

Christianity

Yesterday

and

Today

### Foreword

The purpose of this booklet is to provoke the reader to thought. My aim is that everyone will become aware of this subject and mentally make an analysis of it. Many already bear a great weight of guilt through silence; whereas anyone who speaks and writes against the general trend makes himself unwelcome. But no individual can please everybody.

The present generation is not to blame that, again and again, one is shunted in the wrong direction by wrong setting of the points in the past. Therefore nobody should feel under personal attack. If erroneous developments in church history are demonstrated, then it is not from a desire to criticise, but purely from a love for the truth. In reading this, all would do well to recognise the well meant intention and perceive the helpful hand outstretched.

We believe that the clergy collectively are intent on teaching and acting correctly. All are eager to do the will of God. But no one has opened their eyes to the fact, that a total departure from the original Gospel proclamation and practice has taken place. Today we find many teachings and traditions that are totally without Biblical foundation.

Spiritual orientation of the leaders has been lost, and the masses are let astray. As far as zeal and devotion are concerned, these are found in all religions. But human striving alone is insufficient to bring us under God's grace.

In this short introduction certain subject-matters can only be touched upon or dealt with in telegram style. In future publications we hope to concern ourselves more intensively with fundamental doctrines and themes. In addition, current developments will be illuminated in the light of Biblical prophecy.

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The Editor

By E. Frank

## Which is the Correct Religion?

It is our intention to consider the most important theme of all. Basically it is one that should interest everybody. Indifference can lead to one's undoing. Everyone knows that there are a variety of religions. However, it must be asked: Is there one that is true? All claim to be correct. But doubt has understandably spread itself where religion is concerned. People turn aside from denominations and also desire to have nothing to do with God. Generally God and religion are regarded as belonging to one another. Nevertheless there are people, who quietly reflect on whether there is not a living God, Who concerns Himself with us. But how is one to find one's way among all the religious divisions? How can a definitive answer be given to open questions? Or is everything really deception? Are the Hindus right? Are the Moslems right? Or the Buddhists? Did any of those that founded religions rise from the dead to tell us? Until now, humanity has only heard of the resurrection of One. All others were buried with their doctrines.

That which is true can only come from a truthful source. Did He ever found a religion? If so, when, where, and which? If not, then no one has the right to use His Name. It is not only possible for a person to err, but to be wrong in actual fact. We can accordingly rely on religious founders and church leaders just as little as on ourselves. Apart from the other well known world religions, there are in Christianity some hundreds of different church confessions. Each of them has special doctrines and offers its members salvation in its own particular way. Of course no one accuses a religious institution of deliberately leading men astray, but the fact that there are so many spiritual currents forces us to reflection.

Each person who desires to attain a goal, must start out on the journey, But how do we find the way that leads us with certainty to that eternal goal? How do we find the truth upon which we can rely absolutely? In the midst of all human confusion, there must be a possibility of discovering the divine pathway. Who in the enlightened age is able to trust himself blindly to a faith? To represent something as divine is not sufficient; it needs to be legitimised from above. Everyone should assert his right to orientate himself spiritually. There is surely more at stake than this short life on earth.

We are appointed to fellowship with our heavenly Father. There is not merely a temporal life, but also one that is eternal. As certainly as there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual. Just as it is self-evident that life exists on earth, so is it self-evident that life exists in heaven. The same God created heaven and earth and all that therein is. The majesty of the Creation certainly provides a powerful testimony to the Creator.

Many believe that membership of a church or religious assembly is bound up with salvation. This view is more or less promoted in the religions. Are all making empty promises?

Whoever ambles through a cemetery can read the comforting inscriptions on the grave-stones: "Here rests in peace...", "Departed in the joy of salvation...", "Hidden in God The death announcements in newspapers also sound well: "... blissfully fallen asleep", "... called home by God", "Died after receiving the last rites of the Roman Catholic church ... 2' One obtains the impression that all the dead are with the LORD. But ' how is it in reality? Did those who have passed on actually have a personal relationship with Him?

To those that remain, the comforting words are spoken in the graveyard: "It had pleased the LORD to accept this brother or sister into His Kingdom." Within the church it is then ceremoniously disclosed to the mourners, that the departed is not in paradise, but in purgatory. Aside from the fact that the concept of purgatory is frankly a human invention and not once mentioned in the Holy Scriptures, the question must still be seriously asked, what is then true? Where in reality is the departed one now? Can it be that men and women from their birth to death are held fast in an error and are merely comforted? During their life on this earth they are pronounced blessed; after they are dead, they have apparently not attained their goal. Is religion not after all an opium that only pacifies people, until the time for the fearful awakening comes?

Year after year they receive sacraments of saving grace without apparently having received salvation. From infant baptism via confirmation to the last anointing they are prepared for salvation. After all the many efforts the sad end-result remains: the one who has died has not been received up, but has moved downwards.

In this field, no one can put in a word better than doctors and nurses, who repeatedly experience human deaths. Irrespective of religious allegiance, a death struggle sets in. The despair of many dying is not generally recognised. Of faith, assurance and joy is not the slightest trace. Assuring all that God requires has been done according to one's best knowledge and conscience, it then becomes apparent that it is not a matter of what God requires at all, but what churches claim and impose upon their members.

Since we are here dealing with a matter of life and death, all should undergo a self-examination. Every person, no matter of what race or nationality, has a right to learn the truth concerning God and himself. Everyone, who is not indifferent to his eternal destination, even has a duty with the help of Holy Scripture to make a comparison of the same with that which is taught and practised. Only that which originates from God will lead to the LORD and can stand before Him. Whoever says, "It's all one to me. I don't care if another flood or even destruction is coming. I shan't be around to see it!" is not aware of what he is saying.

The Bible is in reality the only book on earth which informs us about God and His intentions. It contains from beginning to end confirmed facts of divine origin.

We should take life and our dying seriously. We are not intent on giving the living a fear of death; on the contrary. Rather we wish to present the way and the true goal. Faith and trust in God and in His Word must be restored at all costs. God is true (ever-present) and His Word is exalted above every doubt. In all religions man is instilled with a fear of God, and simultaneously acquires a trust in human religious institutions. Our task is to shake trust in all religions and restore the trust in God and His Word.

The Almighty has a blue-print, a plan for humanity. Regrettably, men have made their own plans and, within God's Kingdom, have erected their own religious kingdoms. The human and the divine are in direct opposition to one another. Whoever desires to participate in the eternal counsel of God, must separate himself from all religions which have been devised in the course of time.

The omnipotent God is simultaneously omniscient (all-knowing), and He formulated His plan for mankind before the foundation of the world. The temporary interruption which arose through human failure, disobedience and trespasses, will not set His eternal purpose at naught. Since the LORD has known everything from the beginning, He was able in His original concept to plan for this in advance. The Word of God is just as true and infallible as God Himself.

The way of God with mankind is clearly described in His Word. Regrettably it was obscured and made unavailable by religious teachings and traditions. Even though dogmas are hundreds or thousands of years old, they remain what they are: namely doctrines inserted by man and nothing more. They cannot automatically become right simply because they are promulgated by a religious institution. What is human will never become divine and vice versa. Truth and lies exclude each other. We are either dealing with truth or with error. The origin of all truth is God; the originator of every lie is Satan. A perfect lie is a false presentation of the truth, and the religious world is filled with such. Every theory or practice which does not agree with Holy Scripture can never be of divine origin. The Word of God contains the collective testimony which the LORD has delivered to mankind.

The Old Testament prophets announced the coming of the Messiah and thereby God's salvation. The apostles were eye-witnesses of the fulfilled prophecies in the Redeemer. By the preaching of the Gospel the offer of divine grace to all men is propagated. A reality confirmed by God can surely be believed by anyone. Between the original church and modern Christianity there exists an enormous difference. Everything that existed in the early church is lacking in the modern church; and everything that is in established Christianity today was not present in the original church. A comparison makes that clear.

The proclamation of the Gospel in the earliest days of Christianity was according to the Word. The apostles were instructed by the LORD Himself and were placed under the leading of the Holy Spirit. Anyone reading the early chapters of the Acts of the apostles gains an insight into the life of the original church. In her was manifest a fullness of the Spirit and of God's blessing! The first Christians were of one mind and one accord, shared all things in common, and formed a large family of God. The original church was not a rigid organisation, but a living organism. Our LORD said, "... *I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*" He is still busily occupied with this task.

Just as God revealed Himself through Christ, Christ revealed Himself through His Church. The same proclamation, the same ministry was continued. Great miracles and signs took place. Unbelievers became believers, those possessed of devils were freed and the sick were restored to health. All was still valid; the Word of God was still the valid criterion to those who became believers. They placed their trust in the LORD, Whom they had seen in His ministry, His suffering and death, and after His Resurrection. Reverence for Him was in them, for they had experienced everything with Him and gathered together in His Name.

In the early church were found apostles, prophets, pastors, evangelists and teachers (1 Cor. 12: 28; Eph. 4: 11). These offices were set by God in His Church. They were necessary for spiritual edification and complemented each other. In those days a pope, cardinals, archbishops, priests, monks and nuns were completely unknown. All these things, which the Christian world regards as a matter of course today, did not exist at that time.

According to the will of God, the church of God was originally thought of as a divine establishment on earth. No one has the right to introduce into her anything unscriptural. By all means she consists of men and women with weaknesses and infirmities, and of forgiven sinners that have become God's children, but her doctrine and practice has to agree with the Word of God from beginning to end. Everything that cannot stand the test of the Word here will be unable to stand at the Judgement of God at the Last Day. For a person who believes the Bible, there is no possibility of accepting doctrines concocted and introduced independently of it. The only valid confession of faith rests not on a catechism, but on the Holy Scriptures alone.

The Apostles had also absolutely nothing to do with the coming into existence of the *Regula veritatis*, which was represented as an apostolic statute. On the contrary, immediately before the end stands merely about believing "... in the Holy Ghost; one holy Church; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body. Amen." Every Sunday millions from most denominations throughout the world repeat the words, "I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints..." This compilation does not even stem from the immediately post-apostolic time, but was drafted for the first time after the Council of Nicea and completed

in subsequent synods. In order to lend it importance, the authority of the apostles was in a completely unjustified manner ascribed to it.

It is the same with the book known as the *Didache*, which was first found in a monastery in 1883, but arbitrarily back-dated to the end of the 1st century. It has nothing in common with the teaching of the twelve apostles. For example, on page 29 stands, "If you have earned something with the work of your hands, then you should also give something for the remittance of your sins." Is that Gospel? The Apostles knew the One Who had forgiven our sins personally. Today in every point they would say exactly the same as then. It was written down in the New Testament so that we could prove everything. Who today complies with the instruction, "Prove all things ..." (1 Thess. 5: 2 1)? God does not contradict Himself. His decrees are perfect. All seeming contradictions are in the thinking of the scholars, not in His Word.

Any man that is not looking through religious spectacles must be shocked when he perceives what a deviation has taken place. The original collective belief has been altered until it has become unrecognisable. A completely different Gospel is being preached.

Admittedly, it may be supposed of all men that their intentions are sincere; but this makes nothing false right. As far as questions of faith and teaching are concerned, or the practice of the church, these matters are not to be learnt from a council; rather the only valid source of information is what the original church has left us. Ecclesiastical questions and church problems may be discussed by the relevant bodies, but the doctrine and practice of Christ and of the apostles has long been firmly established. To the Diet of Worms on 18th April, 1521, Luther said, "Since I believe neither in the Pope nor in Councils, because it is a fact that they have often erred and entangled themselves in contradictions, therefore, if I am not overcome by Scriptural evidence and clear reasons, I am convinced by the Scriptural evidence I have cited and am a captive to God's Word. Recant I cannot and will not, because to act against one's conscience is not safe and not wholesome. May God help me. Amen!"

We are concerning ourselves with the eternal counsel of Almighty God for mankind, and by comparison desire to contribute to clarification. It is a matter of two fundamentally different things that are absolutely separate from one another. The one is the divine realm, the other the human. Whoever acknowledges God will believe what God's Word says, irrespective of what is decided in Councils and Synods. The Word of God is not subject to the changes of the times, it is for all time conclusive.

It must be evident to everybody, that the Holy Scriptures contain the definitive collective testimony of God. God has forgotten absolutely nothing. First, in the degree that the divine was omitted, the human was substituted in its place. All resolutions that were passed in the course of church history will never become a constituent part of the divine will, because they did not belong to the original doctrine of Christ and the apostles which was founded on the prophetic Word.

The most serious warnings in the Old and New Testaments may not be ignored or passed over. It is written, "*Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish anything from it*" (Dt. 4: 2). Later the LORD said to the Pharisees and scribes, who failed to recognise what Moses and the prophets had said, but followed the interpretations and traditions, "*This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men*" (Mk 7: 6-7).

In addition, denominational churches fail extensively to consider the Word of God and are entangled with the doctrines of men. Nevertheless there is now more religious activity than ever before. But over all unbiblical practices and proclamations the same words ever stand: "In vain!" In vain are all prayers, all services; in vain all the songs and ritualism; in vain all the massive evangelization plans and church fixtures - everything not according to the Word of God that is done in the Kingdom of God is without validity before God. For how many programmes should He declare Himself? With whom should He take sides?

The LORD permits no adulteration. His desire is that the pure Seed of His Word is preserved in its original form and is sown. Today as formerly, He upbraids the religious leaders, who perhaps enjoy high respect among the people, very sharply with the words, "*Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own traditions*" (Mk. 7: 9). One has to set aside the one, in order to be able to replace it by the other.

The penetrating warning is addressed to us by the LORD Himself: "*Every word of God is pure; ... Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar*" (Prov. 30: 5-6). All who add something to the definitive testimony of Holy Scripture, the Old or the New Testament, will stand there as liars and be called to account by God and be condemned. Since the garden of Eden, Satan, the old liar, has exercised his influence among mankind by interpreting the Word of God in a different sense. Until the end he will twist the Word and so fool mankind. Only those who see through it and withdraw themselves from his influence can place themselves directly under the divine influence, which through the Spirit proceeds from the Word alone.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, and the Word of God alone is the Word of truth. In the last chapter of the Bible is placed the final warning, "*If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in the 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.*"

Who can want only dismiss these words? As certain as was fulfilled what God said in the beginning, "*In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,*" as most definitely will this word prove itself to be true. God means what He says, and says what He means. The Scriptures cannot be broken. All His decisions are unchangeable and perfect.

## The Last Will

The apostle speaks of a Testament or Will, a final disposition, which, as soon as it came into force, could no longer be altered or added to subsequently (Gal. 3: 15). Upon the death of our LORD, the New Testament came into force. How could men have dared to make all the changes? In Hebrews 9: 16-17 reference is yet again made to these circumstances, *"For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator For a testament is in force after men are dead."*

There is often strife over the estate of a person. The possibility is however excluded, that a last will set down in writing could be completely changed, yet in an inconceivable way that is exactly what has happened with the Testament of the LORD. On the one hand people rely upon Christ, on the other they have made out of Him and His Testament something completely different. That which He left behind was made of no effect, and completely foreign ideas were inserted in place of the Word of God.

Every church community has the right to believe and do what it wishes. When however anyone asserts the claim to be the church of the living God or of Jesus Christ, then the Word of God and the Testament of Jesus must be taken in their entirety exactly as they have been left to us. Where is there room for all these dogmas and traditions, which in the course of church history have been inserted? They certainly do not belong to the Testament left to us.

In the consciousness of mankind the thought has become entrenched, that the organised churches are an establishment of God, teaching and practising in the place of Christ here on earth. What, however, are they in reality? In the little catechism we read under the title "The Commandments of the Church", last part: "Christ has bestowed upon the representatives of the Church the right to make commandments. He desires that we obey the commandments of the Church out of love for Him." When and where did Christ say anything of the sort? Gods Commandments were given a long time previously and should be familiar to all. But regrettably mankind has regarded the commandments of the Church as Commandments of God and is thus gone into error.

At the time of Constantine the secular populace was recognised as the church. In A. D. 313 he commenced by means of political chess moves to win both Christianity and heathenism for his own purpose. It was upon his instigation that the Council of Nicea was called.

After A. D. 325 he supported the construction of both churches and heathen temples. Under his domination, secular Christianity assumed a firm shape, and thereby it became a spiritual world power within the Roman empire. Eusebius saw in him a saviour from the depth of a predicament. After the cruel persecutions of Christians from Nero to Diocletian, man now began to breathe a sigh of relief.

In A. D. 380 universal religious freedom was brought to an end by Theodosius and Gratian. Until then there were still assemblies of various beliefs which existed alongside the Christian church recognised by the state. From now on the civil population was forced with the power of the state to become "Roman" Christians. This process was brought to completion under Justinian (527-565). The church was now finally the recognised State Church, and the priests were civil servants. With the disintegration of the heathen Roman empire, the religious predominance of Rome became established. The cruel middle Ages began; and about a thousand years were to pass until the outbreak of the Reformation. The autocracy of church and state, in which the church was almost always victorious, had as a consequence that all who believed differently were persecuted. Whole nations were Christianised by force. Millions suffered a martyr's death, among them hundreds of thousands of Jews, who were branded as "Christ-murderers" and "God's enemies." The church became a factor of political power.

Already in the first two centuries after Christ, various fabricated doctrines had been introduced. However, in the 3rd Century the general use of force began. Adherence to new doctrines and practices was demanded. The crucifix, the sign of the cross, wax candles and incense were introduced. More and more things that were new were added; the veneration of the saints, the daily sacrifice of the mass, and much else.

In A. D. 431 at the Council of Ephesus, the worship of Mary as the Mother of God was proclaimed. About A. D. 500, the priests (as they were now called) began to clothe themselves uniformly. The festival in honour of the Virgin Mary, the kissing of the foot of the pope, the veneration of statues and relics, the veneration of Joseph and fasting on Fridays followed. Celibacy of the priests was introduced in the year 1079, then the rosary, the sale of indulgences, the doctrine of transubstantiation, the festival of Corpus Christi, etc., etc., until the announcement of the dogma of the physical assumption of Mary; also the confessional, of which one knew nothing in the time of the apostles.

The list can be continued *ad libitum*. At this point it must be clearly stated that these dogmas have nothing in common with early Christianity and with the teachings of the Apostles. With what justification have they been introduced? Generally speaking every original doctrine has been changed and much added to it, so that nothing is correct any more.

The LORD said, for example, *"And call no man Your father upon the earth; for one is your Father, which is in heaven"* (Mt. 23: 9). Who can comprehend the way this saying is completely ignored, and that all the world falls to the feet of a man to do homage to him and honours him as "Holy Father"? Thus saith the LORD, *"... I will not give my glory unto another!"* (Isa. 48: 11). Jesus Christ taught us to pray, *"Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name..."* Is it not blasphemy simply to

disregard and use this form of address to a man? Who is then the Holy Father, Whose Name should be hallowed? Is He in heaven or on earth?

Where in the early church are reports of the appearance of Mary? Where of places of pilgrimage or of the worshipping of saints? On the contrary, the Bible warns expressly against any communication with the dead. That is a matter of spiritism and occultism. Also the worshipping of beings for protection is absolutely unscriptural; yes, and more: it goes back clearly to the cult of idol worship in heathenism.

It is equally impossible to find in the Scriptures even the slightest hint that Mary is a mediatrix between God and man. It is written, "*For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*" (1 Tim. 2: 5). The same is true regarding her supposed role as intercessor. In the Word of God it says quite clearly, "*... we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world*" (1 Jn. 2: 1-2).

Likewise the Scriptures of the New Testament report the bodily ascension of Jesus Christ only, "*And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven*" (Lk. 24: 5 1). Not one apostle knew anything about the bodily assumption of Mary. Not until the year 1951 was the legend that Mary had been taken up, body and soul, into heaven made into a dogma. There is no Biblical foundation for it. The commandments of men have never given any salvation, but rather have kept millions from salvation.

### **Unbiblical Claim**

In the Scriptures, there is not the slightest hint of a person of authority, who should be designated as a successor of Peter. In them is never any talk of a representative of Christ. They report solely disciples of Jesus Christ. There is also nothing written stating that Peter was installed as the visible head of the Church. How can there be a man who is supposed to be the head, if Christ Himself is the head?

Of Jesus Christ is written, "*And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church*" (Col. 1: 17-18). Whoever claims to be the head, elevates himself to the level of Christ and must place himself under the condemnation of the Word (2 Thess. 2: 3-4). A biblically believing Christian can only recognise the LORD as the head of the church. A representative, or "*Vicarius Filii Dei*", has not been instituted by Christ. He himself has redeemed His church and is bringing it to perfection.

It is interesting to read about spiritual development in the history of the church. The legends of Peter having acted as Bishop in Rome and having been buried there cannot be historically proved. There is only reported a magician named Simon Magus, who made such an impression

on the Senate and the people in Rome, that they declared him to be a god and made a statue and set it up with the inscription: "*Simoni dea sancto.*"

What has such an account to do with the man of God, Simon Peter, who never set foot in Rome? Also here we refer to the Scriptures alone. According to Galatians 2: 9, Peter, James and John on the one part, and Paul and Barnabas on the other, agreed by a hand-clasp that Paul and Barnabas should go unto the heathen, whereas Peter and the others should go to the Jews.

Paul was the outstanding apostle to the heathen, for God had separated him for this purpose. To him God had said, "*Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles*" (Acts 22: 21). To the church at Rome Paul writes, "*... I will come by you into Spain*" (Rom. 15: 28). The missionary journeys of Paul, including that to Rome, are clearly described. Why is not a single journey of Peter to that city reported? From Rome, Paul sent out the majority of his epistles to the various churches and individuals. Many who were together with him there were spoken of by name, without Peter being mentioned a single time. Who can suppose this to have been possible, if Peter had worked with him in Rome?

In addition, it is of secondary importance where a man of God spent his time and worked. It is solely a matter of exposing a pious fable, upon which a large institution is built, with which she seeks to give her doctrines authority. Th this we can only answer with the words of Peter himself, "*For we have not followed cunningly devised fables...*" (2 Pet. 1: 16).

Also the Scriptures report nothing about an apostolic succession. When Leo the Great in A. D. 440 was chosen as Bishop of Rome, he made the claim, that the Roman Bishop had precedence over all other bishops. He it was, who in this connection referred to Mt. 6: 16. Ceremoniously he proclaimed himself in person as Peter's successor. Until then this idea had already now and again cropped up among the "Nicolaitans", but had never yet been linked to a spiritual office. It was a direction of belief which emphasised the difference between the listening laity and the ministering brothers. It is absolutely against the Word. The redeemed church makes up a "royal priesthood" (1 Pet. 2: 9).

It is well known to historians that the consecrated man of God Polycarp (died A. D. 155) was together with John, the disciple whom Jesus loved and who was banned to the Isle of Patmos. He heard the pure witness from the mouth of the apostle. Not once is there to be found in his writings even the slightest hint of the ideas invented later. Irenaeus (died 202), a messenger of Christ endowed with power, was for a considerable length of time together with Polycarp. He also had nothing to report of a successor to Peter. Until that time men tried as far as possible to hold to the Word of God. Tertullian (died 220) said, "To the LORD, not the servant, belong judgement and verdict."

Even at the Council of Nicea such a thought was not mentioned by the two spokesmen Athanasius and Arius. It was not until A. D. 445 that Emperor Valentinian confirmed the Bishop of Rome as the supreme head

of the church in the West. Now all the power radiated from Rome. The famous ecclesiastical teacher Augustine of Hippo (354-430) gave this thought pre-eminence when he wrote about a "divine state". For him the church constituted the "Kingdom of God." He taught that "church is authority." Where remains the authority of Him Who had said, "*All power is given UNTO ME in heaven and in earth!*"?

This unbiblical development cannot be traced back to the Apostles in the early church. As already mentioned, there were at that time the offices instituted by the LORD for the whole church. But each local assembly had responsible brothers. They were denoted either as "elders", as "overseers" or as "bishops." For example, in his epistle to the Philippians Paul greets the church of the LORD as saints, together with their bishops and deacons. These two offices belonged in the local church. A biblical requirement for this task was that such a man must be married (1 Tim. 3: 3) - it was never demanded of any apostle or prophet that he had to be the husband of one wife, but it was required of deacons and bishops. Only somebody who himself had to overcome marriage and family problems can from experience give others advice and help.

Nevertheless, the Spirit of God already revealed then, as Paul himself said, that it would not remain so. In 1 Tim. 4 we read, "*Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats...*" Of what do we think on reading this Word? It has literally been fulfilled.

### **A Misunderstanding**

Whoever attentively reads Matthew 16: 18 will establish that the LORD did not say, "Thou art Peter, and on thee I will build my church," but "*Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.*" It is not admissible to take a single verse and interpret it arbitrarily. In order to obtain a clear answer it is necessary to read the whole context.

In both, Old and New Testament the LORD is often denoted as a rock, but a man never once. Peter had just been given the divine revelation concerning Christ, and a few minutes later had to recognise his failure, his fallibility. Only a few verses after, the LORD said to the same Peter, "*Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men*" (Mt. 16: 23). That should cause all to think, who presume to be able to bring their own thoughts into the Word of God. Everything not in agreement with the written Word comes from a false inspiration. The same words that the LORD once said to Peter, who in that moment did not think in a divine manner, but along human lines, He says today to everyone standing under a false inspiration.

In the spiritual realm, it is not a matter of whether we promote thoughts that seem to be good and plausible, but whether we promote God's eternal thoughts, which He has expressed clearly in His Word. There are only two sources of inspiration. The individual draws either from the one or from the other. With the first human beings in the Garden of Eden Satan began by giving the Word his own interpretation. Eve first listened to it, and then Adam in turn listened to her. In this way the whole plight on earth began. It must surely be clear to all that Satan will never appear with a proclamation separate from God and the Word. That would be too obvious. He always makes use of God's Word, but quotes it in a distorted form. For only inasmuch as he succeeds in satisfying people that they would be doing the work of God, can he deceive them. Therefore what he says always sounds all along very pious and godly.

From the account of the temptation of our LORD it is dear that the enemy also came to Him with Bible quotations, which he had however torn out of their context and falsely applied. The LORD responded to him each time with, "*But again it is written...*" Reference to Biblical quotations therefore means absolutely nothing, if they are not in agreement with the total testimony of the Holy Scriptures. Although the enemy will always appear citing the Bible, he leaves no citation in its original context.

### **The Keys**

The words, "*I (Jesus) will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven,*" which the LORD addressed to Peter, are directly linked to his calling and sending. When the first church was gathered at Pentecost, Peter stepped forward as the mouthpiece of God. Filled with the Holy Ghost he set forth in few words to the crowd of people that was collected together the fundamental truth of salvation. For those who believe according to the New Testament, those are for ever binding.

A key symbolises access to a thing. If anyone has the key to a palace, a house, or a car, he has access to it. Locked doors are open to him, and he may enter. If anyone has the keys to the Kingdom of heaven, then God's Kingdom with all its treasures, all its promises and gifts, is open to him. In simple terms he has free access to everything that God has prepared. By what He said to Peter, the LORD desired to emphasise this fact in a special way. In the first place the divine authority was placed prophetically on our LORD (Isa. 22: 22). Later He gave it to His servants, whom He personally had called to His service.

The statement in Matthew 18: 18 is also in a false way taken out of context. In it the LORD is speaking not to Peter, but rather to the whole church. Therefore He stated in the plural, "*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.*" Where does one hear of clerics who are capable of binding the powers of Satan, driving

out devils, and setting free those that are bound? Anyone can carry a key about in his robe. Who, however, possesses the divine authority?

The next verse also proves unequivocally, that the LORD is addressing the whole church, *"Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."* How it could be concluded, that verse 18 only applies to those who bear office, is incomprehensible.

The faithful constitute the body of the LORD and are all equal before God. To the church at Rome Paul writes, *'For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another Having then gifts differing according to the grace given to us...'* (Rom. 12: 4-6). These thoughts are specified more completely by Paul in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, Chapter 12, from verse 4, *"Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit..."* He emphasises that we were joined together by the Holy Spirit as members into this one body of the LORD. From verse 7 he explains, *'But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. " That is an experience. Then he continues and lists the nine spiritual gifts of the members of the body of Jesus Christ: "But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him" (1 Cor. 12: 18).*

### **Apostolic Authority**

The apostles and all true men sent from God did not hold sway by means of worldly power, but came with divine authority, with the power of the Holy Spirit. Divine authority was only exercised in combination with the proclamation of the Word at the commission of God, authority which is reserved to God in his sovereignty. This authority was not given in order that one person should dominate over others, but that all should submit themselves under the mighty hand of God. This authority does not depend on an office, but is linked to the all-embracing power of the risen Christ.

After His resurrection, the LORD said to His disciples then present, *"Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."* Following this is written, *"And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost. whosoever's sins ye remit (not thou remittest), they are remitted unto them: and whosoever's sins ye retain, they are retained" (Jn. 20: 21-23).* The connection here is also very clear. The LORD is directing the all-embracing commission only to such men as He had taken into His service for proclaiming the Gospel. Who today can bear witness to having been called and commissioned by the voice of the LORD? On whom has the LORD actually in reality breathed His Spirit as on that occasion? Who has the right to operate in His Name?

Were Peter or Paul chosen by a corporate body of people? Or were they appointed by God? There were no cardinals there to vote on the matter, as has been the case since the 11th century. No smoke rose heavenwards, neither did all the world shout with joy. In the early church the men of God had understood fully and completely what the LORD had commanded. They were being led by the Holy Spirit. All scriptures that belonged to a certain theme they correctly brought together over a common denominator.

On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit fell with the sound of a rushing mighty wind accompanied by cloven tongues of divine fire on all that were present in the place where they were. Thus purified by divine fire they were able, like the prophets in the Old Testament, to utter the Word with the authority of the Holy Spirit. What Peter preached in the first sermon will be said until the last sermon by everyone who is called by the LORD and filled with the Holy Spirit, *"Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins!" (Acts 2: 38).* With respect to those who were sent by the LORD Himself, He said, *"He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me..." (Lk. 10: 16).*

### **The Forgiveness of Sins**

If the LORD speaks today through any person, He will say the same as He did two-thousand years ago. In Luke 24: 47 is written with reference to Christ, *"And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."* The forgiveness of sins was not linked to an office, but to Jesus Christ, the crucified One. Only under the sound of preaching can the Spirit of God effect the necessary repentance in those that hear, and grant the understanding to be converted. Only in this manner is forgiveness imparted to the believer. It is a personal experience, not the operation of an office.

In Romans 10 Paul explains that Biblical faith comes by hearing, that is, hearing from the Word of God. In this it is important that not just anything should be preached, but that the kernel of the sermon should be Christ and His Gospel alone, with the Redemption which He accomplished.

It ought to strike us as really odd, that on the one hand men throughout their lives have their sins absolved and forgiven, but on the other hand are taught that the punishment for them is to do penance. The Word of God says the opposite, *"For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10: 14).* The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a joyous message, a message of salvation. God speaks through the prophet Isaiah, *"Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you" (Isa. 35: 4).* The Apostle Paul confirms it with the following words, *"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men" M. 2: 11).* Isaiah exclaimed, *"...He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of*



*our peace was upon him; and with his, stripes we are healed"* (chapter 53: 5).

Whoever accepts the LORD as Redeemer, can no longer be punished, for He has taken our punishment upon Himself. He who believes that receives forgiveness of sins and peace with God. Paul writes, *"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our LORD Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand ..."* (Rom. 5: 1-2).

The apostle writes further of Christ, *"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace"* (Eph. 1: 7). All can read in Colossians 1, from verse 14, how the complete work of salvation is identified with the Redeemer Himself. In Romans 1: 16 Paul says, *"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth."* It cannot be sufficiently emphasised that this faith is fixed in the Word of God alone. Not everyone, however, is able to teach what God wills, and in doing so use the Name of Christ. Faith must be according to the Scriptures.

In them is no empty promise as to any particular time, but fulfilment is in what the LORD Himself said, *'Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life'* (Jn. 5: 24).

How could forgiveness, which is a gift of grace from God, be dependent on an ecclesiastical operation? It depends alone on the faith of the individual, who hears the Gospel and accepts it. It is written, *"Therefore as by the offence of one judgement came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life"* (Rom. 5: 18).

Where is there still room for good works, by which a man can achieve his own salvation? Everyone with a heart who can do good will do it, but no one can earn his salvation thereby. When our LORD was on the cross, and cried out "It is finished!" and died, our salvation had been paid once and for all time. Paul explains further, *"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous"* (Rom. 5: 19).

As certainly as by Adam we were brought into perdition, into death, and separated from God, equally certainly are we redeemed from perdition through Christ, passed from death into eternal Life and become reconciled with God. God Himself has made good the damage. He who believes that will find salvation. Peter testifies with blunt simplicity, *"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we may be saved"* (Acts 4: 12). There is nothing that needs to be added to these simple and straightforward facts.

It would have been unworthy of God if He had made our eternal salvation dependent on the goodwill of others. The unequivocal task of an authorised messenger of God consists of showing his audience by

preaching from the Scriptures, that a great reconciliation between God and mankind took place at Calvary.

In this connection it is possible during a sermon to state with divine authority to those that hear, "Believe that your sins are forgiven! Believe that your guilt is done away! Believe that your punishment has been borne for you!" To whomever these divine facts are explained by the Spirit of God on the basis of the Word of God, he is for ever pardoned and may go out free. But everyone must accept it for himself in order to receive personal assurance of salvation.

### **A New Beginning**

Shortly before the outbreak of the Reformation the historical development of the church reached its zenith. The exercise of combined power of the state and the church in that period of time is unimaginable. Those who thought and believed differently were accused of heresy, condemned as heretics, and deprived of life in every conceivable manner. Here may be mentioned only the Spanish Inquisition in the 15th Century, as well as the witch trials, and the associated burnings. We do not wish to go into the many human failings here. We are only desirous of pointing to the stage of spiritual development to which a degenerated Christianity arrived in the course of time.

This earth was saturated with much blood. One of the best-known martyrs before the outbreak of the Reformation was Jan Hus (martyred 1415). His voice was heard for the last time at the Council of Constance, but was however shouted down without being able to straighten out anything. Kneeling with his eyes raised heavenwards, he listened quietly while he heard his doom pronounced. Then he cried, "LORD Jesus, I implore Thee for the sake of Thy mercy: Forgive all my enemies." The fathers of the Council laughed, and he was led away to the stake to be burnt.

But the Reformation, which introduced a turning-point in the history of the church, could no longer be stemmed. The truth of the Gospel blazed a trail with power. Martin Luther and others stood up against the abuses which were approved of and even supported by the church. The well known dealer in indulgences, Tetzl, belonged to those who blasphemed God in words and deeds, in that he preached that the Pope had the absolute right to forgive the sins of the living and the dead, and that the absolution of the Pope was just as effective as the cross of Christ. Among other things he also maintained that the Pope for the price of an indulgence could even forgive the sins of anyone who had raped the mother of God. In simple words it meant: everyone could commit the worst crimes and the Pope would forgive everything and grant an indulgence, provided the money was heard to drop in the box.

Church history records the following: "Luther heard of the dreadful items which the shameless monk preached, that the power of the sale of indulgences was as effective as the cross of Christ, that he had a

commission from the Apostle Peter, and that by means of his indulgences he had saved more souls than Peter had with his sermons." And "what Luther perceived concerning the practical consequences of the preaching of indulgences gave the impulse to the first reformatory act." As had always been the case, on this occasion also God used men on earth for the honour and glorification of His Name. God sent men who are not only known in history and are of significance in the history of church, but who were also God's servants through whom history was made in spreading the gospel of the Kingdom of God upon earth.

Such men were Martin Luther, Huldreich Zwingli, Philip Melancthon, John Calvin, John Knox and a great number of others who lived at that time. After centuries during which the Holy Scriptures were withheld from mankind, men began to read the Bible and translate it. First the Bible was printed and published in 14 languages; by about 1600 it was already available in forty, around 1800 seventy-two, and by 1900 fivehundred-and-sixty-seven languages. In 1950 the milestone of eleven hundred languages and dialects was passed. In spite of all attempts to destroy it, God's Book has enjoyed the largest number of editions and the most extensive distribution.

Through His Word God spoke afresh and allowed Biblical truth to become once more a reality in the personal life of faith of the individual. However, the believers did not stop there, but tried also to bring that which had become great and valuable closer to other men. The success which the reformers had, provoked the resistance of the established clergy, who at all costs wanted to hinder the spreading of the Word. The result of this was that the message that makes joyous and free encompassed still larger circles.

Seen from the standpoint of church history, each of the participating men had a definite task to fulfil. Looked at more closely, they complemented one another in the doctrines they especially emphasised. Stress was again on the Bible as the only criterion for the propagation of the Gospel. No one would dare today to denote the issues so clearly by name as Luther did. It is noteworthy how he laid bare the Antichrist. He did not concern himself with specious arguments, but appealed again and again to the Scriptures, in the degree in which they had been revealed to him. Thus, for example, he wrote of the end of the Babylonian captivity of the church and threw into sharp relief justification by faith, which the individual receives by the grace of God, in opposition to justification by works, which can give salvation to nobody.

Many are of the opinion today that the Reformation was only necessary because moral decay and external circumstances supplied the cause. Although this state of affairs existed, this viewpoint must be contradicted. With the Reformation it was not a matter of moral rearmament, but much rather that of a break-through to a spiritual regeneration. A new beginning was necessary. Spiritual tutelage had for ever to come to an end, and the day of grace, the day of salvation, had to be proclaimed afresh.

Nevertheless all men were not ready to believe and to take their place on the side of God. But in spite of all a break-through was made and the unlimited universal power of the church broken.

Only few today AM appear to remember or be conscious of what a price had to be paid for the free propagation of the Word of God. The bloody counter-reformation attempted in almost all European countries to smite the Reformation movement to the ground, which in part it also succeeded in doing. Especially well known are the persecutions of the Protestants in the Netherlands and of the Huguenots in France, in which on St. Bartholomew's night in 1572 the blood of thousands of Protestants flowed in the streets of Paris.

At that time the Roman church exercised spiritual and worldly power simultaneously. Within the region of her domination every army stood at her disposal. Again and again these armies intervened in the spiritual dispute. Everywhere where the Reformation broke out particularly strongly and threatened to advance, a powerful army put in an appearance. When the spiritual struggle was fully underway in Switzerland, the army was also mobilised there. The Reformation had to be halted and forced to retreat. On the side of the citizens of Zurich, the people gathered about Zwingli in order to defend themselves against this attack. He himself marched in the foremost rank and said to them: "Commend yourselves to God, He can take care of us and our loved ones. Let God do as He pleases!" During the bitter fighting he was struck by a stone and wounded by a spear. He lay among the dead, folded his hands, raised his eyes to heaven and prayed. The captain of the Catholic army saw this, strode over to him and demanded of him to make confession. Zwingli declined to do this. With difficulty he succeeded in speaking out the words, "They can kill my body, but not my soul," before he received the death dealing thrust.

In Germany the Reformation appeared to be completely quashed by the counter-reformation. King Gustav Adolf of Sweden came with his army to the help of the Elector of Saxony on the Protestant side. On 17th September, 1632, a significant battle was won. Beforehand the King had prayed in the following words, "Almighty God, from whom victory and defeat come, show us, Thy servants, a gracious countenance who are come from distant countries in order to fight for freedom, truth and Thy Holy Gospel. Grant us victory for the sake of Thy Holy Name. Amen." Two months later, on 16th November, 1632, he fell in battle on German soil.

Under no circumstances is it possible to approve of the introduction of worldly and military might for the defence or propagation of the Gospel. But for the sake of truth it must be said, that the Protestants in this situation were pressed into action. It would lead to too great lengths, if we were to go into the detail of many of the arguments during the counterreformation, in the course of which thousands gave up their lives.

The founder of the Jesuit order, Ignatius of Loyola, he who was mainly responsible for the counter-reformation, for this reason went down as a hero in the history of the Roman Catholic church. A more than life-size

memorial has been erected to him in St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, at whose feet a monster lies, on which are written the names "Luther" and "Calvin". In this way is symbolically represented that he emerged as victor over the "monster of Protestantism".

He was buried in the church "del Gesù" in Rome under an altar richly furnished with splendour and dedicated to him. A similar symbolism is found there. Marble figures in groups on both sides of his coffin represent the victorious Catholic faith and victorious religion, at whose feet lie books and heretics, on which likewise are found the two names "Luther" and "Calvin". Those two memorials speak a clear language.

In Protestant circles today no one appears to give the matter any further thought; filled with the spirit of the times, most people just become immersed in the routine of the day. Everywhere one speaks of dialogue and longs for unification. However, what would all the martyrs and protagonists of the Reformation say to the modern surrender of the most sacred values of the Faith and of the Gospel? But, on the other hand, this development belongs to the final run of events at the end-time.

The Reformation was dearly paid for. Its sense and purpose can therefore not have been merely to leave us the well known state churches and community churches, which differ from country to country. Rather it established the foundation and point of departure for all further spiritual awakenings right up to the present time. If this powerful beginning had not then been made, the many free churches and Christian fellowships would not be able to exist at all today. It is a matter of progressive Reformation, whose objective is the restored church of Jesus Christ.

The eruption of the Reformation was an event of great historical significance in the propagation of the gospel. The Spirit of God brought light and life into the dead religious world. The Word was placed at the centre of all preaching. Since that time internationally well known personalities have to an extent emphasised different doctrines. If these are assembled together, they result once more in a harmonic whole.

To be sure, not all truths were suddenly preached at one and the same time. Also there were points of doctrine, such as those of the Trinity and the Trinitarian formula of baptism, both of which are not anchored in the testimony of the prophets and apostles, and which were not dealt with in the 'official' Reformation movement. In part, a weighty Roman inheritance was carried along into the Reformation, one which today still burdens all Protestant denominations and free churches.

In the second round John Wesley made his appearance, and with him a large number of fiery preachers of spiritual awakening. They emphasised the second experience of a converted man. Just as justification by grace alone through faith in the complete redemptive work of Christ was originally emphasised in the Reformation, so did these men give prominence to the need for believers justified by faith to experience an inner dedication, a total sacrifice. The Bible denotes this experience as "sanctification". True reverence towards God affected the believers to a

greater and greater degree. There emerged from this period the Methodist churches and other religious orientations founded in a special way on the testimony of these Biblical truths, but which in other points of doctrine varied in their interpretations.

John Smith then followed, and consecrated evangelists appeared with him. Believer's baptism was proclaimed without compromise. Only he or she who had made a personal decision for Christ and was prepared to follow the LORD was baptised by immersion. From this emerged the Baptist churches and likewise others which laid common stress on the baptism of believers, but again differed recognisably in other doctrines

In the individual countries spiritual developments assumed different forms. In the Protestant areas the emphasis was generally laid on the personal experience of salvation and the related assurance of salvation. Alongside the generally known spiritual movements, smaller ones were always found which separated themselves from all those organised along religious lines and in turn laid emphasis on particular Biblical truths. We refer only to such movements which in spite of differing doctrines, linked salvation of the soul to the grace of God made manifest in Jesus Christ alone.

Where so-called special revelations are proclaimed on which salvation is made dependent, we are no longer dealing with the continuation of Biblical renewal. All the sects of recent times are an excellent example of this. Redemption is dependent on the Redeemer alone; salvation only from the One Who brought it and paid for it with His own blood, forgiveness solely from the One that granted it: but not from a self-proclaimed guru or leader.

Again and again men of God endued with divine power appeared on the scene who proclaimed anew the old Biblical truths and thereby approached the witness of the Apostles more closely. Early in the present century a general revival came. What until then individuals had experienced, now became an experience of believers throughout the whole world. All who hungered and thirsted for righteousness were given spiritual food and drink. Everywhere the Spirit of God was active in a manner like that in the early church. Baptism with the Holy Spirit was now experienced as previously had been justification and sanctification. The initial supernatural visitation at Azusa Street in Los Angeles and the Welsh revival are well known. This movement, which suddenly sprung up, had no founders. God Himself was working in all continents. Similar testimonies were to be heard in Russia and China, in America and Europe, in Asia and Africa, as far as the uttermost part of the earth. Anointed men of God were produced in this move of God, especially among the Anglo-American ministers.

In August 1906 Dr. R. A. Torrey visited Germany and preached at the annual conference of the Evangelical Alliance on the subject of "The Baptism with the Holy Spirit." Many were most deeply stirred among them Lieutenant-General von Viehbahn. In 1907 the leading brothers of the

movement within the church gathered for their conference week. The immediate theme was: "Did the first Christian church grieve the Holy Spirit?" After lengthy discussion Pastor Stockmeier stood up and cried out like a prophet, "Brethren, we are arguing about whether the first Christian world grieved the Holy Spirit or not. I now address the far more important question to all who are gathered here: Have we grieved the Holy Spirit?" That struck like a thunder-bolt. Many knelt down and humbled themselves before God.

Throughout the world many experienced a gracious visitation from God. During the days of each revival the message preached at the time went around the globe. The development of this school of belief which was denoted as Pentecostal, differed from one place to another. Where Baptist preachers were gripped by the Spirit of God, only believers were baptised, which is understandable. Where Lutheran ministers were seized by the Spirit, the familiar sprinkling of infants continued. There was as yet no clear break-through to the original Christianity, but a start had nevertheless been made. Various unscriptural doctrines were still introduced without testing them by the Word, and have continued until the present time.

After the second World War, in May 1946, the one-time Baptist preacher William Branham started with his unique ministry because of a mighty supernatural visitation. Like Paul he had received an extraordinary calling into service. Much earlier, after his first evangelising, he proceeded to the Ohio River, accompanied by about four-thousand people, for the purpose of baptising several hundred converts. While he was about to baptise the seventeenth person, an extraordinary event occurred. A bright light came through the brassy skies and was seen by all present to descend and hover over this young man of God. Out of the supernatural pillar of light a mighty voice was heard to speak, "As John the Baptist foreran the first coming of Christ, you are sent with a message that shall foreran His second coming!" That took place about 2 o'clock in the afternoon of 11th June, 1933. The writer has met eyewitness of that event at the eastern conference in Jeffersonville itself in April 1966. Such a powerful send-off must of necessity be followed by an unusual ministry. There was a man sent from God with a message of God to the people of God. An incomparable visitation, foreordained since the foundation of the world, was granted to this generation. *"Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?"* (Isa. 53: 1). In this case one can speak of a commission of historical significance in God's plan for mankind.

The second World War involved some fifty nations and demanded the sacrifice of more than 50 million lives, as well as bringing untold misery to millions of displaced people and leaving ruins and suffering when it was ended. In 1946 no one had yet heard of Billy Graham, Oral Roberts, or any of the evangelists who later became world famous. The mentioned divinely empowered apostolic ministry was an inspiration for hundreds of preachers. It spearheaded this last revival. Although none of them received

a direct calling and commissioning like his, they nevertheless contributed their part in proclaiming the Gospel to this generation. Literally millions were reached by means of evangelistic campaigns and over the radio and television.

The decisive break-through occurred during the period 1946-1949. The masses were attracted by this original proclamation. Since the days of our LORD and the apostles a divine vindication is not recorded in church history. The Full Gospel churches opened their doors and received a great inflow of converts. Soon the numbers attending meetings exceeded 10,000. Large halls, sports stadiums and racing tracks were used to accommodate them. The masses streamed together; in Bombay, India, and Durban, South Africa; the crowds reached several hundred thousands. As though caught in a flood wave, evangelists began with their own campaigns since the early 1950's. In this age of technical advance the spiritual awakening spread as never before. The most varied currents flowed from this. Evangelistic associations, such as the International Full-Gospel Business Men's Fellowship and the charismatic movement trace their origins directly or indirectly to this time. Each of the spiritual movements has its own stamp and reaches a particular class of followers. The charismatic movement has penetrated into the Roman Catholic Church as into all denominations and free churches.

In every case it is now the working of the Spirit that grips the whole religious world. At the end the original Word must come into the true members of the Body of Christ, bringing forth the same results as recorded at the beginning. Experiences are good and gifts of the Spirit can be a blessing, but only where the Word is preached in truth and is received as a divine Seed can the Spirit of God bring forth genuine new life. The Word is the Seed.

The Spirit falls upon all flesh in accordance with the promise in the prophet Joel. It can be compared with the rain. But even a cloudburst is of no use if the seed of the Word has not previously been sown in the heart. At the most, the people will be made wet without anything lasting being brought forth. Everything hangs upon this point. In the beginning was the Word, not the interpretation, and so must it be in the end. It depends upon whether men accept the pure Word of God as divine seed in their souls. Only then can the Holy Spirit bring forth divine Life. Only thus can a man be born again (Jn. 3; Jas. 1: 18; 1 Pet. 1: 23). The natural types the spiritual. The rain does not produce the seed. The sowing of the seed comes first, then the rain and the sun play their God-ordained part.

The best example we can find is shown us at the beginning of the New Testament. For four-thousand long years men had been waiting for the Messiah to appear. When the time was fulfilled, the Word of promise was sent to Mary. She accepted it, believed, and the Holy Ghost overshadowed her. Thus was the Word made flesh in the form of a man. In like manner we also must accept God's Word of promise intended for us. Only then can the Holy Spirit bring it to a reality in us. In the Sermon on the Mount the

LORD said, *"For he (God) maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."* (Mt. 5: 45). Wheat and weeds grow in the same field. Both receive the same rain and the same sunshine. The same rain waters the different seeds. Reference is also made to this thought in Hebrews 6: 7-8. Each seed brings forth after its own kind.

Reliance on the operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit alone does not suffice for entrance into the Kingdom of God. In Matthew 7: 21-23 the LORD rejects many who have operated mighty gifts, saying, *"I never knew you."* Both, the Word and the Spirit, belong together. Now the Word-Seed must be sown and brought to life in all of Gods children by the Spirit. Only thus can a Biblical church come into existence which is ready to allow itself to be led into all truth by the Spirit of God. First the teaching must go forth and the Word-Seed be sown in the heart. Only after that can the harvest be gathered in.

We have exposed what deviations have occurred in the course of church history, and also proved that since the Reformation spiritual development is leading back to the original Christianity. However, compromises are again being made everywhere. Everyone believes what he wants to, and does not accept what he does not want to. At the same time many witness joyously of having received the Holy Ghost. We are still in confusion as to what is right. The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of Truth and will never identify Himself with the errors that have been adopted by men. A total return to the original Word is necessary. It must first be discovered in what way the development has taken a wrong turning, so that a correction in course can be undertaken accordingly. Now the whole religious world finds itself in the hour of decision. Who is for Christ - the Word, and who for the Antichrist - the interpretation? Some will return into the lap of the old church, while others will experience the fulfilment of the promises of the Word as a little, called-out flock which will receive the kingdom (Lk. 12:32).

All who represent in their proclamation a traditionally handed-down manner of thinking that stems from the Roman church will return to her again. Precisely considered, the spiritual link has never been completely severed since the time of the Reformation. There were only individuals who followed the call of God, who consistently accepted the Biblical truths and rejected the unbiblical errors. As we shall see, in spite of the independent stance of the Protestant churches, doctrines have remained which are not in agreement with the Bible.

Also remarkable is what is to be denoted as the striving for unity and peace since the second World War. Historical enemies have become friends. On the one hand we have the political union, the United Nations - whose founding charter was signed by 50 nations in San Francisco on 24th October, 1945 - and on the other there is the World Council of Churches, founded in Amsterdam in 1948. Almost all nations, today 150 in number, belong to the "United Nations", and the majority of Christian churches

have joined the World Council of Churches. Our attention is focused on the religious development. In 1948 135 Protestant denominations joined the World Council of Churches; by 1968 it was already 234, and today it is 310. Originally the World Council of Churches, which is of course a Protestant association, was not recognised by the Vatican. In 1960 Pope John XXIII established in Rome the "Secretariat for Christian Unity". In the Second Vatican Council, 1962-1965, the decretal concerning Ecumenicity was published. The first official contact took place at the conference of the World Council of Churches in Uppsala, Sweden, in July 1968, when 15 delegates of the Vatican participated as observers. In June 1969 Pope Paul VI then visited the headquarters of the World Council of Churches in Geneva. In 1984 Pope John-Paul II travelled through Switzerland; he also paid a visit to the World Council of Churches.

It surely has struck some, that for a long time the Protestants have ceased to protest. Who today desires a spiritual altercation? Even the free churches, which fifty, forty or thirty years ago were in part viewed with disfavour, enjoy in the meantime general recognition. Most are corporate bodies according to public law, and their representatives sit at the green table. What is still missing? The word "unity" has received a magic meaning-, the word "peace" is everywhere written large; the concept "safety" is the wish of all. Thus are minds soothed.

Martin Luther would doubtless say the same today as then, "Cursed is the unity which comes into existence at the cost of Truth!" Whoever is at one with Christ is at one with His Word. Whoever agrees with the antichrist unites with him. One need only to think of the words of the LORD, *"Whosoever will save his life shall lose it."* The moment of truth has come, and everyone is forced to make a decision. The broad masses, without knowing it, will greet the coming antichrist with shouts of joy. Only a little flock of true believers will hold to Christ and His Word. The cry is going forth, to come out of Babylon and its religious confusion and be separate. The Christian unions will not take this cry seriously, only all those within them who are enlightened by the Spirit of God.

In the Christian West is of course much that is Christian. We are a Christian society, have Christian political parties, Christian trade unions, Christian clubs, and so on, and are provided with a rich in tradition Christian culture. It must only be asked whether Christ is not confused with the antichrist, and God with the devil. "Anti" means "against"; whatever is contrary to Christ and His doctrine is antichristian. Who is still able to differentiate between divine worship and idolatry? and between faith and superstition?

Those who are consecrated to the Word of God listen attentively for the catchwords "peace and safety", for they know that it is written, *"For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape!"* (1 Thess. 6: 3). All fits exactly with the aforesaid run of events pertaining to the End Time. The politicians are also aware how far the time has

advanced. Thus for example, on 20th January, 1985, the President of the United States said, "I fear that we shall soon experience Armageddon." By this was meant the final great battle (Rev. 16: 12-16). A short time previously a prominent Senator had expressed himself in the following terms, "We are the first generation that knows this is the last." All who have a role to play are now entering upon the world stage. Somehow, there is a general expectation of a global tragedy to strike soon: time is running out.

This generation will at its end experience the great "Miracle" - a surprise such as never was, nor will ever occur again. Political, financial and religious power will for a short time be placed at the disposal of the world ruler, the Antichrist. East and West will make avail of the services of a mediator, who will then give his blessing to the achieved deceptive peace treaty. The last world power will be acted out mainly from a united Europe based on the model of the old Roman empire. Biblical prophecy will soon reach its culmination.

The fear of total annihilation exists on both sides, hence the enforced efforts towards peace and disarmament talks. At the same time rearmament is in full swing, and even the inclusion of space in future warfare is under consideration. As was to be inferred from the mass media, a conference on the plans of the American President for mobilisation of space took place in the Vatican 21st-24th January, 1985, at which Soviet scientists also participated. All this is happening because the time for it has come. In 2 Peter 3 the Apostle refers to the End Time and wrote in his day, *"The heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgement and perdition of ungodly men ... But the day of the LORD will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up ... Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."*

The general and economic world-wide situation enforces mutual cooperation. All hope to survive, and therefore all must pull together. Whoever does not submit to this last world order, will be boycotted and cut off from international trade. Then will be fulfilled what is written (Rev. 13: 17), that one will not be able to buy or sell. Irrespective of the contemporary ideology and social order, all peoples will bow to the final world power. Whoever does not do it will have no chance of survival. Without the general public throughout the world being aware of it, the collective happenings lead to the final apocalyptic round of events. Already we find ourselves in the midst of fulfilment of end-time prophecy.

The development of that time must be considered from the prophetic viewpoint, for the signs of the times speak a clear language. It is not presumptuous to say: Whoever knows the plan of God laid out in the Bible

knows the future. After men have managed the Word for long enough, it is high time that God should have His say and way.