believe that Jesus Christ is the Head of His Church, which He rules and sustains through the Holy Spirit and to which He sent and continues to send His Apostles.

The Church in Queensland has sponsored the establishment of Apostolic Faith in other countries as listed.

The Apostolic Church of Queensland – Northern District (Australia)

Philippines United Apostolic Church – Philippines

United Apostolic Church India – India

United Apostolic Church Pakistan – Pakistan

United Apostolic Church – Burma

United Apostolic Church Canada – Canada/USA

Unity Apostles Church Kenya – Kenya

Unity Apostles Church New Zealand – New Zealand

Should you wish to learn more of our faith and beliefs, please feel free to contact any of the following:

“ALL HONOUR TO GOD”

Source of Contents

**THIS GUIDE IS BASED ON THE HOLY BIBLE
“AUTHORISED KING JAMES VERSION”**

and

**RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS OF THE
APOSTLES OF THE VARIOUS APOSTOLIC CHURCHES
THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.**

**First printed in 1993 and adjusted in 2013 to Assist in the Mission Labour of –
The Apostolic Church of Queensland – Northern District
Philippine United Apostolic Church – Philippines
United Apostolic Church India – India
United Apostolic Church Pakistan – Pakistan
United Apostolic Church – Burma
United Apostolic Church Canada – Canada/USA
Unity Apostles Church Kenya – Kenya
Unity Apostles Church New Zealand – New Zealand**

All part of the World Wide Unity of Apostles

**Australian Address-
P.O. Box 8077, Mt. Pleasant, QLD 4740 AUSTRALIA
Website: www.apostolicchurchqld.org.au**

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| FAITH | 6 |
| ARTICLES OF FAITH | 7 |
| 1. GOD THE FATHER | 8 |
| 2. GOD THE SON | 11 |
| We Believe in Jesus Christ | 11 |
| Jesus Christ, God's only Begotten Son | 11 |
| Jesus Christ, the only Begotten Son | 12 |
| Jesus Christ our Lord..... | 13 |
| Conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary | 13 |
| Suffered under Pontius Pilate | 13 |
| Crucified, Dead and Buried | 14 |
| Descended into Hades | 14 |
| On the Third Day Rose from the Dead | 15 |
| Ascended into Heaven | 16 |
| He sits on the Right Hand of God the Almighty Father; from there He will Come Again | 17 |
| 3. GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT | 18 |
| We Believe in the Holy Ghost (Spirit) | 18 |
| We Believe in the Holy Universal Apostolic Church | 20 |
| A Christian Church is a Community of Work and Mission | 20 |
| In the Communion of Saints | 21 |
| Forgiveness and Remission of Sins | 22 |
| The Resurrection of the Dead and the Life Everlasting | 22 |
| 4. CHRIST'S CHURCH | 24 |
| Jesus Christ is the Head of His Church | 24 |
| The Apostolic Mission..... | 24 |
| Jesus has sent and is still sending Apostles to His Church, as Teachers, Helpers, Intercessors and Ambassadors of Christ..... | 24 |
| What kinds of Authority are there?..... | 25 |
| Apostolic Churches are therefore guided by Ambassadors for Christ, Apostles..... | 26 |
| We Believe in the Holy Scriptures (Bible) of the Old and New Testaments, with all the Promises contained therein, from beginning to end..... | 27 |

We now move to the object of the Church “To be Saved by Grace”

| | |
|---|----|
| 5. THE MEANS OF GRACE | 29 |
| Introduction | 29 |
| Everything we do has a Definite Aim!..... | 29 |
| The Goal | 29 |
| The Path | 30 |
| The Means | 31 |
| The Word | 31 |
| The Sacraments | 32 |
| The Sacraments Form a Unity | 33 |
| | |
| 6. HOLY BAPTISM BY WATER | 34 |
| Baptism in the Old Testament | 34 |
| Baptism by John | 34 |
| The Call to Mission to the Disciples: The Ministry of Baptism | 35 |
| No Baptism without Faith in Christ | 35 |
| The Meaning of Baptism | 35 |
| Baptism is an Act of the Holy Spirit | 36 |
| Why Child Baptism? | 36 |
| Immersion or Sprinkling? | 37 |
| The Unifying Bond of Baptism | 37 |
| | |
| 7. HOLY SEALING | 38 |
| General | 38 |
| The Laying on of Hands | 38 |
| The Meaning of the Word "Seal" | 38 |
| Biblical Examples of the Word "Seal" | 39 |
| The Sealing in Samaria | 39 |
| Sealing is Performed by Apostles | 40 |
| Baptism and Sealing - Two Separate Acts | 40 |
| The Gifts of the Holy Spirit | 42 |
| Further Features of Sealing in the Light of Holy Scripture | 43 |
| Requirements for Receiving Sealing | 46 |
| | |
| 8. HOLY COMMUNION | 47 |
| Introduction and Meaning of Communion – Preparation and Practice .. | 47 |
| Model in the Jewish Passover | 47 |
| Communion and Passover - Past and Present | 48 |
| Communion - Link with the Future | 48 |
| The Blood in the Old and New Testament | 48 |
| Bread as the Sign of Christ's Body | 50 |
| The Bread of Heaven | 50 |
| The Meaning of Communion | 51 |

9. ON THE PRACTICE OF REMISSION OF SINS AND OF HOLY COMMUNION 53

The Bible Teaches that there is Forgiveness of Sins 53
Jesus Christ - the Redeemer from Zion 53
Jesus' Commission to His Apostles 53
Steadfastness in the Breaking of Bread 54
Forgiveness of Sins Precedes Communion 54
Requirements for the Forgiveness of Sins 54
Holy Communion is a Feast 56
The Reservation of the Sacraments and the Celebration of
Communion - A Holy Act 56
Who is Allowed to take Communion 57
The Marriage of the Lamb 58

10. SUMMARY OF ARTICLES ON MEANS OF GRACE59

EXPECTATIONS OF THE FUTURE60

Jesus Christ Will Come Again - The First Resurrection 60
The Second Coming of Jesus Christ Demands the Vigilance of the
Faithful 60
How will the Second Coming Occur? 61
When will the Second Coming take place? 61
The Signs of the Imminence of His Second Coming 62
The Union with Christ and the Marriage of the Lamb in Heaven 64
The Millennium (The Kingdom of God) 64
The Final Struggle, the Last Judgement 65
The New Heaven and the New Earth 66

**EXPECTATIONS OF THE FUTURE –
CONCLUDING REMARKS67**

THE MAIN FUTURE EVENTS IN THEIR TEMPORAL SEQUENCE 68

FAITH

Apostle Paul said: "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7) in other words, the certainty we have in our faith does not rely alone on observable facts. Roughly speaking, there are three types of security, three ways in which man can attain a feeling of security.

1. Security through Perception, through Experience

Many things we know with certainty or we think we know with certainty because we have seen or heard for ourselves. Proof of this can be found in statements like "I only believe what I hear", "seeing is believing." But such are not always reliable, for the perceptions of human beings are often very different. Judges are confronted daily by contradictory statements from witnesses who all maintain that they saw or heard something with certainty. Furthermore, our senses often deceive us. These are reasons enough to be wary of such feelings of certainty.

2. Security through Scientific Evidence

Scientific developments have led to increased knowledge, enabling the doctor to diagnose, the surgeon to carry out operations, the engineer to build bridges or make computers to carry out complicated calculations. However, science has still not developed a perfect method of proving exactly the origin of things. This applies for certainties, which frequently are offered under the label of scientific experiments, but in reality, rely on philosophy.

As far as the meaning and purpose of human existence, science leaves us completely in the lurch. Each year new philosophies, and so called proofs, are emerging, but they are based on theories only and in some cases are introduced to break down the truth of God's involvement in His creation. Only the third kind of certainty can then help us. Indeed, when it is a question of belief, the word 'certainty' is appropriate.

3. The Certainty that Arises from Faith

First of all, it must be said that even belief can lead to rash or false feelings of security. Unhappy is the man who believes everything he is told. Even in the area of religion there are unfortunately many false forms of security the belief in the worship of animals, the creation, ancestor worship, reincarnation, or the belief that one particular human being can declare himself to be God. The faith of an Apostolic Christian is based on God, on the redeemer Jesus Christ sent by Him, on the redeeming work of the Holy Spirit which proceeds from the Father and the Son; and further on All God's promises in the Bible, of which some have already been fulfilled and others are still awaiting fulfillment.

This faith is more than just an assertion of truth. It is above all a way of life that comes from our trust in God, from our hope in the fulfillment of His promises and from our steadfast will, to reveal the love of God in our own lives and to repeatedly purify and shape ourselves through His grace and redeeming work. Hebrews 11:1-3 "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear."

Faith must be in accordance with our works (James 2:22). Faith must be a positive, unshakeable possession, for "without (firm) faith it is impossible to please him" (Hebrews 11:6 also 1 Corinthians 2:5).

ARTICLES OF FAITH

These articles are written to give a greater understanding of:

- "THE TENETS AND FAITH OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH"
- AND TO EXPLAIN OUR BELIEFS IN WHY WE CONTINUE WITH THE MISSION OF CHRIST AND SACRAMENTS AS IN THE INFANT CHURCH.
- LEADING ON TO THE OBJECTS AND REWARDS OF THESE BLESSINGS.

Revelation Chapter 1 verse 8 *"I AM ALPHA AND OMEGA, THE BEGINNING AND THE ENDING, SAITH THE LORD, WHICH IS, AND WHICH WAS, AND WHICH IS TO COME, THE ALMIGHTY."*

"ALL HONOUR TO GOD"

1. GOD THE FATHER

We believe in God the Father the Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth.

Let us dwell first of all upon the statement that God is called the creator of heaven and earth. This means that God is the beginning of all things, the primal source, the primal power from which all things were created. John said, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him" (John 1:1-3). The allusion is to the origin of all things, namely the eternal word, i.e. the being of God. John did not perceive reality and essence to be in creation, but in God. He considered that there is a relationship between the visible creation and the invisible existence of God; this he termed the eternal Word.

Now at times the expression "Word" is misunderstood. It is clear from the original text that we are not talking about a human spoken or written word, but about the primal power (logos), from which everything has come, a power that is linked with rationality, order and cohesion. By "Word" we therefore understand a creating power which is God Himself.

By "heaven and earth" we mean firstly the material creation of God, i.e. the universe with its constellations, including our solar system, its nebulas (collections of billions of stars or infinite formations of sparse matter), its heavenly bodies (comets, planets and moons). All this is known as the macrocosm.

The microcosm is also a part of this material creation. All matter consists of an endless quantity of molecules that are themselves built from atoms. These atoms appear to us as "solar systems" with atom nuclei encircled by electrons. These atomic nuclei comprise still smaller particles. A thick book would be needed if we were to describe these systems. Suffice it to say that the structure of the microcosm and the macrocosm and the function of all particles is based on sound laws. The universe is not chaotic, even though it may sometimes appear to be so.

Roughly speaking, we can distinguish animate and inanimate matter.

When we survey visible creation, as far as we are able to observe it on our earth, we tend readily to distinguish five ascending levels:

1. Inanimate Matter: Constructed from a limited number of elements, wondrously combined from the atoms and molecules mentioned before, the atoms and molecules for their part are again infinitely small, whole entities;
2. The Plant Kingdom: Plants likewise consist of matter; furthermore, they carry out the processes of feeding, metabolism and reproduction. They are with the exception of monomolecular bacteria, localized;
3. The Animal Kingdom: Animals exhibit all the characteristics of plants; feeding, metabolism, reproduction. As well as this, they have motor skills, and the higher animals have a limited consciousness. They do not have a consciousness of self. i.e. they do not realize that they exist. They are to some extent guided by their instincts and drives. An undoubted ability to think is manifest among the higher animals, e.g. among dogs, cats and particularly apes and dolphins;
4. Human beings: The creation of man and then from man, woman, was to be the pinnacle of His creation. Genesis 1:26 "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." We see to be in the image of God, man became a three part being, as God is Father, Son and Holy Ghost, so man became body, spirit and soul. Man possesses, as well, mind and soul. (Genesis 2:7) "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life: and man became a living soul." In the same way that the body provides for bodily functions and can move, breathe, eat and reproduce, the soul, the essential core of a human being, is responsible for our mental functions like love, hatred, empathy, faith, hope, remorse. It could be said that the soul is the repository of mental functions. Many people consider its cognition to be very limited. On the other hand, the highest intelligence is often misused for the lowest of purposes. With his conscience, a human being has the ability to determine whether he has acted rightly or wrongly, and whether he has done good or evil. He can compare and choose. Language, a complicated system for establishing contact, is his means of communicating with his fellow human beings. Man is a highly developed being: body, soul and mind (spirit) form a unity. We could easily list even more typical human qualities;
5. The Realm of the Spirit: We believe in the existence of "spiritual beings": the angels mentioned in the Bible belong to this category. Best known is the reference to their appearance at the birth of Jesus Christ. The "little angels with wings," as depicted in children's story books, do not do justice to our understanding of them and can therefore be set aside.

For a person who only sees the corporeal-material world only the first three levels exist inanimate matter, plants and animals. For him man too belongs to the animal kingdom we however see in man the highest form of material and spiritual creation.

When we immerse ourselves in the splendid structure of inanimate and animate matter, when we recognize the wonderful utility and purpose fullness of even the minutest plant and the smallest animal, and when we direct our gaze once again upon the infinite nature of the constellations and the microcosm then we are compelled to believe that behind this unimaginable and confusingly

complex and splendid construction of reality dwells an omnipotent creator, a super-intelligence, a supernatural builder and architect, a composer of the never-ending song of life; the WORD, that was, is and will be for evermore.

Ultimately we encounter the gross misunderstanding that holds that we should believe, on the basis of the creation story, that the world came into being in six days (according to our conception of time). The scriptures say nothing about the duration of this development but point to the fact that a planning, loving will stands behind it, which prescribes goals and limits for all living things. The creation story is not a scientific description about the genesis of the world but is the testimony of God's omnipotence.

God is infinite in time and space. Accordingly, His attributes and possibilities are infinitely numerous and vast. To know and to fathom Him in His fullness is impossible for man, limited as he is. It is therefore no surprise that the way in which man observes God is limited and that the image of God, the perception which man has of God, has developed and been enlarged over the centuries. Consequently, God was addressed in the Old Testament mostly as Lord. In this word the recognition of His majesty, His greatness, His kingship, His omnipotence, becomes manifest. Only on the odd occasion in the Old Testament is God called "Father" e.g. in Psalm 89:26: "Thou art my father, my God and the rock of my salvation". In Jeremiah 3:19-20 God speaks through the mouth of a prophet to the people of Israel: "And I said, Thou shalt call me, My father; and shalt not turn away from me. But ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel..." The right of mankind to again become sons and daughters of God, thus making Him our Father again, was only restored in its fullness by Jesus Christ's mission and by His Grace won for man. The prophet Hosea foretold this in Hosea 1:10-11 and it was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Ghost was sent to distribute this Grace of Christ to all believers.

With the coming of Jesus, namely in the New Testament, God's being is seen differently. He is now primarily called Father. Many of Jesus' pronouncements indicate this, e.g. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9) "For ONE is your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 23:9)

Naturally, God remains, even for Jesus, God the Lord and Creator of heaven and earth. Consider His saying "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth..." (Luke 10:21). The distance between God and man, however, grows smaller, so that Jesus always calls God His Father the Father of man as well (Matthew 6:14 and 32).

The word "Father" expresses different things. First and foremost, a father gives life to his children. Similarly, Jesus bears the life of God his Father perfectly within Himself. That is why He is also termed the Son of God. And those whom the spirit of God moves, are called the children of God (Romans 8:14). We will see in another context even more clearly that being moved by the spirit of God has its basis in the well established principles of faith.

Jesus as the Son of God came down to earth, that he might reveal the being of the Father, and that He might be crucified to take our sins upon Himself. He rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and sent down the Holy Ghost to comfort and to lead mankind. Whoever believes in Christ and is born again is a child of God and is entitled to call God his Father. "Father" indicates that God loves us, that He wishes to lead us, provide for us, and if necessary, to warn and admonish us. Paternal love does not mean having to do everything that complies with the wishes of children or removing every obstacle for them. But it does mean forming children into grown-up adults, helping them on the way to spiritual maturity, rescuing them in their greatest need and giving them experiences, so that they radiate the being of the Father and become like Jesus Christ.

The word "Father" ultimately expresses a state of trust, characterizing the relationship between God and man. In this father-child relationship, we speak with God, we pray to Him and He speaks to us. He answers us, He shows us the way, He lets us experience things that take the shape of a reply. For this purpose He also sends people to us.

In a good father-child relationship, the dialogue is not interrupted, or to put it in modern terms: there is continuous communication between both parties.

We have seen that creation has many aspects to it: macrocosm and microcosm, the visible and the invisible, the organic and the inorganic, the material and the spiritual.

This creation had, at a particular point in time, reached the stage where God was able to say "It is very good." It is said therefore that creation was complete after seven days of creation (periods of time). It was a clear conclusion. Man was created in God's image. However, that does not mean that God did not care for His creation thereafter. Quite the opposite, God is still active in His visible and invisible creation. He still provides for it and develops it. In the universe, for example, new stars and constellations come into being while other stars die.

In its basic structure (i.e. in the lines and principles of its composition), creation is perfect, yet is developing further. To give an example a new-born child is – if all has gone well – a perfect creation, it possesses all life giving organs and is viable but not yet complete, i.e. it has not yet mastered all its bodily functions, cognition and language are not yet developed, and the child cannot yet look after itself etc. – In this respect, it has to be considered that God's action vis-a-vis man and his environment is repeatedly impaired by man himself, in that the latter goes his own way and is disobedient towards God. This disobedience is possible because God gave man a free will at his creation. Man is able to decide for good or for evil.

Through disobedience man turned away from God. A part of perfection was severed. God has, however, promised to send one into the world who shall break the bonds of Satan or who will, as the Bible expresses it, "bruise the head of the serpent (Satan)" (Genesis 3:15).

At the end of God's never ending work of creation, a new heaven and a new earth, will come into being. We are already on this path (Revelation 21). Then every knee shall bow before God (Philippians 2:10). We humans are, until the attainment of this goal, co-responsible as the custodians of creation. We have to ensure that God's creation is not plundered and destroyed. Nature and man should be able to develop unimpeded in both natural and spiritual terms. Our unchanging and Almighty God does not wish, as our Father, to make of the earth an abiding hell, but wishes to bring about the new heaven and the new earth wherein He will be all in all.

Even the human mind should grasp that there is a creator God. The idea that everything must have come into being through chance we reject as impossible and foolish. One only has to point to the purposefulness, the vitality and the dynamism of every individual and the marvelously rational construction of macrocosm and microcosm with their clear goals. This has been stressed down through the ages by numerous scholars, natural scientists, astronomers and biologists of world renown. However, in order to participate in God's new creation, in the new heaven and the new earth, another precondition is necessary: faith in God in the mission of His Son Jesus Christ.

2. GOD THE SON

We believe in Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ came to reconcile us with God the Father, to bridge the gulf that arose through the fall into sin, i.e. through man's disobedience to God's will. The whole of the New Testament bears witness to this.

The first epistle of John says that Jesus Christ is righteous and He is the propitiation for our sins and for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:1-2). Paul went into the matter deeply "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more than being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" (Romans 5:8-10). Further explanation of the meaning of this sacrament with regard to reconciliation with God can be found in the chapter about holy baptism.

Jesus Christ has revealed the will of the Father in a way in which no one else has done. Paul expressed this by referring to God's sending of his Son Jesus Christ so that the mystery of His will would be made known to us (Ephesians 1:8-9).

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews (the Jewish Christians in Palestine) quotes a saying from the psalms which also tells us that Christ came to reveal God's will: "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God" (Hebrews 10:7-9; Psalm 40:7-9).

From the many statements in the New Testament which confirm this, Jesus Himself can be quoted as having said that He realized God's will by bearing the heaviest burdens: "Abba, Father", he said before His crucifixion, "all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me; nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mark 14:36; Matthew 26:42; Luke 22:42). Jesus Christ therefore came not only to reveal God's will in words, but also – and this above all – to provide an example by His life. He is the great forerunner, the pattern for all mankind. He is the second created man by God, but is different than Adam, in that He was spirit first and body second. After Jesus had washed the disciples' feet, He said: "For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15).

Paul exhorted the members of the church in Rome: "... be like minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus" (Romans 15:5). He wrote to Timothy: "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting" (1 Timothy 1:16).

The importance of Jesus Christ goes further than this. For all who are Christians in the true sense of the word He is the prophet (proclaimer of God's good news) and the pattern. He is also the one who has, through His death on the cross, reconciled us with God, and He is equally our refuge in times of trouble, our Lord and King. He directs our lives through His Holy Spirit and has promised to come again to finally make everything good. He is therefore also our hope for the future of mankind. In short: He is the Saviour of mankind.

With regard to this, we should note the original meaning of the name Jesus. It is a derivative of Joshua or Jeshua which means "rescue." That is also exactly what the angel Gabriel said in his enunciation to Joseph of the birth of Jesus "... thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

Jesus Christ, God's Only Begotten Son

The uniqueness of Jesus Christ lies in the fact that, on the one hand, He was a human being and subject to all the laws of biology and to all human requirements, in short: human in every respect; on the other hand, He was the Son of God who could rise above man's conformity with the laws of nature. According to the Bible, Jesus on more than eighty occasions referred to Himself as "the Son of man," in order to make it clear that He was in every way a real human being, e.g. "... the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Matt. 8:20; Luke 9:58); "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins ..." (Matthew 9:6; Mark 2:10; Luke 5:24).

At the same time, the teachings of Jesus are aimed at developing in His disciples the awareness that He is equally the Son of God. Testimonies before, during and after the earthly life of Jesus attest that He is the Son of God or the Son of the Almighty. Already in the second Psalm, dedicated to the coming of the Messiah, we read God's prophetic assertion: "Thou art my Son ..., I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the utter most parts of the earth for thy possession" (Psalms 2:7-8). At the enunciation of the birth of Jesus the angel said to Mary " ... and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest" (Luke 1:31-32).

During His earthly life, many people testified that He was the Son of God:

– Jesus once asked His disciples "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" After the disciples had given various replies, Jesus asked again: "But whom say ye that I am?" Then Peter answered "Thou art the Christ (i.e. the Anointed One), the Son of the living God," which Jesus confirmed with these words "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jo-na for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." In other words, Peter's answer testified to a consciousness matured through God (Matthew 16:13-17).

- After Jesus' promise that her dead brother Lazarus would rise again, Martha manifested a deep faith in Jesus; she said: "Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world" (John 11:27). She gave this testimony even before Jesus' promise was fulfilled.
- One of His disciples, Philip, once had a discussion with Nathanael. Philip pointed out Jesus and called Him the one "of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write." Nathanael then asked the question which has become proverbial "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" However when Jesus had spoken a few words with Nathanael, the latter realized: "Thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel" (John 1:46-50).
- When Jesus' earthly life had ended on the cross, the veil of the temple was rent, the earth quaked and even rocks were rent. The centurion and those who were with him, watching Jesus, feared greatly and said: "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matthew 27:51-54).
- On countless occasions Jesus Himself attested that he was the Son of God, e.g.: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).
- "He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life" (John 3 :36).
- "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise" (John 5:19).
- "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God ..." (John 5:25).
- Before the high council, the high priest asked Jesus, "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus confirmed this with the simple words "thou hast said" (Matthew 26:63-64), or according to Mark 14:61-62: "I am."
- Even after His death Jesus reminded His disciples that He was the Son of God. In His revelations to John, He spoke to the church at Thyatira: "These things saith the Son of God ..." (Revelation 2:18)

Twice God Himself testified of Jesus that He was His beloved Son. After His baptism in the Jordan, John saw the Spirit of God, descending as a dove and lighting upon Him, and a voice from heaven said: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Matthew 3:16-17 These words could be heard at Jesus' transfiguration, except that God added "hear ye him" Matthew 17:5. Not only God, Jesus, His friends and enemies, bore witness to His being the Son of God, but also the satanic powers. According to Matthew 8:28-34, Jesus encountered two people who were possessed of unclean spirits – Mark 5:1-20 and Luke 8:26-39. When they saw Jesus, they called in despair "What do you want of us, son of God?" Jesus commanded the unclean, devilish spirits to depart from the sick people.

Often the expression "Son of God" is understood in a mythological (legendary) sense. According to Greek, Roman and Germanic myths, gods and goddesses married and begat children. Jesus' claim to be the son of God cannot be compared in any way with the legends of the gods. As the "son of man" Jesus was truly human. His soul and mind exhibited however a plenitude of God's power, might, love and righteousness. His spirit was the spirit of God. His power was the power of God. His love was the love of God. His words were the words of God. John 17:8. It was life from God himself that revealed itself in and through Jesus: "For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" Colossians 2:9. Jesus bore the image of His Father in completeness. Therefore He could say, "and he that seeth me seeth the father" John 12:45 and John 14:9.

Herein is expressed the essential quality of the relationship between God and Jesus Christ – a father-son relationship! In concrete terms this means that Jesus received His life from His Father; he was really begotten of His Father. Jesus lived in total obedience towards the will of God. It was a relationship of love and trust, of the certainty of guidance and of surrender to the will and power of God. Through faith all who have been baptized and have had their being renewed through "the water of rebirth" can become children of God (Galatians 3:26). Here too it is not a question of mythology but of a renewal of soul and mind (spirit).

Jesus Christ the Only Begotten Son

Of all the writers of the books of the New Testament, John is the only one who adds to the phrase "Son of God" the words only begotten. Five times we find this (John 1:14 and 18; John 3:16 and 18; 1 John 4:9) which likewise is contrary to mythological beliefs. Matthew, Mark and Luke described the life of Jesus mainly through reporting facts. John, however, engrossed himself in observations about the facts. He saw them in a wider context. He placed the emphasis upon the fact that the divine life (the incarnation of God in the Son Jesus Christ) was revealed in completeness and had never occurred before to this extent in a human being. Thus John spoke of the only begotten Son, in other words, through no other person can we expect to be saved for eternal life in God. The phrase "only begotten" was an essential at that time, when many princes, for example the Roman emperors who occupied Jewish land, had themselves venerated as "sons of God."

Jesus Christ our Lord

Every true Christian sees in Jesus Christ, his Lord. He knows that he was saved from the death of sin through Jesus Christ's sacrifice. He recognizes in Him the fullness of God and is aware that Jesus, in spite of being human, did not sin and therefore never became a slave of sin. For us Jesus is Lord and Master. The first apostles also called and described Him in this manner:

- "Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am" (John 13:13);
- "Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all)" (Acts 10:36);
- "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:3).

If Christ is our Lord He may do His will by us.

Conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary

The Bible teaches us that Christ's birth was unique in the history of mankind; a birth from a human mother's womb, however not through the will of a man! Any explanation based on human reason is misplaced. We can only point to two things:

1. What does the Bible say about the birth of Jesus?
2. How can we, as a general rule apply reason to the question "are there miracles?"

To take up the last point: we repeat, a rational explanation does not answer the question. Miracles remain for us a sign of divine omnipotence, even if we were able to comprehend them after the event.

What does the Bible say about the immaculate conception of Jesus? Luke is the most detailed in his account. He reports that the angel Gabriel appeared to a virgin who was "betrothed" to Joseph of the house of David. The virgin was called Mary (Luke 1:27). Twice in one sentence Luke stresses that Mary was a virgin. The angel announced to Mary that she would bear a son whose name would be Jesus. Mary spoke to the angel: "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" The angel answered: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:26-35).

Matthew's gospel records too that Mary was "espoused" to Joseph which in our times means being engaged to be married. "When Mary was betrothed to Joseph (other translations: 'when Mary and Joseph were espoused'), it came to pass, before he brought her home that she was found with child of the Holy Spirit". An angel of God had to restrain Joseph from putting her away privily. To him as well the angel spoke: "That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost". Joseph therefore decided to remain with his betrothed and he had no relations with her before she bore a son Jesus (Matthew 1: 18-25).

The records of Luke and Matthew make it clear that the conception of Jesus was effected by the Holy Ghost. This Spirit was placed in Mary as a divine power. Jesus was the seed that grew to become the redeemer of mankind. Jesus means "saviour." He was born man of Mary. His Spirit was and is taken from God's Holy Spirit and was and is, as such, part of God since the beginning of creation (John 1:1).

With the birth of Jesus, a number of prophecies from the Old Testament were fulfilled, among other things: "Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel, which being interpreted is God with us" (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23).

John did not record the birth of Jesus but he did allude to the fact that even people awakened and born in a natural way could be born of God. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of the will of God" (John 1:12-13). Here John was already alluding to Jesus' demand for "rebirth by water and the spirit" (John 3:3-5). The begetting of Jesus by the Holy Ghost has made it possible that all who follow Jesus can be born (anew) in the same way from and through the power of this Spirit.

Suffered under Pontius Pilate

Between 26 and 36 A.D. Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea. After Jesus had been brought before the council of the elders of the people, high priests and scribes led him to the governor. They found Him guilty because He called Himself "King of the Jews" (Luke 23:3). Pilate considered that Jesus had committed no punishable offence. But he feared the wrath of the people and was apprehensive, lest a complaint be lodged against him with the Roman emperor. The Jewish writer at the time, Philo, noted the existence of a letter from Herod Agrippa I to the emperor, describing Pilate as a cruel, corrupt and unreliable person who often had people executed without trial. Doubtless, Pilate knew that he had to be cautious. He found himself to a certain extent caught between two stools, the emperor and the rebellious people. He himself was convinced of Jesus' innocence, as his own testimonies show: "I have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof you accuse him ... and lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him" (Luke 23:14-15). – "What evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him" (Luke 23:22; see also Matthew 27:11-26; Luke 23:13-25; John 18:28-30; John 19:4-6).

Nevertheless Pilate delivered Jesus up to crucifixion. His fear of the emperor and the rebellious people, or more correctly, his fear of the loss of his own position, got the better of his sense of justice. As a sign of his alleged innocence of Jesus' death, he washed his hands (Matthew 27:24). Water cannot however wash away stains from the soul.

Mention of the fact that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate and was crucified and buried at that time shows that Jesus' passion took place in full public view as a reliable historical event. We can also see here that courage to be truthful and just is even lacking in those who are appointed by the state to preside over truth and justice. Personal power and status are preferred to selfless surrender to God's justice. This means retreating from God's responsibility (washing one's hands in innocence).

Crucified, Dead and Buried

Jesus took the cross upon Himself. His crucifixion was part of God's plan. Jesus knew the will of the Father and was ready to perform it to the very end. Thus He could also predict His passion (Matthew 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19). His submission to the will of God was at its highest point in the prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39). Jesus as the Son of God had the power to escape His persecutors and to climb down from the cross. As the Son of man, however, He had suffered and struggled and had been obedient from the cradle to the cross. Through this act, He bridged the gap which had arisen between man and God after the Fall. So man was again reconciled with God. Paul stressed this point to the Ephesians: "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ ... that he might reconcile both (Jews and Gentiles) unto God ... by the cross" (Ephesians 2:13-16); or to the Colossians: "... that in him should all fullness (namely the fullness of God) dwell.... that He made peace through the blood of His cross". In this way God was reconciled unto everything that is in heaven and earth (Colossians 1:19-20). This final penalty of the law had to happen to an innocent man, free from sin, so that the penalties of the law could end. Christ said from the cross "It is finished."

Through Christ's sacrificial death the cross has become the symbol of passion and overcoming and hence also the symbol for Christianity as a whole. The spiritual height to which Jesus had ascended in His deepest humiliation is attested to by His request on behalf of those who had nailed Him to the cross: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). This was also for all other nations of the world, who had ceased from worshipping God over many generations. Christ now had earned the right to call all and give to all the chance of a new way. Psalm 2:8 "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen, for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession."

Crucifixion, which entailed nailing a villain to a wooden cross, was not a Jewish practice. The Romans, however, reserved this punishment for the worst offences. That the Jews demanded of Pilate that Jesus should be crucified shows that they (above all the high priests and scribes) wanted him to suffer the deepest humiliation and the cruelest of all punishments so greatly did they fear the loss of power and status. Therefore they also sought from Pilate a political motive to condemn Jesus: He calls Himself King (Luke 23:2). The miraculous thing here is that by this very passion, humiliation and death, Jesus was able to say a short time later to his disciples – before his ascension "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18). Thus He was, is, and will always be: the prince of the kings of the earth (King of Kings) (Revelation 1:5).

After the death of Jesus, the veil of the temple (that separated the holy of holies) was "rent in twain from the top to the bottom". The earth quaked, and the rocks rent. The graves were opened and many bodies of the saints which slept arose (Matthew 27:51-53). A rich man, Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin (of the highest Jewish court) was a secret follower of Jesus. He asked for Pilate's consent to bury Jesus' body. He laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre (Matthew 27:57-60). With this the prophecy was fulfilled: "And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth" (Isaiah 53:9). In this way both Pilate and the Sanhedrin unknowingly helped to prepare the way that was preordained by God.

Descended into Hades

Frequently the question is raised is there such a thing as Hades? Arguments can be found for and against the existence of an "afterlife". However we will confine ourselves to what the Bible says. First of all, it must be stressed that this question cannot be clarified through reason and science. There are even Christian viewpoints that assert that the Bible has nothing to say about the existence of an afterlife and that there is no continuation of life after earthly existence. Our contradictory view is that the Bible is a continuing testimony to a realm beyond earthly life. We can point to the fact that conceptions of the "realm of the dead" and thoughts about it in the Bible have changed in the course of history. The New Testament gives, for example, a more refined and exact picture than the Old Testament. In the Old Testament we find the idea that the souls of the dead led a ghostly, shadowy existence somewhere under the earth, in the sheol, or in Greek, in hades. There darkness and passivity reigned, and God could not even once be praised (Psalm 6:5). There both good and evil people would live eternally. A miserable and hopeless prospect!

This hell (sheol, hades) was given different names the silence, the underworld, the darkness, etc., (Psalm 115:17; Isaiah 32:18; 2 Peter 2:4).

Isaiah had already said about the resurrection of the dead "Thy dead men shall live ... Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust!" (Isaiah 26:19). One story above all, the story about King Saul in Endor, clearly proves that the Jews believed in an autonomous existence for the dead. Although Saul had forbidden, on pain of death, the invocation of spirits of the dead, he himself did this. When he and his

army were driven into a corner by the Philistines, he went to visit a woman in Endor who claimed she could invoke the dead. He summoned the prophet Samuel, who prophesied his fall.

Gradually people came to the view that not all the dead can dwell in the same place. Isaiah 32:17-32 says that the defeated conquerors of Jewish land would be found among the uncircumcised. Thus arose the concept of two different places, one for the circumcised and another for the uncircumcised and the Gentiles who did not belong to the Old Covenant. The latter place was called gehenna (hell). This name is derived from an infertile valley to the south-east of Jerusalem where during the time of the kings even children were sacrificed to the idol Moloch. Later this served as a burial ground for fallen Jews and for sinners in general and as a place for burning rubbish. This place was seen as the entrance to hell. Later the word gehenna was used to describe hell itself (Encyclopaedia of the Bible).

Whenever Jesus referred to the various places, spheres, regions and dwelling places in the next world, he did so with the aim of characterising the different states of the soul. This becomes clear in the parable of the rich man and in the story about poor Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). There seemed to exist an "unbridgeable chasm" between two places in the next world. The rich man found himself "in a place of agony" (pangs of conscience). Lazarus, however, was "in the bosom of Abraham." "Bosom" means safety, security. It appears Abraham's bosom was the place of waiting for those devout Jews who had tried to live by the law, knowing and believing that a Messiah must come to redeem them for their sins covered by the law sacrifices. It appears from this realm, were souls resurrected with Christ. All others have to wait to be resurrected and judged at the final judgment. For devout Christians, the promise was given to the first Christian, the malefactor on the cross who confessed, acknowledged Christ and asked Him to remember him when he came in His kingdom, a new way was promised. "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). Judgment is no longer a fear, as devout Christians judge themselves daily and receive of the Grace of Christ, which goes beyond the grave into Paradise, to await the Lord's return and come again with Him to be part of the kingdom of God, to live with Him for 1,000 years of peace before going on to eternal life in the heavens.

After His crucifixion, Jesus "went and preached unto the spirits in prison: which sometimes were disobedient, when once the long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah ..." (1 Peter 3:19-20).

Even to the dead, is brought the joyous message of the gospel, salvation and redemption from sin and death. This is why Peter could say "For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit". (1 Peter 4:6). God wants all men to be offered the opportunity of salvation, and Christ is Lord over the living and the dead (1 Timothy 2:4; Romans 14:9). The good news was given, that final judgment would now be in the hands of a righteous judge, Jesus Christ, who had lived and walked the earth.

Apostle John in Revelation 1:18, had this confirmed when the Glorified Christ said to him "I am He that liveth, and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen, and have the keys of hell and death". With the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross and his gaining the keys of hell and death, a new way dawned for the believer. We find the word Paradise used to indicate the destiny and experience of the redeemed souls (Luke 23:43). Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:4, speaks of paradise as a place upwards, where he heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for man to utter. This shows us that our minds cannot and should not try to comprehend this place where the soul goes to wait for the return of Christ on that great resurrection day. It should be sufficient for us to believe that as the original Garden of Eden was created "as in Paradise", so then in a like manner be Christ's Paradise. Christ had given us the great promise of the blessing that is available in Paradise. Revelation 2:7 "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the spirit saith unto the churches; to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

On the Third Day He Rose Again from the Dead

Several times Jesus announced His passion. He always added to this prophecy the comforting, though hardly understood promise that He would *rise again from the dead on the third day* (Matthew 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34; Luke 9:22; 18:33).

In other conversations with His followers, too, Jesus drew attention to the fact that after His earthly body had been broken, He would be resurrected on the third day. The form in which He communicated this, however, was barely understood: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2: 19). This utterance was used in evidence against Jesus when He was brought before the Council of the Jews (Mark 14:58). Jesus was even mocked about this as He hung on the cross (Mark 15:29). John made it clear, however, that Jesus meant His body, which, as the earthly temple of the spirit of God, would be broken and would be rebuilt on the third day (John 2:19-21).

All four gospels described the *resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*, and the fact that He appeared to many (Matthew 28: 1-10; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-18). The details are not the same in all four gospels, but, as is the case with any eye-witness report, each stressed what impressed him most. Such differences in detail strengthen the very reliability of all the eye-witness accounts. Thus all four gospel writers described the fact that on the third day the stone was rolled away from the tomb, that one or several angels were to be found at the open grave, that the body of Jesus had disappeared and that the Lord appeared to many people thereafter. Paul gave a summary, reporting that the risen Christ appeared to more than five hundred of his brethren at once, of whom many were still living when Paul wrote this, and could thereby testify that they had seen the risen Lord (1 Corinthians. 15:16) .

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is of fundamental importance for every Christian. *Thereby death is vanquished!* Then Paul could place the words of the prophet Hosea in a completely new light "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Corinthians 15:55; Hosea 13:14). It is clear from other words of the first apostles that this belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is of fundamental importance. Paul said that without this resurrection, faith would be in vain (1 Corinthians 15:14). Peter too wrote to the Christians living in the diaspora that God had begotten them again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3).

Jesus appeared to His disciples in his risen *body*, a body which bore features of an earthly body and of a supernatural kind. On the one hand, the risen Christ ate a piece of fried fish in the presence of the disciples and showed Thomas His wounds. On the other hand, He came through closed doors into the chamber in which the disciples were (Luke 24:42-43, John 20:24-29).

The overcoming of death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ holds open to those who are born again of His Spirit the prospect of attaining eternal life on the day of the first resurrection. This was the firm belief of all the apostles.

Jesus said to Martha, "I am the resurrection, and the life he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:25-26). Paul expressed it thus: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22). Christ is the first fruit of them that slept (1 Corinthians 15:20). Paul hoped that he would be able to summon up the strength to endure in suffering so that he might attain resurrection from the dead (Philippians 3:10-11).

At the end of the Old Testament the belief in a general resurrection of the dead asserts itself. The prophet Daniel testified most clearly to this "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth (in the realm of the dead), shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2). Jesus added to this: "For the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the grave shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:28-29).

Finally, attention should be drawn to the similarities in the life of every righteous Christian. There are moments in which the new life of Christ is crucified in the human soul. Again and again the stones which hold the heart imprisoned should be rolled away through the power of God, so that man can say: "*I will arise and go to my father*" (Luke 15:18).

At Easter we remember the resurrection of Jesus Christ and we experience the idea of resurrection not only in its fundamental meaning, but also as a personal resurrection, according to the words: "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light" (Ephesians 5:14).

Ascended into Heaven

After He had performed His work on earth, Jesus made His apostles missionaries and ordered them to be His witnesses "in Jerusalem and in the whole of Judea and Samaria and unto the ends of the earth". As a comforting promise, He gave them the assurance that He would be with them to the end of the world and that they would be baptized with the Holy Ghost and would receive from it the necessary power to be active witnesses (Acts 1:5-8; Matthew 28:19-20). Then He departed from them and was carried up into heaven (Luke 24:51). Christ's ascension was not only a spiritual ascension but a physical and a spiritual one. That is understandable – miraculous though it may be – when we consider that Jesus had appeared to His disciples in His glorious risen body, in order to make them His missionaries. This act of being borne up into heaven is called the Ascension of Jesus Christ. Luke summarized this occurrence in his gospel, but as a writer of Acts, he went rather more deeply into it (Acts 1:9-11). Mark too summarized it thus: "So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God" (Mark 16:19). Between the lines of the different scriptural accounts, we can read, however, that the ascension of Christ had a place in the beliefs of the first Christians. When for example the empty place left by Judas among the apostles had to be filled, Peter said to a group of 120 people that this gap had to be closed by one who "beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us" had been among them (Acts 1:21-22). Paul wrote to Timothy that Christ had "been seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (1 Timothy 3:16). The ascension of Jesus took place 40 days after His resurrection (Acts 1:3). The Christians commemorate this occurrence exactly 40 days after Easter.

Several times Jesus Himself alluded to His ascension. Many of His disciples grumbled about the fact that He compared Himself with the living bread that came from heaven. Jesus then said: "What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was?" (John 6:62). In other words: can you only believe if you see my ascension into heaven with your own eyes?

In the description of Jesus' ascension, it is recorded that a "cloud" took Him away from their very eyes. Again and again, the writers of the Scriptures were obliged to reproduce, in their own words, facts about God's kingdom which could not be described (because no language has suitable words for them). The Bible therefore needs metaphorical language for such spiritual situations. For example, heavenly Jerusalem is described as consisting of precious metals and stones. The apostles sit on "twelve thrones", etc. Thus the Bible often uses the word "cloud" when mention is being made of the appearance of angels or of the presence of God. Here are some examples:

- "And the Lord went before them (the Jews in the desert) by day in a pillar of cloud ... and by night in a pillar of fire" (Exodus 13:21);

- "...the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud" (Exodus 16:10);
- "And the Lord came down in a cloud" (during Moses' address to the 70 elders Numbers 11:25);
- "... and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven ..." (Daniel 7:13; cf. the following text);
- "Behold, he cometh with clouds and every eye shall see him..." (Revelation 1:7; prophecy of the Second Coming);
- "And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud ..." (Revelation. 10:1).

Obviously a cloud is the symbol, the *visible sign*, of God's revelation. Furthermore, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews mentions a "cloud of witnesses". This "cloud of witnesses" should be kept in mind when considering the Second Coming

It is easy for us to believe that the clouds seen at Christ's ascension, refer to the clouds of the souls that had resurrected with Him and being taken on to Paradise, and when He returns the clouds mentioned will be those souls that come with Him to be resurrected and reborn to be as He is, spirit first and body second and become His elect.

He sits on the Right Hand of God the Almighty Father; from there He will Come Again

Mark tells us that after His ascension Jesus sat Himself "*on the right hand of God*" (Mark 16:19). This pronouncement has the same importance as Matthew's statement that to Jesus is given "*all power in heaven and in earth*" (Matthew 28:18). In our own language, we are familiar with the expression "the right hand". We use it, for example, for someone who has an important task or who is the boss's representative. Hence the observation that the possession of all power in heaven and on earth is synonymous with being "seated on the right hand of God".

When we look into the derivation of the words "left" and "right", we see that "left" originally had an unfavourable connotation and "right" a favourable meaning. "Left" is connected with "slyness" and "cunning". The Bible therefore also means by "right hand" a good position. Thus Jesus told His disciples that one day all peoples would be gathered before Him and that He would then separate the righteous from the unrighteous, just as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, "the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left" (Matthew 25:32-33). Our study later teaches of the Second Coming of the Lord and the Last Judgment.

3. GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

We believe in the Holy Ghost (Spirit)

The word "spirit" is a translation of the Hebrew *ruach* and of the Greek *pneuma*. These words do not only mean "spirit" but also "breath" or "wind". It is therefore understandable that in the olden days people felt this spirit in the breath of men. Breath is, after all, something that comes from human beings and is not visible beforehand. The saying "to breathe one's last" is also proverbial.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to fully explain the concept "spirit". However, we often speak of the human spirit and mean by this the non material aspects of human beings. *God too is spirit*: frequently the Bible talks about the "spirit of God" or the "spirit of the Lord". Right at the beginning of the Bible we read that the spirit of God "moved upon the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:2), and, with regard to the creation of Adam, that "... (God) breathed into his nostrils the breath of life: and man became a living being" (another translation "a living soul", Genesis 2:7). Hence, in the beginning, man received a *soul from the spirit of God*: he was filled with God's Holy Spirit. Sin destroyed this divine state. Satan, the original destroyer, at the same time "blew into" man *his* spirit, so that man was no longer only filled with God's spirit but also took on satanic spiritual characteristics. Man no longer lived in direct and complete communion with God his character, his thinking, his emotions and his conduct were influenced by the spirit of Satan. The paradisiacal state, the high point of creation, no longer existed; trouble, pain, suffering and death came in place of this. God, however, promised that He would send one who would "bruise the serpent's head" (Genesis 3: 15).

This promise was fulfilled in the sending of Jesus Christ. He bridged the gap between God and man and gave us the possibility of *new birth*. The spirit of man can now be renewed. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, *all things are become new*" (1 Corinthians 5:17). And in his letter to the Galatians, Paul wrote: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a *new creature*" (Galatians. 6:15).

God is spirit. In the Old Testament, this spirit is called "the spirit of God" or the "spirit of the Lord": it is not a holy spirit, but the *Holy Spirit*. The same applies to Jesus Christ: He is the Holy Spirit: as such He has been among us since Pentecost and desires through our rebirth to dwell in the hearts of men. *The holy spirit is therefore the spirit of God which proceeds from both the Father and the Son and acts on, in and through human beings.*

This explains why the Christian church speaks of the Trinity of God:

God creates and preserves the world as its creator.

God reconciles and redeems mankind in Christ.

God assembles and sanctifies His people through the Holy Ghost.

God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost, one God to all eternity.

Now it might be thought that only the New Testament speaks of the workings of the Holy Ghost, but that is not correct. As we have already indicated, Genesis 1:2 speaks of the Spirit of God. In numerous places we read that the spirit of God came upon and inspired particular persons, for instance Gideon, Jephthah, Samson (Judges 6:34; 11:29; 13:24-25); or the prophets, judges and kings who were used by God for special service. The big difference between the Old and the New Testament with regard to the workings of the Holy Spirit is that the Old Testament always speaks of *occasional* workings, whereas the New Testament describes the Holy Spirit as a *continuous* guiding power. The prophets had referred to this (Ezekiel 36:26-27; Joel 2:28-29).

In the chapter on the means of grace, it is argued that God uses *visible and often also audible signs* for special works. For example, during the outpourings of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost: "the rushing of a mighty wind" and "tongues of fire" (Acts 2:2-3). And when Jesus breathed upon His disciples and said to them: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost" (John 20:22), then the breath was the *sign* of the Holy Ghost, the sign with which Jesus made manifest the invisible.

By the power of the Holy Ghost, the disciples could henceforth remain in close *communion* with God and His Son. They could no longer speak merely of Jesus from memory but were in a position to speak and act by the power and inspiration of the Holy Ghost and to spread this spirit abroad. In this sense, apostle Paul called the apostolic ministry the ministry of the New Testament, the ministry of the spirit and of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 3:4-18; 5:18).

In order to gain more insight into the meaning of the Holy Ghost, let us return to the moment when Jesus spoke for the first time of His suffering, His dying and His sacrificial death. Peter expressed the consternation of the disciples: "Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee" (Matthew 16:21-23). Herein was concealed their anxious question: what will become of us when our master is no longer here? Jesus sensed their anxiety and said: "And I will pray the Father and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive..." (John 14:16-17) and "But the Comforter which is the Holy Ghost, *whom the Father will send* in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26). After Jesus had given His apostles the commandment of love (John 13:34-35), and had encouraged them to persevere, He continued "It is expedient for you that I go away for if I do not the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you" (John 16:1 - 10).

These words of Christ confirm that the Holy Ghost *is a power which emanates, from God and His Son so as to work on, in and through man.*

We have drawn attention several times to the fact that we cannot explain and define God and spiritual things fully. We can therefore provide no definition of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, on the basis of the statements cited in this connection, we can name essential features and *workings of the Holy Spirit*:

1. The Holy Ghost is the comforter who, whenever a Christian feels lonely or unable to follow Jesus, always fills him with renewed strength and courage (John 14:26).
2. The Holy Ghost is the spirit of divine *truth* (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13).
3. The Holy Ghost is the spirit which teaches all things and *brings all things to remembrance whatsoever Jesus said* (John 14:26). Whoever is led by this spirit also speaks the language of God and the language of Christ. As a result, Peter was able to spontaneously bear witness before the rulers, elders and scribes of the people of Israel (Acts 4:5-8). Thus Jesus could also tell His disciples not to worry how or what to say if they were ever taken prisoner for the sake of the gospel "For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you" (Matthew 10:19-20; Luke 12:11-12).
4. The Holy Ghost bestows the *gifts and powers* "Holy Sealing", The gifts of the Holy Spirit.
5. The Holy Ghost reveals what is not good, what is sinful: "And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness ..." (John 16:8).
6. The Holy Ghost is a guiding *spirit*. It is truly Jesus Christ's representative on earth. Thus the Lord comforted his disciples with the words: "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:18). Just as a guardian takes control, so it is with those who follow Christ. The Holy Spirit guides and shapes them.
7. The Holy Ghost is the driving force, the reviving strength behind a new creation and the new man. Paul wrote to Titus that Jesus had saved him "by the washing of *regeneration and renewing* of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5). Thereby a person receives renewed strength to persevere, to be just, to be a peacemaker and to go joyously through life, insofar as he has received and has continued to nurture the gifts and powers of the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5; 14:17).
8. The Holy Ghost *proclaims to us what is to come* (John 16:13). All the prophecies of Jesus Himself (e.g. the revelations) and of his apostles are inspired by the Holy Spirit (See Article concerning prophecies of the future).
9. The Holy Ghost has been, since the outpourings at Pentecost, an *abiding* power on earth. The last sentence in the testimony of the English apostles reads: "*And this voice (of the Holy Ghost) will never be silent*".
10. The Holy Ghost is the power through which God proclaims forgiveness of sins through our High Priest Jesus Christ. (John 20:22-23) "*Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them;*"
11. The Holy Ghost is responsible for all successful Mission Labour. Matthew 9:38 "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, and he will send forth labourers into his harvest" .

The Holy Ghost is, second only to Christ, the *greatest healing gift* of God that Jesus gave to His church. Without this Spirit, a church or congregation has no strength, no divine life. The gifts and powers of the Holy Ghost are diverse and have differing effects but they all have the same goal, namely the redemption of mankind. Christ was eternally present through the (His) Holy Spirit even unto the end of the world (Matthew 28:20). The Holy Ghost approaches us for example, through the *word* of Christ's ambassadors and ministries and also *sacramentally* in baptism, sealing and communion.

Different people are not always receptive to the workings of the Holy Spirit in the same way. Sometimes the Holy Spirit can perform nothing more than knocking on the door of the human heart. On the other hand, it is indwelling in the human heart and can bring about splendid spiritual fruits in "love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance" (Galatians 5:22). The extent to which the Holy Spirit is reliant on the disposition of the human soul is demonstrated by Jesus in the parable of the sower. Seed is sown in four different types of ground (in the field of the heart) (Luke 8:11-15). Just as of course no fruits can grow in bad, hard earth, so too the fruits of the Holy Spirit cannot thrive in barren heartland.

God Himself is always waiting with His revelations until a situation in the world and the state of particular souls are ripe for His intervention. Thus we read several times in the Bible: "When the time was fulfilled ..." (Mark 1:15 or Galatians 4:4). Whoever has received the Holy Spirit, with its gifts and powers, bears a great responsibility. We should always remain aware of the fact that one day every human soul will be asked, "What have you done with these gifts?"

It was already shown how important attitude and disposition are if we are to function as a "channel" of the Holy Spirit. We can also *quench* this Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19). We can try to *lie to* it (Acts 5:1-4). From this it is also clear that the Holy Ghost is not to be seen *beside* God but as power from *God*. We can *grieve* the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30), we can *do spite unto* the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 10:29) and we can *resist* it (Acts 7:51). All this can be said in relation to Jesus or God. We can grow in Christ, or diminish, or even let Him die in our hearts. That is true as much for every Christian as for the church as a whole, because the church after all consists of people. Growth or regression can span the entire life of an individual Christian or centuries of Christianity. Therefore, every Christian must

constantly examine himself and must repeatedly ask for the Holy Spirit, although he has received it. That is also true for the church as a whole. There is comfort in Christ's promise that the powers of Satan will not prevail against the church (Matthew 16:18).

Once Jesus "breathed upon" His disciples and said "Receive ye the Holy Ghost" (John 20:22). And yet that was not yet *the full* indwelling of the Holy Spirit with its gifts and powers, for this only occurred at Pentecost, after Jesus' ascension. Thus we cannot say we possess the Holy Ghost so we require nothing further! – The Holy Spirit is like a fire: even though it may burn, it must be rekindled, it must receive new nourishment and new vitality so as not to go out.

We need to point out again that whether we are speaking about the spirit of God, the spirit of Christ or the spirit of the Holy Ghost, this is always the *same spirit* which knocks on the door of the human heart and seeks an abode therein (John 14:23; Ephesians 3:17). We can sum up by saying that wherever people form a congregation in the name of Jesus and He is present through the Holy Ghost, there is His church, His congregation, His temple, His house (1 Corinthians 3:16). The church of Jesus Christ is no human institution or organization; it is a living organism with many organs and Christ as its head (Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Colossians 1:18). "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Revelation 2:29).

We believe in the Holy Universal Apostolic Church

When Jesus had reached an age at which He was allowed to speak publicly, according to Jewish law, He soon gathered a number of disciple pupils around Him. Although the nucleus comprised twelve men, there were also some women who were faithful adherents and followers of Jesus (Matthew 27:55-56). The Bible reports that several women who had followed Jesus from Galilee brought spices and ointments to the sepulchre (Luke 23:55-56). We come across different names: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome (Mark 16:1), Mary the wife of Cleophas (John 19:25), Joanna, Susanna (Luke 8:3).

When the apostles following Jesus' command were together in Jerusalem after His ascension, women were found among them, such as the mother of Jesus (Acts 1:14). We can therefore say with certainty that Jesus formed around Him the first Christian church, a congregation of men and women. For all these male and female followers of Jesus, His words were crucial: "ye have not chosen me, I have chosen you" (John 15:16). He was the Lord and master of all of them, their friend to whom they could come with their anxieties, needs and questions and also with their joys.

When Jesus spoke to the crowd, whether in the synagogues, in the Temple, at the marketplaces, or on the banks of a lake and proclaimed the good news about the present and future kingdom of God, His disciples were with Him and experienced His divine power. They saw how God the Father revealed Himself in and through Him, and came to the realization that He was the Son of the living God (John 6:69).

He is the *central point* of His church, the living standard when it comes to the choice between right and wrong, and consequently the *measure* of all things. He is the mediator through whom God's *power* and *might* are revealed. By His clear example, Jesus showed how the members of His church should relate to Him and to each other. Just as the fruits of a vine are organically connected to the vine, so the link between Jesus and His followers must be a living one (John 15:1-8). Only those who draw sustenance from Him and through Him in this way can overcome baseness and evil and produce the splendid fruits of love, which are the sign of true discipleship (John 13:34-35).

Jesus also summons His followers to *active service*: "As my Father has sent me, even so send I you". He said to His disciples when He appeared to them as the risen Christ (John 20:21). And in the wonderful high priestly prayer, Jesus requested "As Thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:18). Again and again, we remember Jesus' instructions to His apostles to *spread the gospel*: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19). And: "Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

A Christian Church is a Community of Work and Mission

The above article tells us that Jesus formed a church with His male and female followers, which can be regarded as the basis and example of Christian congregations. Jesus, for example, had no fixed home: He traversed the country with His followers. Thus, a community of Christians may always be "in transit", spreading the gospel on the way to perfection and the ultimate kingdom of God. "For here we have no continuing city but we seek one to come" (Hebrews 13:14).

Following the Lord's call to mission, the first apostles traveled into many lands and founded *churches* there. All the congregations together formed *Christ's church*. The word "church" is derived from the Greek word *kyriake*, which literally means "of the Lord". It appears in the original Scriptures mostly in connection with the word *oikia* (= house) from which we can derive the word "church" as meaning *house of the Lord*. The word *congregation*, which we use more commonly, is a translation of the recurring New Testament word *ecclesia*, which in turn is a translation of the Hebrew words *eda* and *qaheel*. *Eda* means church in the general sense, whereas *qaheel* refers more to the spiritual nucleus, the congregation itself. The word "congregation" reminds us, first and foremost, not of a building or institution but of a gathering of people. The original meaning of *ecclesia* is after all a "popular assembly". The word "congregation" appeals to us in our age because it is closely connected to the word *community* and *communal*.

The first Christian churches "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and *fellowship*, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). A community of Christians is not a gathering of like minded people linked solely by common beliefs, but rather a living organism whose limbs interlock and interact, need each other, and live and feel together in joy and suffering (1 Corinthians 12:12-28). In such an organism, there is no division. "When one limb suffers, all limbs are affected." The holy Scriptures show us here the ideal image of the congregation of Jesus Christ.

With the founders of the re-established church, the apostles of the Catholic Apostolic Church in England, we profess "The church of Christ is the fellowship of all people, irrespective of time and nation, who are baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and are separated from all other people through baptism". ("The Apostolic Witness", 1836). However, we regret that this body of Christ, this church, consists of different groups, not all of which are characterized by the same degree of recognition of sacred values and the same measure of faith. We see here the whole spectrum from "warm" to "cold", truth to error, spiritual life to rigid adherence. Thus the warnings of Jesus to the seven churches in Asia Minor are not only valid for those times. They are also intense warnings for all churches and congregations of our time (Revelation 2 and 3). But God loves the people of His New Covenant and calls their members His children (1 John 3:1), so that we must heed the conditions already mentioned. "For as many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God", wrote Paul (Romans 8:14). He thereby indicated that to be a child of God is not one-sided, i.e.. to be interpreted as merely emanating from God, but that it is important to be led by God's Spirit.

It is clear from the letter of apostle Paul to the Ephesians what provision Christ desired for His church: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-13). Unfortunately this apostolic service in the life of the church that was willed by God could not always fully unfold. The blossoming of the beginning, in all its blessedness, was soon followed by spiritual decline. Different reform movements in church history document the waxing and waning of the church's spiritual life.

At the beginning of the 19th century, there came together in England and Scotland a number of devout men who were suffering from the aridity of spiritual life in the church at the time. Wrestling honestly and sincerely with God, they advocated in their prayer circles a renewal of spiritual life in the church. God responded to this honest searching and struggle. A revivalist movement spread through the world which was characterized by the revelation of the manifold gifts of the Holy Spirit and by the calling of spiritual men to the apostolic ministry of Jesus Christ. The ministry of the New Testament, founded by Christ for His flock, the apostolic ministry, was adopted by the young community which was able to develop a beneficial apostolic service, which persisted and even today is of profound significance for the spiritual life of an Apostolic Church. It must remain the sacred and responsible duty of the apostles to measure their service for God and man by the service of the holy Apostle of our profession, namely Jesus Christ, and to be guided by Him alone. Thus the apostles, as indeed the church itself, see their apostolic task as a selfless, nonpartisan service to their fellow men, their fellow Christians and unbelievers, based on the principles of the gospel and the gospel call of their master (Matthew 28: 18-20; John 20:19-23) and on the purity of the gospel. Only the image of Jesus Christ and the fruits of the Holy Spirit should be allowed to develop through apostolic service in the church. It follows that as the world wide Church has not yet obtained "the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13) – that all ministries are still needed within the Church.

We are pleased with what other churches and congregations possess in the way of divine and Christian values and do not say that apostolic authority is exclusively at work in our church. God alone oversees all the things of His church. Where and when He wishes to inspire and unfold the full might of His apostolic mission, depends exclusively on His sovereign will, and everywhere where this is the case, the possibility exists to become a first fruit in Christ. Thus we are not judging or condemning any other Christian churches or congregations, to do so would be directly against the teaching of the Head of the Church (Christ), (Luke 6:37). However, we believe that we have the right and the duty to point out that the apostolic ministry is effective as the ministry of reconciliation and ambassadorship of Christ in the church (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

This re-establishment of the full four fold ministry, or latter day rain of the Holy Ghost, as it is often called in the Bible, was already foretold by the Prophet Joel 2:21-32, and seen by the Apostle John in Revelation 4:4 where the four and twenty elders were seen before the throne and in their midst the four beasts signifying the full four fold ministry in two separate periods of time. Also we can read in Revelation 10:11, "And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues and Kings". This was an instruction to the Apostle Ministry at a later time. This time we believe, began again with this revival and must continue until Christ's return.

In the Communion of Saints

In the Bible the members of the first Christian congregations are often addressed as "holy man". They formed a community of "saints". It should be added that the word in this context has a different meaning than in the vernacular, where "holy men" refer to those who have completely withdrawn from the world, tower far above the crowd by virtue of a high degree of perfection and sinlessness, and perhaps even lead a hermit's existence.

In the original Scriptures, the Hebrew word *kadosch* and the Greek word *bagios* were used. The meaning of these words is very close to every day usage. They mean illustriousness, purity, grandeur, majesty – i.e.. that which is awe-inspiring. *Holy in this meaning of the word is God alone* in His threefold revelation as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts", the prophet Isaiah heard the angels call (Isaiah 6:3), and exclamation which recurs in the Revelation of John (Revelation 4:8).

King David too exalted the holiness of God (Psalm 99:9), and Revelation (15:4) ascribes holiness (or rather: *this* holiness) expressly to God: "For you alone art the holy one".

Mankind is not holy in this sense. Since the Fall, man has, through his disobedience towards God, distanced himself from his maker (Genesis 3). Man lives apart from God and is to a large extent profaned, defiled and robbed of his majesty and his dignity. Mankind has no longer any direct fellowship with God. *It was and is God's will to restore this original fellowship.* Thus Moses was commanded to say to the Jewish people: "Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy" (Leviticus 19:2). Therefore Paul spurred his congregations on to a holy way of life (dedicated to God): "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification" (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

Everything in the history of God's plan of salvation, all His revelations, and all prophecies are directed to this goal the salvation of mankind so that the kingdom of God will grow in prominence. Through the coming of Christ, the way was paved by which man may attain complete purification and sanctification (Hebrews 10:10). Jesus, in a high priestly prayer, said "Sanctify them (the disciples) through thy truth ... I sanctify myself that they also might be sanctified through the truth" (John 17:17 and 19). In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote that Christ loved His church to such an extent that He had died for it *in order to sanctify it* (Ephesians 5:25-26), and according to 1 Corinthians 1:30, the members of the church received from Jesus Christ, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. This sanctification occurs through the power of the Holy Spirit, as sent by God. God has chosen as his first fruits those who have accepted Christ, and has called them to blessedness in the sanctification of the spirit (2 Thessalonians 2:13). Peter too referred to this sanctification through the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1:2). Whoever allows himself to be sanctified in this way and to be guided on the path to the fulfillment of the kingdom of God, has *communion* with God, with Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Ghost (1 Corinthians 1:9; 2 Corinthians 13:13; 1 John 1: 3).

This brings us to the meaning of the word "holy" in the truly Christian sense: *to be apart and to possess a specific destiny.* "Holy men" are people who have set *themselves apart* from the world (from base, ignoble and diabolical things), in order to fulfill their special *destiny*, namely to be a child of God, a first fruit, a bride of Christ and consequently, a bearer of a regal, priestly disposition (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 21:9). This disposition should grow out of the Holy Spirit through its renewing power and should be accompanied by an increasing sense of responsibility. Thus the apostles in the New Testament addressed the members of the congregation as Saints. This was not because they had lived on the threshold of perfection. They had been called through baptism and laying on of hands (sealing) to a special destiny. Here are some examples:

- "to all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints" (Romans 1:7);
- "... to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints (in Corinth) ..." (1 Corinthians 1:2);
- "Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints" (Hebrews 13:24).

Forgiveness and Remission of Sins

We have seen that "saints" are in no way perfect, sinless human beings. All people, be they Christian or non-Christian, have their faults, their failings, their inadequacies, their weakness and their sinful desires, etc. As every sin separates man anew from God, impairs fellowship with Christ and also threatens communion with fellow believers and fellow Christians, every person repeatedly needs forgiveness of guilt and sin. Forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God is, however, *only possible through the merits of Christ.* This fundamental truth for Apostolic Christians is explained in Article, "Holy Communion". Suffice it to say that already in the Old Covenant the possibility existed for a forgiveness of sins that saved from punishment – as a consequence of breaking the laws (Leviticus 16:20-34; 2 Samuel 12:13). Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ there exists in the New Covenant, however, not only the possibility of remission of sins, but also the possibility of *reconciliation* with God. Jesus said to His disciples: "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life as a ransom (the possibility of redemption) for many"(Matthew 20:28). Paul wrote to Timothy, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for *all*" (1 Timothy 2:5). And furthermore to the Ephesians "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Ephesians 1:7; similarly, Colossians 1:14). Through the institution of communion shortly before His death, Jesus made bread and wine the symbols of His atonement (Matthew 26:26-28). Through the celebration of this communion, which is performed at His command in remembrance of Him, the unity of His followers with Him and among themselves is revived and assumes new form and content. Whoever receives justification after forgiveness of sins, and the remission of those sins, and reconciliation with God and is accepted by God through grace, is separated from the world and can be led along the path to his final destiny. In the Biblical sense, he is "holy".

The Resurrection of the Dead and the Life Everlasting

We should say more about the concept of "eternal life". Later we cover the resurrection.

We pointed out that the Bible constantly attests to a life after earthly existence, also called the "next world". According to John 6, Jesus said that He was the *bread of life*, the heavenly manna, and that whoever ate thereof took the life of Christ into himself would *live* in eternity. We might also recall the story of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well who at His bidding gave him something to drink. The woman was astonished that Jesus addressed her at all because the inhabitants of Judea, the Jews, did not mix with Samaritans, as they considered them unclean (John 4:1-15). Jesus then said: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give Him *shall* never thirst ... it shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life".

It is difficult to imagine life after this existence and we must emphasize that every conception, every image of the next world, stems from human imagination. On the basis of the Bible, and above all the sayings of Jesus Himself, we believe in a continuing existence. However, we are reluctant to have definite conceptions thrust upon us or to fantasize about it ourselves. We adhere to the words: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). In other words, what is not seen and never heard (not in the realm of the imagination either) will then be reality. Paul tells of a man who was vouchsafed a glance into paradise, "into the third heaven", and heard there the unspeakable words "which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Corinthians 12:2-4).

We have looked at the concept "eternal life" from a *Biblical* stand point. It was mentioned that men can obtain certainty in three different ways: through *experience*, through *scientific evidence*, or through *faith*. Whereas earlier attention was only drawn to the certainty which comes from faith alone, let us now consider the two other aspects – experience and science. We must remember though that Apostolic Christians in particular form a *living community of faith*. We should not overlook the fact that many are firmly convinced of a life after death on the basis of *experience*. However subjective these experiences may be, we must nevertheless acknowledge that they frequently emanate from reliable people. Dream accounts in which the departed appear, appearances of or contact with the dead, can be often interpreted in a variety of ways, for example as an unconscious image making, as ideas arising from the subconscious or even as the ramblings of the imagination etc. However there are many cases which cannot be explained in this way, because, for example, utterances by the spirits of the departed have been fulfilled. This occurs above all with so called prophecies of death, for example in the case of Brutus, Henry IV of France, Napoleon, President Lincoln of the USA. St. Augustine stated in sermon No. 233 that his own spiritual body had been seen repeatedly. Such experiences occur again and again. However they mostly have a *personal significance* because others, who are told such things, ask whether one of the explanations mentioned before could apply. Anyone who has had an experience like this, has a feeling of certitude which weakens all other arguments.

We today, hear of many people passing away in hospital and witness a foretaste of the soul leaving the body and often see for a moment, see a different realm, before they are brought back to life in this world. We cannot deny or give any other explanation of this.

A further thought with regard to certainty through *scientific knowledge*. A scientific proof for continuing life has never been produced and probably never will be. However, through responsible, logical thinking, we can argue for the improbability of the assertion that the soul would cease to exist after death. Scientists have proven that no material not even an atom, can vanish. Undoubtedly, material can be converted into energy, in part or wholly, as is the case with the splitting of the atom. In principle, this is also possible in reverse. The sum of energy and material remains the same. Nothing is lost!

In the universe, in the whole of creation, there is nothing that has "gone" that could simply have disappeared. When, for example, a candle has burnt down, no molecule, no atom has disappeared. They have only become invisible. The atoms of the candle have combined with other atoms (in part) producing new molecules which move invisibly in the air. *But everything is still there.*

It is therefore difficult to see why spiritual creation should contain elements, such as the human soul, that could completely disappear.

Another piece of Scripture which is often wrongly interpreted: "The soul that sinneth, It shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4, according to the old translation). This passage must often serve as proof that a soul can die. But that is incorrect because the word "soul" means here nothing more than "living being, humankind." The Bible uses the word soul often in this sense. Thus we read in Genesis 46:27: "... all the souls of the house of Jacob, which came into Egypt, were three score and ten." If we continue to read the chapters relating to this in the book of Ezekiel, it becomes clear that reference here is to the death sentence which offenders could expect according to Jewish law. In the new translation (1956) Ezekiel 18:4 uses the word "human" instead of "soul."

Another of Jesus' sayings to believers sheds light upon the immortality of the soul: "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28).

Revelation 21:4 – "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away." Mark 10:30 – "And in the world to come eternal life."

4. CHRIST'S CHURCH

Jesus Christ is the Head of His Church

In previous explanation, we explained that Jesus Christ came to earth as the Son of man and the Son of God, that He is for every Christian the great redeemer, the saviour of mankind, a refuge for everyone in search of help and all who are heavy-laden, and that at the same time He became, through His way of life, *the* great model for each human being.

But as well as this, He is the *head of His church (congregation)*. Paul compared the congregation with a physical body, in which Christ is the head and every member of the congregation is an organ or part of the body (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). The congregation is *Christ's body*, and without Christ it would not be viable. A physical body can probably continue to live without one or the other limb or without particular organs, but it cannot survive without a head. Besides, the head is the centre of the physical and spiritual life of a human being. All the organs and limbs receive their "commands" from this centre. The head is responsible for the organs in their contact with the outside world and as well determines how we must respond to the impulses of our environment and our innermost being. The head directs!

In the same way the unseen Christ directs His body, the church.

He is the head, we are the limbs. He teaches us to assess the value or the lack of value of all that we come into contact with, and how we must respond. He teaches us how we can live according to the will of God, how we as members of the congregation should behave toward each other, and that we may lay all our problems before Him (Matthew 11:28). Paul said,

- "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ..." (Ephesians 4:15);
- "... and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body..." (Ephesians 1:22-23);
- also, in Ephesians 5:23 and Colossians 1:18 he calls Jesus the head of the church.

Therefore no church leader, no apostle or congregational head may call himself "head" of the church or of the congregation. "Christ's representative", "Christ in our time", or "Christ come again". Well may they, if they are true servants, lead those entrusted to them, but they may only lead, by showing that it is Christ who works through them. They must constantly be aware that they are only servants of Christ (1 Timothy 4:6).

The Apostolic Mission

Jesus has sent and is still sending apostles to His church, as teachers, helpers, intercessors and Ambassadors of Christ

An Apostolic Church is guided by the Holy Ghost working through *Apostles*. The word apostle is derived from the Greek word *apostolos*, which means *ambassador*. It is a translation of the Hebrew word *sjaliach*. Such a *sjaliach* had the commission and authority to represent and to act in the interest of the one who had sent him. Comparable, for example, are a nation's ambassadors who in another country represent the interests of their own government. An ambassador, a *sjaliach*, may, despite his clear task and full authority, never take the place of the one who sent him. In this way, Christ's apostles have indeed full authority to carry out certain tasks, but, at the same time, Christ remains the head of the church and consequently also the leader of the apostles.

No Christian church has trouble recognizing that Jesus in His time appointed apostles. The Bible says so expressly and also several times names the first twelve apostles (Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:13-16; Acts 1:13). However, many find it a difficult matter to determine whether these were the only apostles recognized in the Bible. Sometimes the number of apostles is limited to these 12, which assumes in all probability that Matthias was destined to take the place of Judas the betrayer (Acts 1:23-26). But then Paul too later can be added, since he must be seen as a true apostle, a fact made clear both by his life and from numerous Biblical texts. Almost all his letters begin with the words "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle ..." (Romans 1:1-5; 1 Corinthians 9:2). In other places too he spoke repeatedly of his apostleship. Most Christians then limit the number of apostles to 12 (including Matthias) or 13 (including Paul). But there are also those who consider every ambassador called to ministry in the earliest period of Christianity to be an apostle. They use, as the starting point, the meaning of the word apostle, without considering that apostleship also includes full authority, as can be shown from the following facts.

Now the Bible gives no clear indication of such authority in the case of many of the persons named in Acts or in the letters of the apostles. It is therefore hard to determine whether, for example, Titus, Timothy, Apollos or Epaphroditus were apostles. But we can be certain that during the time of the apostle Paul there were some men who had the complete commission and authority of an apostle. Thus Luke writes in Acts (in which the travels and works of the apostles are described) that Paul and Barnabas healed a lame person in Lystra and that the people then called them Jupiter and Mercurius, thus regarding them as Greek gods (Acts 14:12). Luke then

continues: "which when the *apostles Barnabas and Paul* heard of, they rent their clothes....." In his letter to the Galatians, Paul writes that he once came to Jerusalem to visit Peter, "but other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother" (Galatians. 1: 18-19). This did not refer therefore to James, the brother of John and the son of Zebedaeus, but to a natural brother of Jesus. Indeed John reports that the brothers of Jesus had not believed in Him (John 7:5). James, called "the righteous one", became an apostle only after Jesus' resurrection. As a witness to the resurrection, he then bore testimony of his experience to his own brothers who had previously not believed in Jesus, so that they came to have faith in Jesus. Paul calls James a pillar among the apostles and in the church at Jerusalem, of which he was the head. From him comes the epistle of James (possibly the earliest writing of the New Testament). Because of his influence in Jewish circles, James was accused of straying from the old laws and he was thrown off the eastern ledge of the temple precincts.

The writer of the epistle of Jude is seen by many as an apostle. This is not Judas Iscariot the betrayer, nor Judas Thaddaeus, the son of Jacob. Probably it is that Judas whom Matthew and Mark also call the brother of the Lord (Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3). It is therefore not clearly demonstrated that he functioned as an apostle, although it is not out of the question. In short, we can say that in the beginning there were *more than 12 apostles*. Of Paul, Barnabas, and James the brother of the Lord, we can say with certainty that they were generally acknowledged as apostles. (In other Bibles, Andronicus and Junia are also called apostles – Romans 16:7).

As already stated, there are also Christians who think that everyone who has a gospel-call in Christendom is an apostle, simply because apostle means "ambassador". Many even feel that every Christian is an apostle, for every Christian has a gospel-call. Now this is certainly true but it is clear from the following that Christ only entrusted the apostleship to individual men. The cause of the error, namely that every Christian could be an apostle, lies in the fact that *the gospel-call only makes us a Christian, not an apostle*. Every evangelist, for example, has a commission, but this does not mean that he is an apostle. The crux of the matter is: not only the commission, but in particular, the spiritual *authority* of Jesus Christ will have to be recognizable as a sign of apostleship. Ralf Luther (a former clergyman in Dorpat), writes in his "Dictionary of the New Testament": "Christ not only had 12 apostles. Christianity always needs men who are empowered to maintain existing relations between Christ and the churches or to establish these ties in new places. In this sense, apostleship is not only an extraordinary institution which was necessary at a particular time, but a veritable service which is always required (even if the 12 apostles have a unique significance). If there are no apostles and no empowered ambassadors any longer, relations between heaven and earth are ruptured".

We see clearly as written by Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:7-13, that all the gifts of each of the fourfold ministries are needful in the Church to achieve "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the fullness of Christ."

What Kinds of Authority are there?

1. *The authority to speak and to act In the name of Jesus Christ:*

"He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me" (Matthew 10:40);

"As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (from the high priestly prayer that Jesus prayed for His disciples before His capture – John 17:18);

"As my Father hath sent me even so send I you" (John 20:21).

2. *The authority to forgive sins in His Name and to perform redemptive work in a general sense, a work whose consequences have, according to sayings from Jesus, eternal value.*

"Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 18:18);

Paul expressed this authority in this way;

"And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation ... Now then we are *ambassadors for Christ* ... ; We pray you in Christ's stead., be ye reconciled with God" (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

3. *The authority to bestow or awaken the gifts and strengths of the Holy Spirit, in short; the authority to bestow the Holy Spirit* (see the chapter "Holy Sealing").

As well as these authorities, the apostles have the *commission to bear witness* to all people in order to bring mankind to Christ, the great mediator between God and men; for, as Jesus said, "no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (John 14:6). This commission is expressed above all in the so-called *gospel call* which Jesus gave His Apostles shortly before His ascension "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28, 19-20). According to Acts 1:8, Jesus' last words before His ascension were; "... and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth".

Considering the confusion that always comes in relation to the concept "apostle", we believe it important to bear in mind that Jesus directed both His first and His last call to mission only to the twelve apostles He had chosen. Even the above-mentioned authorities he gave exclusively to these twelve – and after the resurrection when Judas was no longer with Him – and to the other eleven. These twelve (later eleven) formed the nucleus of his successors. On one occasion when the multitude that had listened to Him dispersed again, Jesus gave His disciples a more detailed explanation (Matthew 13:36-43). He also imparted to them the signs of the

end of the world (Matthew 24). To impart the last call to mission, He ordered his remaining eleven disciples to go to a mountain from where He ascended into heaven.

The view that every Christian is an apostle is therefore arguable. An Apostle ministry bears one of the highest responsibilities in the church. Jesus said to His disciples; "Have not I chosen you twelve?" (John 6:70). He spoke these words although He had many other followers. Paul differentiated between, "brethren" and "apostles" "After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once. ... after that he was seen of James; then *of all the apostles*" (1 Corinthians 15:6-7).

The fact that Jesus first of all chose twelve apostles and not eleven or thirteen has a deeper, symbolic meaning. The Jewish people consisted of 12 tribes. Jesus desired by His choice of twelve apostles to make clear that His divine message was meant for the whole populace. The entire New Testament bears witness to the fact that the apostles – and not the prophets, evangelists, or pastors – were the responsible leaders of the church. They were to give the teaching to the church. In Jerusalem the proceeds of houses or lands that had been sold were brought and laid "at the apostle's feet" (Acts 4:34-35; 5:2). Apostle Paul makes this particularly plain in his first letter to the first Corinthians (12:28); "And God hath set some in the church, *first apostles*, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers... ". And in his letter to the Ephesians (4:11-12) he puts it this way "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ". The ministries of Christ must always function on a horizontal level, not a vertical ministry. This was shown clearly in Genesis 2:10-14; Ezekiel 1 – All must only have Christ above them.

Several Biblical passages could give the impression that the apostles were only necessary to establish the church. Thus we read in Ephesians (2:20), that the church is built "upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone". And Revelation 21:14 says that the wall of holy Jerusalem had twelve foundations "and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb". The texts quoted above (1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11-12), however, make it clear that apostles are necessary to prepare the body of Christ and to shape the members of the church into perfect successors of Christ. But this does not detract from the fact that the first twelve apostles have a special place in the history of Christianity. They will for all time be called the first after Christ to lay the foundations of holy Jerusalem.

However, it is hard to understand why the blessings of the apostle office should have been destined only for the generation at that time. That would mean that all following generations would no longer have needed or would no longer need from the apostles, leadership, proclamation of sins, instruction and baptism by the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, it is particularly in our time, a period in which many signs point to the approach of the Second Coming, that the world is more than ever in need of apostles commissioned and authorized by Christ. Moreover the first apostles were only able to work in a small part of the world. However, Christ in His much quoted gospel call was concerned with *all nations* (Matthew 28:19-20). This too proves that in later times apostles must work just as diligently, so that not a single nation remains excluded from the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. Whenever priestly service is needed, it is logical that the priestly office has been bestowed upon the church. Whenever the service of bishops is needed, then the service (office) of a bishop is quite natural. If the church is apostolic in principle, why then should the service of apostles no longer be necessary?!

Two further *misunderstandings* that we encounter need to be explained:

– The name "apostle" should be used for the followers of Christ only from the moment when the great call to mission took place or after the out pouring of the Holy Spirit. Luke reports however that Jesus once summoned all His disciples and selected twelve of them whom He called apostles (Luke 6:12-16). (It is clear from this too that not every disciple of Jesus was an apostle.) Mark, too, wrote at the beginning of his gospel about apostles (Mark 6:30).

– Apostles are only those who have walked with Christ. This assumption rests on the words of Peter with which he encouraged his brethren to fill Judas' place: "Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us. Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that He was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of His resurrection" (Acts 1:21-22). But if that were a permanent sign of apostleship, the Bible would incorrectly identify Paul and Barnabas and others as apostles. In Paul's case, it could be said that he saw Christ in a rather special way (Acts 9:1-19). Luke however, calls Barnabas too an apostle (Acts 14:14). The sign of having walked with Christ can therefore be *no* permanent one; it is, at best, temporal.

Apostolic Churches are therefore guided by Ambassadors for Christ, Apostles

We have written of the Universal, Holy Apostolic Church, therefore guided by Ambassadors for Christ, Apostles.

We presented in Article 3 our stance regarding the "Holy Apostolic Church". The spiritual revival of the Apostolic Church which saw its genesis in England and Scotland produced the apostleship which at that time in the church possessed only an historical and theological significance. Now however men were called to this ministry who were filled with the spirit, so that they might breathe new life into it.

This is not to say that in the church the title of office, "apostle", recurs; rather, that a spiritual order was accomplished which Jesus Himself gave to His church. By virtue of apostolic service the church is destined to experience the missionary power of our Lord, indeed in such a way that Jesus Christ Himself can be active in the full truth and clarity of His gospel and thus remains above all the head of His church. It must not bow down before secular or ecclesiastical heads!

For the simple reason that the apostleship is of such significance for the church, it has become the centre of controversy in Christendom from the beginnings to the present day. Right from the outset, false brethren insinuated themselves; "which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars" (Revelation 2:2). Jesus, too, pointed to the danger of a false Christ and false prophets appearing, who might even deceive the very elect (Matthew 24:24).

All these warnings are to be taken seriously! But how do we recognize whether we are dealing with honest, truly empowered apostles of Christ? In all spiritual situations, it is important even here to try the spirit to determine whether the spirit is of God (1 John 4:1). Jesus said: "ye shall know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16). Where there is true apostolic service, there can be found the typical attributes and missionary characteristics evident among the first apostles. It is indisputable that the first apostles who laid the foundations of the church are extremely important. Their attitude of heart which was uncorrupted, accessible to God, humble and studious, was certainly the precondition for their selection as disciples and apostles of Christ. Because these simple people aspired to neither wealth, power or status and were in no way egocentric in their thoughts and actions, Jesus could use them for such an important service. Thus the study of theology in particular or the realization of a professional goal are not necessarily the criteria for the authority to spread the gospel, *but the fact that Christ imparts to a person a vocation and charisma (gifts of the Holy Spirit)*. It is the objective of apostolic service to lead to Christ an adorned bride (church) which is recognizable by the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Through their thoughts and humble immersion in the being and commission of their Lord, the apostles must repeatedly make sure that nothing but the work of Christ is sought and accomplished. The apostles themselves, indeed all believers or seekers, have to ask themselves in the most conscientious manner, in whose commission and inspired by which attitude, apostolic service is performed.

Apostles are not super-human and they are not infallible, either in their works or in their teachings. The history of the first apostles shows that. However, they must be totally devoted to Christ and His church. They must exist in a state of dependency upon their Lord. Their service must be free of maneuvering of power-mongering in a human or institutional sense. It must be their desire to bring people closer to the love of God in Jesus, that they might have life in truth. The apostles are not masters over the faith of the church, but assistants who lead us to the joy of the gospel (2 Corinthians 1:24). They must obey God more than man (Acts 5:29) and must ultimately devote their life to Christ.

The question as to whether apostolic authority is in effect only in our church has already been explored previously. The following could be:

Let us recall the apostolic gathering in Jerusalem at which Paul was present for the first time. It is understandable that he, the feared persecutor of Christians before the time of his conversion, was not acknowledged immediately as an apostle by the other apostles. Mistrust and perhaps even fear were understandable. On occasions false brethren insinuated themselves into the church in order to undermine the work of the apostles (Galatians 2:4). When the apostles noted however the extent of the grace that had been imparted to Paul and the content of his preaching, they greeted him as a brother and *acknowledged him from then on as an apostle* (Galatians 2:2-9). This story teaches us to be humble and modest. The profound recognition that Christ had led us on a path on which we are escorted by His ambassadors should not allow us to form the arrogant opinion that God does not care for other people, nations and churches.

The question as to whether other apostles are active outside the Apostolic Churches must always relate, as mentioned earlier, to the properties of a true apostolic service.

Wherever the apostolic mission is at work *and is accepted*, the life of the first Christians is the model for the members of the church "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). Apostolic service will be necessary until all "kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord" (Revelation 11:15).

One of the tests applied to determine whether an Apostle is valid or not, we find in Revelation 4:10-11. "The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou has created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created". We see that although this is a high office created by Christ, true Apostles are always prepared to take the crown off and cast them before the Throne and always give All Honour to God.

We believe in the Holy Scriptures (Bible) of the Old and New Testaments, with all the Promises contained therein, from beginning to end

As stated previously our whole hope is contained in words written in The Holy Bible. We believe implicitly that it is the written word of God, revealed by the Holy Ghost down through the ages, through the men of God. Recent computer programmes have been developed which shows that all the books of the Bible have the one and same Author. We believe this Author to be the Holy Ghost. Scripture itself confirms It to be the book of all ages. (1 Peter 1:25), "But the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you".

Refers to it as food for the soul. (Deuteronomy 8:3), "And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know, that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live".

It is divinely inspired. (2 Timothy 3:16), "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness".

These words must find their way to our hearts by searching, preaching and teaching. (Colossians 3,16), "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord".

The words show us a way in light. (Psalm 119:105), "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path".

The Bible's words should be loved by All. (Psalm 119:140), "Thy word is very pure, therefore thy Servant loveth it".

These words can become our defence. (Ephesians 6:17), "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God".

It purifies our lives. (John 15:3), "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you".

All Scripture has purpose. (John 20:31), "But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name". (Romans 15:4). "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope".

They are sacred and must not be altered. (Proverbs 30:6), "Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar".

We should always be searching them. (Isaiah 34:16), "Seek ye out of the book of the Lord, and read; no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate: for my mouth it hath commanded and his Spirit it hath gathered them". (John 5:39), "Search the Scriptures: for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me".

It is necessary and vital to be used in mission work and all teaching. (Mark 4:14-15), "The sower soweth the word, and these are they by the way side, where the word is sown but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the words that were sown in their hearts".

These words are absolutely trustworthy. (Luke 21:33), "Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away".

It is dangerous for us to be ignorant of these. (Matthew 22:29), "Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures or the power of God".

All servants that labour in an Apostolic Church must vow that the Bible will be the foundation of their teaching.

**We now move to the object of the Church.
"To be saved by Grace"**

5. THE MEANS OF GRACE

Introduction

When we look closely at living nature, we discover that it is "driven", as it were, by a power which is inherent in every creature, namely the power to aspire to a goal. Here are some examples of thousands of possibilities children would like to be grown up; in the spring the birds strive to build their nests, because preservation and the increase of the species are their instinctive goal. In the same way, plants "strive" to obtain as much light as possible so that they can produce a sufficient number of seeds at the right time. If necessary, they have the capacity to bend in the appropriate direction.

In plants, animals or humans, every part of the body, every organ, has a specific task, for example nourishment, locomotion, perception. When I walk I do so to reach a goal, or for recreation or for training.

This striving is called *the purposefulness of nature, the autonomy of life*. Living creatures are usually not aware of these directed powers.

Now and then we gain the impression that someone is doing some thing without a clear objective. And yet, everything has a definite goal. Let us take a visit, for example. Some people converse, while others sit in silence, ostensibly indifferent and bored, as they feel it idle talk. Is every thing really without a purpose? No, the conversationalists' intention could be passing away the time, hearing themselves speak, or simply making contact with others. The intention of those who are tired of conversing may be to refrain from small talk because they consider it boring. They may wish to follow the passage of their own thoughts or indicate through their presence that they came out of politeness.

Everything we do has a Definite Aim!

But there is a *path* to every goal. A person who has set his sights on becoming a doctor, for example, must use the university as his "path".

Several paths may lead to a goal. They do not need to be equally direct. There are straight paths, detours, twisting, winding and pernicious paths, as well as good ones.

To reach a goal we use specific *means*. Such means are, for instance, a ship and a compass, when we wish to reach an overseas destination. If we have set ourselves the goal of learning something, we need to consult books or use a teacher's instruction as support systems.

Thus we always have to differentiate between the *goal* to be attained, the *path* or paths which lead to the goal, and the *means* which are at our disposal and can help us reach the objective.

It is perhaps unconsciously that every person has the intention of finding happiness. Even to attain this goal it is necessary to embark on a specific route, using – in our context – God-given means.

The Goal

God has a goal for creation. It would however be presumptuous to provide a precise description of this divine objective. That would place man on a par with God Himself. Nevertheless it is possible for us on the basis of the Scriptures to fill in the significant details. Satan as the arch angel, saw that it was God's plan to share His full blessings and glory with His created people and through jealousy, set about to discredit God's words "It is very good" by placing sin between man and God, through his temptation and the justification of Adam and Eve.

The Bible describes how after the so-called days of creation on earth a period followed in which the first humans created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27), lived in complete peace and happiness and in perfect harmony with their creator, in a condition and environment for which the word "paradise" was used (Genesis 2:8-15).

This condition was forfeited through the disobedience of the first humans towards God's command (Genesis 2 and 3). God's plan for humans was that they might live on earth and in heaven in accordance with His will and intentions and live accordingly in an eternally paradisiacal state. Thus God promised after the Fall a time in which "the head of the serpent, i.e. Satan, would be bruised" (Genesis 3:15). The word "Satan" literally means "slanderer". He is the enemy of everything divine, the power of seduction and destruction, God's adversary, the annihilator of human happiness and human dignity, or, as the Bible says, "a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44).

The aforementioned promise is the first intimation of the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as man on earth. Through His suffering and His victory, through His crucifixion and His resurrection, the bridge between man and God has been rebuilt. Through Him man can receive grace and redemption. This is a *fundamental Christian belief*.

Different passages in the Old and the New Testament point to a future age in which the original state of bliss will be re-established. In Isaiah 9:1-16, for instance, the coming of the Messiah, the redeemer, is announced and described subsequently thus "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth *even for ever*".

In Micah 4:1-5, we read that, in the last days, when the mountain on which the house of the Lord rests, will be exalted above the hills, people will flow unto it and the law will go forth into the whole world. "And they shall beat their swords into plough shares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more". In the last prophetic book of the Bible (Revelation 21) we read of the coming of a new heaven and a new earth of which the new Jerusalem will be the centre. There God will "wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain".

From these scriptural passages it is clear that the prophets in the Old Covenant and Jesus in the New Covenant referred repeatedly to the restoration of the paradisiacal, felicitous state of man, *at least for those who acknowledge Jesus Christ unconditionally as their Lord*.

Thus it is not presumptuous to maintain that it is God's plan, *to establish His kingdom on earth*. In this kingdom Jesus Christ will reign and man will be able to live in a harmony, peace, freedom and joy that is scarcely conceivable today, obeying the will of God and filled with love for God, for others, for plants and animals. This love will be the driving force behind all our actions. The human race will then be redeemed from the destructive power of Satan, the dissembler from the beginning of time. Gods words will then be fulfilled "*It is very good*".

The Path

God has prepared a path for the aforesaid goal. Not many paths; indeed, only one path, and this path is *Jesus Christ*. Jesus Himself mentioned this expressly. When He told His disciples that He would leave the earth to prepare a place for them so that they might also be united with Him and dwell with Him in the same heavenly dwelling. He concluded with the words: "And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know". One of the disciples Thomas, who honestly admitted his doubts and his uncertainty, said "Lord, we know not, whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?" Jesus replied "*I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*" (John 14:1-6). This is straight forward.

To the disciple Philip He said "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father"; and "Believeth thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?" (John 14:9-11) .

Jesus explained to the scribes and Pharisees who were convinced that they were observing Jewish law to the letter: 'Ye neither know me nor my Father: if you have known me, you should have known my Father also' (John 8:19). Furthermore, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12).

When Jesus announced to His disciples that He would be handed over to the earthly authorities and would be killed by them, He gave them wonderful words of comfort. He promised to send down to them the Holy Ghost, the power of God. This spirit would lead them into all truth. "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:18). "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26). "For if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you" (John 16:7) "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: ... he shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you" (John 16:13-14).

Before Christ left the earth He not only promised the Holy Spirit as a guiding power but also sent His Apostles into the world with a very clear mission: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:19-20).

In the so-called high priestly prayer Jesus prays fervently for power and assistance for His Apostles, that they might continue His work in perfect union with Him, even though He would no longer be on earth in His physical body. "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:18). "And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them and thou in me..." (John 17:22-23).

We can summarize the path which leads to eternal life as follows Jesus Christ is the way for all times. He *was, is and will be*. He is the eternal king, the High Priest of the New Covenant (Hebrews 4:14-15). He entrusted His work and His mission to His disciples, who, as his ambassadors, were also called apostles (apostle means ambassador). He gave them full authority and the assurance of guidance through the Holy Spirit.

Just as Jesus led His followers to the Father so too the apostles who were filled with the Holy Spirit led men to Jesus and through Him to God.

The Means

Jesus possessed and still possesses *the full* measure of power and strength to convert, redeem and bless men, that they might be instruments in God's hands. This fullness of the Holy Spirit continues to operate in the means which He has given His church. By these means, the person who has chosen the new path, i.e. who has changed his ways and has therefore been *converted*, may also receive the necessary strengths and gifts to genuinely become a new creation. Not until a creature has been fashioned who is worthy of the name of "king and priest" has rebirth attained its goal.

What means has God placed at our disposal? These are the circumstances of life, the experiences, in short, the total life situation in which we find ourselves. Our growth can be furthered by them, or, if we have the wrong attitude, be placed on the wrong track. Furthermore, God has given His church specific means which are of inestimable value. They are present in the *Word*, in the *sacraments*, in the *gifts of ministry and other spiritual gifts*.

The Word

The "Word of God" does not merely imply the imparting and spreading of a number of dogmas, principles or rules. The Word of God is more than that. "A word is a *living* message. In the Word there is something of the will of the speaker. By his word one spirit touches the spirit of another and can have a powerful effect on their lives. Where the Word of God is, *God Himself* is somehow present. He communicates with us. His Spirit touches the human spirit. We feel something of His personal closeness". God spoke not only in the past: He speaks *today* too, in a very forceful manner. (Hebrews 4:12) "*For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*".

The Word of God can reach us in different ways, for example through the *written word* of the Bible. These are the words of Jesus, the first apostles, the prophets, and other men of God of the Old and New Testaments. It must always be borne in mind that only the spirit of God gives life to the dead letter (2 Corinthians 3:6).

Those who read the Bible only superficially and are not therefore guided by the Holy Spirit often draw quite different and false conclusions from it. When reading individual verses it is always necessary to keep in mind the total context of what has been written and its connection with other passages. That is no easy task! We refer therefore to Acts 8:26-35. We read there of a eunuch (one could say the servant) of queen Candace of Ethiopia. The eunuch was returning from Jerusalem to Ethiopia and was reading the book of the prophet Isaiah. The evangelist Philip, impelled by the Holy Spirit, approached him and asked him the well-known question "Understandest thou what thou readest?" The unusual answer was: "How can I, except some man should guide me?" – Then followed Philip's interpretation.

This example shows us that reading the Bible in itself is not sufficient. In many cases we need an interpretation that is guided by the *Holy Spirit*. One might just as well ask a person reading the Bible today: do you understand what you are reading.

The fact that there are infinite numbers and diverse interpretations of the Bible is proof that much is not seen in the light of the Holy Spirit. Over-emphasizing certain passages, and losing sight of the total picture has led to the sad emergence of hundreds of directions within the Christian fellowship .

Apostolic Christians see the Word of Jesus as a *unity* and ensure that all points of view are included. The Old and the New Testament are on the same axis and form a single line. We are of the conviction that the Holy Ghost, in keeping with the times, illuminates the meaning of the written word through apostleship. This spiritual activity is many-sided:

1. The Word of God comes to us in the sermon as an *illuminating, instructive* word of the apostles and other office bearers, the servants of Jesus Christ. Jesus often taught all His listeners and especially His disciples by means of parables, but occasionally He spoke very directly to His disciples. For example: "Take my yoke upon you and *learn* of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29). Jesus found it necessary to instruct and edify the first apostles, with whom He had constant personal contact we who today do not enjoy this privilege, need His instruction all the more. After the disciples stood on their own feet as apostles, the churches were taught by them. Today there is also apostolic teaching. It is *no more* and *no less than the teaching of Christ*.

2. The Word also comes to us to *admonish, warn or comfort us*. We have seen that God's Word penetrates deeply into human life. Consequently man has to change his lifestyle. It is difficult however to discard old habits, the innate tendency toward aggression, the sinful striving for power and possessions, in short "the old ways of Adam" and to become a new creation. Thus every person needs now and again to be admonished and warned, no matter how full of good intentions he may be. The letters of the first apostles to the congregations at that time contain many such words of exhortation. Mostly they were uttered very clearly and directly and this could give the impression that they were sharp reproofs (1 Corinthians 3:1-5; 5; 11:17; Ephesians 5; Philippians 3:17; 1 Peter 2:11-25; Revelation 2 and 3). But it was always the love of saving souls that occasioned the apostles to write such words, and can we people living in "modern" times, who are exposed to far greater temptations than in those days, do without such admonitions?

A reproof is designed to correct and improve what is not good within human conduct, goals, deeds, thoughts and disposition. Exhortations which are not given out of a sense of love, out of a strong desire to save, are taken as criticisms. Their effect is negative. But exhortations that seek to prevent injury to the soul have a *guiding*, direction-changing effect. They help towards attaining the goal of human existence. But that will only happen when the person being admonished allows himself to be guided. This is, in turn, dependent on whether he has *faith* in the mission and calling of the one who by virtue of his office pronounces the admonition to the congregation or the individual member.

The word not only exhorts but also *comforts*. It is no coincidence that the Holy Spirit is also called the Comforter. The essential thing about comforting is to strengthen *hope* in the fulfilment of the many promises of God which He gave through His Son. This hope for the approaching kingdom of God produces a continuous renewal of vitality. In our relationship to God we are and remain children who from time to time need a comforting word.

3. God's Word also comes to us in *prayer*. Other people, for instance the servants of God, can pray on our behalf in the congregation. It may be a parent's prayer for their children, or indeed, any prayer that is offered for the health and welfare of others. The most mature form of prayer is achieved when we even pray for those who persecute us, curse us or speak evil of us (Matthew 5:44: Luke 6:27-28). This is one of the most difficult things Jesus demanded of His disciples. Christ was the supreme example in that He prayed for all while nailed to the cross: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

4. Of great significance is the Word of God that comes to us in the forgiveness *of* sins. No person is capable of completely fulfilling the commands of God. Christians are not people who have already achieved the goal. They are pilgrims on the path to God's eternal kingdom. The new man is not yet perfect in every regard. Basically he still dwells in a guilty state before God the Father. Christ transferred to his apostles the authority that allows for God's forgiveness of sins. And when He said this, He breathed on them, and saith, unto them: "*Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit they are remitted unto them and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained*" (John 20:22-23).

We see that the power to forgive sins is the Holy Ghost and that is why this, the proclamation of peace and forgiveness is continued by those in the Apostle ministry.

The disciples received this authority directly from Jesus Christ the Risen One after they had accepted the Holy Spirit from Him. The fullness of the spirit was imparted to them at Pentecost.

Living with permanent feelings of guilt is fatal. It can destroy a man not only spiritually, but also physically. Remission of sins is therefore an act of liberation and redemption. It gives new courage and strengthens the bond of love between the one who forgives and the one who receives forgiveness. As a rule, on Sundays Apostolic Christians celebrate Holy Communion with the remission of sins. This ensures that the bond of love between God our Father and ourselves His children is continually strengthened.

5. It is significant too that we hear the Word of God in the benediction, both at church proceedings and at the conclusion of the service. In God's blessing lies promise, protection, increase and solace.

6. In all these examples the Word of God comes from "outside". It came and comes to us through the written or spoken word of others. But it is also possible for the Word of God to reach us "from within", namely as the voice *of* conscience, i.e. as the voice of growing consciousness of our responsibility towards God, man and ourselves. Explaining the nature of conscience is beyond the scope of this book. Suffice it to say that conscience has been placed innately in the soul of each man as God's gift. Like every human faculty, conscience too must be developed, which is possible, when it is stimulated by the influence and education of parents or teachers but especially when it is stimulated by God's ministers. This is allied to a very important fact which can only be mentioned here in passing, namely that the divine is also present in man, however limited it may be and however individually different. If this were not the case, if the divine were not present in man, the Word could find not a single point of contact in man. Enrichment, awakening, stimulation and spiritual growth would not be possible.

7. Finally, the Word of Dreams, can come to man in a *supernatural* manner through prophecies, visions and other revelations. This establishes as it were a link between the material world and the transcendent spiritual immaterial world. A person comes in contact with the super sensory world and thus experiences temporarily a liberation from his dependence on time and space.

The Sacraments

We have seen that the Word of God as a means of coming into contact with God can reach men in different ways. But other means too are necessary, namely the *sacraments*. Sacraments are *sacred acts* which impart to us, each in its own way, the grace of Jesus Christ and the powers of the Holy Spirit. Sacraments are therefore also called means of grace.

Apostolic teaching is based on three sacraments: *Holy Baptism*, *Holy Sealing* (anointing of the Holy Ghost) and *Holy Communion*.

Before we treat each sacrament in detail, let us clarify some of their general characteristics. They are holy, i.e. separate, in the meaning that God specifically ascribes to them. Thus a person receives something of the spirit and the power of Christ in a manner that passes all understanding, thereby coming into close *communion* with Him. The spiritual process governing this act is invisible and cannot be explained by human reason. The *consequences*, however, must become *visible* in a person's life.

The ministers sent and commissioned by God avail themselves during these sacred actions of visible *signs*. Thus for baptism, water is used, and for communion, bread and wine. Holy Sealing follows through the laying on of hands by an apostle. These signs (water, bread and wine, laying on of hands) have a *symbolic meaning*. A sign is a symbol. It is not a question of sprinkling with water, eating bread and drinking wine, or of the laying on of hands per se; on the contrary, these signs which are visible to our sense organs represent only the outwardly perceptible form of the sacraments. *They point to a definite spiritual happening*. The visible signs, the visible elements (water, bread, wine) and acts (laying on of hands and audible words) have been given to us as aids; they are concrete supports that symbolize the real events and make them visible.

The word "symbol" has often led to misunderstanding. When we say that something is meant symbolically, many people think that this something is basically nothing special and does not belong to reality. Every symbol, every sign, however, points to something that belongs to reality. A flag is the symbol of a nation, of a country. The cross per se is not important; it consists of only two wooden beams. However it points to suffering, the crucifixion, the overcoming of death through Jesus Christ and *that is* extremely important, and for *this reason* the symbol (the cross) is valuable and significant.

Apart from the signs there are also people who perform the sacred acts in the name of Jesus Christ. They are, so to speak, the *mediators* between Christ and man and correspond to the elements of bread, wine and water as instruments in Christ's hands. In this way therefore holy rites can be performed. Just as in the Old Covenant priests were the mediators in the temple ministry, in so far as they took sacrifices and consecrated them to God, so it is that in the New Covenant the priests perform the holy rites. Only holy sealing is reserved for apostleship.

The precondition for receiving these means of grace, for participating in holy rites, is *belief* in the Holy Trinity and the acceptance of the ambassadors commissioned by God.

In the sacraments there is an interaction between:

- the giver, i.e. God or Christ;
- the recipient, i.e. the person upon whom the act is performed, i.e. the person who is baptized or sealed or who takes Holy Communion;
- the person who serves as an "instrument", for example the priest who baptizes or gives Holy Communion or the apostle who seals;
- that which is given, bestowed or transferred;
- the acts and signs through which saving grace is made visible.

Without earnest faith and a genuine readiness to make an individual contribution to the renewal and diverse development of spiritual life, these acts alone do not achieve anything. We shall treat child baptism in a later context.

The Sacraments Form a Unity

Each sacrament has its special meaning. And yet it is only possible to assess them correctly in their interrelationship, because they compose, as it were, a trinity, or in other words, they are different and yet not different (1 John 5:7-8), and the Holy Ghost is at work in all three sacraments.

The following questions arise. What do I do with what I have received in relation to my fellow man and myself? What do I need to change in myself and how can I initiate a process of change in others?

The development of an Apostolic Christian can be seen as growth towards a *new creation*, until we come "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). A major feature of this spiritual adulthood is the *readiness and capacity to bear responsibility*. An Apostolic Christian demonstrates his responsibility in many ways:

- for those directly entrusted to him, such as his children, or charges, particularly for such who are dependent upon him; for his fellow men in general;
- for the physical and spiritual gifts received from God, and especially for the gifts and powers of the Holy Spirit;
- for all his words, his deeds and his thoughts. An Apostolic Christian does not ask: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9). Quite the opposite – he desires to be his brother's keeper;
- for plants and animals, in fact, for the whole of creation in the sense of building, conserving and using them right according to Genesis 2:15.

6. HOLY BAPTISM BY WATER

Baptism in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament we do not read at all about baptism by water. It can be assumed therefore that it was not performed before the coming of John the Baptist. However there are references to it in Jewish purification laws. Non-Jews who wanted to embrace Judaism were not only circumcised, but also, as a sign that their Gentile impurity had been washed away, "baptized" by immersion in water. Such people are called "proselytes". In the Talmud (the collected Jewish law) it says: "As soon as he (after circumcision) is well again, they immerse him ... When he has been immersed and comes to the surface again, he is in all things worthy to be an Israelite". In this baptism of the proselytes, we already see expressed what was later of essential significance for John the Baptist and the New Covenant the "old creation" must be submerged so that a new life can begin. We find indications of this in the Old Testament through various important events.

Noah and his family during the flood were guided through the water in order to begin a new life. God's commands were observed again so that God could establish a covenant (Genesis 9:9). Peter compares this event with the baptism of Jesus Christ, without however putting it on an equal footing: "... while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us ..." (1 Peter 3:20-21).

The Israelites had to first pass through the Red Sea before they could begin their long journey to the Promised Land. Paul actually compares this passage with a baptism, for he says "All our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea". For him therefore it is an example of baptism as practiced later in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 10:1-2).

The "water of purification" that had to be used when one was unclean according to the law, for example after touching a dead person (Numbers 19).

Baptism by John

In The New Testament we read that many people had themselves baptized by John the Baptist. It was a "baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Matthew 3:5-6; Mark 1:4). Even tax collectors (tax officials who often had a bad name for blackmailing tactics) had themselves baptized by him. John said quite sharply that this only had a purpose if the conversion bears fruits, if a new life comes into being as a result. He even addressed the people as "generation of vipers", which shows that He condemned their innermost attitude. To the publicans he said: "Exact no more than which is appointed you", and to the soldiers: "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages" (Luke 3:7-14). The Pharisees and the scribes would not let themselves be baptized and thereby rejected the counsel of God (Luke 7:30). Obviously they felt that they were good enough. Jesus denounced this later in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican. The publican received grace and the Pharisee did not (Luke 18:9-14).

Jesus too had Himself baptized by John, although He was without sin. John forbade Jesus, saying: "I have need to be baptized of thee and cometh thou to me?" But Jesus answered that He was fulfilling God's intentions (Matthew 3:13-17). Through this Jesus wished to set an *example* for all people and make it clear that all who wished to walk in the way of God had to first undergo purification, or in symbolic terms, discard the old creation and put on the new man. Jesus baptism or use of water for purification was necessary to prepare Him to become anointed as was required by the law. God was now to anoint Him to become our prophet, our high priest and our King of Kings. He was to become the Christ, which means the anointed of God. Directly after the *baptism* of Jesus, the Holy Ghost came over Jesus "like a dove" or under the sign (symbol) of the dove. Did not Jesus already possess the Holy Ghost? Jesus was conceived by the Holy Ghost, so He would have had the Holy Ghost within Him, but now that there was one on earth who could be called the Son of God again, it was necessary that He be anointed so that He had the fullness of God's power with Him to allow Him to fulfill His mission and defeat Satan. God, however, was already making it clear in this context that not only baptism by water was necessary for cleansing and conversion, but also a *subsequent* anointing of the spirit. John himself was witness to Jesus' words: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, after me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, God then spoke direct from Heaven and said "this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." And I knew him not but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, upon whom thou shalt see the spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost" (John 1:29-33). Previously he had said of Jesus: "... but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (Matthew 3:11). Luke says therefore of John the Baptist that he was the *preparer of the way of Jesus* and that with him the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord ..." (Luke 3:4-6; Isaiah 40:3-5; John 3:28). Significant is Jesus' description of John "For I say unto you. Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he" (Luke 7:28). *Baptism by John was only a temporary blessing and can never be a substitute for baptism instructed by Christ, and the anointing of the Holy Ghost as left as sacraments for life.* (Acts 19:1-7).

The Call to Mission to the Disciples: The Ministry of Baptism

Christ's baptism and sealing fulfilled the words found in Daniel 9:24-25

When Jesus Himself began to baptize, a task He generally left to His disciples (John 3:22-26; 4:1-2), baptism assumed a deeper and essentially more far-reaching significance. Soon the number of His followers was greater than John's. The Pharisees thought that this would annoy John, but John said: "This my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease". Further on he pointed to the fact that Jesus gives liberally of the spirit and that eternal life is linked with belief in Him (John 3:29-36).

Before his ascension Jesus summoned the eleven Apostles to a mountain in Galilee. There He appeared to them in His risen body and said: "All power is given to me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, *baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:16-20). From this call to ministry it is clear that baptism is the basis of Christian belief and that it is impossible to be a follower of Jesus without baptism. Baptism is the beginning of the new path of life, the beginning of the new creation that belongs to God. Our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. That is why we say we have a Christian name.

No Baptism without Faith in Christ

It is clear from the call to ministry that people must be brought to the faith and only then baptized. We have already drawn attention to the fact that receiving the sacraments presupposes faith. Mark 16:16 formulates the mission somewhat differently. He adds: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned". This also demonstrates that faith must precede baptism. Baptism without faith contributes nothing to salvation and to the spiritual growth of the new creation for it says that those to be condemned are not those who are baptized but those who do not believe. Paul, too (Romans 10:13), refers to the fact that faith is decisive: "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved", irrespective of his race. Furthermore, "Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed" (Romans 10:11). It is clear that the words "call upon" do not mean that it is sufficient only to utter the name of "God" or "Jesus". Thus Paul also says (Romans 10:14-15) that faith arises from preaching and this testimony can only be meaningfully given when we are sent. This accords with the whole thrust of mission. First there was the Word of Christ, then followed the mission, out of which instruction in Christ blossomed, the fruits of which were faith. Subsequently, baptism could take place, as the departure point for a new path leading to salvation and blessedness.

The Meaning of Baptism

The literal meaning of the word "baptize" is to "immerse" which is also common in the vernacular (to submerge something). Naturally the word has a deeper significance. We shall now look at different aspects of baptism by water. At first glance there are different meanings but that is only apparent. The apostles who performed baptism by water or described it in their letters to the churches repeatedly chose imagery in order to explain the essential process of baptism. There are no other possibilities of explaining spiritual matters. In this regard every language is lacking in suitable words. The following images convey in their entirety the full meaning of baptism.

1. Baptism is a special utterance of love on God's part. With this He sets us on a new path that leads to eternal salvation. In the baptism of Jesus the voice of God was audible: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Whoever believes and is baptized may lay claim to God's pledge you are my dear child, I will lead you to the goal that I have set for mankind (Galatians 3:26-27).
2. Baptism is a purification, a washing away of sins. When Saul was in Damascus he was summoned to go to Ananias, a man who was highly esteemed by the Jews. Ananias said to Saul, "Arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). When Peter, after the outpouring of the Holy Ghost in Jerusalem, proclaimed in his famous address, that the man they had crucified was the true Lord and Christ, the question came from the people: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter answered "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost..." (Acts 2:37-38). As those to whom Peter spoke were devout Jews, who had received circumcision as a form of baptism to the Father, it was now necessary to add to that, the Baptism of Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost.
3. Baptism is acceptance into the New Covenant. At the Last Supper, Jesus, taking the cup, said "For this is my blood of the New Testament which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24). Through the blood, i.e. the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, a new covenant between God and man became possible. In the letter (Hebrews 8:6; 9:15) to the churches in Israel (Palestine), Jesus is named as the mediator of a better (new) covenant so that men might be redeemed from their sins and that those called might be given the promise of eternal inheritance. From the letter of Paul to the Colossians (Colossians 2:11-14) it becomes clear too that baptism is acceptance into the New Covenant. Paul makes it clear there that Jewish circumcision was the hallmark of membership of the Old Covenant, whereas baptized Christians are spiritually circumcised, an act which is performed without hands. By this "circumcision" they are "buried with Christ in baptism", that is immersed in a bath that cleanses and leads to resurrection. The New Covenant therefore signals redemption and cleansing from sin. We saw that baptism by water was given in the name of the Trinity. Purification, washing away of sins, also means acceptance into the New Covenant through the perfect sacrifice of Christ. We see that baptism in the Trinity God, is the first step, as it redeems us from the inherited sin of Adam and Eve from whom we have inherited life.
4. Baptism is called "the washing of regeneration". Paul writes to his colleague Titus 3:5 that Jesus had saved them "by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost". In this connection it is not quite clear whether Paul thought here only of

baptism by water or of baptism and laying on of hands (sealing). In any case we cannot deny that baptism by water means a new beginning: we embark upon a new path. The expression "the washing of regeneration" is therefore understandable and justified. Since the concept "rebirth" has an important place in our faith, we will return to it later in some detail. Suffice it to note now that rebirth can be regarded as a new (spiritual) beginning. But let us not overlook the fact that until the final goal is attained, namely the regal, priestly disposition of the soul, a long path of growth, a process of education, must be instituted. According to Paul (1 Corinthians 15:31) our life must be a continuous dying with Christ. He even says: "I die daily". The more his old nature died, the more the new life developed in him.

5. Baptism is called the "ransom of the Lamb". In his letter to the churches in Galatia (Galatians 3:13; 4:5). Paul defended the freedom of Christians against those who wanted to retain an all too strict allegiance to Jewish law. The law was not denounced by Paul. On the contrary, he only wanted to stress that every person baptized in Christ has been redeemed (in other translations ransomed) from the curse of the law, in order to be a "son of God". Through baptism we are no longer subject to punishment (the curse of the law) but have been brought to freedom in Christ and have been released through His grace from punishment. Naturally Paul meant by freedom neither a lack of attachment nor permanent acts according to our own standards, nor the freedom to succumb to passions and impulses. It is a freedom which leads to a greater consciousness of our own responsibility. According to Peter too, Christians are ransomed. He wrote to the Jewish congregations in other countries that they had not been redeemed (ransomed) from their old ways with gold and silver but with the precious blood of Christ, the blood of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Peter 1:18-19). At that time it often happened that a slave was set free in exchange for payment in gold or silver. Christ however set us free from the slavery of our old being and our old ways even before we knew Him. He paid the ransom with His blood that was shed on the cross for the remission of sins. Here too, the concept of dying to old ways is expressed.

6. Baptism is God's promise of blessedness, of the soul's salvation, a promise of eternal happiness. We have already referred to Jesus' words "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be damned" (condemned) (Mark 16:16). Preconditions are, as already mentioned, faith in Christ and His commandments. So that the effects of God's rescue mission are not lost, it is necessary to nourish the received life through the Word of God in our age.

7. The central meaning of baptism has already been clarified, namely the dying of the old creation and the resurrection, the rebirth, of the new creation. Therefore it is not as strange as it seems that both Jesus and His apostles link baptism with death, which naturally does not mean the death of the natural body. The disciples James and John said to Jesus "grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory" (Mark 10:37-39). A typically human question! It betrays overestimation of the self and ignorance of the severe struggle which leads to the fulfilment of Christ's work. For Jesus also said: "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" In other words, there is a difficult path of suffering before me. If you follow me, you will likewise encounter much suffering and strife. Are you equipped for it? Are you really ready to surrender even your physical body unto death? Jesus uses the word "baptism": metaphorically here. He intimates His own death and also the subsequent resurrection. Thus baptism is here immersion in death and resurrection to eternal life. The fact that Jesus points to His death on the cross by this "baptism" is also clear from the context in which Luke reports interpreting the signs of the times for His disciples, Jesus said "But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished" (Luke 12:50). It is also clear from Paul's writing to the church in Rome "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-7).

Baptism is an Act of the Holy Spirit

The assertion heard from time to time that baptism with water has nothing to do with the Holy Ghost and that the soul receives nothing afterwards from the Holy Spirit, is untenable. First and foremost baptism with water is performed at the behest of Jesus in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. An action is either human, in all gradations of good and evil, or it is of the devil, or of God. For the believer in Christ it is not hard to recognize that baptism instituted by Jesus is a divine act, an act of the Holy Ghost. Where the Holy Ghost acts, there is performed a communication of the Holy Ghost that accords with this act. The God Head is never divided.

Why Child Baptism?

There are Christian groups that reject child baptism on inherently correct grounds that faith must precede baptism. Because neither faith nor understanding can be presupposed in the case of small children, it is felt that only adults should be baptized. It is true that nowhere in the Bible is there any mention of child baptism; but on the other hand the Scriptures say that children were not excluded from baptism when whole families were baptized. It is necessary therefore to look at specific passages in greater detail.

There is for instance the important story of the prison keeper at Philippi who had himself and "all his family" baptized (Acts 16:23-35). Previously, Paul had baptized in Philippi the seller of purple Lydia "and her household" (family) (Acts 16:14-15). He wrote further to the church at Corinth that he had not baptized many in this congregation "but Crispus and Gaius and the household of Stephanas (family)" (1 Corinthians 1:14-16). There is no reason to assume that all these families were childless.

There are other important reasons for child baptism. Jesus Himself gives us a clue to this. Children were once brought to Jesus, so that He might bless them. The disciples rebuked them but Jesus said: "Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16). Did the children understand anything of the significance of the laying on of hands and of the blessing? One could likewise ask: do children understand the significance of baptism by water? We

would ask the counter-question how many adults understand this completely? Indeed, the sacraments are incomprehensible to man. The child does not have the well-considered judgment of the adults, if indeed there can be any question of one. But adults should try to attain the child-like disposition, the trusting devotion of the child.

Even in the Old Covenant children were not excluded. Through the circumcision of boys which took place, according to divine decree, on the eighth day after the birth, they were accepted into the Covenant (Genesis 17:9-14). That was for the Jews a divine act, deeply anchored in faith. It cannot be assumed that the first Christians would have agreed to children being excluded from baptism, i.e. being denied acceptance into the New Covenant. Galatians 3:15-29 clearly gives authenticity to this belief. Jesus also on the faith of His earthly parents, was circumcised – Luke 2:21 “And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.”

There is another general point of view that relates to upbringing. Parents not only have the right, but even the duty, as long as their children are minors, to always choose the best path for them. They choose, for example, according to their best judgment, a specific school for the child. It may be that the child later criticizes the parents for this, objecting that he would have preferred, for example, to attend a trade school rather than a grammar school. But that does not change the fact that parents must choose; it is their duty and also their right.

In the case of child baptism it is the parents who lead the children to the altar on the basis of their belief, just as parents brought their children to Jesus and Jesus dismissed the misgivings of His disciples and laid His hands upon the children. Children are then, after prior instruction, given the opportunity on the day of confirmation, to take the vow of baptism and sealing. They are then responsible themselves for the growth of the life received from God, responsible for not letting it wither and die.

Immersion or Sprinkling?

It was customary for people to be immersed, both during the baptism by John and in the case of the Jewish baptismal bathing (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:5). Now and again it is maintained that baptism at that time always took place in the River Jordan. Certainly the baptismal act was often performed there by John and by Jesus' disciples. But John, who had baptized Jesus in this river, had already baptized in Aenon near Salim, where there was a lot of water (John 3:23). This place was not situated on the Jordan. It is clear therefore that baptism is not bound to one place and the question as to whether to immerse or sprinkle is not crucial. It must be assumed that immersion took place when there was sufficient water. This may be gathered from, for instance, the story of the eunuch of the Ethiopian queen Candace (Acts 8:26-40). After Phillip had explained to him that the Messiah promised by Isaiah was Jesus Christ the eunuch asked whether he might be allowed to be baptized. We read that they went to some water and that they both went down into the water. It can be assumed therefore that immersion occurred here. But when the apostles sent out by Christ baptized subsequently during their missionary travels, they definitely did not always perform this act in this way. We might recall the prison keeper in Philippi who took the prisoners Paul and Silas into his household (in or near the prison), washed their wounds and straightway had himself baptized with his family (Acts 16:33-34). After the baptism he laid the table for them. This happened "in the same hour of the night". There is nothing to say that they had gone (in the middle of the night!) to a river or deep water to be immersed.

Even in the story of Paul's conversion there is no mention of immersion (Acts 9:18-19). Ananias, a disciple of Jesus, laid his hands on Paul (Saul or Saulus) “And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose and was baptized ...” There is the strong suggestion that already at the time of the first apostles immersion was replaced by the simpler method of sprinkling with water. There is a flaw in the argument that baptism through sprinkling has no or less validity. The prophet Ezekiel in 36:25-27 uses the words "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean." Water and the act are only then signs, i.e. the symbols which point to that which really happens even if invisibly, namely rebirth in Christ. A symbol is never more important than that to which it refers! Throughout history it has been an error of logic to confuse the symbol with the thing itself.

The Unifying Bond of Baptism

We have already shown that all acts of God performed on humanity for humanity carry inherent obligations. This is why Thiersch (Catholic Apostolic Church) notes in one of his writings: "Our rootedness in Christ through which we partake of His existence is a divine act which man may well deny but cannot undo. It is irrevocable and eternally valid ... Through baptism the Christian receives an indelible stamp, which distinguishes him forever from the unbaptized, be it for salvation or damnation". – Similarly, Apostle Thomas Carlyle, one of the English apostles, writes "God's works are real and true. Whoever is baptized, is and remains a Christian, whether or not his life is worthy of the name.... otherwise God's judgment would be upon unfaithful Christians ... without reason and truth".

In the teachings on baptism a unifying bond has been retained in Christendom through God's grace. As a result all who receive baptism enter into a bond of brotherhood. In Ephesians 4:2-6 Apostle Paul writes: "With all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all".

7. HOLY SEALING

General

Everything that applies to baptism by water, namely that it has been retained as a unifying bond in Christianity, is unfortunately not true of the sacrament of Holy Sealing (anointing of the Holy Ghost with its gifts and powers through the laying on of hands). Indeed not even during the time when the church was under the leadership of the first apostles can sealing be shown to have been a constantly performed rite. Later the Roman Catholic Church resumed the doctrine of the laying on of hands, usually done by a Bishop. The Catholic Church calls it confirmation, understanding by it a personal taking of the baptismal vow and as continuation in the grace given at baptism. The Orthodox Church, too has continued to a similar rite usually by anointing oil traced back to the original Apostles. Then, after the reformation many combined the teachings of the laying on of hands, and of baptism by water. In other words, it was believed that all the values, powers, and meanings of sealing could be obtained in baptism by water. In the Protestant churches a variety of methods have been introduced, from the confirmation method by Bishops (Anglican) to no ceremony of the bestowal and around the gifts of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands.

After the Catholic (General) Apostolic Church had been established around 1830 in England as the result of prophecies and manifold testimonies of the Holy Spirit, the apostles came to the realization that the gifts and powers of the Holy Spirit needed again to be transmitted to believers through the laying on of hands. Consequently "ministries of sealing" were instituted, the first on 31st May, 1847 by Apostle Cardale in "The Central Church" in London. In Germany the first sealing was performed by Apostle Carlyle on 17th October, 1847 in Frankfurt on the Main. In Switzerland it was Apostle Drummond who performed the first sealing on 30th June, 1850 in Basle and in Holland this happened through Apostle F.W. Schwarz on the 5th May, 1864 in Amsterdam. As the various branches of the Church spread to other countries, this sacrament has been dispensed in those countries by various Apostles.

As our Lord had to be anointed (sealed) even though He was conceived by the Holy Ghost, so the Church (living members) also have to be anointed at sealing, even though they are baptized in the name of God the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The Laying on of Hands

Already in the Old Testament there is mention of the laying on of hands. On the Day of Atonement of the Israelites the sins of the people were transferred to a goat through the laying on of hands. The goat was then let loose in the wilderness (Leviticus 16:21). Here therefore the laying on of hands was regarded as a sign of the transfer of guilt. Through the laying on of hands Moses transferred his power and supreme authority to Joshua (Numbers 27:18). In the New Testament the laying on of hands is mentioned as an act of blessing in a sacramental and in a general sense, for example in the healing of the sick who believed in the power of Jesus. The laying on of hands was however much more significant when it was a question of transmitting and arousing the power and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

According to the author of the letter to the Hebrews, the laying on of hands was common knowledge and thus part of the gospel of the early church.

According to Hebrews 5:12 and 6:2 the writer comes up against the fact that he constantly has to teach some people about the beginnings of Christianity. He compares these Christians with "suckling infants" because they cannot bear the "solid food of the perfect ones" (adults) and still need "milk". He advises them: "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith towards God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment". Here the conclusion can be drawn that baptism by water and the laying on of hands are both related and separate acts.

Taking the Scriptures as a whole the laying on of hands has a fivefold meaning:

- with the transfer of sin,
- with the blessing of children,
- at consecration and ordination (ministry),
- when healing the sick,
- the bestowal of the Holy Ghost with its gifts and powers.

Thus the apostles practiced the laying on of hands in diverse ways.

The Meaning of the Word "Seal"

A seal is in most cases a wax or lacquer imprint on an object. Its purpose is, among other things:

- To verify the credibility of something. Thus in early times, for example, the princely seal was impressed on a document or decree. It contained the coat of arms of the prince so that everyone could tell that it was a princely decree.

– To express ownership. The seal of the owner was imprinted on valuable documents. With animals or even people (slaves) it was branded into their skin. Thus it was almost impossible for slaves to flee. This of course only happened to animals or slaves who weren't destined to be sold but who were always to remain the property of their master. It was customary to burn a seal, a mark, into the skin of the temple slaves or to tattoo them so that everyone could see at all times that they were forever the property of the gods.

– To lock something up so that unauthorized people discover nothing of the content, for example, of a letter. Secret messages were sent and still are sent today as sealed documents. If a statesman sends a secret to another statesman, only the recipient is entitled to break the seal. – In early times it was also customary to seal a will. Only the heir then had the right – was worthy enough – to break the seal at the appropriate time and to be apprised of the content.

In short: A seal is an acknowledgment of authenticity, a proof of ownership and a means of security.

Biblical Examples of the Word "Seal"

Mention could be made of the revelation of God given to Daniel in the Old Testament. He is shown a book in which, among other things, the time of great tribulation is named which will come over the earth and in which those who are written in the book will be saved. Daniel is commanded "Shut up the words and seal the book, even to the time of the end" (Daniel 12:4; Revelation 5, points clearly to this scroll at the end of time).

When Jesus had miraculously fed a multitude (John 6:26-28), He said to those present that they should not only think of food for the body but also of food "which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed". In other words; I am God's property and carry treasures within me which are now still hidden but which will see the light of day when I sacrifice my body (when I am "broken"). Its "content" is genuine and divine.

In the last book of the Bible mention is made numerous times of seals. This book is called "The Revelation of Jesus Christ to John". John had been exiled in old age to the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea. The era of the first apostles came to an end, but God does not desire mankind to succumb to darkness. Thus He commissioned His Son Jesus Christ to let John see the broad sweep of future events right up to the completion of the world. After this extraordinarily graphic report, John was shown a scroll that was "written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals" (Revelation 5:1-5). No one "in heaven nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon". But then he heard a voice: "Weep not: behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof". It is clear that Jesus is meant here. This is also obvious from the continuation, for in the next sections (Revelation 6) there is a description of how "the Lamb," i.e. Jesus, breaks one seal after the other so that John – and therefore the whole of humanity – may learn of the content of the scroll, i.e. the great events in the development of God's plan of salvation.

In Revelations 7:2-3 there is mention of an angel who had the seal of the living God. Thus he was recognizable as a true messenger of God. The angel commanded that the earth should not be hurt "till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads". God does not allow the proclaimed time of great tribulation which will come over the whole earth to begin until his own people are gathered (Revelation 3:10).

The prophet Ezekiel 9, foretells the role of the Church before the end time in doing God's work in the sealing or marking of those to be saved.

In the first letter to the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 9:2) Paul confirms that some did not acknowledge him to be an apostle, but he then says: "If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord". The church at Corinth had therefore received something in which the genuinely divine was recognizable. The life of the members of the congregation had demonstrated this. In 2 Corinthians 1:22, he writes that it was God who had sealed him and the church.

We see from these examples that frequently "sealing" is mentioned in conjunction with the "seal" of God. There is no doubt that this has a profound significance. Our belief is that, it is God that performs the sealing at all times, using His Apostles as the earthly medium.

The Sealing in Samaria

The evangelist Philip traveled to Samaria to proclaim the gospel. That was not easy for the following reasons: first of all there was enmity between the inhabitants of Judea (capital: Jerusalem), and the inhabitants of Israel (capital: Samaria). The Judeans regarded the Samaritans as "unclean". If an inhabitant of Judea touched the shadow of a Samaritan, there were grounds to wash. Into such an atmosphere Philip brought the gospel. Jesus had given His disciples the mission to "be witnesses both in Judea and in Samaria", therefore to witness before friend and enemy. The second difficulty was that in Samaria there was a sorcerer called Simon who was obviously capable of doing miraculous things, thereby drawing many people under his spell. We read that all, both great and small, listened to every word and said of him "this man is the great power of God". An extremely influential man! God however revealed Himself to Philip through signs and miracles so that in the end many men and women had themselves baptized, even Simon "the Magician"! When the apostles learned that there were many in Samaria who had accepted the Word of God, they sent Peter and John there. There something strange happened. The apostles confirmed that despite the many workings of the Holy Spirit through Philip, those who had been converted to Christ were not yet filled with the gifts and powers of the Holy Spirit. They had only been baptized in

the name of Jesus. So they "laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit". Even Simon the Magician had to recognize that something special had happened. He even offered the apostles money so as to be able to buy the means of bestowing the Holy Spirit. The apostles were incensed about this and Peter answered him: "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money ... and pray God if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee" (Acts 8:5-25).

We call the laying on of hands of an apostle of Christ, whereby the special workings of the Holy Ghost come about, Holy Sealing. The soul receives through this act the seal as the proprietary right of God who has entrusted all power in heaven and earth unto His Son Jesus Christ. We find confirmation of this in the letter to the Ephesians 1:3-14. Here Paul writes: "... in whom (Christ) also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession unto the praise of His glory".

Sealing is Performed by Apostles

1. The history of the church in Samaria (Acts 8:5-25) shows that the evangelist Philip certainly proclaimed the gospel and baptized in the name of Jesus, even in such a manner as to reveal genuine powers and signs, but nevertheless did not yet lay on hands. This was reserved for apostles Peter and John.

2. When Paul came to Ephesus, he met twelve disciples. Obviously he preached the gospel to them otherwise they would not have been disciples. Paul asked them whether they had already received the Holy Ghost. To his astonishment they answered that they did not know that there was a Holy Ghost! It turns out that they had been baptized according to the practices of John the Baptist. Paul explained to them that this was not sufficient if they wanted to belong to Christ. He baptized them in the name of Christ and then laid hands upon them. Then the Holy Ghost fell on them and they spoke in tongues and prophesied (Acts 19:1-6). Here too, was the laying on of hands after baptism by water. And here too, the laying on of hands, was performed not by a person who had proclaimed the gospel (Apollos, Acts 18:24) but by an apostle, an act that was associated with special powers.

3. When Paul was in prison and was expecting death, he wrote a letter to his beloved disciple Timothy. He charged him to continue his work and promised that he would pray for him day and night. But he also reminded him that the gift of God which was in him had to be continuously kindled "... that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands" (2 Timothy 1:6). Again it is demonstrated that through the laying on of hands by an apostle of Jesus Christ, gifts of the Holy Spirit are transferred. One could argue that Timothy had already received the laying on of hands, but we read that all the elders had done this to him (1 Timothy 4:14). Why? Paul travelled from one land to another. Churches were founded everywhere. The foundation of belief was often still unsound, and knowledge of the works of God was scanty. Paul wrote therefore to Timothy that he should remain in Ephesus to strengthen the congregation. Prophecies had been made about Timothy (1 Timothy 1:18) that had inspired in Paul such confidence that he entrusted to this young man a leading position. On the basis of these prophecies all the elders had laid their hands on Timothy as an affirmation of God's blessing upon his difficult work. It needs to be stressed that Paul had been absent at this time. He had been in Macedonia. On his return however, as already noted, he himself laid his hands on Timothy. The laying on of hands by elders was obviously no substitute for the laying on of hands by an apostle.

Baptism and Sealing – Two Separate Acts

In Protestant circles baptism is regarded as "baptism with water and fire" or "with water and spirit". We may recall the words of John the Baptist: "But he that cometh after me ... shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16); or, Jesus' warning to the amiable Pharisee Nicodemus "verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). Particularly because of this passage, the view is commonly held that there is only mention of baptism with water, or that baptism of the Spirit, performed in the three-fold name of God, is contained in baptism by water. It is true that the Holy Ghost is communicated in baptism. In the section "Holy Baptism by Water" we have tried to explain this. The soul receives through baptism not only a promise of salvation and blessedness; "something" that is of divine origin is also bestowed upon it. Everything that comes from God is a gift of His Holy Spirit or more accurately it is His Holy Spirit. Therefore it is correct to say that the soul receives the Holy Ghost during baptism by water. However a careful reading of the Bible must lead to the conclusion that in the first Christian congregations two different acts of blessing were performed, leaving aside Holy Communion for the time being. The most important references to them are now expounded one by one:

1. After the crucifixion of Jesus, when the disciples were gathered together behind closed doors in Jerusalem, for fear of the Jews, Jesus entered among them and said: "Peace be unto you! As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you". Then "he breathed on them" and said: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained" (John 20:19-23). Breathing on them was the communication of the Holy Spirit. Despite the fact that the disciples had already partaken of the Holy Spirit and without doubt were already baptized, they were also commissioned to remain in Jerusalem (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4), because at Pentecost they were to be filled with the strength and fire of the Spirit and to be equipped to carry out their task.

2. The aforementioned story of Samaria (Acts 8:5-25) tells us that after the baptism with water a further act was performed, namely the laying on of hands by the apostles.

3. The story of Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-9) tells us that there were disciples there who were only baptized "unto John's baptism". When Paul came into the city he baptized them in the name of Jesus Christ. "And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied". Here we have a total act as a whole, the laying on of hands as an

element of baptism with water. The comments we have made already – and those that follow – show however, that this is unacceptable. It is worth noting that prophecy and speaking in tongues (gifts of the Holy Spirit) are expressly mentioned as the consequence of the laying on of hands.

4. In the letter to the Hebrews 6:1-3, the writer complains that he has to discuss again and again the principles of faith: belief in God, baptism, teachings, laying on of hands. If the laying on of hands had been included in baptism with water, there would have been no purpose in singling out for particular mention the laying on of hands.

5. The conversion of Paul (also known as "Saul" or "Saulus" – Acts 9:1-19). Saul persecuted the Christians fiercely. It seemed to be a matter of honour for him to bring them before the courts. However he did this out of a real sense of conviction; he believed that this was pleasing to God. On his way to Damascus in Syria, where he was likewise to begin to persecute Christians, a light from heaven suddenly shone around him, and he heard a voice "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Saul fell to the earth and said: "Who art thou, Lord?" "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest". Saul was blinded, and Jesus commissioned him to go on to Damascus, where he would be told what he must do. The men who journeyed with him led Saul by the hand. In Damascus lived Ananias, a disciple of Jesus. The latter received a message from Jesus to meet Saul and lay his hand upon him. Even the name of the street and the house were told to him. Ananias was frightened and expressed his reservations. Saul was the notorious persecutor of Christians! Jesus answered: "Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel". Ananias obeyed, met Saul and told him the reason for his visit "The Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost". After Ananias laid his hands on Saul, his blindness was cured immediately and he was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then we read "... and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized ..."

The conversion of Saul has in the history of the evolution of God's salvation plan for mankind a special significance. As Paul was to become a chosen instrument in God's hand that he might bring His name before the Gentiles, he, the pious Jewish upholder of the law, had to first learn that salvation could no longer be expected from the law, but from Christ. Because of this conversion Paul was in a special position to explain salvation in Christ to those Jewish Christians who had lapsed into the belief in Jewish law. God's intention to let not only the Jews but also the Gentiles partake of salvation becomes clear in the conversion of the Gentile centurion Cornelius.

6. The conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10). Cornelius was a Roman officer, a centurion of the Italian band, the occupation troops. He was God fearing and well thought of – even among the Jews. An angel of the Lord commanded him to send men to Joppa where Peter lived. For this purpose Cornelius commissioned two of his household servants and a devout soldier. Peter at this time was on the roof of his house (the roof in those parts was a favourite spot for recreation, prayer, meditation) and saw in a vision a great sheet knit at the four corners wherein were all manner of beasts of the earth which according to Jewish law were unclean. A voice spoke "Rise, Peter; kill and eat". Peter however objected; "Not so, Lord for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean". The voice answered: "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common". This was done thrice. Peter was uncertain. What did God mean by this vision? Then Cornelius' men came and asked him to go with them to their Lord. This was a strange request as Jews do not enter the house of Gentiles because they regarded them as unclean! It was now obvious to Peter what the vision meant what God had cleansed, men could not make common or profane even if that went against the regulation hitherto. Peter went down with them to Cornelius' house. He, for his part, told him what the angel of the Lord had commanded him to do and he asked Peter to tell him what God had called him to say. Cornelius had also invited his family and friends, and to this group Peter now bore witness of Jesus Christ. While Peter was still speaking the Holy Ghost fell on all listeners, on both the Romans and the Jews whom Peter had brought with him. Peter then said that it was impossible to deny baptism to Gentiles who had received the gift of the Holy Spirit and he ordered that they be baptized in the name of the Lord.

There are parallels to be drawn here with the conversion of Paul. Here too we have the personal intervention of God, with the intention of making it clear to the Jews in general and to Peter in particular that Christ also died for the Gentiles, that the path of salvation had to be opened for them too, and that the Holy Spirit of God is not bound to a specific people or a specific race. This was a revolution in the thinking of Jews who believed in Christ! In itself this was redemption, namely from exaggerated national sentiment and racial prejudice!

Let us attempt to seriously consider what significance this story has. The first non-Jew who received the Holy Ghost and baptism was an officer of the hated occupational troops! Peter had to bear the responsibility for that. We read (Acts 11) how he had to account in detail for this occurrence before the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and also before his fellow apostles. But having carefully said all that, his brothers were convinced that God was at work there. They were appeased, thanked God and said: "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life!"

Two facts are highly significant in the conversions of Saul and Cornelius that the Holy Ghost was given before baptism took place, and that water baptism was still necessary after revelation and the bestowal of the Holy Ghost. Thus two separate sacred acts, two distinguishable sacraments which cannot be divided. Of all the Biblical passages there are only these two events from which we can see a departure from the order of occurrences, baptism with water – baptism with the spirit. Both events point to a revolution in early Christian thought.

We have demonstrated two cases without the laying on of hands by an apostle, namely:

1. Among the first Christians from the Old Covenant, the Jews who were chosen by Jesus to continue His work. They received the powers and gifts of the Holy Spirit through a special sign during the first feast of Pentecost after Jesus' death.
2. Among the first Christian Gentiles. It was the Roman centurion Cornelius with his family and friends.

It could be said that these incidents represented two turning points, two significant moments in the history of God's plan of salvation for mankind, moments when God Himself provided a direct revelation of His Holy Spirit.

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

We have seen that prophecies and speaking in tongues are gifts of the Holy Ghost. When the Holy Ghost was given to the apostles at Pentecost, the many foreigners heard from the apostles in their own language the testament of the possibility of redemption through Christ (Acts 2:1-13). It is Jesus who is referred to in Joel 2:32: "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered". There was great excitement and commotion, all the more because the speaking in tongues occurred through people who had not learnt these foreign languages. But as always when there are incomprehensible occurrences, there was also scorn and derision: "these men are full of new wine". One might ask why so many people from so many countries were in Jerusalem. The fact that Jerusalem was one of the largest trade centres should be considered. Moreover Pentecost was one of the festivals which the Jews, wherever possible, celebrated in Jerusalem.

This speaking in foreign tongues by uneducated men was certainly one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But there are many other gifts of this spirit as well. In his letter to the Romans 12:4-8, Paul compares the gifts with the members of a body. Just as a body is a unity, with different members (organs), of which each has its own task, so too the members of a church, with their different gifts, form the one body of Christ. And although one member does not control all the gifts, it is through the grace of Christ that gifts are given. As examples Paul cites:

- the gift of holding office (being able to serve);
- the gift of teaching (making testimony accessible and correct);
- the gift of exhortation;
- the gift of bestowing with a pure heart (communicating efficiently and simply the workings of the Word of God in one's own soul);
- the gift of prudent leadership;
- the gift of showing compassion with cheerfulness.

Paul also writes to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 12:1-11) about the many gifts of the Holy Spirit. Before he begins to name some of them, he remarks significantly: "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost". In other words the fact that someone recognizes that Jesus is truly Lord and king is already proof that in such a person the Holy Spirit has been at work.

We can therefore say emphatically that the workings of the Holy Ghost are not limited to the laying on of hands during sealing, but that the Holy Spirit is at work everywhere where new divine life is awakened or strengthened, whether it be through the Word in all its forms, whether it be through the holy acts (sacraments), or whether it be directly through a revelation of God, as for instance at the conversion of Paul. As gifts of the Holy Spirit, Paul also lists:

- speaking from the point of view of wisdom, which is quite different from speaking from a scholarly or a scientific standpoint;
- speaking from the knowledge of that which has been received from the Holy Ghost;
- belief; naturally not every belief; Paul adds therefore "in the same spirit," thus belief in Christ and in the teachings of the apostles the gift of healing;
- prophecy, i.e. the proclamation of a message from God, which is not always necessarily a message about the future, as is often erroneously held to be the case (the literal meaning of the word "prophet" is messenger of God) the gift of discerning spirits. The bible teaches us this gift can be for the edifying exhortation and comfort of members (1 Corinthians 14:3).
- the gift of many languages (speaking in tongues, known as glossolalia) words are spoken which are immediately incomprehensible for other people, so Paul;
- adds the gift of interpreting the language (tongues) to others.

It is clear that Paul did not make a complete list, otherwise the notes would accord with those in the letter to the Romans 12:4-8. Further gifts are, among others, love of truth, trust in God and in everything divine; steadfastness, gentleness, humility, simplicity, endurance, dreams, visions, revelations etc.

Many people think that the gifts of the Holy Spirit could only reveal themselves in a mysterious, supernatural way. Paul's account proves that that is not true. Paul even distances himself somewhat from one of the gifts, namely "speaking in tongues" (many languages, i.e. speaking in incomprehensible sounds). He asks the church at Corinth: "Except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? For ye shall speak into the air" (1 Corinthians 14:9). Later he adds: "Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue" (1 Corinthians 14:19). Speaking in tongues is a sign to those that disbelieve, while prophecies are for believers (1 Corinthians 14:22). Further to that he says: "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (1 Corinthians 2:12). That is also an important gift of the Holy Spirit. In his famous prophecy Isaiah 11:2 refers to this gift: "And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord".

There are many gifts but they all emanate from the same Holy Spirit of God. Dreams and Visions are also important gifts of the Holy Ghost, if discerned in the light of the Spirit.

Further Features of Sealing in the Light of Holy Scripture

1. Holy Sealing is (Baptism) anointing of the Holy Ghost

This can be seen in various Biblical passages: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance but he that cometh after me is mightier than I he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (Matthew 3:11). Mark puts the Baptist's message more briefly: "I indeed have baptized you with water but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost" Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16, uses the same wording as Matthew, and John (not the Baptist, but the disciple) reports: "Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost" (John 1:33). When Jesus sat down to teach His disciples once more after His resurrection and shortly before His ascension, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for the fulfilment of God's promise. "For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (Acts 1:4-5).

2. Rebirth

Holy Sealing is an important element in the process of rebirth. We have seen that baptism by water was also called "the washing of regeneration". But Paul added something to that: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Titus 3:5). The expression "washing of regeneration" (baptism) shows that it is possible to speak of spiritual renewal through the workings of the Holy Ghost. This renewal of the human spirit is assisted all the more through the bestowal and awakening of the powers and gifts of the Holy Spirit at sealing. At rebirth there commences a process of spiritual growth, just as, after natural birth, life as a whole is a continuous process of growth.

There is yet another passage which reveals that rebirth relates both to baptism by water and baptism by the spirit (sealing), namely Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, a well-known Pharisee and ruler of the Jews (John 3:1-13). Jesus told him that those who were not born anew would not be able to see the kingdom of God. It is understandable that Nicodemus did not grasp the importance of these words, thus his question how can man be born when he is old; can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born? Jesus answered: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee: except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit". This can only be interpreted as a pointer to the growth of the new creation or more accurately, a renewed human spirit, through the intervention of the Holy Ghost at baptism and sealing. Those who are of the opinion that "of water and of the spirit" refers solely to baptism by water, which is the case with many Christian churches, should remember the aforesaid promise of Jesus to His disciples which was fulfilled at Pentecost: "But ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (Acts 1:5). We have no reason, therefore, to assume that Jesus, in His encounter with Nicodemus, only meant by "rebirth of water and the spirit" baptism by water. Thus He said to John: "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one and there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit; and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one." (1 John 5:7-8). Here reference is being made to the three sacraments of baptism, sealing and communion which have a considerable part to play in the rebirth of the new man and must therefore be regarded as a unity. "Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature" (2 Corinthians 5:17). The fullness of rebirth to be as Christ, spirit first and body second. We have to be led to this day by the Holy Ghost.

3. First Fruits

Baptism and sealing together result in the calling of first fruits among all nations. Such people can and should bear witness throughout their whole life to the redeeming, liberating, saving, felt citous powers of the Holy Ghost in word and deeds, and thoughts and mind. James said: "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures" (James 1:18).

Paul wrote: "But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2 Thessalonians 2:13). This selection of first fruits of His creation can, according to Revelation 14:1-4, lead to the 144,000 souls which have the name of Christ and the name of His Father written in their foreheads and have been redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb. This shows that the state of being first fruits is connected with sealing ("written in their foreheads"). Other passages in Revelation speak of

"the seal of God in their foreheads" (Revelation 7:3-4; 9:4; 22:4). In our view the 144,000 is not to be taken literally. It is recognizable however that God knows the church of His Son most intimately, and marks it as His own through His seal.

4. Sealing is anointment

Sealing is anointment to royal priesthood. There are various convergences and parallels between the Old and the New Testaments. Such parallels are also called analogies. An analogy presupposes a good deal of similarity, without completely excluding differences. One of the differences between the Old and the New Testament is that the Old Testament only relates to a people – the people of the Old Covenant, the Jews – while the New Testament relates to all nations and peoples. No person of whatever race and nationality is excluded from becoming a Christian through baptism.

An important analogy is the act of anointing. In the Old Covenant every "male" child had to be circumcised. That was the sign of the everlasting covenant that God had concluded with the Israelites (Genesis 17:10-12). Within this so-called "Old Covenant" some were chosen for special anointment with oil, namely anointment to the priesthood (Exodus 28:41). Kings too were anointed and thus set apart from the public (2 Samuel 5:3). Here it has been overlooked that anointment now and then occurred as a mark of honour or for healing. We shall now give, as explicitly as possible, Biblical evidence of this analogy with the Old Testament act of anointing.

Paul clarifies the connection between sealing and the act of anointing: "Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Corinthians 1:21-22).

John writes that unfortunately there were some who had been influenced by the anti-Christ. "But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things" (1 John 2:20). The members of the church knew therefore that they had received a special unction. In verse 27 too, he speaks twice more of this act of anointing.

Christians who formed small communities within Gentile cultures and religions drew Peter's attention to the extraordinary status to which they had attained through God's grace: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people ..." (1 Peter 2:9).

Paul writes that through the disobedience of one person (Adam) all had become sinners but that very many were justified through the obedience of one man (Jesus). In this connection he then said: "... they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:17-18).

To Timothy he wrote almost the same thing: "... if we suffer, we shall also reign with him" (2 Timothy 2:12).

In Revelation Jesus turns to the seven churches in Asia. At the beginning of this book, John, bearing witness to Jesus, brought the following salutation: "... And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father" (Revelation 1:6).

The prophecy of the millennium in which Christ, after Satan's power has been contained, will become Lord Most High, says of the martyrs and all those "who had not worshipped the beast, neither his image": "On such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him (Gr.: "reign as kings") a thousand years" (Revelation 20: 1-6).

Almost at the end of this prophecy the New Jerusalem is described: "But the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it: and his servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads ... and they shall reign ("and they will reign as kings") for ever and ever" (Revelation 22:3-5). It should be clear that "reigning" is not meant in the customary, generally negative sense of dominating, of exercising power, etc. The gospels show this 'reigning' as a serving, helping, harmonizing task, however not in the often non-committal way in which this generally happens today, but truly with power and strength in the divine sense.

5. The Bridal Church

Sealing is amongst other blessings, a distinct advantage leading to membership of the bride of Christ – in different places Jesus calls Himself, and others call Him, the bridegroom. Where there is a bridegroom there is also a bride and a marriage is celebrated. Indeed, those who really follow Jesus and let themselves be fashioned into new creatures in Christ are occasionally called His bride (2 Corinthians 5:17). There are indications (Rev. 19:7) that at the second coming, the major occurrence will be the marriage of the Lamb.

Before we ponder the deeper significance of this symbolism, let us follow up the relevant passages:

The disciples of John the Baptist asked Jesus why His disciples were not fasting. Jesus answered: "Can the children of the bride chamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast" (Matthew 9:15; Mark 2:19-20; Luke 5:34-35).

John the Baptist bore witness of Jesus: "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom". John himself was not Christ but had only been sent to testify of Him. He even calls himself the friend of the bridegroom and rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice (John 3:28-29). Thus he too compares Jesus to a bridegroom and those who follow Him to the bride.

At the end of Revelation John sees a new heaven and a new earth and testifies: "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2-3, 21:9). Here therefore, new Jerusalem, another name for the kingdom of God, is compared to a woman who is adorned as a bride; and in the following verses (19-21) the city is described in a strongly metaphorical manner: the foundations are compared to precious stones, the gates to pearls, and the streets are made of pure gold, like transparent glass. – We have already pointed to the fact that no language has words to express appropriately the state of the soul. Every word we choose releases only a vague and imperfect image of that which is really meant. John resorted to images taken from the religious conceptual world of his time in order to represent the majesty of the new Jerusalem that will descend from heaven. This striving for appropriate expression is also manifest when he says that there shall be no more tears and no more death (Revelation 21:4), and that by contrast, "the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and ... liars will have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone". It is the community of those who are prepared as an "*adorned bride for their husband*". Without doubt the inhabitants of this realm will have a spiritual risen body. It is our conviction that there is an intensifying yearning on the part of mankind to escape the growing suppression and the destructive power of Satan, even if many are not conscious of this. People long for true freedom, true peace, light, warmth, comfort and redemption. Even if this is not applicable to every individual, the tendency is definitely there. For we understand the request with which Revelation concludes, indeed we can pray together: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come" (Revelation 22:17). The bride of Christ, the bridal church, is preparing itself, is adorning itself with divine attributes, that it might be worthy and ready when the bridegroom returns and "receives his own" (John 14:3). It is earnestly awaiting His promise: "Surely I come quickly" (Revelation 22:20).

Let us now turn to the deeper significance of the symbolism of bridegroom, bride and marriage. Why did Jesus choose these images?

At that time it was customary for the bridegroom to withdraw before the marriage while the bride adorned herself. At an agreed time the bridegroom was fetched by several young women, preferably maidens, who would accompany him to his bride. After that the wedding was celebrated, i.e. the union of the bridegroom with the bride. This practice casts light upon Jesus' parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13).

(a) Those who wish to be present at the wedding of the bridegroom have to take oil with them in order to light the way to the bridegroom. That means that for all who wish to be with Jesus it is necessary to be guided by the light of the Holy Ghost.

(b) The bridegroom left his bride at first but returned later to take her and to celebrate the wedding. – In the same way Jesus departed from His disciples, however with the promise that He would return in order to be united with His bride at the "marriage of the Lamb". And this is why He was able to say to the disciples of John the Baptist that His disciples did not need to fast yet, as they had the bridegroom still in their midst, and therefore had every reason to be joyful.

The Bridal Church Awaits its Bridegroom!

6. Sealing helps achieve a future Inheritance

Sealing helps the recipient to achieve a future inheritance. Many passages in the New Testament speak of a divine, heavenly legacy. Obviously this inheritance does not mean material goods or possessions or titles or privileges, but divine "goods" such as eternal joy, eternal peace, eternal guidance through the Spirit of God.

With few exceptions an heirloom is destined in general for the children of the testator. It can happen that children are excluded from an inheritance, for example due to unworthy conduct. But a child generally knows that he will one day inherit his parents' assets. Before then he is already drawing on the assets, for he receives food, clothing, shelter, and perhaps pocket money or an allowance, but he cannot yet use the entire assets. There have been court cases to furnish evidence that a certain person is really the child "of deceased, wealthy parents". Paul logically and unequivocally links the rights of children with heirship. He writes: "And if children, then heirs" (Romans 8:17).

The question arises who is a child of God? Not all people can be called children of God in the Biblical sense. They cannot be so by nature, but they become children of God through belief in Christ, in rebirth through baptism, and the workings of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are people who in their thinking, intentions and spiritual life take after God, as it were, and, like the only begotten Son of God, carry God's image within them". In this sense Jesus remarks in His sermon on the mount: "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God" (Matthew 5:9). Paul confirms: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God", and he adds: "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Romans 8:14-16).

John too writes about this but approaches it from a different angle by asking himself who is a child of the devil: "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother" (1 John 3:10). The common link that binds the above-mentioned accounts would seem to be the following: being a true child of God means that the reborn person has allowed himself to be guided by the Holy Ghost in such a way that this calling becomes visible in his life through works of peace, justice and brotherly love.

Paul said to the church at Ephesus: "... in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance" (Ephesians 1:13). Sealing with the Holy Spirit thus bestows on us something that can be regarded as a promise of a future inheritance. A security means two things.

One gives a creditor an object as a security, thereby guaranteeing him the payment of debt. If one neglects to pay one forfeits the security. There were even times when children or women were pawned.

A security does not always have to do with debt. In pre Christian times there were nations in which bride and groom presented each other with a ring as a sign of fidelity. The word "pledge" is used in this sense by the apostles.

Baptized Christians who are sealed with the Holy Spirit have received this spirit as a pledge. This means that God has given them the promise of His future inheritance. The Holy Ghost is both pledge and asset, allowing us to successfully claim the inheritance provided we avail ourselves of the grace distributed by this spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; 2 Corinthians 5:5).

The first epistle of Peter (1:3-5) establishes a connection between baptism and sealing on the one hand, and the right of inheritance on the other. The epistle was aimed at Christians who were living in despair and who needed to have their hope and trust in the fulfilment of God's promises strengthened. Peter writes that God the Father had "according to his abundant mercy begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you". Paul's letter to Titus (3:5-7) contains the same gist: "... but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life".

God has given us the "pledge", the Spirit. That is one side of the coin. But we must be willing to keep our baptismal and sealing vows towards God so that we do not lose the pledge. This is the other side of the coin. Those who love Christ truly will remain faithful until their last hour, and having overcome, will attain the final goal (James 2:5). Jesus says of such people: "He that overcometh shall inherit all things (namely, heavenly treasures); and I will be his God, and he shall be my son" (Revelation 21:7).

Just as the Jews as "the children of Abraham" were heirs to the Promised Land, so the children of God are the heirs to heavenly Jerusalem (Galatians 3:29; Romans 4:13-14). God's children love Jesus Christ; they follow Him, love their neighbours, are peace-loving, are faithful unto death and will overcome. For this, the soul has kept the Holy Ghost in rebirth as a pledge, as evidence of continuous faith, fidelity and love of God. That is a great gift of grace! It is therefore our task to make sure that the fire of the Holy Spirit does not grow dim or die out. We should be able to continually kindle it by attending to the Word and celebrating Holy Communion.

Requirements for Receiving Sealing

It should be clear that Holy Sealing cannot be received unless certain requirements are fulfilled. There are several criteria for this:

1. Belief in the mission of Jesus Christ as God's Son who has bridged the gulf between God and His creation mankind. Jesus' words are authoritative in this regard: "No man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (John 14:6).
2. Belief in the mission of the apostles. The apostles are commissioned by Jesus to continue His work and through the laying on of hands to bestow and awaken the powers and gifts of the Holy Ghost. We think here of the words of Jesus in His high priestly prayer: "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:18).
3. Holy baptism with water as a means of becoming a member of the body of Christ must have taken place.
4. The honest intention to behave in life as befits a child of God, so that the "image of Jesus Christ" is made visible (Romans 8:29). In short: our entire way of life must correspond with the faith that we profess. No word centred belief, but a deed-centred belief! "And I will shew thee my faith by my works" (James 2:18).

With baptism by water and sealing for children, it is the faith of the parents that is paramount. On various occasions when Jesus healed children the faith of the parents was decisive (Matthew 9:18-26; 15:21-28; 17:14-21).

A complete change of life and a complete knowledge of all matters of faith are not conditions for baptism and sealing. No one on earth can achieve this degree of perfection. If this were so, the grace of Christ would be redundant! Let us consider that almost all the letters of the apostles begin with the words: "Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father!" Thus the members of the church needed the grace and the peace to be given anew again and again, although they were baptized and sealed.

The will and the desire to do God's will must indeed be genuine, for every faith in God and in Jesus Christ will be tested for its authenticity (1 Peter 1:7). Jesus' perpetual war of words with the Pharisees was aimed at exposing hypocrisy. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess" (Matthew 23:25). It would be dreadful if such a thing had to be said of an Apostolic Christian.

An encouraging passage to conclude our beliefs about Holy Sealing:

"And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you".

8. HOLY COMMUNION

Introduction and Meaning of Communion

Preparation and Practice

On the Thursday before the Jewish Passover the disciples came to Jesus and asked him where they should prepare the paschal lamb. Thereupon Jesus commanded two of His disciples to go to Jerusalem. There they would meet a man carrying a jug of water: they should follow him. The owner of the house into which this man would go would show them a large room.

The two disciples found the house, just as Jesus had said, and there they undertook the necessary preparations. In the evening of the same day Jesus celebrated the Passover, the Jewish festive meal, with His apostles. During this Last Supper Jesus announced that one of His circle of apostles would betray Him (Matthew 26:17-25; Mark 14:12-21; Luke 22:7-13). "And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body. And he took the cup, and when had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it. For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." (Mark 14:22-25; Matthew 26:26-29; Luke 22:14-20) For all Christians these words are of the greatest importance. As can be seen from the following, their value is above estimation.

In Luke's gospel we read that Jesus handed them bread and wine, with the words: "This do in remembrance of me". Therefore in Christian churches (every Sunday in the Apostolic Church) communion is celebrated, in remembrance of the bitter suffering and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. We shall return later to the deeper significance of this shared meal which is also known as "the Lord's Supper". For the time being, we shall assert that this act – The shared celebration of communion – is seen by Apostolic Christians as a sacred event and is therefore, with baptism and sealing, a sacrament. From the various letters of the New Testament it is clear that the first Christian churches regularly celebrated communion together. This is particularly clear from the first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 11:17-34). Among other things Paul points to Jesus' words at the Last Supper: "This is my body, which is broken for you this do in remembrance of me". Remembrance is the interpretation of the word memorial, which means it must stand forever. Also we should dwell on the word remission, which means to take something away and replace it with something better. In this sacrament God takes away our forgiven sins and replaces with the righteousness of Christ.

Model in the Jewish Passover

There is a clear connection between the practice of Holy Communion and the celebration of the Jewish Passover, the Pesach or Passah (Aramaic). Because this connection between communion and the Passover is of essential importance for Christians, we have to look back at the origins of the Easter festival.

It is generally known that the Jewish people lived for a long time (430 years) in a part of Egypt in conditions that were close to slavery. It was there that Moses was commissioned by God to lead the people out of Egyptian slavery into the Promised Land (Canaan in Palestine). The Pharaoh (Ancient Egyptian title for a king) resisted with all possible force the departure of the Jews. Then Moses told the Pharaoh of God's command and said that great disaster would befall Egypt if he did not let the Israelites go.

In fact there was a period when Egypt was plagued by one disaster after another. After every plague the Pharaoh promised the Jews their freedom but did not keep his promise. Finally Moses announced the tenth plague: all the first born, both of men and of animals, would die in a single night. Acting under God's orders, Moses then commanded that every Jewish family kill a lamb, and on the evening of a certain day, strike its blood on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses. Afterwards the slaughtered lamb had to be eaten with unleavened bread (baked without leaven) and bitter herbs. They had to prepare themselves for a journey, gird their loins, put shoes on their feet and staffs in their hands ready for a quick departure. Then the tenth plague would come upon the Egyptian people. But every house that had the blood of the lamb on it would be protected from the death of the first born. That night the terrible drama in Egypt was accomplished, while the Jewish people were spared and under the guidance of Moses left for the Promised Land: a journey that was to last 40 years (Exodus 12).

Since this time the Jewish people have been celebrating Passover as a festival in memory of the departure from Egypt. This celebration has been going on for more than 3000 years. As in earlier times unleavened bread and the meat from a freshly slaughtered lamb are eaten. It was on the evening of this feast of remembrance that Jesus held the Last Supper with His apostles. The fact that God had this Last Supper – which in the Christian sense was the first Holy Communion – coinciding with the Passover meal is deeply significant because on the day after that Jesus entered upon His sacrificial death.

Communion and Passover – Past and Present

In the following section we refer to several parallels between the Passover on the one hand, and the events of the Last Supper, of Good Friday and Easter, on the other.

1. At Passover a lamb (or more precisely an unblemished, male, year old lamb) is sacrificed. Communion reminds us that Jesus sacrificed Himself. As a result He is often called the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29; Revelation 5).
2. The Passover Lamb was sacrificed anew every year. Jesus' sacrifice is unique and eternally valid.
3. Usually the enjoyment of bread and wine serves to sustain earthly life. At the celebration of Holy Communion, however, bread and wine are signs of Jesus Christ's broken body and the blood that He shed. Taking Holy Communion in faith produces powers that sustain and promote eternal life. John the Baptist said: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting Life" (John 3:36). Jesus Christ Himself bore witness to this: "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life: and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:48-56).
4. During the Passover meal the cup was passed around several times before, during and after the meal. The last time the cup was passed around was called the "cup of thanksgiving" – thanksgiving for the rescue from Egypt. When Holy Communion is celebrated the cup is the symbol of the New Covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 10:16).
5. The Passover remembers the liberation from slavery, the departure from oppression and the setting forth upon a better future in a land "flowing with milk and honey". Accordingly, communion means turning away from the old life, departure from the slavery of sin, the setting forth to the realm of God, the land of light and love!
6. During Passover unleavened bread and bitter herbs were eaten. At communion we partake of the "Lord's body", the heavenly manna. Just as unleavened bread contains no foreign ingredients or additives, so divine life in Christ is pure and true. It is perfect in itself. However this life of Jesus is "baptized again and again in bitter herbs". For Jesus this occurred through His crucifixion. For His successors bitter herbs symbolize scorn, derision, disgrace, persecution, the sacrifice of the self, the "crucifixion" of the old Adam. The blood on the door posts and top made a cross, symbolizing the Cross of Jesus. All who partake of Communion, see death pass over them.

Communion – Link with the Future

The celebration of Holy Communion does not only remind us of the past but points us also to the future. We have already mentioned Jesus' words that those who have eternal life and will receive the resurrection, eat of Jesus' flesh and drink of His blood: "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life" (John 6:53-58).

As we have already seen, the celebration of Holy Communion must be seen in connection with the departure for the kingdom of God. Communion is an essential element in the process of rebirth which has been effected through witness, baptism and sealing. There is a revitalization and a strengthening of rebirth whenever communion is celebrated in an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ and His sacrificial gift. When Paul rebuked the Corinthians for misusing and defiling the Lord's Supper, he added: "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come" (1 Corinthians 11:26). There was therefore a clear indication here of the future – the Second Coming of Christ.

Jesus rebukes the church at Laodicea for having many members who were lukewarm and indifferent, spiritually bankrupt, blind and spiritually impoverished. He admonishes them to mend their ways: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me". He adds: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Revelation 3:14-22). Here we recognize a clear pointer to Christ's Second Coming to establish the thousand-year realm on earth in which those who are reborn and have overcome will reign (serve) with him as kings and priests. The martyrs, the reborn, and those that withstood antichrist will then be united as bridal souls with Christ the bridegroom (Revelation 20:1-6). The Bible calls this union "the marriage of the Lamb". And "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:9).

Jesus' Last Supper with His disciples was the first meal in the new sense of the word. The "supper of the Lamb" will be the conclusion of a long time span in the history of the kingdom of God. Then shall Christ Himself reign on earth.

The Blood in the Old and New Testament

1. In antiquity blood was considered to be the vessel of life. It was believed that the soul dwelt in blood. This conception was not only prevalent among Jews but also among most other peoples. Consequently, Jews were not allowed to handle any blood when preparing meals. "No soul of you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger that sojourneth among you eat blood" (Leviticus 17:12). This command had already been in force since the time when the laws were given to Moses. The punishment for breaking this law was death (Leviticus 17:14).

Why was the spilling of blood considered a terrible sin? We find the answer in Leviticus 17:11: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood". In Deuteronomy 12:23 we read: "Only be sure that thou eat not the blood for the blood is the life". The blood of sacrificial animals was not allowed to be shed; it was simply used to sprinkle the altar. "For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul:" (Leviticus 17:11).

Jesus distanced Himself from these laws of Moses for he was to fulfill the law, but placed at the forefront the importance of the spiritual life: "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man" (Matthew 15:11). Not food, but unspiritual utterances defile the life of the human soul. We shall return later to the significance of blood with regard to the ministry of reconciliation.

It may have been the Old Testament prohibition on the consumption of blood that caused the apostles great trepidation when they heard the words of Jesus: "This is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many..." (Mark 14:23-24); and "he that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him" (John 6:56). We have already seen that it was Jesus' intention to let His disciples and followers partake of His being. Indeed they were to become perfectly one with Him. Those who eat or drink something can say what I have eaten and drunk I have absorbed and I live from it. Those who partake of Christ's being can say: He is in me, and I in Him.

2. Jesus' blood brings salvation and purification. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews compares Christ to the high priest in the temple. The high priest shed the blood of goats and calves. Christ however spilt His own blood, "thereby obtaining eternal redemption for us". Christ purges our conscience from dead works (Hebrews 9:11-14). Through this act we are saved from eternal death, eternal separateness from God's love. In the New Testament the blood is the symbol of the purging of soul and mind. John expresses this thought clearly in his first letter: "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). And in the powerful vision which John had on Patmos, he saw a throng of redeemed souls clothed in white. He was told: "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:14). The blood of the Lamb is the blood of Jesus Christ. Through His sacrificial death we have the possibility of attaining eternal life in Him. This covering was already prefigured in the Garden of Eden, when God had to spill blood to obtain the skins of animals as a covering for Adam and Eve. Likewise through the spilling of Christ's blood we can be covered by His righteousness.

We need to realize however that acceptance of the gifts of the Lord was never meant to be a passive receipt. We have to want to receive; we must ourselves struggle, believe, and follow the right path. We can have our natural clothes washed by others, without touching them ourselves. Our spiritual attire can only be washed white through Christ, not however without our active involvement by righteously combating our own sinfulness. Therefore Jesus says: "Strive to enter in at the strait gate" (Luke 13:24). And Paul advises Timothy "Follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith ..." (1 Timothy 6:11-12).

3. The blood of Christ is the sign of reconciliation with God. Through His sacrificial death Christ reconciled man to God. This is often misunderstood. This does not mean that man no longer needs to be reconciled to God, that he can sin no more or that his sinful conduct is already forgiven in advance. The meaning of reconciliation with God is as follows: man was separated from God through his disobedience towards Him and had become alienated from Him. Satan received power and had a claim over man. The intimate communion between God and man was shattered. In its wake two opposite tendencies had become visible in humanity the search for God on the one hand and the propensity for evil on the other. One man had to come who could not only point the direction and the way to God but was also in a position to re-establish the link with God; a person who broke through the chain of human failings, who fulfilled completely the law and will of God and sacrificed His innocent life for reconciliation with God. This person was Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Apostle Paul testifies of Him: "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:21-22). To the Romans Paul writes that Christ died for us and that we are reconciled to God through His death (Romans 5:8-11).

A clean slate has been made of man's past life. It now is the responsibility of each individual to decide for or against Christ. Being against Him means dwelling in sin and death. Being for Him means taking His guiding hand to step on to the bridge which spans the chasm between God and man. The apostles of Jesus Christ exhort and urge that we, today as then, cross this bridge: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20-21). Paul in turn refers to the fact that Christ died for us on the cross as if He Himself had been a sinner. John expresses this thought of reconciliation clearly and simply: "And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). "Herein is (God's) love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

4. Blood in the Bible is the sign of a covenant which God concludes with mankind. During the long journey of the Jewish people through the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land, God transacted a covenant with them. At God's command Moses built an altar out of twelve stones – one for each tribe of Israel – and had burnt offerings brought to it (Exodus 24:1-11). "And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words"(verse 8). From this moment on blood was the sign of the covenant between God and the Jews. Again and again, so it was promised, God would save His people from great tribulation and redeem them from their enemies.

With Christ's coming the covenant with God was placed on a worldwide level. God's salvation is there for all mankind, provided that man accepts God's Son Jesus Christ. Therefore Jesus says about the blood of the covenant: "For this is my blood of the New Testament which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28; Mark: 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25). We mentioned earlier that circumcision provided access to the Old Covenant and baptism to the new. The blood of animals is a sign of the

Old Covenant. In the New Covenant, it is the blood of Christ which is shed not only for one nation but for the redemption of the whole world.

Bread as the Sign of Christ's Body

When Jesus had once fed a multitude of 5000 in a miraculous way with five loaves and two fishes, the people exclaimed: "This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world". People even wanted to make Jesus king by force, but He departed again into a mountain alone (John 6:1-15). People were obviously no different than today, eating and drinking, obtaining their material needs – even if it occurred in such an impressive and sensational way. People are happy to entrust themselves to those who can perform such acts. Such a person can become a king, thereby assuring a good, material existence. When the people sought Jesus on the next day after this experience and finally discovered Him, He said to them that they had not come to hear His message of eternal salvation and to receive spiritual strength and refreshment from Him, but to be fed again in a miraculous manner. "Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed" (John 6:26-27).

The people reminded Jesus that a miraculous meal had been eaten in the past. When Moses led the Jews through the desert and they had nothing more to eat, manna fell from the heaven, that each day nourished the people anew. Thereupon Jesus stressed that not Moses but God had provided the manna from heaven. But now the true bread of heaven had come which would give life to the world. "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). Jesus continued the analogy with the manna in the following words: "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38).

The people did not understand Him. They grumbled about the fact that Jesus had said: "I am the bread that has come from heaven". Did they not know His parents? Jesus saw their doubts and repeated emphatically: "I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6:41-51).

Again the Jews did not understand. Who could blame them? "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Jesus repeated in different words that only through the acceptance of His flesh and His blood could eternal life be gained. In this passage Jesus compared Himself eight times with the bread of heaven, always adding, that eating this bread leads to eternal life. We must consider therefore this part of John's gospel to be one of the crucial utterances of Jesus.

The Bread of Heaven

Since time immemorial bread has been a widespread food. It lies in the nature of the thing that it stills hunger only temporarily and cannot prevent death. The "bread of heaven" should likewise serve as food to all people in all ages. However it does not have temporal but eternal significance because it is spiritual food. Merely speaking about bread does not satisfy hunger and it does not revitalize. Rather, it must be consumed and digested by the body.

Accordingly, it makes little sense to speak only of Jesus Christ. We must adopt Him in our hearts. Our life must be one with His. Only then can His life develop in us. That means "eating his flesh and drinking his blood", or, as a symbol for this, eating bread and drinking wine.

The conversion of bread into energy for the physical body is, in fact, a marvellous process which the eye cannot perceive. It is even more miraculous that we receive strength for our eternal life through the acceptance of the "bread of life". When hunger and thirst are satisfied, we feel fortified again and filled with new energy. We even say sometimes: "I feel like a new man a new lease of life". Accordingly, we must become new people, new creatures in Christ, through the acceptance of the "bread of life" (2 Corinthians 5:17). It is God's intention to form the reborn person in the image of His Son Jesus Christ, within a spiritual growth process (Romans 8:29).

Healthy, diligent people do not refuse food. They need regular nourishment. They know that irregular eating is injurious to health. Why should this not also apply to the "health of the soul"? Indeed it should! Those who neglect themselves by not receiving the bread of life remain spiritually dead and separated from God.

Only those people who had shaken off the yoke of Egyptian slavery and had set out for the promised destination, the land of Canaan, could enjoy manna, the bread of heaven, which God sent to the people of the Old Covenant during their wanderings in the wilderness. In a metaphorical sense that is true even today. The only people who receive the "bread of heaven" are those who have the courage of faith to reach God's kingdom through the "wilderness of life" after much toil and struggle.

At the beginning of recorded time the Italian cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum were buried under masses of lava from Vesuvius. Excavations this century have shown that large parts of these cities remained almost intact. Thus we can still see a bakery with its baked bread from that time. However well preserved this bread is, we cannot enjoy it any longer because it is completely petrified.

Unfortunately "bread of life" is offered repeatedly which, while it looks like bread to the beholder, is so stale and petrified through empty traditions and prescribed doctrines that it has lost its nourishment altogether. The life force has disappeared from it. As far as the bread of life, Jesus Christ, is concerned: "As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me" (John 6:57).

The Bible shows the great benefit to those who partake of this bread. After the resurrection of our Lord, we can read in Luke 24:13-35 how He walked with the two disciples who did not recognize Him. He explained to them, by His words the scriptures concerning the recent happenings but still they did not know Him. We read that the recognition only came when – verses 30-31, "And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him: and he vanished out of their sight." We see when we partake of the bread, converted to His body, we have a greater opportunity to know Him.

The Meaning of Communion

We can summarize what we have said already as follows:

1. Holy Communion is a meal of remembrance (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25). With communion it is not simply a matter of remembering the Passover feast that Jesus had with His disciples, but more than this, we should be conscious of the fact that Jesus sacrificed His body and His blood for us, in order to reconcile us with God. It is possible to remember something in a strictly objective sense, without the heart taking part in this. Whenever we recall an occurrence that has made a great impression on the soul, the same feelings are always awakened. We then experience the event again. We are once more in the same situation; we feel the same joy or the same sorrow. Depending on the nature of the occurrence, this re-experiencing can be positive or negative. Remembering distressing war experiences can perhaps be very burdensome. The remembrance of Jesus' Last Supper, the empathy for His sadness in regard to the rejections of His message from His own people, the remembrance of His path of suffering and sacrifice – all this also has its consequences we can be profoundly moved and our hearts can be opened to salvation in Jesus Christ. The celebration of Holy Communion should be understood as a co-experience in which our whole being body, soul and mind – participates. "I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings" (Psalms 77:12).

2. As well as remembrance, the celebration of Holy Communion makes possible a fellowship with Jesus Christ. We are permitted to sit at the Lord's table. Through His invitation and His welcome, the meal becomes a real meeting. A genuine communion between mankind and Jesus Christ takes place. Isn't this reminiscent of the parable of the Prodigal Son? The son opened his heart and went to his father. The latter welcomed him and in this way the meeting was turned into a feast (Luke 15:11-32).

Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, emphasizes the significance of fellowship with Christ at communion "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? ... I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.... Ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils" (1 Corinthians 10:16 and 10:20-22).

Communion is a meeting with Jesus Christ in which we have fellowship with Him and in which contact is established between God and man. In addition those who take part in the Lord's Supper experience fellowship with one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, as the children of God. The experience of fellowship, the feeling of being united with brothers and sisters, is probably strongest whenever Holy Communion is celebrated together.

3. The celebration of Holy Communion is a renewal of the covenant. As Jesus handed the cup to His disciples, He said: "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24). Here Jesus Himself establishes the nexus between the celebration of Holy Communion and the New Covenant. Remission means to take something away and replace it with something new. When we partake of Holy Communion worthily, our repented, forgiven sins are taken away and replaced by Christ's righteousness. Our heart can then be a dwelling place for the Holy Ghost. His blood is the sign of this covenant. Compare the following passages in this connection "There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Romans 11:26-27). "And the redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob" (Isaiah 59:20). "But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel ... for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jeremiah 31:33-34).

To the Christian Gentiles in Ephesus, Paul wrote that although they had been aliens of the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, they who had earlier been far off, were now made nigh by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:11-13). The Christian Jews addressed in the epistle to the Hebrews, on the other hand, had to put out of their minds the thought that the high priest in the temple was the mediator between God and man. The writer of this letter points several times to the fact that Jesus is the mediator of a new and a better covenant (Hebrews 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). We read further in Hebrews 9:13-14: "For if the blood of bulls and of goats ... sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who ... offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience ". Here Jesus' sacrificial blood is compared to the blood of animals, with which, In the Old Covenant, the altar and occasionally also the sacrifices were sprinkled, as a sign of reconciliation to God (Exodus 24:8).

The New Covenant has become a reality in and through Jesus Christ. If we follow Jesus Christ He is our ally until the end of the world. God and Christ remain faithful to this covenant until eternity! The onus is on us to remain equally faithful!

4. Communion reminds us of the future of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote: "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Here Paul refers to the Second Coming, the hope and comfort of Christians. We recall John's vision. He saw a vast multitude that no one could count. Their clothes were washed in the blood of the Lamb, the crucified Christ. This is the multitude of souls which is protected in the great tribulation that shall come over the earth. God will wipe away all tears from their eyes, neither will they hunger or thirst (Revelation 7:13-17). Manifest here is the connection with Jesus' words: "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger: and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). Those who remain constant in the teachings of the apostles, in fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer, discover sources of blessing that lead to redemption.

As a meal of remembrance Holy Communion connects the past with the future. In this celebration past, present and future are one:

- we commemorate the past again,
- we experience here and now fellowship with the Lord and with our brothers and sisters,
- we look to the future, to the fulfilment of the promise of Christ's Second Coming.

5. Holy Communion signifies purification from sin and reconciliation with God. Through the sacrificial blood of Christ man is washed clean of his sin. Christ is the high priest of our profession. He is the sole mediator between God and man. His sacrificial death on Golgotha brings about reconciliation with God.

6. Through Communion the Holy Ghost becomes life within us (John 6:53).

9. ON THE PRACTICE OF REMISSION OF SINS AND OF HOLY COMMUNION

The Bible Teaches that there is Forgiveness of Sins

In the Old Testament there is already mention of the forgiveness of sins. Once a year – on the great day of atonement – the high priest, through the laying on of hands, transferred the sins of the Jewish people to an animal, a goat, and then drove it into the desert. "For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, that you may be cleaned from all your sins before the Lord" (Leviticus 16:20-34).

When King David had committed a grave sin, the prophet Nathan reproached him for it. In those days one needed a lot of courage to do such a thing! It could have cost the prophet his life. But David acknowledged his guilt: "I have sinned against the Lord". So Nathan was able to say: "The Lord also hath put away thy sin" (2 Samuel 12). In Psalm 32, David raised a song of praise for the blessing of confession, and the forgiveness of sins.

It can be demonstrated that even in the Old Testament there was a possibility for the forgiveness of sin. But still there was nothing about the intercession of a single person between God and man, nothing about the fact that only one authority had the power to forgive sins. On the day of atonement it was the high priest who appeared as this person. At other times, possibly in David's time, it was a prophet. In the New Testament Jesus alone has the power, from God to forgive sins, since "... he is the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 2:2). And whenever the apostles empowered in His name, forgive sins, it occurs solely through His authority. In the Old Testament Jeremiah already referred to the remission of sins: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah ... I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, ... for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jeremiah 31: 31-34).

In Jeremiah 33:8 we find the same promise repeated. Paul too reminded the Romans of this promise, with the words: "For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins". But he added that it was Zion's redeemer who would deliver them from ungodliness (Romans 11:26-27). In the epistle to the Hebrews the passage from Jeremiah 31 is taken up again – a pointer to its importance (Hebrews 8:8-12; 10:16-17).

Jesus Christ – the Redeemer from Zion

Jesus Christ is the redeemer of Zion promised in Jeremiah (Zion = symbol of the Christian Church striving for the Kingdom of God). Paul referred to this on various occasions. In Antioch he said: "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38-39). Paul wrote to the church at Corinth: "To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

On several occasions Jesus used His power to forgive sins. When a man sick with palsy was brought to Him, He said: "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee" (Matthew 9:2) Certain of the scribes considered this to be blasphemous. Jesus reacted in a surprising manner; He said: "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house" (Matthew 9:6-7).

When Jesus was once the guest at the house of a Pharisee, a woman came up to him who had sinned greatly. She cried, wetting Jesus' feet with her tears. With her hair she dried Jesus' feet and afterwards anointed His feet with an expensive ointment. The Pharisee said to himself "This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him for she is a sinner". But Jesus knew that this woman had dedicated to Him the most costly thing that she possessed. "And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven". He dismissed her with the words "Thy faith hath saved thee" (Luke 7:36-50). Belief in Christ and love for Him were the reasons for the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus' Commission to His Apostles

We have seen that Jesus had received from His Father the power to forgive sins and that He frequently made use of it. However it was not God's intention to offer His grace solely to those whom Jesus met during his work in Palestine. Grace is for all peoples and for all generations. Therefore Jesus empowered his apostles with that same instruction that he had been given (John 20:21) "As my Father hath sent me, even so I send you" giving them the power by the Holy Ghost to grant forgiveness of sins from God, through the intercession by our High Priest Jesus Christ. We read this clearly in John 20:23 and in Matthew 18:18. We emphasize that this instruction was given to all the apostles. These Biblical passages cannot be interpreted in any other way. The often stated opinion that only Peter was accorded this power is erroneous. Those who are of this opinion have misunderstood the Biblical passage that is cited to substantiate this opinion. So that this text can be understood correctly, we shall quote and discuss it. Jesus once asked His disciples: "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the

Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:13-20).

Thus Jesus asked everyone the question "Whom say ye that I am?" Peter answered: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God". And then Jesus said that He would build His church upon this rock. (*This faith in Christ*), is therefore the foundation, upon which the church should be built. Peter answered for everyone and so everyone also received the same power. In the above mentioned gospel of Matthew we can read again the same words that were directed to Peter but which are now directed to everyone. "Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 18:18). Further Biblical passages which make it clear that the commission and power is given to all apostles can be found in Matthew, Chapter 10 and John, Chapters 14–17. We must understand clearly that our Lord was promising the power to forgive sins to His Apostles, that they would have to teach to the world. Matthew 20:22-23 "And he had said this, he breathed on them and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them: and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." It is clear that it is the Holy Ghost who will forgive the sin.

Steadfastness in the Breaking of Bread

Since the foundation of the church the celebration of Holy Communion has been a fixed part of the Christian church service. It should remain so until the "marriage of the Lamb". Originally the Lord's supper was held at the house of one of the church members; later it was held at other gathering places. In Acts 2 we read of the life of the church in Jerusalem. They shared their possessions and in their houses broke the bread together with joyful and simple hearts. This "breaking of bread" certainly does not refer to a normal meal. Moreover, we are probably justified in drawing the conclusion that the first apostles, as commanded by their Lord, carried out the breaking of bread in the celebration of Holy Communion, as an essential part of the profession of faith in Jesus Christ. This can also be seen in verse 42: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers". These are the essential elements in the life of an Apostolic Christian:

- acceptance of the teachings of the apostles as the ambassadors of Jesus Christ,
- maintaining the church through attending church services and through active participation in the life of the church,
- seeking the grace of Christ through repentance and forgiveness of sins,
- participation in Holy Communion,
- an inner life of prayer, both individually and collectively.

Two comments in this regard:

1. The teachings of the apostles must never be anything but the teachings of Jesus Christ. Nothing may, or should, be added or taken away from these teachings.
2. Anyone who says that he believes in God and in Jesus Christ but does not think it necessary to attend church services and participate in the life of the church is demonstrating a horrifying degree of misunderstanding of the nature of Christian life. (Hebrews 10:25)

Forgiveness of Sins Precedes Communion

The Bible describes someone who has received God's grace as "justified". Paul refers to our justification through the blood of Christ (Romans 5:9-10; Titus 3:7). He emphasizes many times that man cannot be justified through his good works but only through the grace of God (Romans 3 and 4). God's grace alone bestows justification when sins are forgiven through the power of the Holy Ghost and redeemed through the blood of Christ. Recognizing this is a matter of faith. Paul emphasizes clearly that atonement of human beings before God is not possible without faith. Because the Lord's Supper is a sacred act, in which the faithful experience a union with Christ, it is necessary for everyone who believes in Christ's mission to participate in this meal with a sincere and pure heart. In the parable of the marriage feast Jesus tells of a guest who appeared at the wedding feast not wearing a wedding garment. The king had this man cast into outer darkness (Matthew 22:1-14). Jesus gave here a clear instruction before participating in the Lord's Supper, one must have purified one's "spiritual" clothing. This is why, in church services of the Apostolic church, sincere repentance and forgiveness of sins precedes Communion. So that this remission of guilt does not become an empty and hence meaningless ritual, a particular attitude on the part of the believer is necessary.

Requirements for the Forgiveness of Sins

We cannot expect God to forgive our guilt if we come before Him in the wrong frame of mind. What inner attitude should we then regard as the requirement for the forgiveness of sins?

1. Faith must be considered the most important requirement – faith that Christ had bridged the gulf between God and man, and that God through Him reconciled the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19). We call to mind the story of the sinful woman, to whom Jesus said: "Thy faith hath saved thee" (Luke 7:50).

2. Furthermore, the acknowledgment of our own sins is essential, and as a consequence of this acknowledgment, sincere repentance is necessary. The sinful woman's tears showed a deep remorse regarding her way of life. Even David acknowledged his grave guilt towards God. On his travels spreading the gospel, Paul preached to both the Jews and the Gentiles that they should repent and turn to God (Acts 26:20). It is written of the Ephesians: "And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds" (Acts 19:17-18). The importance of acknowledging and confessing our own sin can be seen from the story of the malefactors on the cross. One of the criminals who was being crucified with Jesus railed at Him. The other however saw his mistake: "We receive the due reward of our deeds." In this way he confessed his misdeeds and then asked Jesus: "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom". This criminal then received the greatest conceivable grace when Jesus said to him: "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:39-43). Finally we should mention the passage from the epistle of John: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Confession of guilt means: acknowledgment of our sins and repentance!

3. Important is the readiness to forgive from our hearts those who have sinned against us, offended us or hurt us. In the Lord's Prayer Jesus teaches His disciples to pray: "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12; Luke 11:4). Jesus added: "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14-15).

Jesus shows through a parable how necessary is the readiness to forgive. He tells His disciples of a king who wanted to sell a servant with his whole family because the latter could not pay his debt of ten thousand talents. The servant begged the king for mercy. The king was moved with compassion and forgave him the debt. The servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who still owed him a hundred pence. And he, who himself had been forgiven a great debt, took him by the throat, and demanded his money back and even had him imprisoned until everything was paid. When the king heard that, he became angry and delivered the heartless servant to his tormentors till the debt was paid in full (Matthew 18:29-35).

The crux of this story is clear. If we have received much forgiveness ourselves, then it is a disgrace not to forgive another person a much lesser failing. This invalidates the mercy received. Jesus adds the following words to the parable: "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses" (Matthew 18:35).

4. A further condition for receiving forgiveness of sins is the honest desire, as far as it is practicable, to compensate for the damage which has arisen through our own guilt.

Linked with that must be the firm will to improve. A good example for this is the conversion of Zacchaeus the publican (Luke 19:1-10): "And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold". Thus forgiveness is possible, even if the offence is still considerable: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1: 18). In other words living a better life must follow forgiveness of sins! Thus Paul writes to the church in Ephesus:

- put away lying and speak the truth,
- let not the sun go down on your wrath,
- let him that stole, steal no more,
- let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth,
- be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you (Ephesians 4:32).

Is it not in keeping with our conception of honesty and decency that we make good an injury that we have caused? Thus we can add, if you have hurt someone ask that person for forgiveness, but if you have injured someone, make good this injury. If you have maintained something unjustly, do not be ashamed to retract this statement. Your reputation will not be diminished by the fact that you confess to mistakes.

5. How often do we have to forgive? God continually sends His grace anew. Thus we should always forgive again. That is difficult for many and Christians are no exception. But those who really believe in Jesus Christ and love His works will be capable of forgiving others anew. God's grace is so bountiful that it passes human understanding. We however often think that we have achieved big things when we found ourselves prepared to forgive another person. Peter wanted to take that one step further. He felt the magnitude of God's mercy and wanted to pay in kind. "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?" Jesus gave an answer that was no doubt bewildering "I say not unto thee. Until seven times: but, until seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21-22). In other words, God's grace knows no limits and our mercy should also be without bounds. Let us reiterate that only those who have a great faith in God and much love for the Father and the Son are capable of putting this into practice. But they must also evidence a good deal of love for their fellow men. We need to remember that the noblest command is still to love God with our whole heart and to love our neighbour as ourselves. We ask forgiveness for our own sins daily. Do we do the same for our neighbour?

The decisive element in the forgiveness of sins is not the severity of the offence but faith, acknowledgement and confession of guilt, the desire and resolution to do better henceforth, and the readiness to practise forgiveness ourselves. Only then does the

forgiveness of guilt make sense for then we can begin anew: then the spiritual growth of the new creation can continue. This can only be achieved if we become humble.

6. We conclude our observations on the forgiveness of guilt by once again referring to the important nexus between the forgiveness of sins and redemption. In the Lord's Prayer the fourth request reads: "... deliver us from evil (wickedness)." God not only wishes to forgive the guilt of sinners who honestly confess and ask for mercy; He also wishes to redeem us, i.e. to free us from the power of evil which again and again drives us to sin before God and man. The redeemed person from now on is no longer subject to the power of evil. The redeemed man no longer needs to serve the "original seducer". In him the new creature in Christ becomes more and more visible. Unfortunately so many individuals remain, despite much forgiveness, unredeemed, "old" sinners. Paul writes to the Corinthians: "We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain" (2 Corinthians 6:1).

We are all reminded that sin can be a sin of commission or also of omission, meaning the things we do or the things we should do and do not. James 4:17 "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

Holy Communion is a Feast

Although Communion reminds us of the passion and death of Jesus Christ it is nevertheless a festive meal, The renewal of the covenant, the purification of the soul, reconciliation with God, and the hope made alive of the fulfilment of Christ's promises with regard to His Second Coming hearten us to participate in the Lord's Supper with joy and thanksgiving.

When Jesus proclaimed His departure from the earth He pointed out that the world would rejoice but that His disciples would be saddened. "And ye now therefore have sorrow but I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you" (John 16:20-22). The gospel is the good news! When their faith is genuine, Christians are joyous people.

When a person is downcast and sad there can nevertheless be joy in his heart, Paul meant that when he told of his work for Christ, mentioning that he was sad (because of set-backs and opposition), yet always rejoicing (2 Corinthians 6:10). The apparent contradictions he names in close succession sad, yet always rejoicing! Anyone who commits himself to Christ's work will understand this strange statement; The disciples of John the Baptist once came to Jesus and asked Him: "Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?" Jesus answered: "Can the children of the bride chamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them?" (Matthew 9:14-15).

Communion and fellowship with Jesus mean walking joyously the path of life! Many passages in the New Testament mention the joy of Christians John writes: "... our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full (1 John 1:3-4). This joy has radiance. It is not a deafening, superficial or even arrogant joy but an inward joy, deeply anchored in the soul. We must imitate the first Christians in this regard: "They did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people" (Acts 2:47).

The Reservation of the Sacraments and the Celebration of Communion – A Holy Act

The fact that Jesus said: "Eat this bread, it is my body, drink this wine, it is my blood", has led many Christians to assume that this utterance has to be understood literally. The reservation of the bread and wine is however no magical occurrence. Bread and wine do not change. They are the symbol, the sign of spiritual union with Christ. That does not mean that nothing essential occurs during this process. In this process there are changes not to the bread and wine but to the human soul and mind. The experience of union with Christ has a purifying, cleansing and gladdening effect which we discern in human behaviour. That is miraculous enough in itself. The gifts and powers, however, which become active when the sacraments are blessed, cannot be explained. They remain invisible. For this invisible act bread and wine therefore serve as visible signs. In faith we believe in a miracle conversion.

In contrast to many other Christian conceptions and practices, we celebrate Holy Communion not only in remembrance of Christ's passion and death but also above all as a means of grace, a sacrament, that guarantees us fellowship with Christ in a mysterious way. There is no reason to believe that Holy Communion should be celebrated only several times a year. We might refer again to what was written of the first Christians: "And they continued daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house ..." (Acts 2:46-47). Thus in the Apostolic Church communion is celebrated every Sunday as the high point of the service. Forgiveness of sins and communion steel us, free us, and strengthen our will to live decisively according to God's Word. It is not those who cry "Lord, Lord" who will enter the kingdom of heaven but those who do the will of the Father.

It speaks for itself that such an important act should not be performed in an unworthy manner. It is a privilege, a grace, to be allowed to take communion. Unfortunately, it has been shown by past and present practice that not all Christians appreciate this.

It is even possible to participate in communion in an unworthy manner. That was the case, for instance, in the church at Corinth. Paul devoted to this problem a large part of his first epistle to this church (1 Corinthians 11:17-34). Paul expresses his profound disapproval and warns insistently that in this sorry state of affairs the people are sinning against Christ Himself. Among the church members there were some who had abandoned themselves to fornication (1 Corinthians 5:1). Among them were also extortioners, idolaters, railers, drunkards, thieves, adulterers and child abusers (1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:10; 10:14-22). Paul said that they should have nothing to do with such people, even if one of them "would call himself brother". Paul desired that such members, if they did not turn

to God, should leave the church and therefore not be allowed to take communion. He referred to the fact that there were people among the communicants who caused disunity and schisms, and consequently great damage (1 Corinthians 11:18-19).

There were also some who used the opportunity to eat a lot and to drink plenty of wine. Some even became drunk (1 Corinthians 11:21-22). Such people were sinning against the body and blood of the Lord and making it hard for the needy members of the church. When we read such things we could ask the question were they Christians at all? We must consider however that Corinth at that time was a large international port where moral standards were very low, as is incidentally still the case in many ports today too (and not only there). Any one saved from such a way of life and introduced to Christ's church certainly had a struggle forsaking the former life style and adapting fully to the new life in Christ. The withering of the "old man" requires of course a lot of energy and endurance. Hence we should not judge the church at Corinth too harshly but rather we should critically examine the state of our own hearts.

In other churches at that time too, the degree of worthiness at communion left much to be desired. In the short epistle from Jude (a brother of Jesus) several church members are called "spots in your feasts of charity" (Jude 12). Obviously the reference here is to members who participate in communion in an unworthy manner. Paul even saw a connection between the unworthy participation in communion and the many cases of illness in the church "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep" (1 Corinthians 11:30).

In the Old and to a large extent also in the New Testament we find the conception that sin and sickness are closely interconnected, i.e. illness was always the consequence of sin. The Lord's disciples also held this belief. When Jesus and His disciples met a blind man they asked the Lord; "Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents but that the works of God should be made manifest in him". Jesus then healed him (John 9:1-3). Jesus taught His disciples that illness does not always have to be the result of sin. On the other hand, we should not set aside the standpoint of the apostle Paul as "old-fashioned" or "unscientific", for in medical science, psychology and psychiatry it is today an unchallenged principle that there is a correlation between body, soul and mind. These can have positive or negative influences upon each other. It is therefore not a completely alien concept that a sick spirit, which tends toward sinfulness, could be the cause of bodily weakness, sickness and death. Going into this matter more closely would take us too far from the subject at hand.

However many other circumstances can lead to an unworthy celebration of Communion. They are the result of not heeding the already described requirements for the forgiveness of sins. Some examples:

- Anyone who cannot forgive, because of a hardened heart, should renew their position in light of the Lord's Prayer "And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12). Many of Jesus' and the apostles' pronouncements confirm the necessity of being merciful ourselves if we would like to receive mercy (Matthew 6:14-15; James 2:13).
- Without faith in Christ taking communion is meaningless.
- Anyone who has not acknowledged his sins before God and has not repented, has not received forgiveness of sins and goes unpurified to communion.
- The significance of communion should be ever present in our thinking and feeling during the celebration of communion. Anyone who is thinking of something else, perhaps of a new item of clothing or of what is planned after the church Service, could be counted among the unworthy participants in communion. The same can be said when the celebration of communion is nothing more than habit or tradition.

The focus must be: "*this do in remembrance of me*".

Who is allowed to take Communion?

As Holy Communion is a free gift from Christ, it must be offered to all who have the desire to partake of it without any discrimination. This is done in Apostolic Churches.

It should be pointed out that during the Last Supper Jesus did not deny the bread and wine to Judas, even though he knew that he would betray him (John 13:21-30).

With regard to the participation of children in Holy Communion we can establish the following: there is no reason to exclude children from the celebration of Holy Communion. We have seen that at the first Passover all family members had to eat the slaughtered lamb and be ready for their journey. In every family a lamb had to be slaughtered. If a family was too small and hence not in a position to eat the whole lamb, the family had to do this with another family (Exodus 12:4). Nowhere is it stated that children were not allowed to be included.

Just as baptism by water among Christians has taken the place of circumcision (which also applied to children), so too has communion taken the place of the Passover meal. There too children should not be excluded. At the end of his life Moses commissioned the Jewish people to teach the children to observe all the words of the law (Deuteronomy 32:46). Should children then have been excluded from the blessings? Would parents today impose duties on their children whilst at the same time withholding

rights? Parents who follow Christ walk before their children in doing God's will. Should we then demand of them that they withhold from their children the blessing of the divine acts of salvation which take place at Holy Communion? Certainly not. We can therefore join in Moses' prayer: "Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children" (Psalm 90:16).

We recall Jesus' pronouncement: "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not (Mark 10:13-16), and we repeat what we said about baptism: children do not have to be adults before God the Father can receive them; but adults must first become child-like, i.e. minors, needy, simple, trusting, spontaneous in sympathy and in joy. This in any case is the nature of children, if they have not already been spoiled by adults.

Proverbs 22:6 "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

It is by partaking of the Holy Communion that we are granted the righteousness of Christ to complete our bridal garment. Psalms 111:3 "His work is honourable and glorious: and his righteousness endureth for ever." (Romans 5:17; 2 Peter 3:13)

The Marriage of the Lamb

We close by referring to *one of the most wonderful promises* of Jesus Christ. Each person who belongs to His bridal church looks toward the moment when he himself may celebrate the "marriage feast" at the Second Coming of Christ. Then the bride – (His church) – and the bridegroom Jesus Christ will be united. Christ will take His own to Himself, so that they, united with Him, will reign as kings and priests – (serving, leading and guiding) – for a thousand years. This union is "the marriage of the Lamb".

"And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And He saith unto me, Write, *Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb*. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God" (Revelation 19:6-9).

10. SUMMARY OF ARTICLE ON MEANS OF GRACE

We set out to show how our beliefs regarding the means of grace are firmly tied to Holy Scripture. To this end we naturally had to expound upon the details. As a result our explanation has been fairly extensive. A summary is therefore needed to make it easier to view the whole spectrum and the most important points:

Originally men lived with their Creator in perfect harmony. This paradisiacal condition was forfeited by man's disobedience to God's commandments. God's *goal* however, remains, a humanity who will live in earth and in heaven in accordance with His will and His intentions, and in this way, with Him eternally once more in a happy union.

It is basic Christian belief that God through His Son Jesus Christ has laid the *path* for all men. He, the Son of God, in His righteousness, has atoned for the unrighteous, and through His death of propitiation He has made possible man's return to God.

Jesus Christ for His part, before He returned to His father, founded the apostolic office and afterwards at Pentecost He filled His apostles with the Holy Spirit. Through this Holy Spirit, Christ is constantly with them and with all who believe in Him through their teachings.

The Holy Ghost continues to work in the *means* that God has given the church. The means exist in the *Word*, in the *sacraments* and in *apostleship and other spiritual gifts*.

The *Word* comes to us in many ways, for instance through the written word of the Bible, through preaching in church services, as the voice of conscience, or in a supernatural manner, e.g. through prophecies, visions or other revelations.

The *sacraments* of baptism by water, sealing and communion are sacred acts, God's means of grace. Whatever is communicated through them remains invisible, but the effects should become visible. Through their bestowal, something is given to the individual which he himself is unable to give and which brings him duties for his whole life. The prerequisite is faith. God has provided visible signs (water, laying on of hands, wine and bread) so that the invisible can be perceived.

The three sacraments form what is known as a trinity, or in other words: they can indeed be distinguished but not separated (1 John 5:7-8). Their essential content is:

- in *baptism by water*, being accepted into the New Covenant, giving up old nature of Adam to death and the resurrection, the rebirth to the new man; the point of departure in a process of spiritual growth to a new life in Christ;
- in *sealing*, the perfection of the grace through baptism, and the procuring, and even more, the awakening and furthering (because the divine, from the time of creation, however much it has been lost, is present in man) of the gifts and powers of the Holy Spirit; sealing is an important part of the process of rebirth;
- in *communion* (with the forgiveness of guilt) the purification of sins and reconciliation with God; in communion we are united with Christ; everything that is reborn through water and the spirit is constantly nourished and increased through the unity that takes place in communion.

The Holy Spirit is at work in all three sacraments; its effectiveness is not limited therefore to the laying on of hands at sealing. The Holy Ghost is at work everywhere where divine life is awakened or strengthened, whether it be through the Word in all its forms, whether it be through the three sacraments, or whether it be through direct revelations of God.

Through faith, through acceptance of the Word of Christ, through taking the sacraments as divine acts of salvation, through serving in the gifts of apostleship given by Christ, the Holy Spirit can work in the soul of man to cleanse and form and lead us on till we come "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

EXPECTATIONS OF THE FUTURE

Jesus Christ will come again – The First Resurrection

The Second Coming of Christ is a focal point of the gospel. Belief in it does not rely on vague, nebulous statements, and it is equally no "wish fulfilment dream", for it is discussed or referred to in the New Testament over three hundred times.

Here are several passages:

- "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3).
- When Jesus' disciples watched "as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, *shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven*" (Acts 1: 10-11).
- In various parables Jesus spoke of a master who went on a journey and came back unexpectedly. The significant point is the behaviour of the master's servants during his absence and the use to which they have put the gifts received from him. See the parables of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) and the pounds (Luke 19:11-27).
- Almost all the epistles of the apostles testify that the first Christians lived in *expectation of the return of Jesus Christ*: "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body..." (Philippians 3:20-21).
- The Thessalonian church was waiting "for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead..." (1 Thessalonians 1:10). Both letters to the Thessalonians are almost exclusively concerned with the theme of the Second Coming.
- In the message to the church at Philadelphia we read; "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I (Jesus) also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world" (Revelation 3:10).
- *Jesus was, is and will come again!*
- "And behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me ... I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last" (Revelation 22:12-13).

The Second Coming of Christ Demands the Vigilance of the Faithful

Christ's Second Coming demands from a sincere Christian a certain "attitude" which can be described by the words *vigilance* and *activity*.

Expecting the Lord is not the same thing as waiting for Him. "Waiting" has more of a passive meaning, whilst "expecting" – in the Biblical sense – requires an active spiritual attitude. The parable of the wise and foolish virgins shows this most clearly (Matthew 25:1-13). According to the custom at the time, ten virgins went forth to meet the bridegroom. However he made them wait for him and so it grew dark. Five virgins had brought lamps with them but had no supply of oil. When the cry was made that the bridegroom had arrived unexpectedly, they were forced to go off in search of oil first. In this way they missed meeting the bridegroom.

What did Jesus mean to make clear in the parable? The foolish virgins had *not done enough!* They had failed to fill their lamps with oil (the righteousness of Christ). In order to meet the bride groom a walk *in the light* is necessary.

According to Luke's gospel too Jesus spoke at length about the necessity for *vigilance*. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find *watching*..." (Luke 12:35-37). Here again it is made clear that this waiting is an active process. See also Luke 12:43: "Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so *doing*".

According to Mark's gospel, Jesus said: "Take ye heed, watch and pray for ye know not when the time is". He exhorted them that a master returning from a journey does not want to find his servants sleeping, and concluded His admonition with the words: "And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch" (Mark 13:33-37; see also Luke 21:34-36).

The apostles too constantly exhorted people to be vigilant:

- "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong" (1 Corinthians 16:13);
- "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving..." (Colossians 4:2);

- "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him. That ye be not soon shaken in mind" (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2);
- "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8);
- "And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the *full* assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful..." (Hebrews 6:11-12).

These statements clearly tell us the meaning of vigilance resistance to the seduction of Satan, prayer, taking care of the light of the Holy Spirit. "*Walk as children of light...* proving what is acceptable unto the Lord" (Ephesians 5:9-10).

How Will the Second Coming Occur?

In His discussion of the last times Jesus said: "For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:27), or, according to Luke: "For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day" (Luke 17:24). The Second Coming of Christ will therefore shock many people like an unexpected flash of lightning. Paul too referred to the suddenness of this occurrence. Likewise there is talk of a certain order of events as with the First Resurrection: first the dead and then those who at this point in time are alive on earth:

- "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trump for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51-52);
- "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming..." (1 Corinthians 15:22-23);
- "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep ... and the dead in Christ shall rise first then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).

At the beginning of the Revelation of Jesus Christ to John, the greatest prophecy of all times, a further feature of the Second Coming of Christ is suggested, namely that *the whole world will see Him*: "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him ... " (Revelation 1:7). The prophet Zechariah had already been permitted to see this in a vision: "... and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced ... " (Zechariah 12:10). John took up the subject of the prophecy when he described the piercing of Jesus by the Roman soldiers (John 19:37). – "Coming with clouds" and "being caught up with clouds in the air" is again, as so often in the Bible, the language of imagery. And because human language is only a very deficient tool for expressing emotions, spiritual events, visions, etc, it is best to present such descriptions in a less than concrete manner. Thus, when reading the word "clouds", it is better not to think of "rain clouds" but rather, according to Hebrews 12:1, of a "cloud of witnesses", souls that will come with Him from Paradise and the Golden Altar.

When Will the Second Coming Take Place?

It is understandable that many Christians cherished the desire and still cherish it – of being able to experience the Second Coming of Christ during their earthly life, in order, as already explained, not to have to die but to be changed (1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). Even the first apostles had this wish. Thus John exhorted, for instance: "Little children, it is the last time: ... even now are there many anti-christs; whereby we know that it is the last time" (1 John 2:18, also Philippians 4:5). In view of the clearly outlined condition of the world, as prophesied by Jesus Himself (Matthew 24), it would be surprising if a baptized and sealed Apostolic Christian did not watch longingly for the time when Christ Himself will assume leadership on this earth.

However understandable this longing is, we may not go so far as to maintain that we know – more or less exactly – the precise time of Jesus' Second Coming. Throughout all ages there have repeatedly been individuals and groups of people who have made this *unbiblical assertion*, which has led to many believers becoming disappointed or even losing their faith in Christ altogether. A thick book could be written about the many groups who, over the centuries, and even in the early Christian period, literally segregated themselves from their community in order to await the Lord's coming. Even now such groups still exist. Again and again some think they know in which year, or even on which day the Lord will come. Such movements are particularly prevalent at the turn of centuries. Just before the year 1000 A.D. thousands of people sold all they owned in order to either "have a last fling" or "to segregate themselves from the world". Many became prone to deep depressions that occasionally led to suicide.

We should take heart:

- "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father" (Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32);

- "Therefore be ye also ready for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 24:44);
- "But of the times and the seasons (of the coming of the Lord), brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night" (in an unexpected moment, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2; similarly, Matthew 24:43; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 3:3, 16:15).

These passages are unambiguous. We could ask those who think they can foretell the "time and the hour" of the coming of the Lord: are you greater than Christ? Are you closer to God than He is? You maintain that you know something which is not even known to Christ!

We must understand that Christ will be returning as a bridegroom to collect His wife. Under a Jewish wedding, the father of the bridegroom was the only one to know when he would send forth his son. No other person or being knows of the time, not even the son. Therefore we can understand why Jesus did not know the *exact time* of His coming, but He did describe in detail the *signs* which will precede His coming. This description is an impressive prophecy and a great vision.

The Signs of the Imminence of His Second Coming

When asked by His disciple, "What shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?", Jesus described various occurrences and situations:

1. The first – and probably therefore the most important – is the fact that many will be *deceived*.

"Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (Matthew 24:4-5). Several times Jesus emphasised the danger that deception could lead to *loss of faith*.

Not only will false prophets appear (Matthew 24:11), but even some who call themselves Christ, pretend to be Christ and allow themselves to be worshipped and honoured as God. Indeed there will even be some among them who will perform "great signs and wonders" (Matthew 24:24). More than ever this is happening. In many and varied names leaders of religious movements offer their services and find thousands of followers. We should take to heart in this connection Jesus' admonition "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not" (Matthew 24:23).

Later Paul himself also warned the churches that they should not allow themselves to be deceived by anyone, for a falling away comes first and Satan will reveal himself "with all power and signs and lying wonders" (2 Thessalonians 2:3-9).

Great deception leading to a loss of faith – one of the most striking signs of the end of time!

2. "And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars ... For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom..." (Matthew 24:6-7).

World history has hardly known a year without wars, but in our recent times warlike conflicts have increased enormously, more and more countries are being affected (first and second world wars), fighting is taking place at the same moment in more and more places, and the effect of the weapons is becoming more and more terrible. Everyone is certain of the fact that a third world war would be more catastrophic than all previous wars.

Daniel, even then, spoke several times of the signs of the end of time. Four times he prophesied the "abomination of desolation" (Daniel 9:27, 11:31, 12:1-11). The faithful will experience a hard time by the "sword, and by flame, by captivity, and by spoil"; some will fall so that they shall be purged and cleansed (Daniel 11:33-35); but at the end of the days the faithful will reach their destination (Daniel 12:13).

Today we have at our disposal the means and possibility of annihilating large areas of the globe, indeed even of the whole earth, so that the words "hear of wars and rumours of wars" have now taken on a world-wide perspective. Jesus said, "...for all these things must come *to pass*, but the end is not yet" (Matthew 24:6). It is a sign that *precedes* His coming.

3. *Famines and earthquakes* (Matthew 24:7). Many people will point to the recent enormous famines and earthquakes in many countries. Others will counter-argue that all centuries were characterized by famines and earthquakes, whose extent and consequences no one knows. This is true. However Jesus said remarkably that we would *hear* of these occurrences and see them. Whenever there was a famine in bygone centuries only a few people got to hear of it – and often only years later. If however a disaster occurs today, in whatever country, then the whole world *hears* and *sees* it the very same day on the radio and on TV. This sign hearing about wars and natural disasters – is thus fulfilled. Even in the great prophecy, the Book of Revelation, there are several references to enormous earthquakes (Revelation 6:12, 8:5, 11:13-19).

4. Those who confess the name of Jesus are *hated, oppressed and delivered* unto the enemies of God. "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake" (Matthew 24:9). This is the time in which many will come to grief. There will even be those who betray and hate one another. Jesus had already pointed to this. When He sent out His disciples for the first time, He gave them, with prophetic words, a glimpse of what His witnesses could expect: "And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up

against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake". But Jesus reassured them straightaway, "But he that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 10:21-22). In the following verses of Matthew 24, too, Jesus spoke once again expressly about the great tribulation which would come about at the end, i.e. at the conclusion of this period of time (Matthew 24:21-29; Mark 13:19-24). But he always added the great reassurance that the period of tribulation will be shortened for the elect and that He would assemble them from all the ends of heaven (Matthew 24:31).

The book of Revelation is almost in its entirety, certainly in chapters 6-18, a description of dreadful tribulations and catastrophes which will appear before the Second Coming.

Christians were infinitely more oppressed in bygone centuries than is the case today. We might recall the genesis of Christianity and the time of the Reformation. Many people died as martyrs. But now the powers of the antichrist are gaining even greater prominence and in some countries the persecution of Christians is a reality. This tendency will increase in coming years. Even the generation gap is widening, and contempt for those who subscribe to the norms and values of Christians is increasing.

Over the centuries – at least in our part of the world – there has evolved a certain measure of tolerance and freedom of conscience and religion, although admittedly in the wake of considerable controversy. Gradually we see, however, increasing intolerance. Polarisation (the clash of opposites) is lauded as something desirable and replaces tolerance. If this tendency continues, it requires little imagination to predict the suppression of our beliefs. How topical are the ancient words of the prophet, "But who may abide the day of his coming" (Malachi 3:2).

5. "And because *Iniquity* (in other translation 'unrighteousness') shall abound, the *love* of many shall *wax cold*" (Matthew 24:12). The disregard for God's laws and ordinances is increasing daily. Not only is the crime rate increasing alarmingly according to official statistics, but it can also be confirmed that, for instance, marital fidelity, reverence for life, honesty and reliability are less and less sought after. Terrorism in the whole world stands in sharp contradiction to the command "Thou shalt not kill". The so called "sexual revolution" makes a mockery of the command "thou shalt not commit adultery". The sharp increase in burglaries, offences involving property and subtle forms of fraud and swindling are in marked contrast to the simple command, "Thou shalt not steal". These examples derive not from a pessimistic view of the world but from official statistics.

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself" (Luke 10:27; Matthew 22:37-38; Mark 12:30-31). How is it possible that love as it is understood by this all-embracing law has become an alien word and has degenerated into mere sex! Even contempt for every law is increasing. Anarchy is spreading. Anarchy means in fact: without government. But there are those who would object that these are only sporadic outbursts of anarchy which disappear again. The whole history of the twentieth century shows that there is a wave-like movement, i.e. peaks and lows, but also that these "breakers" are intensifying. Laws are not only disregarded and infringed by citizens in relation to the state; governments too are guilty of such violations with respect to nations and citizens. Apostle John equates unrighteousness (in the original scripture: lawlessness) with sin "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4).

Paul described the conduct and the life of people at the end of time quite explicitly: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof ... " (2 Timothy 3:1-5). Thus it can be said that *the increase in sin* is one of the signs that precede the coming of Christ. Only those who are spiritually blind do not recognize this, And there are so many sins that have never seen the light of day! How much terrible injustice, such as business criminality, racial and religious persecution, genocide, etc occurs in the guise of legality. *Contempt for the law*, in whatever form, whether individual or collective, *kills love!*

6. *The gospel is proclaimed to all peoples.* "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14). Mark expresses it thus "And the gospel must first be published among all nations" (Mark 13:10). – Let us draw a comparison: in 1500 the Bible was first translated into 14 languages; in 1974 there were 1,225 translations, and now there are over 2000 translations. Despite the animosity that still exists towards the gospel its world-wide proclamation through modern technology has become a reality. That does not mean that all the people of the world have been converted but that the offer of Christ's grace can be heard world-wide.

7. At the end Jesus pointed to the fact that *human affairs will be similar to the time of Noah* "But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:37-39). Jesus meant two things by this:

(a) In the period preceding His coming people are predominantly captive to the transitory side of life. Few people are interested in spiritual and eternal things. Superficiality triumphs and belief in God's will and mission is largely derided. Those who perform the will of God are – like Noah – exposed to mockery.

(b) We can conclude from Mathew 24:40-42, that not everyone automatically belongs to those whom Christ can call "His own". Some will be united with Him, but others who do not have the requisite preparation will have to stay behind. That does not mean that they are damned. After the thousand-year realm of peace every person will have to finally *decide for or against Christ*.

8. *A godless power will perform great signs and miracles and will even be worshipped as; God.* Paul elaborated on the signs which the Lord mentioned as preludes to His coming. Thus he wrote that we should not believe that the day of the Lord had already dawned: "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there came a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God" (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). This passage suggests that Satan, the adversary, masquerades as the angel of light and takes into his service people who even in the temple of God let themselves be adulated as though they were God. The worship of human beings and idolatry are signs of a falling away from God and of the imminence of the Second Coming.

The Union with Christ and the Marriage of the Lamb in Heaven

Referring to statements from Apostle Paul, we discussed the fact that, shortly before the beginning of the millennium, the faithful will be taken away and united with Christ. This – *union* – is known in the Bible as *the marriage of the Lamb*. Jesus called Himself the *bridegroom* (Matthew 9:15; Mark 2:19-20; Luke 5:34-35). "His own", who belong to Him, form a *bridal church*. They are sealed with the Holy Spirit (see the chapter "Holy Sealing"). By the *lamb*, Jesus Christ is meant, who voluntarily allowed Himself to be slaughtered like a sacrificial lamb, in order to take upon Himself the burden of our sins and to make possible the reconciliation with God.

Marriage is the symbol of the union of the bridegroom with His bride (bridal church). The bride will be bound to Him eternally and will recognize Him as king. In Revelation (19:6-9) this union is described in particularly beautiful words: "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: *for the marriage of the Lamb is come*, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints". When we read this we must think of the promise that was given to the church in Sardis: "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment ..." (Revelation 3:5). White is the symbol of purity and cleanliness. The purity which is meant here arises through the grace of Jesus Christ, through His Word of absolution and the forgiveness of sin. "...And the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

When young people love each other, they are driven by an understandable longing for ultimate and complete union. The longing for and prospect of this union, and the preparation for it give life an extra dimension; it becomes deeper, richer and fuller. In the same way, the children of God who belong to this bridal church look longingly for this union, for the moment in which they are transported so as to celebrate the heavenly "marriage". This transforms their lives. Life becomes finer, richer and more purposeful. The "hues" of their lives change because they are allowed to walk henceforth in the light of the Holy Spirit. In order to be part of this "marriage of the Lamb" it is necessary to put on the "wedding gown". In a parable Jesus said that a man was ejected from the bridal chamber because he was not wearing a "wedding garment" (Matthew 22:10-13). By this Jesus meant that a suitable "garment", namely the "white raiment" of righteousness, is necessary for this spiritual "marriage". John saw this in an impressive vision: "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes ..." (Revelation 7:9), and further (verse 14) "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb".

In order to enter the "bridal chamber" *preparedness* is necessary. In addition to the often mentioned "white raiment", baptism and sealing, we need to have a *nuptial frame of mind*, as the fruit of rebirth by water and the spirit. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5); "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Galatians 5:22-23). The characteristics of the nuptial frame of mind are also: trusting to the very end and the offering up of sacrifices to the Lord in many ways.

Jesus also calls His bridal souls His *first fruits*: "These were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto God, and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile, for they are without fault before the throne of God" (Revelation 14:4-5). These first fruits will be the first to be resurrected after Christ: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first fruits, afterward they that are Christ's at his coming..." (1 Corinthians 15:22-23).

The bride or the bridal church is being prepared. Those who are "sealed in their foreheads" (Revelation 7:3, 9:4) and are preparing for the coming of the bridegroom belong to the bridal church.

The bridal church is in three stories, those on the earth, those in paradise and those under the golden altar. Revelation 6:9-11; Luke 23:43; Ezekiel 41:16.

The Millennium (The Kingdom of God)

During the wedding in heaven, God will cleanse the earth so that He can fulfill the Jewish wedding by giving a special gift to the Bridegroom and Bride. This cleansed earth will become again like in the Garden of Eden, a place where God can give every blessing without any sorrows or troubles. Isaiah 66:24 "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." What is certain is that there will be a lengthy *period of repose, security, peace and joy*, or to quote the Bible: "And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls

of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:1-6).

Satan, therefore, will be *bound* during this period so that for the first time, after the Fall, the aforesaid year of peace and freedom will dawn, a period in which Jesus Christ will be *king* over the whole earth.

Paul described the binding of Satan and the dominion of Christ as follows: "... and then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming" (2 Thessalonians 2:8). The bridal souls who are chosen to establish the realm of peace with Christ will, just like Christ after Easter, be on earth in their risen body. Over them the "second death" (Revelation 20:6) has no power, i.e. they will not fear the Last Judgment. They will exercise priestly and secular power, though in a *servant* manner according to the words of their Lord: "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister ..." (Mark 10:45). God's word will again be validated that He spoke in the original garden "It is very good" Genesis 1:31. Proving to all realms that God's word shall endure forever. All other people born into the world from the beginning of time, who were not part of the Elect lady, will not be resurrected from the dead until this period is complete. They will come forward for the final judgment from the place of waiting, to be judged according to their works, by the righteous judge, Jesus Christ.

The *hope* of every true Christian is directed towards the fulfillment of this promise, namely of being allowed to serve with Christ in a regal and priestly manner. This hope does not fill him with anxiety, but gives his life direction. It is *comfort* in suffering, in the endurance of scorn, derision, pain and tribulation. It is the *light*, the first rays of which he sees at the end of the "earthly tunnel" through which he must pass and in which it is so often dark. A greater, more genuine and surer hope is not to be found on earth. In the place of earthly chaos and strife, order and peace will reign. Every guiding hand in this period will rest on the foundation *of love* for God, for Jesus Christ and for our fellow men. Uncertainty will give way to certainty, unrighteousness to righteousness, impurity to purity. Isaiah 66:25 also gives an insight on God's creation during this time. "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the bullock; and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord." We see why Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans about the blessings to come from this kingdom – Romans 8:22 "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now."

Let us refrain from our own imaginings concerning this realm. We do well to base our conception on the promise of Christ that Satan will be bound and that those who take part in the first resurrection will be allowed to reign (serve) with Him as "priests and kings". Micah had prophesied this millennium hundreds of years before Christ. According to his exalted prophecy: "They shall beat their swords into plough shares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Micah 4:3).

The Final Struggle, the Last Judgment

Following the millennium, the last phase of the period before the final revelation of the kingdom of God will dawn. "Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which have built up again in the four quarters of the earth ..." (Revelation 20:7-8). Then the final *struggle* will begin, a contest in which all will have to decide for or against God, for or against Christ. Everyone born into this period *will be able* to choose. Many who have never known temptation will choose Satan. Their number will be "as the sand of the sea" (Revelation 20:8). Heavenly powers will come to the aid of the faithful on earth so that the victory will be with God and His faithful ones. Verses 7 to 10 describe this final contest most graphically. This last struggle will be followed by the final *separation* of good and evil, a separation of those who wish to obey God's law from those who show no love for God and His Son and give preference to the seductions and deceits of Satan and his horde. All those who came into the kingdom with Christ will remain true, as their eternal salvation is assured. It is the final conclusion of the period of struggle between God and Satan, between good and evil, which began after the Fall of Man. The Bible calls this the *Day of Judgment* (other translations "the Last Judgment", Revelation 20:11-15). Jesus said about it, for instance "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works" (Matthew 16:27). This pronouncement also makes it clear that the enemies of everything divine and the followers of Satan will be *definitively segregated* from those who have decided in favour of Jesus Christ and His gospel. We read that all the dead will be raised (= *second resurrection*) and that they will be judged, each according to his works (Revelation 20:13). The decisive issue will not be what someone *claims* to believe or to confess but that the *works* of Christ, i.e. what was *done* according to His will, will be Christ's yardstick of discernment. This can be seen from the example of the separation of the sheep and the goats. According to Matthew 25:35-46, Jesus clearly stated that all acts of compassion that were shown to the least of His brothers were *done unto Him*. As a consequence, those who have fed the hungry, and have given the thirsty to drink and have clothed the naked will be allowed to enter His kingdom and reap eternal life. The others however, who have not done this, will "suffer eternal torment", or, as Revelation expresses it "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8). In our own way we can express it thus: eternal repentance, an eternal fire of self reproach is the due of all those who have received the gospel but did not allow themselves to be cleansed through the blood of Christ and have filled their lives with lies and deceit, with physical and spiritual impurity and with idolatry. The "fiery lake" is the image of the unredeemed condition, the consequence of obstinate resistance to God's mercy.

The prophet Daniel had already alluded clearly to this second resurrection and to the Last Judgment "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was

since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to *everlasting life* and some to *shame and everlasting contempt*. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament: and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" (Daniel 12:1-3). There are many allusions in the Old Testament to the end of time, though all these prophecies need to be considered with caution as they refer to different times and different phases of "end time".

Many people will ask whether such damnation unto eternity is reconcilable with God's love. Is this not lacking in mercy? Is not God's grace infinite? – We can counter the argument: we see increasing chaos and misery around us. As already mentioned, lawlessness (sin) is gaining the upper hand, while love is growing even colder. More and more people are desperately wondering where the world is heading. The nations of the earth are gripped by anxiety. In despair they seek a better, fairer world, a New World Order. Would God be testifying to His love if He allowed people to maim, murder, martyr, oppress and abuse one another for all eternity? God's grace is boundless, and is offered to every soul. But the Lord cannot permit the earth to remain a vale of sorrow to all eternity and millions of people to experience no spark of joy. *It is precisely because of His love that this state will come to an end!* At the same time this is an expression of His Justice. The head of the old "snake" will be bruised through the power of Christ! (Genesis 3:15). God's words "It is very good" must be fulfilled. The whole Bible, particularly the New Testament, is a continuous pointer to the imminent kingdom of God. Revelation 21:8 names different groups that will be banished from God's realm at the Last Judgment. At the close of the Bible we hear it again: "For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie" (Revelation 22:15). If God were so "kindhearted" as to admit into His kingdom all the souls which, for example, have murderous dispositions (such as torturers in many countries), side by side with all those who possess one of the other kinds of disposition, wouldn't the same misery that exists in our present world re-establish itself very quickly? Therefore let us rejoice at the promise that the time will come when every knee shall bow before God and every tongue shall confess Him (Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10-11).

We in this life must never allow ourselves to judge others. Jesus Christ will be the only judge. While we live, the door of grace is always open for repenting sinners. We have proof of this with the male-factor on the cross (or his deathbed) he repented, acknowledged Jesus as the Christ and asked Him to remember him when he came into His Kingdom. The promise given "Verily, I say unto thee, Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise." Luke 23:43 This promise is still valid today, for all who seek after the Grace of Christ, no matter what their former life may have contained.

The New Heaven and the New Earth

After the Last Judgment was revealed to John, he was shown the last vision. We can find no better words for it than the Bible uses itself. It is a splendid glorification, the zenith of the Bible, the most comforting of all prophecies.

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful" (Revelation 21:1-5).

Thereupon follows the description of the *new Jerusalem*. Any other representation would be inadequate here against the splendid divine vision which John was allowed to behold. But let us emphasize a few characteristic ingredients:

- God Himself will be king in this new realm. The glory of God will lighten it and the Lamb is the light thereof (Revelation 21:23).
- The servants of Christ will inherit a place unto all eternity (Revelation 20:4-6). Over them will the second death have no dominion.
- There is no more room for impurity. The citizens of this kingdom are only those whose names appear in the book of life (Revelation 3:5; 20:12; 21:27).
- In order to characterize purity and beauty John used the names of well-known precious stones and gold and silver as symbols of illustrious, divine attributes.
- The heavenly Jerusalem is built on the foundation of the first twelve apostles (Revelation 21:14).
- The heavenly Jerusalem as the bridal church of Jesus Christ. This "city" has a central place and is the focal point of the final kingdom of God.

The thousand-year realm of peace is the reign of Jesus Christ. There He has His kingdom. After the Last Judgment, however, He will transfer the kingdom to God the Father the Almighty. Now, that must not create the impression that only Christ rules in the millennium and God alone in new Jerusalem. Indeed, we read that God had already laid claim to the kingdom at the marriage of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6). In the description of the millennium it is noteworthy that the risen souls will reign as kings *with Christ* (Revelation 20:4). In the new Jerusalem there is already mention of the throne of God and of *the Lamb* (Revelation 22:3). But the light comes from God "For the Lord God giveth them light" (Revelation 22:5). Paul also states clearly that the highest dominion, the kingdom, will rest in God. After pronouncements on the first resurrection Paul stresses: "then cometh the end, when he *shall have delivered up the kingdom to God.*" (1 Corinthians 15:24). That happens therefore at the end, after the Last Judgment.

EXPECTATIONS OF THE FUTURE –

Concluding remarks

1. No Anxiety for those who follow Christ

In the book of Revelation it is made clear that the time preceding the Second Coming will be extremely difficult. There is talk of seven plagues (vials of wrath) to be poured over humanity. Space does not permit us to elaborate this point. Suffice it to say that many people, even at times, believers in Christ, are filled with anguish upon reading how the earth will be visited. Over the centuries fear and anxiety have played a major role in the dissemination and proclamation of the gospel – fear of hell, fear of the Second Coming, fear of the Last Judgment (Day of Judgment). However, the Bible often states "Fear not!" These words are often a preliminary to God's message, an announcement or a prophecy. Fearlessness presupposes faith, and faith and true discipleship in Christ finally drive out fear. There is no fear in love (1 John 4:18). And the Lord certainly keeps His promise. With regard to the tribulation preceding His Coming, Jesus says comfortingly:

- "And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: *but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened*" (Matthew 24:22);
- "But he that endureth to the end *shall be saved*" (Matthew 10:22);
- "... men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth ... and when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; *for your redemption draweth nigh*" (Luke 21:26-28).

Of considerable value therefore is Jesus' promise to the church at Philadelphia "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also *will keep thee from the hour of temptation*, which shall come upon all the world..." (Revelation 3:10). Furthermore all the letters to the seven churches in Asia conclude with a *promise of salvation* for those who are washed in Christ's blood and have overcome. Revelation 12 is a recording of what is required of the Christian Church and the things Satan will throw against it. We see great blessings given out during this persecution – verse 6 "And the woman fled in the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, and he should feed her there a thousand, two hundred and three score days." And also when Satan is direct because he is now on the earth – verse 14 "And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place where she is nourished for a time, and times and half a time, from the face of the serpent."

Many Christians are of the view that Jesus will simply come to the Last Judgment. We have seen however that He will come first of all to bring home His own people and to found the thousand-year realm of peace. For the Lord's faithful, things can only become better. The night of cares and tribulations and of sorrow will cease. The sun of love and righteousness will fully illuminate their lives with the Second Coming. Life in expectation of that day should never be full of fear and panic but should be *happy, active, growing, god-fearing and optimistic*, desiring to meet the Lord face to face to thank Him for His mission of restoring mankind again, to be *sons and daughters of God*.

2. Israel

The Bible teaches that before the Lord returns, the scales will be taken from their eyes and they too, will be offered to partake of Christ's grace, so they can also be part of the Kingdom of God. Many of the prophets foretold this. Jeremiah 31:31 "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah". This refers to admission into the New Covenant through Christ. In the letter to the Hebrews this promise is expressly stated. We read here, for instance: "But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days ... and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Hebrews 8:8-12; Jeremiah 31:31-34). Paul imparted a "secret" to the church in Rome "Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved" (Romans 11:25-26). Joel 2:32 "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered: for in Mount Zion (Church) and in Jerusalem (Jew) shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant when the Lord shall call (other faiths). Zechariah 13:1 "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and uncleanness."

3. Chronology – Summary

It is impossible to cite all the prophecies and visions relating to the future. John's Book of Revelation contains a large number of such visions. They are certainly not all written in chronological order. John only presented what he had seen, in order to carry out Jesus' request: "Write: for these words are true and faithful" (Revelation 21:5). John saw the events of a distant future. Glancing at a mountain panorama from a very great distance, it is almost impossible to establish any sequence with regard to the proximity of individual peaks. Thus caution is advisable when organizing the visions written down by John into a specific sequence, and we should be no less cautious when trying to connect the different "trumpets" and "vials of wrath" with specific historical events. Over the centuries many attempts were made in this regard, all of which however were debatable. We have confined ourselves to that which is either unambiguous or was confirmed by several prophets. From the description of the marriage of the Lamb onwards, however, a clear *chronology* is discernible, and as there are differing views with regard to this time sequence in Christianity, it seems appropriate to cite these future events in their temporal sequence. This is at the same time a *summary*, albeit a short one, of the whole chapter concerning the article of faith.

THE MAIN FUTURE EVENTS IN THEIR TEMPORAL SEQUENCE ARE:

1. Before the Second Coming there will be *great tribulation* on earth.
2. At the Second Coming all those who belong to Christ and have remained faithful to Him will come to the first *resurrection*. The dead among them will be the first to rise. These spirits and souls will be brought by Christ as the clouds from Paradise or Golden Altar, the bodies will rise and be made whole, the spirit and soul will go back into the body to complete the rebirth. They will now be as Christ, spirit first and body second. They will be followed by those alive on Earth who will be saved from the final tribulation through a change. (Transformation)
3. The risen and changed faithful will be united with their Lord Jesus Christ at the *marriage of the Lamb*. Over them the "second death" will have no dominion.
4. Christ will come back to earth with His own and will establish the *millennium*. Satan will be bound during this time. During these blessings in heaven, God will cleanse the earth and destroy all remaining mankind in readiness for the Kingdom of God.
5. Thereafter Satan will be let loose for a short period and the *final struggle will begin*. This will end in the loss of power for Satan and his followers.
6. The remaining dead will rise (*the second resurrection*). They will be judged together with the living according to their works. This is the final judgment, the Last *Judgment*, the final separation of good and evil.
7. God will create *the new heaven and the new earth*. He will be all in all. In the new creation there shall be no more death, *eternal life* in the highest heaven in the glory of God.

Let us conclude this chapter with the severe Biblical warning to leave *unchanged* the great prophecy of John, the revelation of Jesus Christ (Revelation 22:18-19) "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book". – Three times the Lord makes the assurance in this chapter (verses 7, 12 and 20), that He will come soon. How this strengthens us, makes us joyful and fills us with confidence!

Ephesians 2:5 "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)."

"Revelation 22:20-21"

*Surely I come quickly,
Amen.*

*Even so, come,
Lord Jesus.*

*The Grace of our Lord
Jesus Christ
be with you all,
Amen.*