

CATECHISM OF THE NEW APOSTOLIC CHURCH



New Apostolic Church



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Vision and Mission of the New Apostolic Church

Vision

A church in which people feel at home and, inspired by the Holy Spirit and their love for God, align their lives to the gospel of Jesus Christ and thus prepare themselves for His return and eternal life

Mission

Reaching out to all people in order to teach them the gospel of Jesus Christ and to baptise them with water and the Holy Spirit

Providing soul care and cultivating a warm fellowship in which everyone shall experience the love of God and the joy of serving Him and others

Foreword

For the first time ever, a systematic description of the New Apostolic doctrine has been developed. Naturally there have already been other works describing significant elements of the New Apostolic faith, for example the book *Questions and Answers concerning the New Apostolic Faith*, which was last revised in 1992. Nevertheless there have been increasing calls for a more comprehensive description of our doctrine. The New Apostolic Church is active in many countries of varying cultural backgrounds, which makes a uniform foundational work such as this necessary in order to reinforce doctrinal unity despite all other differences.

I am pleased to make this Catechism—the creation of which was initiated by my predecessor in ministry, Chief Apostle Fehr—available to all brothers and sisters in time for the 150-year anniversary of the New Apostolic Church. It would make me happy if this work were also to be met with interest by believers of other churches. I warmly invite all to acquaint themselves with the content of the Catechism.

This book brings to expression fundamental convictions common to all Christians, but also sets forth the special features of the New Apostolic faith. The Catechism has been written in faith for people of faith. It must be emphasised that in all differences of interpretation, the New Apostolic Church holds great respect for the doctrinal statements of other churches.

The Catechism is a fundamental reference work. It is a standard for New Apostolic faith life. Certainly this book will not answer all questions in detail. It provides a great deal of opportunity for dialogue and discussion about timely issues.

A work group comprised primarily of District Apostles and Apostles has created this reference work. This project has been accompanied by the assem-

bly of all District Apostles of the world at important steps along the way. The present text has been completed in close consultation with me.

I would like to extend heartfelt thanks to all involved and express my appreciation and gratitude for all the work they have done. May this work be used in blessing and provide orientation in faith!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Wilhelm Leber'. The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name 'Wilhelm' and the last name 'Leber' clearly distinguishable.

Wilhelm Leber
Zurich, March 2012

Introduction

1 Professions of the New Testament

The Christian faith is intended to be shared with others. Already in early times, Christians were instructed to profess their faith and testify of it to others: “Always be ready to give a defence to everyone” (1 Peter 3: 15).

The New Testament contains statements and formulations in which the fundamental elements of the Christian faith, namely the profession of Jesus as the resurrected Lord, come to expression. Examples of this are:

“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the Twelve” (1 Corinthians 15: 3–5).

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2: 5–11).

These formulations served to give authoritative expression to the faith and impart the fundamentals of Christian faith to those who wanted to be baptised and become Christians. Beyond that, belief in Jesus Christ, which was

already menaced by heresies in New Testament times, was to be spread in un-adulterated fashion.

2 Concerning the term

The term “Catechism” has its origin in the Greek language (from Greek *kata* = “downward”, “toward”, and *echein* = “ring out”, “resound”), and was originally used in reference to the instruction of those who were being prepared for baptism with water. The content of the Christian faith and how it is to affect one’s lifestyle is set forth in the Catechism.

The foundation for the doctrine of the Church is Holy Scripture. The core statements of its message, as contained in both the Old and New Testaments, are presented in the Catechism.

The work presented here will begin by exploring Holy Scripture, the Ecumenical Councils of the fourth to seventh centuries, as well as the early church creeds and the most important statements of the Christian faith.

Beyond that it will describe the insights that have developed since the renewed occupation of the Apostle ministry in the early nineteenth century, which are formulated in the New Apostolic Creed.

3 Structure and content

The Catechism of the New Apostolic Church starts off with some remarks on the self-revelation of God and Holy Scripture (Chapter 1). This is followed by an explanation of the New Apostolic Creed (Chapter 2) and an explanation of the doctrine of the Trinity of God (Chapter 3). Some central positions of Christian faith, which are valid across denominational borders, come to expression in the chapter on the Trinity. Presented here is the belief in God, the Father, the Creator of heaven and earth, the belief in God, the Son, who became human in Jesus Christ, who died and resurrected from the dead, as well

as the belief in God, the Holy Spirit, through whom sanctification and the new creation are effectuated.

This is followed in Chapter 4 by statements on the condition of mankind before God, which also remark on the fall into sin and the necessity of redemption. In this context there is also commentary on the functions of the Mosaic Law and its relationship to the gospel. The remarks on the Ten Commandments (Chapter 5) make it clear that Christian faith is not a purely internal matter, but that it also has practical implications for conduct in life.

Believing sinners who have been made righteous by God practise their faith in the church, that is in the fellowship of the baptised, who believe in Jesus Christ and profess Him as their Lord. Chapter 6 describes the church of Jesus Christ and its various forms, and explains how the New Apostolic Church perceives itself within the one church of Jesus Christ. Ministry—the significance of which is presented in Chapter 7—is also part of the church of Christ. Here the Apostle ministry is understood as the source of all other ministries. This brings a pivotal element of the New Apostolic faith to expression: church and Apostle ministry belong together.

Chapter 8 contains remarks on the sacraments, namely Holy Baptism with water, Holy Communion, and Holy Sealing, that is the baptism of the Spirit. Here it becomes clear that the sacraments are essential elements of God's salvific care. They are fundamental to the New Apostolic faith.

The chapters on "Life after death" (Chapter 9) and "The doctrine of future things" (Chapter 10) deal with individual and universal eschatology, respectively. Every human being is confronted with questions as to what transpires after death, what form of relationship exists between the departed and God, and whether there are still opportunities for attaining salvation after death. Also presented here is the New Apostolic Christian goal of faith. Here we are given a glance into the future in accordance with God's plan of salvation.

These statements concerning the New Apostolic doctrine are supplemented by others that relate to the history of Christianity and the New Apostolic Church (Chapter 11) as well as to divine service (Chapter 12), and general practice in life (Chapter 13).

4 Functions

The Catechism of the New Apostolic Church takes into account earlier portrayals of the New Apostolic faith, but goes beyond previous publications of our Church in terms of both language and development of the contents of faith. Our bond with the fundamentals of faith of all Christians becomes evident in our acknowledgement of the early church creeds. The path to salvation in Christ is described in accordance with the stipulations of current understanding. This occurs in the knowledge that God, in His omnipotence, can also grant salvation to human beings in other ways than the revealed and recognisable path.

It can be considered an important function of the Catechism to serve as a basis for Church instruction and ministers' meetings. Beyond that it is intended to bring greater uniformity to doctrinal statements while taking other languages and cultures into account. In this manner, the content will also serve to deepen the knowledge and strengthen the faith of New Apostolic Christians.

The New Apostolic doctrine is also to become clear in its relationship to the doctrines of other Christian churches. Thus the Catechism presents both sides, namely that which binds us together and that which distinguishes us. The presentation of these differences is not intended to exclude others or close ourselves off to them, but can rather be a starting point for fruitful dialogue with other Christians.

The Catechism is a call to all New Apostolic Christians to occupy themselves intensively with the content of their faith. Beyond that it is also an invitation to all other interested parties to become acquainted with the New Apostolic doctrine of faith.

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Part 1

The revelations of God

1

1 The revelations of God

God, who created heaven and earth, reveals Himself in various ways in nature and history, thereby making it possible to recognise nature as His creation and the history of mankind as the history of salvation.

God has revealed Himself in a unique way in His Son Jesus Christ. In order to ensure that this revelation would always be kept alive, the Eternal One sent the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. He reveals God as the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. At the return of Christ, God's revelation to those who will then be caught up to Him will be perfect, for they will see God as He is (1 John 3: 2).

1.1 The self-revelation of God in creation and history

On their own, human beings cannot perceive God's being and nature or God's reign and will. Nevertheless, God does not conceal Himself, but rather reveals Himself to mankind.

His revelation is a declaration of divine nature, divine truth, and divine will, and is to be seen as a sign of God's love and care for mankind.

When we speak of God's "self-revelation" we understand that God grants human beings insights into His nature. God thereby makes Himself known as the Creator of heaven and earth, the Deliverer of Israel, the Reconciler of mankind, and the Maker of the new creation. However, this revelation is not only a self-revelation and expression of the divine will, but also an encounter which God grants human beings in word and sacrament.

1.1.1 God reveals Himself as the Creator

The self-revelation of God in the visible creation is accessible to all human beings. Since the beginning of time, man has observed the grandeur of nature and inquired about its origin and author. Occupying oneself with this question is to lead to faith: God is the Creator and Protector of the material world, which also includes mankind.

The material world is an expression of God's will and activity. Thus we can also recognise a self-revelation of God in it. The visible creation bears witness to the existence of God, the Creator, as well as to His wisdom and power: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Psalm 19: 1).

Apostle Paul also points out that God reveals Himself through His creation, and that all human beings should be able to recognise Him: "... because what may be known of God is manifest in them [the Gentiles who do not believe in God], for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1: 19–20).

Unbelievers do not realise that God reveals Himself through the visible creation, and therefore draw false conclusions from this self-revelation of God by worshipping things created by God. They thus bring the glory—which is due the Creator alone—to created things, and thereby make them into idols. For this reason, idolatry is also criticised in the Book of the Wisdom of Solomon: "[God] the first author of beauty hath created them [the powers of nature]. But if they [the unbelievers] were astonished at their power and virtue, let them understand by them, how much mightier He is that made them. For by the greatness and beauty of the creatures, proportionably the maker of them is seen" (Wisdom of Solomon 13: 3–5).

Even though man is able to perceive the wonder of the natural creation, it does not necessarily follow that he will, on his own, relate this to the living God. Furthermore, the phenomena of creation may merely lead him to conclude that a living God must exist. However, it is only in the context of God's

self-revelation throughout history, that is through His word addressed to human beings, that the nature and will of God can truly be perceived by mankind.

1.1.2 God reveals Himself in the history of Israel

The fact that God revealed Himself in history first becomes clear in the development of the people of Israel as attested in the Old Testament.

When He revealed himself in the burning bush, God provided an historical reference by pointing out that He had already revealed Himself to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 3: 6).

The central event of salvation for the people of Israel is their liberation from slavery in Egypt. Here, God led His people in the form of a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire (Exodus 13: 21–22). This deliverance is mentioned again and again in the Old Testament: the prophets make reference to this great deed of God, and the Psalms sing of it.

In addition to the exodus from Egypt, the promise that the people of God would be given a land of their own in Canaan and the covenant made at Mount Sinai are divine revelations of decisive importance: God Himself determined the place where His people were to live and, through the Commandments at Mount Sinai, gave Israel rules and standards by which to live.

The faith of the people of Israel is based upon divine revelations in their history, which they experienced either as an expression of God's helping care or of His punitive judgements.

Psalms 105 and 106 proclaim in impressive fashion that God both shapes history and manifests Himself within it. Likewise, the events during the time of the judges and kings in Israel and Judah, the Babylonian captivity, and the return from exile, provide examples of the fact that God intervenes in history.

Moreover, God revealed Himself through His prophets: "I have also spoken by the prophets, and have multiplied visions; I have given symbols through the witness of the prophets" (Hosea 12: 10). It is the same God who leads and instructs His people: "Yet I am the Lord your God ever since the

land of Egypt, and you shall know no God but Me; for there is no Saviour besides Me” (Hosea 13: 4). It is likewise through the prophets that God promises the coming Messiah, the Saviour (Isaiah 9: 6; Micah 5: 2).

1.1.3 God reveals Himself in His Son

God’s incarnation in Jesus Christ is the historical self-revelation of God that surpasses everything before it (John 1: 14; 1 Timothy 3: 16). The gospel according to Luke expressly places the birth of the Son of God in a historical framework: “And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria” (Luke 2: 1–2).

The historicity of God’s incarnation is also underlined in the first epistle of John. There John confronts groups within the Christian community who denied that Jesus Christ had really “come in the flesh” (1 John 4: 2). John goes on to write: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life ...—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1: 1–3).

1.1.4 God reveals Himself in the time of the church

With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem on Pentecost, God revealed Himself to mankind as the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In addition to the revelations of God attested in Holy Scripture in ancient times, there are also insights of the Holy Spirit in recent times, which are imparted to the church of Christ through the Apostle ministry. The deeper insights into His plan of salvation, which are provided by the Holy Spirit, serve as a reference to the unique self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ, to maintain awareness of it, and to point to Christ’s return.

The revelation of the Holy Spirit makes it clear that the fundamental renewal of mankind and the creation has become possible. In human beings this occurs through the sacraments. At the end of time, heaven and the earth will also be newly created.

SUMMARY

God reveals Himself in various ways in nature and history, such that nature is always to be recognised as His creation and history as the history of salvation. (1)

On their own, human beings cannot perceive God's being and nature or His reign and will. (1.1)

Revelation is a declaration of divine nature, divine truth, and divine will, and is a sign of God's love and care for mankind. (1.1)

Self-revelation means that God makes Himself known as the Creator, the Deliverer of Israel, the Reconciler of mankind, and the Maker of the new creation. (1.1)

The self-revelation of God in the visible creation is accessible to all human beings, however, it can only be properly recognised in faith. (1.1.1)

It is only through the self-revelation of God in history—that is to say through His word addressed to mankind—that the nature and will of God can truly be recognised. (1.1.1)

God revealed Himself in the history of Israel, as attested in the Old Testament. The principal event of salvation for the people of Israel was their liberation from slavery in Egypt. In addition, God revealed Himself through His prophets. (1.1.2)

The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is the historical self-revelation of God which surpasses everything before it. (1.1.3)

With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, God revealed Himself in His Trinity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (1.1.4)

In addition to the revelations of God attested in Holy Scripture in ancient times, there are also insights of the Holy Spirit in recent times which are imparted through the Apostle ministry. (1.1.4)

1.2 Holy Scripture

Over the course of many centuries, human experiences of God's revelation and His acts in the course of the history of salvation have been recorded in writing. Already in the time after the Babylonian exile, that is in the centuries before Christ's birth, the writings concerning God's acts, promises, and commandments were accorded great authority in Judaism, and were also called "Holy Scriptures" in the epistles of the New Testament. The second epistle to Timothy emphasises that these Scriptures are based on divine revelation: "... that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3: 15–16).

While Apostle Paul uses the term "Holy Scriptures" in reference to the compilation of sacred writings of Judaism in use at the time, the modern Christian usage of the term applies to the collection of the writings from both the old and the new covenants.

The term "Bible" is derived from the Greek word *biblia*, meaning "books, scrolls". The Bible is a collection of books from Old Testament times which came into being over a span of more than 1000 years, as well as books from the New Testament period, which were composed over a span of about 70 years.

The author of Holy Scripture is God, while its writers were human beings whom the Holy Spirit inspired (2 Peter 1: 20–21). God made use of their abilities to commit to writing that which was to be passed on in accordance with His will. Although the contents of the biblical books have their source in

the Holy Spirit, they bear the mark of their respective writers and their perceptions of the world, in terms of style and form of expression. We have God to thank for the fact that these texts have remained unadulterated over all this time.

Holy Scripture is a testimony of the revelation of God without claiming to be a complete account of all of God's deeds (John 21: 25).

1.2.1 Content and structure of Holy Scripture

The Bible is comprised of two main parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The term "Testament" derives from the promise of the "new covenant" recorded in Jeremiah 31: 31–34¹. While the writings of the Old Testament refer to the covenant that God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as with Moses, the writings of the New Testament testify of the new covenant, which God initiated with the sending of His Son.

Both the Old and New Testaments testify of God's plan of salvation for mankind and are thus linked to one another. The designation "Bible" for the Old and New Testament has already been in use since the ninth century.

1.2.2 The Old Testament

The Old Testament contains accounts of the creation, individual events from the time after the fall into sin, as well as the origin and history of the people of Israel. Beyond that, it contains works of Judaic wisdom literature, the Psalter as Israel's book of hymns and prayers, as well as books that bear witness of the words and activities of the prophets of God.

¹ The Hebrew term *berit*, which means "covenant", is rendered as *diatheke* in the Greek translation of the Bible. This Greek term has the double meaning of "covenant" and "testament".

1.2.2.1 The origin of the Old Testament canon

The term “canon” (meaning “standard” or “guideline” in English), which was borrowed from the Greek language, is used to describe the collection of holy writings that have been binding on all Christendom since the middle of the fourth century.

The Christian canon of the Old Testament is based on the Hebrew canon of Judaism. Even by the time of Jesus and the early Apostles, Judaism did not yet have a firmly defined canon. Although there was a basic collection of holy writings (the Torah, the books of the prophets, and the Psalms), there were also other books which were accepted as holy by some Judaic groups but rejected by others. The scope of the Hebrew canon was conclusively defined by the end of the first century AD.

At that point in time, the Christian canon of the Old Testament was far from complete.

To this day there is no uniform canon of the Old Testament that is binding on all Christian churches.

1.2.2.2 The books of the Old Testament

In the New King James Version of the Bible used in the English-speaking world, the Old Testament can be divided into three groups: historical books, doctrinal books, and prophetic books.

The seventeen **historical** books are:

The five books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy)

The book of Joshua

The book of Judges

The book of Ruth

The two books of Samuel

The two books of the Kings

The two books of the Chronicles

The book of Ezra
The book of Nehemiah
The book of Esther

The five **doctrinal books** are:

The book of Job
The book of Psalms
The book of Proverbs
The book of Ecclesiastes
The Song of Solomon

The seventeen **prophetical books** are:

Isaiah
Jeremiah
Lamentations of Jeremiah
Ezekiel
Daniel
Hosea
Joel
Amos
Obadiah
Jonah
Micah
Nahum
Habakkuk
Zephaniah
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

1.2.3 The later writings of the Old Testament

The later writings of the Old Testament contained in many editions of the Bible are also known as “Apocrypha” (“hidden Scriptures”). These are Judaic

writings that came into being between the third and first centuries BC. In terms of content, they constitute an important binding agent between the Old and New Testaments. Important convictions of faith of the New Testament are foreshadowed in these writings. In the New Apostolic Church these later writings of the Old Testament are just as binding for faith and doctrine as all other writings of the Old Testament canon.

Those English-language editions of the Bible that contain the Apocrypha generally place these books between the Old and New Testaments.

The fifteen **Apocryphal books** are:

The two books of Esdras

Tobit

Judith

The rest of Esther

The Wisdom of Solomon

Ecclesiasticus

Baruch

The Song of the Three Holy Children

The History of Susanna

Bel and the Dragon

The Prayer of Manasses

The three books of the Maccabees²

1.2.4 The New Testament

The New Testament contains the records of the mission and activity of Jesus and His Apostles handed down in the gospels and the Acts. Letters from the Apostles to the congregations and individuals provide insight into the congregational life and missionary activity in the early Christian period. These let-

² Some English-language publications of the Bible include three books of the Maccabees, however, the third book is widely considered non-canonical.

ters also provide explanations about the doctrine, which the Apostles proclaimed by commission of their Sender.

In the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the prophetic book of the New Testament, Jesus Christ admonishes His church in various ways, comforts them with the promise of His return, and points to future events.

1.2.4.1 The origin of the New Testament canon

For the early Christian congregation, today's Old Testament comprised the actual Bible. In addition, the recorded "words of the Lord" (*logia*) soon came to be accorded special regard. The *logia* were at first passed on verbally. Even before any accounts of Jesus' activity were ever recorded in writing, the congregations had various creeds and hymns in which the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ were professed. These also found their way into the writings of the Apostles.

The oldest early Christian writings handed down to us are the letters of Apostle Paul. These were read aloud in the divine services and then passed along to neighbouring congregations.

After the epistles of Paul, the gospel of Mark is the oldest written testimony of Christian belief. The content and structure of the gospels according to Matthew and Luke are closely related to it.

In order to preserve the apostolic tradition, pass along its teachings, and distinguish it from false doctrines, it became necessary to prepare a collection of New Testament writings that would be binding upon the church. An Easter letter from Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria dating from the year AD 367 lists all 27 writings of the New Testament as binding. This canon was ultimately ratified by the synods of Hippo Regius (AD 393) and Carthage (AD 397).

The Old and New Testament canons did not come into being on account of human contemplations alone, but most of all through the will of God.

1.2.4.2 The books of the New Testament

In the New King James Version of the Bible the New Testament can be divided into the same categories as the Old Testament.

The five **historical books** are:

The gospel according to Matthew

The gospel according to Mark

The gospel according to Luke

The gospel according to John

The Acts of the Apostles

The 21 **doctrinal books** are:

The epistle of Paul to the Romans

The two epistles of Paul to the Corinthians

The epistle of Paul to the Galatians

The epistle of Paul to the Ephesians

The epistle of Paul to the Philippians

The epistle of Paul to the Colossians

The two epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians

The two epistles of Paul to Timothy

The epistle of Paul to Titus

The epistle of Paul to Philemon

The epistle to the Hebrews

The epistle of James

The two epistles of Peter

The three epistles of John

The epistle of Jude

The **prophetical book** is:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ (Apocalypse)

SUMMARY

The author of Holy Scripture is God. Its writers were human beings whom the Holy Spirit inspired. In style and form of expression the books of the Bible bear the mark of their respective writers and their perceptions of the world. (1.2)

Holy Scripture is a testimony of God's revelation, although it is not a complete account of all of God's deeds. (1.2)

The Bible—that is Holy Scripture—is comprised of the Old and New Testaments. Both parts testify of God's plan of salvation for mankind and are thus linked to one another. (1.2.1)

The Christian canon of the Old Testament is based upon the Hebrew canon. The Old Testament consists of seventeen historical books, five doctrinal books, and seventeen prophetic books. (1.2.2.1; 1.2.2.2)

In terms of content, the fifteen later writings of the Old Testament (Apocrypha) comprise an important link between the Old and New Testament Scriptures, and are just as binding for faith and doctrine as the other books of the Old Testament canon. (1.2.3)

The New Testament contains records of the mission and activity of Jesus and His Apostles. The 27 books of the New Testament have been considered binding (canonical) since the fourth century. The New Testament consists of five historical books, 21 doctrinal books, and one prophetic book. (1.2.4; 1.2.4.1; 1.2.4.2)

1.2.5 The significance of Holy Scripture for doctrine and faith

Holy Scripture is the foundation for the doctrine of the New Apostolic Church.

Accordingly, the proclamation of the word in the divine services is also based on Holy Scripture. It is the starting point, and foundation for, the sermon (see 12.1.6).

1.2.5.1 Interpretation of Holy Scripture through the Holy Spirit

The correct understanding of Holy Scripture, which came into being through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, can only be unlocked by the same Spirit. God's will—and thus also the Holy Scripture given by Him—can only be opened up in all its depth through the activity of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2: 10–12).

As “servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4: 1), the Apostles of Jesus are also commissioned to interpret Holy Scripture. They can only do this through the Holy Spirit.

1.2.5.2 Jesus Christ—the centre of Scripture

According to Christian understanding, the principal aim of the Old Testament is to prepare the way for the arrival of the Messiah and to testify of Him. Jesus Himself emphasised this (John 5: 39; Luke 4: 17–21; 24: 27). He interpreted the Scriptures for His disciples in relationship to His activity. Concerning this He made the statement: “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me” (Luke 24: 44). Accordingly, the Old Testament must be interpreted on the basis of the Son of God. The old covenant is fulfilled in Christ. The incarnation of the Son of God is the most important self-revelation of God and is the centre of the entire history of salvation. This reality is brought to expression in the statement: “Jesus Christ is the centre of the Scripture.”

The significance for faith and doctrine of any statements made in the individual books of the Old Testament—or in the later writings of the Old Testament—can be determined by the agreement of their contents with that which the gospel teaches.

1.2.5.3 Personal use of the Holy Scriptures

It is recommendable for every believer to read regularly from Holy Scripture, as it comforts and edifies, provides orientation and admonition, and serves to promote knowledge. The important thing in this process is the attitude of heart with which the reader studies the Bible. The striving for the fear of God and sanctification, together with sincere prayer for correct understanding, are contributing factors for profitable reading of the Bible. Reading the Bible intensively leads to a better understanding of the gospel. This in turn promotes knowledge and reinforces certainty of faith.

SUMMARY

Holy Scripture is the basis for the doctrine of the New Apostolic Church. (1.2.5)

The proper understanding of Holy Scripture can only be opened up in all its depth through the activity of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles of Jesus also have the commission to interpret Holy Scripture. They are only able to do this through the Holy Spirit. (1.2.5.1)

Jesus Christ is the centre of Scripture. Thus even the significance of the Old Testament writings is determined by their agreement with the teachings of the gospel. (1.2.5.2)

Reading Holy Scripture offers believers comfort, edification, orientation, admonition, and advancement in knowledge. (1.2.5.3)

1.3 Present-day revelations of the Holy Spirit

Fundamental evidence that the Holy Spirit would, after Jesus' return to His Father, reveal new things, and thus disclose that which had been previously hidden can be found in John 16: 12–14: “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth,

has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is mine and declare it to you.” With these words, Jesus Christ promised His Apostles that they would receive further explanations about God’s nature and plan of salvation through the Holy Spirit.

The early Apostles experienced the activity of the Holy Spirit in the manner that the Lord had announced to them. The letters of the Apostles bear witness to the fact that the Holy Spirit had opened up to them an extensive understanding about the Lord (Philippians 2: 6–11; Colossians 1: 15–20) and of future events (1 Corinthians 15: 51–57). Their activity and testimony was permeated by that which the Holy Spirit revealed to them (Ephesians 3: 1–7).

The preaching of the Apostles of Jesus active today is based on the statements of Holy Scripture (*see* 1.2.5). They are guided by the Holy Spirit in their teaching commission. It is in this manner that the aforementioned promise of the Son of God is also fulfilled today: the Holy Spirit keeps alive the self-revelation of God manifested in Jesus Christ, brings it to life in the present, and points to the appearing of the returning Christ. The incarnation, death, resurrection, and return of the Son of God are at the centre of this revelation today.

Beyond that, the Holy Spirit imparts to the apostolate new insights about God’s activity and plan of salvation, which, although intimated in Holy Scripture, have not yet been fully revealed. An important example that bears mentioning is the teaching that salvation can also be attained by the departed (*see* 9.6.3).

On the basis of his teaching authority, it is incumbent on the Chief Apostle to proclaim such revelations of the Holy Spirit, and to declare them as binding doctrine of the New Apostolic Church.

SUMMARY

Jesus Christ promised His Apostles that they would receive further clarification about the nature of God and the plan of salvation through the Holy Spirit. (1.3)

The Holy Spirit grants the apostolate new insights concerning God's activity and plan of salvation, which are already intimated in Holy Scripture. (1.3)

1.4 Faith as mankind's response to the revelations of God

Faith is one of the basic realities of human life. It does not refer primarily to a particular doctrine or view of the world, but rather to a more or less well-founded conviction, in other words, something held to be true as contrasted with verifiable knowledge. Furthermore, "faith" in the non-religious sense signifies a subjective attitude of confidence in someone.

All people believe, regardless of whether they profess a religious doctrine or not. Their way of life is predominantly defined by that which they believe. In this respect, an individual's personal beliefs also shape his personality.

In the religious sphere, faith is manifested when a person binds himself to a divine being or principle.

The foundation and content of Christian faith is the triune God. The belief in God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has been made accessible to mankind by Jesus Christ.

Fundamental statements about faith are recorded in Hebrews 11: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (verse 1). Here it is emphasised that faith is indispensable for entering into the proximity of God: "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (verse 6).

However, it remains an act of grace on the part of God whenever a human being finds his way to Him through faith. Believers should recognise faith as a gift, and put it into practice in their lives (*see 4.2.1.5*).

1.4.1 Belief in God, the Father

Holy Scripture testifies that God has revealed Himself in all time periods and in a variety of ways (*see 1.1*).

Among the revelations that allow mankind to recognise God are the works of creation (Romans 1: 18–20). For example, believers praise these works in the Psalms.

Furthermore, God reveals Himself to human beings through His word and intervenes powerfully in their lives. For example, God called Abraham to leave his native country. Abraham obeyed God, following the path God showed him with unreserved trust (Genesis 12: 1–4). In doing so, he demonstrated that he believed God.

Whenever God reveals Himself, He calls upon human beings to believe: the only appropriate response man can give to God's call is to believe, in other words, to be open to this revelation and to accept it. Moreover, believers will voluntarily and unconditionally bind themselves to God, and endeavour to structure their lives in obedience to Him.

The old covenant centred on faith in God, the Creator, Preserver, and Liberator, who had also already revealed Himself as Father. Thus we read as follows in Isaiah: "Look down from heaven, and see from Your habitation, holy and glorious ... Doubtless You are our Father ..." (Isaiah 63: 15–16; cf. Deuteronomy 32: 6).

1.4.2 Belief in God, the Son

With the incarnation of God, the Son, the Old Testament promises pointing to the coming of the Messiah were fulfilled. Jesus Christ gives the exhortation:

“You believe in God, believe also in Me” (John 14: 1). Thus belief in God as revealed in His Son was also required in addition to belief in God as the omnipotent Creator of heaven and earth, who had made a covenant with the people of Israel. The faith that is now required also entails keeping the word of Jesus Christ (John 8: 51; 14: 23).

In the old covenant, the term “God, the Father” expressed God’s care for His people. Through Jesus Christ, however, it becomes evident that God is the Father of the only-begotten Son from eternity.

Jesus Christ opens up the way for human beings to attain childhood in God and to be called as firstlings (*see 10.1.3*), through the rebirth out of water and the Spirit, that is by receiving Holy Baptism with water and Holy Sealing. These two prerequisites are not contingent on being a descendant of Abraham, but on believing in the Saviour and receiving all of the sacraments (Romans 3: 22, 29–30; Ephesians 2: 11–18). Being caught up to the Lord at His return is the direct expression of becoming a firstling. Firstlings are guaranteed direct fellowship with God eternally.

1.4.3 Belief in God, the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit’s activity is already attested in the Old Testament: kings and prophets were guided by the Holy Spirit (Psalm 51: 11; Ezekiel 11: 5).

According to the words of the Lord, the Holy Spirit’s activity in the New Testament is divine revelation (John 14: 16–17, 26). Here too, the only appropriate response for mankind is faith, namely faith in the Spirit, who presently guides into all truth and reveals God’s will.

1.4.4 Faith and the sermon

Jesus Christ made it clear that faith in Him and His gospel is brought about by accepting the word of His ambassadors, His Apostles: “As You sent Me into the world I also have sent them into the world. I do not pray for these

alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word” (John 17: 18, 20).

The preaching of the gospel generates faith: “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10: 17).

The Risen One commissioned His Apostles to preach the gospel to all nations and to observe His word (Matthew 28: 19–20). With reference to salvation and future redemption, it is a fundamental requirement to accept the preaching of the gospel in faith. Concerning this, Mark 16: 16 states: “He who believes and is baptised will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”

SUMMARY

Faith is one of the fundamental realities of human life. (1.4)

The basis and content of the Christian faith is the triune God. Whenever God reveals Himself, He calls upon human beings to believe. Faith is an act of grace on the part of God, which human beings are to put into practice in their lives. (1.4)

In the old covenant, faith revolved around God, the Father, who revealed Himself as Creator, Protector, and Liberator. (1.4.1)

With the incarnation of God, the Son, the Old Testament promises concerning the coming Messiah were fulfilled. Since then, faith is also required in God, who is not only the Creator, but who also reveals Himself in Jesus. Through the rebirth out of water and the Spirit, Jesus Christ opens up the way for human beings to attain childhood in God as well as the opportunity to attain the status of firstling. (1.4.2)

Belief in God, the Holy Spirit, is the belief in the Spirit who currently leads into all truth and reveals God’s will. (1.4.3)

The word of preaching of those sent by Jesus produces faith. In order to be saved, it is necessary to accept God’s word imparted through the sermon. (1.4.4)

Part 2

The Creed

2

2 The Creed

A creed summarises the essential content of a doctrine of faith. Those who profess a creed fulfil one of the prerequisites for belonging to a respective denomination of faith: one thus believes the same things all other members of this denomination profess. A denomination thus defines itself by its creed, and thereby distinguishes its doctrine from that of others.

2.1 Biblical creeds

The old covenant already had its own confessional statements. Professing Yahweh as the God of Israel was linked to His historical act of salvation for His people, that is their deliverance from slavery in Egypt (Deuteronomy 26: 5–9). This profession of the One God necessitates the rejection of all other gods (Joshua 24: 23).

The focus of synagogue divine service is the creed “Hear, O Israel” (*Shema Yisrael*) which states, among other things: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! ... And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house” (Deuteronomy 6: 4–7).

The creeds of the New Testament express God’s act of salvation in the sending of Jesus Christ. Already early on, there were statements in which Christians expressed their faith at baptism or in divine service.

An example of this is the statement “Jesus is the Lord!” (Romans 10: 9). An important statement expressed in the creeds of the early church is the testimony that the Lord is resurrected: “The Lord is risen indeed” (Luke 24: 34; cf. 1 Corinthians 15: 3–5). Likewise the statement “Maranatha”—which can be translated as “O Lord, come” (1 Corinthians 16: 22) or

“Our Lord is coming”—can be understood as a creed. It first came into use in the Aramaic-speaking congregations of the early church.

Further professions of Jesus Christ, His essence, and His work can be found in the early church hymns, for example in 1 Timothy 3: 16: “God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory” (Philippians 2: 6–11, Colossians 1: 15–20).

2.2 The origin of the early church creeds

As Christianity spread through the Roman Empire, many who became Christians remained, at least in part, mired in their previous religious or philosophical views. The fusion of these views with Christian doctrine resulted in heresies, which caused uncertainty among the believers. In particular, the doctrines of the Trinity and of the essence, or nature, of Jesus Christ ignited serious disputes. To counter this development, efforts were made to formulate creeds which were intended to be binding for the faith of the congregation and thus also for the individual believer. Conformity to the doctrine of Christ and His Apostles served as the standard when it came to deciding whether a statement about God’s being and activity should find its way into the creeds. Over the course of time, various creeds were formulated: the Apostles’ Creed (*Apostolicum*), the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople, and the Athanasian Creed.

2.2.1 The Apostles’ Creed

The Apostles’ Creed originated in the early post-apostolic period. Some of its essential statements are based upon the sermon preached by Apostle Peter in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10: 37–43). The basic tenets of the *Apostolicum* were compiled in the second century and lightly supplemented in the fourth century.

It has the following wording:

“I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day He rose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy universal [catholic] church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.”

2.2.2 The Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople

In the year 325 Emperor Constantine convened the Council of Nicaea. Approximately 250 to 300 Bishops accepted the emperor’s invitation. Constantine regarded the now widespread Christian faith as a force potentially capable of supporting the state. Since the unity of Christendom was threatened by a controversy concerning the essence of Christ (“the Arian controversy”), he was very interested in having the Bishops formulate a unanimous doctrine.

The most important result of this council was the Nicene Creed. It was further refined in later councils right up until the eighth century—among them the significant Council of Constantinople (AD 381)—and is designated as the “Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople”. In particular, this creed goes beyond the scope of the Apostolicum to enshrine the profession of the Trinity of God and emphasise the distinguishing features of the church.

Following is the wording of the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople:

“We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds (æons), Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten,

not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the virgin Mary, and was made man; He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; from thence He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son¹, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spake by the prophets. In one holy universal [catholic] and apostolic church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.”

A creed that largely corresponds to the Nicene Creed in its statements is the much more detailed Athanasian Creed, which likely came into being during the sixth century and was made public (ca. AD 670) at the Synod of Autun.

2.3 The early church creeds and their significance for the New Apostolic Church

The doctrine of the New Apostolic Church is based on Holy Scripture. The early church creeds express the fundamentals of the Christian faith as attested in the Old and New Testaments. The early church creeds do not extend be-

¹ The statement that the Holy Spirit also emanates from the Son (Latin *filioque*) is not part of the original text of this creed. This formulation was incorporated within the Western Church in the eighth century. This led to a dispute with the Eastern Church, which has refused to accept the addition to this day. This dispute was one of the reasons for the separation between the Eastern and Western Churches in the year AD 1054. The Roman Catholic Church, the Old Catholic Churches, as well as the churches of the Reformation eventually emerged from the Western Church, while the Eastern Church eventually spawned the various national Orthodox Churches.

yond that which is attested in Holy Scripture, but rather summarise its content in concise and binding terms. As such, they stretch beyond confessional borders and—like Holy Baptism with water—represent a unifying link between all Christians.

The New Apostolic Church professes belief in the triune God, in Jesus Christ as true God and true Man, in His birth by the virgin Mary, in the sending of the Holy Spirit, in the church, in the sacraments, in the expectation of the return of Christ, and in the resurrection of the dead, as formulated in the two early church creeds.

SUMMARY

A creed summarises the essential contents of a doctrine of faith. A religious denomination thereby defines itself and distinguishes itself from others. (2)

The old covenant already had its confessional formulas in which the profession of the one God was linked with His historical act of salvation, deliverance from Egypt. (2.1)

The professions of the New Testament bring to expression God's act of salvation in Jesus Christ. (2.1)

When disputes flared up over the trinity of God and the doctrine of the nature of Jesus Christ, creeds were formulated. The standard for their formulation was the New Testament, that is the doctrine of Christ and His Apostles. (2.2)

The Apostles' Creed (Apostolicum), the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople, and the Athanasian Creed thus came into being. The basic tenets of the Apostles' Creed were summarised in the second century and lightly expanded in the fourth century. The Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople brings the trinity of God to special expression. (2.2.1; 2.2.2)

The early church creeds summarise the testimony of Holy Scripture in concise and authoritative form. Thereby they transcend confessional borders and represent a binding agent between all Christians. (2.3)

The New Apostolic Church professes the belief formulated in both creeds of the early church. (2.3)

2.4 The New Apostolic Creed

It is the task of the apostolate to interpret Holy Scripture and the early church creeds in a manner that is authoritative for our faith. An important result of this is the New Apostolic Creed. In it the faith and doctrine of the New Apostolic Church come to binding expression.

The New Apostolic Creed is closely related to the early church creeds. The first three Articles of Faith largely correspond to the Apostolicum. They thereby emphasise the significance of this early church confession. The seven Articles of Faith that follow represent an interpretation and further development of, as well as a complement to, these creeds as they apply to the ministries, the sacraments, the teaching of the last things, as well as the relationship between the individual and society.

Since its inception, the New Apostolic Creed has been revised on several occasions. This was done in order to reflect the proper and timely development of the New Apostolic doctrine of faith. Interpretation is an action that can take place on an ongoing basis. This is part of a dynamic tradition that occurred in the writings of the New Testament itself, and in the interpretation work of later generations which was based upon it. Dynamic tradition is not rigid, but is instead characterised by both preservation and change. Both of these are of decisive importance for tradition and therefore also interpretation: preservation is indispensable for church doctrine if it does not want to forget its history or dissociate itself from its origins. Change is indispensable for church doctrine if it does not want to become irrelevant to present generations and become rigid in one or the other insights of a particular period.

Through the course of time the Creed came to propagate belief in the triune God, in Jesus Christ as the incarnate God, in His sacrificial death, in His resurrection, in His return, in the church as the authority that imparts salvation, in the sending of the Apostles, and in the sacraments as expressions of God's saving love and care.

New Apostolic Christians are to profess the Articles of Faith. The creed is to define their attitude of faith. It also serves to familiarise others with the essential content of the New Apostolic faith in concise form.

The New Apostolic Creed is formulated in the awareness that God’s love, grace, and omnipotence cannot be exhaustively expressed in doctrinal and confessional statements, and that these divine characteristics will always be greater than anything human beings can ever say about them. Thus the creed does not draw any boundaries that would deny other Christians access to salvation.

2.4.1 The First Article of Faith

I believe in God, the Father, the Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth.

The First Article of Faith refers to God, the Father, as the Creator (*see* 3.3). That God is the Creator is attested in both the Old and New Testaments. The creation incorporates both heaven and earth, namely—as the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople states—“all things visible and invisible”. Both the material and the spiritual exist on the basis of God’s act of creation: God is the author of all reality, and it testifies of Him.

God is not only almighty as regards His work of creation, but is omnipotent in all respects. The omnipotence of God is also demonstrated by the fact that He has authored the creation in the absence of any preconditions: the act of God’s free will created all that exists from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*, Hebrews 11: 3).

Although the First Article of Faith speaks of God, the Father, as the Creator, God, the Son, and God, the Holy Spirit, are also involved in the act of creation. After all, it is the triune God as a whole who is the Creator, as is suggested in Genesis 1: 26: “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.” In John 1: 1 and Colossians 1: 16 the creatorship of the Son is expressly referenced.

2.4.2 The Second Article of Faith

I believe in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried, entered the realm of the dead, rose again from the dead on the third day, and ascended into heaven. He is seated at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, from where He will return.

The Second Article of Faith refers to Jesus Christ, the foundation and content of Christian faith. Each statement of this article has a direct relationship to the New Testament. The designation “Jesus Christ” is in itself already a statement of profession, namely that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah (from Hebrew: “Anointed One”, Greek: “Christ”) who had been awaited by Israel.

Yet Jesus is not only the Messiah, but also “the only begotten Son” of God (John 1: 14, 18). This formulation brings to expression the oneness of substance between God, the Father, and God, the Son. The Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople clarifies the meaning of the formulation “only begotten Son”: the Son is “begotten of the Father before all worlds (æons), Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father”. This “only begotten Son” is “our Lord”. In the Old Testament, “Lord” is the designation for God. In the New Testament this term is applied to Jesus Christ in order to emphasise His divine nature. Here the term “Lord” also signifies that Jesus Christ holds dominion over heaven and earth (Philippians 2: 9–11).

The ensuing statements deal with the divine origin of the Man Jesus and His miraculous birth. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1: 35, Matthew 1: 18), and thus did not come into being through natural conception by a man, since Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus (Luke 1: 27). The virgin birth is not to be regarded as a matter of secondary importance or as an ancient mythological notion, but is rather among the fundamental convictions of Christian faith. The mention of Mary in the gospels demonstrates that Jesus was true Man and that He had a mother.

The historicity of Jesus also becomes clear through the mention of “Pontius Pilate”. This man was the Roman governor in Palestine in the years from AD 26–36, which means that Jesus’ sufferings took place during his time of rule (John 18: 28 et seq.).

The article then goes on to mention three significant events that relate to Jesus, namely that He “was crucified, died, and was buried”. This once again clearly highlights the true humanity of Jesus: He had to endure a shameful death, namely the death of the cross. He died and was buried, and thus shared in the general fate of mankind. The special thing about all of this is only brought to expression by the words: “rose again from the dead on the third day”. Here we are confronted with an event that far transcends the human sphere of experience, and which can only be expressed and understood from the perspective of faith. Behind this formulation there is another confessional statement which is already mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15: 3–4: “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.” The dual reference “according to the Scriptures” demonstrates that these were not merely random events, but requirements of salvation history. Jesus Christ “rose again from the dead”. His resurrection is the prerequisite for, and the promise of, the resurrection of the dead in general.

However, the Apostolicum also inserts the words “He descended into hell [the realm of the dead]” in between the phrases “buried” and “On the third day He rose again”. The New Testament evidence for this statement can be found in 1 Peter 3: 19, which states that Jesus “preached to the spirits in prison” after His death on the cross.

After the profession that He “rose again from the dead”, it states that Jesus Christ “ascended into heaven” (Acts 1: 9–11). The earthly life of Jesus—as well as His direct presence on earth as the Risen One—thereby came to its conclusion. The receiving of the Risen One into heaven signifies His return to the Father and His exaltation. The exalted state of Jesus Christ comes to verbal expression in the formulation: “He is seated at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty” (Colossians 3: 1).

The end of the Second Article of Faith states that the exalted Lord will return in order to take His own unto Himself (John 14: 3).

2.4.3 The Third Article of Faith

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the one, holy, universal, and apostolic church, the community of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead, and life everlasting.

The Third Article of Faith begins with a profession of belief in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead. The Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople again brings to expression the divine essence of the Holy Spirit and His oneness with the Father and the Son: “[We believe] in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spake by the prophets.” Believers thereby acknowledge the Holy Spirit and His divinity.

One of the works of the Holy Spirit is the church. The church is not something that emanates from human beings or that was created by them. Rather it is a divine institution. It is the assembly of those who are baptised, who follow Christ in their conduct of life, and who profess Jesus Christ as their Lord. The purpose of the church of Christ consists, on the one hand, of making salvation and eternal fellowship with the triune God accessible to mankind, and on the other hand, of bringing praise and worship to God.

The church of Jesus Christ has a concealed side and a revealed side. In this respect it corresponds to the dual nature of Jesus Christ, who is both true Man and true God. The concealed side of the church (*see also* 6.3) cannot be fathomed by human reason, but can be accessed through faith and experienced, for example in the sacraments and in the spoken word of God, that is in all the signs of divine salvation and divine nearness. The revealed side of the church is a reference to the true humanity of Jesus Christ. Like the Man Jesus, the church is part of the history of mankind, although the Man Jesus was without sin—which is not the case with the revealed side of the church. It

shares in the sinfulness of humanity on account of the human beings at work within it. Thus the mistakes and deficiencies of human history are also present in the church.

The Apostolicum only makes reference to the “holy universal church”. The formulation “one holy universal and apostolic church” is taken from the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople. This formulation makes the essential criteria of the church of Christ clear: it is “one”, it is “holy”, it is “universal”, and it is “apostolic”.

The church is “one”: the fact that the church of Jesus Christ is one is based upon the profession of the one God. God, the Father, is the Creator. Jesus Christ is the sole head of the church. He is the one Lord. The one Holy Spirit is at work in this church and fills the believers with the knowledge of the truth.

The church is “holy”: this holiness has been conferred upon the church by God. Holy things are revealed in it—for example in the sacraments—and the Holy Spirit is at work within it.

The church is “universal” (Greek: *catholic*): the universality, or catholicity, of the church implies that it is all-encompassing, in other words, that it far transcends anything which can be experienced by human beings. God’s universal will to save finds direct expression in the church, and thus it encompasses both that which is of this world and that which is of the world to come, both past and present. It even reaches into the future and finds its completion in the new creation.

The church is “apostolic”: the apostolicity of the church has a content-related aspect and a person-related aspect. First of all, the church is apostolic because the gospel of the death, resurrection, and return of Christ—as preached by the early Apostles—is proclaimed within it. On the other hand, the church is apostolic because the apostolic ministry is historically manifest in the Apostles who work within the church in the present.

In its historical manifestation the church will never do complete justice to the requirements of oneness, holiness, universality, and apostolicity. Among other things, this is also due to the sinfulness of the human beings who are active in it. Despite these inadequacies, the church of Christ does not remain

concealed or inaccessible. It can be most clearly experienced where the Apostle ministry, the dispensation of the three sacraments to the living and the dead, as well as the proper proclamation of the word are present. It is there that the Lord's work of redemption² to prepare the bride of Christ for the marriage in heaven is established.

Though all believers share in the holiness of the church, the narrower meaning of the "community of the saints" nevertheless has an eschatological dimension. It consists of those who will belong to the bride of Christ, and will thus only be revealed at the return of Christ. In the broader sense, however, the "community of the saints" also has a current dimension: it comprises all those who are part of the church of Christ. Ultimately, the "community of the saints" will be revealed in its full perfection in the new creation.

The opportunity for "forgiveness of sins", which has been created by the sacrifice of Christ, is also an object of profession. The fundamental liberation from the rule of sin occurs through Holy Baptism with water, in which original sin is washed away.

The Third Article of Faith ends with two eschatological hopes, namely the "resurrection of the dead, and life everlasting". The belief in the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of the dead—which is predicated upon it—are among the essential certainties of Christian faith. The "resurrection of the dead" refers to the fact that those who have died in Christ will receive their own glorified body, whereby they can share in God's glory (1 Corinthians 15: 42–44).

The Third Article of Faith concludes with a view to "life everlasting", that is unceasing fellowship with God in the new creation.

² The term "Lord's work of redemption" is generally understood to mean Jesus' act of salvation, which is already concluded. When this term is used here, it refers to that part of the church in which the Apostles are active to impart those gifts of salvation which serve for the preparation of the firstlings, the bride of Christ.

2.4.4 The Fourth Article of Faith

I believe that the Lord Jesus rules His church and thereto sent His Apostles, and until His return still sends them, with the commission to teach, to forgive sins in His name, and to baptise with water and Holy Spirit.

The Fourth Article of Faith further specifies the belief in the church already mentioned in the Third Article of Faith. This article starts off by mentioning the rule of Jesus Christ: it is He who rules His church because “He is the head of the body” (Colossians 1: 18). Among other things, this rule comes to expression in the sending of the Apostles. The great commission (Matthew 28: 19–20) shows that the proclamation of the gospel and the dispensation of the sacraments were originally bound to the apostolate. Here the apostolicity of the church, as already generally referenced in the Third Article of Faith, is taken up again and set in the concrete framework of the church in its historical manifestation.

The Apostle ministry is not historically confined to the era of the early church. It is rather to fulfil its task “until His [Jesus’] return”. That which Jesus Christ effects through His Apostles—which can be experienced by every believer—is expressed in the following: “to teach, to forgive sins in His name, and to baptise with water and Holy Spirit”.

The commission “to teach” also applies to the proper proclamation of the gospel of the death, resurrection, and return of the Lord.

A further task incumbent on the apostolate is to “forgive sins in His [Jesus’] name” (John 20: 23), that is to bindingly proclaim forgiveness to human beings on the basis of the sacrifice and merit of Jesus Christ.

The Fourth Article of Faith concludes with a reference to the sacraments of Holy Baptism with water and the Holy Sealing. The apostolate has the commission to baptise with water and the Holy Spirit, that is to dispense those sacraments through which a new creation in God can come into being.

2.4.5 The Fifth Article of Faith

I believe that those designated by God for a ministry are ordained only by Apostles, and that authority, blessing, and sanctification for their ministration come forth out of the Apostle ministry.

Like the Fourth Article of Faith, the Fifth Article of Faith also refers to the significance of the Apostle ministry. While the Fourth Article of Faith emphasises the link between the Apostle ministry and the proper proclamation of doctrine, forgiveness of sins, and dispensation of sacraments, this article deals with the spiritual ministry. God is the one who designates an individual for a ministry. Thus the ministry is not a human work, nor is it ultimately that of the congregation. Rather it is God's gift to His church. The human being, as expressed in the Fifth Article of Faith, bears his ministry on the basis of divine will and not human decision. This is executed or implemented by the Apostle ministry. The ministry and the apostolate are inseparably linked to one another. Consequently, where the Apostle ministry is active there is also a spiritual ministry (*see* 7). In the church of Christ there are also various other functions which aid in proclaiming the gospel and serve to the benefit of the believers, which can also be performed without ordination.

Through the Apostle ministry, ministers receive "authority, blessing, and sanctification for their ministration". The ministry is not an end unto itself, that is it is not geared toward itself, but rather has its place in the church, most often in a specific congregation. The term "ministration" is understood as service to Jesus Christ and the congregation.

The ordination to a spiritual ministry incorporates three aspects: "authority, blessing, and sanctification". Especially for priestly ministries, the element of "authority" is of decisive importance, because they are authorised to proclaim the forgiveness of sins by commission of the Apostle and to consecrate Holy Communion. The priestly ministries share in the proper dispensation of the sacraments through the Apostles. The proper proclamation of God's universal will to save also occurs through the "authority" bestowed through the apostolate. Through the "blessing", both the priestly ministries and the Deacons are assured of the divine support and help of the Holy Spirit in the ex-

ercise of their ministries. “Sanctification” points to the fact that it is God Himself, in His holiness and inviolability, who seeks to act through the ministry. “Sanctification” is also necessary because the church is “holy”.

Although the minister is chosen by God, it may nevertheless happen that he does not do justice to his ministry or even fails in it. Nevertheless, this does not call into question the original call of God.

Since “authority, blessing, and sanctification for their [the ministers’] ministration” come forth out of the Apostle ministry, every minister stands in an indissoluble relationship to the Apostle ministry.

2.4.6 The Sixth Article of Faith

I believe that the Holy Baptism with water is the first step to a renewal of a human being in the Holy Spirit, and that the person baptised is adopted into the fellowship of those who believe in Jesus Christ and profess Him as their Lord.

The Sixth Article of Faith deals with Holy Baptism with water. It brings to expression the essential elements of Holy Baptism with water. Through baptism the fundamental separation between mankind and God is suspended. This does not occur through the merit of the human being, that is to say through his voluntary decision to turn to God, but rather because God inclines Himself to the human being and liberates him from the dominion of sin. Through this act of God’s love and care, human beings share in the sacrifice of Christ and in His power that overcomes sin. This becomes immediately clear in the fact that original sin is washed away through Holy Baptism with water and that the baptised is now incorporated into the church of Christ. He thereby becomes a Christian.

Holy Baptism with water does not yet contain everything that is necessary for a human being to become a new creation before God. It is the “first step to a renewal of a human being in the Holy Spirit”. This process of renewal in the Holy Spirit, which has begun in Holy Baptism, finds its continuation in

the imparting of the gift of the Holy Spirit in Holy Sealing. Only then is the person reborn out of water and Spirit.

Holy Baptism with water not only constitutes fellowship with God, but also the fellowship of Christians among one another, since “the person baptised is adopted into the fellowship of those who believe in Jesus Christ and profess Him as their Lord”. Belief in Jesus as the Christ and as the Lord—namely as the power that defines one’s life—is something that binds all believing Christians together.

2.4.7 The Seventh Article of Faith

I believe that Holy Communion was instituted by the Lord Himself in memory of the once brought, fully valid sacrifice, and bitter suffering and death of Christ. The worthy partaking of Holy Communion establishes our fellowship with Jesus Christ, our Lord. It is celebrated with unleavened bread and wine; both must be consecrated and dispensed by a minister authorised by an Apostle.

As the Sixth Article of Faith refers to Holy Baptism, so the Seventh Article of Faith deals with Holy Communion. The first sentence alludes to its institution by Jesus Christ. The second sentence speaks of the effect of the worthy partaking of Holy Communion, and the final sentence makes it clear that the authorised ministry is necessary for the consecration and dispensation of the Lord’s Supper.

To begin with, the article makes it known that Holy Communion is a meal of commemoration. This aspect is already emphasised in the oldest text handed down to us about Holy Communion. It is Jesus Himself who calls upon the believers to remember Him (1 Corinthians 11: 24–25). Holy Communion calls to mind “the once brought, fully valid sacrifice, and bitter suffering and death of Christ”. To begin with, the sacrament commemorates the sacrifice of Jesus and its timeless significance. This is linked to Jesus’ “suffering and death” as attested in the gospels. Holy Communion thus calls to

mind the concrete events immediately preceding the crucifixion, as well as the enduring significance of Christ's death on the cross.

Partaking in Holy Communion has a great effect. The prerequisite is the "worthy partaking" (1 Corinthians 11: 27), which is made possible, among other things, by faith, the acceptance of forgiveness of sins, and a repentant heart. The "fellowship with Jesus Christ, our Lord" is thus "established" by the worthy partaking in Holy Communion (John 6: 56). In this respect, Holy Communion strengthens faith in Jesus Christ as well as the desire and the ability to follow Him. In Holy Communion, believers have sacramental fellowship with Jesus Christ as their Lord, and are strengthened in order to structure their lives accordingly.

The article then goes on to talk about the composition of the elements of the sacrament: "It is celebrated with unleavened bread and wine". In order for Holy Communion to be celebrated, "unleavened bread" and "wine"—both of which are parallels to the Passover meal—must be present. Like the water in Holy Baptism, the "unleavened bread and wine" constitute the visual requirements for the sacrament.

After this reference to the outward elements of the sacrament, the Seventh Article of Faith concludes by mentioning the prerequisites through which the sacramental reality—namely the presence of the body and blood of Christ—comes into being. Bread and wine must be "consecrated and dispensed by a minister authorised by an Apostle". Through the Apostle ministry and the minister authorised by it, the presence of Christ's body and blood is manifested in the bread and wine (*see 8.2.22*).

The authorised ministry necessary to establish this comprehensive sacramental reality accomplishes two things: it consecrates and dispenses Holy Communion. First of all, "consecration" or "consecrating" means setting apart bread and wine from their normal use ("In the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, I consecrate bread and wine for Holy Communion."). It also expresses that the concealed presence of the body and blood of Christ has been manifested in the visible elements of bread and wine through the pronouncement of the words of institution. In this context, "dispensing" refers to the act of making the body and blood of Christ accessible to the con-

gregation, as is brought to expression in the invitation to receive Holy Communion and in the distribution of the consecrated wafer.

2.4.8 The Eighth Article of Faith

I believe that those baptised with water must, through an Apostle, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit to attain the childhood in God and thereby the prerequisite for becoming a firstling.

The Eighth Article of Faith deals with Holy Sealing or the Baptism of the Spirit, namely the imparting of the gift of the Holy Spirit to the believers.

Holy Sealing is the one sacrament that is assigned solely to the Apostle ministry. The prerequisite for receiving this sacrament is Holy Baptism with water. Only those who have been baptised are to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Holy Sealing has both a present and a future effect: the present effect of receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit is the “childhood in God” (Romans 8: 14–17). Those Christians who are reborn out of water and the Spirit possess “childhood in God”. It constitutes, as it were, an anticipation of the believer’s future status of firstling and a “royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2: 9). Consequently, “childhood in God” is that condition of a human being before God which is characterised by receiving all the sacraments and aligning one’s life by the return of Christ, in accordance with the proper proclamation of the gospel. The future effect of receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit is to attain the status of firstling. However, the sealed believer has not yet acquired the status of firstling, but through the baptism of the Spirit, he has received the prerequisite for attaining it. If the believer strives for the day of Christ, he can belong to the bridal congregation, or the “community of the saints”. Sealed believers have been assigned the task of following Christ continually and allowing themselves to be prepared for the return of Jesus Christ through word and sacrament.

2.4.9 The Ninth Article of Faith

I believe that the Lord Jesus will return as surely as He ascended into heaven and that He will take to Himself the firstfruits of the dead and living who have hoped for and were prepared for His coming; that after the marriage in heaven He will return to earth with them to establish His kingdom of peace, and that they will reign with Him as a royal priesthood. After the conclusion of the kingdom of peace, He will hold the Last Judgment. Then God will create a new heaven and a new earth and dwell with His people.

The Ninth Article of Faith represents an eschatological clarification of the corresponding statements in the Second and Third Articles of Faith (the return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, life everlasting). The detail of this article demonstrates the great priority these future events are assigned in the New Apostolic faith.

The beginning of the article refers to Acts 1: 11: “This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” Beyond that, the article builds on the eschatological statements made in the Second Article of Faith.

Associated with the return of Jesus Christ is the fact that the Lord will “take to Himself the firstfruits of the dead and living who have hoped for and were prepared for His coming” (1 Thessalonians 4: 16–17). The “firstfruits of the dead and living” are provided with a spiritual body and caught up to the returning Christ. The “firstfruits” are those who have become God’s property, have maintained a lively expectation of the returning Lord, and have allowed themselves to be prepared for the return of Christ.

The return of Christ is the central event upon which further eschatological events depend. The objective of the rapture of the “dead and living” is fellowship with Jesus Christ, which is symbolised by the “marriage in heaven”. The “marriage in heaven” marks the start of direct fellowship of the Lord and the bridal congregation.

The “marriage in heaven” is of limited duration. After its conclusion, Jesus Christ—together with His own—will direct attention to all human beings

who did not partake in this event. Then Jesus Christ will visibly appear on earth and establish “His kingdom of peace” (Revelation 20: 4, 6). As a “royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2: 9; Revelation 20: 6), the bridal congregation—whose figurative number is “one hundred and forty-four thousand” (Revelation 14: 1)—will share in the rule of Christ. The gospel will then be proclaimed to all human beings, both living and dead.

Only “after the conclusion of the kingdom of peace” will He “hold the Last Judgement”. Then it will be made known to all of creation that Jesus Christ is the righteous judge from whom nothing is concealed (John 5: 22, 26–27).

The concluding sentence of the Ninth Article of Faith provides an outlook into God’s future creation: “Then God will create a new heaven and a new earth and dwell with His people.” Among other things, Revelation 21 and 22 refer to the new creation. This is the domain of the perfect presence of God. When it says that God will dwell with His people, this refers to a completely new existence with God, namely the “life everlasting” that is mentioned at the end of the Third Article of Faith.

2.4.10 The Tenth Article of Faith

I believe that I am obliged to obey the worldly authorities provided no godly laws are thereby transgressed.

The Tenth Article of Faith is fundamentally distinct from the preceding nine: whereas they focus on God’s creatorship, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the church, its ministries and sacraments, as well as the hope for the future, the Tenth Article of faith deals with the Christian’s relationship to the state.

The Tenth Article of Faith makes it clear that Christian life does not transpire outside the framework of civic and societal reality. It demonstrates that the Christian faith has a generally positive relationship to the state, that is the “worldly authorities”. This positive relationship is summarised by the term “obedience”.

The relationship between the Christian church and the political authorities was already contemplated in New Testament times (1 Peter 2: 11–17). The statements made in Romans 13: 1–7, which describe the state as “God’s minister”, are quite well known. This passage has created many misunderstandings, since it appears to convey that believers are to show unconditional obedience, even to an unjust state. However, this interpretation fails to take into account that the state is to serve God, in other words that the divine will—as clearly expressed in the Ten Commandments, for example—is also to be the standard for the laws of the state.

Romans 13: 1–7 is also the background of the Tenth Article of Faith. It not only requires “obedience”—that is loyalty to the state—but also refers to the standard by which such obedience is justified: “provided no godly laws are thereby transgressed”. Not even the state is completely free, as it too is subject to the stipulation of divine order. At the very least, its laws should not contradict the divine order, but better yet, be in harmony with it. If the divine will and the laws of the state do not oppose one another, but rather even complement one another to a certain degree, Christians are obliged to accept the law as something positive and binding. However, if they stand in opposition to one another, the following applies for the individual: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5: 29).

SUMMARY

It is the task of the apostolate to interpret Holy Scripture and the early church confessions in a manner authoritative for faith. An important result of this is the New Apostolic Creed. (2.4)

The First Article of Faith deals with the creatorship of God, the Father. (2.4.1)

The Second Article of Faith speaks of Jesus Christ, the foundation and content of Christian faith. (2.4.2)

The Third Article of Faith professes belief in the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, belief in the church, and other elements of salvation. (2.4.3)

The Fourth Article of Faith states that Jesus Christ rules His church and that the expression of this rule is the sending of the Apostles. (2.4.4)

The Fifth Article of Faith expresses that it is God who designates an individual to receive a spiritual ministry, and that ministers receive authority, blessing, and sanctification through the Apostle ministry. (2.4.5)

The Sixth Article of Faith applies to Holy Baptism with water. (2.4.6)

The Seventh Article of Faith deals with Holy Communion. (2.4.7)

The Eighth Article of Faith has to do with Holy Sealing. (2.4.8)

The Ninth Article of Faith speaks of the return of Christ and the events that will follow. (2.4.9)

The Tenth Article of Faith deals with the relationship of the Christian to the state. (2.4.10)

Part 3

The triune God



3 The triune God

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit comprise the one God. That God is triune from eternity is attested by the self-revelations of God within the history of salvation, which makes clear that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have existed, created, acted, and sustained from the beginning.

In the old covenant God predominantly revealed Himself as God, the Father, whereas the activity of the Son and the Holy Spirit was still largely concealed from mankind. From the perspective of the New Testament, Apostle Paul declares that the Son of God was already present when the people of Israel made their way through the desert (1 Corinthians 10: 4). Beyond that, both Mark 12: 36 and Hebrews 3: 7 state that the Holy Spirit already spoke in the old covenant.

The incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Son of God, as well as the sending of the Holy Spirit, allow believers to recognise God as triune. In John 16: 13–15, Jesus Christ underlines the workings of the trinity of God: that which belongs to the Son also belongs to the Father, and that which the Holy Spirit declares, He takes from the Father and the Son.

The triune God is one God in the fellowship of Father, Son, and Spirit. He seeks to make this fellowship of His accessible to mankind.

3.1 The nature of God

God, in His nature and activity, cannot be grasped by human understanding. Access to God in His omnipotence and greatness is only possible through faith. Jesus Christ revealed God to human beings as a loving, compassionate, and gracious Father, and enabled them to experience Him as such. Further

revelations from God are given by the Holy Spirit who leads the faithful into the deep things of God (1 Corinthians 2: 6–16).

Characteristics of God’s nature are: He is the One (the Only One), the Holy One, the Almighty, the Eternal, the Loving One, the Gracious One, the Righteous One, the Perfect One. God is neither unknown nor concealed. He inclines Himself to human beings, speaks to them, and allows them to speak to Him.

The description of the divine characteristics is to bring to expression the perfection and absoluteness of God, but all terms taken from the human sphere of experience will fail to do justice to the reality of God.

3.1.1 One God in three persons

The trinity of God is a mystery. The Trinitarian formula, “In the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,” does not use the plural “names”, but the singular: “the name”. The one God is the triune God. In His words to the Apostles, Jesus allowed them to recognise the trinity of God by stating that they were to baptise “in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28: 19). When we speak of God as “the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit”, we do not imply that these are three different Gods, but rather three persons (hypostases), who are the One God.

3.1.2 God, the One

Belief in God as the One God is one of the fundamental professions of both the Old and New Testaments. God Himself spoke to Moses of His oneness and faithfulness to Himself, which is expressed in His name: “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3: 14). The profession of God’s uniqueness—“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!” (Deuteronomy 6: 4)—remained with the people of the old covenant throughout their entire history.

Although already stated unequivocally in the First Commandment—“You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20: 3)—it was a long time before Israel professed the uniqueness of God to the exclusion of all other gods and their worship. Again and again, the prophets had to reproach the people for worshipping other gods. In Isaiah 45: 21–22, we find the words of God: “And there is no other God besides Me, a just God and a Saviour; there is none besides Me. Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.” After their return from Babylonian captivity, profession of the one God (monotheism) entered into the consciousness of the Jews as the essential distinguishing feature between them and the Gentiles. To this day, the belief expressed in the Wisdom of Solomon has been a distinguishing feature of Judaism: “For neither is there any God but [Thee]” (Wisdom of Solomon 12: 13).

This profession is also firmly rooted in Christian faith, from the earliest apostolic congregations until the present. Apostle Paul advocated monotheism without restrictions of any kind. With a view to the polytheism of the Greek and Roman religions, he wrote: “Therefore ... we know that ... there is no other God but one” (1 Corinthians 8: 4).

3.1.3 God, the Holy One

In the Old Testament God is repeatedly described as “the Holy One” (Isaiah 43: 3; Jeremiah 50: 29; Habakkuk 1: 12). The holiness which is part of God’s nature, being, and rule, refers to the fact that He is majestic, untouchable, and separate from the profane. This is also attested in Revelation 4: 8 with the words: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come” (Isaiah 6: 3). His word and His will are equally holy.

The nearness of God, the presence of the Holy One, which has been repeatedly experienced throughout the history of salvation, commands reverence for Him. That the presence of God is holy and that it demands reverence was experienced by Moses when he saw the burning bush and heard the voice of God: “Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the

place where you stand is holy ground” (Exodus 3: 5). The holiness of God sanctifies the place where He reveals Himself.

Participation in God’s holiness is both a gift and a duty: “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” (Leviticus 19: 2; cf. 1 Peter 1: 15–16). Thus every believer is called upon to strive for holiness, which derives from the holiness of God. Thereby the name of God is “hallowed”, which is also expressed in the Lord’s Prayer: “Hallowed be Your name” (Matthew 6: 9).

3.1.4 God, the Almighty

The profession in the First Article of Faith—“I believe in God the Father, the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth”—attests that God can do anything, that nothing is impossible for Him, and that for Him there are no restrictions whatsoever in the implementation of His will. In Psalm 135: 6 this is expressed as follows: “Whatever the Lord pleases He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deep places.”

God’s omnipotence is also clearly shown to mankind in His creation, for by His word alone everything came into being from nothing (Hebrews 11: 3). In His omnipotence, God constitutes the beginning and the end: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1: 8). The new creation will therefore also be an expression of God’s omnipotence.

Jesus Christ also spoke of the omnipotence of God: “With God all things are possible” (Mark 10: 27). His omnipotence was also attested by the angels: “For with God nothing will be impossible” (Luke 1: 37).

The omnipotence of God incorporates His omnipresence and omniscience. The omniscience of God is referred to in Psalm 139: 2–4: “You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it altogether.” The same psalm also refers to God’s omnipresence: “If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I

take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me” (verses 8–10).

3.1.5 God, the Eternal

God, “the Eternal”, has neither beginning nor end. Temporal limitations do not exist for Him. “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God” (Psalm 90: 2). God is the Creator and Lord of time. Unlike the material world, which is subject to time, God defines time in a sovereign manner. He grants time and can also take it away.

The eternal nature of God transcends the horizon of human experience. It is infinite, however, it is not timeless. Rather, the past, present, and future are all equally current to God. That God is exalted over, and stands above, the dimension of time is implied in 2 Peter 3: 8: “But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”

3.1.6 God, the Loving One

In the old as well as in the new covenant, God reveals Himself as the Loving One. Out of love He elected the people of Israel and freed them from Egyptian captivity. However, God not only revealed Himself as the Loving One to the people of Israel in this historical act, but ultimately to all mankind in Jesus Christ: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3: 16). God not only turns to the world in love, but God *is* love (1 John 4: 16).

3.1.7 God, the Gracious and Righteous One

God is the Gracious One. His grace is part of His righteousness. He shows mankind grace, compassion, patience, and kindness (Psalm 103: 8). In His righteousness, God granted His people grace even when they went astray or did not keep the covenant: “‘With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you,’ says the Lord, your Redeemer” (Isaiah 54: 8).

That God is the Gracious One is demonstrated in the new covenant by the fact that He turns to human beings, who are entangled in sin, and forgives their sins. Apostle Paul attests that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Corinthians 5: 19). Through grace, God pronounces the unrighteous righteous, sinners receive forgiveness, and those in need of salvation are granted salvation, that is redemption.

God is righteous: “His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice” (Deuteronomy 32: 4). Statements like “For the wages of sin is death ...” (Romans 6: 23) or “Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgements” (Revelation 16: 7) are clear expressions of His righteousness. In the new covenant it is He who, through Jesus Christ, grants sinners justification which they did not earn (Romans 3: 24–26; 5: 18).

3.1.8 God, the Perfect One

God is perfect. He requires no improvement, change, or any further development. He is the Unchangeable One and is free from all conditions and constraints. His actions are not based on external necessity, but solely on His completely sovereign will.

God revealed Himself to Moses as the Perfect One who is completely identical with Himself: “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3: 14).

The perfection of God is closely linked to His goodness: everything that occurs in God, everything that emanates from Him or is created by Him, is perfect and good. God’s perfection is also demonstrated by the fact that there

is absolutely no difference of any kind between His will and His actions, between His intentions and their execution. Nor is there any failure with God, or any other thing that would be imperfect in itself. The creation shares in God's perfection and goodness, and it is for this reason that God finds His creation to be "very good" (Genesis 1: 31).

The perfection of God also incorporates the truth. With God there is no lie, deception, or uncertainty. "The entirety of Your word is truth" (Psalm 119: 160). The divine word is reliable. God binds Himself to His promises and is true.

The truth of God corresponds with wisdom. God rules and fills the entire creation with it: "Wisdom reacheth from one end to another mightily: and sweetly doth she order all things" (Wisdom of Solomon 8: 1).

God's perfection can be directly experienced in Jesus Christ, "the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12: 2) because He is perfect in His speech and conduct. Jesus Christ is the example and teacher of that perfection for which mankind is to strive (Philippians 2: 5).

The "goal for the prize of the upward call of God" (Philippians 3: 14)—in other words, perfection—is of an eschatological nature. Sinful human beings may well strive for perfection, but they will not attain it. Once they have been accepted at the return of Christ and permitted to partake in the new creation God will ultimately allow human beings to share completely in His perfection.

SUMMARY

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are the one God, who has existed, created, acted, and sustained from the beginning. (3)

In His nature and activity, God cannot be grasped by human beings. Access to Him is only possible through faith. (3.1)

The one God is triune: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is not a reference to three Gods, but rather three persons (hypostases). (3.1.1)

Belief in the one God (monotheism) is among the fundamental professions of the Old and New Testaments, and is anchored in the Christian faith from the earliest apostolic congregations right up to the present. (3.1.2)

Holiness—majesty, inviolability, separation from the profane—is part of God’s nature, being, and rule. His word and will are equally holy. (3.1.3)

God can do anything. There are no limitations of any kind for Him. His omnipotence also includes omniscience and omnipresence. (3.1.4)

God has neither beginning nor end. God’s eternity is infinite, but not timeless. He is the Creator of time and thus superior to all dimensions of time. The past, present, and future are all equally current before Him. (3.1.5)

“God is love” (1 John 4: 16). He also shows Himself in history as a loving God. Above all, this becomes clear in the fact that He gave His Son for all humanity. (3.1.6)

God is the Gracious and Righteous One. He also demonstrates His grace in that He forgives sins. He grants the sinner righteousness through Jesus Christ. (3.1.7)

God is perfect. His works and ways are without flaw. His actions are based solely upon His completely sovereign will. God binds Himself to His promises and is true. God’s perfection is directly perceptible in Jesus Christ. (3.1.8)

3.2 God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

God has revealed Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus God can be recognised as the triune God. This self-revelation of God constitutes the basis for the doctrine of the Trinity. God’s actions in history and creation are executed as the respective works of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God reveals Himself as Creator, Redeemer, Reconciler, and Maker of the new creation. God reveals His triune nature in Jesus’ life—at His baptism, transfiguration, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension into heaven—as well as at

the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost: He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The mystery of the divine Trinity comes to expression in various ways in the Old and New Testaments. However, Holy Scripture does not mention the term or provide any doctrine on the Trinity. This doctrine was recognised and formulated in the early church on the basis of biblical evidence.

3.2.1 References to the triune God in the Old Testament

The first reference to the activity of the triune God is recorded in the first account of creation (Genesis 1: 1–31; 2: 1–4). There it states: “And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1: 2) and also: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in Our image, according to our likeness’” (Genesis 1: 26). “Elohim”, the designation for God used in the original Hebrew text, is plural. It means “the Divine” as well as “gods” and should be understood, in light of the gospel, as a reference to the triune God.

The various divine manifestations, for example “Angel of the Lord” (Genesis 16: 7–11, 13; Exodus 3: 2–5; Judges 6: 11–16), “Spirit of God” (Genesis 1: 2), or “Spirit of the Lord” (Judges 3: 10; 1 Samuel 16: 13) are also interpreted as references to the mystery of the trinity of God.

The events and references in which the number three appears also allude to the Trinity:

- The three messengers of God who visited Abraham (Genesis 18) are understood in Christian tradition as a reference to the mystery of the divine Trinity.
- The activity of the triune God in the priestly blessing from Numbers 6: 24–26 is interpreted in the same way: “*The Lord* bless you and keep you; *the Lord* make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you, *the Lord* lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.”
- The angel’s threefold praise in the inaugural vision of the prophet Isaiah is also considered an indication of God’s trinity: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!” (Isaiah 6: 3).

3.2.2 References to the triune God in the New Testament

Although the New Testament does not contain a fully formulated doctrine of the Trinity, it nevertheless records events and formulations which clearly show the divine Trinity and its activity in the history of salvation. One example of the presence of the triune God can be found right at the beginning of Jesus' public activity, when, at His baptism, the Father and the Holy Spirit attest to the sending of the incarnate Son of God: "And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heaven parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, 'You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'" (Mark 1: 10–11). The Son of God, as is revealed here, works in unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are also mentioned in the commission to baptise, which Jesus Christ gave His Apostles before His ascension into heaven (Matthew 28: 18–19).

Indicators of the bond between the persons of the Trinity can be found in the gospel according to John, which speaks of the oneness between the Son and the Father, and where Jesus Christ says: "I and My Father are one" (John 10: 30; cf. John 1: 1, 18). The promise of the Holy Spirit also attests to the trinity of God (John 16: 13–15).

There are further references to God's trinity in the epistles of the New Testament. They can be found in the praises of God as well as in the wording of certain blessings. Accordingly, 1 Corinthians 12: 4–6 states: "There are diversities of gifts, but the *same Spirit*. There are differences of ministries, but the *same Lord*. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the *same God* who works all in all." This passage refers as much to the uniqueness of God as to the different self-revelations of the divine persons. That God's activity provides evidence of His Trinitarian nature is also attested in Ephesians 4: 4–6: "There is one body and *one Spirit*, just as you were 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." The salvific activity of the triune God is referenced in 1 Peter 1: 2: "... according to the foreknowledge of

God the Father, in sanctification of the *Spirit*, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of *Jesus Christ*.”

A clear reference to God’s triune nature is found in the wording of the blessing at the end of the second epistle to the Corinthians: “The grace of the Lord *Jesus Christ*, and the love of *God*, and the communion of the *Holy Spirit* be with you all. Amen” (2 Corinthians 13: 13).

3.2.3 The development of the doctrine of the Trinity

The recognition of God’s triune nature and its doctrinal presentation already began shortly after the New Testament Scriptures had been written. To express these interrelations linguistically, ancient philosophical terms like “person” or “hypostasis”, as well as “substance”, were used. Formulating the doctrine of the Trinity served, on one hand, to put into words the understanding gained through faith, and on the other, to protect the faith against heretics who sought to convey an image of God which did not correspond to the testimony of the New Testament. The doctrine of the Trinity was formulated during the first councils of the fourth and fifth centuries.

The term “Trinity” was coined by Theophile of Antioch, who lived in the second half of the second century, but it was the church leader Tertullian (ca. AD 160–220) who made it popular. Tertullian emphasised the oneness of God: “one [divine] substance in three persons” (Latin: *una substantia tres personae*). He was also the first to apply the term “person” to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Council of Nicaea (AD 325) explicitly enshrined the divine oneness of substance of the Father and Son. The direct reason behind this was the doctrine of Arius (died AD 336), who argued that the pre-existent Son was created by the Father from nothing, which therefore constituted God’s first act of creation. In opposition to this view, the council insisted that the Son was not created, but has been, from all eternity, part of the triune God.

This dispute, known as the “Arian controversy”, did not come to an end with the Council of Nicaea, but went on until the Council of Constantinople

in AD 381. This council brought to expression that the Holy Spirit is as much a divine person—and true God—as the Father and the Son.

In the following years, the doctrine of the Trinity was, with few exceptions, generally accepted by Christendom. The deliberations over the doctrine of the Trinity had, however, not been concluded. Particularly under the influence of the Church Father Augustine (AD 354–430), the Western Church later emphasised that the Holy Spirit emanates equally from both the Father and the Son. In contrast, the Eastern Church maintained an older version of the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople, which states that the Holy Spirit emanates from the Father through the Son.

The Reformers adopted the belief in the Trinity of God from the early church (second to sixth century). With the exception of the aforementioned divergent interpretation concerning the Holy Spirit, the doctrine of the Trinity is common to all Christian churches. It is among the most fundamental statements of the Christian faith and is an essential feature that distinguishes it from the two other Abrahamic religions, Judaism and Islam.

At the eleventh church synod of Toledo (AD 675) it was proclaimed: “The Father is the same as the Son, the Son the same as the Father, the Father and the Son the same as the Holy Spirit, namely by nature *one* God.”

3.2.4 The unity of the three divine persons

Christians profess the one triune God. Each of the divine persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is true God. The Christian faith states that God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—has always existed, namely from eternity.

Accordingly, “Father”, “Son”, and “Holy Spirit” are not merely names that designate various modes of being and revelation of God. Rather the three names stand for divine persons who are different from one another in their being. The Father is actually not the same as the Son, and the Son not the same as the Father. The Holy Spirit is not the same as the Father or the Son. This is because the “Father” is the begetter, the “Son” the begotten one, and the “Holy Spirit” the one emanating from both.

The three divine persons are continually interrelated and are eternally one. The distinctiveness of the three divine persons does not dissolve God's oneness, for they are one nature, or substance. In them there is no contradiction of will. The Father is entirely in the Son, entirely in the Holy Spirit. The Son is entirely in the Father, entirely in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is entirely in the Father, entirely in the Son.

Christians profess that all acts of God in creation, salvation, and the new creation are acts of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. While all divine acts are, at the same time, acts of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, they are not always carried out in the same manner. Whereas creation was an act of God the Father and God the Son, it was neither God the Father nor God the Holy Spirit, but God the Son alone, who became incarnate. It was neither the Father nor the Son, but rather the Holy Spirit alone, who was poured out. In Christian tradition, the three divine persons are each assigned a point of emphasis (appropriation): God the Father is Creator, the Son is Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit is the Maker of the new creation.

SUMMARY

God's actions in the creation and in history are the works of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. (3.2)

References to the trinity of God can be found in the first account of the creation, in the three messengers of God who visited Abraham, in the threefold Aaronic blessing, and in the three-fold praise of the angel in the inaugural vision of the prophet Isaiah. (3.2.1)

An example for the presence of the triune God can be found at the baptism of Jesus, when the Father and the Holy Spirit attest to the sending of the Son. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are also mentioned in Jesus' great commission as well as in the benediction formula recorded in 2 Corinthians 13: 13. (3.2.2)

The doctrine of the trinity of God was formulated at the Ecumenical Councils of the fourth and fifth centuries. At the Council of Nicaea the divine oneness of substance of the Father and the Son became binding doctrine. At the

Council of Constantinople the oneness of substance of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son was enshrined as doctrine. (3.2.3)

“Father”, “Son”, and “Holy Spirit” are different divine persons in their being, however, they are continually interrelated and eternally one. (3.2.4)

In Christian tradition each of the three divine persons is assigned a particular point of emphasis: God, the Father, is the Creator, while God, the Son, is the Redeemer, and God, the Holy Spirit, is the Maker of the new creation. (3.2.4)

3.3 God, the Father

God reveals Himself as the Father in unsurpassed fashion through the incarnation of God, the Son: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. ... No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (John 1: 14, 18). God the Father has begotten His only Son from eternity (*see 3.4.1*). This mystery is only revealed to those to whom the Son discloses it: “No one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him” (Matthew 11: 27).

When believers use the term “Father”, in connection with God, it is linked to aspects of His creation, authority, and loving care. God is the source and sustainer of everything He has created. In this respect, all human beings are able to address God, who is their Creator, as Father.

In Old Testament times, God revealed Himself as a loving and caring Father to the people of Israel. He said to Moses: “Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord: Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me’” (Exodus 4: 22–23). The people of Israel called God “Father” (Deuteronomy 32: 6; Jeremiah 31: 9). When Jesus spoke to the Jews in the Sermon on the Mount, He too referred to God as their

Father (Matthew 5: 16). He called upon them to invoke God with the words: “Our Father in heaven” (Matthew 6: 9).

Jesus Christ opened the way for human beings to become children—and thereby heirs—of the Most High through the rebirth out of water and the Spirit (Ephesians 1: 5; Titus 3: 5–7; Romans 8: 14–17). Thereby the concepts “Father” and “child” have taken on a new dimension. In 1 John 3: 1, the Fatherly love of God is given as the reason for which the reborn can be certain of their status as children of God: “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!”

3.3.1 God, the Creator

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1: 1). This statement from the first verse of Holy Scripture expresses a basic truth which we profess in the First Article of Faith. It is God who has created the heavenly worlds and the universe, and who, in so doing, has given the earth its place in the universe. It is here that God became Man.

Everything that exists has emanated from God’s creative activity. On the one hand, He has wrought this creation from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) and without any template, that is to say, in a completely independent way: “God ... calls those things which do not exist as though they did” (Romans 4: 17; cf. Hebrews 11: 3). On the other hand, He has also fashioned things and living beings from the matter He created (Genesis 2: 7–8, 19). All created things are subject to Him.

The creation and its order bear witness to God’s wisdom, the magnitude of which no human being can fathom. With admiration the psalmist exclaims: “O Lord, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions” (Psalm 104: 24).

The New Testament reveals that God has created everything through His Son. This follows primarily from the beginning of the gospel according to John: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made

through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1: 1–3; cf. Colossians 1: 16; Hebrews 1: 2; *see 3.4.2*). Like the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is also Creator. This is suggested by the words: “Let *Us* make man in *Our* image, according to *Our* likeness ...” (Genesis 1: 26).

Through His word, the triune God has created the material world. He sustains its existence and governs it. Thus the creation not only harbours the mystery of the origin and the beginning, but also of the continuation and the future. Everything demonstrates the Creator’s constant care: “For Thou lovest all the things that are, and abhorrest nothing which Thou hast made: for never wouldest Thou have made any thing, if Thou hadst hated it. And how could any thing have endured, if it had not been Thy will? Or been preserved, if not called by Thee? But Thou sparest all: for they are Thine, O Lord, Thou lover of souls. For Thine incorruptible Spirit is in all things” (Wisdom of Solomon 11: 24–12: 1).

SUMMARY

God reveals Himself in unique and unsurpassed fashion in the incarnation of God, the Son. (3.3)

When the term “Father” is used in connection with God, it is linked to aspects of His creation, His authority, and His loving care. (3.3)

Through His word, God has created all that exists. On the one hand, God has created from nothing and without template. On the other hand, He has also fashioned things and living beings out of the material He has created. All creation is subject to Him. He sustains the creation and guides it. (3.3.1)

3.3.1.1 The invisible creation

Holy Scripture provides multiple references to a purely invisible world, that is to say realms, occurrences, conditions, and beings outside the material world. It was created by God and is called the “invisible creation”. Sometimes the term “beyond” is also used to emphasise that the invisible creation is beyond human perception. Like God Himself, its mysteries elude human investigation. Nevertheless it is possible, through divine revelation, for human beings to gain insights into the invisible creation.

The invisible world cannot actually be described in human terms, since these are based on the human sphere of experience (that which is visible). Nevertheless, Holy Scripture uses such terms in order to make statements on the invisible world in figurative language.

From the biblical account we can conclude that the invisible creation incorporates the realm where God rules on His throne (Revelation 4 and 5), the angels (*see 3.3.1.1.1*), the immortal soul of man (*see 3.3.4*), as well as the realm of the dead (*see 9*). The Devil, the adversary of God and the enemy of mankind, as well as his followers also belong to the invisible world, although they were not created as evil (*see 4.1 and 4.1.2*).

3.3.1.1.1 The angels

The term “angel” is the translation of the Hebrew word *malak* or the Greek *angelos*. Here and there, both words are used in the respective Hebrew or Greek texts of Holy Scripture with the general meaning of “messenger, emissary”¹, but they are mainly used in reference to heavenly messengers of God.

1 One example in Holy Scripture where humans are also described as “angels” can be found in Revelation 2 and 3. The “*angels of the churches*” mentioned there are to be understood as the respective rectors of the congregations.

The task of the angels is to worship God, fulfil His instructions, and thereby serve Him. In individual cases angels can, if God wills, become visible. Holy Scripture relates that angels brought messages to human beings at God's behest. There is also much biblical evidence that angels commissioned by God served human beings by offering them help or protection. They are "all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation" (Hebrews 1: 14). Matthew 18: 10 points out that children are assigned angels who always see the face of God.

The services performed by angels for human beings are always based on the will of God. Thus it is not to the angels, but to God alone, that gratitude and worship are due: "I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels, which present the prayers of the saints, and which go in and out before the glory of the Holy One. ... For not of any favour of mine, but by the will of our God I came; wherefore praise Him for ever" (Tobit 12: 15, 18).

The formulation "multitude of the heavenly host" in Luke 2: 13 conveys the distinct impression of a great number of angels. The same idea comes across in Matthew 26: 53, where Jesus remarked that His Father could immediately provide Him with more than twelve legions of angels. The angels are described as those "who excel in strength" (Psalm 103: 20) and as holy and majestic beings. They can inspire shock and fear in human beings (Luke 1: 11–12, 29; 2: 9–10).

Likewise, Holy Scripture tells of the cherubim who guarded access to the tree of life after mankind's fall into sin (Genesis 3: 24), and of the seraphim whom the prophet Isaiah saw in a vision serving before the throne of God (Isaiah 6: 2–7).

The biblical account allows us to conclude that there are different ranks within the angelic realm: we read of Michael, the chief prince or archangel (Daniel 10: 13; 12: 1; Jude 9), and of Gabriel and Raphael who stand in the presence of God (Luke 1: 19; Tobit 12: 15) and thus seem to occupy an elevated position. Holy Scripture does not provide specific information on how the angelic realm is ordered.

God's love for human beings is also demonstrated by the fact that He allows the angels to serve them.

3.3.1.1.2 The significance of the invisible realm for the life of human beings

The belief that the soul and spirit continue to exist eternally in the beyond after physical death is of great importance to man (1 Peter 3: 19; 1 Corinthians 15). The attitude a person adopts toward God during earthly life has consequences for his existence in the beyond. This insight can help a person resist the temptations of the Devil and lead a life that is pleasing to God.

In this sense it is beneficial to occupy oneself with things pertaining to the beyond and the invisible. On the other hand, concerning oneself with the invisible by way of necromancy or conjuring the dead does not correspond to God's will (Deuteronomy 18: 10–11; 1 Samuel 28).

Apostle Paul clarifies the significance of the invisible: “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4: 17–18).

SUMMARY

An invisible world (invisible creation, the beyond) is attested many times in Holy Scripture. It includes the realm in which God rules, the angels, the immortal souls of human beings, as well as the realm of the dead. The Devil and his followers also belong to the invisible world. (3.3.1.1)

“Angels” are primarily to be understood as messengers of God whose task it is to worship God, fulfil the instructions He gives them, and thereby serve Him. According to biblical accounts, there are certain rankings in the angel world, which include “angel princes” or “archangels”. Holy Scripture does not give specific explanations about the orders in the angel world. (3.3.1.1.1)

The human soul and spirit continue to exist eternally in the beyond after physical death. This insight can help human beings to resist temptations and to lead a God-pleasing life. (3.3.1.1.2)

3.3.1.2 The visible creation

Holy Scripture attests that God created the visible world in six “days of creation”. These are not to be understood as specific measures of time. The Bible relates how all that which is perceptible to human beings was called into existence: God is the Creator of all discernable reality. It was at His word that heaven and earth, light, the shape of the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the plants and animals, and even human beings came into being—and it was all “very good” (Genesis 1: 31).

Although the creation also came under the consequences of the fall into sin, it retains its generally positive assessment from God. Among other things, this is demonstrated by the fact that He watches over the order which He has laid into the creation (Genesis 8: 22). Thus the visible creation—even in its fallen state—provides an eloquent testimony of God, the Creator (Romans 1: 20). God also entered into the material world through His incarnation.

God has assigned human beings their living environment and issued them the mandate to have dominion over the earth and to protect it (Genesis 1: 26–30; Psalm 8: 6). Human beings are thus accountable to God, the Creator, for their actions with regard to the creation. They have been instructed to treat all life and their habitat with esteem.

3.3.2 Man in the image of God

Of all creatures, God conferred on human beings a special position, and thereby brought them into a close relationship to Himself: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1: 26–27).

What distinguishes human beings here is that they are just as much a part of the visible as the invisible creation, because they possess both a material and a spiritual nature as a result of this divine act: “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 being” (Genesis 2: 7). God gave His most distinguished creation a life force and also permitted them to share in divine characteristics such as love, personality, freedom, reason, and immortality. God enables human beings to recognise the Creator, to love Him and to praise Him. Thus human beings are oriented to God even though they may not always recognise the true God and may put something else in His place.

Because it is God who gave man both a physical and a spiritual nature, both of these aspects should receive the dignity due them.

The fact that man has been created in the image of God means that he has been given an exceptional position within the visible creation: he is the one whom God loves and to whom God speaks.

Beyond that, mankind’s likeness to God points to the fact that God became Man in Jesus Christ, the “image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1: 15). Jesus Christ is the second “Adam” (1 Corinthians 15: 45, 47), in whom the image of God becomes evident in perfect fashion.

That man has been created in the image of God does not imply, however, that one can draw any conclusions about God’s nature from human nature. This is only the case with Jesus Christ.

God created man as a being endowed with speech. This too is related to mankind having been created in God’s image. God has always spoken from eternity. Through the Word He created everything and called man by name. It is by hearing the divine call that a human being perceives himself as a person—it is through God’s address of a human being as “you” that the person becomes “I”. The person is now capable of praising God, communicating with God in prayer, and listening to God’s word.

The ability to make free decisions also derives from the fact that man is created in God’s image. At the same time, the freedom with which he has been endowed makes man responsible for his actions. He must bear the consequences of his deeds (Genesis 2: 16–17).

Man and woman are both created in the image of God and therefore of the same nature. They were not only created with one another but also for one another, and have the same commission to have “dominion” over the earth, in other words, to shape and protect it. This authority granted to mankind does not entitle them to deal with creation in a reckless way, however. Rather, because they have been created in the image of God, it is their duty to treat creation in a manner befitting divine nature: with wisdom, kindness, and love.

SUMMARY

God, the author of all perceptible reality, has assigned human beings a living environment and issued them the mandate to have dominion over the earth and to protect it. Human beings are thus directed to treat all life and their environment with respect. (3.3.1.2)

God has created human beings in His image. Human beings are just as much a part of the visible creation as of the invisible creation. God gives mankind a life force (the “breath of life”) and also allows them to share in divine characteristics. (3.3.2)

Being created “in the image of God” means that man has been given a special status within the visible creation: mankind is loved and addressed by God. Man and woman are both equally created in the image of God. (3.3.2)

3.3.3 Man’s fall into sin

Following their creation, God permitted human beings to have direct fellowship with Him. Through His commandment that they should not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, He identified Himself to mankind as their Lord and lawgiver, who expected obedience.

Through the influence of the evil one, mankind entered into temptation and succumbed to it by contravening the law given by God: sin thereby be-

came part of mankind's existence. It is associated with separation from God, spiritual death. This became clear to the first human beings in the recognition of their nakedness before God, which caused them to be ashamed (Genesis 3: 7–10).

This shame is a sign that the trust which man had originally placed in the Creator was now destroyed. The disobedience of the first human beings led God to exclude them from the fellowship with Him which they had previously enjoyed.

The result of this separation was that man now had to lead a troubled existence on earth, which would end with the death of the body (Genesis 3: 16–19). The condition of separation from God cannot be bridged by man on his own.

Since the fall into sin, mankind has been sinful, that is to say enmeshed in sin and thus incapable of living without sin. He lives a life filled with pain and cares in a world burdened by the curse of God. Fear of death defines his life (*see 4.2.1*).

All of this brings to expression that mankind's original freedom has been decisively curtailed: although man can endeavour to lead a life in accordance with God's will, he will repeatedly fail because evil exercises power over him. He therefore remains a slave to sin throughout his life. In other words he is never free and is bound by sin.

However, even as a sinner, man does not remain without God's comfort and help. God does not leave him in death. In the presence of man, God addressed the following words to the serpent: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Genesis 3: 15). This is the first reference to the sacrifice of Jesus, through which the Lord conquered evil.

3.3.4 Man as an entity consisting of body, soul, and spirit

God created man as both a physical and spiritual being (that is with a spirit and soul). The human body is mortal, whereas the spirit and soul are immortal (*see 9.1*).

The body comes into being through procreation and thus shares in the nature and form of the parents. The soul, on the other hand, is not the result of the human act of procreation, but is created directly by God. In it God's present-day creatorship becomes evident.

In the Bible, spirit and soul are not definitively distinguished from one another.² They enable man to partake of the spiritual world, to recognise God, and to communicate with Him.

Spirit, soul, and body should not be understood as being independent from one another. Rather, they are interconnected. They permeate and influence one another because man is a unified entity: for as long as he lives on earth, he is an entity comprised of spirit, soul, and body (1 Thessalonians 5: 23), which exist in close interaction with one another. After the death of the body, this entity consists of spirit and soul.

Death does not put an end to human personhood. This personhood is then expressed through spirit and soul.

At the resurrection of the dead, spirit and soul will be united with a resurrection body (*see 10.1.2*).

SUMMARY

The evil one tempts human beings. The latter are quick to succumb to temptation and thereby violate the God-given commandments: sin has entered into the existence of human beings. (3.3.3)

² The immortal soul should not be confused with the human "psyche", which is also more colloquially designated as "soul". Likewise, the spirit, which is also part of man's eternal essence, should be distinguished from the intellect (colloquially called the "human spirit").

The consequence of sin is separation from God. Beyond that, the original liberty of mankind has been decidedly restricted. Human beings may well endeavour to live a life in accordance with God's will, but they will fail again and again. Even as sinners, human beings do not remain without God's comfort and help. (3.3.3)

God created mankind with both a physical and a spiritual nature: the body is mortal, but the spiritual being—spirit and soul—live on forever. Death does not cancel out a human being's personhood. It is from then on expressed in spirit and soul. (3.3.4)

3.4 God, the Son

Professing Jesus Christ as the Son of God is one of the fundamentals of Christian faith.

The statement in the Second Article of Faith—"I believe in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, our Lord"—expresses this belief in a few brief words. The Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople (*see* 2.2.2) further develops the content of this belief: "We believe ... in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds (æons), God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made."

When we talk about "God, the Son", we are referring to the second person of the trinity of God, who lives and reigns from eternity to eternity in fellowship with God, the Father and God, the Holy Spirit. The term "begotten" is not to be understood in biological terms, but rather as an attempt to capture in words the mysterious relationship between God, the Father and God, the Son.

There is absolutely no hierarchical difference between God, the Father and God, the Son—although the terms "Father" and "Son" might suggest an order of precedence. Father and Son are equally true God. They are of the same

essence. This is expressed in Hebrews 1: 3: The Son is "... the express image of His [the Father's] person."

In Jesus Christ, God, the Son became human, and at the same time remained God: God entered into, and became active in, historical reality. Belief in God, the Son, is inseparably bound to faith in Jesus Christ as a person who was present and active in history. The creed makes this clear by pointing out essential events in the life of the incarnate Son of God, and shows them to be, at the same time, the basis of the events of the history of salvation: "I believe in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried, entered the realm of the dead, rose again from the dead on the third day, and ascended into heaven. He is seated at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, from where He will return."

Jesus Christ is true Man and true God. He has two natures, a human one and a divine one, which are both present in Him in a pure, unchangeable, inseparable, and indivisible state.

In His human nature He is like other human beings. What distinguishes Him from them is that He came into the world without sin, never sinned, and remained obedient to God, the Father until his death on the cross (Philippians 2: 8).

In His divine nature, He remained the unchanged true God in omnipotence and perfection, even in His state of abasement on earth. In many ways, Jesus Himself revealed the mystery of His person. For example, in Matthew 11: 27, He said: "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." The knowledge that Jesus Christ is the Son of God is a divine revelation: "And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life" (1 John 5: 20).

3.4.1 The only begotten Son of God

The statement that Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of the Father (John 1: 14) is also expressed in the Second Article of Faith: “I believe in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God.” This signifies that Jesus Christ is God’s Son in incomparable and unique fashion. In this context, the term “only begotten” means that He has been begotten, not created, by the Father. “He is ... the firstborn over all creation” (Colossians 1: 15).

In John 3: 16, Jesus is described as the “only begotten Son [of God]”. He is the one who can authentically bear witness to the Father. In John 1: 18 this is expressed as follows: “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.”

The Son of God is not created, like human beings, nor can He be likened to the angels, whose existence also began at a certain point in time. He is without beginning or end, identical in essence to the Father, and therefore “begotten” from eternity. In reference to Psalm 2: 7, the author of the epistle to the Hebrews employs the term “begotten” in order to express the unique relationship between Father and Son (Hebrews 1: 5).

3.4.2 The incarnate Word

John 1: 1–18 contains fundamental statements about the being of God and His revelation in the world. It speaks of the beginning and the source which defines all things and from which all things emanate. This beginning—which in itself is unconditional, and which transcends time—is closely associated with the term *logos*, as used in the original Greek text, which is usually translated as the “Word”. This *logos* is the true power which marked the beginning of creation. Here, Word and God are directly correlated: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1: 1). God and the Word have both existed from eternity.

John 1: 14 attests to the presence of the *logos* on earth: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of

the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” The transcendent divine Word, which was in the beginning with God, now entered the earthly and human sphere. Moreover, it became flesh—the eternal Word itself became true Man.

The statement “and we beheld His glory” refers to the Son of God incarnate, to the historical reality of the “Word made flesh”. Here the passage makes reference to the circle of witnesses to Jesus Christ’s activity on earth. The Apostles and disciples had direct fellowship with Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh (1 John 1: 1–3).

The transcendent glory of the Father became historical reality in the earthly and directly perceptible glory of the Son. Accordingly, the Son of God was able to say of Himself: “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14: 9).

Hebrews 2: 14 gives the reason for the Word having become flesh: “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself [Jesus Christ] likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the Devil.”

3.4.3 Jesus Christ, true Man and true God

The teaching that Jesus Christ is true Man and true God—the doctrine of Hypostatic Union—was enshrined at the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451. This doctrine of the dual nature of Jesus transcends the horizon of human imagination and experience. It is a mystery.

In Philippians 2: 6–8 the incarnation of the Son of God is described as self-abasement: “who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men, and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

Jesus shared in the full human spectrum of physical and spiritual feelings. In His human existence, the Son of God was, like other humans, bound to a

body and its requirements. In Luke 2: 52 it says that Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men. At the wedding in Cana, Jesus rejoiced with the cheerful. He suffered with the sad and wept when Lazarus died. He was hungry during His stay in the wilderness. He was thirsty when He came to Jacob's well. He suffered pain when the soldiers beat Him. Confronted with His imminent death on the cross, He expressed: "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death" (Matthew 26: 38).

The fact that Jesus Christ is true Man is stated in Hebrews 4: 15. At the same time, the difference between Him and all other human beings is made clear here: He is without sin.

Likewise, Jesus Christ is true God.

Both the divine Sonship and the Godhead of Jesus Christ are attested in Holy Scripture. At Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, a voice from heaven was heard saying: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3: 17). Likewise, at the transfiguration, the Father emphasised that Jesus was the Son of God by saying: "Hear Him!" (Matthew 17: 5).

The words of Jesus—"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6: 44) and "No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14: 6)—attest to the equally divine authority of God, the Father, and God, the Son. The Father draws human beings to the Son, and the Son leads human beings to the Father.

It is only as true God that Jesus Christ can declare: "I and My Father are one" (John 10: 30) and thereby state, in simple language, that the Father and Son are identical in essence.

Further biblical evidence that Jesus Christ is true God include:

- the actions of the Apostles after Christ's ascension: "And they worshipped Him [Jesus Christ]" (Luke 24: 52);
- the statement in John 1: 18: "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him";
- the attestation of Apostle Thomas after He had seen the Risen One: "My Lord and my God!" (John 20: 28);
- the profession of the nature of Jesus in the Christ hymn: "For in Him dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2: 9);

- the testimony contained in 1 John 5: 20: “And we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life”;
- the statement: “God was manifested in the flesh” (1 Timothy 3: 16).

3.4.4 References to Jesus Christ in the Old Testament

The Old Testament already provides references to the coming Messiah, Saviour, and Redeemer. For example, we find the first reference to a coming Redeemer in the curse of the serpent immediately following the fall into sin (Genesis 3: 15).

The author of the epistle to the Hebrews sees a reference to Jesus Christ in the acts of the royal priest Melchizedek, who brought Abraham bread and wine and blessed him (Genesis 14: 17–20; Hebrews 7).

The Son of God accompanied the chosen people of Israel throughout their history. Apostle Paul expressly attests to Christ’s presence during their wandering through the desert: “Our fathers ... all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10: 1–4).

Old Testament prophets refer to concrete details associated with the appearance of the Redeemer:

- Isaiah describes Him with names that underline His uniqueness: “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9: 6).
- Micah announced the place of the Lord’s birth: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel whose goings forth are from old, from everlasting” (Micah 5: 2).
- Malachi prophesied of a way-preparer for the Son of God: “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” says the Lord

of hosts” (Malachi 3: 1). The one preparing the way here is John the Baptist (Matthew 11: 10).

- Zechariah described the Lord’s entry into Jerusalem: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zechariah 9: 9).

Thus the incarnation of the Son of God, as well as His walk upon the earth, were already foretold in the Old Testament.

3.4.5 Jesus Christ—the Redeemer

The name “Jesus” means “The Lord saves”. When the angel of the Lord heralded the birth of Jesus, he announced His name at the same time: “and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1: 21). Thereby it already becomes clear in the assignment of His name that Jesus is the promised Saviour and Redeemer.

In His works, Jesus Christ revealed Himself as the Redeemer sent by God: “The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them” (Matthew 11: 5). However, redemption through Jesus Christ reaches far beyond the visible and temporal dimension and into the sphere of the invisible and eternal. It deprives the Devil of his claim to mankind and leads out of sin and death.

The redemption of mankind is founded upon the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1: 7). In Him alone, salvation is made accessible to mankind (Acts 4: 12).

SUMMARY

God, the Son, is the second person of the trinity of God. In Jesus Christ, God became Man and yet remained God: He entered into historical reality. (3.4)

Jesus Christ is true Man and true God, and thus has two natures. According to His human nature, Jesus Christ is like all other human beings—albeit without sin. According to His divine nature, He remains true God unchanged, even during His abasement on earth. (3.4)

Jesus is described as “God’s only begotten Son”. The Son of God, the only begotten, is begotten of the Father—that is not created, but eternal, without beginning or end, and one in substance with the Father. (3.4.1)

The transcendent divine Word (*logos*), which was with God in the beginning, now entered the sphere of the earthly and human in Jesus. It “became flesh” (John 1: 14)—the eternal Word became true Man. The transcendent glory of the Father became directly perceptible historical reality in the earthly glory of the Son. (3.4.2)

The dual nature of Jesus Christ as true Man and true God is a mystery. As true Man, Jesus shared in the full spectrum of physical and emotional experiences. As true God He brought His oneness of substance with the Father to expression with the words: “I and My Father are one” (John 10: 30). (3.4.3)

The Old Testament makes reference to the coming Messiah. The prophets of the Old Testament point to concrete details in association with the appearing of the Redeemer. They foretell the incarnation of the Son of God, His path over the earth, as well as His eternal existence. (3.4.4)

In His works, Jesus Christ revealed Himself as the Redeemer sent by God. Redemption from death and sin is founded exclusively upon the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Salvation is only accessible to mankind in Him. (3.4.5)

3.4.6 Majestic titles of Jesus

“Majestic titles” refer to names and designations for the Son of God by which Holy Scripture alludes to various characteristics of His uniqueness.

3.4.6.1 Messiah—Christ—Anointed One

All three terms mean the same: “Messiah” is derived from the Hebrew *maschiach*, the Latin *Christus* stems from Greek *Christos*. In translation this means “the Anointed One”.

In some of the Psalms, the kings of Israel are described as “the anointed” [of God] (Psalm 20: 6). Their anointing is closely linked to statements concerning a special covenant of God with David and his successors. The adoration of the king anointed by God sometimes even went so far as to designate him as God (Psalm 45: 6–10).

Based on the statements of the prophets (Isaiah 61; Jeremiah 31: 31 et seq.), there developed among the people of Israel an understanding of the Messiah which increasingly foreshadowed a figure who would transcend all things human, and who would possess divine character in the deepest sense.

It is the unanimous profession of the New Testament that Jesus of Nazareth is this Messiah this Christ. The majestic title “Christ” is so closely linked to Jesus that it has become a proper name: Jesus Christ. Whoever believes in Him professes the Messiah expected by Israel, the bringer of salvation sent by God.

Wherever the New Testament speaks of Jesus, it is referring to the Messiah, namely Christ. This marks a defining difference: while today many people of the Judaic faith still await the arrival of the Messiah, Christians profess that the Messiah has already come, and that He is present in Jesus Christ. This belief is formulated in the powerful statement at the beginning of the gospel of Mark: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1: 1).

3.4.6.2 Lord

In the Old Testament, the designation “Lord” is mostly used when speaking of the God of Israel. In the New Testament, this majestic title is also used in reference to Jesus Christ.

In the epistle to the Romans, we read “that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10: 9). From this text is derived the statement *Kyrios Iesous* (from the Greek: “Jesus is Lord”), which is among the oldest professions of early Christianity. Here the term “Lord” is not to be understood as a respectful form of address, but as a designation of the divine authority of Jesus Christ.

That Jesus is “Lord” became an irrefutable certainty for His disciples after His resurrection. Apostle Thomas addressed the Risen One with the words: “My Lord and my God!” (John 20: 28).

Whenever Jesus is called “Lord”, it is also intended to express that it is none other than God Himself who has become incarnate in Him.

Apostle Paul wrote that the rule of Jesus Christ eclipses all other sovereigns—including the Roman emperor who claimed divinity for himself: “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Corinthians 2: 7–8).

Since Jesus is the Lord of glory, great significance is accorded to the invocation of His name and to His worship (Philippians 2: 9–11).

3.4.6.3 Son of Man

In Daniel 7: 13–14, the term “Son of Man” is used to denote a heavenly being who is not part of the human race.

At the time of Jesus, devout Jews awaited the coming of the “Son of Man”, to whom God was to commit dominion over the world. According to John 3: 13, the Lord revealed Himself as the Son of Man: “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man.” As such, He has the authority to forgive sins (Matthew 9: 6), is Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12: 8), and has come “to seek and save that which was lost” (Luke 19: 10).

Finally, the Lord announced the suffering (Matthew 17: 12), sacrificial death (Matthew 12: 40; 20: 28), and resurrection of the Son of Man (Matthew 17: 9). Whenever Jesus spoke about the Son of Man, He was referring to Himself.

Stephen also attested to the divinity of the Son of Man: “I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” (Acts 7: 56). Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, is now back in the place from which He came (John 16: 28).

3.4.6.4 Immanuel—Servant of God—Son of David

Holy Scripture mentions additional majestic titles of Jesus: Immanuel, Servant of the Lord, Son of David.

The Hebrew name “Immanuel” means “God with us”. In reference to Jesus, Matthew 1: 22–23 cites the prophecy found in Isaiah 7: 14: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.” Jesus Christ is thus the One in whom God is directly present and through whom God can be directly experienced.

In the Old and New Testaments, the term “Servant of the Lord” refers to outstanding personages in the history of salvation: patriarchs, prophets, Apostles. Isaiah’s references to the Servant of the Lord were fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Isaiah 42: 1).

In the New Testament, “Son of David” is a familiar title for Jesus Christ. The beginning of the gospel according to Matthew already emphasises that it is “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham” (Matthew 1: 1). This signifies that the promises which had been made to David were fulfilled in the Son of God.

SUMMARY

“Majestic titles” are names and designations which refer to various characteristics of the uniqueness of the Son of God. (3.4.6)

That Jesus of Nazareth is the “Messiah” is unanimously professed in the New Testament. (3.4.6.1)

“Lord” is a designation of the divine authority of Jesus Christ. (3.4.6.2)

The term “Son of Man” denotes a heavenly being that is not part of the human race. The Lord personally identified Himself as this Son of Man. (3.4.6.3)

Holy Scripture lists “Immanuel” (“God with us”), “Servant of God”, and “Son of David” as further majestic titles of Jesus. (3.4.6.4)

3.4.7 The ministries of Christ—King, Priest, and Prophet

The title “King” is associated with the notion of reigning and ruling. Priests performed sacrificial services in order to effect reconciliation between man and God. Prophets were expected to proclaim the divine will and foretell coming events.

Ruling and reigning, effecting reconciliation with God, proclaiming God’s will and foretelling future events—all of these can be found in perfect fashion in Jesus Christ.

3.4.7.1 Jesus Christ—the King

When the angel of the Lord announced the birth of Jesus to the virgin Mary, he said: “He [Jesus] will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest ...

And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1: 32–33).

The wise men from the East asked for the newborn King of the Jews whom they had come to worship (Matthew 2: 2).

In Jesus Christ the promise that God had given through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, that I will raise to David a branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgement and righteousness in the earth” (Jeremiah 23: 5).

Nathanael, one of the first disciples of Jesus, professed: “Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (John 1: 49). However Jesus’ kingship was not rooted in any earthly regency and was not manifest in outward power, but rather demonstrated in the authority of His actions and in the signs and miracles He performed.

Jesus definitively rejected all notions that He was striving for an earthly kingdom or that He would accept any political mandate.

All four gospels mention how Jesus entered into Jerusalem prior to His suffering and death. In so doing, He revealed Himself as the King of peace and justice whom the prophet Zechariah had already announced (Zechariah 9: 9). The people would gladly have made Jesus the earthly king of Israel, and cheered His coming (John 12: 13).

Even during His questioning by Pilate, Jesus made clear that His kingdom was not of this world and that He made no claim to the power of an earthly ruler. Pilate responded to the words of Jesus as follows: “Are you a king then?” He thereby gave the Son of God the opportunity to speak of His kingship: “You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth.” Here Jesus even professed before a representative of the worldly power of Rome and of the Gentiles that He is King and witness of the truth (John 18: 33–37).

His death on the cross constitutes the highpoint and conclusion of an abasement which was, in reality, the path to Jesus Christ’s exaltation. “Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross; and the writing was: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS ... and it was written in Hebrew,

Greek, and Latin” (John 19: 19–20). In a deeper sense, this caption in three languages served to make the kingship of Christ known to the entire world.

The royal dignity of Jesus Christ is also emphasised in the Revelation of Jesus Christ: He is “ruler over the kings of the earth” (Revelation 1: 5). When the seventh angel sounds his trumpet, he announces that “the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (Revelation 11: 15). The rule of Jesus Christ will then be manifest everywhere.

3.4.7.2 Jesus Christ—the Priest

The foremost tasks of the priests in the old covenant included bringing sacrifices to God, instructing the people in the law, and ruling on difficult legal issues and all questions pertaining to ritual purity. The high priest’s task was to bring his own sins, the sins of the priests, and the sins of the people before God. For this purpose he would enter the Most Holy Place once each year on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). Here he would act on behalf of the people, and serve as the link between God and the people of Israel.

With a view to the priesthood of the old covenant and the offerings sacrificed in the temple, the epistle to the Hebrews states: “[they] serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things” (Hebrews 8: 5). In light of the gospel, it becomes evident that the Old Testament priesthood was only provisional, “for the law made nothing perfect” (Hebrews 7: 19).

In the incarnation of the Son of God, a priesthood that exceeds all other priesthoods becomes manifest. Jesus Christ is not simply another high priest in the long line of Israel’s high priests. Rather, in Jesus Christ there appears a High Priest upon whom the redemption of the world is founded: God Himself overcomes the abyss of sin and reconciles the world to Himself in Jesus Christ. No other priesthood can achieve this. Thus Jesus Christ is the eternal High Priest: “But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come

to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7: 24–25).

Unlike the high priests of the old covenant, Jesus Christ is not in need of reconciliation with God. He Himself is the Reconciler. He not only gives testimony of His encounter with God—in Him man and God are inseparably united.

God’s loving care of the world is clearly revealed in the priesthood of Jesus Christ. In Him mankind has access to God’s salvation.

The epistle to the Hebrews gives an account of Christ’s high priestly ministry as the propitiation for the sins of the people (Hebrews 2: 17). In Jesus Christ, the eternal High Priest, the certainty of the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life are assured.

In Hebrews 3: 1 we read: “Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus.” On the one hand, Jesus Christ surpasses the service of the Old Testament high priests because He is the true High Priest, and on the other hand He is also the prerequisite for the Apostles’ activity in the new covenant. The content of apostolic ministry becomes clear in 2 Corinthians 5: 20: “We implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.”

3.4.7.3 Jesus Christ—the Prophet

The promise which God made to Moses was fulfilled in Jesus Christ: “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him” (Deuteronomy 18: 18).

The prophets in the old covenant were called to proclaim God’s will. Their messages were often introduced with a reference to their source in God: “Thus says the Lord.” In Jesus Christ, God Himself speaks to mankind.

According to Mark 1: 15, the Son of God began His activity with the words: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.” The Lord taught with the full power of divine authority, which comes to expression in the words: “But I say to you ...” (Matthew 5–7).

As a prophet, Jesus Christ also revealed future events, as recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, for example.

In the Lord's farewell discourses (John 13–16), He promised the Holy Spirit, who was to lead into all truth.

In the book of Revelation the Son of God unveils the progress of salvation history up to and including the new creation.

So it is that Jesus Christ also worked as a prophet: He proclaimed the will of God, illuminated the past, revealed hidden things, showed the way to eternal life, and gave promises of things to come. His statements are eternally valid: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (Mark 13: 31).

SUMMARY

The kingship of Jesus Christ is shown in the authority with which He acted, and through the signs which He performed. (3.4.7.1)

In a deeper sense, the caption on the cross—which was written in three languages—served to announce the kingship of Jesus Christ to the whole world. (3.4.7.1)

The royal dignity of Jesus Christ is also brought to expression in Revelation (Revelation 1: 5; 11: 15). (3.4.7.1)

The High Priest upon whom the redemption of the world is founded appears in Jesus Christ: through Jesus Christ, God reconciles the world to Himself. Unlike the high priest of the old covenant, Jesus Christ did not need reconciliation with God—as did the high priest of the old covenant—because He Himself is the Reconciler. (3.4.7.2)

God's loving care for the world becomes clear in the Priesthood of Jesus Christ: in Him human beings have access to God's salvation. In Him there is also the assurance of forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life. (3.4.7.2)

The prophets in the old covenant were called upon to proclaim the will of God. Jesus Christ acted as a prophet by announcing the will of God, illumi-

nating the past, uncovering concealed things, showing the way of life, and giving promises for the future. (3.4.7.3)

3.4.8 New Testament references to the person and activity of Jesus Christ

The gospels attest to the life and activity of Jesus Christ. However, the Evangelists did not provide this account as biographers. Rather they bore witness that this Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah expected by Israel: His story is that of the saving intervention of God in the course of the world, right from the start of the kingdom of God in His person. The essential elements of the profession to Christ are founded upon the testimony of Jesus in the New Testament.

3.4.8.1 The conception and birth of Jesus

The gospels of Matthew and Luke describe the birth of Jesus. Jesus was born at the time when Herod ruled as king over Judea, when Augustus was Caesar in Rome, and when Quirinius was his governor in Syria. These precise details point to the real historical existence of Jesus and refute all attempts to consign the story of Jesus of Nazareth to the domain of myth or legend.

The uniqueness of the Man Jesus is emphasised on account of the virgin birth, which is related in the gospel of Luke. The angel Gabriel brought the virgin Mary the message: “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1: 31–33). He also explained to Mary how she would conceive: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the

power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1: 35).

The statement in the Second Article of Faith that Jesus was “conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary” describes the incarnation of Jesus as an exception to the normal course of natural events. Jesus of Nazareth is true Man, however, His physicality and humanity are inseparably linked with God’s will to save: His conception and birth are acts of salvation and thus part of the history of salvation. This is underlined by symbolic phenomena that accompanied His birth:

- Angels appeared and proclaimed the glad tidings to the shepherds in the fields: “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2: 11; cf. Micah 5: 2).
- A star announced the birth of the newborn King. Wise men from the Orient followed the star and were led to Bethlehem, where they worshipped the Child (Matthew 2: 1–11).

3.4.8.2 Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan

Jesus Christ is without sin. Nonetheless, He allowed Himself to be baptised by John the Baptist and to be counted among the sinners (2 Corinthians 5: 21). This act of baptism—which was an expression of repentance—makes it clear that Jesus Christ abased Himself and subjected Himself to the same act that must be performed on every sinner.

Already here it is clear that Jesus Christ, who is without sin, took the sins of others upon Himself and ultimately opened the way to righteousness before God.

After His baptism the Holy Spirit descended visibly upon Jesus. In a voice from heaven, the Father then testified: “You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased” (Luke 3: 22). Through this act of divine revelation, the divine Sonship of Jesus is announced to the whole world by the Father, and His Messianic identity is proclaimed: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

The fact that John the Baptist recognised in Jesus the suffering servant (Isaiah 53: 5), the Saviour, becomes clear in his words: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” It had been revealed to him beforehand that the one “upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptises with the Holy Spirit.” John reaffirmed this: “And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God” (John 1: 29, 33–34).

3.4.8.3 Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness

After His baptism in the Jordan, Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness “to be tempted by the Devil” (Matthew 4: 1). He remained there for forty days and was tempted several times by the Devil. Jesus withstood the temptation and rejected the Devil.

This event is of significance for the history of salvation: Adam succumbed to temptation and fell into sin, while Christ—“who ... was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4: 15)—resisted temptation as the New Adam. Already before the start of His public activity, He proved Himself as the victor over Satan.

SUMMARY

The history of Jesus of Nazareth is the story of the saving intervention of God in the course of the world. The gospels are not biographies, but rather testimonies of faith. (3.4.8)

The uniqueness of the Man Jesus is emphasised by the virgin birth. His conception and birth are events of salvation and are thus part of salvation history. (3.4.8.1)

Although Jesus Christ is without sin, He allowed Himself to be baptised by John the Baptist and to be counted among the sinners. After the baptism, the divine Sonship of Jesus was proclaimed to the entire world by God, the Father. (3.4.8.2)

Just before the start of His public activity, Jesus was tempted in the wilderness. He proved to be victor over Satan. (3.4.8.3)

The focal point of Jesus' teaching was the kingdom of God in its present and future form. In Jesus Christ it was personally present. (3.4.8.4)

3.4.8.4 Jesus' teaching activity

The focus of Jesus' preaching was on the kingdom of God—the rule of God which was to manifest itself in history—in both its present and future form: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1: 15). From that point on, the kingdom of God was personally present in Jesus Christ (Luke 17: 21).

The fundamental content of the gospel is the grace, love, and reconciliation manifested in Jesus Christ. He is the Son of God and He came to destroy the works of the Devil, to redeem mankind from the sin into which they had fallen and become entangled, and to liberate them from the claim of the Devil. Through His sacrifice, Jesus Christ opened the way to reconciliation with God, and the gate to eternal life, for mankind. Through His death and resurrection, He proved once and for all that He is Lord over death and the Devil. Mankind shares in this victory through faith (1 Corinthians 15: 57).

Jesus called disciples to follow Him. He preached with power and majestic authority, and forgave sins. He also performed miraculous deeds in order to make it clear that salvation had come to mankind through Him. Thereby He underscored His message of the dawning rule of God and of His activity as the Saviour.

3.4.8.5 Jesus' miracles

All four gospels handed down to us in writing give account of the miraculous deeds of Jesus as real events that attested to His Messianic identity. His miracles demonstrate God's merciful devotion to suffering people. They are events of revelation in that they serve to manifest Christ's glory (John 2: 11) and His divine authority (John 5: 21).

The miracles which the Son of God performed were diverse. They included healing the sick, casting out evil spirits, raising the dead, miracles of nature, miracles of feeding, and gift miracles.

Healing the sick

Jesus healed the sick, the blind, the lame, the deaf, and the lepers. This healing of the sick drew attention to the divine nature of Jesus Christ, who acted exactly as God had described Himself to Israel: "For I am the Lord who heals you" (Exodus 15: 26). One of these miracles is the healing of a paralytic in Capernaum (Mark 2: 1–12), to whom Jesus first of all said: "Son, your sins are forgiven you" (verse 5). The scribes considered this blasphemy, but the Lord made it clear that He had both the authority to forgive sins as well as the power to heal. These miracles of healing were closely linked to the faith of the people whom He healed.

Casting out evil spirits

The miracles worked by Jesus also included casting out evil spirits (Mark 1: 23–28). Jesus Christ was even recognised as Lord by the demons (Mark 3: 11). Here it becomes clear that evil is not an independent power in itself, but is subject to the power of God: the time of its destructive rule and influence on mankind has come to its end with the appearing of Jesus Christ (Luke 11: 20).

Raising the dead

The gospels give account of three cases in which the Lord brought people back to life after they had died: the daughter of Jairus (Matthew 9: 18–26), the young man of Nain (Luke 7: 13–15), and Lazarus (John 11: 1–44). Before raising Lazarus from the dead, the

Lord revealed Himself with words of fundamental importance: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11: 25–26). Jesus Christ not only had the power to raise the dead to life—He Himself is the life, He Himself is the resurrection. The raising of the dead is a symbolic reference to the fact that faith in Jesus Christ signifies the overcoming of death and thus the attainment of eternal life.

Miracles of nature

When the Lord commanded the wind and the sea to be still, He demonstrated His power over the elements (Matthew 8: 23–27). This power over the forces of nature underlines the creatorship of the Son of God, who, as the eternal Word of the Father, existed before all creation (John 1: 1–3).

Miracles of feeding

All of the gospels give an account of the feeding of the five thousand (Mark 6: 30–44). Beyond that, both Matthew and Mark also relate the feeding of the four thousand (Matthew 15: 32–39; Mark 8: 1–9). On the one hand, these events are reminders that God fed His people in the desert, and on the other hand, they constitute a reference to Holy Communion: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world” (John 6: 51).

Gift miracles

Those miracles in which people received an abundance of earthly gifts are also signs of Jesus Christ’s divinity and the proximity of the kingdom of God. Examples of these are Peter’s miraculous catch of fish (Luke 5: 1–11) and the events of the wedding in Cana, when Jesus transformed water into wine (John 2: 1–11).

SUMMARY

The grace, love, and reconciliation revealed in Jesus Christ constitute fundamental content of the gospel. (3.4.8.4)

All the gospels speak of miracles as real events. They attest to the Messiahship of Jesus and clearly show the merciful care of God toward suffering human beings. (3.4.8.5)

The miracles which the Son of God performed were many and diverse: He healed the sick, cast out evil spirits, raised the dead, and performed miracles of nature, miracles of feeding, and gift miracles. (3.4.8.5)

3.4.8.6 Jesus' parables and images

In His sermons, Jesus used many parables and in so doing employed a wide range of imagery from the daily lives of His listeners. In Matthew 13: 34–35 we read: “All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: ‘I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world.’”

In His parables Jesus talked about the essential elements of His doctrine and opened up the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven: “The kingdom of heaven is like ...” (Matthew 13: 1 et seq.).

More than forty parables are recorded in the first three gospels. Through them, the Son of God illustrated the major aspects of His gospel: the nearness of the kingdom of God, the commandment to love one’s neighbour, the attitude of man’s heart, and the coming of the Son of Man.

The kingdom of God is present in Jesus Christ

In the parable of the mustard seed, Jesus illustrated the humble beginnings—and the growth—of the kingdom of God. In the parable of the leaven, He made it clear that Christ would permeate all things in the end (Matthew 13: 31–33).

The parable of the treasure hidden in a field and the parable of the pearl of great price showcase individuals who recognise the wealth hidden in Christ and make use of the offer to partake in the kingdom of God (Matthew 13: 44–46).

In this kingdom of God, or kingdom of heaven, which is at hand, God identifies Himself as the loving heavenly Father. Thus the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son (Luke 15: 4–32) illustrate God's love for, and will to reconcile with, the sinner. Without regard for the person, the Lord invites all, and offers them fellowship with Him.

Love for one's neighbour

The greatest commandments of the law are to love God and one's neighbour. In the account of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 30–35), Jesus illustrated who this neighbour is, and that loving our neighbour means that we must not close our eyes to the distress of others, but rather provide help. The manner in which this is to be put into practice can also be derived from the parable of the Last Judgement (Matthew 25: 35–36).

The attitude of man's heart

The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18: 9–14) draws attention to the attitude of man's heart: it is not those who praise their own deeds, but those who approach God in humbleness and in search of grace, who will be justified. Among other things, the parable of the sower also deals with the attitude of man's heart: it demonstrates that a God-fearing heart is necessary in order to properly absorb the word of God (Luke 8: 15).

The parable of the unmerciful servant also has to do with attitude: it deals with forgiveness and calls upon those who have received God's grace to likewise show grace to others. Those who recognise the magnitude of God's love will feel the need to reconcile with their neighbour (Matthew 18: 21–35).

The coming of the Son of Man

In the parables about the return of the Son of Man, Jesus revealed future events. In Matthew 24: 37–39, a comparison is made between the time before His return and the time of Noah: the return of Christ will be sudden. In the same context, the parable of the thief in the night concludes with the exhortation: “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Matthew 24: 44). This is also the message in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matthew 25: 1–13): it is important to be watchful and prepared for the sudden return of the Lord. The parable of the talents is an admonition to make use of the time before Christ’s return (Matthew 25: 14–30).

All of these parables deepen our understanding of Jesus’ statements concerning His return, deliverance and the judgement, His reign at the end of time, the powers of this world, and eternal life as the actual destiny of mankind.

Images

Some images that bring Jesus’ nature to expression—and thus constitute a self-revelation of God—can be found in the gospel of John. In the “I am” statements He introduces Himself as the “bread of life” (John 6: 35) and the “light of the world” (John 8: 12). Likewise He is the “door” to salvation (John 10: 9), the “good shepherd”, who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10: 11), and He is the “vine” (John 15: 5). Jesus Christ is the “resurrection”, “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 11: 25; 14: 6). He alone opens access to God, the Father. These seven “I am” statements demonstrate Jesus’ entitlement to majesty and divinity: He is not only the messenger of the Father, but God Himself.

3.4.8.7 Jesus and the law

The Mosaic Law was the highest authority for Israel. Its observance and fulfilment were considered the key to the relationship between mankind and God.

Jesus did not repeal the law, however, He made it clear that He possesses a higher authority and that He is Lord over the law.

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), Jesus took position on the law in the presence of His disciples and the people. In the so-called antitheses (“You have heard that it was said “but I say to you ...”)—by way of which He clarified the law and led His listeners to the proper understanding of the will of God upon which it was based—He introduced Himself as the only one entitled to interpret the law with authority.

By exposing the core of the Mosaic Law, He made it clear that the law—like the entire old covenant—referred to Him, and that He had come to fulfil it. Through His obedience He countered the disobedience of the first human beings. With His perfect fulfilment of the law, He ended the unrestricted rule of sin over mankind.

3.4.8.8 Jesus and His Apostles

In order to spread the gospel, Jesus selected twelve Apostles from the ranks of His disciples (Luke 6: 12–16; Mark 3: 14). They were His closest followers, and He had a special relationship of trust with them. When the other disciples left Him because they did not understand Him, the Apostles remained with Him and professed that He is the Christ.

To them He gave an example of humble service when He washed their feet (John 13: 4 et seq.) Only the Twelve were with Him when He instituted Holy Communion (Luke 22: 14 et seq.). His farewell discourses were directed at them (John 13–16). It was to them that He promised the Holy Spirit. He let them know that He would be returning to the Father. He gave them the promise of His return. In His intercessory prayer He interceded for them and for those who would come to believe through their word (John 17). He sanctified Himself for them so that they too could “be sanctified by the truth” (verse 19).

It was also to them that He showed Himself repeatedly after His resurrection (Acts 1: 2–3), and it was to them that He gave the great commission before His ascension.

SUMMARY

In figurative speech, namely parables, Jesus talked about essential elements of His doctrine, and thereby opened up the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. The parables of Jesus revolve around His return and describe how to prepare for it. (3.4.8.6)

In the images of the gospel of John, Jesus reveals Himself as true God. (3.4.8.6)

By exposing the core of the Mosaic Law, Jesus made it clear that the law—like the entire old covenant—refers to Him. He had come in order to fulfil it. (3.4.8.7)

In order to spread His gospel, Jesus elected twelve Apostles out of the circle of His disciples. He had a special relationship of trust with them. After His resurrection He showed Himself to them repeatedly, and it was to them that He gave the great commission before His ascension. (3.4.8.8)

3.4.9 Jesus' passion and sacrificial death

The last days before Jesus' sacrificial death are described in great detail in the gospels.

When the Lord rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, the prophecy of Zechariah 9: 9 was fulfilled. With the cleansing of the temple, Jesus made it clear that the house of the Lord is holy. The disputes with the Pharisees and Sadducees became more and more intense—they plotted to take His life (Luke 20).

According to His own words, when Jesus was anointed with costly oil of spikenard, it was to foreshadow His impending death (John 12: 7). Some of

those present were indignant about this and considered it a waste: if the oil had been sold, the proceeds of 300 pieces of silver would have been a great help to the poor. Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve Apostles, then went to the high priests. They offered him 30 pieces of silver to betray Jesus, an amount that was customarily paid for a slave (Exodus 21: 32). Thereby the words of Zechariah 11: 12–13 were fulfilled: the Lord was placed on the same level as a slave, as it were.

3.4.9.1 Jesus institutes Holy Communion

The Lord had gathered together with the twelve Apostles for the feast of the Passover. As they were seated at the table, the Son of God instituted Holy Communion: “And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins’” (Matthew 26: 26–28). Thereby His earlier words, which had caused many of His disciples to turn their backs on Him, became understandable: “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you” (John 6: 53).

During the meal, the Lord identified His betrayer. The latter left the fellowship “and it was night” (John 13: 30).

3.4.9.2 Jesus in Gethsemane

After the Last Supper, Jesus and the Apostles went to the Garden of Gethsemane. The human nature of the Son of God became evident in His dread of the impending crucifixion. In humbleness and surrender to God He knelt down and wrestled in prayer: “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22: 42). An

angel then appeared and strengthened Him. Jesus subjected Himself completely to His Father's will—prepared to bring the sacrifice.

Thereafter Jesus was arrested. Judas Iscariot had betrayed Him to the soldiers with a kiss. The Lord did not make use of the powers of heaven in order to avoid arrest, but rather drank the cup of suffering which His Father had given Him (John 18: 11). The disciples abandoned Him and fled.

3.4.9.3 Jesus before the high council

The high council pronounced Jesus guilty of blasphemy and condemned Him to death. The fact that He claimed to be the Son of God was interpreted as blasphemy.

During Jesus' trial before the high council, Peter denied that he knew Jesus and that he was a disciple of Jesus (Luke 22: 54–62). Christ also suffered on account of this denial by Peter. Nevertheless the Lord did not reject Peter.

After Jesus had been condemned to death, Judas Iscariot regretted his betrayal and wanted to give the 30 pieces of silver back to the high priests: "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood" (Matthew 27: 1–5). Since the high priests did not want to accept the money, he threw it into the temple, went away, and hanged himself. From his words it can be concluded that Judas did not want Christ to die. Although his betrayal fulfilled the Scriptures (Matthew 27: 9–10; Jeremiah 32: 9; Zechariah 11: 12–13), this does not absolve him from responsibility for his actions.

3.4.9.4 Jesus before Pilate and Herod

The Jews led Jesus to the residence of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, a place which devout Jews would not enter in order to avoid being defiled (John 18: 28). Jesus, however, had to enter the court house.

During His hearing before Pilate, Jesus made it clear that His kingdom was not of this world and that He did not pursue any worldly claims to power.

Pontius Pilate found no fault in Jesus and sent Him to King Herod. It was on this day that Herod and Pontius Pilate, who had previously been enemies, became friends (Luke 23: 12). The worldly powers thus united against the Lord.

The Son of God was scourged by the Romans. The people demanded He be crucified and accused Him of having risen up against the emperor as the King of the Jews, a crime punishable by death (John 19: 12). Pilate saw a way of granting Jesus His freedom: the people were to decide whether Jesus or the criminal Barabbas should be set free. The people, incited by the high priests and elders, chose Barabbas, however. In order to demonstrate that he was not responsible for what was to follow, Pilate washed his hands before the people and said: "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it." The people replied: "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matthew 27: 24–25). Then Pontius Pilate had Jesus scourged once more, and turned Him over to the soldiers to be crucified.

On account of the Roman governor's involvement, the conviction and execution of Jesus was no longer only a matter concerning the Jews. Gentiles had also become part of it. In short, all of mankind is guilty of the death of the Lord.

3.4.9.5 Jesus' crucifixion and sacrificial death

On the way to Golgotha, a great multitude followed Jesus. To the women who wept over Him the Lord said: "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children" (Luke 23: 28). With these words He was referring to the impending destruction of Jerusalem.

Two criminals were executed together with the Lord. Jesus' cross stood between them. Here the words of Isaiah 53: 12—that the Lord would be numbered with the transgressors—were fulfilled. The unimaginably heavy suffering finally led to a cruel death struggle.

The words Jesus spoke on the cross attest to His divine greatness. Even while suffering and dying, He turned to others in mercy, forgiveness, intercession, and care, thereby revealing the love and grace of God.

Ecclesiastical tradition has arranged the final words of Jesus—which are recorded differently in each of the gospels—into a specific sequence, which is also followed here:

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23: 34).

The Son of God, compassionate even on the cross, interceded before God the Father on behalf of all those who had put Him to the cross and who were unaware of the scope of their actions. Here, Jesus perfectly fulfilled the commandment to love one’s enemies (Matthew 5: 44–45, 48).

“Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23: 42–43).

The Lord turned in compassion to the criminal who had been crucified together with Him, who had asked Him for grace, and who, in the face of death, had recognised Jesus as the Saviour. The Paradise which the Lord opened to the repentant sinner was—according to the understanding of that time—the dwelling of the devout and righteous in the hereafter.

“Woman, behold your son!”—“Behold your mother!” (John 19: 26–27).

In the face of death, Jesus showed concern for Mary, His mother, and entrusted her to His disciple John. This demonstrates the love and care of Christ who, despite His own need, still stood up for the needs of others.

In Christian tradition, Mary is interpreted as a symbol of the church, which was then placed under the care of the Apostle ministry, as represented here by Apostle John.

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Mark 15: 34).

When death is near, devout Jews turn to God with these words from Psalm 22. On the one hand, they thereby lament the feeling that

God is distant, but on the other hand, also profess their faith in His power and grace. Jesus here addressed these words to His Father.

However, Psalm 22 also refers to the suffering of the righteous and their trust in God. Beyond that, this psalm is considered a broad reference to the sacrificial death of Christ and thus an Old Testament testimony of the Messiah Jesus.

“I thirst” (John 19: 28).

Hereby the words of Psalm 69: 21 were fulfilled: “They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” In the figurative sense, this last drink signified that Jesus had to drink the cup of suffering in its entirety and thereby perfectly fulfil His Father’s will.

“It is finished!” (John 19: 30).

It was about the ninth hour, that is in the early afternoon, when these words were spoken. An important stage in the history of salvation had now come to an end: Jesus had brought the sacrifice for the redemption of mankind. His sacrificial death had closed the old covenant, which had only been made with the people of Israel. The new covenant, to which Gentiles also have access, had now taken effect (Hebrews 9: 16).

“Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit” (Luke 23: 46).

This quotation from Psalm 31: 6 makes clear that, even in this moment, Jesus Christ fully trusted in His Father.

Dramatic events accompanied the Lord’s death: the earth shook, rocks were split, and the veil of the temple, which separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, was torn in two. This signified that the Old Testament’s sacrificial service had come to an end in Christ’s death, and was no longer of significance. The old covenant had been fulfilled. On the other hand, this is an indication that through Jesus’ sacrificial death and the tearing of “the veil”—“that is, His flesh” (Hebrews 10: 20)—the way to the Father is now open.

Under the impact of these events, the Roman captain and the soldiers who were guarding Jesus said: “Truly this was the Son of God!” (Matthew

27: 54). Thus it was the Gentiles, who testified of Jesus as the Son of God at His death.

Joseph of Arimathea, who belonged to the high council, went to Pontius Pilate and requested that he be given the body of Jesus in order to bury Him. Together with Nicodemus, whom the Lord once taught about the rebirth of water and the Spirit (John 3: 5), he laid Jesus in a tomb that had never been used before, which was hewn out of the rock. A stone was rolled in front of the grave. The high priests had soldiers guard the tomb (Matthew 27: 57–66).

Like His death, the suffering of Jesus has occurred on behalf of mankind, according to the testimony of the Scriptures, and is thus able to effect salvation: “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ‘Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth’; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Peter 2: 21–24).

Through His suffering and death, Christ the Mediator reconciles mankind with God and creates redemption from sin and death. Thereby the words of John the Baptist are fulfilled: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1: 29). Through His sacrificial death the Lord has broken the power of Satan and overcome death (Hebrews 2: 14). Since Jesus resisted all the temptations of Satan and remained without sin, He was able to take the sins of all humanity upon Himself (Isaiah 53: 6), and through His blood was able to acquire the merit whereby all guilt of sin can be washed away. His life, which He gave for the sinner, is the ransom. His sacrificial death opens up the way for mankind to come to God.

3.4.9.6 Old Testament references to Jesus' suffering and sacrificial death

Isaiah 53 describes the suffering servant of God who is abased. This refers to Jesus Christ, who was “despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (verse 3). His abasement culminates in His bitter suffering and death: “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; ... the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed” (verses 4–5). This is a reference to Christ’s path of suffering and His sacrificial death.

After the death of Jesus, one of the guards pierced His side with a spear, thereby fulfilling the words of Zechariah 12: 10: “... then they will look on Me whom they pierced.” In contrast to what they did to the criminals crucified with Him, the soldiers did not break the legs of Jesus. This was foreshadowed in the first Passover in the commandment of God concerning the way in which the lamb should be eaten (Exodus 12: 46; John 19: 36).

These examples show that the Old Testament does not simply describe the history of the people of Israel. Viewed in retrospect from the cross, it becomes clear that the Old Testament is oriented to Jesus Christ and that it finds its fulfilment in Him (*see also 1.2.5.2*).

3.4.9.7 Jesus' references to His suffering and death

The gospels tell us how the Lord announced His suffering and death, as well as His resurrection, on various occasions. A few examples are mentioned here:

- After Peter’s confession to Jesus: “[You are] the Christ of God”, the Lord revealed to His disciples: “The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day” (Luke 9: 22).
- Shortly after the events on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus taught His disciples: “The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and

they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day” (Mark 9: 31).

- Before entering Jerusalem, the Lord turned to the Twelve and said: “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again” (Matthew 20: 18–19).
- When the scribes and Pharisees wanted to see signs, Jesus pointed to the story of the prophet Jonah: “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12: 40).
- He made a similar reference at the cleansing of the temple: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2: 19). Only after His resurrection did it become clear to His disciples that Jesus Christ had thereby been referring to the temple of His body (John 2: 21–22).

3.4.9.8 References to Jesus’ sacrificial death in the letters of the Apostles

The sacrificial death of Jesus, and the path of redemption that had thereby been opened up for mankind, are central themes in the letters of the Apostles. For example, we read in 1 John 3: 16: “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us” (1 Peter 2: 21–24).

The epistle to the Hebrews compares the new covenant to the old and places the sacrifice of Christ at the centre of the history of salvation. The high priests of the old covenant were sinners and mortal, and their priesthood came to an end. Jesus Christ, on the other hand, is without sin and immortal. His priesthood is everlasting. Whereas the priests in the old covenant had to offer again and again, Christ’s sacrifice was brought once and is eternally valid (Hebrews 9).

The letters of the Apostles also made statements about the sacrificial death of Jesus on account of the heresies that had arisen. One of the notions that developed was that of a messenger who had come into the world, only appeared to become human, and neither suffered nor died on the cross. Other heresies denied the resurrection of the Lord. Apostle Paul countered by stating “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15: 3–4).

The significance of the sacrificial death of Jesus is described in 2 Corinthians 5: 19: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself ...”

3.4.9.9 The cross

The core of the gospel is Jesus Christ who, through His death on the cross and His resurrection, created eternal salvation. Thus the cross of Christ became the epitome of God’s reconciliatory actions toward sinful mankind. The words of Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1: 18 demonstrate a conflicting understanding of Christ’s death on the cross: “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” Death on the cross was generally considered a defeat, the ignominious end of a despised person who had been cast out of human society. But here, according to the wisdom of God, the apparent defeat is really a victory which laid the foundation for an immeasurably great work of redemption.

Through the resurrection, God acknowledged the Crucified One as the Christ (Acts 2: 36). In Him alone eternal salvation is given.

SUMMARY

The last days before Jesus’ sacrificial death are described in detail in the gospels: in the circle of the Apostles, Jesus Christ institutes Holy Communion. At His capture Jesus is betrayed by Judas Iscariot. Jesus is then accused of blasphemy before the high council. (3.4.9; 3.4.9.1; 3.4.9.2; 3.4.9.3)

On account of the complicity of the Roman governor Pilate, the sentencing and execution of Jesus are not solely Israel's doing—Gentiles likewise share in these events. As such, mankind as a whole is guilty of the death of the Lord. (3.4.9.4)

Like His death, His suffering occurred on behalf of mankind and thus had salvific effect. As the suffering and dying Lord, Jesus Christ, the Mediator, reconciled mankind with God and created redemption from sin and death. His sacrificial death on the cross opened the way for mankind to God. (3.4.9.5)

The sacrificial death of Jesus confirmed the references from the Old Testament. Jesus Himself had announced His death and His resurrection. The letters of the Apostles describe the significance of Jesus' sacrificial death. (3.4.9.6; 3.4.9.7; 3.4.9.8)

The cross of Christ becomes the epitome of God's reconciling actions upon sinful mankind. (3.4.9.9)

3.4.10 Jesus Christ's activity in the realm of the dead

In 1 Peter 3: 18–20 we read that, after His death on the cross, the Son of God preached to those who had been disobedient in Noah's time. He did this in order to offer them salvation: "For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who 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). Thus the saving activity of Christ also encompasses the dead. Just as the Son of God had turned to sinners while He walked on earth, so now He turned to those who had been disobedient to the will of God during their earthly lives.

Ever since Jesus brought His sacrifice it has also been possible for the dead to attain redemption (*see* 9.6). He Himself said: "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live" (John 5: 25).

Through His sacrificial death, the Son of God took the power over death away from the Devil (Hebrews 2: 14–15). He, Jesus Christ, holds the keys of death and Hades (Revelation 1:18). Here “Hades” does not mean “the place of eternal damnation”, but the “realm of the dead”. To “have the keys” means to exercise rule.

In Romans 14: 9 it says: “For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.” As Lord, He has been exalted over all things by the Father: God has given Him the name “which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth” (Philippians 2: 9–10).

The Son of God’s entry into the realm of the dead is the triumph of the Victor of Golgotha, who has broken the power of death and relieved it of its finality.

SUMMARY

The salvific actions of Christ also encompass the dead. (3.4.10)

Jesus Christ possesses the keys of death and Hades. The entry of the Son of God into the realm of the dead is the triumph of the Victor of Golgotha, who has broken the power of death and taken away its finality. (3.4.10)

3.4.11 The resurrection of Jesus Christ

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an act of the triune God, which occurred in a manner that had never happened before:

- On the one hand, the power of God, the Father, is revealed in that He raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 5: 30–32).
- On the other hand, the words of God, the Son, were fulfilled: “I have power to lay it [My life] down, and I have power to take it again” (John 10: 18).

- Finally, the activity of God, the Holy Spirit, is also attested: “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (Romans 8: 11).

The resurrection of Jesus Christ occurred without any human witness to the event. Nevertheless, Holy Scripture attests to many witnesses of the resurrection of the Son of God. One of these is the empty tomb attested by the disciples. Further testimonies include the various appearances of the Lord in the forty days between His resurrection and ascension. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not wishful thinking on the part of His followers who sought to make future generations believe in a miracle. Nor is it an expression of mythological thinking. The resurrection of Christ is historical reality. It actually took place.

3.4.11.1 The significance of Jesus Christ’s resurrection for salvation

The resurrection of Jesus testifies of the power of God over death. This power is intrinsic to the being of Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

In the resurrection of Jesus Christ, promises of the Old Testament were fulfilled (Luke 24: 46; Hosea 6: 2) as were the predictions made by the Son of God Himself (Mark 9: 30–31; 10: 34).

Without belief in His resurrection, faith in Jesus Christ is meaningless: “And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty” (1 Corinthians 15: 14). It is only through the resurrection of Christ that the believer has a justified hope for eternal life, because the resurrection has made it possible to undo death and the resulting separation between mankind and God which was caused by Adam’s fall into sin (1 Corinthians 15: 21–22).

Profession of Jesus as the Christ and belief in His resurrection are of fundamental importance for the deliverance of mankind (1 Peter 1: 3–12). This belief in the resurrection of Christ, the “firstfruits of those who have

fallen asleep”, constitutes the foundation for the resurrection of the dead in Christ and the transformation of the living at His return: “... and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15: 52).

3.4.11.2 The appearances of the Risen One

When Mary Magdalene and other women came to the grave at the break of day, they saw that the stone had been rolled away and that the tomb was empty. They were therefore the first witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus, which had just occurred. An angel announced that Jesus had risen (Matthew 28: 5–6). Later on, the Risen One identified Himself to Mary Magdalene. He also encountered Peter and the other Apostles.

The post-Easter appearances of the Lord document that Jesus Christ is risen indeed. There are specifically named persons to whom He showed Himself and who recognised Him. This refutes any speculation that the disciples had stolen the body in order to fake a resurrection (Matthew 28: 11–15).

When He appeared to the disciples the Risen Son of God gave them direction and instruction for that which lay ahead of them. He taught them and issued them authority and various assignments.

The Lord explained the Scriptures to the disciples of Emmaus and broke bread with them (Luke 24: 25–35).

On the evening of the day of His resurrection He appeared in the midst of His disciples. His greeting: “Peace be with you!” took away their fear and gave them confidence. The Lord then issued the commission to them: “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” As the Risen One and Lord over death and sin, He gave the Apostles authority and power, breathed on them, and said: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (John 20: 19–23).

The Lord appeared to His disciples on another occasion at the Sea of Tiberias. Apostle Peter was given the commission to tend the lambs and sheep of Christ, in other words, the church (John 21: 15–17).

The Risen Lord showed Himself to His Apostles “by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1: 3; cf. John 21: 1–14).

The Apostles brought this testimony of the resurrection of Christ to the whole world. In 1 Corinthians 15: 6, Apostle Paul mentions that the Lord had been seen as the Risen One by more than five hundred brethren at the same time. Then he relates that the Lord had been seen last of all by Paul himself. The events which occurred in front of the gates of Damascus as referenced here (Acts 9: 3–6) are of a different quality, however: this was a revelation of the exalted Christ directly from heaven. However, only those who saw Christ on earth during the time between His resurrection and His ascension are witnesses of Christ’s resurrection in the true sense.

3.4.11.3 The resurrection body of Jesus Christ

The resurrection body of Jesus Christ is a glorious body. His resurrection did not signify a return to His earthly existence. It is fundamentally distinct from the raising of Lazarus, for example (John 11: 17–44), who died again at a later point in time. The risen Christ has been permanently torn from the clutches of death: we know “that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him” (Romans 6: 9). God has raised up Jesus from the dead, no more to return to corruption (Acts 13: 34–35).

Christ lives by the power of God (2 Corinthians 13: 4). After the resurrection, His glorious body was taken out of the finiteness and mortality of the flesh. He was no longer bound to space or time. It was in this body that the Lord appeared in the midst of His disciples (Luke 24: 36), walked through closed doors (John 20: 19, 26), broke bread with His disciples (Luke 24: 30), showed them His wounds, and ate with them (Luke 24: 40–43). He thereby made it clear that He was not a “spirit”, but that He was with them in His physical presence as Jesus Christ.

Apostle Paul compares Christ's resurrection body to the body which the dead in Christ will occupy after their resurrection. This is a spiritual body which will resurrect in glory and in power (1 Corinthians 15: 42–44). In the transformation at the return of Christ, the living will receive a body that conforms to the glorious body of Christ (Philippians 3: 21).

3.4.12 The ascension of Jesus Christ

Forty days after His resurrection, Jesus Christ ascended from among the circle of His Apostles into heaven, to God, His Father. His last command to them was “not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father,” as they were to be “baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1: 4–5).

Even as Jesus blessed the Apostles, He was taken up into heaven, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. As they stood there, still watching Him, two men in white apparel stood with them and said: “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1: 11). In contrast to the resurrection, for which there were no eyewitnesses, the Apostles directly experienced the ascension of Christ. They recognised that the Risen One had been exalted and had returned to the Father. The human nature of the Lord was thereby dissolved permanently into divine glory. Thus the words were fulfilled: “I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father” (John 16: 28).

In Mark 16: 19 we read: “So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.” Thus He did not enter the holy places made with hands, like the high priest of the old covenant, “but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Hebrews 9: 24). At the right hand of God He makes intercession for His elect (Romans 8: 33–34).

The image that Christ is seated at the right hand of God demonstrates that He shares in the fullness of power and in the glory of God, the Father. He desires to share this glory with His own in the future: “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me” (John 17: 24). This will happen when Christ takes His own unto Himself from among the dead and the living. Then they will be with Him always (1 Thessalonians 4: 15–17).

SUMMARY

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an act of the triune God. It occurred without eyewitnesses, however, the Risen One was seen by many witnesses. His resurrection is not wishful thinking, nor is it the expression of mythological thought. It did indeed occur. (3.4.11)

Through the resurrection of Jesus, believers have a justified hope in eternal life: thereby the opportunity has been created to undo death and the resulting separation between God and mankind, which occurred as a consequence of Adam’s fall into sin. (3.4.11.1)

Belief in the resurrection of Christ, the firstfruits, establishes the foundation for belief in the resurrection of the dead in Christ as well as the transformation of the living at His return. (3.4.11.1)

The Risen Lord showed Himself to the disciples. Encounters with the Risen One are repeatedly attested in the New Testament. This testimony of the resurrection of Christ was brought to the entire world by the Apostles. (3.4.11.2)

After the resurrection, Jesus’ glorified body was lifted up out of the finiteness and mortality of the flesh. He is no longer bound to space or time. (3.4.11.3)

Forty days after His resurrection, Jesus Christ ascended to God, His Father, in heaven, out of the circle of His Apostles. The human nature of the Lord thus permanently entered into divine glory. (3.4.12)

In contrast to the event of the resurrection, for which there were no eyewitnesses, the Apostles directly witnessed the ascension of Christ. On this occasion they were given the promise of Christ’s return. (3.4.12)

3.4.13 Jesus Christ as the head of the church

Jesus Christ has returned to the Father, however, He also is present here on earth in the Holy Spirit even after His ascension. He, to whom all authority has been given in heaven and on earth, thereby fulfils His promise: “And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28: 20). The Holy Spirit glorifies Christ (John 16: 14) and attests to His presence in the church.

Apostle Paul variously uses the image of the “body of Christ” to represent the church. For example, Christ is praised as the “head of the body, the church” (Colossians 1: 18) in a hymn of praise to the glory of God.

The church of the Lord has many members and is nonetheless one body, “for by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body” (1 Corinthians 12: 13). This symbolism makes it clear that the church of the Lord is not merely an institution or organisation. The church of the Lord is more than the sum of its parts—it is a living organism led by Christ, the head. It is a gift of God and has been called forth from the realm of human accessibility (*see 6*).

3.4.14 Jesus Christ as the head of the creation

According to Ephesians 1: 20–23, Christ has been set as the head above all “principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.” As the *logos* (*see 3.4.2*) Christ is the firstborn of all creation: “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible ... All things were created through Him and for Him” (Colossians 1: 16). Through Him, God created the world (Hebrews 1: 2). As the head of the creation, Christ leads mankind, who has become mired in sin, “from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Romans 8: 19–22). This will also be to the benefit of the creation and become reality in the new creation: “There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying.

There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21: 4).

SUMMARY

Even after the ascension, Jesus Christ is still present on earth in the Holy Spirit. (3.4.13)

The New Testament employs the image of the “body of Christ”. It illustrates that the church of Jesus Christ is not merely an institution or organisation, but rather a living organism, led by Christ, the head. (3.4.13)

As the *logos* the Son of God is the firstborn over all creation. Through Him God created the world. (3.4.14)

3.4.15 The promise of Jesus Christ’s return

The promise of Jesus Christ’s return is a central element of New Testament proclamation. Terms such as the “day of the Lord”, the “day of Christ”, the “future of our Lord”, the “revelation of Christ’s glory”, the “appearing”, or the “return of the Lord” all represent the same event: Christ will come again and take His own unto Himself from among the dead and the living. This event is not the Last Judgement, but rather the rapture of the bride of Christ to the marriage of the Lamb (Revelation 19: 7).

There are many biblical references to the promise of Christ’s return. They can be found throughout the entire New Testament.

- To begin with, it is the Lord Himself who said to His Apostles: “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14: 3). He admonished His disciples to be watchful and prepared: “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Luke 12: 40). The parables of the coming of the Son of Man

(see 3.4.8.6) emphasise that the day of Christ will come suddenly and usher in a separation: some will be accepted and others will remain behind.

- The angels at Jesus' ascension also promised that He will return (Acts 1: 11).
- Finally, the letters of the Apostles also reinforce the promise of Christ's return. For example, 1 John 3: 2 provides a concise description of the magnificent future of God's children, who will be like the Lord in their perfection. Apostle James appeals to the believers to be patient until the coming of the Lord, "for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (James 5: 8). The author of the epistle to the Hebrews also admonishes patience: "For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry" (Hebrews 10: 37). When Christ returns for the second time, He will not come on account of sin, but will rather appear "to those who eagerly wait for Him ... for [their] salvation" (Hebrews 9: 28).
- The second epistle of Peter is directed against all those who deny the fulfilment of the promise of Christ's return. Even the possibility of a delay in the fulfilment of this promise is ruled out (2 Peter 3: 9).
- Apostle Paul reinforces the promise of Christ's return and repeatedly refers to this event in his epistles. There he makes concrete statements on the resurrection of the dead in Christ and the transformation of the living on the day of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4: 13–18). This day will come like "a thief in the night" (1 Thessalonians 5: 2). The Apostle concludes his first epistle to the Corinthians with the greeting "O Lord, come!" which originally appears as "Maranatha!" and can also be interpreted to mean "Our Lord is coming!" (1 Corinthians 16: 22).
- In the Revelation of Jesus Christ, it is the Son of God who reveals what will shortly come to pass (Revelation 1: 1). The call: "Surely I am coming quickly" is the core message of the Revelation. In response to this call, the Spirit and the bride say: "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22: 12, 20).

The cited Bible passages speak of the return of Christ as an event that is imminent and certain to occur, which will bring salvation and fellowship

with Christ and thus comfort in hardship and distress (Romans 8: 17–18). Thus the promise of Christ’s return constitutes glad tidings for all mankind. Those who have accepted Christ, who carry His Spirit and life within themselves, and who, despite their sinfulness, hold fast to His words: “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1: 27) will experience the fulfilment of this promise upon themselves.

SUMMARY

The promise of Christ’s return is a central element of New Testament proclamation. The Last Judgement is not associated with this return of Christ. Rather, Christ will take unto Himself those—from among both the dead and the living—who carry His Spirit and His life within themselves. (3.4.15)

Witnesses for the promise of Christ’s return can be found throughout the entire New Testament. It is spoken of as an event which is imminent and which will certainly come to pass. (3.4.15)

3.5 God, the Holy Spirit

Holy Scripture provides abundant testimony of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God. It testifies that understanding God is only possible through the Spirit of God: “Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 2: 11). Apostle Paul unconditionally links the knowledge that Jesus is Lord with the Holy Spirit: “No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12: 3).

The Third Article of Faith attests: “I believe in the Holy Spirit.” This corresponds to the wording of the Apostolicum (*see* 2.2.1). In the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople this content is formulated even more comprehensively: “And [we believe] in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spake by the prophets.”

The Holy Spirit is true God. He emanates from the Father and the Son, and lives eternally in fellowship with Them. He is also active in the creation (*see* 3.3.1) and in the history of salvation. The Holy Spirit is a divine person (*see* 3.1.1) who, together with the Father and the Son, is worshipped and glorified as Lord.

In Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit is also designated as the “Spirit of God” (Genesis 1: 2; Romans 15: 19), the “Spirit of the Lord” (1 Samuel 16: 13; 2 Corinthians 3: 17), the “Spirit of truth” (John 16: 13), the “Spirit of [Jesus] Christ” (Romans 8: 9; Philippians 1: 19), the “Spirit of His Son” (Galatians 4: 6), and the “Spirit of glory” (1 Peter 4: 14).

The New Testament also speaks of the Holy Spirit as the Comforter and Helper (John 14: 16), as well as a “power” and “gift of God” (Acts 1: 8; 2: 38). This power of God has been promised and sent by the Father and the Son. As a power and gift, the Holy Spirit is imparted at Holy Sealing, which, together with Holy Baptism with water, constitutes the rebirth out of water and the Spirit, whereby the believer becomes a child of God.

3.5.1 The Holy Spirit as a divine person

From the beginning, God has revealed Himself to mankind (*see* 1.1). Already during the creation, God speaks and acts as a person. Personhood is part of God’s nature (*see* 3.2.4) and is revealed in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Like the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit speaks and reigns, and is addressed and worshipped. He too is “Lord” (2 Corinthians 3: 17).

The Holy Spirit possesses divine majesty. Apostle Peter’s remarks in Acts 5: 3–4 make it clear that anyone who lies to the Holy Spirit is lying to God. That the Holy Spirit is a person becomes clear from the fact that He sends human beings to proclaim the gospel (Acts 13: 4), that He can communicate with the human spirit (Romans 8: 16), and that He intercedes before God on behalf of those who pray (Romans 8: 26).

The activity of the Holy Spirit is clearly revealed

- in the incarnation of Jesus Christ,
- in the divine revelations of the past and present,
- in the sending and activity of the Apostles,
- in the sacraments,
- in the word of preaching, particularly in keeping alive the promise of Jesus Christ's return.

3.5.1.1 The Holy Spirit in unity with the Father and the Son

The Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople (*see 2.2.2*) states that the Holy Spirit emanates from the Father and the Son. According to the words of Jesus, the Father and Son are senders of the Holy Spirit in equal measure: "But when the Helper comes, *whom I shall send you* from the Father, the Spirit of truth *who proceeds from the Father*, He will testify of Me" (John 15: 26). The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father (John 14: 26) and is sent by the Son, and therefore also proceeds from the Son (John 16: 7). Thus the Holy Spirit is both the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son. This is also expressed in Jesus' words: "He [the Holy Spirit] will glorify Me, for He will take of what is mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine" (John 16: 14–15).

Thus, an understanding of the Holy Spirit's nature only becomes clear in view of His oneness of substance with the Father and the Son. Like the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is "very God of very God". He is not created, but is rather of one substance with the Father and the Son and, like them, He is active eternally.

3.5.1.2 The Holy Spirit and the incarnation of the Son of God

A central event in the history of salvation is the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. The virgin Mary became pregnant by the Holy Spirit (Matthew

1: 18; Luke 1: 35). This biblical statement is taken up in the New Apostolic Creed: “I believe in Jesus Christ, ... who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary ...”

It is also the Holy Spirit who testifies of the sending of the Son. The divine authority of the incarnate Son of God is revealed by the descending of the Spirit at Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan (Matthew 3: 16–17; John 1: 32–34). It is here that the anointing of Jesus with the Holy Spirit occurs, with respect to His human nature, whereby God acknowledges Him as the Messiah, the “Anointed One”. Apostle Peter taught in the house of Cornelius: “... that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power” (Acts 10: 37–38). The gospels attest that the Holy Spirit is enduringly present in the incarnate Son of God (Luke 4: 1, 14, 18, 21).

SUMMARY

Holy Scripture attests that understanding God is only possible through the Spirit of God. (3.5)

The Holy Spirit is true God. He emanates from the Father and the Son and lives eternally in fellowship with them. The Holy Spirit is a divine person who is worshipped and glorified as Lord along with the Father and the Son. (3.5)

The New Testament also refers to Him as the “Comforter” and “Helper”, as well as a “power” and as the “gift of God”. Holy Spirit is imparted in Holy Sealing as a power and gift. (3.5)

Personhood is part of the nature of God, and is revealed in the Father, in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. (3.5.1)

The Holy Spirit emanates from the Father and the Son. Like the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is very God of very God. He is not created, is of one substance with the Father and the Son, and like them is active eternally. (3.5.1.1)

The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ was effected by the Holy Spirit, because the virgin Mary became pregnant by Him. The Holy Spirit attested to the sending of the Son at Jesus' baptism in the Jordan. In the process Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit according to His human nature. Thereby God acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, the "Anointed One". (3.5.1.2)

3.5.2 The Holy Spirit as a power—the gift of the Holy Spirit

Like the Hebrew *ruach* and the Latin *spiritus*, the Greek term *pneuma* which is usually translated as "spirit", can also mean "wind, breath, or life-spirit", among other things. In Genesis 2: 7 we read of the Spirit as the divine breath of life. The Holy Spirit brings about life itself and is shown to be the divine power of life.

In the course of salvation history, the Spirit of God manifests Himself as the power which takes hold of human beings and enables them to become instruments of God. This power can influence, fill, and even renew a human being (Titus 3: 5).

Jesus Christ acted in the power of the Spirit and "the power of the Lord was present" in Him (Luke 4: 14; 5: 17). Shortly before His ascension into heaven, the Risen One promised His Apostles: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1: 8).

After his sermon on Pentecost, Apostle Peter promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who allowed themselves to be baptised (Acts 2: 38).

God bestows this gift through the laying on of hands and prayer of an Apostle, as exemplified by the occurrence in Samaria (Acts 8: 14–17). The believer is filled with Holy Spirit and, at the same time, with the love of God (Romans 5: 5).

It is important to differentiate between the Holy Spirit as a gift of God and the Holy Spirit as a person of the Godhead. The gift of the Holy Spirit is imparted by God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

3.5.3 Evidence of the Holy Spirit's activity in the time of the Old Testament

Since the Holy Spirit has existed eternally in unity with the Father and the Son, He was active during the creation and is active in the history of salvation. So it is that Holy Scripture provides abundant evidence of the Spirit's activity in Old Testament times, despite the fact that there was no understanding of the Trinity at that time, nor any dispensation of Holy Spirit in the New Testament sense. In the time of the old covenant, the Holy Spirit brought forth many promises concerning the coming of the Messiah and the establishment of the new covenant.

3.5.3.1 The Spirit of God

“And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1: 2). This reference shows that the triune God, namely the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, exercise creative activity in equal measure (Genesis 2: 7).

When the Old Testament speaks of the “Spirit of God” it is referring to the Holy Spirit. He is not yet defined in His personality, but is rather described as a life-giving power.

Examples for the activity of the Spirit of God are recorded from the time of Moses (Exodus 31: 3; Numbers 11: 25–29) and the Judges in Israel (Judges 3: 10; 6: 34; 11: 29; 13: 25), who—inspired by the Holy Spirit—led the people of the Lord with courage and strength in battle against their enemies.

Kings of the people of Israel were also filled with the Spirit of God. Examples include Saul (1 Samuel 10: 6) and David (1 Samuel 16: 13). Later on, Jesus Christ referred to the activity of the Holy Spirit through King David with the words: “For David himself said by the Holy Spirit: “The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool”” (Mark 12: 36). Here, as in other passages of the New Testament (e.g. Acts

1: 16; 4: 25), it becomes clear that David, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was already alluding to Jesus Christ.

In Old Testament times, the Holy Spirit filled human beings only temporarily, and not as a permanent sacramental gift like in the new covenant (1 Samuel 16: 14; Psalm 51: 11).

3.5.3.2 The activity of the Holy Spirit in the prophets of the Old Testament

Both the Old and New Testaments attest that the Holy Spirit was active in the prophets and that He spoke through them (e.g. Ezekiel 11: 5; Micah 3: 8; Zechariah 7: 12; Acts 28: 25). In the New Testament it is emphasised that the prophets were referring to Jesus Christ: “But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled” (Acts 3: 18).

SUMMARY

Jesus Christ acted in the power of the Spirit. Before His ascension He promised the Apostles this same power. (3.5.2)

God grants the gift of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands and prayer of an Apostle. It is important to distinguish between the Holy Spirit as a gift of God and the Holy Spirit as a person of the Godhead. (3.5.2)

In Old Testament times the Holy Spirit would only fill a person for a limited amount of time and not—as in the New Testament—in enduring fashion as a sacramental gift. (3.5.3)

Examples of the activity of the Holy Spirit are recorded from the time of Moses, the judges, and the kings in Israel. The Holy Spirit was also active in the prophets. (3.5.3.1; 3.5.3.2)

3.5.4 Jesus Christ's promise to send the Holy Spirit

Before His return to the Father, Jesus Christ announced to His Apostles the coming of the Holy Spirit as the Comforter and the "Spirit of truth". He also promised the Holy Spirit as a divine "Helper" and as the power from on high, which was to be imparted to His own.

Jesus stated that His departure from this world was a prerequisite for the coming of the Holy Spirit as a Helper (John 16: 7). Likewise, the dispensation of Holy Spirit as a gift only occurred after Christ had been glorified through His death, resurrection, and return to the Father (John 7: 39).

3.5.4.1 The Helper and Comforter

Jesus Christ is the Helper and Advocate of His own (Matthew 28: 20; 1 John 2: 1). In His farewell discourses before His capture and crucifixion, the Son of God promised yet another Comforter, namely the "Paraclete" (derived from the Greek term *parakletos* = assistant, intercessor, helper, or comforter): "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever ... But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14: 16, 26). The Holy Spirit is this "other" Comforter and Helper who will remain with the church. He testifies of Jesus Christ and glorifies Him (John 16: 14).

After the ascension of the Lord and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, this Spirit keeps the gospel alive among the followers of Christ and assists them (Matthew 10: 19–20).

3.5.4.2 The Spirit of truth

Jesus Christ also described the Holy Spirit as the "Spirit of truth" (John 15: 26). This Spirit makes clear what is pleasing to God and what is contrary

to His will: “And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgement” (John 16: 8). The Holy Spirit clearly distinguishes between truth and falsehood (Acts 13: 9–10).

During His activity on earth, the Lord did not provide exhaustive explanations concerning all truth and the course of the history of salvation, but referred to the future revelations of the Holy Spirit: “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever he hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come” (John 16: 12–13). It is also in this manner that the Holy Spirit works in the present (*see 1.3*).

Everything the Spirit of truth reveals is closely linked to Christ’s nature and work. Thus He testifies of the sovereignty of the Son of God (1 Corinthians 12: 3). He professes that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (1 John 4: 2), and imparts the knowledge that He has come as the Son of the Father, and will come again.

3.5.4.3 The power from on high

Before His ascension into heaven, the risen Lord promised His Apostles: “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but you tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high” (Luke 24: 49). Thereby He announced the sending of the Holy Spirit, as God had already promised through the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28-29). On Pentecost this promise was fulfilled, which marked the start of the public activity of the Apostles.

The phrase “power from on high” (Greek: *dynamis*: “power”) is an allusion to the fulfilling, motivating, and strengthening activity of the Spirit, and points to the powerful intervention of God. Just as the Father and the Son revealed themselves within the historical world, this self-revelation of God in the Holy Spirit took place on Pentecost as an event of salvation history. The Holy Spirit strengthens the church of Christ in its endeavour to live in a manner pleasing to God and thereby prepare for the return of Christ.

SUMMARY

Jesus Christ, the Helper and Advocate of His disciples, promised another Comforter and Helper. The latter bears witness of Him and glorifies Him. He keeps the gospel alive among the followers of Christ and provides support to the church. (3.5.4; 3.5.4.1)

Jesus Christ further described the Holy Spirit as the “Spirit of truth”. The Holy Spirit distinguishes between truth and falsehood. (3.5.4.2)

Jesus referred to future revelations of the Holy Spirit. They are all related to Christ’s nature and work. (3.5.4.2)

The expression “power from on high” refers to the powerful intervention of God in the activity of the Holy Spirit. (3.5.4.3)

The self-revelation of God in the Holy Spirit occurred on Pentecost. Associated with this was the beginning of the public activity of the Apostles. (3.5.4.3)

3.5.5 The Holy Spirit and the church

The epistles of the New Testament express that the Holy Spirit was present in the early Christian congregations. Jesus Christ had promised and sent the Holy Spirit to His disciples as a Helper and Comforter. The church is described as the “house of God”, “dwelling place of God”, or “temple of the living God” (1 Timothy 3: 15; Ephesians 2: 22; 2 Corinthians 6: 16).

In the old covenant, the temple was the dwelling place of God among His people (1 Kings 8: 13). This image is adopted in the New Testament and employed in order to illustrate the enduring presence of God—and thus also the presence of the Holy Spirit—in the church. Like “living stones”, believers are to be “built up [into] a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2: 5).

3.5.5.1 The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost

Through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost it is revealed that God is triune: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (*see 3.1.1*). The Holy Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, filled the Apostles and all those who were with them.

Thereby the church of Christ (*see 6.4.2*) became historical reality. This event shows that the Holy Spirit is a necessary prerequisite for church: church and the Holy Spirit belong together.

The Holy Spirit is continually present in the congregations led by Apostles. In them there is divine life, which is revealed in the activity and preaching of the Apostles, and which is also to emerge in the words and deeds of every believer (Romans 8: 14).

By receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, human beings have fellowship with the triune God as children of God. For those who will be caught up to the Lord, this fellowship will attain its perfection at the return of Christ.

3.5.5.2 The activity of the Holy Spirit in the sacraments

The salvific power inherent in the sacraments is based on the fact that all three divine persons are at work in these acts.

Thus the Holy Spirit is also an active power in Holy Baptism with water: God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—leads the baptised out of their state of remoteness from God (*see 8.1*).

The consecration of bread and wine for Holy Communion is only possible because the Holy Spirit is active in this act. Thus, by way of human words, the power of the Holy Spirit creates divine reality. Fully valid Holy Communion—the real presence of the body and blood of Christ—comes into being if it is supported by the power of the Holy Spirit and if the consecration of the elements of Holy Communion is performed on the basis of the authority issued by Apostles (*see 8.2.12*).

The imparting of the gift of the Holy Spirit through Apostles occurs in the sacrament of Holy Sealing, the baptism of the Spirit. Here God's power,

God's life, and God's love are bestowed upon a human being. In the rebirth out of water and Spirit, the Holy Spirit causes God to take up His dwelling in a human being (Romans 8: 9).

3.5.5.3 The activity of the Holy Spirit in the Apostle ministry

The Apostles exercise their ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit. The activity of the Holy Spirit confers special authority upon their actions. This is demonstrated in the proper administration and dispensation of the sacraments, in the proper proclamation of the gospel on the basis of Holy Scripture, in keeping alive the promise of Christ's return, and thereby in the preparation of the bride of Christ for His return. Through the Apostles of today, the Holy Spirit works in the same fullness as at the time of the first Apostles.

SUMMARY

The Holy Spirit was present in the early Christian congregations. The church is described as the "house of God", the "dwelling place of God", or the "temple of the living God". This illustrates the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church. (3.5.5)

The Holy Spirit is a necessary prerequisite for church: church and the Holy Spirit belong together. (3.5.5.1)

The imparting of the gift of the Holy Spirit through Apostles occurs in the sacrament of Holy Sealing, the baptism of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is also the power at work in the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. (3.5.5.2)

The Apostles exercise their ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit. (3.5.5.3)

Part 4

Mankind in need
of redemption

4

4 Mankind in need of redemption

Mankind has fallen into sin and is thus in need of redemption from the evil one.

4.1 Evil—the powers opposed to God

The origin of evil within the order of creation cannot be rationally grasped or explained. Paul speaks of evil as a mystery (2 Thessalonians 2: 7). Evil cannot always be clearly recognised. Sometimes it disguises itself and takes on the appearance of something good or divine (2 Corinthians 11: 14). Only through faith in the gospel do the ultimate nature of evil, its power, strength, and effects, become clear.

Only God is absolutely good. In God's words, both the invisible and the visible creation was "very good" in the beginning (Genesis 1: 1–31), and thus evil had no place within it originally. God did not create evil as such. It is thus not among the things that were expressly created, but has rather been permitted.

When God created man, He made him according to His own likeness (Genesis 1: 26 et seq.). This means that man has been endowed with a free will. He has the ability to decide between obedience and disobedience to God (Genesis 2: 16–17; 3: 1–7). The ability to do evil is also rooted in this free will. Evil manifests itself when human beings knowingly and intentionally oppose that which is good by distancing themselves from God and His will. Thus the evil in man was not created by God, but was at first only an alternative which man chose by violating the divine commandment. God neither wanted nor created evil, but nevertheless permitted it in that He did not prevent human beings from exercising choice.

Since the fall into sin, evil has affected both mankind and the entire creation (Romans 8: 18–22).

Evil began to unfold when the created (man) began to oppose the Creator. As a consequence of disobedience, of the fall into sin, evil gained a foothold and led to a state of remoteness from God, estrangement from God, and ultimately godlessness.

4.1.1 Evil as a power opposed to God

Evil is a power that stems from the desire for independence from God and the desire to be “like God”. This power completely changes those who fall prey to it: angels become demons, human beings become sinners.

Throughout the history of man, the power of evil has manifested itself again and again. For example, after Adam and Eve’s fall into sin we see evil manifested in the Old Testament in Cain’s murder of his brother, in the godlessness of Noah’s time, and in the oppression of the people of Israel by the Egyptians.

Evil is a destructive power that opposes the creation of God. It takes on many forms: it is delusion and subversion, it is untruth, envy, and avarice. It seeks to destroy, and it brings death.

Since the fall into sin, it has not been possible for any human being—with the exception of the incarnate Son of God—to lead a sinless life. This is due to the human predisposition to sin (concupiscence). Nevertheless, no one is involuntarily subject to evil. Therefore, no individual human being is exempt from personal responsibility for his sins.

4.1.2 Evil as a person

Evil is not only manifested as a power, but also as a person. Holy Scripture refers to the personification of evil as “the Devil” (Matthew 4: 1), “Satan”, or “unclean spirit”, that is demon (Job 1: 6 et seq.; Mark 1: 13, 23).

The accounts in 2 Peter 2: 4 and Jude 6 speak of angels who have sinned. These spiritual beings fell prey to evil and became evil themselves. The Devil “has sinned from the beginning” (1 John 3: 8), he was “a murderer from the beginning”, and a “liar and the father of it” (John 8: 44). The question of the serpent to Adam and Eve caused man to doubt God and rebel against Him: “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3: 4–5).

The antichrist is a manifestation of evil. Jesus referred to the antichrist when He spoke of “false christs and false prophets” (Mark 13: 22). The terms “man of sin” or “son of perdition” also refer to the antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2: 3–4).

Satan is not capable of thwarting God’s plan of salvation. On the contrary, “the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the Devil” (1 John 3: 8). The power of the Devil and his followers is limited, and has already been broken by Jesus Christ’s sacrificial death. Jesus Christ has been given “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28: 18). Thus He also has power over evil spirits.

According to Revelation 12, evil—which is personified as Satan, the Devil, the dragon, or the serpent—will be cast out of heaven. After the kingdom of peace, he will be given one last opportunity to unleash powers opposed to God (Revelation 20: 7–8). The ultimate banishment of evil into the “lake of fire and brimstone” is finally described in Revelation 20: 10. In the new creation, where God will be “all in all” (1 Corinthians 15: 28), evil will no longer have a place.

SUMMARY

The origin of evil cannot be rationally comprehended or explained. It is only through belief in the gospel that the true nature of evil ultimately becomes clear. (4.1)

The invisible and visible creation was very good at first. Evil as such was not created by God, but rather permitted. The capacity to do evil lies rooted in

the human ability to decide between obedience and disobedience toward God. (4.1)

Evil began to unfold when the created rebelled against the Creator. This led to a state of remoteness from God, estrangement from God, and ultimately godlessness. (4.1)

Evil is a destructive power that arises from the will to be independent from God. It changes those who fall prey to it. Thereby human beings become sinners. (4.1.1)

On account of concupiscence, no human being—with the exception of the incarnate Son of God—is capable of leading a sinless life. Nevertheless, no one is exposed to evil without a choice. No human being is exempt from personal responsibility for his sins. (4.1.1)

Evil not only appears as a power, but also as a person, and is called, among other things: “the Devil”, “Satan”, or “unclean spirit” (demon). (4.1.2)

4.2 The fall into sin

The doctrine of sin and mankind’s need for redemption is based on Holy Scripture’s account of the fall into sin (*see also* 3.3.3): “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘... but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die’” (Genesis 2: 16–17).—“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate” (Genesis 3: 6).

4.2.1 The consequences of the fall into sin for mankind

As a consequence of the fall into sin, man was driven out of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3: 23–24).

Now that human beings had turned away from God through their actions, they experienced a new dimension: separation from God (Genesis 2: 17; Romans 6: 23).

4.2.1.1 Mankind in sin

Mankind sought to rise above the Creator. Thereby the untroubled relationship between God and man was destroyed. This has had drastic effects on the human race to this day.

Adam represents the archetype of all sinners, as it were. This is true as regards his motivation to sin, his conduct while in the state of sinfulness, as well as his hopelessness after the fall into sin.

The thought behind the decision to transgress the boundary imposed by God was expressed in the temptation: "... you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3: 5). Some of the motivations for sinful conduct are: the desire not to have any God over oneself but rather wanting to be a god in one's own right, no longer respecting the commandments of God but rather doing what one's own will and lusts desire.

The sinfulness of all human beings is portrayed in Genesis by an appalling increase in the sins of the human race: Cain rose up against God's counsel and warning, and killed his brother (Genesis 4: 6–8). As time went on, the sins of mankind continued to increase, and cried so loudly to heaven that God responded with the great flood (Genesis 6: 5–7, 17). But even after this judgement, human beings persisted in their disobedience and presumptuousness towards their Creator. For example, the Bible describes the conduct of the builders of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11: 1–8), whom God caused to fail on account of their ambition.

Apostle Paul writes as follows about the phenomenon of the sinfulness of all mankind after the fall into sin, and of the spiritual death which resulted from it: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5: 12).

The fall into sin brought about changes in the lives of mankind which they could not reverse. Fear estranged them from their Creator, whose nearness they no longer sought. Instead, they tried to hide from Him (Genesis 3: 8–10). The relationship of human beings toward one another also suffered (Genesis 3: 12), as did their relationship with the creation. From that time on, human beings had to toil arduously for their survival and, at the end of their lives, return to the ground from which they had been taken (Genesis 3: 16–19).

Man cannot return to the state of sinlessness.

4.2.1.2 Sinful mankind is still loved by God

Mankind, who had now become sinful, would from that time on have to reap what they had sown: “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6: 23). Despite their disobedience and presumption, the Eternal One still loved those He had created. He continued to care for them and attend to them. Illustrations of this divine care include the fact that God made tunics of hide for Adam and Eve and clothed them (Genesis 3: 21), and that He set a mark upon Cain to protect him when he feared vengeance after killing his brother (Genesis 4: 15).

The love of God, which still covered mankind even after the fall into sin, was revealed in perfect fashion through the sending of His Son. Jesus Christ came and defeated sin (1 John 3: 8). In Him, mankind was saved from the harm brought about by sin (Acts 4: 12).

In impressive contrast to the rebelliousness and presumptuousness of mankind, who had become increasingly entangled in sin, the Son of God in His human form set an example of perfect obedience to His Father

(Philippians 2: 8). Through His sacrificial death, Jesus Christ acquired the merit by which human beings could be liberated from their sins and ultimately redeemed from “the bondage of corruption” (Romans 8: 21), thereby making it possible for them to live in eternal fellowship with God.

Apostle Paul makes this contrast clear: “Therefore, as through one man’s offence judgement came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous” (Romans 5: 18–19).

However, sinful mankind does not automatically gain justification before God. Through the sacrifice of Jesus, God has shown His commitment to mankind: He does not condemn human beings, but rather seeks to grant them salvation. Human beings are called upon to make a serious effort to accept God’s offer and attain salvation. For this purpose, God has endowed human beings with conscience, reason, and faith. If human beings align these gifts by Jesus Christ, then the justification attained by the Son of God (Romans 4: 25) becomes accessible to them by grace. That which human beings accomplish thus has no justifying effect. Rather, that which they accomplish—their works—are a necessary and self-evident expression of faith, a sign that they have accepted God’s offer of salvation.

SUMMARY

The separation between man and God came into being through the fall into sin. The consequence of this was expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Adam is the archetype of all sinners. (4.2.1; 4.2.1.1)

God’s love still covered mankind even after the fall into sin. It was revealed in perfect fashion in the sending of Jesus Christ, who conquered sin and death. (4.2.1.2)

4.2.1.3 Conscience

Holy Scripture uses various terms to describe conscience as a gift which mankind has received from God¹. In reference to this the Old Testament often uses the term “heart”, in which the voice of God can be heard. Thus we read in Deuteronomy 30: 14: “But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.” In contrast, Apostle Paul explains that the will of God was not only laid into the hearts of those living under the Mosaic Law, but also into the hearts of the Gentiles: “For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them” (Romans 2: 14–15). Therefore all human beings carry within themselves an awareness of the will of God—all of them possess such a conscience.

Sinful human beings are without orientation. They have lost the security and support that comes with obedience to God. Here the authority of conscience can help in making decisions that correspond to God’s will. Nevertheless it is still quite possible to arrive at erroneous decisions, especially if the conscience is not guided by reason and faith.

Human beings—who have been left to their own devices—can perceive the will of God in their conscience. Thus the authority of the conscience is capable of leading an individual’s will toward that which is good. For this reason, individuals should endeavour to continually expand and sharpen their conscience through the law that has been written into every human being’s heart.

The conscience distinguishes between what is good and what is evil. If the conscience is governed by reason and faith, it assists mankind in acting wisely. It likewise allows human beings to recognise whether they have incurred

¹ The term “conscience” is used in many other contexts—e.g. sociological, philosophical, and psychological—which are not treated here.

guilt before God or their neighbour, and reveals where they have transgressed against God's will and violated His ordinances, whether in thought or deed.

First and foremost, human beings must recognise themselves and give account to their own conscience. If the conscience attests that they have sinned and incurred guilt, and—provided they allow themselves to be guided by remorse and repentance—God in His grace offers forgiveness through the merit of Christ. This is the path God has established for the justification of mankind who has fallen into sin.

Human beings can experience Holy Baptism with water as the healing care of God: “There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3: 21). God's word strengthens human beings so that they can continue along the path they have begun toward salvation. Thereby the conscience undergoes a constant sharpening process, which aids human beings in recognising God's will more and more clearly.

The experience of grace fills the heart with the peace of God, and the conscience, which had previously condemned the individual on account of his sins, is calmed. John sums this up with the words: “And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things” (1 John 3: 19–20).

SUMMARY

The authority of conscience can help make decisions in accordance with the will of God. It is the conscience that weighs the question of what is good and what is evil. (4.2.1.3)

If the conscience is defined by reason and faith, it helps human beings to act wisely, and allows them to recognise whether they have incurred guilt with God or their neighbour. (4.2.1.3)

4.2.1.4 Reason

Reason is a gift of God that distinguishes human beings—as the image of God—from all other creatures. It is of particular help in structuring their existence and comprehending their environment.

Reason is revealed when human beings think and act while engaging their intellect and knowledge. In so doing, they are accountable before God and themselves, whether they know it or not (*see* 4.2.1.3). Human beings are capable of recognising circumstances and interpreting the connections between them. They recognise themselves as individuals and see themselves in relationship to the world. Ultimately, reason is a gift of God to human beings, which can guide them to proper conduct: “Counsel, and a tongue, and eyes, ears, and a heart, gave He them [mankind] to understand” (Ecclesiasticus 17: 5–6).

Mankind received from God the commission to “subdue the earth” (Genesis 1: 28). With their inquisitive minds, human beings seek to access and make use of that which is available to them in the creation. When they do this out of a sense of responsibility toward God and the creation, human beings act in a reasonable manner, in accordance with the gift of God.

In the Bible, reason is also described using the term “wisdom”. Understood as the ability to know, it is attributed to the activity of God. “For He [God] hath given me certain knowledge of things that are, namely, to know how the world was made, and the operation of the elements ...” (Wisdom of Solomon 7: 17). Apostle Paul also used the term “human wisdom” to refer to reason. It equips human beings with the cognitive faculty by which they endeavour to penetrate divine mysteries (1 Corinthians 1: 20–21). If human beings were to elevate themselves over divine ordinances and thus over God Himself, they would thereby dismiss divine wisdom as foolishness. Ultimately this means that reason would reject faith (1 Corinthians 2: 1–16). In so doing, human beings would ultimately fail to understand the purpose of their lives. Since the Age of Enlightenment, such a tendency can be clearly identified in many areas, especially in the industrialised world. It always reveals itself

wherever mankind's inquiring mind is not subordinate to his responsibility toward God and the creation.

In this respect human reason is always imperfect on account of sin. It is for this reason that, from the perspective of faith, an attitude that defines reason as the measure of all things is exposed as foolishness: "For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.' Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" (1 Corinthians 1: 19–20).

It is impossible for human reason in its finiteness to grasp the endlessness of God. His actions transcend all human reason. Therefore, human beings must always be aware that they can never succeed in completely penetrating divine matters with reason (Romans 11: 33).

Although reason cannot be the measure of all things, it is still needed, for example to recognise the interconnections of the gospel, and to perceive and understand words and images in Holy Scripture. We also need it to profess the doctrine of Jesus to others. Reason is a valuable divine gift, but not the highest good (Philippians 4: 7). Accordingly it must never become the only standard of measure.

Whenever reason is tempted to rise up against things divine, the individual must be aware that he is not properly engaging the gift of reason, but rather demonstrating a lack of responsibility toward God. Through faith, human beings know that it is their duty to fight against such presumption, "casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10: 5).

SUMMARY

Human beings exhibit reason when they think and act by engaging their understanding and knowledge. In so doing they are responsible toward God, themselves, and the creation, whether they are aware of it or not. (4.2.1.4)

Reason is a gift of God which can lead human beings to proper conduct. (4.2.1.4)

In its finiteness, reason is incapable of comprehending God in His endlessness. God's actions transcend all human reason. (4.2.1.4)

Even though reason cannot be the measure of all things, it is nevertheless needed in order to understand and profess the interconnections of the gospel. (4.2.1.4)

4.2.1.5 Faith

The word "faith" is not mentioned in the Hebrew texts of the Old Testament. Wherever we find this term in modern translations, the original words used were "trust", "loyalty", "obedience", "confidence", or "certainty". All of these meanings are implicit in the single word "faith". In Hebrews 11: 1 we read: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (*see 1.4*).

Faith always starts with God, who reveals Himself through His word and His works. As long as human beings trust God completely, they are able to obey God. Disobedience caused mankind to sin and therefore incur guilt before God. Ever since, mankind has had a broken relationship with his Creator. For any human being who desires to enter into fellowship with God again, it is indispensable to believe (Hebrews 11: 6).

For the models of faith in the time of the old covenant, salvation still lay in the future (Hebrews 11: 39). When God revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, the Old Testament promises were fulfilled. Thereby faith acquired a new dimension: it was now directed at the Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Through faith in Him, it is possible to be reconciled to God and enter into fellowship with Him.

The Son of God demanded this kind of faith: "... believe in God, believe also in Me" (John 14: 1). He emphasised the consequences of unbelief in all

its implications: “For if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins” (John 8: 24).

Great things are promised to those who believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and accept Him: they will “not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3: 16).

True Christian faith is always based first and foremost on God’s grace of election and revelation. This is evident from the profession of Apostle Peter: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”, and Jesus’ response: “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 16: 16–17). Faith is a gift of God as well as an obligation for human beings. If they accept God’s word, trust in it, and act accordingly, then their faith is alive and will lead to salvation.

SUMMARY

Faith is a gift of God which constitutes an obligation for human beings. When human beings accept God’s word, trust in it, and act in accordance with it, their faith is alive and leads to salvation. (4.2.1.5)

The beginning of faith is always God, who reveals Himself through words and works. (4.2.1.5)

Through faith in Jesus Christ it is possible to be reconciled with God. (4.2.1.5)

4.2.2 The consequences of the fall into sin for the creation

Mankind’s fall into sin also resulted in far-reaching consequences for the creation, which is blameless.

Originally, the creation was “very good”, that is to say perfect (Genesis 1: 31). Man was made regent of the visible creation. Thus man bears responsibility to God for the creation, but also bears responsibility to the creation itself (Genesis 1: 28–30). Considering that man occupies such an important position within the visible creation, his disobedience toward God also has sig-

nificant effects upon the earthly creation: after mankind sinned, both the ground—as an image of the visible creation—and the serpent were cursed (Genesis 3: 17–18). Thorns and thistles—and the effort mankind now had to summon up to eke out an existence—are symbolic of mankind’s remoteness from God and God’s concealment from mankind, which have prevailed in the creation since that time. Mankind could no longer find direct access to God in the creation. Man’s life was now accompanied by insecurity and fear.

The behaviour of animals towards each other can be seen as a sign of hostility and discord. The longing to overcome and heal even this situation is expressed in Isaiah 11: 6–8: “The wolf shall also dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat ...”

Hence the creation is in need of liberation from the curse that weighs upon it. The epistle to the Romans makes clear reference to this: “For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now” (Romans 8: 19–22).

SUMMARY

Mankind’s disobedience also had consequences for the blameless creation: it was originally perfect but has now been damaged. (4.2.2)

In this corrupted creation, human beings cannot find direct access to God. Their lives are accompanied by uncertainty and fear. (4.2.2)

The fallen creation is in need of redemption. (4.2.2)

4.3 Sin and guilt

The Bible uses the terms “sin” and “guilt” interchangeably in some cases, and with different meanings in others. The distinction between these two concepts is clearly shown in the words of the Son of God when He defended His disciples who, by the interpretation of the Pharisees, had broken the law and thus committed a sin: “Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath [that is they sin by breaking the Third Commandment], and are blameless?” (Matthew 12: 5).

4.3.1 Sin

Sin is everything that is opposed to God’s will and contrary to God’s being. Every sin separates from God. To restore a close relationship with Him, the sin must be forgiven (*see 12.1.8*).

Neither the Old nor the New Testament offers a self-contained “doctrine of sin” or a systematic and exhaustive “catalogue of sins”.

God Himself always defines what is right by revealing His will. It is advisable for man to inquire into God’s will and to act accordingly. All words, deeds, and deliberate thoughts that are contrary to God’s will and being are sins, just as it is also a sin to intentionally neglect to do good (James 4: 17).

Holy Scripture describes the following as “sins”: any violation of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20: 20), the breaking of vows made to God (Deuteronomy 23: 22), refusal to believe in Christ (John 16: 9), as well as avarice, envy, and the like.

The exclusive deciding factor in assessing whether a deed is sinful or not is the divine will—as manifested in Holy Scripture, as corresponds to the mind and spirit of the gospel of Christ, and as revealed by the Holy Spirit. By no means may humans take it upon themselves to define what constitutes a sin.

All human beings in their various circumstances of life are accountable to God and themselves, and thus bear personal responsibility for their conduct.

4.3.2 Guilt

Whenever human beings violate God's will, they sin and thereby incur guilt before God. Guilt is manifest when God in His righteousness and omniscience holds this misconduct against an individual who has committed a sin. The magnitude of guilt incurred can only be measured by God.

The extent of such guilt may vary: the knowledge and motivation of the sinner with regard to his actions are decisive factors here. Likewise, certain influences to which human beings are exposed may play a role, such as their general circumstances of life, social structures, statutory norms, emergency situations, and pathological dispositions. The guilt incurred by a particular sin may in one case be virtually non-existent, while in another case, it may be so severe as to "cry out to God" (Genesis 4: 10). From all of this it is clear that guilt, in contrast to sin, can be relativised.

God, in His love, wishes to redeem human beings from sin, and free them from guilt. The sacrifice of Christ, the epitome of divine salvific activity, serves to this end.

SUMMARY

Sin and guilt must be distinguished from one another. (4.3)

Sin is everything that opposes the will of God and runs counter to His nature. Every sin separates from God and must be forgiven. Whether or not something is a sin lies exclusively in the divine will. By no means can human beings define on their own what constitutes sin. (4.3.1)

Guilt is incurred when God in His righteousness and omniscience holds the misconduct of a human being against him when he has committed a sin. The seriousness of the guilt incurred can vary. God alone measures it. In contrast to sin, guilt can be relativised. (4.3.2)

4.4 God's plan of salvation

Holy Scripture uses the term “salvation” in the sense of “deliverance”, “protection”, and “redemption”. God’s activity is intended to bring about salvation. This process is known as the history of salvation. In it we can recognise a sequence of divine actions that follow a plan made by God.

The history of salvation begins immediately after the fall into sin. It continues with the deliverance of Noah from destruction in the flood, the divine election and blessing of the patriarchs, the covenant with Israel, and the history of the Old Testament people of God. The central event in salvation history is the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, His sacrifice on the cross, His resurrection, and His ascension into heaven. This is followed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the spread of the gospel by the Apostles of the early time, and the further development of Christianity right up until the reoccupation of the Apostle ministry. This development is geared toward preparing the bridal congregation for the return of Jesus Christ. This will be followed by the activity of salvation during the thousand years of peace, until the Last Judgement. Finally, God will create the new heaven and new earth. This whole sequence is described as “God’s plan of salvation”.

The first expression of any divine thought of salvation is found in God’s actions after the fall into sin (*see 4.2*). Accordingly, Christian tradition considers the cursing of the serpent to be the first reference to the coming Redeemer, the focal point of the plan of salvation.

The nature and extent of salvation to be imparted are variously structured by God during the different phases of the history of salvation. But above all stands God’s will to save, which applies to all of mankind in every time period.

4.4.1 Hope for salvation in the Old Testament

In the old covenant, the hope of salvation revolved mainly around deliverance from earthly affliction and captivity. In this respect, the people of Israel experienced God's salvation through their deliverance from Egyptian slavery.

Then God gave His people the law through Moses. It contains instructions as to how human beings can be freed from situations of guilt with respect to other human beings (Exodus 21: 28–30; Leviticus 25: 39 et seq.).

In the course of time, Israel's hope for salvation focused more and more clearly on the expected Messiah, on deliverance from the enslaving power of sin: "O Israel, hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is abundant redemption. And He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities" (Psalm 130: 7–8).

Through many promises given by the prophets, God prepared the way for the appearing of the Redeemer. In Him all these promises were fulfilled.

4.4.2 Jesus Christ—Saviour and Mediator of Salvation

In Galatians 4: 4–5 we read that the entire history of salvation in the old covenant was geared toward the birth of the Son of God, Jesus Christ: "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."

Jesus Christ is the Redeemer sent by God. He reveals Himself as the Redeemer in His words and deeds. Those who believe in Him will recognise that "this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world" (John 4: 42). Only in Him is there salvation (Acts 4: 12).

During His time on earth, the Son of God performed many miracles of healing. When He healed a lame man, as related in Matthew 9: 2–6, Jesus pointed to a kind of healing that is much more significant, namely the redemption of man from sin.

Salvation has come into the world through Jesus Christ. He is the author of eternal salvation (Hebrews 5: 9). He has brought salvation and is the only Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2: 5–6). Through the sacrifice of Christ, mankind's relationship with God has been set upon a new foundation. The merit Christ thereby acquired makes liberation from sin—and the undoing of permanent separation from God—possible: “Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5: 17–19).

No human being can achieve salvation on his own. All people are sinners and are thus dependent on God's activity of salvation (Luke 16: 26). Through Jesus Christ, all human beings, both living and dead, have access to salvation (Acts 13: 47; Romans 14: 9).

God's plan of salvation provides that, in the course of time, salvation will be offered to all who ever lived or ever will live. Thus the spread of the gospel by the early Apostles, the worldwide propagation of Christianity, and the preparation of the bride for the return of Christ are all phases in this plan of salvation.

SUMMARY

God's actions are aimed at bringing about salvation—in the sense of “deliverance”, “protection”, and “redemption”. This transpires in the form of salvation history, in which a series of divine actions occurring in accordance with God's plan can be identified. This is described as “God's plan of salvation”. (4.4)

The manner and measure of the salvation that is to be imparted varies throughout the different phases of salvation history, however, God's will to save—which is valid for all people of all time periods—stands above everything else. (4.4)

In Old Testament times, the hope of salvation was primarily focused on deliverance from earthly need and captivity. Over the course of time, Israel's hope for salvation became more and more clearly directed toward the expected Messiah. (4.4.1)

The history of salvation in the old covenant is geared toward Jesus Christ, the Redeemer sent by God. He is the author of eternal salvation and the only Mediator between God and human beings. The merit which Christ acquired on the cross makes liberation from sin—and the undoing of the separation from God—possible. (4.4.2)

Through Jesus Christ salvation has become accessible to all human beings, both living and dead. No human being can attain redemption on his own. (4.4.2)

4.4.3 The preparation of the bridal congregation

Through fellowship with Jesus Christ in word and sacrament, believers today experience salvation by being prepared for the return of Christ, which will enable them to share in the glory of God. The Apostle ministry (*see 7.4*) has been reoccupied in order to attain salvation in Christ in the current stage of the divine plan of salvation (*see 11.3.3*). The Apostles have the task of proclaiming the word of God and dispensing the sacraments (*see 8*).

The objective of imparting salvation in this form is to gather the bride of Christ and prepare her for the Lord's return. For the bride of Christ, who has believingly accepted the divine offer of grace, salvation consists of entering into eternal fellowship with God—already on the day of the Lord—through the marriage of the Lamb (*see also 10.5*).

In the stages of the plan of salvation which follow after the day of the Lord (*see 10.3 to 10.6*), salvation can be obtained by other means:

Those believers who lost their lives for the sake of their profession to Christ will share in the first resurrection and will reign as priests with Christ.

During this time, the thousand-year kingdom of peace, salvation will be offered to all mankind. All those who find grace at the Last Judgement will enter into eternal fellowship with God in the new creation.

God's plan of salvation, as can be derived from Holy Scripture, will find its conclusion in the new creation (Revelation 21).

SUMMARY

In the present phase of the divine plan of salvation, the Apostle ministry has been reoccupied. It imparts salvation through word and sacrament. The objective is to gather the bridal congregation and prepare for the return of the Lord. (4.4.3)

The bridal congregation will only attain perfect salvation at the return of Christ, when it enters into eternal fellowship with God. (4.4.3)

God's plan of salvation will come to its completion in the new creation. (4.4.3)

4.5 Election

Election is rooted in God's will to call forth individual human beings or groups for a purpose determined by Him, thereby making them accountable to Him.

4.5.1 Election in the Old Testament

Already in the creation we see a reference to divine election, which is linked to a responsibility resulting from it. Out of all His creatures, God elected man and gave him the task of making the earth subject to him. The special position man has been granted is clear from the Wisdom of Solomon 2: 23: "For

God created man to be immortal, and made him to be an image of his own eternity.” In the course of the Old Testament plan of salvation, the significance of this election is especially apparent in the case of Noah, Abraham, and the people of Israel.

- When God decided to eradicate mankind from the earth (Genesis 6: 1–8), He promised to deliver Noah. Noah made this election sure by doing all that God commanded him to do. As a result, Noah and his family—and thereby the human race—were saved from destruction.
- Abraham was elected so that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him (Genesis 12: 3). God’s promises to him were passed on to Isaac.
- Of the latter’s two sons, Esau, as the firstborn, should have been the rightful recipient of the blessing, however, God elected Jacob and blessed him (Genesis 28: 13–15). This shows that no one can lay claim to God’s grace of election and that it cannot be comprehended by human understanding.
- The people of Israel came forth out of the twelve sons of Jacob. God called them to become the people of His covenant: “For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all the peoples; but because the Lord loves you” (Deuteronomy 7: 6–8). The origin of election is thus God’s love.
- From among the people of Israel, God also elected certain individuals who proclaimed His will, and who had been predestined by Him to fulfil particular tasks. These included Moses and Joshua, as well as several judges, kings, and prophets.

4.5.2 Election in the New Testament

Jesus elected the Apostles from among His disciples and sent them to all the nations in order to teach and baptise (Matthew 28: 19–20; Luke 6: 13). The Lord elects the people of the new covenant from among both Jews and Gentiles. Those who make their election sure accept the gospel believingly and allow themselves to be baptised with water and the Holy Spirit. In 1 Peter 2: 9 we read as follows concerning the people of the new covenant: “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.” From this it also follows that all those who belong to the people of the new covenant are obliged to bear witness—in both word and conduct—of the favours they have received from God (2 Peter 1: 10–11).

4.5.3 God’s free election by grace

Election is a gift of God that is either accepted in faith or rejected in unbelief.

No one can earn election through deeds, much less lay claim to it. It cannot be explained by reason. Divine election is a mystery of God that can only be grasped in faith. God grants election to those whom He has foreordained (Romans 9: 10–20).

Human beings are not forced to accept or secure God’s election. It is the individual’s own decision whether or not to believe and heed the divine call and faithfully fulfil the tasks assigned to him.

In this respect, there exists an area of tension—which cannot be resolved—between God’s act of election through grace (which is independent of human conduct) and man’s free decision to accept or reject God’s election.

God elects human beings for their own salvation as well as for the salvation of others. They are chosen to work along in His plan of salvation. Whenever God elects someone, this election is linked to a task or purpose.

Therefore those who have been baptised and who profess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour are called and elected to be Christian. They are to spread the gospel. Beyond that, those Christians who are reborn out of water and the Spirit have fulfilled the condition for becoming firstlings. It is from this group that the bride of Christ is prepared in order to comprise the royal priesthood in the kingdom of peace (*see 10.6*).

By no means can the doctrine of election be taken to mean that an individual's actions are predetermined from the start, or that a human being has no decision-making power at all². Rather, this freedom of choice is an essential element of man's being. Likewise it cannot be concluded that the election of one person to the bridal congregation signifies the rejection of those who have not been chosen for this purpose. Rather, all human beings have access to future salvation—all the way up to and including eternal fellowship with God in the new creation.

Acceptance of one's election in faith means following Jesus Christ conscientiously. Election also has eschatological effects: when Jesus Christ establishes His kingdom of peace as the King of all kings, the royal priesthood will proclaim the glad tidings of salvation in Christ to all human beings. Those who participate in the first resurrection are elected to this purpose (Revelation 20: 6).

Human beings demonstrate that they have made this election sure by accepting this grace in belief and by remaining loyal to God and His work.

Election is an act of God's love. He remains faithful to His elect. No external influences are capable of separating them from the love of God (Romans 8: 29, 37–39).

² Election is frequently associated with the doctrine of predestination. Predestination was at various times interpreted as divine providence of fate upon an individual human being. However, predestination does not relate in a definitive way to the course of human life on earth, but to the fact that God has predestined human beings for salvation.

SUMMARY

Election is founded upon the will of God. God calls individuals for a specific purpose decided by Him. Out of all His creatures, God has chosen human beings and given them a commission, namely to subdue the earth. (4.5; 4.5.1)

No one can lay claim to God's electing grace, nor can it be comprehended by human contemplation. This is demonstrated by many examples in the Old Testament. (4.5.1; 4.5.3)

Out of the circle of His disciples Jesus called the Apostles and sent them into the entire world with the commission to teach and baptise. God then elected the people of the new covenant from among both Jews and Gentiles. (4.5.2)

Election is a gift of God's love, which is either accepted in faith or rejected in unbelief. This freedom to choose is intrinsic to man's being. Acceptance of one's election in faith signifies following Jesus Christ diligently. (4.5.3)

God chooses human beings for their own salvation as well as for the salvation of others. Whenever God elects someone, there is a certain task or purpose associated with it. (4.5.3)

Election does not mean that the actions of human beings are predetermined. (4.5.3)

4.6 God's blessing

By "blessing" we understand God's loving care. Blessing is synonymous with God's saving and healing activity upon both mankind and the creation. Its antithesis is curse, which occurs when God turns away from man.

The conviction that man's entire existence is dependent on God's blessing points to an image of mankind that derives from belief in God as the almighty Creator and Sustainer of all creation. On their own, human beings are not capable of shaping their lives in such a way as to benefit themselves, their fellow human beings, or the creation.

Curse, being the opposite of blessing, came upon human beings when they rebelled against God with the fall into sin. Curse incorporates everything that leads human beings away from God and everything they experience in this condition: they are filled with agitation and strife, and are abandoned to corruption and death. They cannot find any help in and of themselves, but rather only in God.

Grace redeems from the curse of having fallen prey to sin. By grasping the gifts of God in faith and allowing the Lord to lead them, human beings can partake in blessing.

God often imparts His blessing through human beings commissioned by Him for this purpose.

Blessing is comprehensive and has its effect on a human being as a whole. It contains divine power and brings mankind the promise of future salvation. Blessing is an expression of God's loving care, which no one can earn. To be blessed means to receive good things from God. No one can bless himself. Nevertheless, human beings are called upon to pray for God's blessing and to conduct themselves in such a manner as to show themselves worthy of this blessing.

Blessing unfolds when faith is present. Blessing is a gift of God that continually renews itself. Whether it is of lasting effect depends not least of all on the attitude and conduct of the person being blessed. If the latter acts in accordance with God's favour, he will in turn become a blessing to others.

Blessing can extend beyond the life of its direct recipient and carry over to future generations.

4.6.1 God's blessing in the creation

During the creation God blessed all creatures and laid the law of increase into the life He had created. He entrusted the creation to man and granted him a special blessing for this purpose (Genesis 1: 28–30), a blessing which He renewed after the flood (Genesis 9: 1, 11). All the things that this blessing entails come to expression in His words: "While the earth remains, seedtime

and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease” (Genesis 8: 22).

Although the blessing of God which originally covered the creation was hampered in its effect through the curse of sin, it was not completely removed: “For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God” (Hebrews 6: 7). All human beings profit from this blessing (Matthew 5: 45).

4.6.2 God's blessing in the old covenant

The promise of blessing given to Israel was part of the covenant God made with His chosen people. This blessing was contingent on Israel fulfilling its covenantal duties, namely to serve God alone and to obey His commandments. Whenever the people of Israel acted otherwise, curse would follow. This decision fell to the people: “Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you today; and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God ...” (Deuteronomy 11: 26–28). This clearly shows that deviating from God and His commandments results in curse.

In the old covenant, the blessing of God manifested itself primarily in the daily life directly experienced by the people, and encompassed all areas of life, for example victory in battles against enemies, longevity, wealth, numerous descendants, and fertile soil (Deuteronomy 28: 3–6). Even in the old covenant, however, blessing already had a dimension which surpassed earthly welfare, as becomes clear in God's promise to Abraham: “I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12: 2–3). This blessing extended far beyond the promise of personal wellbeing. It enabled Abraham to become a blessing for others as well. The blessing of God was to

encompass all future generations: this blessing became accessible to all nations in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3: 14).

4.6.3 God's blessing in the new covenant

Starting in the new covenant, divine blessing was imparted through Jesus Christ. The Lord blessed through His word, through His miracles, and through His conduct. He placed His hands of blessing upon children. He forgave sinners. His ultimate blessing was given when He offered up His sinless life on the cross as an expiatory sacrifice for the reconciliation of all mankind. He thereby took upon Himself the curse which had burdened sinners.

The blessing which is made accessible through Jesus Christ can be understood in a comprehensive way. Thus we read in Ephesians 1: 3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." This blessing began with the election before the foundation of the world (verse 4). It also incorporates redemption and forgiveness of sins (verse 7), leads to the knowledge of God's will (verse 9), and includes the predestination as an heir of future glory (verse 11). It also grants access to the gospel (verse 13), and enables human beings to be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit, the pledge of the inheritance until redemption (verses 13–14).

Believers know that being chosen in Jesus Christ incorporates the calling to inherit the blessing (1 Peter 3: 9). They demonstrate their thankfulness for God's blessing through a life defined by the fear of God, obedience of faith, and selflessness.

Another thing associated with blessing is offering (*see 13.2.4*). This is a fundamental experience of Christian life.

Many divine blessings are made available to the believers in the divine service (*see 12.1 and 12.2*).

The fullness of blessing consists of sharing in God's glory forever.

SUMMARY

Blessing is an act of God's loving care, which no one can earn. Blessing is synonymous with God's salvation-bringing activity upon mankind and upon the creation. (4.6)

God often imparts His blessing through human beings commissioned by Him for this purpose. No one is able to bless himself. Blessing develops when faith is present. (4.6)

During the creation God blessed the creatures He had made, and laid the law of multiplication into His creation. He entrusted the creation to the care of man and promised to bless him. Although the blessing of God was somewhat subdued in its effect due to the curse of sin, it was not completely undone. (4.6.1)

In the old covenant, the blessing of God was primarily shown in earthly well-being, but nevertheless also had a dimension which transcended this. (4.6.2)

Jesus Christ imparted blessing through word and deed. The surrender of His sinless life as an expiatory sacrifice for the reconciliation of all human beings is the greatest blessing of all. (4.6.3)

Divine blessings are made accessible to believers in the divine service. (4.6.3)

The fullness of blessing consists of partaking in God's glory forever. (4.6.3)

4.7 The functions of the law

In general, we understand "law" to mean the binding regulations and rules issued by a superior authority, which apply to all those living within the domain of this authority. It defines both rights and duties.

God, as the highest sovereign, stands above all lawgivers. The unwritten law that applies to every human being is called the "natural and moral law" (Romans 2: 14–15). It makes clear the ethical and moral requirements and standards by which human life should be conducted. In its basic features and

obligations, the moral law is unchangeable, irrespective of all historical and social changes. Essential parts of statutory legislation can be derived from general moral law. Important elements of this law come to expression in the Ten Commandments, for example.

Not only is there a law that places obligations on individuals and instructs them on how to act, there is also a law that governs the reality of life. The latter's function is to provide structure and order to biological, social, and political life. It can be experienced in the elementary events of human life, in history, and nature. Birth and death, aging and dying, success and failure, as well as the experience of historical events or natural disasters: these are all facets of how this law can be experienced.

The Old Testament assumes that man is made righteous before God by living in accordance with the Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 6: 25). At that time the Mosaic Law was considered the highest order binding on the Israelites. The gospel, however, states that salvation and the righteousness which is valid before God comes from faith in Christ's sacrifice and resurrection. Divine grace stands above the law.

In his epistle to the Romans in particular, Apostle Paul explores these contradictory notions of righteousness, namely the law and grace. In the early Christian congregations, these two differing approaches led to disputes between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. This gave the Apostle cause to occupy himself with this topic in great detail.

4.7.1 The term "law"

The term "law" refers, first and foremost, to the written Mosaic Law, that is the five Books of Moses (the Torah). Essential elements of the Mosaic Law include the Ten Commandments and the double commandment of love (*see* 5.3).

In the old covenant, the law is understood as the path to salvation. It opened up the possibility for man to avoid sin, to thereby live righteously before God, and to thus avoid His judgement. The law obliged the Israelites to

make a decision: if they kept it, they would have the blessing of God, but if they broke it, they would incur God's curse (Deuteronomy 11: 26–28). Cases where only the ritual side of the law was emphasised—the merely formal fulfilment of the Commandments—were harshly criticised by the prophets (Isaiah 1: 10–17).

The path to salvation, that is to complete reconciliation with God, was established in Jesus Christ. The New Testament exposes what the Mosaic Law is all about: it is not—as had been previously believed—a path to salvation, but rather illustrates the situation of mankind irredeemably entangled in sin before God, and points to the true path of salvation.

Furthermore, the New Testament allows for a considerable extension of the concept of law: it no longer refers only to the Torah which was enshrined in writing, but also to the basic state of all life and all things, of which man is also a part. This includes the laws of cause and effect, seed and harvest, and birth and death, from which nothing and no one is exempt. The term “law” also refers to an authority present within man which places moral and ethical demands on him (*see 4.2.1.3*).

Both Jews and Gentiles are subject to the law: the Jews are subject to the law revealed to Moses, while the Gentiles are subject to the law which God Himself wrote in their hearts (Romans 2: 15).

4.7.2 The law as a guide to righteous conduct

The function of the law given by God is to instruct mankind in the conduct that is pleasing to God. It constitutes God's kind help in life, which provides human beings with concrete rules of conduct. Thus the law leads man to do good works and seeks to help him avoid evil.

Of central importance within the Mosaic Law were the commandments concerning food and purity, as well as the instructions concerning the observance of the Sabbath and the exercise of the priestly service. This law provided mankind with a standard for the appropriate worship of God as well as the correct way of interacting with each other: “He has shown you, O man,

what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6: 8).

To act in accordance with “God’s word”—that is the law—means above all to remain faithful to God and not worship idols. A person’s humbleness is demonstrated by his obedience toward God. On an interpersonal level, to “practise love” means to respect and esteem others. Jesus Christ expresses this fundamental requirement of the law in the Sermon on the Mount: “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the prophets” (Matthew 7: 12).

The devout of the old covenant assumed that the law’s requirements could be fulfilled and thereby serve to the attainment of salvation. However, there are also several passages in the Old Testament that attest to an awareness of the fact that man is incapable of completely fulfilling all prescriptions of the law (Psalm 19: 12). In general, however, the conviction stood: those who fulfilled the law were righteous and would receive salvation. Those who transgressed against the law were sinners who stood under threat of judgement.

4.7.3 The law as a guide for recognising sin

The correct understanding of the law given by God is revealed in the light of the gospel.

Apostle Paul wrote in his epistle to the Romans: “Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3: 19–20). In view of the law’s demands, which they repeatedly fail to fulfil, human beings recognise that they are sinful and unrighteous, and therefore in need of divine grace (Romans 7: 7–10).

From the perspective of the New Testament, the most important function of the Mosaic Law consists of helping people recognise that it is impossible to attain salvation solely through their own efforts. The law cannot make an unrighteous person righteous or grant pardon to a sinner. Nevertheless, the

basic requirements of the law—as illustrated in the Ten Commandments and the commandment to love God and one’s neighbour—remain valid.

The law thus exposes human beings as sinners. It clearly demonstrates the necessity of receiving complete salvation through the forgiveness of sins. As such it has always pointed to Jesus Christ: “But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterwards be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3: 23–24). Here the term “tutor” refers to a teacher who creates an awareness of various interconnections and leads the way to Christ.

Paul summarises the obligations stemming from the law in his epistle to the Romans: by *one* man’s (Adam’s) disobedience, many were made sinners. By the obedience of the *one* Redeemer (Jesus Christ), many were made righteous. Between these two lies the law, or, as Apostle Paul wrote, “the law entered” (Romans 5: 19–20). Ultimately, the Mosaic Law is to lead to the recognition that it does not in itself effect redemption. This can only be achieved through Jesus Christ.

SUMMARY

The unwritten and unchangeable law that applies to all human beings is the natural and moral law. Important elements of this law come to expression in the Ten Commandments. (4.7)

The law that governs the reality of life brings order to biological and societal life. (4.7)

In the old covenant the Mosaic Law is understood as a path to salvation. It opens up the way for human beings to avoid sin, to thereby live righteously before God, and to escape His judgement. The way to salvation—that is to complete reconciliation with God—is laid down in Jesus Christ. The New Testament makes it clear that the Mosaic Law is not the path of salvation, but rather that it points the way to salvation. (4.7.1)

The function of the Mosaic Law is to provide instruction for God-pleasing conduct. The proper understanding of the law given by God is revealed in the light of the gospel. (4.7.2)

The law exposes human beings as sinners and clearly highlights the necessity of receiving complete salvation through the forgiveness of sins. Thus it has always pointed to Jesus Christ. (4.7.3)

4.8 The law and the gospel

Strict adherence to the Mosaic Law and the study of its content were of central importance in the old covenant (*see* 4.7.1).

The term “gospel” means “good tidings”. However, this is not the only way the New Testament understands the term. The term is already referenced in the Old Testament, for example in Isaiah 61: 1: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach *good tidings* to the poor” (Luke 4: 18).

In the New Testament, “gospel” is understood as the saving activity of God in Jesus Christ, from His birth to His death on the cross, to His resurrection, and ultimately His return. Significant elements of the gospel are described by Apostle Paul: “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the Twelve” (1 Corinthians 15: 3–5).

Thus the gospel brings to expression Jesus Christ’s deed of salvation, which nothing can ever relativise or diminish. The gospel proclaims that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation.

While there is a certain tension between the law and the gospel, they both reveal God’s will to save. The Mosaic Law, however, was oriented to the elect of that time, namely the people of Israel, whereas the gospel is universally valid.

Nevertheless, one cannot exclusively equate the law with the Old Testament and the gospel with the New Testament. Both parts of Holy Scripture contain elements of the law and of the gospel. However, the essence of law and gospel in the Old Testament can only be unlocked with the key of the New Testament's understanding. The gospel, which permeates Holy Scripture, is the "message of the cross" (1 Corinthians 1: 18), the "word of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5: 19).

4.8.1 The law of Christ—grace

In his elaborations concerning the righteousness that results from faith, Apostle Paul cites passages from the Old Testament prophets, namely Isaiah 28: 16 and Joel 2: 32. He writes: "For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For 'whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved'" (Romans 10: 10–13). With regard to the gospel, the Apostle emphasises the unity of the old and new covenants.

The New Testament awareness that all human beings are sinners is already present in the Old Testament: "Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight ... Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51: 4–5). The situation of the sinner can hardly be expressed any more bluntly. Here we detect nothing of the supposed superiority of the law-abiding over the godless. Thus already in the Old Testament, there were some who recognised their need for redemption.

Isaiah 49 to 56 can also be understood as an anticipation of the gospel's message of grace. We read in Isaiah 53: 4–6: "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows ... The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed ... And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

Even as the old covenant already contained references to the gospel, so also in the new covenant, reference to the law is part of the proclamation of the gospel. Serious analysis of the law and its new interpretation can be found in the gospels as well as in the letters of the Apostles.

This is not a matter of repealing the law, but rather of its proper understanding, which was only revealed by the gospel of Jesus Christ: "... since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law" (Romans 3: 30–31).

Christ is both the fulfilment and the goal of the law. Thus, the understanding of the law as the path to salvation has also come to an end (Romans 10: 4–5).

While in the old covenant it was assumed that the law would lead to life and to the overcoming of sin, Apostle Paul made it very clear that it merely led to the recognition of sin: "I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said: 'You shall not covet'" (Romans 7: 7).

While the Mosaic Law, on the one hand, is intended to make human beings aware of the fact that they are sinners, it also provides instructions for righteous conduct. Jesus Christ summarised the enduringly valid and necessary content of the Mosaic Law with His commandment to love God and one's neighbour (Matthew 22: 37–40).

Accordingly, the "law of Christ" draws upon important elements of the Mosaic Law—namely the requirement to love God and one's neighbour (Deuteronomy 6: 5; Leviticus 19: 18)—and emphasises their basic functions. This context again makes clear both the conflict between, and the interconnectedness of, the law and the gospel.

The devout of the old covenant expected that the endeavour to fulfil the Mosaic Law would lead to the overcoming of sin. This was impossible to achieve, however. It was only in the "law of Christ" that overcoming sin became a reality.

Pardoned human beings are justified before God. The sinner's justification is a result of the sacrifice of Christ: "Therefore, as through one man's offence

judgement came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life" (Romans 5: 18).

4.8.2 The relationship between faith and works

Human beings are justified through faith in Jesus Christ. Thus the works they perform do nothing to contribute to their sanctification and justification: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law" (Romans 3: 28).

Nevertheless, faith and works are closely related and cannot be separated from one another: good works are an expression of a living faith. Where they are lacking, faith is dead. Thus faith is not only an inner attitude, but also a force that prompts a person to perform certain deeds (James 2: 15–17).

Good works have their source in faith. They are, so to speak, the visible expression of faith by which the reality of one's faith can be recognised. Faith manifests itself first and foremost in love for God and in loving conduct toward one's neighbour.

Like faith and works, justification and sanctified conduct belong together and cannot be separated.

SUMMARY

The term "gospel" means "glad tidings". In the New Testament, "gospel" is always understood as God's salvific activity in Jesus Christ. (4.8)

Both the law and the gospel reveal God's will to save, however, the law is directed toward the people of Israel, while the gospel is universally valid. (4.8)

As there were already references to the gospel in the old covenant, so there is also mention of the law in the proclamation of the gospel in the new covenant. (4.8.1)

Jesus Christ summarised the always applicable and necessary elements of the Mosaic Law into the commandment of love for God and one's neighbour. So it is that the "law of Christ" adopts important elements of the Mosaic Law. (4.8.1)

Human beings are justified through faith in Jesus Christ. In this respect, the works they perform do nothing to contribute to their sanctification and justification. Nevertheless, faith and works—justification and sanctified conduct—belong together. Good works have their source in faith. They are, so to speak, its visible expression. (4.8.2)

Part 5

God's commandments

5

5 God's commandments

God has given mankind commandments in which He proclaims His will for their benefit.

5.1 Living in faith according to God's commandments

Belief in God has a decisive effect on the life of an individual as a whole. Believers strive to live up to the will of God through their thoughts and actions. They recognise in God the author of a righteous order.

In order that human beings may conduct themselves within the framework of this order, God, as their Creator, has given them commandments. The commandments bring to expression God's will concerning the structure of mankind's relationship with Him. Beyond that, they constitute the foundation for constructive relationships between people.

Since believers acknowledge God as their Lord and trust His works in awareness of His omniscience, they will inquire into the will of God and endeavour to subject their own will to His.

Already in the time of the Old Testament, there were men and women who allowed their faith to determine their actions. Hebrews 11 lists some examples. These witnesses of faith are also examples for Christians. Hebrews 12: 1 admonishes us to lay aside the "sin which so easily ensnares us", and courageously pursue the path of faith in battle against sin.

The greatest example is Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of our faith. He was one with His Father and always subordinated His will to the will of God (Luke 22: 42). His unconditional obedience and fulfilment of all things which the Father had commanded Him encourages us to follow, and demands a conduct of life in accordance with His example: "If you keep My

commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15: 10). Thus Jesus Christ is the author of eternal salvation for all those who follow Him in believing obedience (Hebrews 5: 8–9).

Part of the Christian faith is the knowledge that salvation is attained by receiving the sacraments. The receiving of these divine acts of salvation and the expectation of the imminent return of Christ causes them to deny "ungodliness and worldly lusts [and] live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that he might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works" (Titus 2: 12–14).

To live "godly in the present age" means to align one's thoughts and actions with the will of God out of childlike trust, free from all hypocrisy and pretence. The basis of this childlike trust in our heavenly Father is His love for mankind. In obedience of faith, man subordinates himself to the divine will.

To establish "obedience to the faith" in the name of Jesus is the task of the Apostle ministry (Romans 1: 5; 16: 25–26). Those who remain in this obedience will align their lives by the doctrine of Christ (Romans 6: 17). That is true life in faith in accordance with God's commandments. It is in this manner that mankind's love for God comes to expression.

SUMMARY

God's will concerning the way in which our relationship with Him should be structured comes to expression in the Commandments. They furthermore constitute the foundation for prosperous relationships between human beings. (5.1)

Human beings accept God as their Lord in faith. They trust in Him and strive to live up to the will of God in their thoughts and actions. (5.1)

Jesus' unconditional obedience to His Father calls upon us to follow, and demands a conduct of life in accordance with His example. (5.1)

5.2 God's commandments—an expression of His love

God is love (1 John 4:16), and His commandments are an expression of His love. The purpose of the commandments is to help human beings live in accordance with God's will and in harmonious relationships with one another. God's commandments are to guide us to "love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith" (1 Timothy 1: 5).

God has created and blessed mankind. He has loved man right from the start. His preserving love also extends to the fallen creation. All of God's activity of salvation is founded upon His love. It was out of love that He chose the people of Israel (Deuteronomy 7: 7–8). In the commandments He proclaims His will to this people for their protection. It is also to this people, through whom all nations are to be blessed, that God sends His Son, Jesus Christ, as the highest expression of His love for the world (John 3: 16).

Jesus Christ also refers to the outstanding significance that God assigns to love already in the issuing of the law and in the proclamation of the prophets in the old covenant. When asked which is the "great commandment of the law" (Matthew 22: 36), He responded with two references from the Mosaic Law: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22: 37–40).

Jesus Christ is the conclusion of the old covenant and the beginning of the new covenant. In the new covenant, God opened up for mankind the opportunity to become His children and receive their very own divine nature, namely love: "... the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5: 5). This indwelling love for God helps us recognise that God's love is shown in His commandments. This leads us to fulfil the commandments, not out of fear of punishment, but out of love to our heavenly Father: "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5: 2–3; cf. John 14: 15, 21, 23).

5.2.1 Love for God

Man's love for God and his neighbour is rooted in God. Love is the nature of the Creator and therefore eternal: divine love has existed before all created things and will never end. All things are of Him, through Him, and to Him (Romans 11: 36).

Out of the love that God directs toward mankind, believers develop the desire to reciprocate this love (1 John 4: 19). Just as faith is man's response to God's revelation, so man's love is the response to God for the love he has received.

Ecclesiasticus 1: 14 states: "To fear the Lord [in other translations: "To love the Lord"] is the beginning of wisdom." Those who love God will have the longing to enter into fellowship with Him. The fact that the love of God has been poured out by the Holy Spirit into the hearts of those who are reborn is of special help in this effort (Romans 5: 5). This love for God is strengthened through the worthy partaking of Holy Communion. In this way it can grow within reborn believers and permeate them increasingly.

Those who love God will pursue love (1 Corinthians 14: 1). To love God is a commandment that applies to a person's entire being, and requires complete dedication: "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mark 12: 30). Fulfilling this commandment gives content and purpose to life.

Love for God is to mould an individual's nature and define his conduct.

SUMMARY

God's commandments are an expression of His love. Their purpose is to help human beings live in accordance with God's will and in harmonious relationships with one another. (5.2)

The recognition of God's love in His commandments leads human beings to fulfil them out of love toward Him and not out of fear of punishment. (5.2)

5.2.2 Love for our neighbour—love for our fellow human being

“You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Leviticus 19: 16–18). The Mosaic Law primarily defines neighbours as members of the people of Israel. It was only within this framework that the commandment at first applied. However, it was also extended to protect foreigners living in the country of the Israelites (Leviticus 19: 33–34).

The Son of God combined the commandments contained in Leviticus 19: 18 and Deuteronomy 6: 5 into the double commandment of love (Matthew 22: 37–39).

The example of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25–37) demonstrates that Jesus repealed this restriction on the commandment to love one's neighbour—which previously applied only to Israel. On the one hand, He defined one's neighbour as anyone in need of help. The parable does not specify whether He was talking about an Israelite or a Gentile: “A certain man went down from Jerusalem ...” On the other hand, one's neighbour can also be the person who provides help—in the parable he belongs to a nation held in contempt by the Israelites, a Samaritan. It becomes clear that the moment one person interacts with another they become neighbours. Our neighbour can therefore be any person with whom we come into contact.

This allows us to conclude that the domain within which the Ten Commandments (Decalogue) are valid is to be extended, and that they now apply to all human beings.

Most of the Ten Commandments have to do with one's neighbour (Exodus 20: 12–17). This is underscored by the fact that, when He addressed the rich young man, the Son of God placed the commandment to love one's neighbour on the same level as a number of commandments from the Decalogue (Matthew 19: 18–19).

Apostle Paul considers the prescriptions concerning one's fellow man to have been summarised into the commandment to love one's neighbour (Romans 13: 8–10). This insight is based on the Lord's statement that the double commandment of love encompasses “all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22: 37–40). This statement is also found in the Sermon on the

Mount, in connection with the “golden rule”: “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7: 12).

Any human being can be the neighbour of another. Just how seriously Jesus takes this can also be inferred from the Sermon on the Mount, in which He even exhorts the people to love their enemies.

Love for our neighbour prompts us to show compassion to all who are in need of compassion, even our enemies. In practice, love for one's neighbour is demonstrated, for example, in unselfish efforts to benefit others, primarily those who are disadvantaged in one way or another.

Followers of Christ are not only called upon to practise neighbourly love in earthly matters, but also to refer others to the gospel of Christ. This is love “in deed and in truth” (1 John 3: 18). Our intercessions for the departed are also to be seen in this context.

“You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Matthew 22: 39)—these words of Jesus give human beings the right to think of their own interests. On the other hand, the Lord places a clear limit on egoism, and exhorts us to treat all our fellow human beings with love.

Practised love for one's neighbour in any form deserves high regard. The more it is exercised, the more distress will be alleviated, and the more harmoniously structured our coexistence will be. The doctrine of Jesus Christ illustrates that love for one's neighbour comes to full fruition through love for God.

5.2.3 Love for our neighbour—love in the congregation

Love for one's neighbour should be especially manifest in the congregation: “Let each of us please his neighbour for his good, leading to edification” (Romans 15: 2). Jesus taught: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another”

(John 13: 34–35). The love of Christ's followers for one another is thus also an identifying feature of the Lord's congregation.

The standard that has been set for their love extends beyond the “golden rule” recorded in Matthew 7: 12: everyone is to love his neighbour just as Jesus loves His own. This love was manifested in the early Christian congregations by the fact that the multitude of those who believed “were of one heart and one soul” (Acts 4: 32). Admittedly, these congregations had to be repeatedly exhorted to reconciliation, peaceableness, and love.

Apostle John associated the commandment to love one another with the commandment to love God. The Apostle describes the appearing of the loving God to mankind in the sending of His Son and in the sacrifice of Christ, and concludes the following: “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” He continues his train of thought in greater detail: he who says he loves God but hates his brother is a liar. From this he concludes: “And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother” (1 John 4: 7–21).

Accordingly, our love for God finds its expression in loving concern for our brothers and sisters in the congregation, irrespective of their individual personality or social standing. Apostle James describes any form of discrimination within the congregation as incompatible with the “faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory”. No matter what the form of prejudice within the congregation, it violates the commandment to love one's neighbour. Based on this, James concludes: “... but if you show partiality, you commit sin” (James 2: 1–9).

“Love for one another” protects against any irreconcilability, prejudice, or contempt for individual members of the congregation. If the commandment to love our neighbour already requires us to help our fellow human being in situations of distress, this should be demonstrated first and foremost within the congregation: “... let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6: 10).

“Love for one another” is a special power that promotes cohesion within the congregation and brings warmth to congregational life. It prevents conflicts—which occur in any human society—from escalating into permanent

antagonism. It enables us to accept our brothers and sisters as they are (Romans 15: 7). Even though the expectations, ways of thinking, and modes of conduct of some members of the congregation may not be comprehensible to others, they will not be denigrated or excluded as a result, but rather be met with tolerance.

Furthermore, such love will expand our view to the fact that others too are numbered among the Lord's elect, the "holy and beloved". This knowledge inspires all to recognise their duty to treat one another with warm compassion, friendliness, humility, meekness, and patience. If there is reason for complaint, we strive to forgive according to the words: "... even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do." Apostle Paul gives the following advice: "But above all these things, put on love, which is the bond of perfection" (Colossians 3: 12–14).

Every local congregation can be seen in the image of the body of Christ. Every individual belonging to the congregation is a member of this body. Thus all children of God are united and obligated to one another through their common head: "God composed the body, that ... the members should have the same care for one another." Each individual serves the good of the whole by taking an interest in the circumstances of others. It is a matter of course for us to show sympathy in sorrow and never begrudge good things to our neighbour: "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it." All are to be aware: "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually" (1 Corinthians 12: 12–27).

In the thirteenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians, Apostle Paul shows the congregation the way of love, and concludes with the words: "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." If love is practised in the congregation, the effects are more extensive than any gifts, talents, insights, or knowledge could achieve.

SUMMARY

The Mosaic Law primarily identifies the people of Israel as neighbours. As the parable of the Good Samaritan shows, Jesus lifted this limitation: every human being can be the neighbour of the other. (5.2.2)

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus even demands that the people show love to their enemies. (5.2.2)

Love for one's neighbour places limits on egoism. It inspires us to show compassion to all. Followers of Christ are not only called to show neighbourly love in earthly matters, but are also called to make others aware of the gospel of Christ. It is also in this context that our intercessions for the departed are to be assessed. (5.2.2)

Love for one's neighbour comes to complete perfection through love for God. (5.2.2)

The standard set for the love among Christ's followers far transcends the "golden rule" ("Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them!"). Each one of us is to love others in the same manner that Christ loves His own. This kind of love protects against irreconcilability, prejudice, and derogatory views of others, since it accepts brother and sister as they are. (5.2.3)

5.3 The Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments comprise the core of the Mosaic Law, the five books of Moses (Torah). They bring to expression the kind of conduct that is pleasing to God and the kind that displeases Him. From them, specific instructions can be derived which demonstrate how the love for God and one's neighbour commanded by Jesus Christ is to be implemented in daily life.

In the Ten Commandments, God turns to all mankind and makes each individual personally responsible for his actions and conduct of life.

5.3.1 The term “commandment”

The designation “Ten Commandments” or “Decalogue” is derived from the biblical formulation “ten words” (*deka logoi*) in Exodus 34: 28 and Deuteronomy 10: 4.

5.3.1.1 The count

The Bible firmly establishes the count of the commandments at ten, but does not number them. This has led to differing ways of counting them. The counting method in use in the New Apostolic Church dates back to a tradition from the fourth century AD.

5.3.1.2 The Ten Commandments in the Old Testament

The Ten Commandments are assigned outstanding significance within the Mosaic Law: only these commandments were audibly declared to the people by God on Mount Sinai (Deuteronomy 5: 22) and only these commandments were written into stone tablets of the law (Exodus 34: 28).

The proclamation of the Ten Commandments is part of the covenant that God made with Israel. Thereby He renewed the covenant into which He entered with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob earlier in history (Deuteronomy 5: 2–3). In Deuteronomy 4: 13: we read: “So He [God] declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.”

Keeping the commandments was a covenantal duty of the Israelites and was blessed by God (Deuteronomy 7: 7–16). Already the children of the people of Israel learned them by heart (Deuteronomy 6: 6–9). To this day the Ten Commandments have retained their great significance in Judaism.

5.3.1.3 The Ten Commandments in the New Testament

In the New Testament the Ten Commandments are reinforced and given deeper meaning by the Son of God. In the statements He makes, Jesus Christ shows Himself to be Lord over the Commandments, and indeed over the entire law (Matthew 12: 8). His words to the rich young man make it clear that eternal life can only be attained if, beyond the mere observance of the commandments, one is also prepared to follow Christ (Matthew 19: 16–22; Mark 10: 17–21).

Jesus Christ opened up an entirely new perspective on the Mosaic Law (*see* 4.8)—and therefore also on the Ten Commandments. Apostle Paul brought the purpose of the Mosaic Law—according to the understanding of the Old Testament—to expression as follows: “For by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3: 20).

Violation of even a single one of these commandments makes a person guilty of breaking the law as a whole (James 2: 10). Accordingly, all human beings break the law—and thus all human beings are sinners.

The law makes it possible to recognise sin. Only the sacrifice of Christ, the foundation of the new covenant, is capable of washing away sins that have been committed.

The Ten Commandments also apply in the new covenant. They are binding upon all human beings. The reason for the changed understanding of the Ten Commandments also lies in the fact that—in accordance with the prophecies recorded in Jeremiah 31: 33–34—God’s law is no longer written on stone tablets, but rather into the hearts and minds of all mankind. The law as a whole is fulfilled by fulfilling the commandment of love for God and one’s neighbour (Romans 13: 8–10).

5.3.1.4 The wording

The wording of the Ten Commandments in use today is not the same as that contained in the Bible text. A simple format that is easy to remember and that keeps the original meaning is preferred.

The Ten Commandments in their present-day wording	The Ten Commandments in Exodus 20: 2-17	The Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5: 6-21
First Commandment		
<p>I am the Lord, your God. You shall have no other gods before Me.</p>	<p>I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me.</p> <p>You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.</p> <p>For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.</p>	<p>I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me.</p> <p>You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.</p> <p>For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.</p>

The Ten Commandments in their present-day wording	The Ten Commandments in Exodus 20: 2-17	The Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5: 6-21
Second Commandment		
You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.	You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.	You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.
Third Commandment		
Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.	Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.	Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

The Ten Commandments in their present-day wording	The Ten Commandments in Exodus 20: 2-17	The Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5: 6-21
Fourth Commandment		
Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.	Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.	Honour your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you.
Fifth Commandment		
You shall not murder.	You shall not murder.	You shall not murder.
Sixth Commandment		
You shall not commit adultery.	You shall not commit adultery.	You shall not commit adultery.
Seventh Commandment		
You shall not steal.	You shall not steal.	You shall not steal.
Eighth Commandment		
You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.	You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.	You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.
Ninth Commandment		
You shall not covet your neighbour's house.	You shall not covet your neighbour's house.	You shall not covet your neighbour's wife;
Tenth Commandment		
You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbour's.	You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbour's.	and you shall not desire your neighbour's house, his field, his male servant, his female servant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that is your neighbour's.

SUMMARY

The Ten Commandments comprise the core of the Mosaic Law. In them God addresses all human beings. (5.3)

The proclamation of the Ten Commandments, which the people were obliged to fulfil, is part of God's covenant with Israel. (5.3.1.2)

Jesus Christ opened up a new perspective on the Mosaic Law and thus on the Ten Commandments. They are also valid in the new covenant. (5.3.1.3)

The text of the Ten Commandments is recorded twice in Holy Scripture: Exodus 20: 2–17 and Deuteronomy 5: 6–21. (5.3.1.4)

5.3.2 The First Commandment

I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before Me.

5.3.2.1 God—Lord and Benefactor

“I am the Lord your God.” This statement stands as an introduction to all the commandments that follow, and brings to expression that God is Lord over all. Unrestricted sovereignty is due Him, the Creator of all things. He establishes the law through His word. He is to be obeyed.

The Old Testament attests of this awareness in the books of the law, in the Psalms, and in the prophets. The New Testament emphasises: Christ is Lord. His divine will is binding.

God is not only the ruler, but also the protector. In His blessing He reveals Himself as a benefactor to all human beings.

5.3.2.2 God leads out of bondage

Although God is absolutely sovereign and accountable to no one, He nevertheless explains His demand of obedience to the Israelites: He led Israel “out of the house of bondage” and out of slavery in Egypt. He is the God who leads into freedom. He is the redeeming God.

God, who liberated the people of Israel from foreign rule in an earthly sense, reveals Himself as the benefactor of all human beings in a much greater sense in His Son Jesus Christ: out of love, God sends His Son. The latter sacrifices His sinless life on the cross out of love and in obedience. Ever since, all human beings have had the opportunity to be redeemed from bondage to sin and death. Those who recognise the significance of redemption will want to show love and obedience to the Redeemer. The close relationship between the First Commandment and the call to love God is emphasised in Deuteronomy 6: 4–5: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”

5.3.2.3 Worship and the fear of God

Only God the Lord is worthy of worship. Only He is to be served.

The forms of worshipping God in the old covenant are various. The Psalms attest that praise and adoration come to expression in prayer. The sacrificial service in the temple was also a form of worship.

Over the course of time, the temple cult misled the people to practise an externalised and ritualised worship of God, which was already denounced by the prophets (Amos 5: 21–22, 24). Jesus also picked up on this prophetic tradition and taught: “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4: 23–24). Thus the proper worship of God is

not a purely formal act, but rather consists of a human being's complete devotion to God.

Devotion to God is also defined by the fear of God, that is to say respect for God. The fear of God is not an expression of subservient fear, but rather of humbleness, love, and trust. It expresses itself in the worship of the Most High out of childlike love, and in unconditional acceptance of God's majesty. The fear of God is evidenced in the endeavour to keep the commandments, in other words, to avoid sin.

5.3.2.4 The prohibition against worshipping other gods

"You shall have no other gods before me." With these words, God makes it clear that He is the only One to whom worship and reverence as God are due. The veneration or worship of anything else that human beings might consider divine—be they living creatures, natural phenomena, objects, or real or imagined spiritual beings—is sin. Paul writes: "For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is *one* God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and *one* Lord Jesus, through whom are all things, and through whom we live" (1 Corinthians 8: 5–6).

5.3.2.5 The prohibition of images

Israel was surrounded by peoples who worshipped constellations and natural phenomena, statues, animal figurines, stones, and the like, as gods or their manifestations. The Israelites allowed themselves to be influenced by such cults and from time to time created images which they worshipped, for example, the golden calf (Exodus 32).

The biblical wording of the First Commandment forbids the fabrication of any images of things created by God: "You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in

the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them” (Exodus 20: 4–5).

The prohibition against the fabrication and worship of images must be seen in the context that images and statues were venerated and worshipped as divinities.

Human beings are not to make any image of God for themselves, but rather accept Him as He has appeared in the world: in Jesus Christ, the self-revelation of God in the flesh. Here it is not a matter of an external form of appearance, but rather of God's nature and will (John 14: 9).

Christian tradition does not regard the First Commandment as a prohibition against making pictures, sculptures, photos, or films, however. Among other things, this position can be derived from the fact that, according to the biblical account, God Himself commissioned sculptures to be made (Numbers 21: 8–9).

5.3.2.6 Violations of the First Commandment

The veneration and worship of statues, idols, or amulets, as well as mountains, trees, and natural phenomena, are violations of the First Commandment. Further violations of the First Commandment include Satanism, fortune-telling, magic, spiritualism, and necromancy.

It is contrary to God's will to make a god, as it were, of power, honour, money, or one's own person, to which everything else must be subordinate. Likewise, it is a violation of the First Commandment to create a conception of God that is defined by one's own wishes or opinions.

The First Commandment calls on us to honour God out of love and accept Him as He has revealed Himself. Such worship of God is conducted in adoration, obedience, and the fear of God. In this manner the words are fulfilled: “Ascribe greatness to our God” (Deuteronomy 32: 3).

Devotional images, icons, statues, and the like do not have any sort of religious function in the New Apostolic Church. They are not worshipped. They are not ascribed any spiritual powers or healing effects.

SUMMARY

The words: “I am the Lord, Your God” bring to expression that God is due unrestricted sovereignty. Through His word He makes laws that are to be obeyed. (5.3.2.1)

God is the only one whom worship is due. The worship of any other living creatures, natural phenomena, objects, or real or imagined spiritual beings is sin. (5.3.2.3; 5.3.2.4)

Human beings are not to make any images of God, but are rather to accept Him as He has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. (5.3.2.5)

Veneration of God also occurs in worship, obedience, and the fear of God. (5.3.2.6)

5.3.3 The Second Commandment

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

5.3.3.1 God’s name

When God spoke to Moses from the burning bush, He stated His name (Exodus 3: 14). This was at the same time an act in which God revealed His being. The name “Yahweh”, which God made known here, can be translated as “I shall be who I shall be” or also as “I am who I am”. In this way, God reveals Himself as the One who is totally identical to Himself, unchangeable, and eternal.

Out of reverence, Jews avoid speaking the name of Yahweh. To this day, whenever this name of God appears in the text of the Old Testament, Jews

speak the name “Adonai” (“Lord”). This is an effort to avoid the danger of taking the name of God in vain, even unintentionally.

The Old Testament also mentions other names for God, for example “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” or the “Lord God of your fathers”. These names refer to divine acts in history as experienced in the time of the patriarchs. God is also called “Lord Sabaoth” (“Lord of hosts”). Here the term “hosts” refers to the angels.

God is also described as “Father” (Isaiah 63: 16). When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He told them to address God as the “Father in heaven” (Matthew 6: 9). The designation “Father” makes it clear that human beings may turn to the loving God in childlike trust in all matters.

In the great commission given to the Apostles (Matthew 28: 19) and in the blessing recorded in 2 Corinthians 13: 14, God is referred to as “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”. This name reveals the divine being in hitherto unknown clarity: God is triune, and is invoked and worshipped as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is forbidden to speak of the three divine persons in an inappropriate manner.

5.3.3.2 Forms of taking the name of God in vain

Anyone who speaks the name of God should do so in the awareness that he bears responsibility to God for this.

Blasphemy is a serious abuse of the name of God by way of which God is intentionally vilified, derided, or berated. Anyone who invokes the Almighty while telling a lie is also taking the name of God in vain.

In the course of history, people have frequently taken God's name in vain in order to enrich themselves, wage wars, discriminate against other human beings, or to torture and kill.

Violations of the Second Commandment can also be found in daily life. Any loose talk using the names “God”, “Jesus Christ”, or “Holy Spirit” is sinful. It is no different for curses in which God or Jesus are mentioned—even

if only in altered form—and for jokes which feature God, the Father, Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit. Such talk degrades God’s majesty and the holiness of His activity. This is to be considered “coarse jesting” as described in Ephesians 5: 4.

5.3.3.3 The threat of punishment

The second part of the commandment states: “... for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.” This makes clear that God’s commandments must be taken seriously. The Bible is silent on the question of what this punishment specifically entails. Anyone who becomes aware that he has used God’s name in vain and repents of it may hope for forgiveness.

Love for God and the fear of God—not fear of any punishment—should be the primary motivation for obeying the Second Commandment.

5.3.3.4 Hallowing God’s name—prayer and conduct of life

The Second Commandment admonishes us to keep holy everything that has to do with God and His name. This also applies to our conduct of life. As a Christian, the believer bears a special responsibility toward the divine name. If those called by His name were to conduct their lives dishonourably, they would thereby dishonour the name of God.

On account of their relationship to their heavenly Father, God’s children bear a high degree of responsibility for keeping the name of God holy, as they bear the name of the Father and the Son (Revelation 14: 1).

5.3.3.5 Oath—Vow

The question of whether it is permissible to take an oath by invoking—or to make a vow using—God’s name is linked to the Second Commandment.

While this was permitted in Israel (Deuteronomy 6: 13; Deuteronomy 10: 20), swearing was forbidden in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5: 33–37).

The inconsistent statements about swearing in the New Testament (James 5: 12; Romans 1: 9; 2 Corinthians 1: 23; Philippians 1: 8, etc.) allow us to conclude that the prohibition against swearing was not regarded as a general standard of conduct. Accordingly, Christian tradition applies Jesus Christ's prohibition only to frivolous swearing in daily life but not to taking an oath in a court of law, for example. When someone calls upon God as witness in a mandatory oath formulation ("So help me God")—in order to declare his obligation to be truthful to the Eternal One—he thereby publicly professes his faith in the omnipotent, omniscient God. Such an oath is not seen as a sin.

SUMMARY

With the name "Yahweh"—"I shall be who I shall be", or "I am who I am"—God identifies Himself as the One who is completely identical with Himself, unchangeable, and eternal. (5.3.3.1)

Blasphemy is the serious abuse of the name of God. (5.3.3.2)

The Second Commandment is the only Commandment that contains a threat of punishment. (5.3.3.3)

It admonishes keeping the name of God holy, also in one's conduct of life. (5.3.3.4)

Frivolous swearing while invoking God's name is a violation of the Second Commandment. (5.3.3.5)

5.3.4 The Third Commandment

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

The Third Commandment is an exhortation to set aside one day of the week in order to worship God, gratefully remember His deeds of salvation, and occupy oneself with His word.

5.3.4.1 Reasons for the Third Commandment in Israel

The Sabbath is to be kept holy as part of the order of creation because God rested on the seventh day of creation and hallowed it (Genesis 2: 2–3; Exodus 20: 8–11). Thus the holiday has been given in order to honour and commemorate God’s creative work, which benefits all of mankind.

Another reason for keeping the Sabbath day holy is recorded in Deuteronomy 5: 15: “And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.”

The day of rest therefore serves to praise the Creator and recall Israel’s liberation from captivity. Besides this, the Sabbath commemorates God’s deeds upon mankind and for His chosen people in particular.

5.3.4.2 The Sabbath in Israel

Even before issuing the law on Mount Sinai, God had set apart the Sabbath (Exodus 16: 4–30). He gave the Sabbath as a gift, as a day on which the people of Israel were to rest from work and turn to God without distraction. Thus the Sabbath was a day of rest and, at the same time, a holy day. It was characterised by a special sacrificial service (Numbers 28: 9–10). Those who honoured the Sabbath and avoided personal business and idle talk (Isaiah 58: 13–14) were promised blessing.

5.3.4.3 Jesus Christ and the Sabbath

Jesus' position on the Sabbath differed fundamentally from that of the law-abiding Jews. The conduct of the Son of God makes it clear that the law and the gospel assessed the Sabbath differently. Although Jesus did go to the synagogue on the Sabbath (Luke 4: 16), He nevertheless healed the sick there (Luke 6: 6–11)—which was considered by the scribes to be work, and thus a violation of the Third Commandment. For Jesus, on the other hand, healing the sick was an expression of divine beneficence, and thus also permissible on the Sabbath.

Jesus Christ has the authority to liberate the day of rest from the constrictions of strict legalism: “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2: 27).

5.3.4.4 From Sabbath to Sunday

“For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath” (Matthew 12: 8)—these words of Jesus, which document His divine authority over the law, were also fulfilled in the changing of the day of the week that is hallowed by nearly all Christians: while the seventh day of the Jewish calendar—the Sabbath—is hallowed in Israel, Christians celebrate the Sunday. The reason for this is that, according to the unanimous testimony of the gospels, Jesus Christ resurrected from the dead on this day of the week (Matthew 28: 1; Mark 16: 2; Luke 24: 1; John 20: 1). For Christians, hallowing the Sunday is therefore also a profession of Jesus Christ's resurrection and a remembrance of Easter.

After Christ's ascension into heaven, the early Christians still held on to their Jewish traditions, which also included keeping the Sabbath day holy. This changed with the missionary work among the Gentiles. Over the course of several decades, the Sunday developed into the Christian holiday. The first references to the significance of the Sunday can be found in Acts 20: 7 and 1 Corinthians 16: 2.

In AD 321, Emperor Constantine I decreed Sunday to be a day of general rest in the Roman Empire. In Christian countries, this regulation has largely retained its validity up to the present.

5.3.4.5 Keeping Sunday holy—in divine service

Above all, believers sanctify the Sunday by worshipping God in divine service, believingly accepting His word, receiving forgiveness of sins in a repentant attitude, and worthily partaking of Christ's body and blood in the sacrament of Holy Communion. In so doing, believers commemorate Christ's sacrifice and act of redemption, celebrate the Lord's resurrection, and direct their eyes to His return. By attending the divine service, believers show their gratitude for Jesus' acts of salvation. This also brings to expression their longing for God's word and the sacrament.

Members who are unable to attend divine services on account of professional activity, sickness, disability, or age hallow the Sunday by seeking a connection to God and the congregation in prayer to the best of their abilities. God draws near to them and grants them peace, comfort, and strength (*see 12.4.3*).

Those holidays of the church year (*see 12.5*) which do not fall on a Sunday are also celebrated with divine services.

Beyond that, the Sabbath—as a day of rest—is a model of the rest we have been promised with God. The link between the Third Commandment and this future “day of rest” is described in Hebrews 4: 4–11. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to make use of “today”, and believingly accept God's word and sacrament in the divine service (Hebrews 3: 7).

5.3.4.6 Working on Sundays—between duty and sanctification

Those who sanctify Jesus Christ in their hearts (1 Peter 3: 15) will seek fellowship with Him in divine service whenever possible. Those who have to work

on a Sunday should seek to connect themselves to God and the congregation through prayer.

5.3.4.7 The structure of the Sunday

As far as possible, the Sunday should be a day of rest and remembrance of the gospel. It is the soul's special day—here its needs stand in the foreground. Divine values such as peace and fellowship contribute to sanctification.

The commandment to keep the Sunday holy calls upon believers to assess the degree to which their activities are consistent with the purpose of this day, which is consecrated to the Lord. Their primary concern should be to deepen and preserve the effect of the divine service.

If the Sunday is utilised in this way, the faithful live in accordance with the exhortation in Psalm 118: 24: "This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it."

SUMMARY

The Sabbath serves to praise the Creator and recall Israel's deliverance from captivity. It is on this day that God's deeds upon mankind and His chosen people are commemorated. (5.3.4.1)

Christians celebrate the Sunday, the day of Jesus Christ's resurrection, as the Sabbath. (5.3.4.4)

Attendance in divine service demonstrates the believer's gratitude for Christ's deeds of salvation. (5.3.4.5)

The Sabbath as a day of rest foreshadows the promised rest we will have with God. (5.3.4.5)

The Third Commandment calls upon believers to structure the Sunday as a day dedicated to the Lord. (5.3.4.7)

5.3.5 The Fourth Commandment

Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

The provisions of the Ten Commandments that apply to interpersonal relationships begin with the Fourth Commandment. The Commandment does not contain any kind of prohibition, but rather demonstrates the mode of conduct that is pleasing to God. It is directed at people of all ages, and requires them to accord their father and mother the esteem and appreciation they are due. The specific implementation of this commandment can take different forms, depending on particular life circumstances such as age, social environment, and social norms and customs.

5.3.5.1 The Fourth Commandment according to the understanding of the Old Testament

Like the Mosaic Law as a whole, the Fourth Commandment stands in the context of the Israelites' desert migration (Deuteronomy 5: 16). It is from this historical situation that the original meaning of the commandment can be derived: it applied first and foremost to the liberated Israelites (according to the understanding of the time, it thus did not include women, foreigners, or slaves). They were to show honour to the older members of the family by providing them with support in this arduous journey. The promise mentioned in the commandment also applied to the Israelites: they were to live long—that is things were to go well with them—specifically in Canaan, the land that had yet to be conquered. Here it becomes clear that, for the people of the old covenant, “long days” were associated with earthly life. When the Israelites later settled in Canaan, the children honoured their aged parents by providing for them and caring for them in the event of illness.

Several writings of the Old Testament give interpretations of this commandment: for example, Ecclesiasticus 3: 12 relates the Fourth Commandment to the relationship with the now aged parents: “My son, help thy father

in his age, and grieve him not as long as he liveth.” Proverbs 1: 8 admonishes obedience toward father and mother, and according to Tobit 10: 12, even one’s parents-in-law are to be honoured: “And he said to his daughter, ‘Honour thy father and thy mother-in-law, which are now thy parents, that I may hear good report of thee.’ And he kissed her.”

5.3.5.2 Jesus Christ and the Fourth Commandment

According to Luke 2: 51, Jesus subordinated Himself obediently to His mother Mary and her husband, Joseph. Just how far His devotion to His mother extended is demonstrated by His conduct on Golgotha: on the cross He honoured Mary by commending her to the care of Apostle John (John 19: 27).

In His conversation with the rich young man the Son of God mentioned the Fourth Commandment as being important for attaining eternal life (Mark 10: 17–19). In His teaching activity, the Lord reproved the teachers of the law for undermining that aspect of the commandment which applied to providing for one’s parents in their old age (Mark 7: 9–13).

5.3.5.3 The Fourth Commandment in the letters of Apostle Paul

The letters of Apostle Paul expressly mention the Fourth Commandment. Children are admonished to be obedient to their parents (Ephesians 6: 1–3; Colossians 3: 20). The disobedience of children toward their parents is even included in the so-called catalogue of vices (Romans 1: 30; 2 Timothy 3: 2). On the other hand, fathers are also admonished to behave in a considerate way toward their children (Ephesians 6: 4), and mothers are to love their children (Titus 2: 4). Here it becomes clear that, in addition to the obligations arising for children from the Fourth Commandment, parents also have obligations toward their children.

5.3.5.4 The broadening of the Fourth Commandment in Christian tradition

Over the course of time, the Fourth Commandment developed a broader meaning. While the wording of the commandment only speaks of honouring one's parents, Christian tradition also regarded this commandment as an obligation to acknowledge all authority. The Fourth Commandment relates primarily to one's conduct with respect to one's forefathers.

Any obligation of obedience—even toward one's parents—is tempered by the standard: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5: 29).

5.3.5.5 The Fourth Commandment in modern life

Regardless of their age, children have the unaltered task of honouring their parents.

If their relationship with one another is characterised by love and trust, parents can expect obedience of their children. Adolescents are called upon to become aware of all the care their parents have shown them in the course of their childhood and youth. This leads to a thankful disposition. Esteem and respect should be perceptible in their dealings with parents, as well as in their conversations with them and about them.

There is also an obligation for parents that arises from the Fourth Commandment: they bear a high degree of responsibility in raising their children, and are to ensure—through their own God-pleasing conduct—that they do not make it difficult for their children to esteem them. Through the way in which they treat, speak with, and speak of their own parents and parents-in-law, parents set an example for their children. It is conducive to a harmonious family life when parents and children treat one another with love and thereby build up and maintain a relationship of trust.

Fulfilling the Fourth Commandment also entails loving acceptance of one's parents even in high age. If one's conduct is characterised by thankfulness, love, and trust, the Fourth Commandment is fulfilled and the blessing

of God can rest upon it. In the conception of the Old Testament, “long life” is an expression for God’s blessing. In the new covenant this blessing reveals itself primarily in spiritual gifts.

SUMMARY

The regulations that apply to interpersonal relationships begin with the Fourth Commandment. It does not contain any prohibition, but rather demonstrates a God-pleasing mode of conduct. (5.3.5)

In addition to the obligation of children to honour their parents, parents also have obligations, namely to provide for their children and set an example for them. (5.3.5.5)

If the commandment is fulfilled, it attracts the blessing of God. (5.3.5.5)

5.3.6 The Fifth Commandment

You shall not murder.

5.3.6.1 The prohibition against killing in the Old Testament

The literal translation of this commandment from the original Hebrew text is: “You shall not murder!” In its original meaning, the Fifth Commandment forbade the unauthorised, unlawful shedding of innocent blood which was damaging to the community. It did not refer to military service or the death penalty.

In terms of penalties, the Mosaic Law distinguished between inadvertent, negligent, and deliberate homicide (Exodus 21: 12–14).

Generally, killing was punishable by death in Israel. In the case of the first two kinds of homicide referenced above, however, the perpetrator had the option of avoiding this punishment: if he succeeded in reaching one of the

“cities of refuge”, he was safe from the avenger of blood (Numbers 35: 6–34). In the case of deliberate murder, however, the death penalty was unavoidable.

The Old Testament mentions killing on several occasions, for example in connection with the conquest of the land of Canaan or the battles of the people of Israel against the Philistines. Warfare was also considered a legitimate means of protecting Israel from idolatry.

5.3.6.2 The prohibition against killing in the New Testament

Jesus’ interpretation of the Fifth Commandment went far beyond the original meaning: “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgement.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgement” (Matthew 5: 21–22). Thus He did not confine the observance of this commandment to its literal fulfilment, but also took into account the individual’s inner attitude. Accordingly we read as follows in 1 John 3: 15: “Whoever hates his brother is a murderer.”

5.3.6.3 The significance of the Fifth Commandment today

Life is given by God. God alone is the Lord of life and death. Therefore no human being is entitled to terminate a human life.

Violence and disregard for life in today’s society must not relativise the commandment.

The commandment not to murder also incorporates the duty to protect and preserve human life.

5.3.6.4 Specific questions concerning the Fifth Commandment

All specific questions are to be answered with a view to the basic principle that God is the source of all life. He is the authority in whose hands the beginning and end of human life lies. No human being is entitled to violate this divine order.

Death penalty

The New Apostolic Church does not recognise the death penalty as a suitable deterrent, and therefore does not regard it as a suitable means of community protection either.

Wars

Killing in war constitutes a violation of the Fifth Commandment, even though the individual is hardly able to influence the events. However, even in such exceptional situations, it is the individual's responsibility to choose the lesser evil and to do his very best to avoid killing. Even in certain cases where one might attempt to justify the use of violence in order to prevent greater harm, or for the purposes of self-defence, killing is a violation of the Fifth Commandment.

Grounds for justification and exemption from guilt

Even killing in self-defence is a violation of the Fifth Commandment. Regardless of the legal penalty, however, the guilt incurred before God may, in this and in similar cases, be minimal.

Killing unborn life

Unborn life is to be respected and protected, since it must be assumed that it is, already from the moment of conception, a human life given by God. Thus the Church disapproves of killing embryos—that is abortion as well as the destruction of artificially generated human life. If, however, a medical prognosis concludes that a mother's life is in danger, her life should be saved. Although such a case still constitutes a violation of the Fifth Commandment, the guilt incurred may certainly be minimal.

Suicide

Suicide is a violation of the Fifth Commandment.

Assisted suicide

This applies to a terminally ill person for whom there is no prospect of healing and whose suffering cannot be alleviated.

Active assisted suicide

Active assisted suicide is a violation of the Fifth Commandment, just like helping someone to commit suicide.

Passive assisted suicide

Any decision regarding measures to prolong life is, first and foremost, up to the patient himself. In the event there is no statement of will, this decision should be made solely in consultation with doctors and relatives after a responsible assessment of the patient's best interests. Neither of these cases is considered a violation of the Fifth Commandment.

Euthanasia

The killing of handicapped or maimed human beings is a violation of the Fifth Commandment.

Killing other living creatures

The killing of animals is not covered by the Fifth Commandment. Genesis 9: 1–3 expressly allows for animals to serve as food for human beings. Nevertheless, the life of the mute creatures is also to be respected. This derives from mankind's shared responsibility for the preservation of the creation. It is every individual's duty to respect all life.

SUMMARY

Life has been given by God. He alone is Lord over life and death. Therefore it is not permitted for any human being to terminate a human life. (5.3.6.3)

According to its original meaning, the Fifth Commandment forbids the arbitrary, unlawful shedding of blood which is harmful to the community. (5.3.6.1)

Jesus did not limit the fulfilment of this commandment to its literal observance, but rather also takes into account the inner attitude of the individual. (5.3.6.2)

The commandment not to murder also includes the mandate to protect and preserve human life. (5.3.6.3)

5.3.7 The Sixth Commandment

You shall not commit adultery.

5.3.7.1 Marriage

Marriage is the lifelong union between a man and a woman as desired by God. It is based on an act of free will which is expressed in a public vow of fidelity (Matthew 19: 4–5).

The Bible describes various forms of marriage. Whereas the Old Testament often speaks of polygamy (marriage to many partners, understood here as one man married to several women), Jesus Christ—and with Him the New Testament, gives unequivocal support to monogamy (marriage to one partner) as the form of matrimonial cohabitation of man and woman that is desired by God and appropriate to believing Christians (Matthew 19: 5–6; 1 Timothy 3: 2, 12; 5: 9).

Already in the Old Testament, marriage was understood as a covenant protected by God (Proverbs 2: 17; Malachi 2: 13–16) and blessed through prayer: “And after they were both shut in together, Tobias rose out of the bed, and said, ‘Sister, arise, and let us pray that God will have pity on us.’ Then began Tobias to say, ‘Blessed art Thou, O God of our fathers, and blessed is Thy holy and glorious name for ever; let the heavens bless Thee and all Thy creatures’” (Tobit 8: 4–5).

Generally, couples where at least one partner should be New Apostolic may receive a wedding blessing in the New Apostolic Church upon their request. This blessing of God contains powers that will enable them to fashion their future life together in a manner desired by God. This includes the ser-

ious endeavour on the part of the married couple to pursue their path of life together in love and the fear of God.

Marriage, as it corresponds to God's will, is an image of Christ's fellowship with His church and is therefore holy. It obliges both partners to honour and love one another (Ephesians 5: 25, 28–33). Marriage is intended to be indissoluble until death: "Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19: 6). In view of this, it is advisable to protect and nurture marriage.

5.3.7.2 Adultery

In general terms, any married person who has sexual intercourse with someone other than his/her spouse, or any unmarried person who has sexual intercourse with a married person, commits adultery. According to the words of Jesus: "But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5: 28), "adultery of the heart" can occur despite an outwardly blameless conduct of life. This commandment is not only violated by committing the actual act of adultery, but already when it is played out in thought (Mark 7: 20–23).

5.3.7.3 Divorce

In the New Testament, divorce is assessed as sin: "Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Mark 10: 9). The only exception in which divorce was permissible was in the case of adultery committed by one's spouse (Matthew 19: 9).

The gospel of Mark describes the remarriage of a divorced person as adultery (Mark 10: 11–12). According to further statements in the New Testament, divorce and remarriage during the lifetime of the divorced spouse are violations of the Sixth Commandment. Remarriage after divorce was apparently—though with certain exceptions—not accepted in the early Christian congregations (1 Corinthians 7: 10–11, 39; Romans 7: 2–3).

The New Testament's statements concerning divorce need to be seen in the historical and social context of the ancient world: they served, above all, to improve the situation of women, who only had very limited rights. The woman was to be protected from being arbitrarily cast aside by her husband.

The abovementioned quotations from the Bible notwithstanding, the church still faces the question of how to deal with divorced persons. Here the overall personal circumstances are to be taken into account. It can be difficult to make decisions that correspond to the spirit of the gospel. It should always be kept in mind that Jesus did not deal with mankind in the spirit of the legalities of the old covenant, but in the spirit of love and grace (John 8: 2–11).

Like any other sin, adultery and divorce require forgiveness. When a marriage ends in divorce, it is usually the case that both partners have contributed to it. The degree of individual guilt may vary. For example, there are cases in which one partner may use violence or may not wish to maintain the marriage. It is therefore good for both partners to earnestly examine themselves and take stock of the personal idiosyncrasies and modes of conduct that have contributed to the situation.

Separated and divorced persons are not excluded from receiving the sacraments. They have their place in the congregation and are cared for by their ministers in unbiased fashion.

Divorced persons who wish to remarry and who request a wedding blessing will receive it. This is to provide them with an opportunity for a new start.

5.3.7.4 Holy conduct in marriage

Marriage should be honoured and the matrimonial bed kept “undefiled” (Hebrews 13: 4). The insight that the body of a reborn individual is the dwelling place of God, and also the property of the Most High, results in the obligation to live a holy life (1 Corinthians 6: 19–20). This applies in particular to one's conduct in marriage (1 Thessalonians 4: 3–4; *see also* 13.3).

SUMMARY

Marriage is the union of man and woman as desired by God. As an image of the fellowship of Christ with His church, it is intended to be indissoluble. Given this context it is advisable to protect and promote matrimony. (5.3.7.1)

Any married individual who engages in sexual intercourse with anyone other than his or her spouse, and any unmarried individual who has sexual intercourse with someone who is married, commits adultery. (5.3.7.2)

Violation of this commandment has already occurred if adultery has already been played out in thought. (5.3.7.2)

5.3.8 The Seventh Commandment

You shall not steal.

5.3.8.1 Theft in general legal systems

It is forbidden to take that which belongs to another person. This prohibition of theft, which has its source in God, is one of the basic principles of human legal systems and serves to ensure protection of, and respect for, property.

However, the commandment to love one's neighbour also entails that property should not be used in an avaricious and selfish way. Possessions thus also imply responsibilities.

Generally, theft is understood as the illegal misappropriation of another person's property. This can apply to both material things and intellectual property. It is forbidden to unlawfully acquire or damage the property of others. Likewise it is forbidden to deceive others in order to thereby acquire undue gain at their expense. The lust for power and profit must be held in check. It is also necessary to respect the dignity and wellbeing of others.

5.3.8.2 The prohibition against theft in the Old Testament

Originally the prohibition against stealing was intended, above all, to outlaw kidnapping. The purpose of this was to protect free men from being kidnapped, sold, or held captive. In Israel, kidnapping was punishable by death—in contrast to property offences, for which one was able to atone by material compensation: “He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, shall surely be put to death” (Exodus 21: 16). This was therefore an offence that was punishable by the most severe of all possible penalties.

Beyond that, it was also a punishable offence to steal another person's property. The Mosaic Law required compensation to be made for stolen property. As a rule, twice—and in more severe cases even four and five times—the amount stolen had to be replaced (Exodus 22: 1, 4, 7, 9).

5.3.8.3 The prohibition against theft in the New Testament

In His conversation with the rich young man (Matthew 19: 16–23) Jesus quoted the Seventh Commandment. In Mark 7: 20–23, the Lord described theft as a sin, which has its root in the hearts of men and defiles them. In these passages, the Seventh Commandment is interpreted in traditional Old Testament terms.

In John 10: 1 the Seventh Commandment is extended and elevated to a spiritual level: “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.” This is a reference to those who lead others to believe false teachings. They are thieves and robbers who act like wolves, searching for prey among the believers, and trying to snatch them from Christ's flock (Acts 20: 29).

5.3.8.4 Various forms of theft

Although theft in the literal sense occurs when material or intellectual property is taken from others, there are also other forms of theft. For example, fraud can also amount to theft according to the meaning of the Seventh Commandment.

The event related in Luke 19: 1–10 illuminates this aspect. The fortune of the tax collector Zacchaeus was in no small measure amassed through fraud. After Jesus had come to his house, the tax collector promised: “Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold” (Luke 19: 8). This example extends the concept of theft even further in the area of interpersonal relationships: it also includes usury, exploiting another person’s misfortune, misappropriation, and embezzlement. Fraud, tax evasion, corruption, and squandering money entrusted to one’s care also fall into this category.

Thus the Seventh Commandment is an admonition not to touch or unrightfully diminish the property of one’s neighbour, nor to rob him of his honour, reputation, or human dignity.

SUMMARY

It is forbidden to misappropriate the possessions of one’s neighbour in any way whatsoever. (5.3.8.1)

The Seventh Commandment is also an admonition not to encroach upon the honour, reputation, or human dignity of one’s neighbour. (5.3.8.4)

5.3.9 The Eighth Commandment

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

5.3.9.1 Original meaning

At first, the Eighth Commandment pertained to false statements made in court. For the Israelites, the “neighbour” (*see* 5.2.2) was generally anyone with whom they interacted in everyday life. Both false accusation and untrue testimony were considered “false witness”.

5.3.9.2 Examples of false witness in the time of the Old Testament

When dealing with cases involving the death penalty in Israel at the time of the Old Testament, at least two witnesses had to be summoned to court (Numbers 35: 30). If these accused the defendant using false testimony, he was, given the corresponding verdict, executed despite his innocence (1 Kings 21).

If, however, the court found that a witness had given false testimony, then this witness would receive the punishment which the defendant would have received if he had been found guilty (Deuteronomy 19: 18–19).

In Jewish wisdom literature, bearing false witness is associated with lying in general: “A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies shall perish” (Proverbs 19: 9).

5.3.9.3 Examples of false witness in the time of the New Testament

Jesus Christ repeatedly referred to the Eighth Commandment (e.g. Matthew 19: 18). He pointed out that violation of this commandment is an expression of an improper attitude and that it defiles a person (Matthew 15: 18–19).

The Son of God likewise had to experience what it meant to be accused by false witnesses: His death sentence was the result of such false testimony (Matthew 26: 57–66; Luke 23: 2). Even after His resurrection, the chief priests and elders circulated yet another lie (Matthew 28: 11–15). Jesus Christ, “the Faithful and True Witness” (Revelation 3: 14), suffered the lies of the false witnesses with regal dignity.

5.3.9.4 False witness today—prohibition against lying and fraud

All false witness is a lie. In a broader sense, the Eighth Commandment can be understood as a prohibition against any dishonest conduct (Leviticus 19: 11). Due to the imperfection inherent in human beings, no one will succeed in speaking nothing but the truth. However, the more diligently a person follows Christ, the more he will speak and act in a truthful manner.

Apostle Paul advises: “Therefore, putting away lying, ‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbour’” (Ephesians 4: 25). To speak truth with one’s neighbour does not, however, imply that everyone in every case may or should reproach his fellow man with unpleasant truths. Much evil could result if someone were to relentlessly denounce all the mistakes made in his surroundings. Even the Eighth Commandment is subordinate to the principle of loving one’s neighbour. Great care should therefore be taken in speaking to—and about—others. Accordingly, Proverbs 6: 19 states that “a false witness who speaks lies” is an abomination to God. This is also true for “one who sows discord among brethren”.

5.3.9.5 Further violations of the Eighth Commandment

Everyone is called upon to strive for sincerity and truthfulness. Our conduct in society and business should also be oriented by the Eighth Commandment.

Besides giving false testimony in court and blatantly lying, white lies, half-truths, statements intended to conceal the true facts, and slander are violations of the Eighth Commandment. Likewise bragging and exaggeration, duplicity and hypocrisy, spreading rumours, defamation, and flattery are expressions of untruthfulness.

5.3.9.6 False and true witness in the spiritual sense

The triune God is the epitome of truth (John 17: 17; 14: 6; 16: 13), whereas the Devil is the father of lies (John 8: 44). The true witness of the Holy Spirit stands in opposition to his false witness.

Christians are called upon to give true witness by believing in the gospel, proclaiming it, and conducting themselves in accordance with it.

SUMMARY

At first the Eighth Commandment only applied to bearing false witness in a court of law. Both false accusation and untrue testimony qualified as false witness. (5.3.9.1)

All false witness is a lie. In the expanded sense, the Eighth Commandment can also be seen as a prohibition against any dishonest conduct. (5.3.9.4)

Christians are to give truthful testimony by believing in the gospel, proclaiming it to others, and living a lifestyle in accordance with it. (5.3.9.6)

5.3.10 The Ninth and Tenth Commandments

You shall not covet your neighbour’s house. You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbour’s.

5.3.10.1 Different counting methods and versions

The last two of the Ten Commandments are closely linked to one another in terms of content. They are often counted together as the Tenth Commandment, for example in Judaism, whereas they are most often separated into the Ninth and Tenth Commandments in Christianity.

There are different versions of these two commandments. In Exodus 20: 17, the house of one’s neighbour is mentioned first, whereas Deuteronomy 5: 21 first mentions his wife.

5.3.10.2 Covetousness—the cause of sin

The core of the Ninth and Tenth Commandments is the statement: “You shall not covet ...” It does not prohibit each and every form of human desire, only the sinful lust after the wife or property of one’s neighbour. Such desire—like breaches of many other commandments—violates the commandment to love one’s neighbour (Romans 13: 9).

Since the beginning of time, Satan has tried to entice mankind to sin by awakening desire and lust for forbidden things (Genesis 3: 6). Adam and Eve succumbed to this desire and fell into sin through their disobedience to God’s commandment. The consequences are described in James 1: 15: “Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”

Covetousness—understood as sinful craving—originates within a person. It causes unclean thoughts to arise. If it is not restrained, this sinful thought

will be transformed into a deed. This becomes clear in the words of the Son of God: “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matthew 15: 19).

The Ninth and the Tenth Commandments assign man the task of watching over the purity of their hearts. This includes the endeavour to reject any temptation to commit sin.

5.3.10.3 Coveting the spouse of one's neighbour

In the Old Testament, David and Bathsheba provide a stark example of where the desire for the wife of one's neighbour can lead, namely to adultery, lies, and murder (2 Samuel 11). The Son of God also addressed the correlation between coveting the wife of one's neighbour and adultery (Matthew 5: 27–28). In Christian understanding, the commandment not to covet the wife of one's neighbour also prohibits a woman from desiring her neighbour's husband. If this covetousness is directed at the spouse of another person, this constitutes a violation of God's commandment. In this sense, 1 John 2: 16–17 can also be understood as a warning against such covetousness: “For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it.”

5.3.10.4 Coveting the property of one's neighbour

At the time of the Mosaic Law, a man's house, field, and livestock represented his possessions—as did his wife, male servant, and female servant. The commandment forbids coveting the property of one's neighbour. Such covetousness can lead to avarice and stems mostly from envy.

Covetousness drives the greedy to take possession of the property of others without any regard for them. The poor were often exploited by the unbridled greed of the powerful. Countless wars have also come into being in this way.

According to Ecclesiastes 5: 10, greed, like the love of money, is boundless, and cannot be satisfied. Apostle Paul calls the covetous “idolaters” (Ephesians 5: 5) and describes the love of money as “a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Timothy 6: 10–11).

5.3.10.5 Overcoming sinful desire

Galatians 5: 19–25 states that sinful desire manifests itself in sinful conduct, in “works of the flesh”, which are then described in dramatic fashion. Christians, however, should keep away from such sins: “And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” Apostle Paul assigns the following task: “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” To “walk in the Spirit” means to bring forth the fruit of the Holy Spirit, namely “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” Here the term self-control refers to self-restraint which manifests itself in moderation and abstinence. This virtue prevents budding desire from escalating into covetousness.

Christians are admonished to conduct themselves in accordance with their calling and to resist sinful desire “as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct” (1 Peter 1: 14–15).

SUMMARY

The last two commandments are very closely linked to one another in terms of content, and are often counted together as the Tenth Commandment. The core message common to both is the sinful desire for the wife or possessions of another human being. (5.3.10.1; 5.3.10.2)

The Ninth and Tenth Commandments assign human beings the task of safeguarding the purity of their hearts. (5.3.10.5)

Part 6

The church of
Jesus Christ

6

6 The church of Jesus Christ

The church of Jesus Christ has been established on earth by the Lord Himself. In it salvation is made accessible to human beings. In it human beings bring worship and praise to God.

6.1 Concerning the term “church”

The word “church” is derived from the Greek *kyriake* (“belonging to the Lord”). The New Testament uses the term *ekklesia* (“those who have been called out”). The word *ekklesia* can be translated as “assembly”, “congregation”, or “church”.

In general speech, the term “church” has various meanings. On the one hand it can mean a Christian house of God as a place of assembly for the believers. On the other hand it can refer to a gathering of people of Christian faith, that is a local parish. Beyond that, the term can also describe a Christian denomination. The following remarks refer to the “church” as an object of faith.

Those human beings who belong to the church of Christ have been called forth by God for eternal fellowship with Him, namely with God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The focal point of church life is the divine service. In the midst of the church, Jesus Christ prepares His bridal congregation through Apostles for His imminent return and the “marriage in heaven”.

6.2 Biblical foundation

On the one hand, the purpose of the church of Jesus Christ is to make salvation and eternal fellowship with the triune God accessible to mankind and, on the other hand, to bring worship and praise to God.

6.2.1 Old Testament references to the church of Jesus Christ

After the fall into sin, human beings could not remain in direct fellowship with God. They had to leave the environment in which God had granted them encounters with Himself. Through sin, mankind had fallen prey to death. God wishes to redeem human beings from this condition of deterioration into death, grant them salvation, and allow them to have eternal fellowship with Himself.

From the very beginning, God provided for mankind. Upon their expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the Creator clothed them and promised that a descendant of the woman would defeat the tempter (Genesis 3: 15).

The recognition that mankind is fundamentally dependent on God is brought to expression again and again in the Old Testament. This finds direct expression in the building of altars and the offering of sacrifices.

In the course of time, sin became overwhelmingly powerful, and mankind increasingly turned away from God. For this reason, God caused them to perish in the flood, a divine judgement. God granted grace to Noah and his family. They were saved in the ark. God made a covenant with them in which He promised all descendants of the human race that He would preserve and care for them. He gave the rainbow as a sign of this covenant.

These events are already a reference to God's acts of salvation which would later be carried out in the church of Christ: God inclines Himself to mankind, cares for and protects them, and takes them into His covenant. Deliverance in the ark is expressly interpreted in 1 Peter 3: 20–21 as a model for baptism, through which deliverance is effected in the new covenant. As a result, Christian tradition understands the ark as an image for the church of Christ.

The covenant with Noah included all human beings. Through God's election of Abraham, a further covenant was established, which called Abraham and his descendants into a special relationship with God: they became the chosen people of God. The outward sign of this covenant was circumcision. This covenant was confirmed with Isaac and Jacob.

When Moses received the Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai and passed them on to the people of Israel by God's commission, God revealed His will in the form of a law. This was proclaimed to a particular assembly, a congregation.

The law defined the relationship between human beings and God, as well as their relationships with one another. It established rules for proper divine service. The latter consisted of the sacrificial rite performed by the priests in the tabernacle, in addition to worship of, and devotion to, God by the people through prayer, profession, and obedience. As the people chosen by God, Israel was called to this divine service.

These elements of the old covenant also point to Jesus Christ and to the establishment of the church: the old covenant points to the new covenant, the old covenant mark of circumcision points to baptism, the proclamation of the divine will points to the preaching of the word of God, the priestly sacrificial service points to Holy Communion and its administration by the authorised ministry, and prayer and profession point to the worship of the triune God in Christian divine service.

The divine service of the Old Testament had its central place in the temple of Jerusalem, where it was celebrated in solemn fashion. It was there that the house of the Lord stood, and it was there that the people came together in order to praise God (Psalm 122) and bring Him sacrifices. This changed with the destruction of the temple and the ensuing Babylonian captivity of the Jewish people. During this period, the Jews gathered in synagogues for divine service, in which the word of God—the law—was read aloud and interpreted. The sacrificial service could not be performed there, however. In this respect, these divine services were deficient. Even once the temple in Jerusalem had been rebuilt after the Babylonian exile, and after sacrificial service had once

again become possible, the believers continued to gather for divine service in synagogues, in which the proclamation of the word was the focal element.

This serves as a reference to the church of the New Testament, in the centre of which Jesus Christ is present as the Word incarnate (John 1: 1). The epistle to the Hebrews interprets the old covenant with its law, sacrificial service, circumcision, and priesthood as a “shadow”—that is an anticipation—of the new covenant (Hebrews 8: 5; 10: 1). A shadow is not the object itself—it merely refers to the object. It is not the old covenant that is God’s perfect institution of salvation, but rather only the new covenant which Jesus Christ established.

Therefore the chosen people of the old covenant already foreshadowed that which would become reality in God’s people of the new covenant, in the church of Christ.

6.2.2 The beginning of the church of Christ

Everything that church is, and everything on which it is based, has its origin in the person and deed of Jesus Christ, who both is and brings salvation. “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Galatians 4: 4–5). Jesus, the Son of God, was born as a human being into God’s chosen people of the old covenant. God became Man—He entered into human history and became part of it.

He called human beings to follow Him, gathered disciples, preached the kingdom of God, revealed Himself—for example, in the Sermon on the Mount—as a lawgiver, healed the sick, fed the hungry, raised the dead, forgave sins, and promised and sent the Holy Spirit.

The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is the essential prerequisite for the existence of church. All other events pertaining to the foundation of the church are founded upon, and have derived from, this event: the choosing of the Apostles (Luke 6: 12–16), the establishment of the office of Peter (Matthew 16: 18), the institution of Holy Communion (Matthew 26: 20–29),

the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the great commission (Matthew 28: 19–20).

The first historical manifestation of the church of Christ was on Pentecost, with the outpouring of Holy Spirit. Apostle Peter preached in the power of the Holy Spirit and the first congregation came into being. Baptism, forgiveness of sins, and the receiving of the gift of Holy Spirit are elements that impart salvation on the path of redemption (Acts 2: 38). The early Christians “continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2: 42). These characteristics are of decisive importance for the church of Christ.

SUMMARY

The church of Jesus Christ has been established on earth by the Lord Himself. (6)

The term “church” is used to describe a Christian place of worship, a local parish, or a Christian denomination. In the theological sense, however, the term refers to the church of Jesus Christ. (6.1)

Those human beings who belong to the church of Jesus Christ have been called forth by God for eternal fellowship with Him. (6.1)

The purpose of the church of Jesus Christ is, on one hand, to make salvation and eternal fellowship with God accessible to human beings and, on the other hand, to bring worship and praise to God. (6.2)

Already in the Old Testament there are many references to the church of Christ. (6.2.1)

The letter to the Hebrews also interprets the old covenant—with its law, sacrificial service, circumcision, and priesthood—as a “shadow”, that is, a foreshadowing, of the new covenant. Thus the old covenant already intimated that which has become reality in the church of Jesus Christ in the new covenant. (6.2.1)

Everything that church is, and everything on which church is based, has its source in the person and deed of Jesus Christ. The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is the essential prerequisite for the existence of church. (6.2.2)

In history the church of Christ was first revealed on Pentecost with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. (6.2.2)

The early Christians continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. These characteristics are decisive for the church of Christ. (6.2.2)

6.2.3 Images for the church of Jesus Christ in the New Testament

The New Testament does not provide a self-contained doctrine of the church. There are, however, multiple images and examples through which the nature of the church is revealed. Each of these images refers to one or several aspects of the church. These images can be interpreted in various ways. Even the Bible uses them inconsistently.

6.2.3.1 The body of Christ

The image of the church as the body of Christ occupies a central position. It is often applied to those who, through baptism, faith, and profession, belong to Jesus Christ. In Romans 12: 4–5, believers are described as “members” of the one body of Christ. This image picks up on a common metaphor of the time, in which the state was envisioned as an organic body and the individual as a member of it. The gifts of the individual members of the congregation vary, as do their tasks. However, they are all interconnected and serve one another. Accordingly the church is an organism in which all are dependent on each other.

Despite the diversity of the individual members, together they comprise a single entity. As members of the body of Christ, they care for, and are united with, one another: “But now indeed there are many members, yet one body” (1 Corinthians 12: 20).

In Ephesians 1: 22–23, Christ is shown as the head of the church and the ruler of all things. This builds on the hymn recorded in the epistle to the Colossians in which it says: “He is the head of the body, the church” (Colossians 1: 18). In this imagery, the church of Christ is equated with the “body of Christ”. It shares in the perfection of its Lord.

The image of the body is also used for the local congregation, in which imperfect human beings are to “come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4: 13).

The growth of the body—applied to the church as a whole, as well as to the local congregation and the individual believers—occurs through the activity of God (Colossians 2: 19). This growth is oriented toward Christ. As the head, He is the Lord, the standard, and the goal (Ephesians 4: 15). For the edification of the body of Christ, God provided ministries and commissions.

6.2.3.2 The people of God

The image of the people of God refers to the fact that God has chosen a single people from among all the various peoples: “For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers ...” (Deuteronomy 7: 6–8).

The history of Israel is founded on God’s activity of redemption. He liberated the people from slavery in Egypt and brought them into the Promised Land. It was to this people that He sent His Son, and it was in the midst of

this people that God became Man. Israel, however, rejected Jesus as the Messiah and did not believe in Him: for God's people of the old covenant, the Son of God became a stumbling stone and a rock of offence.

By contrast, there are those who, as God's people of the new covenant, believe in Jesus: "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people ... who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy" (1 Peter 2: 9–10).

Here the church of Christ is shown both in its present state as well as in its intended form. At present it prefigures what it will be in perfect fashion in the future.

6.2.3.3 The city of God

In the image of the city of God, the church is shown as the place where God dwells among all those who belong to Him. On earth, church is the place where Jesus Christ, the Mediator, makes salvation accessible in various ways and grants fellowship with God. In this respect, church is the place of encounter with God, as well as the place of worship and divine service.

The church of Christ transcends human imagination. It is both of this world and of the world to come, it is both present and future. These manifestations belong together. Hebrews 12: 22–24 gives an indication of the grandeur of the church in its ultimate perfection. The words, "you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem," are directed at the church in its absolute fullness. In this respect, the earthly side of the church is interwoven with its heavenly side. God rules in the heavenly Jerusalem. This includes the angels, "the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven", the perfected righteous souls, and Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant.

In heaven God is worshipped and praised by the heavenly creatures (Psalm 29: 1; Revelation 4). Believers do the same on earth, namely in the earthly side of the church of Christ.

In the future city of God, New Jerusalem, God Himself will dwell with mankind (Revelation 21: 3).

6.2.3.4 The kingdom of God

The image of the kingdom of God refers to the reign of God in His church. Jesus described the kingdom of God in many parables and with various emphases (Matthew 13). The “kingdom of God” can, for example, represent:

- Jesus Christ, the present Lord Himself (Luke 17: 21),
- His church, which is present on earth,
- the kingly reign which will be revealed at the marriage feast in heaven (Revelation 19: 6–7),
- the kingdom of peace which Jesus Christ, the returning Lord, will establish on earth,
- the eternal kingly reign of God in the new creation, and
- the realm of eternal life.

In John 3: 3, 5 it states that the kingdom of God is only accessible to those who have been born of God: “unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God ... unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” To “see the kingdom of God” means to see God face to face. For the firstlings, this will already come to pass on the day of the Lord (1 John 3: 2): they will see the realm of eternal life.

6.2.3.5 The flock of God

The image of the flock of God portrays Jesus Christ as the good shepherd. He knows His own and gives His life for them. He calls sheep to Himself who are from other places—He continuously calls upon human beings to believe in Him and His church. In the end, there will be one flock and one shepherd (John 10: 11–16). Jesus speaks to His own through the Holy Spirit. Those who believe and follow Him will receive eternal life from Him (John 10: 25–28).

Prior to His ascension into heaven, the Risen One entrusted His lambs and sheep to the care of Apostle Peter (John 21: 15–17). This Apostle bore responsibility for the care of those who belonged to the church of Christ. Nevertheless, as the flock of Jesus Christ, the faithful remained His property.

In 1 Peter 5: 2–4, the ministers of the church are called upon to shepherd the congregation as the “flock of God”. In doing so, they are not to act as lords over the congregation, but rather serve as examples. They fulfil their tasks with a view to the return of Jesus Christ, the “Chief Shepherd”.

The image of the flock shows the church as a community that follows Christ. It receives its care, protection, and leadership through Jesus Christ, the good shepherd.

6.2.3.6 Further images for the church

The New Testament contains other figurative descriptions that underline the above-mentioned hallmarks of church and illustrate its additional characteristics. These include: God’s field, God’s building, the house of God, the dwelling place of God, the temple of God, the woman clothed with the sun and the male child, as well as the bride (1 Corinthians 3: 9; 1 Timothy 3: 15; 1 Corinthians 3: 16–17; Revelation 12, Revelation 21: 2). The interpretation of these images is dependent on their respective biblical contexts. Depending on its context, one image can therefore be used to make different statements. It is significant that in some biblical passages several images are linked to each other.

Thus the individual image should not be viewed in isolation. When viewed together, however, the images allow us to recognise that the church is one, apostolic, universal—that is all-encompassing—and holy.

SUMMARY

The New Testament contains a great number of images and examples in which the nature of the church is revealed. (6.2.3)

The image of the church as the body of Christ is often applied to those who, through baptism, faith, and profession, belong to Jesus Christ. It demonstrates that the church is similar to an organism in which all are dependent on one another. The growth of the body is geared toward Christ, who as the head is Lord, standard, and goal. (6.2.3.1)

Just as God chose the people of Israel out of many nations, He has also chosen a people in the new covenant, namely His church. (6.2.3.2)

In the image of the city of God, the church is shown as the place where God dwells in the midst of all those who are His own. (6.2.3.3)

The image of the kingdom of God refers to the rule of God in His church. (6.2.3.4)

The image of the flock shows the church as a community which follows Jesus Christ, the good shepherd. (6.2.3.5)

Other images for the church include the house of God, the temple of God, the woman clothed with the sun and the male child, as well as the bride. (6.2.3.6)

6.3 The church of Jesus Christ—a mystery

Everything that church is and will ever be is founded upon the word, work, and nature of Jesus. Jesus Christ is true God and true Man, and thus exhibits two natures (*see* 3.4.3). This mystery remains unfathomable. Likewise, the nature of the church of Christ is unfathomable: it is also a mystery, it also has a dual nature, and it can likewise only be grasped in faith.

Through Jesus Christ, the Mediator between God and mankind, human beings can obtain salvation. These glad tidings are to be preached and passed

on by Apostles (1 Timothy 2: 5–7). In the words of the sermon, the word of Christ is brought to expression in various ways through the activity of the Holy Spirit. It is by hearing this word that faith comes into being (Romans 10: 16–17). In this capacity, the church shares in Christ’s ministry of mediation through the proclamation of the gospel.

In its nature, the church of Christ reflects the dual nature of Jesus Christ. His divine nature is concealed or invisible, whereas His human nature is visible or manifest. In His human nature, Jesus aged just as every other human being. He felt pain and fear, and He knew hunger and thirst. Hence He shared in the fate of all humanity, albeit without being subject to sin.

Likewise, the church of Christ has a concealed—or invisible—and a visible—or manifest—side. These two sides of the church of Christ can no more be separated than the two natures of Jesus Christ. Although they are different from one another, they belong together indivisibly.

Like the divine nature of Jesus Christ, the concealed side of the church is ultimately indescribable. Its presence, however, can be perceived in the salvific effects of the sacraments and in the word of God. In the concealed side of the church—which is comprised of those who are properly baptised, who genuinely believe, and who profess the Lord—the four identifying features of church (unity, holiness, universality, and apostolicity) are present in perfect fashion. This side of the church is addressed in the Third Article of the New Apostolic Creed.

The revealed side of the church of Christ, like the Man Jesus, shares in the general history of mankind. In contrast to Him, however, the human beings at work within the church are subject to sin. Hence the errors, aberrations, and lapses inherent in mankind are also to be found in the church. However, the deficiencies of the visible church can neither damage nor destroy the invisible and perfect church, namely the church to which the true believers and elect (*see 4.5*) belong.

This interconnection and simultaneous distinction between the visible and invisible church can only be grasped in faith. The visible form of the church—the church of Christ in its historical manifestation—is not the object

of faith. Rather it is the institution in which, at present, salvation and the nearness of God can be experienced.

6.4 Belief in the one, holy, universal, and apostolic church

Salvation is accessible in the church of Jesus Christ, which has been established by the Lord Himself on earth. Those human beings who belong to it have been called forth by God to eternal fellowship with God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God is worshipped in the church. The focal point of church life is the divine service.

In its spiritual nature and perfection, the church of Christ remains concealed, and can only be grasped in faith. In its historical manifestation, however, it can be perceived and experienced. In the Third Article of Faith we profess: "I believe in ... the one, holy, universal and apostolic church." Thus the church is an object of faith.

The first three Articles of Faith profess belief in God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In the same manner, Christians throughout the ages have professed belief in the church. This makes it clear that the church is not an external or trivial thing, but rather one of the fundamental elements of Christian faith. Without church, it is impossible to be a Christian.

SUMMARY

Everything that church is and ever will be is rooted in Jesus' word, work, and nature. (6.3)

In its nature the church reflects the dual nature of Jesus Christ. His divine nature is concealed while His human nature is visible. The church likewise has an invisible and a visible side which belong together inextricably. (6.3)

The invisible side of the church is perceptible in the salvific effect of the sacraments and in the word of God. (6.3)

Like the Man Jesus, the visible side of the church shares in the general history of humanity. By contrast to Him, however, the people at work within the church are subject to sin. It is for this reason that the same errors, aberrations, and lapses inherent in human beings are also to be found in the church. (6.3)

The triune God is worshipped in the church. The focal point of church life is the divine service. Without church it is impossible to be Christian. (6.4)

6.4.1 Distinguishing features of the church

The Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople states that the church is the one, holy, universal, and apostolic church. These distinguishing features of the church are called *notae ecclesiae*.

6.4.1.1 The church is “one”

The profession of the one church arises from the belief in the one God. The triune God has founded and preserved the one church through the Father who sent the Son, through Jesus Christ who—as the head of the body—is enduringly united with the congregation, and through the Holy Spirit who is active in the church of Christ. The church of Christ therefore attests to the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus described oneness with one another and love for one another as identifying features of those who belong to Him and follow Him (John 13: 34; 17: 20–23). Thereby differences among the members of the church become meaningless, and unity is established. Togetherness and mutual support in the body of Christ are based on love, “the bond of perfection” (Colossians 3: 14).

Thus the nature of God is revealed in the church: “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him” (1 John 4: 16).

6.4.1.2 The church is “holy”

The church of Christ is holy on account of the sanctifying activity of God in Christ’s sacrifice and through the activity of the Holy Spirit in word and sacrament. This sanctifying activity takes its effect upon believers in divine service.

The holiness of the church of Christ is founded solely upon the triune God, not the human beings who belong to it. In Jesus’ intercessory prayer, the Lord brings to expression that He sanctifies Himself for His Apostles, “that they also may be sanctified by the truth” (John 17: 19). He also includes the church in this process of sanctification through Himself (John 17: 20).

Hebrews 10: 10 speaks of this sanctification through the sacrifice of Jesus: “By that will [of God] we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

Apostle Peter calls the believers a holy nation (1 Peter 2: 9–10). He says this despite the fact that the believers are human beings encumbered by imperfections. Their sinfulness does not invalidate the holiness of the church.

6.4.1.3 The church is “universal”

In its historical context, “universal” (“catholic”) means that there are no boundaries for the preaching of the gospel. This comes to expression in the commission the Risen One gave to His Apostles (Matthew 28: 19; Mark 16: 15; Acts 1: 8). Jesus Christ and His church are there for the people of all nations, for both the living and the dead (Romans 14: 9). God’s universal will to save thereby takes on a directly perceptible form within the church.

The church of Jesus Christ is all-encompassing and universal: it is both of this world and of the next, both present and future. While it is at present perceived as an institution for imparting salvation and fellowship with God, the concealed nature of the church will be revealed when it is complete: it will have a life in perfect salvation and in direct fellowship with God.

6.4.1.4 The church is “apostolic”

The church of Christ is apostolic in two respects: in it the apostolic doctrine is proclaimed and in it the apostolic ministry is active.

The apostolic doctrine is the unadulterated message of the death, resurrection, and return of Christ, according to the teaching of the early Christian Apostles, as attested in the New Testament, and as believed and practised by the early Christians (Acts 2: 42).

The apostolic ministry is the Apostle ministry given by Christ and led by the Holy Spirit, with all its powers, namely to proclaim the gospel, administer the sacraments, and forgive sins (Matthew 28: 19; John 20: 23).

Thus the apostolicity of the church consists of the fact that it continues the proclamation of the apostolic doctrine, as attested in Holy Scripture, and that the Apostle ministry is historically manifest within it until the return of Christ.

SUMMARY

The Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople states that the church of Christ is the one, holy, universal, and apostolic church. (6.4.1)

The church is *one*. Profession of the one church derives from belief in the one God. The church attests to the oneness of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. (6.4.1.1)

The church is *holy*. This has its foundation in the sanctifying actions of God. The holiness of the church has its foundation in God alone, and not in the people who belong to it. Their sinfulness does not invalidate the holiness of the church. (6.4.1.2)

The church is *universal*. This means that it is all-encompassing and universal. It is both of this world and of the next, both present and future. (6.4.1.3)

The church is *apostolic*. In it apostolic doctrine—the message of Christ’s death, resurrection, and return—is proclaimed. Likewise the Apostle ministry instituted by Jesus Christ has been historically manifested in the church until His return. (6.4.1.4)

6.4.2 The manifestation of the church of Christ in history

The historicity of the church is based on the historicity of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ lived as true Man among mankind: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled ... we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1: 1–3).

Just as human beings were able to perceive Jesus Christ with their senses, so too they can experience His church. It is manifest in historical reality, specifically within the fellowship of human beings who have been baptised, who believe in Christ, and who profess Him.

The letters of the Apostles in the New Testament already bear witness to the discrepancy between the demands of the gospel and the reality in the congregations. This divergence has always persisted throughout its historical reality, and has up until now remained impossible to undo. Although the church of Christ is perfect in nature, it shows itself to be imperfect in its historical form. While it is perfect as an institution of God, it exhibits shortcomings on account of the human beings who are active within it and who are to serve as “living stones ... being built up” as “a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2: 5).

6.4.2.1 The church of Jesus Christ at the time of the early Apostles

The incarnation, life, and activity of Jesus Christ comprise the foundation for the historical manifestation of the church established by Him: “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3: 11). The church of Christ was manifested upon this foundation, and developed further with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

The first congregations began to form. In them, Apostles and other ministers were active, the gospel was preached, and the sacraments were administered. In accordance with the great commission, the Apostles went to both Jews and Gentiles in order to bring them the tidings of salvation through Christ.

6.4.2.2 The church of Jesus Christ after the death of the early Apostles

The situation changed with the death of the first Apostles. The ministry which Jesus had entrusted with the administration of the sacraments, forgiveness of sins, and the proclamation of the gospel was no longer occupied. It was thus no longer possible to dispense the gift of the Holy Spirit. Holy Communion remained intact as a meal of remembrance, profession, fellowship, and thanksgiving (*see 8.2.8 et seq.*). The forgiveness of sins pronounced in authority was no longer possible, however, it is conceivable that—even in this time—God showed His grace of forgiveness to those who believed.

Believers who professed Christ continued to receive the sacrament of Holy Baptism with water and were thereby incorporated into the body of Christ.

In the proclamation of the word, the expectation of the imminent return of Christ gradually receded into the background. Nevertheless, belief in the life and activity of the Son of God, and in His death and resurrection, was kept alive. Believing people continued to pass along the gospel and the Chris-

tian system of values. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, fundamental statements of Christian doctrine were formulated in the creeds of the early church. Throughout the centuries, missionaries then carried the testimony of Jesus Christ into the world. Finally, in the nineteenth century, the gift of prophecy was awakened in a number of people and called those men who, according to the will of God, had been chosen as Apostles.

So it was that, even during the time after the death of the early Apostles, the Holy Spirit was active, albeit not in His original fullness.

6.4.2.3 The church of Jesus Christ after the reoccupation of the Apostle ministry

With the renewed occupation of the Apostle ministry in the year 1832 (*see 11.3*), the Lord gave back something essential to His church on earth: apostolicity was once more fully restored in the visible church. The activity of the newly called Apostles was not intended to establish another Christian denomination. Its goal was rather to prepare all of Christianity for the return of the Lord. With the reoccupation of the Apostle ministry, the proper administration of the sacraments was also restored. In addition, the proclamation of the word was given a more binding character through the authority of the ambassadors for Christ. This was especially brought to expression in that the certainty of the imminent return of Christ was kept alive. Likewise, it again became possible to proclaim forgiveness of sins through Apostles.

Thus the ministry and the proper administration of the sacraments associated with it, as well as the proper proclamation of the word, were once more fully present as essential elements of the church of Christ in its historical reality.

SUMMARY

The historicity of the church is rooted in the historicity of Jesus Christ. He lived as true Man among mankind. (6.4.2)

Just as human beings were able to perceive Jesus Christ with their senses, so too they can perceive His church. It is manifest in historical reality, specifically within the fellowship of human beings who have been baptised, who believe in Christ, and who profess Him. (6.4.2)

In its nature the church is perfect, however, it still demonstrates imperfections in its historical manifestation. (6.4.2)

With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the church of Christ began to unfold. In it Apostles and other ministers were active, the gospel was preached, and the sacraments were dispensed. (6.4.2.1)

After the death of the early Apostles this ministry was no longer occupied. Even during this time, the Holy Spirit was at work, albeit not in His original fullness. Believers continued to spread the gospel and the Christian system of values, however, the expectation of Christ's return faded into the background. (6.4.2.2)

In the nineteenth century the Apostle ministry was reoccupied. Apostolicity was thereby once again fully restored in the visible church. Thus the ministry, the dispensation of the sacraments, and the proclamation of the word are once more fully present in the historical reality of the church. (6.4.2.3)

6.4.3 The church of Jesus Christ and ministry

The Fourth Article of Faith refers to the unity of the church and the Apostle ministry: "I believe that the Lord Jesus rules His church and thereto sent His Apostles, and until His return still sends them with the commission to teach, to forgive sins in His name, and to baptise with water and Holy Spirit."

Jesus Christ rules His church. In the time of its founding—as in the time of the bride's preparation for His return—He sent Apostles to the earth through whom His regency was to be felt. The Apostle ministry has been given for the church of Christ as a whole. Its commission is to work its way into all parts of the church.

The Apostles have been sent to all nations in order to teach and baptise them. They call upon all human beings, both non-Christians and the baptised who believe in Jesus Christ and profess Him as their Lord, to be baptised with the Holy Spirit and be prepared for the return of Christ.

The Apostles testify of Jesus Christ as the One who is and was and who is to come. They thereby also disclose future events in the history of salvation. The focus on a future in direct fellowship with God represents an important element of the nature of the church of Christ. It is the primary task of the Apostles to proclaim the imminent return of Christ and to lead the bride to the Lord (*see 10.1.2*).

The bride of the Lord—also known as the “community of the saints” in the narrower sense—are those believers who have been reborn of water and the Spirit, who have allowed themselves to be prepared by the Apostles of Jesus Christ for the day of the Lord, and who have been accepted by Him.

The original ministry is the Apostle ministry. Only this ministry was instituted by Jesus Himself. All other ministries have come forth from the Apostle ministry. Concerning this, the Fifth Article of Faith states: “I believe that those designated by God for a ministry are ordained only by Apostles, and that authority, blessing, and sanctification for their ministration come forth out of the Apostle ministry.”

SUMMARY

Jesus Christ rules His church. At the time of its establishment and in the time in which the bride of the Lord is being prepared for His return, He has sent Apostles. Their primary tasks are to proclaim the imminent return of Christ and lead His bride to Him. (6.4.3)

The Apostle ministry has been given for the church as a whole with the commission to work its way into all parts of the church. (6.4.3)

The original ministry of the church is that of the Apostle. It is from this ministry that all other ministries have come forth. (6.4.3)

6.4.4 The church of Jesus Christ and the sacraments

Wherever believing souls are properly baptised—that is in the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—they can, through the grace of God, be incorporated into the body of Christ. Holy Baptism has been entrusted to the church as a whole. This is professed in the Sixth Article of Faith: “I believe that the Holy Baptism with water is the first step to a renewal in the Holy Spirit, and that the person baptised is adopted into the fellowship of those who believe in Jesus Christ and profess Him as their Lord.”

The all-encompassing administration of the sacraments—the dispensation of Holy Baptism with water, Holy Communion, and Holy Sealing—is entrusted to the Apostle ministry. The Apostles also dispense the three sacraments to the departed.

The sacrament of Holy Communion is celebrated in proper fashion together with the Apostles as a table fellowship in which the sacrifice of Christ, as well as the body and blood of the Lord, are present. Concerning this the Seventh Article of Faith states: “I believe that Holy Communion was instituted by the Lord Himself in memory of the once brought, fully valid sacrifice, and bitter suffering and death of Christ. The worthy partaking of Holy Communion establishes our fellowship with Jesus Christ, our Lord. It is celebrated with unleavened bread and wine; both must be consecrated and dispensed by a minister authorised by an Apostle.”

The sacrament of Holy Sealing can only be administered by the Apostles, as is stated in the Eighth Article of Faith: “I believe that those baptised with water must, through an Apostle, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit to attain the childhood in God and thereby the prerequisite for becoming a firstling.”

SUMMARY

Wherever baptism is properly performed, believing human beings can be incorporated into the body of Christ. Holy Baptism with water is entrusted to the church as a whole. (6.4.4)

Comprehensive administration of the sacraments occurs through the Apostle ministry. The Apostles also dispense the three sacraments to the departed. (6.4.4)

Holy Communion is celebrated in proper fashion together with the Apostles as a table fellowship in which the sacrifice of Christ, as well as the body and blood of the Lord, are present. (6.4.4)

Holy Sealing can only be dispensed by Apostles. (6.4.4)

6.4.5 The church of Jesus Christ and the future

Belief in the future events of salvation is professed in the Ninth Article of Faith: “I believe that the Lord Jesus will return as surely as he ascended into heaven and that He will take unto Himself the firstfruits of the dead and living who have hoped for and were prepared for His coming; that after the marriage in heaven He will return to earth with them to establish His kingdom of peace, and that they will reign with Him as a royal priesthood. After the conclusion of the kingdom of peace, He will hold the Last Judgement. Then God will create a new heaven and a new earth and dwell with His people.”

The church not only has a present, but also a future dimension. The church, which according to its own profession awaits the return of Jesus Christ, is also future-oriented. The praise of God and adoration of His majesty will never cease. His servants will serve Him “forever and ever” (Revelation 22: 3–5).

At the time of Christ’s return, church will be manifest as it is, in all its salvation and also in all its deficiencies. A twofold life will be clearly revealed within the church, namely that of the bride of Christ and that of the “woman clothed with the sun” (Revelation 12). Whereas one part of the church of Christ will be caught up from the earth, another will remain behind on earth and will have to prove itself in a period of antichristian afflictions.

The future manifestation of the church also becomes clear in the promise that the firstlings who are elected to the royal priesthood will share in Christ's reign. In the kingdom of peace, they will be directly involved in imparting salvation (Revelation 20: 6), and will be ambassadors for Christ to all mankind who have ever lived.

The new Jerusalem described in Revelation 21 and 22 is an image for the church which has been perfected in all aspects as an expression of God's acts of salvation and new creation. In the new Jerusalem there will be eternal worship and unending praise of God.

SUMMARY

The church has a present and a future dimension. (6.4.5)

At the return of Christ the church will be revealed in all its salvation and all its deficiencies: part of the church will be caught up to God, and another will remain on the earth and will have to prove itself in a period of antichristian afflictions. (6.4.5)

The future manifestation of the church also becomes clear in the promise that the firstlings elected to the royal priesthood will be involved in imparting salvation in the kingdom of peace. They will be messengers of Christ for all human beings who have ever lived. (6.4.5)

6.5 The church of Jesus Christ and the churches as institutions

In its historical manifestation, the church of Jesus Christ will not completely live up to the commandment of oneness, holiness, universality, and apostolicity. The main reason for this is that for a long period of time the Apostle ministry was not active at all, and that, since the nineteenth century, it has only been able to unfold to limited effect. The multiplicity of "Christian churches" is conditioned by cultural, social, and historical differences, as well as the great diversity of human interpretations of the one gospel, the one

Holy Scripture. Despite these differences, the church of Christ does not remain concealed or inaccessible. It is most clearly revealed where the Apostle ministry, the administration of the three sacraments to the living and the dead, as well as the proper proclamation of the word are present. It is there that the Lord's work of redemption¹ is established, in which the bride of Christ is prepared for the marriage feast in heaven. Binding elements between the individual Christian churches² are baptism, the common profession of Jesus Christ, and belief in Him as the only Lord and Redeemer, as Holy Scripture testifies of Him. Christian tradition states that only true believers can be assigned to the invisible, concealed church, in contrast to those who, though baptised, neither believe in Jesus nor profess Him as their Lord (Revelation 3: 1).

Church—as a fellowship of faith, hope, and love—can only be experienced in the first place by the baptised who live their faith and profess Jesus as their Lord. Thus the church of Christ is not only present where the Apostle ministry is active, that is in the Lord's work of redemption to prepare the bride. It is also present in other churches where Christian faith is manifest in active love for one's neighbour, in the clear profession of Jesus Christ, and in the sincere endeavour to follow Christ. This includes those Christian denominations where worship and the praise of the triune God occur in divine service, and in which oneness, holiness, universality, and apostolicity are to be found in various forms and to varying degrees.

Where the Apostles in the New Apostolic Church today work to prepare the bride of Christ for the return of her Lord, all the means required for this

1 The term "Lord's work of redemption" is generally understood to mean Jesus' saving act, which has already been completed. When this term is used here, it refers to that part of the church in which Apostles are active in imparting those gifts of salvation that serve to the preparation of the firstlings, the bride of Christ.

2 The World Council of Churches formulates the elements that bind all churches together as follows. Churches are those which "confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

are available, despite all imperfections. The redemption work of the Lord will be completed within the church of Jesus Christ.

SUMMARY

In its historical manifestation the church of Christ will not completely live up to its oneness, holiness, universality, and apostolicity. (6.5)

The church of Christ is most clearly revealed where the Apostle ministry, the dispensation of the sacraments to the living and the dead, as well as the proper proclamation of the word are present. It is there that the Lord's work of redemption to prepare the bride of Christ for the marriage in heaven is established. (6.5)

Binding elements between the individual Christian churches include baptism, the profession of Jesus Christ, and belief in Him. Through the baptised who live in accordance with their faith, the church can be perceived as a fellowship of faith, hope, and love. Thus the church of Christ is also visible in the churches in which oneness, holiness, universality, and apostolicity are present in varying forms and to varying degrees. (6.5)

Part 7

Ministry



7 Ministry

Generally a “ministry” is understood to be a function or official position which is assigned to a specific area of responsibility. In the broader sense, “ministry” is an authority that has been bestowed in order to represent, lead, and provide order to a community. The exercise of a ministry¹ incorporates both administrative and authoritative tasks.

7.1 Ministry and duties

A spiritual ministry constitutes authorisation, blessing, and sanctification issued through ordination for service in the church of Christ. It is exercised in the power of the Holy Spirit.

¹ The New Apostolic Church understands “ministry” as a spiritual, ordained ministry. It therefore understands a minister as one who is authorised, blessed, and sanctified through ordination by an Apostle (cf. Fifth Article of Faith: “I believe that those designated by God for a ministry are ordained only by Apostles, and that authority, blessing, and sanctification for their ministration come forth out of the Apostle ministry.”) The New Apostolic Church does indeed encourage all of its members to utilise their gifts and talents, and to be involved in various activities, as “the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all” (1 Corinthians 12: 1–11), and “as each one has received a gift”, we are to “minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4: 10), “... for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4: 12). The problem arises in that the English translation of the Bible (and the English language in general) uses “ministering” and “serving” (or “ministry” and “service”) interchangeably. While other parts of the Christian church may refer to such services, duties, functions, or exercises of gifts and talents as “ministry”, from the perspective of the New Apostolic Church these must be distinguished from the spiritual, ordained ministry (see paragraph 3 of 7.1; cf. also *Divine Service Guide, Special Edition* 03/12). Someone who serves the youth, for example, is indeed *ministering* to the youth, but does not have a “ministry” in the sense of the Fifth Article of Faith. The ministering unto various groups in our Church is a service.

The spiritual ministry is assigned by a superior, in other words, the sender. The one who is sent is responsible and accountable to his sender in the fulfillment of his ministerial mandate. Ministry is always linked to Jesus Christ and the Apostles sent by Him (*see 7.6*).

In the church of Christ, ministry is to be distinguished from the various duties which serve for the proclamation of the gospel and the benefit of the believers, and which can also be performed without ordination.

It is also important to distinguish ministry from the call that has gone out to all believers, namely to serve the Lord by following Him (John 12: 26; 1 Peter 2: 5, 9). Just as the Apostles bear witness of the gospel through word and conduct, reborn Christians do the same in fellowship with them, thereby supporting their great commission.

SUMMARY

The term “ministry” describes a function or position that is assigned to a specific area of responsibility as well as an authority that has been bestowed in order to represent, lead, and provide order to a community. (7)

The spiritual ministry constitutes authority, blessing, and sanctification issued through ordination for service in the church of Christ. (7.1)

A distinction must be made between the ministry and the many diverse duties that support the proclamation of the gospel and the wellbeing of the believers, which can also be performed without ordination. (7.1)

It is also important to distinguish between ministry and the call that has gone out to all believers to serve the Lord through following. Just as the Apostles bear witness of the gospel through word and conduct, reborn Christians do the same in fellowship with them, thereby supporting their great commission. (7.1)

7.2 Source of ministry in the church

The spiritual ministry is founded upon the sending of Jesus Christ by the Father. Jesus is King, Priest, and Prophet (*see* 3.4.7). As the One sent by His Father, He was authorised, blessed, and sanctified for the redemption of mankind.

Already in the old covenant there were forerunners to the ministry in the church. Nevertheless, there is a considerable difference between the ministry of the old covenant and that of the new covenant. Concerning this, Hebrews 8: 6 states: “But now He [Jesus] has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant ...”

Through the calling and sending of the Apostles, Jesus instituted the ministry for His church.

The church of Jesus Christ was revealed in its historical manifestation on Pentecost. It was also at this point in time that the ministry began to take effect within the church. The ministry itself had already been given by Jesus Christ to His Apostles beforehand, however. He authorised, blessed, sanctified, and equipped them with the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 20: 21–23). The Apostles are those who have been sent by Jesus.

7.3 Biblical foundation

Holy Scripture does not have a uniform definition for the word “ministry”, nor does it expound upon any doctrine concerning ministry. It nevertheless makes a number of different statements about the content and nature of the ministry.

7.3.1 Old Testament references

From the perspective of the New Testament, the ministry—in the present-day sense—was only established by Jesus Christ, however, there are already refer-

ences to the ministry of the New Testament in the old covenant: in the king, in the priest, and in the prophet. However, this does not mean to say that all kings in Israel bore a spiritual ministry. Rather, the references to ministry can be seen in the example of outstanding persons in the history of salvation:

- David represents the chosen and anointed king—his significance for salvation history also becomes evident in the fact that Jesus is described as the “Son of David” (Matthew 21: 9).
- Melchizedek represents the priest who imparts the blessing of God (Genesis 14: 18–19).
- Moses stands for the prophet (Deuteronomy 18: 15) who proclaims the divine will by giving the law to the people at the instruction of God.

In the light of the New Testament, these ministries are understood as references to the coming, “higher ministry” which Jesus Christ bears.

The central ministry in the Old Testament is that of the priest. The archetype of priestly service and of the high priestly ministry is Melchizedek. He blessed Abraham and received offerings from him (Psalm 110: 4). As the one who blesses He stands above the one being blessed—in his function, the priest thus stands above the patriarch of faith.

All of Israel had been called by God as a “kingdom of priests” (Exodus 19: 6). Nevertheless, God only set aside one tribe—the tribe of Levi—for service in the temple, and only a portion of the tribe of Levi—namely the Aaronic priesthood—was assigned the sacrificial service.

Looking back on the priestly ministry from the perspective of the epistle to the Hebrews, we read that one of the tasks of the priests consisted of preparing the people for the arrival of the Messiah, the coming of Jesus Christ, as the true High Priest (*see 3.4.7.2*).

7.3.2 Foundation of the ministry in the New Testament

The ministry of the Old Testament was already an allusion to Jesus Christ. Everything that had been laid down in the ministry of the Old Testament is reflected in Him: He is King, Priest, and Prophet.

By His divine authority, He, the Elect of God, elected twelve Apostles. He authorised, blessed, and sanctified them for their service to the gospel. It was to them that He entrusted the administration of the sacraments. In this manner, His sacrifice of redemption can be made accessible to human beings (Matthew 28: 19–20).

The great significance that Jesus Christ accorded His Apostles is demonstrated by His conduct just before His suffering and death: He spoke to them, gave them the promise of His return, and interceded for them in His intercessory prayer: “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world” (John 17: 18). The Risen One gave His Apostles the authority to forgive sins and once again closely linked His sending with theirs: “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (John 20: 21–23).

While the sending of Jesus Christ was aimed at effecting redemption through His death and resurrection, the sending of the Apostles is intended to make this merit of Christ and the fullness of salvation accessible to mankind.

As the ministry of the old covenant had been given to prepare the people for the appearing of the promised Messiah, so it is the primary task of the New Testament’s ministry to prepare believers for the return of their Lord.

SUMMARY

The spiritual ministry is based on the sending of Jesus Christ by the Father. (7.2)

Through the calling and sending of the Apostles, Jesus instituted the ministry for His church. (7.2)

Holy Scripture provides abundant references to the content and nature of ministry: in the old covenant there was the ministry of the king, the priest, and the prophet. Everything that was already laid out in the Old Testament ministry is reflected in Jesus Christ: He is King, Priest, and Prophet. (7.3.1)

By His divine authority Jesus elected the twelve Apostles and authorised, blessed, and sanctified them for service to the gospel. The sending of the Apostles makes the fullness of salvation in Jesus Christ accessible to mankind. (7.3.2)

7.4 The Apostle ministry

The word “Apostle” derives from the Greek *apóstolos* which means “ambassador” in the New Testament.

Jesus Christ Himself directly gave His church only one ministry, namely the Apostle ministry. In His stead and by His commission, the Apostle ministry is to build the church and make redemption in Jesus Christ accessible to human beings who long for salvation. Furthermore, the Apostle ministry is mandated to prepare believers for the return of Jesus Christ.

The Fourth Article of Faith describes the significance of the Apostle ministry with the following words: “I believe that the Lord Jesus rules His church and thereto sent His Apostles, and until His return still sends them with the commission to teach, to forgive sins in His name, and to baptise with water and Holy Spirit.”

7.4.1 Characteristics of the Apostle ministry

Jesus Christ equipped the Apostle ministry with extensive powers. The Apostle is an ambassador of Jesus Christ and acts in His name. The characteristics and functions assigned to the Apostle ministry have their source in the ministries of Christ—King, Priest, and Prophet (*see* 3.4.7). Thus the Apostle

ministry receives all its authority from Jesus Christ and exists in an unconditionally dependent relationship with Him.

Apostle Paul was the only one of the early Apostles who spoke about his ministry. In his second epistle to the Corinthians, he makes substantial reference to the significance of the Apostle ministry. His statements are not of a dogmatic nature, but are rather a reaction to attacks made by the congregation in Corinth as well as by others from outside. These statements clearly show Apostle Paul's understanding of his ministry. From them, general characteristics of the Apostle ministry can be derived:

The ministry of the new covenant

This designation serves to make a distinction from the ministry of the old covenant. Just how fundamentally the new covenant distinguishes itself from the old covenant is made clear in 2 Corinthians 3: 6: "... for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." The "letter" here is the Mosaic Law, while "Spirit" signifies the gospel, the salvific effect of which is founded upon the grace of God.

Jesus Christ is the eternal High Priest of the new covenant who gave Himself as a sacrifice (Hebrews 4: 14–15; 7: 23–27). Since Christ's ascension into heaven it has been the task of the Apostles to make the salvation He attained accessible to mankind. The means of salvation obtained by Jesus Christ are administered and imparted on earth (*see* 9.6.3). Through the incarnation of God, the earth was thus designated by God Himself as the place where salvation would be imparted.

In contrast to the ministry of the old covenant, which was restricted to the people of Israel, the ministry of the new covenant knows no borders: it is active among all nations.

The ministry of the Spirit

The Apostle ministry is the "ministry of the spirit" (2 Corinthians 3: 8; Acts 8: 14–17). Through the dispensation of the gift of the Holy Spirit, a person baptised with water receives the childhood in God and the prerequisite for becoming a firstling.

The ministry of righteousness

The Apostle ministry, as the “ministry of righteousness” (2 Corinthians 3: 9), is contrasted with the Old Testament “ministry of condemnation”. Apostle Paul writes: “But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious ..., how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?” (2 Corinthians 3: 7–8). Here the Apostle clearly shows the significant difference between the Mosaic Law and the law of Christ.

The Apostle ministry draws attention to the fact that human beings are sinners and in need of God’s grace. Belief in Jesus Christ and acceptance of His sacrifice leads to the righteousness valid before God.

The ministry of reconciliation

The Apostle ministry, the “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5: 18–19), admonishes repentance and leads human beings to the redeeming act of God which was accomplished in Jesus Christ. The Apostle proclaims the death and resurrection of Jesus, and enables believers to share in the fullness of Christ’s merit through the forgiveness of sins and the celebration of Holy Communion. “Reconciliation” signifies the restoration of the untroubled relationship between mankind and God, and between human beings among themselves. Perfect reconciliation will be achieved when the glory of the childhood in God is revealed and the “children of God” are like the Lord (1 John 3: 2).

Ambassadors for Christ

The statement of Apostle Paul, “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf ...” (2 Corinthians 5: 20) expresses that Jesus Christ works through the Apostles in His church. The Apostle acts in the power of the Holy Spirit, proclaims the gospel, and administers the sacraments. His activity serves to the salvation of human beings in need of redemption.

Further characteristics of the Apostle ministry can be derived from the first epistle to the Corinthians and the Acts of the Apostles:

Stewards of the mysteries of God

Paul speaks of the Apostles as “stewards” (1 Corinthians 4: 1). A steward is responsible for the household, namely the church. In the church, the Apostles ensure the proper proclamation of the gospel and administration of the sacraments. They ordain ministers and maintain order in the church.

Apostle Paul uses the term “steward” in connection with the “mysteries of God”. This suggests that the Apostle ministry has also been assigned the task of imparting and unveiling revelations of God, that is His “mysteries”. These include, for instance, the election of the Gentiles—those who are not Jewish—and the rapture of the bridal congregation at the return of Christ (1 Corinthians 15: 51; Colossians 1: 26–28).

The ministry of the word

In the prologue of the gospel of John, the Son of God is described as the “Word” (*logos*) through which everything was created. The Apostle ministry, to which the Lord also entrusted the commission to teach, also shares in this power of the word in a ministering capacity. It is also in this sense that Acts 6: 4 is to be understood: “But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” The Apostles preach the gospel and interpret Scripture in the proper manner (Galatians 1: 11–12).

Orientation to the day of the Lord

Another significant characteristic of the Apostle ministry is its orientation to the day of the Lord. Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth: “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11: 2). “Chaste virgin” is an image of the bridal congregation chosen by Jesus Christ, which is being prepared by the Apostles for the return of Christ.

SUMMARY

“Apostle” (*apóstolos*) means “ambassador”. (7.4)

Jesus Christ personally only gave His church one ministry, namely the Apostle ministry. The Apostle ministry takes all its authority from Jesus Christ and is unconditionally dependent on Him. (7.4)

The Apostle ministry is described as the “ministry of the new covenant”, the “ministry of the Spirit”, the “ministry of righteousness”, and the “ministry of reconciliation”. Apostles are also called “ambassadors for Christ” and “stewards of the mysteries of God”. (7.4.1)

The orientation of the congregation to the return of Christ is another significant characteristic of the Apostle ministry. (7.4.1)

7.4.2 Equipping and sending of the Apostles

From among His disciples, Jesus Christ chose twelve men and appointed them as Apostles (Mark 3: 13–19; Luke 6: 13–16). Holy Scripture relates two occasions on which the Apostles were sent:

On the first occasion, the Lord sent His Apostles to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” and expressly forbade them to go to the Samaritans and Gentiles. He gave them power to heal the sick, to raise the dead, to cast out evil spirits, and to bring peace, as well as to preach the kingdom of God. He underlined this commission with the words “He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me” (Matthew 10: 40).

On the occasion of the second sending of His Apostles, which took place after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, His commission to them opened a new, higher, and much greater dimension: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew

28: 18–20). According to His promise He will thus be with them to the end of the world (Greek: *aeon* = “age of the world”).

Among other passages, the names of the first twelve Apostles are recorded in Matthew 10: 2–4: Simon, called Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James, Thaddeus, Simon the Canaanite, Judas Iscariot. These Apostles are called “the Twelve”, even after the betrayal of Judas Iscariot.

In addition to these, the New Testament also mentions additional Apostles: Matthias (Acts 1: 15–26), Barnabas (Acts 13: 1–4; 14: 4, 14), Paul (1 Corinthians 9: 1–16; 2 Corinthians 11), and James, the brother of the Lord (Galatians 1: 19; 2: 9). Only in the case of Matthias was the call to the Apostle ministry bound to having been an eyewitness to the life of Jesus (Acts 1: 21–22). Silvanus and Timothy were also described as Apostles (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2: 6), as were Andronicus and Junia (Romans 16: 7).

7.4.3 Peter—the head of the early Apostles

In the presence of the other Apostles, the Lord granted Simon Peter special authority. His leading position among the Apostles took effect after the Lord’s ascension into heaven, but was certainly already suggested prior to this event:

- Peter was designated as the “rock” and was given the authority of the keys: “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16: 18–19).
- Prior to His sacrificial death, it was to Peter that the Lord addressed the words: “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail: and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren” (Luke 22: 31–32).

- Peter spoke on behalf of the twelve Apostles. After many of the disciples had turned away from Jesus, Peter answered the question as to whether they too wanted to leave as follows: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (John 6: 68–69).
- Peter was the one whom Jesus Christ asked the question: “Do you love Me?” Three times Peter affirmed that this was the case, whereupon the Lord entrusted His lambs and sheep to Peter’s care (John 21: 15–17).
- It was Peter who initiated the replacement of Judas Iscariot in the circle of the Apostles (Acts 1: 15–26), who preached the sermon on Pentecost (Acts 2: 14), and to whom the Lord showed that salvation in Christ was also intended for the Gentiles (Acts 10).

7.4.4 New Testament references to the activity of the Apostles

Luke in particular reports on the activity of the Apostles in the book of Acts. For instance, in Acts 11: 1–18 and 15: 1–29 we read of two assemblies led by Apostles, in which the matter of allowing Gentiles access into the new covenant—and other questions of the time—were resolved. This makes it clear: together the Apostles made decisions which had far-reaching effects.

Also attested in Acts is the fact that the dispensation of the gift of the Holy Spirit is bound to the Apostle ministry: Philip preached in Samaria and baptised the believers with water. When the Apostles heard about this, they sent Peter and John there. These Apostles “prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8: 15–17). According to Acts 19: 6, Apostle Paul acted in the same manner.

An essential task of the Apostles was to proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 13: 26–41; 17: 1–4). They fought against heresies, primarily those that denied the true humanity of Jesus and His resurrection (1 Corinthians 15: 3–8; 1 John 4: 1–6).

The Apostles expected the Lord's return during their lifetime, and prepared the believers for this event (1 Thessalonians 4: 14–18). This demonstrates the close connection between the Apostle ministry and the proclamation of the return of Christ.

SUMMARY

Jesus Christ ordained twelve Apostles, however the New Testament attests to more than twelve Apostles. (7.4.2)

Jesus issued the authority of the keys to Simon Peter and gave him the commission to lead the church. (7.4.3)

It is primarily the book of Acts that records the activity of the Apostles. Among other things, it attests that the gift of the Holy Spirit was dispensed by Apostles. The Apostles proclaimed the gospel and fought against heresies. (7.4.4)

7.5 The development of the ministries from the Apostle ministry

The only ministry given by Jesus Christ is the Apostle ministry. As of Pentecost, the Apostles began fulfilling their commission to spread the gospel in the developing congregations. Very soon it became clear that they would need helpers to cope with the many tasks that had arisen. At their suggestion, seven men were chosen by the congregation. Through laying on of hands and prayer, the Apostles equipped them spiritually for their ministry (Acts 6: 6). These seven men are described as the first Deacons. It was this practice—that is the laying on of hands and prayer of an Apostle—that established the foundation for future ordinations.

The Apostles and other believers established new congregations which required spiritual care. For this purpose the Apostles ordained congregational rectors. These were called “Bishops” or “Elders” (Greek: *episcopoi* or *presby-*

teroi). From Titus 1: 5, 7 it is clear that both terms stood for one and the same task. In addition, prophets, Evangelists, pastors, and teachers were also active in the early Christian congregations (Ephesians 4: 11).

According to the testimony of the pastoral letters and the *Didache*², a hierarchy—which assured the spiritual life of the congregations—eventually began to develop along with the growth of the church, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

After the death of the early Apostles, spiritual commissions, each with different tasks and designations, began to develop.

SUMMARY

In order to cope with all the tasks incumbent on them the Apostles needed helpers. Through laying on of hands and prayer they equipped these men for their task. This practice established the foundation for future ordinations. (7.5)

Beyond that, Bishops or Elders, prophets, Evangelists, pastors and teachers helped along in the early Christian congregations by commission of the Apostles. As the church grew, a ministerial hierarchy developed under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. (7.5)

7.5.1 Continuity of the Apostle ministry

The Apostle ministry was established by the Lord for His church. The Apostles are to be His witnesses to the end of the earth (Acts 1: 8). In order to fulfil this extensive commission, Jesus also sends Apostles today. Even during the time when there were no bearers of this ministry on earth, the ministry established by Him remained (2 Corinthians 3: 11).

² Doctrine of the Twelve Apostles, assumed to have originated in ca. AD 100

7.5.2 Interruption in the activity of the Apostles

The New Testament relates the death of Apostle James (Acts 12: 2). There is no information about the demise of the other Apostles. According to extra-biblical sources, John, the last of the early Apostles mentioned in the Bible, died near the end of the first century. Until the Apostle ministry was reoccupied in the year 1832 (*see 11.3*), the activity of the only ministry established by the Lord Himself was interrupted.

This interruption in the personal presence of the Apostle ministry is rooted in the will of God. Ultimately, His sovereign rule remains a mystery to mankind. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit was also active after the death of the early Apostles (*see 11.2*), in order to ensure the preservation and development of the gospel.

7.5.3 The reoccupation of the Apostle ministry

The Apostle ministry was again occupied in accordance with the will of God when the time for the final gathering and preparation of the bride of Christ had come. Thus the Apostle ministry is occupied by human beings both at the beginning of the church of Christ and in the time preceding the return of the Lord, during which He prepares His bride.

Between the Apostle ministry of early Christianity and the end time, there is no difference in commission or effect, however, there are different points of emphasis in the practical exercise of the ministry. Although there is no historical succession, there is certainly a spiritual succession.

With the reoccupation of the Apostle ministry, ministers were once again ordained. Within the Catholic Apostolic Church a differentiated ministerial order came into being. In the course of its history, a number of ministries with different tasks have also developed in the New Apostolic Church.

SUMMARY

The mandate of the Apostles is not limited to the early Christian period. (7.5.1)

At the end of the first century there were no more Apostles. Up until the renewed occupation of the Apostle ministry in 1832, the activity of the only ministry instituted by Jesus Christ had been interrupted. The interruption in the personal presence of the Apostle ministry is rooted in the will of God. It ultimately remains a mystery to human beings. (7.5.2)

By the will of God, the Apostle ministry was once again occupied. While there may not be a historical succession between the early Christian Apostle ministry and that of the end time, there is certainly a spiritual succession. (7.5.3)

With the reoccupation of the Apostle ministry, ministers were again ordained. A differentiated ministerial order came into being. (7.5.3)

7.6 The ministries in the New Apostolic Church

From its beginnings, the New Apostolic Church has understood itself as a church of ministry. It is a church that is led by the apostolate.

All other ministries come forth out of the Apostle ministry. Concerning this, the Fifth Article of Faith states: “I believe that those designated by God for a ministry are ordained only by Apostles, and that authority, blessing, and sanctification for their ministration come forth out of the Apostle ministry.”

Today there are three levels of ministry, each with different spiritual powers, in the New Apostolic Church:

the Apostle ministry

Chief Apostle, District Apostle, and Apostle;

the priestly ministry

Bishop, District Elder, District Evangelist,
Shepherd, Evangelist, and Priest;

the diaconal ministry

Deacon and Sub-deacon.

7.6.1 The apostolate

The apostolate is defined by the ministries of Chief Apostle, District Apostle, and Apostle.

Together with the Apostles, the Chief Apostle leads the Church. The District Apostles are each responsible for one or more District Churches.

Already in the Catholic Apostolic Church there was a senior Apostle, who was also described as the “Pillar of the Apostles”. Although the latter did not have any powers or authority surpassing that of the other Apostles—he remained the first among equals—his word had special weight in the Apostles’ College.

The Apostles of the new order (*see 11.3.1*) at first worked in largely independent fashion in their assigned areas, however, they kept contact with one another in order to promote oneness. Toward the close of the nineteenth century, the ministerial term “Chief Apostle”³ began to emerge as the designation for the individual who exercised the office of Peter in the New Apostolic Church.

7.6.2 The function of the apostolate

The most important references to the work of the Apostles can be derived from the words and deeds of Jesus:

- Christ gave the Apostles the authority to “bind and loose” (Matthew 18: 18). This formulation speaks to the fact that the Apostles, together with the Chief Apostle, comprise the spiritual leadership of the Church and that they decide on the ordinances of congregational life.

³ Up until the start of the twentieth century, the working area of each Apostle was designated by the name of one of the twelve tribes (German: *Stamm*) of Israel. From this, the designation *Stammapostel* (the German equivalent of “Chief Apostle”) was derived.

- It was in the circle of His Apostles that the Son of God instituted Holy Communion, which they were then to celebrate in accordance with His example (Luke 22: 14, 19–20).
- The Apostles are ambassadors for Jesus Christ (John 13: 20; 20: 21).
- Through the Holy Spirit, the Apostles receive the essential knowledge required for the exercise of their ministry (John 14: 26).
- The Apostles are dependent on their direct relationship with the Lord, “for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered” (John 15: 5–6).
- Jesus issued His Apostles the authority to proclaim forgiveness of sins in His name (John 20: 23).

7.6.3 The self-conception of the Apostles

The Apostles have received their ministry and commission from Jesus Christ. They work in accordance with the will of their Sender and are completely dependent upon Him. In accordance with the example of Jesus, the Apostles are servants of all (John 13: 15). They do not have dominion over the faith of the congregations, but are fellow workers for their joy (2 Corinthians 1: 24). This means that, through the activity of the Apostles, believers are to develop a thankful and joyful fundamental attitude toward God. When necessary, admonitions and orders also serve this purpose (James 1: 21).

The Apostles feel themselves obliged to serve as examples to the church and lead them in following Christ (1 Corinthians 11: 1).

7.6.4 The authority of the Apostle ministry

The authority of the Apostle ministry derives from the calling of the Apostles by Jesus Christ and from the powers which the Lord has laid into this ministry. The importance of the ministry becomes evident in the intercessory prayer of Jesus: “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the

world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth” (John 17: 18–19).

7.6.5 The Apostles in the church of Jesus Christ

The objective of the Apostles’ work is to edify the Lord’s work of redemption and lead it to its completion. The fellowship of the Apostles with the believers is characterised by warm care and loving understanding.

The apostolate has been given for the entire church of Christ. Its task is to offer salvation in Jesus Christ to human beings (Acts 13: 47). Salvation is only possible through the Son of God (Acts 4: 12). Until the return of Christ, salvation is imparted through the Apostles in word and sacrament, that is to say through the preaching of the gospel, the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins, baptism with water and Holy Spirit, and through Holy Communion.

SUMMARY

The New Apostolic Church is a church of ministry. (7.6)

There are three ministerial levels, each with different spiritual powers: the Apostle ministry, priestly ministry, and diaconal ministry. (7.6)

The apostolate is defined by the Chief Apostle ministry, the District Apostle ministry, and the Apostle ministry. Together with the Apostles, the Chief Apostle leads the Church. (7.6.1)

Jesus Christ has issued the power to “bind and loose” to the Apostles. This formulation speaks to the fact that the Apostles, together with the Chief Apostle, comprise the spiritual and organisational leadership of the Church and decide on the ordinances of congregational life. It was in the circle of His Apostles that He instituted Holy Communion, which they were to celebrate in accordance with His example. He also issued authority to them to proclaim forgiveness of sins in His name. (7.6.2)

The Apostles are active by the will of their Sender, Jesus Christ, and are completely dependent on Him. They see it as their duty to serve as examples to the church and lead them in following Christ. (7.6.3)

The authority of the Apostle ministry derives from their calling by Jesus Christ. (7.6.4)

7.6.6 The Chief Apostle ministry

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the head of His church. In this Church, it is the task of the Chief Apostle to discharge the office of Peter in accordance with the words of Jesus: “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16: 18–19).

Jesus speaks of the foundation and the building of His church in connection with the special position of Apostle Peter. The latter is the “rock” upon which Jesus builds His church. Thereby the Son of God created an indissoluble relationship between the ministry of the rock and His church. The ministry of the rock and the church of Christ have been given to mankind for salvation in Jesus Christ.

The office and tasks which the Lord entrusted to Apostle Peter are today discharged by the Chief Apostle. Thus he too works to keep the oneness among the Apostles as requested by the Lord (John 17: 20–23) by strengthening his brethren, that is the Apostles (Luke 22: 32). He tends the “lambs and sheep” of the flock of Christ (John 21: 15–17).

The office of the Chief Apostle functions to keep the doctrine pure while developing it further, opening up new insights, and uniformly spreading the testimony of faith. The Chief Apostle also lays down the order within the church.

These tasks comprise the “authority of the keys” of the Chief Apostle ministry.

The Chief Apostle is the highest spiritual authority. He is accorded a leading position in the circle of the Apostles.

The Chief Apostle ordains the Apostles. It is necessary for the Apostles to remain in oneness with him: only in this manner can the task incumbent on the apostolate as a whole be fulfilled, namely to make salvation accessible to mankind.

7.6.7 The District Apostle ministry

Beyond the tasks incumbent on each Apostle, the District Apostle ministry is responsible for providing uniform pastoral care, caring for the congregations, and spiritually equipping the ministers within a defined working area (District Apostle district). Moreover he defines the points of emphasis in church work, decides on the ordination of ministers, and seeks to preserve the oneness in the circle of the Apostles. As a rule, he celebrates Holy Communion for the departed within his working area. One task that goes beyond the actual work within the District Apostle district is participation in conferences of the District Apostle Meeting, which advises and supports the Chief Apostle in leading the Church. In addition, the District Apostle is the general representative for his District Church.

SUMMARY

It is the task of the Chief Apostle to discharge the office of Peter. The Chief Apostle is the highest spiritual authority. He is accorded a leading position in the circle of the Apostles. (7.6.6)

The Chief Apostle exercises the authority of the keys. (7.6.6)

The District Apostle has the responsibility of working within his working area to provide uniform pastoral care, to provide for the congregations, and to assure that the ministers are spiritually equipped. (7.6.7)

7.7 Ordination

Authority, blessing, and sanctification issue forth from the Apostle ministry in order to equip ministers for their work in the congregations.

Ordination to a spiritual ministry is performed by the Apostle in the name of the triune God through laying on of hands and prayer (*see 12.1.12*). In the exercise of his ministry, the minister is accountable to, and dependent on, the Apostle ministry.

During the ordination, the specific ministerial power is imparted and the corresponding authority is issued by the Apostle ministry, be it for the work of a diaconal ministry, priestly ministry, or Apostle. Upon this foundation, the minister will be able to fulfil the functions assigned to him.

Through the ordination, the minister is blessed and sanctified for his work. Available talents are awakened and consecrated for the exercise of the ministry.

Ordination is not a sacrament, but rather an act of blessing. The holiness of this act and the serving character of this ministry are demonstrated by the fact that the ministry is received on one's knees. The minister being ordained makes a vow before the Apostle to remain faithful to God and follow Christ, and promises obedience of faith.

In principle, being designated for a ministry is not based upon human will but upon the divine will. It is the task of the Apostle to recognise God's will and act in accordance with it.

Divine blessing is imparted during the ordination. It contains the assurance of the Holy Spirit's strength and support, as well as the protection of the angels' service.

A minister cannot perform his duties on the basis of his own abilities, but rather only in oneness with the apostolate and in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle ministry is authoritative for doctrine and serves as a model for the proclamation of God's word by the other ministries.

7.8 The exercise of a ministry

In his conduct and spiritual competency, a minister must live up to certain requirements. The sanctification received through the ordination must be put into practice by the minister so that the gifts he has received can unfold to the blessing of the congregation (1 Timothy 3: 2–3, 8–9).

Those who have been called to a ministry serve out of love toward God and their neighbour. They align themselves with the example of Jesus, and know that they are instruments in the hand of God.

The trust between the members of the congregation and the ministers is a prerequisite for blessed development within the congregation. In order to build and preserve such a relationship of trust, it is indispensable for the ministers to be one with one another and their Apostle.

Ministers discharge their ministries within the framework of the authority issued to them. To this end they receive a commission from their Apostle, who assigns them a working area.

In principle, the commission to exercise a ministry ends upon retirement, however, the ministry remains. On the other hand, the ministry is lost in the event of resignation or dismissal from ministry.

7.9 Tasks of the ministries

Apostle Paul writes: "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all" (1 Corinthians 12: 4–7).

Thus each minister is a servant of God with the task of proclaiming and advocating the unadulterated gospel of Christ. He provides care to the members of the congregation entrusted to him, and promotes their faith and knowledge. In caring for their souls, he sympathises with their personal concerns, prays with them, and helps them carry the burdens of daily life. The minister is an example for the congregation. To him the words apply: “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself” (Philippians 2: 3).

The following remarks describe aspects of the individual ministerial gifts. They are vested in all ministries, but come to expression differently.

SUMMARY

Ordination is performed by an Apostle in the name of God through laying on of hands and prayer. Through the ordination the necessary ministerial capacities are imparted and ministerial authority is issued out of the Apostle ministry. (7.7)

The minister can only discharge his ministry in connection with the apostolate and in the power of the Holy Spirit. (7.7)

The sanctification that has come forth through the ordination must be put into practice by the minister. He exercises his ministry within the framework of the authority issued to him. (7.8)

Every minister is a servant of God. He provides pastoral care to the members of the congregation entrusted to him and promotes their faith. (7.9)

7.9.1 The priestly ministries

The ministries from the Bishop to the Priest are summarised by the term “priestly ministries”. Through the Apostle these ministers have received the commission and authority to dispense Holy Baptism with water, proclaim the forgiveness of sins, and consecrate and dispense Holy Communion.

The high demands on the priestly ministers are derived from Malachi 2: 7: “For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.”

The tasks of the priestly ministries also include conducting divine services, performing acts of blessing and funerals, proclaiming God’s word, and providing pastoral care to the members of the congregation.

Bishop

The word “Bishop” (Greek: *episkopos*) means “overseer”. The Bishop is the direct co-worker of the Apostle. In oneness with the Apostle, he instructs and cares for the ministers, and takes charge of special tasks in pastoral care.

District Elder⁴

As a rule, a District Elder is the rector of a district and thus responsible for several congregations in both a spiritual and organisational respect. He ensures that the gospel is proclaimed in its purity in the congregations. He also sees to it that the necessary ministerial gifts are available in the congregations. He adopts guests into the congregation and leads preparatory discussions with those who are to receive the sacrament of Holy Sealing. The District Elder provides pastoral care to the congregational rectors and their families.

District Evangelist

The District Evangelist works at the side of the District Elder and supports him in the fulfilment of his tasks.

Shepherd

The special focus of this ministry is to care for and preserve the congregation. The Shepherd also performs leadership tasks. As a rule, he is also appointed as the congregation’s rector.

4 In earlier times there was also the ministry of Community Elder.

Evangelist

The special accent of the Evangelist ministry (Greek: *euangelistes* = “messenger of joy”) lies in the clear, understandable proclamation of the word. As a rule the Evangelist also performs leadership tasks.

Priest

The Priest proclaims the word of God and cares for the souls within the congregation. This includes being close to the members, visiting them regularly, reinforcing their faith, and promoting their knowledge. The Priest stands by them, comforts them, and prays with them. He makes regular visits to the sick and celebrates Holy Communion with them. He also pursues those whose ties with the congregation are waning. In many congregations Priests also take on the function of rector.

7.9.2 The diaconal ministry

The diaconal ministry is discharged by Deacons and Sub-deacons. The word “Deacon” has its source in the Greek and signifies “servant”. Deacons help in various ways in the congregation.

It is also their task to support the Priests in their pastoral care work.

Today no one is ordained into the Sub-deacon ministry anymore. This ministry corresponds to the Deacon ministry in nature.

7.10 Appointments

An appointment is the assignment of a firmly defined task. It is not to be equated with an ordination. The appointment can be limited in terms of both duration and location.

In association with a ministry, the term “appointment” is understood as an appointment to the task of congregational rector, district rector, District Apostle Helper, or Chief Apostle Helper. It is usually issued within the frame-

work of a divine service by leading ministers of the Church. It is not bound to the duration of one's ministerial activity, but ends when this activity ends.

In order to fulfil the various services and tasks within the congregations and districts, special mandates are issued to both brothers and sisters, independent of ministry.

Like the ministers, these appointed functionaries generally perform their services in the Church on a voluntary basis.

SUMMARY

The ministries from Bishop to Priest are summarised by the term “priestly ministries”. They have received commission and authority from the Apostles to dispense Holy Baptism with water, to proclaim the forgiveness of sins, and to consecrate and dispense Holy Communion. Further tasks of the priestly ministries include conducting divine services and funerals, performing acts of blessing, proclaiming God's word, and providing pastoral care to the members of the congregation. (7.9.1)

The word “Deacon” is derived from the Greek language and means “servant”. Deacons help along in various ways in the congregation. (7.9.2)

An appointment is the assignment of a firmly defined task. It is not to be equated with ordination. An appointment can be limited in terms of both duration and location. (7.10)

Part 8

The
sacraments



8 The sacraments

Sacraments are fundamental acts of God's grace. They are holy acts that are performed upon a human being in order to allow him to attain salvation, be adopted into the fellowship of life with God, and be preserved in it. Receiving the three sacraments opens up the possibility for being united with the Lord at the return of Christ.

Salvation in the sacraments is founded upon the incarnation, sacrificial death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as well as the sending and activity of the Holy Spirit.

The term "sacrament" is not recorded in the New Testament. The word *mysterion* which is rendered in some Old Latin Bible translations with the term *sacramentum* is originally unrelated to the acts that later came to be designated as "sacraments". In antiquity, the term *mysterion* referred to a secret matter only accessible to the initiated.

According to the Roman understanding, "sacrament" signified, among other things, "pledge of allegiance", "consecration", or "pledge". In the course of the second and third centuries AD, the terms *mysterion* and *sacramentum* came to be used in reference to ritual acts. Thus, for example, Tertullian (ca. AD 160–220) associated the baptismal vow and the creed—albeit not the act of baptism itself—with a military oath formulation. The church leader Augustine (AD 354–430) made the most significant contribution to our understanding of the sacraments in later antiquity: a sacrament comes into being through the union of a visible element with a spoken word that refers to the reality behind it.

A sacrament legitimately comes into being through four interrelated variables:

- sign (*signum/materia*), that is the rite or the visible element,
- content (*res/forma*), that is the presence of salvation,

- dispenser (the mediator of the sacrament),
- faith (on the part of the recipient), so that the sacrament is received for salvation.

The validity of the sacraments is not dependent on their interpretation or the understanding a person has of them, but rather only on the four aforementioned variables. The sign (*signum*) and content (*res*) are linked together through the word (*verbum*) of institution or consecration spoken by the dispenser.

Since this is not a magical or automatic event, as it were, the faith of the person receiving the sacrament is a prerequisite for the sacrament to unfold to its full salvific effect. However, even unbelief does not invalidate the sacrament, because that which God has done cannot be undone by the unbelieving recipient.

The proper administration of the sacraments is incumbent upon the Apostles. They have been commissioned by Christ to make the sacraments accessible in proper fashion. Although not all sacraments need to be dispensed by the Apostles or those commissioned by them, sacraments nevertheless exist in an apostolic relationship.

There are three sacraments (1 John 5: 6–8): Holy Baptism, Holy Sealing, and Holy Communion. They have been instituted by Jesus Christ.¹

Through Holy Baptism with water, a human being enters into his first close relationship with God—he becomes a Christian, and through his faith and profession to Christ belongs to the church (*see 8.1*). Through Holy Sealing, God grants the baptised the gift of the Holy Spirit. Both sacraments together comprise the rebirth out of water and the Spirit. Through this rebirth, a human being becomes a child of God and is called to be numbered among the firstlings at the return of Christ (*see 8.3*). Holy Communion preserves a

1 cf. Matthew 28: 19–20; John 3: 5; Luke 22: 19–20; John 6: 53–58; 1 Corinthians 11: 23–26; concerning the distinction between Holy Baptism with water and Holy Sealing, see Acts 8: 14–17; 19: 1–6.

human being in the intimate fellowship of life with Jesus Christ. To this end, this sacrament must be received repeatedly in faith (*see* 8.2).

The sacraments are also dispensed upon children (Matthew 19: 14).

SUMMARY

Sacraments are fundamental acts of God's grace. (8)

Salvation in the sacraments is founded upon the incarnation, sacrificial death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as well as in the sending and activity of the Holy Spirit. The proper dispensation of the sacraments is the responsibility of the Apostles sent by Christ. (8)

A sacrament comes into being through the union of a visible element with a word that refers to a reality behind this word. (8)

A sacrament comes into being through four interrelated variables: sign, content, dispenser, and faith. (8)

Faith is the prerequisite for a sacrament to unfold to its full salvific effect. (8)

Jesus Christ instituted three sacraments: Holy Baptism with water, Holy Sealing, and Holy Communion. (8)

8.1 Holy Baptism with water

Holy Baptism with water is the first and fundamental act of grace of the triune God bestowed on a human being who believes in Jesus Christ. Through it, original sin is washed away and the believer is led out of his position of remoteness from God. Nevertheless, his inclination to sin (concupiscence) remains.

Through Holy Baptism with water, the baptised shares in the merit Jesus Christ acquired for mankind through His sacrificial death. Thereby a human being is led into his first close relationship with God—he becomes a Chris-

tian. Thereby he is also incorporated into the church, that is into the fellowship of those who believe in Jesus Christ and profess Him as their Lord.

Accordingly the Sixth Article of Faith states: “I believe that the Holy Baptism with water is the first step to a renewal of a human being in the Holy Spirit, and that the person baptised is adopted into the fellowship of those who believe in Jesus Christ and profess Him as their Lord.”

8.1.1 Definition of the term

The term “baptism” is a translation of the Greek word *baptizein* = “to immerse”. In early Christian times, baptisms were primarily performed by immersion in water.

8.1.2 The biblical basis for Holy Baptism with water

The ritual washings referenced in various passages of the Mosaic Law can be regarded as precursors to baptism with water. They led to a ritual cleansing of persons who, due to their physical conditions, were considered unclean. However, these washings did not have a covenantal character.

8.1.2.1 Old Testament references to Holy Baptism with water

As with the other sacraments, references to Holy Baptism with water can be found in the Old Testament.

The deliverance of Noah and his family in the ark is regarded in 1 Peter 3: 20–21 as an “antitype of baptism” and a reference to future salvation. In Christian tradition, the Israelites’ passage through the Red Sea—their deliverance from Egyptian captivity—is also understood as a reference to the deliverance that occurs through baptism with water.

The Mosaic Law strictly distinguishes between “clean” and “unclean”. Water is one of the means used to bring about ritual purity. Persons who were unclean in a religious sense had to subject to a bath of purification (Leviticus 13–15).

Ezekiel 16: 9 mentions a washing with water and an anointing with oil, through which Jerusalem was received into a covenant of salvation. This can also be understood as a reference to Holy Baptism with water and Holy Sealing.

Likewise, the situation of the Aramaic commander Naaman can be related to baptism: at the instruction of the prophet Elisha, the leper washed himself by dipping his body seven times into the Jordan, and the disease abated (2 Kings 5: 1–14). This can be understood as a symbol for the washing away of original sin through baptism.

8.1.2.2 Holy Baptism with water in the New Testament

In the New Testament “baptism” is often understood as having two parts, namely baptism with water and baptism with the Spirit (Acts 8: 14 et seq.; 10: 47; 19: 1–6; Titus 3: 5). Holy Baptism with water and Holy Baptism with the Spirit are therefore interdependent.

Jesus Christ submitted to the baptism of John the Baptist in order to demonstrate how righteousness before God can be attained (Matthew 3: 15). So it was that the baptism of repentance, as practised by John, led to Holy Baptism with water. The Son of God abased Himself and put Himself on the same level as the sinner (Philippians 2: 7). Thereby Jesus Christ set an example for mankind mired in sin.

At the same time, Jesus’ true identity as the Son of God was clearly revealed at His baptism. The triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—was present. The mystery of the Trinity began to reveal itself. The fact that Jesus is the Son of God was proclaimed (Matthew 3: 17; Mark 1: 10–11).

Jesus Christ also described His sacrificial death as “baptism”. The sacrifice on the cross and Holy Baptism with water are thereby linked to one another (Luke 12: 50).

The great commission issued by the Risen One makes it clear that baptising—in the form of baptism with water and the Spirit—is one of the tasks assigned to the Apostles: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28: 19). Baptism therefore emanates from the triune God. It is not a work of man, but an act of God’s salvation upon a human being.

After the Pentecost sermon, the Apostles called on those who had come to believe: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2: 38). In this manner, those who believed were incorporated into the congregation (Acts 2: 41).

8.1.3 The necessity of Holy Baptism with water for salvation

Holy Baptism with water is indispensable for partaking in salvation. It is the first step on the way to complete redemption. Hence, Holy Baptism with water opens the way to eternal fellowship with the triune God.

8.1.3.1 Holy Baptism with water as an act of God

Holy Baptism with water is not a figurative or symbolic action, but rather a real act of God’s loving care. Through this act, the relationship between a human being and God is fundamentally changed. The effect of Holy Baptism with water acts upon a person’s entire being.

SUMMARY

Holy Baptism with water is the first and fundamental sacramental act of grace of the triune God upon a human being who believes in Jesus Christ. (8.1)

Through Holy Baptism with water the baptised enters into his first close relationship with God—he becomes a Christian and is thereby incorporated into the church. (8.1)

In the New Testament “baptism” is often understood as a two-part baptism with water and the Holy Spirit. Holy Baptism with water and Holy Baptism with the Spirit are therefore interdependent. (8.1.2.2)

Jesus Christ submitted to the baptism of John the Baptist in order to demonstrate how righteousness before God can be attained. (8.1.2.2)

The great commission issued by the Risen One makes it clear that baptising—in the form of baptism with water and the Spirit—is one of the tasks assigned to the Apostles. Baptism is an act of God’s salvation upon a human being. (8.1.2.2)

Holy Baptism with water is necessary for salvation. (8.1.3)

It is not a figurative or symbolic act, but is indeed an act of God’s loving care that fundamentally changes the relationship between a human being and God. (8.1.3.1)

8.1.3.2 The washing away of original sin

“Original sin”² refers to man’s state of separation from God, in other words, the remoteness from God that has come into being through the fall into sin.

² The doctrine of original sin was first formulated by Augustine based on biblical testimony. Original sin has its source in the primal sin of Adam and Eve. The biblical basis for the doctrine of original sin is Psalm 51: 5 and Romans 5: 12.

Through disobedience, mankind has lost the permanent and direct fellowship with the Creator.

Since the fall into sin a fundamental state of sinfulness and remoteness from God has weighed upon every human being (Genesis 3: 23–24; Psalm 51: 5; Romans 5: 18–19). This means that, from the very beginning—before any deed or thought—every human being is a sinner, even if no individual sin has yet been committed. Through baptism, original sin is washed away. The image of washing brings to expression that God lifts the state of permanent separation and remoteness from Him: He grants human beings their first close relationship with Him as well as the opportunity to have fellowship with Him. Even after baptism, the human inclination to sin remains as a further consequence of the fall into sin.

SUMMARY

“Original sin” refers to man’s state of separation from God, in other words the remoteness from God that has come into being through the fall into sin. Since the fall into sin, a fundamental state of sinfulness and remoteness from God has weighed upon all human beings. (8.1.3.2)

Through baptism with water original sin is washed away and the believer is led out of the state of remoteness from God. His inclination to sin (concupiscence) remains. (8.1.3.2)

8.1.4 The proper dispensation of Holy Baptism with water

The elements of the three sacraments have been prescribed by God. The two essential elements of Holy Baptism with water are the water and the Trinitarian formula: “I baptise you in the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” When performed in this fashion, Holy Baptism can unfold in its effect upon the believer.

The water, the outward sign of inner purification, requires consecration to lift it up out of the domain of the profane and into that of the holy. It is therefore consecrated in the name of the triune God prior to the act of baptism. The baptising minister then uses the consecrated water to make the sign of the cross three times on the forehead of the person being baptised, and—under laying on of hands—baptises him in the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The sign of the cross symbolises salvation in Christ and the redemption He effected through His sacrificial death. Making the sign of the cross three times on the forehead of the person being baptised is a reference to the triune God.

8.1.5 Prerequisites for receiving Holy Baptism with water

Anyone can receive Holy Baptism with water. In the New Apostolic Church it is administered by an Apostle or priestly minister to both children and adults. The prerequisite is the believer's profession of faith in Jesus Christ and His gospel.

When children are baptised, the parents, or persons responsible for the religious upbringing of the children, must profess their faith in Jesus Christ and vow to raise the baptised child in accordance with the gospel. The practice of baptising children is based upon the insight that the blessings of God should be made available to them. They too require the grace of the Lord, and the kingdom of God is open to them (Mark 10: 14).

SUMMARY

The two essential elements of Holy Baptism with water are the water and the word in the Trinitarian formula. The water is consecrated in the name of the triune God. Thereafter the baptising minister uses the consecrated water to make the sign of the cross three times on the forehead of the person being baptised, and baptises in the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. (8.1.4)

Any human being can receive Holy Baptism with water. The prerequisite is profession of faith in Jesus Christ and His gospel. (8.1.5)

When children are baptised, those who bear responsibility for their religious upbringing must profess their own faith in Jesus Christ and vow to raise the baptised child in accordance with the gospel. (8.1.5)

8.1.6 The effects of Holy Baptism with water

Through Holy Baptism with water, a person who believes in Jesus Christ and professes Him is incorporated into the church of Christ and thereby has fellowship with Jesus Christ. Holy Baptism with water performed in the name of the Trinity is a binding element among Christians.

Holy Baptism with water—similar to circumcision in the old covenant—is a mark of the covenant. Through it, a human being is adopted into the new covenant and can then receive further marks of the covenant: access to Holy Sealing is open to those who are baptised. Those baptised in the New Apostolic Church are entitled to partake regularly in Holy Communion.

The baptised shares in the death of Jesus Christ and in His new life. Seen in a spiritual sense, he partakes in the experience of Jesus Christ. Just as Christ died on the cross for the sins of mankind, so the baptised is to be “dead indeed to sin” by renouncing it. Baptism incorporates the believer into Christ’s activity of redemption such that Christ’s death on Golgotha also becomes the “death” of the baptised: this signifies the end of life in the condition of remoteness from God and the beginning of life in Christ. Baptism imparts powers to wage the battle against sin (Romans 6: 3–8; Colossians 2: 12–13).

Baptism is “putting on Christ”. With it, the first step on the path to renewal of the inner man has been taken: “For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3: 27). This image constitutes the basis for abandoning one’s old way of life and “putting on” the virtues of Christ. It describes that which comes to expression in the term “repentance”, namely

the act of turning away from one's old nature and turning to the Lord. This means that one must earnestly endeavour to lead one's life in accordance with God's will. The baptised person vows to conduct and organise his life under the regency of Christ.

8.1.7 Faith and Holy Baptism with water

Like all other sacraments, Holy Baptism with water is dispensed on the basis of faith. Sacrament and faith belong together: "He who believes and is baptised will be saved" (Mark 16: 16). A person's faith is both a prerequisite for receiving the sacrament as well as his response to this act of God.

The unbelief into which a baptised person may fall cannot undo the validity of Holy Baptism with water. A validly dispensed Holy Baptism with water is not repeated.

8.1.8 Holy Baptism with water and Holy Sealing

Although Holy Baptism with water and Holy Sealing are interdependent, they are two distinct sacraments. The book of Acts relates that Holy Baptism with water and baptism with Holy Spirit were administered in two separate acts (Acts 2: 38–39; 8: 12–17, 10: 44–48; 19: 5–6).

The rebirth out of water and the Spirit occurs when a person receives both sacraments, namely Holy Baptism with water and Holy Sealing (John 3: 5).

8.1.9 Holy Baptism with water and following Christ

During Holy Baptism with water, the believer vows to earnestly endeavour to avoid sin and to lead a life of following Christ. The kind of following to which the baptised are called consists of aligning themselves to the life and nature of

Jesus, in accordance with His words: “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Matthew 16: 24).

8.1.10 Holy Baptism with water and the Apostle ministry

In Matthew 28: 18–20, the Risen One gives His Apostles the commission to baptise. The administration of the sacraments is inseparably linked to the Apostle ministry. While Holy Sealing—according to the testimony of the Scriptures—was only dispensed by Apostles, there are several biblical references indicating that Holy Baptism with water was not exclusively performed by Apostles (Acts 8: 38). Priestly ministers in the New Apostolic Church also have the authority to baptise with water.

However the Holy Baptism with water administered by the Apostles and ministers ordained by them is not the only valid one: since it has been entrusted to the church as a whole, properly performed baptisms in other churches are also valid (*see 6.4.4*).

SUMMARY

Holy Baptism performed in the name of the Trinity is a binding element among Christians. (8.1.6)

Baptism is a covenantal mark, whereby a human being is accepted into the new covenant. It is the first step on the path to renewal of the inner being. The baptised individual shares in the death of Jesus Christ as well as in His new life. (8.1.6)

A properly dispensed Holy Baptism is not repeated. (8.1.7)

Holy Baptism with water and Holy Sealing are two interdependent yet distinct sacraments. The rebirth out of water and the Spirit occurs by receiving both of them. (8.1.8)

The Risen One issued the commission to baptise to His Apostles. In the New Apostolic Church, Apostles have the authority to baptise and can also issue this authority to the priestly ministries. (8.1.10)

Since Holy Baptism with water has been entrusted to the church as a whole, properly performed baptisms in other churches are also valid. (8.1.10)

8.2 Holy Communion

The Seventh Article of the New Apostolic Creed states: “I believe that Holy Communion was instituted by the Lord Himself in memory of the once brought, fully valid sacrifice, and bitter suffering and death of Christ. The worthy partaking of Holy Communion establishes our fellowship with Jesus Christ, our Lord. It is celebrated with unleavened bread and wine; both must be consecrated and dispensed by a minister authorised by an Apostle.”

Of the three sacraments, Holy Communion is the one which is repeatedly made available and dispensed to a human being. The content and significance of Holy Communion cannot be fully grasped in rational or doctrinal terms. It is closely associated with the mystery of the person of Jesus Christ.

In Holy Communion, the reality of God and His devotion to mankind can be directly experienced. Holy Communion is the central event of the divine service. It also takes on a significant position in the consciousness and life of the faithful.

8.2.1 Designations for the sacrament

There are various designations for the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, which emphasise different aspects of the sacrament:

- “Holy Communion” refers to the sacrament’s historical institution by Jesus Christ in fellowship with His Apostles on the evening before His crucifixion.

- The term “Eucharist” derives from the Greek *eucharistein*, meaning “to give thanks”. Jesus Christ gave thanks to God when He instituted Holy Communion (Luke 22: 19). The giving of thanks in Holy Communion calls believers to an all-encompassing gratitude, in particular for the sacrifice and merit of Jesus Christ, but also for redemption and sanctification.
- “Lord’s Supper” is a designation for Holy Communion which draws attention to the fact that Jesus is the Lord (*see* 3.4.6.2) and that, in this capacity, He has instituted it and invites us to celebrate it.
- “Breaking of bread” refers to the Passover meal which Jesus Christ celebrated when He instituted Holy Communion (Matthew 26: 26). That the breaking of bread was an identifying feature of Jesus can be seen from the fact that the disciples travelling to Emmaus thereby recognised the Risen One (Luke 24: 13–31). The early Christians referred to their meal fellowships as “breaking of bread”, through which their unity and fellowship was brought to expression (Acts 2: 42, 46).

8.2.2 Old Testament references to Holy Communion

The Old Testament not only makes frequent references to the Son of God, His suffering, and His sacrifice, but also relates many events that have a certain affiliation with Holy Communion. In retrospect, they can be understood as references to the sacrament established by Jesus Christ. From them it is clear just how closely the old and the new covenants are interrelated.

Genesis 14: 18–20 describes Abram’s encounter with the royal Priest Melchizedek. Melchizedek—whom the epistle to the Hebrews interprets as a reference to Jesus Christ—blessed Abram and also brought him bread and wine (verse 18). “Bread and wine” are reminiscent of the elements of Holy Communion. This relationship becomes even clearer in Hebrews 5: 10, where Jesus Christ is called a “High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek”.

Another important Old Testament reference to Holy Communion can be seen in the feeding of the Israelites with manna as they wandered in the wilderness (Exodus 16: 4–36). Manna is described as “bread from heaven”

(verse 4). According to John 6: 35, Jesus Christ called Himself “the bread of life”. This manna held the promise of something greater, as it were, namely a food which would not only strengthen the body, but also one’s entire being, and serve for salvation.

8.2.3 Jesus’ miracles of feeding and Holy Communion

The gospels attest that Jesus Christ ate and drank with sinners. In contrast to the Pharisees and scribes, He had table fellowship with those who, in accordance with the Mosaic Law, were considered unclean and who were therefore excluded from association with the righteous (Mark 2: 13–17).

Not only did Jesus eat with others, the gospels also relate that He provided food for them. His miracles of feeding—for example, the feeding of the five thousand (John 6: 1–15), the feeding of the four thousand (Matthew 15: 32–38), but also the miracle of transforming water into wine at the wedding in Cana (John 2: 1–11)—are all signs of the kingdom of God which has drawn near to mankind in Jesus Christ. Beyond the satisfaction of physical hunger, these earthly meals are also a reference to salvation in Christ. This becomes clear in the words of the Lord when He linked the feeding of the five thousand with the statement: “I am the bread of life” (John 6: 26–51).

8.2.4 The Passover meal

At the Lord’s command, the Israelites celebrated their first Passover on the night before their exodus from Egypt. Lambs without blemish were killed and prepared. With the lamb, the Israelites ate unleavened bread. The blood of the lamb, which was painted on the doorposts, was the sign that would spare the Israelites from the tenth plague to come upon Egypt, namely the death of the firstborn (Exodus 12).

God commanded that the Passover should be celebrated every year in commemoration of the liberation from Egypt.

The similarities between the Passover meal and Holy Communion are quite apparent: both are meals of commemoration in which bread is an indispensable component. The cup of wine which is drunk at the end of the Passover meal symbolises the joy resulting from the Israelites' deliverance from Egyptian captivity. The blood of the Passover lamb effected deliverance for the firstborn of the Israelites. This is a reference to Jesus Christ as the "Lamb of God" who was sacrificed: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1: 29; cf. 1 Peter 1: 19).

The Passover meal is a commemoration of the Israelites' deliverance from Egyptian captivity. Holy Communion refers to deliverance in a much broader sense, namely to the redemption of mankind from the bondage of sin through the sacrifice of Christ, and to deliverance from eternal death.

8.2.5 The institution of Holy Communion by Jesus Christ

Already before Jesus Christ established Holy Communion in the presence of His Apostles, He said: "... unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you" (John 6: 53). "Flesh and blood" are a reference to Holy Communion, which, as the Lord hereby emphasised, is indispensable for salvation. Also significant here are the additional statements of the Lord: "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life ... He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in Him" (John 6: 54, 56).

The Synoptic Gospels relate that Jesus Christ shared a meal together with His Apostles on the Feast of Passover. Matthew 26: 26–29 describes how the Lord instituted Holy Communion: "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom'" (Mark 14: 22–25; Luke 22: 14–20). While

the account in the gospel of Mark largely coincides with the account in the gospel of Matthew, we find the following additions in Luke: “Do this in remembrance of Me” and “this cup is the new covenant in My blood” (Luke 22: 19–20).

With the words: “Do this in remembrance of Me”, the Lord gave His Apostles the commission and authority to celebrate Holy Communion in the same way as He Himself had done.

8.2.6 Holy Communion in the first epistle to the Corinthians

In 1 Corinthians 11: 17–32 we find evidence of the celebration of Holy Communion and of Jesus’ words of institution which He spoke in the process. This text first of all attests that the celebration of Holy Communion was part of the religious practice of the early Christian congregations. Here Apostle Paul cited the words of institution for Holy Communion as practised in Corinth. Here it becomes clear that a predetermined wording was prescribed: “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you.” This is followed by the words of institution: “The Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes” (1 Corinthians 11: 23–26).

This text describes the situation in which Holy Communion was instituted and also relates the words spoken by Jesus. The commemoration of this unique event in the history of salvation also incorporates the words of institution. Wherever Holy Communion is celebrated, this night in which the Lord was betrayed is also commemorated.

Breaking of bread and giving thanks (Greek: *eucharistein*) to God also belong together. At the same time, Jesus’ interpretation of the bread and wine is repeated: the bread is not only the Passover bread, but rather “My body which

is broken for you”. Likewise, the cup not only contains the customary wine of the Passover, but is “the new covenant in My blood”. The one cup of wine which was passed around during the celebration of Holy Communion calls to mind the death of Jesus upon which the new covenant was founded. Whoever drinks from this cup receives the blood of Jesus Christ, that is to say the Lord Himself. The conclusion of the text emphasises the importance of the proclamation of the unique event of Christ’s death as well as the importance of His return. The significance of Holy Communion for fellowship of life with the Lord is also underlined: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are *one* bread and *one* body; for we all partake of that *one* bread” (1 Corinthians 10: 16–17).

8.2.7 The significance of bread and wine

The elements of bread and wine which constitute the sacrament belong to the domain of sustenance, of celebration, and of Israelite divine service.

Bread is a symbol for human sustenance in general. The meals of bread and the related miracles of the Old and New Testaments demonstrate that God is concerned with the human being as a whole, not only in part—that is not only the body, and not only the soul. Even within the divine service, bread had been assigned an important function by the Mosaic Law: twelve loaves of showbread (“Bread of the Presence”) were placed on a table in front of the veil to the Most Holy Place. On each Sabbath, they were eaten by the priests and replaced with new loaves (Exodus 25: 30).

In general, wine is also a reference to the primal and creaturely dependence of human beings on sustenance. In ancient Israel, wine was one of the beverages consumed at feasts. In Israel, wine was also a symbol of joy and of future salvation (Isaiah 55: 1).

SUMMARY

Holy Communion is the sacrament which is dispensed to a human being again and again. It is the central event of the divine service. (8.2)

Holy Communion is also known as the “Eucharist” (“giving thanks”), the “Lord’s Supper”, and the “breaking of bread”. (8.2.1)

Already the Old Testament contained references to Holy Communion. (8.2.2)

Both the Passover meal and Holy Communion are meals of remembrance of which bread is an indispensable component. The Passover meal commemorates the liberation of the Israelites from captivity in Egypt. Holy Communion points to liberation in a much more comprehensive sense, namely to the redemption of mankind from the servitude of sin. (8.2.4)

On the occasion of the Passover feast, Jesus Christ shared in a meal with His Apostles. In the process He instituted Holy Communion. (8.2.5)

The oldest evidence of the celebration of Holy Communion and the words of institution which Jesus spoke at that time can be found in 1 Corinthians 11. This also recalls the situation in which Holy Communion was instituted. (8.2.6)

The sacrament is constituted by the elements of bread and wine. (8.2.7)

Bread is a symbol for human sustenance in general. Wine is also a reference to the human dependency on sustenance. In Israel, wine is also a symbol of joy and of future salvation. (8.2.7)

8.2.8 Holy Communion as a meal of remembrance

Holy Communion is a meal of remembrance because it first of all commemorates the death of Jesus Christ as a unique event which is valid for all times. The remembrance of this event is important because it emphasises that Jesus Christ is true Man who had to suffer real death. It also recalls the situa-

tion at the institution of Holy Communion in the circle of the Apostles. This highlights the importance of the Apostles for the proper administration of Holy Communion. However, this remembrance extends even further, namely to the resurrection of the Lord (which is why Holy Communion is also an Easter meal) and to His ascension into heaven. Everyone who celebrates Holy Communion partakes in this commemoration and its proclamation until Christ returns.

This is not only a matter of remembrance directed toward the past, but rather also a reminder of the certainty of Christ's current presence and His future kingdom.

8.2.9 Holy Communion as a meal of profession

Holy Communion is a meal of profession, as is clear from the words: "You proclaim the Lord's death ..." (1 Corinthians 11: 26). The profession of the death, resurrection, and return of Jesus Christ is part of the fundamental profession of the Christian faith. This profession is required of all those who wish to partake of Holy Communion for salvation.

Those who regularly partake of Holy Communion in the New Apostolic Church should be aware that they are thereby publicly professing their faith in the activity and authority of the Apostles of Jesus at work today (*see 2.4 and 8.2.21*).

The emphasis on the confessional nature of the holy meal also serves to counteract thoughtless or purely habitual partaking in the sacrament.

8.2.10 Holy Communion as a meal of fellowship

Holy Communion is a meal of fellowship in a threefold sense:

- First of all, the incarnate and glorified Son of God enters into fellowship with His Apostles in the celebration of Holy Communion. Thereby the original situation at the institution of Holy Communion is repeated.

- However, in the celebration of Holy Communion the Risen One also has fellowship with those believers who partake of the Lord's Supper worthily for their salvation.
- Moreover, those assembled in the congregation for divine service also have fellowship with one another in Holy Communion.

8.2.11 Holy Communion as an eschatological meal

Holy Communion has an eschatological—end-time—character because it is closely linked to the marriage supper in heaven. In Jesus Christ the kingdom of God has drawn near. In accordance with His statement: “I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes” (Luke 22: 18), the congregation joined in Holy Communion awaits the fulfilment of the promise announced to them in this Communion fellowship. Until the future and ultimate unification of the bride with the bridegroom (*see 10.2*), the congregation experiences its most intimate fellowship with the Lord through Holy Communion.

SUMMARY

Holy Communion is a meal of remembrance: it commemorates the death of Jesus Christ as a unique event that is valid for all time. This commemoration extends beyond the resurrection and ascension of the Lord and also incorporates the current presence of Christ as well as His future kingdom. (8.2.8)

Holy Communion is a profession of the death, resurrection, and return of Jesus Christ. This profession is required of all who wish to partake of it. (8.2.9)

Those who regularly partake in Holy Communion in the New Apostolic Church should be aware that they are thereby also professing belief in the Apostles of Jesus active today. (8.2.9)

In Holy Communion Jesus Christ joins in fellowship, first with His Apostles, and then with the believers. The congregation gathered for divine service also has fellowship among one another in Holy Communion. (8.2.10)

Holy Communion also has an eschatological character: it is closely associated with the marriage feast in heaven. Until the ultimate reunion of the bride and bridegroom, the congregation experiences its most intimate fellowship with Him in Holy Communion. (8.2.11)

8.2.12 The real presence of the body and blood of Christ in Holy Communion

The elements of bread and wine are not transformed in their substance through the consecration and pronouncement of the words of institution. Rather, the substance of Christ's body and blood is joined to them (consubstantiation). There is thus no transformation of the substances (transubstantiation).

There is a close connection between Holy Communion and the fact that Jesus Christ has both a human and a divine nature, both of which exist unadulterated and indivisible in Him (*see* 3.4). It is in this sense that the relationship between the bread and wine and the body and blood of Christ is to be understood: after the consecration, a parallel exists between the "bread and wine"—which corresponds to the human nature of Christ—and the "body and blood"—which corresponds to the divine nature of Christ.

In Holy Communion, bread and wine correspond to the human nature of Christ, while the body and blood correspond to His divine nature. Accordingly, there can be no transubstantiation of the bread and wine. Rather, even after consecration, the bread and wine retain their natural substance. Yet the bread and wine are not merely metaphors or symbols for the body and blood of Christ. Rather, the body and blood of Christ are truly present (real presence). Through the words of consecration spoken by an Apostle or a priestly

minister commissioned by him, the substance of the body and blood of Christ is joined to the substance of the bread and wine.

The outward form (accidence) of the elements of Holy Communion is not changed by this act. Just as the Man Jesus was visible during His life on earth, so also the bread and wine are visible in Holy Communion. After their consecration, however, the elements of Holy Communion constitute a dual substance—like the two natures of Jesus Christ—namely that of bread and wine and that of the body and blood of Christ. The Son of God is then truly present in the elements of Holy Communion: in His divinity and in His humanity.

However, as regards the elements of Communion it is not the case that the bread alone corresponds to the body of Christ and that the wine alone corresponds to the blood of Christ. Rather, the body and blood of Christ is completely present in each of the two elements, both the bread *and* the wine.

The body and blood of Christ remain present in the consecrated wafer until it has reached its designated recipient.

After the divine service, the wafers that were not dispensed are treated with reverence and care.

8.2.13 The real presence of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in Holy Communion

In Holy Communion, it is not only the body and blood of Christ, but also His sacrifice itself, that are truly present. However, this sacrifice has only been brought once and is not repeated in Holy Communion. Neither is Holy Communion merely a reminder of the sacrifice. Rather, during the celebration of Holy Communion, Jesus Christ is in the midst of the congregation as the crucified, risen, and returning Lord. Thus His once-brought sacrifice is also present in that its effect grants the individual access to salvation. In this way, the celebration of Holy Communion causes the partakers to repeatedly envision the sacrificial death of the Lord, which enables them to proclaim it with conviction (1 Corinthians 11: 26).

SUMMARY

The bread and wine are not changed in their substance through the consecration or the speaking of the words of institution. Rather the substance of the body and blood of Jesus is joined to them (consubstantiation). (8.2.12)

In Holy Communion the bread and wine correspond to the human nature of Christ, while the body and blood correspond to His divine nature. (8.2.12)

Bread and wine are not merely metaphors or symbols for the body and blood of Christ. Rather the body and blood of Christ are truly present (real presence). (8.2.12)

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is also present in Holy Communion. (8.2.13)

8.2.14 The relationship between forgiveness of sins and Holy Communion

The forgiveness of sins and Holy Communion are closely related to one another. Both the forgiveness of sins and Holy Communion have their foundation in Christ's sacrifice (Acts 13: 37–38). Jesus Christ instituted Holy Communion on the basis of His sacrifice: "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26: 28). At the same time, these words of the Lord make it clear that He brought His sacrifice in order to redeem mankind from sin.

Christ authorised His Apostles to proclaim the forgiveness of sins (*see* 7.6.2) and to celebrate Holy Communion as He Himself had done with them (Luke 22: 19).

Although the sacrifice of Christ becomes present in Holy Communion, Holy Communion does not in itself effect forgiveness of sins. Rather, the forgiveness of sins proclaimed before the consecration of the elements of Holy Communion also enables believers to worthily partake of Holy Communion.

8.2.15 Holy Communion and the Apostle ministry

Jesus Christ instituted Holy Communion in the circle of His Apostles and entrusted it to them. He commissioned them to proclaim the gospel and to dispense the sacraments. The epistle to the Hebrews illustrates that Jesus Christ is the true High Priest who offers Himself up as a sacrifice. Whenever an Apostle or a priestly minister commissioned by Him performs the consecration, this occurs by the commission and authority of Jesus Christ. Here it is the Holy Spirit who effects the real presence of the Son of God, His body and blood, in Holy Communion. It is also in this sense that the Apostles of Jesus are “stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4: 1).

Where the Holy Spirit is active through the ministry established and authorised by Jesus Christ, this sacramental reality comes into being.

SUMMARY

The forgiveness of sins and Holy Communion are closely related to one another. Both are founded upon the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Although the sacrifice of Christ is present in Holy Communion, forgiveness of sins is not effected at the same time in the sacrament. (8.2.14)

The forgiveness of sins also enables believers to worthily partake of Holy Communion. (8.2.14)

Jesus Christ instituted Holy Communion in the circle of the Apostles and entrusted it to them. (8.2.15)

Where the Holy Spirit is at work through the ministry established and authorised by Jesus Christ, this sacramental reality comes into being. (8.2.15)

8.2.16 The words of consecration in Holy Communion

For the consecration of Holy Communion, the authorised minister speaks a liturgically fixed text based on 1 Corinthians 11: 23 et seq. and Matthew 26: 26 et seq. as follows:

“In the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, I consecrate bread and wine for Holy Communion and lay thereupon the once brought, eternally valid sacrifice of Jesus Christ. For the Lord took bread and wine, gave thanks and said: ‘This is My body which is broken for you. This is My blood of the new covenant given for many for the remission of sins. Eat and drink! Do this in remembrance of Me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this wine, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes. Amen!”

8.2.17 The celebration and receiving of Holy Communion

The sacrament of Holy Communion is administered by dispensing the body and blood of Jesus Christ in the consecrated wafer with the words: “The body and blood of Jesus given for you.” Hence the designation “Holy Communion” is used primarily in reference to the consecrated and dispensed communion wafer (bread and wine as sacramental elements).

Since both the consecration of the communion wafer and its dispensation are part of the sacrament, the term “Holy Communion” is used, in the broader sense, as the designation for the complete act of consecration and dispensation (sacramental act).

Owing to its great importance, the congregation is called upon to celebrate Holy Communion in reverence, faith, and complete devotion to Christ.

8.2.18 The prerequisites for partaking in Holy Communion

The fundamental prerequisites for partaking worthily of Holy Communion are belief and a repentant heart filled with longing for salvation. Although unbelief does not render the sacrament invalid, faith is the prerequisite for it to serve for blessing and salvation. Unbelief in receiving the sacrament can be related to the words in 1 Corinthians 11: 29: “For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgement to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.”

Those who are indifferent to the suffering and death of Christ or who merely make a habit of the celebration of the sacrament, and partake of Holy Communion in this manner, run the risk of doing so unworthily.

8.2.19 The manner in which Holy Communion is received

Holy Communion is received both by the ministers and the congregation in both forms, namely bread and wine.

As of 1917, the New Apostolic Church has dispensed both elements of Holy Communion together in the form of a communion wafer sprinkled with wine.

8.2.20 The effects of Holy Communion

Those who partake worthily of Holy Communion share in the merit acquired by Jesus Christ through His sacrifice. The believer’s share in the new covenant and in the merit of Christ—which is founded upon Holy Baptism with water—is continually reinforced by partaking in Holy Communion.

Furthermore, Holy Communion guarantees fellowship of life with the Son of God. It is a visible expression and a reinforcement of life with Jesus Christ. Through His body and blood, Christ shares His nature with the believer—a

nature which is distinguished by perfect strength to overcome—thereby allowing the believer to live in Christ.

On account of the real presence of the body and blood of Christ, the worthy partaking of Holy Communion establishes true fellowship with the Lord and thereby the unity of the believers, both the living and the dead, with one another (John 17: 20–21). This is also expressed in 1 Corinthians 10: 17: “For we, though many, are *one* bread and *one* body; for we all partake of that *one* bread.” This unity of the faithful created through Holy Communion is the unity with Jesus Christ, the Apostles sent by Him, and all those who have been reborn of water and the Spirit. In this fellowship of the Lord’s Supper the true nature and true form of the church of Christ are thus clearly revealed (see 6.5).

At the same time, Holy Communion is an essential means of preparing for the day of Christ’s return.

SUMMARY

When consecrating Holy Communion, the authorised minister speaks a liturgically fixed text based on 1 Corinthians 11: 23 et seq. and Matthew 26: 26 et seq. (8.2.16)

The body and blood of Jesus Christ is dispensed in the consecrated wafer. (8.2.17)

The basic prerequisites for partaking worthily of Holy Communion are a longing for salvation, willingness to repent, and faith. (8.2.18)

In the New Apostolic Church bread and wine are dispensed in the form of a wafer sprinkled with wine. (8.2.19)

The believer’s share in the merit of Christ—which is founded upon Holy Baptism with water—is continually reinforced by partaking in Holy Communion. Holy Communion assures the fellowship of life with the Son of God and establishes the unity of the believers among one another. (8.2.20)

Holy Communion is an essential means of preparation for the return of Christ. (8.2.20)

8.2.21 Eligibility for partaking in Holy Communion

All those who have been baptised, adopted, or sealed in the New Apostolic Church are entitled to regularly partake in Holy Communion. These individuals profess the content of the New Apostolic Creed (*see 2.4*).

An essential prerequisite for receiving Holy Communion is Holy Baptism with water. Only those who have been baptised should partake in Holy Communion.

Although usually only New Apostolic Christians receive Holy Communion, Christians from other denominations who have been baptised in the proper manner (*see 8.1.4*) can partake of Holy Communion as guests. It should be made clear to them that Holy Communion is a meal of profession of the Son of God who died, resurrected from the dead, and will come again.

Secession or excommunication from the New Apostolic Church also voids admission to Holy Communion. Upon readmission to the New Apostolic Church, the believer is once again granted access to Holy Communion.

8.2.22 Communion celebrations of the churches

Where the authorised Apostle ministry is active, the body and blood of Jesus is joined to the bread and wine in Holy Communion. The celebrations of other churches also contain important elements of Holy Communion, since the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are also commemorated with belief and gratitude there.

New Apostolic Christians should bear in mind that by regularly partaking in the Communion celebration of another church they are in principle professing that church's doctrine.

SUMMARY

Those who are baptised, adopted, or sealed in the New Apostolic Church are entitled to regularly partake in Holy Communion. The essential prerequisite is Holy Baptism with water. Properly baptised Christians can be admitted to Holy Communion as guests. (8.2.21)

Secession or excommunication from the New Apostolic Church invalidates the right to partake in Holy Communion. (8.2.21)

The Communion celebrations of other churches also contain important elements of Holy Communion. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are also commemorated with belief and gratitude there. (8.2.22)

8.3 Holy Sealing

Holy Sealing is the sacrament through which the believer, through the laying on of hands and the prayer of an Apostle, receives the gift of the Holy Spirit and becomes a child of God with the calling to become a firstling. Accordingly, the Eighth Article of Faith states: “I believe that those baptised with water must, through an Apostle, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit to attain the childhood in God and thereby the prerequisite for becoming a firstling.”

8.3.1 Concerning the term “sealing”

The term “sealing” refers to the use of a seal. Important documents are certified and given authority by means of a seal. It documents authenticity. Confidential documents are closed with a seal. Owners designate their property with a seal. A seal is a guarantee that the authority behind it assures protection and integrity.

These aspects of the word’s meaning are also reflected in the designation for the sacrament of baptism with the Spirit. Furthermore, in the epistles of

the New Testament, “being sealed” is understood to mean receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit:

- “Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee” (2 Corinthians 1: 21–22).
- “In Him [Christ] you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit” (Ephesians 1: 13).
- “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4: 30).

The book of Revelation also contains references to sealing as a mark of ownership or as an eschatological sign of salvation (Revelation 7: 3; 22: 4).

8.3.2 The promise of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

In the time of the old covenant, the Holy Spirit was active in individual human beings chosen by God for specific tasks. Hence the prophets used the words “Thus says the Lord” to attest to their divine authority and instruction. The Spirit of God awakened in them the thoughts on which their proclamations of both judgement and salvation were based.

By commission of God, the prophets also anointed kings to rule the chosen people. Thus, for example, David was anointed king by Samuel (1 Samuel 16: 12–13). With this act, David’s kingship was “sealed”, as it were. Furthermore, we read that the Spirit of God came upon David. According to Psalm 51: 11, the king prayed—after having committed a sin—that the Lord should not take His Holy Spirit from him.

Moreover, the Old Testament contains references to the future, when the Spirit of God would be poured out—no longer merely upon individuals, but upon many people: “And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those

days” (Joel 2: 28–29). Comparable promises can be found in the words of other prophets, for example in Ezekiel 36: 27: “I will put My Spirit within you.” In his sermon on Pentecost, Apostle Peter pointed out that the promise of the prophet Joel had been fulfilled (Acts 2: 15 et seq.).

8.3.3 Jesus’ anointing with the Holy Spirit

Like the two other sacraments, Holy Sealing also has its foundation in the life and activity of Jesus Christ. Concerning Him—the Son of Man—John 6: 27 states that “God the Father has set His seal on Him.”

After Jesus had been baptised in the Jordan, John the Baptist also testified: “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him.” This was the identifying sign that God had promised John the Baptist, by which he was to know Him “who baptises with the Holy Spirit ... this is the Son of God” (John 1: 29–34).

This event is also described in Matthew 3: 16: “When He had been baptised, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.” The descending of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus occurred after His baptism with water was complete. Two distinct acts can therefore be identified. The Holy Spirit and the voice of God proclaim the divine Sonship of Jesus. The anointing of Jesus with the Holy Spirit is a legitimation of His Messiahship, and is at the same time a reference to the later sacrament.

The understanding of the link between Holy Baptism with water and Holy Sealing is based—among other things—on these two events, namely baptism with water and anointing with the Holy Spirit. They belong together and are interrelated—and yet they are two distinct sacraments.

That Holy Sealing has its example in the anointing of Jesus is also underlined in Acts 10: 37–38: “The word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John

preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power.”

8.3.4 The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost

In His farewell discourses, Jesus Christ repeatedly promised to send His Apostles the Holy Spirit, for example in John 15: 26: “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.” This promise was fulfilled on Pentecost when the Apostles and disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2: 1–4).

God acted directly in both of these fundamental events, and this symbolically prefigures the sacrament of Holy Sealing: He sealed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and testified that He was the Son of God. He sealed the Apostles—and the believers who had fellowship with them—with the Holy Spirit.

After the Pentecost sermon, when those who had come to believe in Christ asked him what they should do, Peter answered: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2: 38). This shows that Holy Baptism is a prerequisite for receiving the Holy Spirit.

The centurion Cornelius was an exception: here God gave the gift of the Holy Spirit directly to non-baptised souls in order to show Apostle Peter that salvation was now also accessible to the Gentiles. Therefore, in this special case, Holy Baptism was only administered after the dispensation of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10).

8.3.5 Further attestations of Holy Sealing in the New Testament

According to the testimony of Scripture, Holy Sealing is bound to the Apostle ministry. Philip had preached in Samaria and baptised those who believed in

the gospel: “Now when the Apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8: 12 et seq.). Simon the sorcerer “saw that through the laying on of the Apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given” (Acts 8: 18). In this incident, the sacraments of Holy Baptism with water and Holy Sealing—that is the receiving of the gift of the Holy Spirit—are clearly distinguished from one another.

There is another event that serves to substantiate the distinction between baptism with water and the receiving of the Holy Spirit. In Ephesus there were disciples who, having only received the baptism of John, were then baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus: “And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them” (Acts 19: 1–6).

These accounts indicate that, apart from the exceptions mentioned, the gift of the Holy Spirit was solely administered by Apostles. Furthermore, it becomes clear that the gift of the Holy Spirit was dispensed only after baptism with water had been administered.

8.3.6 The proper dispensation of Holy Sealing

As the water in Holy Baptism and the bread and wine in Holy Communion, the gesture of laying on of hands of the Apostle is—according to the testimony of the New Testament—the visible element in Holy Sealing. The prayer of the Apostle is also part of the proper dispensation of this sacrament.

The sacrament of Holy Sealing, the baptism of the Spirit, is exclusively dispensed by Apostles.

SUMMARY

In Holy Sealing believers receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (8.3)

The descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus occurred after His baptism was complete. The anointing of Jesus with the Holy Spirit is a legitimation of His Messiahship and a reference to the sacrament of Holy Sealing. (8.3.3)

The sending of the Holy Spirit, as promised by Jesus, was fulfilled on Pentecost. (8.3.4)

According to the testimony of Scripture, Holy Sealing is bound to the Apostle ministry. (8.3.5)

The gift of the Holy Spirit was only dispensed after baptism with water had been performed. (8.3.5)

The sacrament of Holy Sealing is dispensed exclusively by Apostles through the gesture of laying on of hands and a prayer. (8.3.6)

8.3.7 Prerequisites for receiving Holy Sealing

Holy Sealing requires the recipient to believe in the triune God and the Apostles sent by Jesus Christ. Prior to this he must have been baptised with water in the proper manner (*see 8.1*). He must profess his faith and vow to follow Christ. In the Lord's work of redemption, he will then be prepared for the imminent return of Christ.

Holy Sealing is dispensed to both adults and children. When children receive Holy Sealing, their parents—or those responsible for the religious upbringing of the children—must profess the required belief on their behalf and vow to raise the children in the New Apostolic faith.

8.3.8 Holy Sealing as an act of God

Like Holy Baptism with water, Holy Sealing is also an act of God upon a human being. That which was begun in Holy Baptism is completed in Holy Sealing, namely the rebirth out of water and Spirit. Both sacraments are acts of God's grace upon a human being and are only performed once. The life received thereby is nourished and preserved above all by regularly partaking of Holy Communion.

The new creation (2 Corinthians 5: 17) which comes into being through the rebirth is a reference to the sanctification and renewal which occurs through God, the Holy Spirit.

8.3.9 The effects of Holy Sealing

Through the sacrament of Holy Sealing, the baptised believer is filled with the Holy Spirit, with power from God (*see* 3.5.2).

Through Holy Sealing, the Spirit of God makes His permanent abode in a human being—God Himself grants him a share in His nature: "... the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5: 5). The initial relationship of proximity to God founded upon baptism with water now takes on a new quality in the childhood in God.

Through the rebirth out of water and Spirit, the believer is moreover called by God to become a firstling. With respect to the kingdom of God, the rebirth has both a present and future aspect (John 3: 5).

The present effect of the rebirth—the childhood in God—represents, as it were, an anticipation of being a firstling and part of the "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2: 9). In this sense, "childhood in God" thus refers to that condition of a human being before God which is characterised by having received all the sacraments, believing in the proper proclamation of the gospel, and aligning one's life by the return of Christ.

The "Spirit of adoption" whose activity begins to unfold within a human being through Holy Sealing, confidently addresses God as "Abba, Father!"

The Holy Spirit testifies to those who have received Him that they are children of God (Romans 8: 16). This occurs in the conscience (*see* 4.2.1.3) but also through the word proclaimed in the divine service.

At Holy Sealing the believer surrenders himself to the triune God, and God accepts him as His property. This means that the reborn believer becomes an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ. He is called to suffer with Christ, and receives the promise that he will be glorified with Christ (Romans 8: 15–18).

The surrender to Christ begun in Holy Baptism with water is completed in Holy Sealing. The believer thereby receives that spiritual revival which will lead him into fellowship with the returning Lord (James 1: 18; Revelation 14: 4). Accordingly the believer now belongs to that group within the church whom God prepares through Apostles for the return of Christ and the marriage in heaven (Revelation 19: 7–8).

The enduring presence of Holy Spirit within a human being also has profound and noticeable effects on one's earthly life: if the sealed believer gives the Holy Spirit room to unfold, divine virtues will develop, which Apostle Paul figuratively describes as "fruit" of the Spirit (Galatians 5: 22–23).

The Holy Spirit will then reveal Himself as a light that provides the believer with insight into divine interrelationships. He is a Comforter and Helper. The Holy Spirit also admonishes the sealed believer, sharpens his conscience, and provides orientation on the way to the goal of faith.

SUMMARY

The prerequisites for receiving Holy Sealing are baptism with water, belief in the triune God, as well as belief in the Apostles sent by Jesus Christ. (8.3.7)

The rebirth out of water and the Spirit, which was begun by God in Holy Baptism with water, is completed through Holy Sealing. The new creation that comes about through the rebirth is a reference to the sanctification and renewal that occurs through God, the Holy Spirit. (8.3.8)

At Holy Sealing a human being is enduringly filled with the Holy Spirit. (8.3.9)

The effect of the rebirth out of water and the Spirit is childhood in God as well as the calling to be a firstling. If the sealed soul gives the Holy Spirit room to unfold, divine virtues will develop. (8.3.9)

Part 9

Life after death



9 Life after death

It is a fundamental Christian conviction that man lives on after physical death. Insights concerning life after death can be found in Holy Scripture. Beyond that, the doctrine of the afterlife is based on revelations of the Holy Spirit.

9.1 The immortality of the soul

Man is both a physical and a spiritual being. Holy Scripture understands the human being as an entity comprised of spirit, soul, and body (*see* 3.3.4). The material being of a person, that is the body, is transitory. It is taken from the earth and will return to the earth (Genesis 3: 19). Soul and spirit, by contrast, exist eternally (Matthew 25: 46). Thus we are justified in speaking of the immortality of the soul or of “life after death”.

The immortality of the soul should not be equated with the biblical term “eternal life”, which actually refers to eternal fellowship with God.

9.2 Death

Holy Scripture provides various interpretations of the term “death”.

First of all, the term describes a person’s physical death, the end of his earthly existence. Once death has occurred, the soul and spirit have left the body.

“Spiritual death” is the separation of man from God, which is brought about through a life of sin (Romans 6: 23).

Holy Scripture also speaks of a “second death” (Revelation 20: 6; 21: 8). This refers to the separation from God which will take effect after the Last Judgement.

Finally, Holy Scripture also speaks of death as a power opposed to God, which seeks to threaten and destroy physical and spiritual life alike. At times this power is figuratively personified (Revelation 6: 8).

Jesus Christ conquered death and thereby made it possible for mankind to gain access to eternal life (2 Timothy 1: 9–10). His power was already manifested when He raised people from the dead (Matthew 9: 18–26; Luke 7: 11–15; John 11: 1–45), but above all in His own resurrection (1 Corinthians 15: 54–57).

At the end of all things, death will be relieved of all its power (1 Corinthians 15: 26; Revelation 20: 14).

9.3 The afterlife of the soul

In the Old Testament, the continued life of the soul after physical death is already suggested by formulations such as being “gathered to [one’s] people” (Numbers 20: 23–24; 27: 12–13). The New Testament gives significantly clearer testimony concerning life after physical death (Luke 9: 30–31, 1 Peter 3: 19–20, and Revelation 6: 9–11).

The account of the events on the Mount of Transfiguration shows, among other things, that a person retains his personality after physical death: here Moses and Elijah appeared from the beyond and were also recognised as such.

Notions such as “soul sleep” or “reincarnation” (repeated lives on earth) are unfounded and stand in contradiction to biblical testimony (Hebrews 9: 27).

SUMMARY

Human beings live on after physical death. While the body is transitory, the soul will continue to live forever. It is immortal. (9; 9.1)

Jesus Christ has conquered death and thereby granted human beings access to eternal life. At the end of all things all power will be taken from death. (9.2)

The afterlife of the soul is attested in the Old and New Testaments. A human being retains his personality after physical death. (9.3)

9.4 The beyond

The term “beyond” generally refers to all realms, events, and conditions that exist outside of the material world. In a narrower sense this term refers to the realm of the dead (Hebrew: *Sheol*; Greek: *Hades*), and will, in the following, be used with this meaning. Thus, in principle, the beyond and the dead are invisible to living human beings. However, departed souls can, in individual cases, show themselves. To make contact with the dead through necromancy or channelling is prohibited by God and therefore sinful (Deuteronomy 18: 10–11).

The Old Testament describes the realm of the dead as a predominantly dark place (Job 10: 21–22) where the dead find themselves in a condition bereft of joy (Psalm 88: 10–12; 115: 17). Yet there is also a note of hope for redemption from darkness (Psalm 23: 4; 49: 15).

In His parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus, Jesus Christ referred to the bosom of Abraham, an image of security (Luke 16: 19–31). From this parable, further details can be derived:

- After physical death, the human soul lives on in the realm of the dead. The individuality of the soul remains intact.
- In the realm of the dead there is a place of security as well as a place of torment, which are separated from one another.

- The place in which a person's soul dwells after death depends upon his conduct with regard to God's will during his lifetime.
- The departed can become aware of their condition. Those who suffer in agony will hope for help.

Beyond that, the parable refers to Jesus' resurrection, and thus also to His sacrificial death and the possibility of redemption founded upon it. It figuratively illustrates conditions in the beyond at the time of the old covenant: the gulf between the realm of torment and the realm of security was impossible to bridge in the old covenant.

Through His merit, Christ, the "firstfruits" in the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15: 23), has overcome the Devil and defeated death (1 Corinthians 15: 55; Hebrews 2: 14). For the souls in the beyond He thereby also opened up a hitherto unimaginable proximity with God: the gulf between the realm of torment and the realm of security can now be bridged.

9.5 The condition of souls in the beyond

The condition of souls in the beyond is a direct expression of their proximity to, or remoteness from, God, and therefore varies greatly. Death has not brought about any change to the condition of the souls. Rather, their condition is identical to that which they had during their lifetime.

The term "realm" is sometimes used in connection with proximity to, or remoteness from, God. The realm into which a soul passes in the beyond depends upon how a person has conducted himself with respect to the will of God. In this each individual bears responsibility for himself. For instance, belief or unbelief, forgiveness or irreconcilability, love or hatred not only leave their mark on human beings during earthly life, but also in the beyond.

In 1 Thessalonians 4: 16 we read of the "dead in Christ". These are souls who were reborn of water and the Spirit, and who sincerely endeavoured to live in accordance with their faith. The fellowship with the Lord, into which they entered during their earthly lives through Holy Baptism with water and Holy Sealing, and which they maintained through Holy Communion, will

continue after their death. Together with the faithful on earth, they belong to the congregation of the Lord, and find themselves in a condition of righteousness before God (*see 4.2.1.2 and 4.8.2*). For these souls, preparing for the return of Christ was the central element of their earthly lives, and the longing for this moment also fills them in the beyond. They were and remain devoted to the Lord, and will experience security and peace.

The Wisdom of Solomon 3: 1–3 already mentions the possibility of a condition of security: “But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die: and their departure is taken for misery. And their going from us to be utter destruction: but they are in peace.”

The dead in Christ have access to the word of God. Through this word as well as through Holy Communion administered to them by Apostles (*see 12.1.9 and 12.1.3*) they receive that which they need for attaining eternal life.

There are also reborn souls who pass into the beyond who have not lived according to their faith. In order to rectify their deficiencies they need—as is the case on earth—the grace of God in word and sacrament.

Those souls in the beyond who have never heard of the gospel, never experienced forgiveness of sins, and never received any sacraments, find themselves in a condition of remoteness from God. This can only be overcome by believing in Jesus Christ, accepting His merit, and receiving the sacraments.

SUMMARY

The term “beyond” refers to all realms, events, and conditions that lie outside of the material world. Often the beyond is equated with the realm of the dead. (9.4)

Christ, the “firstfruits” in the resurrection, has conquered death and thereby made it possible for the souls in the beyond to enter into the proximity of God. (9.4)

The condition of the souls in the beyond is an expression of their proximity to God, or remoteness from Him, and is the same there as it was during their lifetime. Those who are reborn and who followed the Lord will find them-

selves in a state of righteousness before God. Souls who have never heard of the gospel, never had their sins forgiven, and never received a sacrament, find themselves in a condition of remoteness from God. This can only be overcome by believing in Jesus Christ, accepting His merit, and receiving the sacraments. (9.5)

9.6 Help for the departed

Ever since Christ brought His sacrifice, it has been possible for the condition of the souls in the beyond to change for the better. Thus salvation can still be attained even after physical death.

9.6.1 Intercession

Already at the time of the old covenant, there is evidence of the belief that it is possible to perform good deeds for the departed and thereby help alleviate their situation. The twelfth chapter of 2 Maccabees tells of Jews who had served idols and then died in battle. The living implored God to wipe out their sins, and collected money in order to buy animals and bring an offering of atonement. They did this because they were convinced that the dead would one day rise again.

Hope in the resurrection of the dead has always been a fundamental component of Christian teaching. Associated with it is also the conviction that intercessions for the dead are necessary, and that these intercessions will have an effect on them.

The same is true for the dispensation of sacraments for the dead. The biblical basis for this is found in 1 Corinthians 15: 29: in Corinth, the living were baptised on behalf of the dead. This practice inspired by the Holy Spirit has been readopted by the Apostles of today. From this developed the services for the departed that are customary today.

New Apostolic Christians intercede in prayer for the departed: they ask the Lord to help those who have gone into the beyond in an unredeemed state.

9.6.2 The participation of the dead in Christ

From 2 Maccabees 15: 12–14 it follows that departed souls can also offer intercessory prayers: “And this was his [Judas Maccabeus’] vision: that Onias, who had been high priest ... holding up his hands prayed for the whole body of the Jews. This done, in like manner there appeared a man with gray hairs, and exceeding glorious, who was of a wonderful and excellent majesty. Then Onias answered, saying, “This is a lover of the brethren, who prayeth much for the people, and for the holy city, to wit, Jeremias the prophet of God.” Moreover, Holy Scripture tells us that the spirits and souls of the righteous can worship and praise the Lord: “O ye spirits and souls of the righteous, bless ye the Lord: praise and exalt Him above all forever” (The Song of the Three Holy Children 64).

The dead and the living in Christ comprise a single fellowship. Together they are part of the Lord’s work of redemption. In the beyond—as here—they will work in His mind, interceding with God for the unredeemed.

The events on the Mount of Transfiguration also reinforce the conviction that redeemed souls continue to be active in the beyond (Luke 9: 30–31).

9.6.3 Imparting salvation to the departed

According to 1 Peter 3: 18–20, those who died in the flood received special love and care from Jesus Christ: after His sacrificial death, He proclaimed the gospel to them in the realm of the dead. The fact that the departed need the proclamation of the gospel in order to “live in the spirit” is also stated in 1 Peter 4: 6: “For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.”

Jesus Christ is Lord over the dead and the living. His gospel is equally valid for all. It is the desire of God that all men be saved (1 Timothy 2: 4–6; John 3: 16). This means that God’s will to save is universal. Salvation is offered through the proclamation of the word, the forgiveness of sins, and the sacraments. All of these are likewise intended for the departed. For them as for the living, belief in Jesus Christ is indispensable for attaining salvation. Redemption occurs solely through Jesus Christ.

The Apostles fulfil the commission of Jesus—namely to proclaim the gospel, to forgive sins, and to administer the sacraments—upon both the living and the dead. They act in Christ’s stead and in His name. Just as Jesus Christ brought His sacrifice on earth, salvation is also imparted through the Apostles on earth. Since sacraments always have a visible component, they can also only be performed in the visible realm. The effect of the sacraments as essential elements in imparting salvation is the same for both the living and the dead.

The dispensation of Holy Baptism with water, Holy Sealing, and Holy Communion to the departed is effected when the visible act associated with each is performed upon a living person (*see 8 and 12.1.13*). Here the salvific effect is not for the benefit of the living, but rather exclusively for the departed.

Departed souls who, through Holy Baptism with water and Holy Sealing, have experienced the rebirth of water and the Spirit are of equal standing with the dead in Christ (1 Thessalonians 4: 16).

SUMMARY

Since the sacrifice of Christ, salvation can still be attained even after physical death. (9.6)

New Apostolic Christians intercede in prayer for the departed: they ask the Lord to help the souls who have entered into the beyond in an unredeemed state. (9.6.1)

Together, both the living and the dead in Christ belong to the Lord's work of redemption. Both here and in the beyond, they will intercede with God on behalf of the unredeemed. (9.6.2)

God's will to save is universal. Jesus' commission to proclaim the gospel, forgive sins, and dispense the sacraments is fulfilled by the Apostles of today upon both the living and the dead. (9.6.3)

The effect of the sacraments is the same for both the living and the dead. The dead who have received the rebirth out of water and the Spirit have the same status as the dead in Christ. (9.6.3)

Part 10

The doctrine of
future things

10

10 The doctrine of future things

God's actions are aimed at making salvation accessible to mankind. His will to save applies to all people in the past, the present, and the future. The history of salvation progresses according to the wise plan of God (*see 4.4*). The knowledge that God is faithful enables us to confidently wait for the fulfillment of further divine promises (Hebrews 10: 23).

The doctrine of future things (eschatology) is based on Holy Scripture. Many references to events in the future of salvation history are contained in the gospels and the letters of the Apostles.

Some key statements are recorded in the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which speaks of future things in figurative terms. In this important source of hope for the future, the Lord repeatedly reinforces the promise of His return, reveals the progress of the history of salvation, and thereby grants insights into His future actions.

10.1 The return of Jesus Christ

In close similarity to the Apostolicum, the Second Article of Faith professes: "I believe in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, our Lord, who ... ascended into heaven. He is seated at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, from where He will return."

This profession is further expanded in the Ninth Article of Faith: "I believe that the Lord Jesus will return as surely as He ascended into heaven and that He will take to Himself the firstfruits of the dead and living who have hoped for and were prepared for His coming."

Jesus Christ will return—this is a core statement of the gospel. Ever since His ascension into heaven, the Apostles of the early and latter time have pro-

claimed the return of the Lord. To be accepted by Him at this event is the goal of faith of New Apostolic Christians.

10.1.1 The promise of the return of Jesus Christ

In His farewell discourses, Jesus Christ gave His Apostles the promise of His return: “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14: 3). This promise of the Lord was reinforced by angels at His ascension into heaven: “This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1: 11).

No man or angel, but only God alone, knows the day or the hour of Jesus Christ’s return. The Son of God repeatedly admonishes watchfulness: “Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming” (Matthew 24: 42; cf. Luke 21: 36).

Through parables, the Son of God made it clear that one should at all times be vigilant in faith and await His coming (Matthew 24: 43–51; 25: 1–30).

Accordingly, the early Apostles already encouraged the faithful to prepare themselves for the return of the Lord. For example, Apostle Paul addressed the congregation of Corinth with the early Christian call: “Maranatha!”—which means: “Our Lord is coming!” or: “O Lord, come!” (1 Corinthians 16: 22).

The call to watchfulness also comes to expression in the book of Revelation. There Jesus Christ says: “Behold, I am coming quickly!” (Revelation 3: 11; 22: 7, 12, 20). Thereby all believers are called upon to align their lives conscientiously with the return of Christ.

The expectation that the Lord’s promises will be fulfilled, together with the hope of personally experiencing Christ’s return and being caught up to Him, also remain at the core of the New Apostolic faith today. In 1 John 3: 2 we read as follows concerning this: “Beloved, now we are children of God;

and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

10.1.2 Events associated with the return of Jesus Christ

The events at the return of Christ are described in various letters of Apostle Paul:

1 Thessalonians 4: 15–17

“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

1 Corinthians 15: 51–52

“Behold, I tell 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 trumpet. For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

Philippians 3: 20–21:

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”

These Bible passages are of central significance for belief in the return of Christ. An overview results in the following sequence of events:

At the return of the Lord, the dead in Christ will first resurrect incorruptible, and the living who have allowed themselves to be prepared for His coming will experience the transformation without suffering physical death. Thus both the dead and the living will receive a body that is like the glorious body

of Christ. They will then be caught up together to the Lord, who will not descend upon the earth. In this manner they will be led into eternal fellowship with the triune God. These events are part of the first resurrection mentioned in Revelation 20: 5–6 (*see 10.5*).

The statements in Matthew 24: 40–41 and Luke 17: 34 demonstrate that at the return of Christ, the Lord—happening upon mankind in their daily lives—will usher in a separation, a parting, and in this sense also execute a judgement. The words in 2 Corinthians 5: 10 also address this: “For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (cf. Romans 14: 10). This knowledge does not lead believers to fear, but rather encourages them to strive diligently for the goal of their faith (1 Thessalonians 5: 9).

That Jesus Christ will take His bridal congregation unto Himself is one of the fundamental certainties of the New Apostolic faith. From this knowledge, believers also derive the hope that they will not need to suffer physical death, but will rather be transformed: “For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven. ... For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee” (2 Corinthians 5: 2, 4–5). The rapture at the return of Christ is first of all promised to those who have been granted the rebirth out of water and the Spirit, who believe in Christ, and who follow Him. Whether God will also grant other human beings the grace of the rapture is beyond human judgement and is subject to the decision of God.

10.1.3 The bridal congregation

The commission of the Apostles is to prepare the church of Christ for the reunion with Jesus Christ at His return, in accordance with the words of Apostle Paul: “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have be-

trothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11: 2). The “chaste virgin” is a reference to the “bride”, an image for the eschatological community of the saints (Revelation 19: 7).

Those who are numbered to the bride of the Lord will only be revealed at the return of Christ. One of the identifying characteristics of those who will belong to the bride is that they wait daily for the return of Christ and consistently cry out: “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22: 17, 20).

Representing this community of the saints, we also find the images of the “hundred forty-four thousand” (Revelation 14: 1–5) and the “male child” (Revelation 12: 5). These images also indicate important characteristics and conditions.

We read as follows concerning the hundred forty-four thousand: “Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father’s name written on their foreheads. ... These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.” The number 144,000 is of symbolic character. It is derived from the twelve tribes of Israel, and represents divine perfection.

The identifying mark bearing the name of the Lamb and of the Father signifies that the hundred forty-four thousand are the property of God. By following Christ they lead a life in accordance with the gospel in both word and deed (“in their mouth was found no deceit”, “without fault”). They are also described as firstlings (in the Greek text: “firstfruits”), a reference to the Old Testament’s laws of offering. The “firstfruits” are all those whom the Lord takes unto Himself at His return, in figurative terms, those whom He “harvests” (Revelation 14: 15).

Revelation 12 speaks of a woman clothed with the sun—an image for the church of Christ (*see* 6.4.5)—who is about to give birth to a male child. The latter is menaced by a dragon, but he is caught up to God (Revelation 12: 5). The male child symbolises the host of those who will be caught up to God at the return of Christ. The dragon is an image for Satan (Genesis

3: 1; Revelation 12: 9). He can prevent neither the perfection nor the rapture of the bridal congregation.

SUMMARY

The doctrine of future things (eschatology) has its basis in Holy Scripture. (10)

The return of Jesus Christ is a core statement of the gospel. To be accepted by Him on this occasion is the goal of faith of New Apostolic Christians. (10.1)

Jesus Christ promised his return to the Apostles. This was reinforced by angels. No human being or angel—but only God alone—knows when Jesus Christ will return. Every believer is called upon to conduct his life in view of the return of Christ. (10.1.1)

At the return of Christ, the dead who have died in Him will be the first to resurrect. The living who have allowed themselves to be prepared for His coming will receive a body that is like the glorious body of Christ. Together, all of these souls will be caught up and led into eternal fellowship with God. (10.1.2)

The Apostles have the commission to prepare the bridal congregation for the return of Jesus Christ. (10.1.3)

Those who are numbered to the bride of the Lord—the group of those who will be caught up to God—will only be revealed at Jesus' return. They are also known as “firstlings”. Another image for the bridal congregation is the “male child”, and a numerical symbol for them is the “hundred forty-four thousand.” (10.1.3)

10.2 The marriage of the Lamb

The marriage of the Lamb follows directly after the bride has been caught up to heaven. The image of the eschatological marriage feast is found in Revela-

tion 19: 6–9. It refers to the everlasting fellowship of the firstlings with their Lord and their partaking in His glory (Colossians 3: 4; 1 John 3: 2).

The image of the Lamb is already used in Isaiah 53: 4–7. It demonstrates that the coming Messiah will bring His sacrifice, in submissiveness to the will of God, for the redemption of mankind. John the Baptist refers to the Son of God with the words: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1: 29).

The book of Revelation makes frequent reference to Christ as the Lamb. Revelation 5: 12 expresses that the slain Lamb has gained the victory. This means that the abased and crucified Son of God is both the Triumphant and Victorious One. The crucified Christ is the returning Lord, the bridegroom (*see 10.1.3*).

During the marriage of the Lamb the people remaining on the earth will have to endure the rule of Satan, the great tribulation.

10.3 The great tribulation

For as long as the Lord’s work of salvation is on this earth, the earthly creation remains under the special protection of God (Revelation 7: 3). After the return of Christ, a time will begin in which both mankind and the creation will be exposed to the power of Satan. Everything will suffer under the circumstances associated with this.

This period of time can be associated with the “hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world to test those who dwell on the earth”, as referenced in Revelation 3: 10. Holy Scripture also refers to this event as the “great tribulation” (Revelation 7: 14).

Satan’s extensive display of power in the great tribulation far surpasses the trials and the severity of hardships which the church had to endure before the return of the Lord. The bridal congregation will be caught up to God before the start of the great tribulation (Revelation 3: 10; 12: 5, 12).

The image of the woman clothed with the sun—after she has given birth to the male child—represents those who are numbered to the church of

Christ, but who were not caught up to God. They will continue to feel God's support and spiritual care in the "wilderness", that is a condition of hardship and deprivation (Revelation 12: 6).

Even during this time, in which Satan and his forces will rule, there will be human beings who firmly profess Christ, who refuse to worship the Anti-christ, and who will be killed as a consequence of their profession (Revelation 13: 10, 15; cf. Revelation 14: 12–13). These steadfast witnesses for Christ will become martyrs.

10.4 The coming of the Lord with power and great glory

After the marriage in heaven, the Son of God will return to the earth with the firstlings (Revelation 19: 11–16). The Lord foretold this event by referring to His coming "with power and great glory" (Matthew 24: 29–30). Jesus Christ will then reveal His divine power on earth for all to see (Revelation 1: 7). He, the King of kings and Lord of lords, will take away all power from Satan and his followers, and thus put an end to the time of the great tribulation. Satan's followers will be judged (Revelation 19: 20). Satan himself will be bound for "a thousand years", so that "he should deceive the nations no more" (Revelation 20: 1–3). After Satan has been bound and cast into the bottomless pit, the resurrection of the martyrs from the great tribulation will take place (Revelation 20: 4).

10.5 The first resurrection

The only place in Holy Scripture where the expression "first resurrection" can be found is in Revelation 20: 5–6, where it is mentioned in conjunction with a significant beatitude: "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power ..." Those who are praised here as blessed and holy—that is those who will be caught up to God at the

return of Christ, and the martyrs from the great tribulation—are exempted from the Last Judgement.

In 1 Corinthians 15: 20, 22–24 Apostle Paul makes reference to the “order” in the resurrection of the dead: “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ... For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.”

Apostle Paul thus highlights three important aspects:

- Christ was the first to resurrect. He is the firstfruits of those who will resurrect. All hope for the resurrection of the dead is founded upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- The resurrection “afterward” is promised to those who belong to Christ when He comes: at His return the dead in Christ will resurrect, and will then be caught up to God along with the transformed living souls (*see 10.1.2*). In connection with Christ’s coming with power and great glory, the martyrs from the great tribulation are promised resurrection. These two events frame the first resurrection. The following applies to all those who partake in it: “... they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (Revelation 20: 6).
- The “end” of which Apostle Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 15: 24 is a reference to the Last Judgement. Before this, the general resurrection of the dead will take place.

10.6 The continuation of the plan of salvation

After the conclusion of the first resurrection, Christ will establish His kingdom of peace on earth. Then the rule of Jesus Christ as King will be manifested without restriction. He is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9: 6). Satan will be bound and will no longer be able to tempt anyone to sin. Nevertheless,

human beings will continue to be sinners, since the inclination to sin will not have been lifted. People will continue to be born and to die. Death will not yet have been suspended (Revelation 20: 14; cf. Isaiah 65: 20–21).

Exempted from this are the priests of God and Christ, who will have a spiritual body similar to that of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15: 44).

Christ's kingly rule, in which He includes His own as a royal priesthood, will last "a thousand years"—which symbolises a long, but limited time (Revelation 20: 6). It will then be possible to proclaim the gospel without impediment, and salvation will thus be offered during this time: the glad tidings will be brought to those living on earth and to the souls who dwell in the realms of the departed. In this way, all of mankind from all time periods will, by the end of the kingdom of peace, have become acquainted with the gospel of Christ.

The kingdom of peace will come to an end when Satan is released and given one last opportunity to tempt mankind. After his ultimate defeat, he will be condemned and "cast into the lake of fire and brimstone" (Revelation 20: 7–10). Evil in all its manifestations will then have been rendered powerless forever.

Then follows the resurrection of the dead for judgement (Revelation 20: 11–15). Christ will then judge all human beings who did not take part in the first resurrection.

The deciding factor in the verdict pronounced on each human being will be the attitude that he ultimately adopts toward Christ. Those who reject Him and whose names are not "written in the book of life" will remain in the misery of remoteness from God.

Those who find grace in the Last Judgement will become inhabitants of God's new creation and will be permitted to have eternal fellowship with Him.

For those who already reigned with Christ in the kingdom of peace as a royal priesthood, the following promise will be fulfilled in the new creation: "... and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp

nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 22: 3–5).

The expectation recorded in 2 Peter 3: 13 will then become reality: “Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (Isaiah 65: 17). God will replace the old creation with a new one, and the words will be fulfilled: “He [God] will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God” (Revelation 21: 3). This kingdom of God will be eternal, and then God will be all in all (1 Corinthians 15: 28).

SUMMARY

The rapture of the bridal congregation is followed by the marriage of the Lamb. This image for the eschatological marriage feast is a reference to the everlasting fellowship of the firstlings with the Lord. (10.2)

Jesus Christ as the Lamb signifies that the abased and crucified Son of God is, at the same time, the Triumphant and Victorious One. He is the bridegroom. (10.2)

After the return of Christ, a time in which both human beings and the creation will be exposed to the power of Satan will begin: the great tribulation. The image of the woman clothed with the sun—after she has given birth to the male child—refers to those Christians who were not caught up to Jesus Christ. They continue to experience divine support and spiritual nourishment. (10.3)

After the marriage in heaven the Son of God will return to the earth with the firstlings and put an end to the time of the great tribulation. Satan’s followers will then be judged. (10.4)

After Satan’s power has been taken away, the resurrection of the martyrs from the great tribulation will take place. (10.4)

All those who were caught up in the rapture at the return of Christ, as well as the martyrs from the great tribulation, will share in the first resurrection. They will not have to partake in the Last Judgement. (10.5)

After the conclusion of the first resurrection, Christ will establish His kingdom of peace on earth. At the end of the kingdom of peace all human beings of all time periods will have received the gospel of Christ. After Satan has been given one last opportunity to tempt mankind, he will be permanently defeated and judged. Evil in all forms will from then on be rendered powerless forever. (10.6)

This is followed by the resurrection of the dead for judgement. Those who find grace in the Last Judgement will become inhabitants of God's new creation and have eternal fellowship with Him. (10.6)

Part 11

From the history of Christianity

11

11 From the history of Christianity

11.1 The early Christian congregations

According to the great commission given by Jesus Christ, it is the task of the Apostles to go into all the world in order to proclaim the gospel and make disciples of all human beings.

To start with, the Apostles turned to the Jews, and it was in Jerusalem that the first congregation came into being. On account of persecution many believers fled from Jerusalem (Acts 8: 1; 11: 19). Even in their new surroundings they proclaimed the word of the Lord, like Philip did in the capital of Samaria.

In a vision, God showed Apostle Peter that the gospel is also intended for the Gentiles (Acts 10 and 11).

A decisive step in bringing the gospel to the Gentiles was made with the conversion of Saul (Acts 9). He is first identified as an Apostle in the company of Barnabas—and by the name of Paul—in Acts 14: 14.

At the Apostles' council in Jerusalem the first pressing and decisive questions about the position on the mission to the Gentiles and the significance of the Mosaic Law in relationship to the gospel were discussed and clarified (Acts 15: 1–29).

While the gospel was primarily proclaimed among the Jews by Apostles Peter and James, Apostles Paul and Barnabas travelled to the Gentile countries surrounding the Mediterranean for the same purpose. As Eusebius of Caesarea writes in his *Church History*, other Apostles are said to have brought the gospel further to countries in Asia and Africa, and to have established congregations there.

11.2 Christianity after the death of the early Apostles

The activity of the Holy Spirit continued after the death of the early Christian Apostles:

- He saw to it that the biblical canon of the Old and New Testaments came into being.
- He inspired the Church Fathers in the first councils to formulate important principles of Christian doctrine. These include, for example, the doctrine of the Trinity and of the person and dual nature of Jesus as true Man and true God, as well as the knowledge of the key significance that Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection hold for the salvation and redemption of mankind.

During this period, salvation was imparted through the properly performed dispensation of Holy Baptism with water.

Beyond that, the fact that the Christian faith was able to spread around the world can also be attributed to the activity of the Holy Spirit over the centuries.

11.2.1 The Church Fathers and the ecumenical councils

In the year AD 313, the Roman Emperor Constantine (ca. AD 270/288, died 337) proclaimed freedom of religion for the Christians. In the years AD 380/381, the Christian religion became the state religion of the Roman Empire.

Before this time, many Christians had been persecuted and had lost their lives. What had begun with the stoning of Stephen grew into waves of persecution which made martyrs of many believers.

It was the concern of the Church Fathers to defend the Christian faith against both Gentiles and Jews, and to define the fundamentals of Christian doctrine. The early generation of these men were known as the "Apostolic Fathers". They included Clement of Rome (died ca. AD 100), Ignatius of

Antioch (died ca. AD 115), Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna (ca. AD 69, died ca. 155), and Papias of Hierapolis (ca. AD 70, died ca. 130/140).

Later generations of defenders of the faith (apologists) and witnesses to the apostolic tradition are known as the “Church Fathers”. These include Ambrose of Milan (AD 339–397), Sophronius Eusebius Hieronymus (AD 347–420), and Augustine of Hippo (AD 354–430). The doctrinal statements of these men had a decisive influence on Christian dogma.

Athanasius (ca. AD 295–373) was also among the teachers of the church. It was under his theological influence in the year AD 325 that the Nicene Creed was formulated. New Apostolic Christians also adhere to the tradition of this creed.

The essential contents of the Christian faith were ultimately defined over centuries of debate in various church councils. Although often convened under the influence of secular rulers, the councils still brought to expression—objectively and according to God’s will—the content of the gospel. Viewed as a whole, the basic tenets of Christian doctrine were defined in these councils.

11.2.2 Christianity—the state religion and its spread

In AD 380/381, Emperor Theodosius made Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire and forbade all pagan religions.

During the great Migration Period, Christianity in Europe grew stronger and spread to many areas of the then known world. Starting in the seventh century, Christians in parts of Asia and Africa had to contend with the new religion of Islam.

Monasticism played a special role in the propagation of Christianity. These religious individuals were often responsible for outstanding scholarly accomplishments and were also involved in agriculture and social issues. Many considered the propagation of the Christian faith to be one of their principal tasks.

Conditioned by historical developments, Christianity became the force which shaped the life and society of the people of Europe.

Medieval Christianity faced crises such as the East-West Schism of 1054, that is the separation of the Western Church (Roman Catholic Church) from the Eastern Church (Orthodox Churches), as well as the crusades (1096 to 1270), the power struggle between the Popes and emperors of Central Europe, and increasing conflict with Islam.

11.2.3 Aspects of Christianity in medieval Europe

The struggle of church dignitaries for worldly power and their failure to take direction from the gospel led to widespread secularisation of the Christian church, which entailed ever increasing moral decay. More and more efforts were made to reform the church. While some truth-seeking individuals sought to serve God through rational knowledge (scholasticism), others attempted to do so in mysticism through the direct experience of the nearness of God.

Individuals like the French merchant Peter Waldo, also called Pierre de Vaux (died before 1218), the English theologian John Wycliffe (1320–1384), and the rector of the University of Prague, Jan Hus (ca. 1369–1415), were consistent critics of the secularised church. The pre-Reformation movements initiated and supported by them affected large parts of Europe and ultimately led to the Reformation.

11.2.4 The Reformation

The search for the original form of the gospel and for guidance by the Holy Spirit defined a movement in Europe which is described by the term “Reformation” and is closely associated with Martin Luther (1483–1546).

Criticism of the Roman Church's secularisation, as well as the humanists' demand for a return to its sources and a resulting devotion to the Bible, were significant precursors to the Reformation.

Luther developed his theology based on his interpretation of the Bible. At its core is the doctrine of justification by faith, with its fundamental notion that God does not provide rewards on the basis of good works, but rather grants His grace to the sinner who believes in Jesus Christ.

Luther came into conflict with the Roman Church because he rejected the Pope's authority and cast doubt on the infallibility of the councils. He argued that the Bible, with its witness to Jesus Christ, should be the sole basis for doctrine. Luther translated the Bible into the German language and thereby made it accessible to the people.

The rapid spread of the Reformation in Germany is not only to be attributed to Luther and other reformers, but also to the political and economic interests of many princes.

Outside of Germany, the Reformation gained a foothold primarily in northern Europe, in the Netherlands, in France, and in Italy. The reformer Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) was active in Zurich, and John Calvin (1509–1564) who started an independent reform movement, was active in Geneva.

The ideals of the Reformation also took on political dimensions. Both sovereigns and peasants adopted it—for various motives—in order to achieve social and political goals.

The Anglican Church came into being independently in England in 1534.

As a reaction to the Reformation, the Council of Trent (from 1545) inspired a period of reflection and renewal in the Roman Catholic Church and prepared the way for the Counter-Reformation.

11.2.5 Catholicism and Protestantism in upheaval

The Reformation led to a counter movement (the Counter-Reformation) as European Catholicism strove for spiritual renewal and reinforced the power

of the papacy. The Popes endeavoured to regain Protestant territories for Catholicism.

In the course of these conflicts, the Thirty Years' War broke out in Europe (1618–1648) which served, among other things, to strengthen the institution of the state church. The sovereign determined the religion of his subjects.

In the eighteenth century, a rationalistic Christianity—a kind of Christianity which adopted the insights of the sciences of the time—began to merge with the philosophical concepts of the Enlightenment. Denominational conflicts and philosophical-theological disputes brought Protestantism into a state of crisis. As a reaction, Pietism gained more and more influence.

The hallmarks of Pietism include interest in intensive Bible study, social and missionary engagement, and a strong focus on Jesus Christ's activity as Redeemer.

Emphasis on the importance of emotions for Christian life and faith found a certain continuity in the revivalist movements. These evangelical movements, which originated in the eighteenth century, particularly in England and the USA, sought to distinguish themselves from “cultural Christianity” and return to a living faith.

In the nineteenth century, the *Innere Mission* (Inner or Home Mission) and the Protestant Free Churches—churches that were independent of the state—came into being in Germany and began to spread from there. This movement was not only aimed at winning non-Christians in foreign countries for Christianity, but also at those in Germany who had, through poverty and ignorance, become alienated from the faith. The further propagation of Christianity in non-European countries, particularly in Africa, received significant momentum from missionary societies.

A kind of devotion oriented to spiritual experience can also be observed in eighteenth and nineteenth century Catholicism.

It is in this context that the ideological conflicts with the French revolution, the attendant circumstances of the dawning industrial age, as well as the scientific and rationalistic thinking which sought to explain the world without reference to traditional faith, should be understood.

11.2.6 Christianity at the beginning of the nineteenth century

At a time when the natural sciences attempted to dominate large areas of thinking, when social issues challenged Christian ethics, and when national power politics sought to use religion to its own ends, the call to return to an awareness of the gospel and the related Christian hope for the return of Christ became louder and louder.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, missionary efforts were initiated mainly from Spain and Portugal. As a result, however, the Christian faith was often forced upon the populations of conquered regions. In the nineteenth century, devoted Christians cultivated intensive, peaceful missionary activities, especially in the colonised world.

This is the historical background in which God prepared for the renewed activity of Apostles.

SUMMARY

In accordance with the Lord's great commission, the Apostles began to proclaim the gospel, at first amongst the Jews, and later in the Gentile countries surrounding the Mediterranean. (11.1)

The activity of the Holy Spirit continued in many forms after the death of the early Christian Apostles. (11.2)

The concern of the Church Fathers was to defend the faith and define the fundamentals of the Christian doctrine. (11.2.1)

More than anything else, the doctrinal statements of the Church Fathers had a decisive influence on the Christian dogmas. At various church councils, the main contents of the Christian faith were emphasised as binding doctrine. (11.2.1)

At the end of the fourth century AD Christianity became the state religion in the Roman Empire. (11.2.2)

Monasticism played a special role in the spread of Christianity. Christendom became the most important variable to define life and society in Europe. (11.2.2)

In the East-West Schism of 1054 the Western Church (Roman Catholic Church) and the Eastern Church (Orthodox Church) separated from one another. (11.2.2)

Widespread secularisation came about in the Christian church during the European Middle Ages, which led to efforts for church reform. The search for the original form of the gospel defined a development in Europe which is summarised by the term “Reformation”. (11.2.3; 11.2.4)

After the Reformation there was a renewal within Catholicism and in the development of other religious movements. (11.2.4; 11.2.5)

Beginning in the fifteenth century, missionary work began in countries outside of Europe. In the nineteenth century, this work was intensified. (11.2.6)

This is the historical context in which God prepared the way for the renewed activity of Apostles. (11.2.6)

11.3 The reoccupation of the Apostle ministry in the Catholic Apostolic Church

Between 1826 and 1829, in close cooperation with the Presbyterian clergyman Edward Irving (1792–1834), the banker Henry Drummond (1786–1860) invited representatives of the “Students of Prophecy” to his country estate in Albury in southern England for a series of conferences in order to clarify certain biblical statements regarding the reawakening of the original fullness of the Holy Spirit and the return of Christ.

In Scotland, believers of various denominations also shared the expectation of an increased activity of the Holy Spirit. In 1830, manifestations of healing, speaking in tongues, and prophecy occurred in their circle and were also widely noticed.

It was in this context of believing expectation of a special ministry in the church that John Bate Cardale (1802–1877), a member of the Anglican Church, was called to the Apostle ministry by the Holy Spirit and designated by Henry Drummond as an Apostle on 31 October 1832 (other sources mention 7 November 1832) in London. He had joined Irving's congregation in August 1832. On Christmas 1832, Cardale carried out his first ministerial act as an Apostle and ordained William R. Caird as an Evangelist. For nearly a year Cardale remained the only Apostle, and had a defining influence on the concept of the Apostle ministry in the nascent church.

In the time following, the movement developed more defined structures. Beyond that, an understanding of ministry and the sacraments developed.

11.3.1 The development of a church led by Apostles

Beginning in September 1833, further Apostles were called through prophecy. In the process, people with prophetic gifts played an important role.

In 1835, the Apostles called through prophecy were consecrated to their future work. Subsequently the Apostles, now numbering twelve, adjourned for one year to Albury for intensive consultations.

The Apostles waited to be sent to all Christians and to receive a special power for this purpose. With the *Great Testimony* of 1837 they sought to reach out to all spiritual and secular leaders of Christendom. They called on the clergy to subordinate themselves to the Apostles. In preparation for the unification of all Christians under their leadership, the Apostles began familiarising themselves with the doctrines and liturgies of various denominations as of 1838. The appeal of the Apostles met with no response, however.

Within the apostolic work a focus began to develop on the preparation of the end-time group known as the “one hundred and forty-four thousand” mentioned in the book of Revelation. These were to be sealed through the laying on of hands of the Apostles. In 1847 this act was performed on approximately one thousand believers in England. In the same year, Holy Sealing was

also performed in Canada by Apostle Francis Woodhouse and in Germany by Apostle Thomas Carlyle.

11.3.2 The calling of additional Apostles

Apostle Thomas Carlyle, supported by one other Apostle, proposed the convening of an Apostle meeting in 1851. In this meeting, he did not garner the necessary support from among all the other Apostles for his motion that the two Apostles Duncan Mackenzie and Henry Dalton—who were no longer exercising their ministries—be replaced by others.

In the year 1855, three Apostles died, among them Apostle Carlyle. Successors in the Apostle ministry were called by Edward Oliver Taplin (1800–1862), the “Pillar of the Prophets”, and the prophet Heinrich Geyer (1818–1896). The calling of these men was not recognised by the other Apostles, however.

Yet the longing for the preparation of the bride of Christ by the Apostles, and the expectation of their sending in the full power of their ministry, remained alive among many of the ministers once ordained and instructed in northern Germany by Apostle Carlyle. Here, the congregations of Berlin and Hamburg played a major role.

11.3.3 The continuation of the Apostle ministry in the New Apostolic Church

The English Apostles were successful in their resistance of an extension of the circle of Apostles and thereby actually the continuation of the church led by Apostles. In opposition to this, the prophet Heinrich Geyer and the leader of the Hamburg congregation, Friedrich Wilhelm Schwartz (1815–1895), insisted that Rudolf Rosochacky (1815–1895) had received a divine calling. On 10 October 1862, the latter had been called as an Apostle by the prophet

Geyer. On 4 January 1863, the Hamburg congregation acknowledged this calling.

Even when Apostle Rosochacky resigned from his ministry shortly thereafter, Geyer, Schwartz, and the Hamburg congregation maintained that a divine calling had indeed been given. On 27 January 1863, Schwartz was removed from his ministry by Apostle Woodhouse and expelled from the Catholic Apostolic Church. The Hamburg congregation was also excommunicated because they followed Schwartz.

Therefore January 1863 marks the beginning of the New Apostolic Church.

Soon after, Priest Carl Wilhelm Louis Preuss (1827–1878) and, a little later, Friedrich Wilhelm Schwartz, were called as Apostles. Preuss worked in northern Germany while Schwartz was assigned the Netherlands as his working area. Further callings of Apostles followed shortly thereafter.

The newly formed community called itself the *Allgemeine Christliche apostolische Mission* (“General Christian Apostolic Mission”). This name, like the designation of the Dutch branch “Restored Apostolic Mission Church”, reflected the hope of reaching large parts of Christianity.

In 1872, Friedrich Wilhelm Menkhoff (1826–1895) was called as an Apostle for Westphalia and the Rhineland.

In 1884, he founded the first Church periodical in Germany, entitled *Der Herald. Monatsschrift für wahrheitsliebende Christen* (“The Herald, a monthly circular for truth-loving Christians”). Under his influence, Apostle Schwartz, beginning in his working area, did away with liturgical vestments and many elements of the liturgy taken over from the Catholic Apostolic Church. As of 1885, these changes were adopted by all other congregations.

In 1881, Friedrich Krebs (1832–1905) from Braunschweig was called as an Apostle. After the death of Apostles Schwartz and Menkhoff, he took on the function of leader. His most important concern was the oneness among the Apostles. He was the first Chief Apostle in the current sense of the word.

The more the Apostle ministry, with its comprehensive powers, came to the foreground in the Church toward the close of the nineteenth century, the

more the significance of the prophets began to diminish. By the end of the 1920s there were no more prophets active in the congregations.

The first decades in the history of the New Apostolic Church served, among other things, to consolidate the congregations and the unity among the Apostles. Beginning in 1897, the Chief Apostle ministry began to crystallise as the leading ministry of the Church. It was occupied by Friedrich Krebs until his death in the year 1905.

Other bearers of the Chief Apostle ministry were:

- Hermann Niehaus (1848–1932, Chief Apostle from 1905 to 1930),
- Johann Gottfried Bischoff (1871–1960, Chief Apostle from 1930 to 1960),
- Walter Schmidt (1891–1981, Chief Apostle from 1960 to 1975),
- Ernst Streckeisen (1905–1978, Chief Apostle from 1975 to 1978),
- Hans Urwyler (1925–1994, Chief Apostle from 1978 to 1988),
- Richard Fehr (born 1939, Chief Apostle from 1988 to 2005),
- Wilhelm Leber (born 1947, Chief Apostle as of 2005).

SUMMARY

It was in the context of believing anticipation of a special ministry in the church that believing men were called to the Apostle ministry in England starting in 1832. (11.3)

In 1837 the Apostles published the *Great Testimony* and called upon the clergy of all the churches to subject themselves to the authority of the Apostles. This appeal of the Apostles met with no response, however. (11.3.1)

In January 1863 the congregation in Hamburg acknowledged the calling of Rudolf Rosochacky as an Apostle.

Therefore January 1863 marks the beginning of the New Apostolic Church. (11.3.3)

As of 1897 the Chief Apostle ministry began to emerge as the leading ministry of the church. (11.3.3)

Part 12

Divine service, acts of
blessing, and pastoral care

12

12 Divine service, acts of blessing, and pastoral care

12.1 Divine service

Divine service is the activity of God upon human beings and a work of human beings for God.

12.1.1 General remarks concerning divine service

In the divine service the congregation gathers to hear God's word and receive blessing through the sacrament. Human beings worship God in reverence and humbleness.

Thus divine service is an encounter between God and man. In the worshipful serving of the believers and in the perceptible presence of the triune God, the congregation experiences that God serves them in love.

12.1.2 Divine service in the Old Testament

The divine service of the Old Testament is based upon encounters between God and mankind. The various forms of divine service developed over a long period of time. Again and again, God revealed Himself and granted His help to man.

In the Garden of Eden, God addressed His word to the first human beings. After the fall into sin, He did not leave them unprotected. Rather He comforted them and gave them hope for future salvation.

Genesis 8 tells of the first altar built by man in order to serve God, worship Him, bring thanks to Him, and bring sacrifices to Him. Noah erected an altar and brought God an offering of thanks. The Lord responded with the promise that He would henceforth protect the creation.

Jacob consecrated the place where God had spoken to him and called it Bethel, which means “house of God” (Genesis 28: 19).

In the law, God gave Moses instructions for building an altar: “In every place where I record my name I will come to you, and I will bless you” (Exodus 20: 24 et seq.). He also gave a reminder that He had hallowed the seventh day, and commanded: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20: 8).

During the Israelites’ journey through the desert, God chose men from among them to serve Him as priests and perform the sacrificial service. They were given the commission to convey God’s blessing to the people by way of a specific formulation (Numbers 6: 22–27). This blessing states: “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace” (Aaronic blessing).

In the time of King David it says that singers and musicians were also active in praising God with psalms in the divine services (1 Chronicles 25: 6).

King Solomon had the temple built in Jerusalem. It was there that divine services were conducted, which consisted mainly of the daily slaughtering of sacrificial animals by the priests. This sacrificial service was from then on practised exclusively in the temple of Jerusalem. The temple was also the place where the Israelite feasts—such as the Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23)—were celebrated.

After the destruction of the temple, the sacrificial service could no longer be performed, according to the understanding of the Israelites. During the period of captivity in Babylon, the believers gathered in specially built houses known as synagogues in order to pray and read and interpret Holy Scripture. This is one of the sources of the later Christian form of divine service.

SUMMARY

Divine service is the activity of God upon human beings and a work of human beings for God. (12.1)

The divine service of the Old Testament is based upon encounters between God and mankind. The various forms of divine service developed over a long period of time. (12.1.2)

After the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem there was no more sacrificial service. In the time of the Babylonian exile, the believers would gather in synagogues in order to pray and read and interpret Holy Scripture. This is one of the sources of the later Christian form of divine service. (12.1.2)

12.1.3 Divine service in the New Testament

The incarnation of Jesus Christ marked the beginning of a completely new dimension of God's service to mankind. The Son of God came to earth as both true Man and true God. He was born into the Jewish nation, He went to the temple, participated in the divine service of the synagogue, and helped define it. Beyond that He acted as a teacher who preached with divine authority (Matthew 7: 29). Beyond that, He caused people to be baptised, and later instituted Holy Communion. Thus Jesus' words and deeds already contained that which would later come to define Christian divine service: word and sacrament.

Jesus' actions, which are thus the standard for divine service, find their crowning achievement in His death on the cross: He brought the perfect sacrifice, which far surpassed—and replaced—the sacrificial service of the old covenant (*see* 3.4). In every celebration of Holy Communion, Christ's sacrifice is recalled.

Even before His sacrificial death, Jesus Christ promised His Apostles that He would send them the Holy Spirit to assure the continued teaching activity of Christ and preserve His gospel: "... and the word which you hear is not

Mine but the Father's who sent Me. These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14: 24–26).

The Holy Spirit inspired the Pentecost sermon of Peter. The word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit "cut to the heart" of three thousand listeners, and caused them to repent and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ, whereupon they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. In a certain sense, Pentecost is the first divine service of the church of Christ. Four fundamental elements of New Testament divine service are attested among the members of the early Christian congregation in Jerusalem: "And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2: 42).

12.1.4 Further development of Christian divine service

Over the course of the centuries, Christian divine service has been celebrated in various forms. Whereas the emphasis was originally on the liturgy, divine service emphasising the sermon developed later on through the Reformation and within Protestantism. Divine service in the Catholic Apostolic Church was also characterised by a highly defined liturgy. The sequence of today's New Apostolic divine service adheres more to the traditions of reformed divine services.

12.1.5 Divine service as an encounter with God

The four elements of divine service present in the early church are still today among the definitive characteristics present when the congregation experiences the mystery of an encounter between God and man at the altar, which is always new.

The Trinitarian opening formula—“In the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit”—is an invocation of God and the reassurance of His presence. This is how we begin every encounter with the triune God in divine service. Likewise, every divine service is concluded with the Trinitarian benediction. This makes it clear to those attending the divine service that God is present.

Just as the heavenly hosts praise God in heaven (Isaiah 6: 3; Revelation 4: 8–11), so too the congregation glorifies and praises the triune God, His grace, and His mercy.

The divine service is intended to strengthen hope in the imminent return of Christ and to prepare the believers for the appearing of the Lord. For this reason, divine service is sacred to them. Thoughtless neglect in attending divine service jeopardises the steadfast continuation in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers, as practised by the early Christians.

Those who frequently abstain from attending the divine services without compelling reasons run the risk of losing their longing for the sacrament and the word effected by the Spirit. Beyond that, the powers of Holy Communion do not flow into their souls, their sins are not forgiven, and they lose out on fellowship with God and all related blessings.

Those who refuse to give God the worship due Him by rejecting or even despising the divine service and the grace it offers, charge themselves with sin—whether or not they actually attend the divine service.

12.1.5.1 The Apostles’ doctrine

Already Jesus, who is described as the “Apostle ... of our confession” in Hebrews 3: 1, said: “My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me” (John 7: 16). As the One sent by His Father, He in turn sent the Apostles and gave them the commission to “[teach] them to observe all things that I have commanded you ...” (Matthew 28: 20).

As Jesus Christ's servants, the Apostles are called and ordained to preach the gospel and to promote obedience of faith (Romans 1: 1, 5). The ministers commissioned by them likewise proclaim Jesus Christ's doctrine to the congregations.

The word of the sermon effected by the Holy Spirit serves to strengthen faith and promote understanding. It imparts comfort, admonishes listeners to act in accordance with the standards of the gospel, and keeps the expectation of Christ's imminent return alive. In this way, believers experience the fulfilment of Jesus' promise: "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak in His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you" (John 16: 13–14). Thus the sermon inspired by the Holy Spirit also distinguishes itself by glorifying Christ as the Saviour and Redeemer.

12.1.5.2 Breaking of bread

In the celebration of Holy Communion (*see* 8.2), the congregation experiences the central event of the divine service. Following the forgiveness of sins, the believers come to the altar and receive the body and blood of Jesus in the form of a consecrated wafer of bread and wine. In so doing, the faithful experience Holy Communion as both an expression of thanks and a celebration of remembrance of Christ's sacrifice (Luke 22: 19). It is a meal of fellowship and profession which includes the departed, both those who have died in Christ and those who have been granted access to the altar through God's grace. It also strengthens the hope in the coming of the Son of God (1 Corinthians 11: 26).

The worthy partaking of Holy Communion preserves the life implanted in the soul through the rebirth. Furthermore, it gives the soul the certainty of remaining in Jesus and maintaining the closest fellowship of life with Him (John 6: 51–58). The powers thereby received help believers overcome that which could be an impediment to the salvation of the soul and allows them to

develop into the nature of Jesus. In this way, fellowship of life with Jesus Christ can be strengthened in every divine service.

12.1.5.3 Fellowship

In divine service, believers can experience, again and again, the fulfilment of Jesus Christ's promise: "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18: 20). Divine service is thus fellowship with Jesus Christ. He is in the midst of the congregation in His word, and truly present in His body and blood. Beyond that, divine service is the fellowship of the believers gathered in the worship and praise of God. When, in addition to Holy Communion, the sacraments of Holy Baptism with water or Holy Sealing are dispensed in the divine service, the members of the congregation surround those receiving the sacrament as witnesses. In addition, each individual can apply these words of blessing to himself. Those who have already been baptised and sealed are thereby encouraged to recall anew the moment when they received the sacraments. This makes it clear that all reborn souls stand united in full sacramental fellowship.

12.1.5.4 Prayer

Divine service is inseparably associated with prayer. Already before the divine service, the faithful seek the nearness of God through personal prayer. During the prayers in the divine service, the congregation unites in prayer with the words spoken by the officiant. These express adoration, thanksgiving, intercessions, and pleas. Special significance is attached to the Lord's Prayer, which the congregation prays together. It is prayed in accordance with the wording recorded in Matthew 6: 9–13, and precedes the celebration of Holy Communion. After the believers have partaken of the body and blood of Jesus, they thank Christ in a silent prayer for His sacrifice and the grace they have received. At the end of the divine service, the officiant speaks a prayer.

SUMMARY

With Jesus Christ a new dimension of divine ministration upon mankind began to emerge. The defining elements of Christian divine service—namely word and sacrament—have their source in Jesus' word and deed. (12.1.3)

Four fundamental elements of divine service are attested in the New Testament: the Apostle's doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. (12.1.3)

The Christian divine service was celebrated in various forms over the course of the centuries. The current sequence of the New Apostolic divine service stands in the tradition of reformed divine services. (12.1.4)

The Trinitarian opening formula is an invocation of God and an assurance of His presence. Every encounter with the triune God in divine service is introduced in this manner and concluded with the Trinitarian benediction. (12.1.5)

The divine service is intended to strengthen the hope in the imminent return of Christ and prepare the believers for the appearing of the Lord. (12.1.5)

The Apostles are called to proclaim the gospel. The ministers active in their commission do the same. (12.1.5.1)

In the celebration of Holy Communion the congregation experiences the central event in the divine service. (12.1.5.2)

Divine service is fellowship with Jesus Christ in word and sacrament. Divine service is also the fellowship of the believers who gather in worship and praise of God. (12.1.5.3)

Divine service is inseparably associated with prayer. Adoration, thanks, intercession and pleas are brought to expression here. (12.1.5.4)

12.1.6 Proclamation of the word

The timely will of God is proclaimed in the divine services. This proclamation of the word is described as the “sermon”.

The necessity of God’s word for the life of the new creation was expressed by the Lord Jesus in the statement: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4: 4). Apostle Paul pointed out that faith cannot come into being without hearing the word of God (Romans 10: 17). In 1 Peter 1: 24–25, the transitory nature of mankind is contrasted with the eternal nature of God’s word: “... the word of the Lord endures forever. Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.”

12.1.6.1 Concerning the term “sermon”

The term “sermon” can be traced back to the Latin word *sermō*, which means “discourse” or “talk”. The sermon in the divine service is a spiritual address given by a minister, which is inspired and permeated by the power of the Holy Spirit and addressed to the congregation. The sermon is based on a passage taken from the Bible.

12.1.6.2 The proclamation of the word in the New Testament

While believing people already proclaimed the will of God through the power of the Holy Spirit during the time of the Old Testament, a new dimension of God’s word became reality with the birth of the Son of God. In Jesus Christ the Word of God came to mankind in perfection.

Jesus taught in the temple in Jerusalem, in synagogues, and in other places. Much of the content of His sermons has been handed down to us in the gospels, which contain the basic principles of Christian doctrine. When He preached, Jesus used parables and interpreted the Old Testament. Further-

more, He made many references to the future. For instance, He foretold His own suffering, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, and gave the promise of His return. The outstanding nature of Jesus' preaching is illustrated in the Sermon on the Mount, which contains the beatitudes and many statements that had never been heard before. The effect of this sermon is shown in the reaction of His audience: "... the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matthew 7: 28–29).

Although the Son of God had already assigned the Apostles the task of preaching the word during His activity on earth (Matthew 10: 7), after His resurrection He commissioned them to go into all the world and preach the gospel to all (Mark 16: 15).

Apostle Peter preached the first Christian sermon on Pentecost (Acts 2: 14 et seq.). Other sermons of the early Apostles can be found, for example, in Acts 3: 12–26; 17: 22–31. Beyond that, many of the letters of the Apostles, which were read to the believers in the congregations, can also be compared to sermons. Their contents were tailored to the congregations or the prevailing circumstances in each. They urged the members to repent, accept God's grace, and receive the sacraments. Furthermore, they were of an instructional and admonishing character. They testified of God's desire to redeem mankind and grant them eternal life in His glory.

12.1.6.3 The proclamation of the word today

In the New Apostolic divine service, great significance is attached to the proclamation of God's word. The Apostles and ministers appointed by them are called upon to proclaim God's word in the congregations. For this purpose they have been blessed and equipped through their ordination.

In the first place, God's word consists of that which has been handed down to us in Holy Scripture. Every sermon must be oriented by this, and so the basis of every single sermon is a prescribed passage from the Bible com-

plete with notes on its interpretation, which is made available by the Chief Apostle for the ministers in order to help them prepare for the divine service.

The interpretation of the Bible text in free discourse constitutes the core of the sermon, which is inspired by the Holy Spirit. The congregation experiences this through the words of the minister conducting the service and through supplementary contributions by assisting ministers. The proclamation of God's word by a number of ministers, each with a different personality and corresponding gifts, aids in illuminating several aspects of the sermon from various perspectives, and serves to deepen understanding for God's will.

12.1.6.3.1 Main content of the proclamation of the word

At the core of the proclamation of the word is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the glad tidings. It tells of Jesus' life and sacrifice, of His resurrection and return, as well as the completion of the plan of salvation.

However, the glorification of God and the praise of His works throughout the ages also constitute the content of the sermon. Furthermore, the sermon provides orientation for a life in accordance with God's will. This is also supported by accounts of experiences of faith.

Additional elements of the sermon include the praise of God's grace and Jesus Christ's great deed of reconciliation. Furthermore, the sermon appeals to the believers to reconcile. All of this prepares the way for the receiving of the sacraments.

12.1.6.3.2 The objective of the proclamation of the word

The "preaching of Jesus Christ" calls listeners to obedience of faith (Romans 16: 25, 26). The sermon's primary goal is to awaken and preserve the faith which Jesus expects to find at His return. The Apostolic proclamation of the word is always geared toward preparing the congregation for the coming of Jesus (2 Corinthians 11: 2).

Belief in the imminent return of the Lord has an effect on the believer's conduct in daily life. According to Galatians 5: 22–23, the activity of the Holy Spirit is to produce the “fruits” of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

The proclaimed word imparts comfort and confidence, promotes knowledge, and strengthens trust in God.

Through the word of God, listeners are presented, as it were, with a mirror in which they can recognise themselves and become aware of what is necessary in order to grow into the nature of Christ (James 1: 22–24). This also entails accepting in faith the reconciliation with God effected by Christ, and summoning up the willingness to reconcile with all people as a result.

12.1.6.3.3 Levels within the proclamation of the word

The word of God is perfect, pure, and infallible, and yet it is proclaimed by imperfect human beings. For this reason the sermon can contain imperfect elements. Nevertheless, God, who hears the fervent pleas of both the preacher and the listener, lays His power into the inadequate human words of the sermon. There are therefore two levels. One is the human level: a human being speaks, and other human beings listen. On this level, both linguistic errors and errors of content on the part of the speaker, as well as misunderstandings on the part of the listeners, cannot be ruled out. The other level is the divine: the Holy Spirit speaks through the commissioned servant of God to the souls of the listeners and strengthens or awakens faith within them. Thus, the imperfection of the words and sentences expressed does not prevent God from filling them with power.

But the listeners must also fulfil certain prerequisites in order that they do not perceive the sermon as the mere utterances of a human being. The basic requirement for this is faith. This means that, in believing trust, the listeners must open themselves to the word of the sermon, accept it, and be prepared to apply it in their lives. Then the word of the sermon will also inspire re-

morse in the listener. The sins he has committed are thus recognised, and regret, repentance, and the longing for grace are awakened.

Prior to the sermon, the listeners should pray for the Lord to provide strength and peace through the word. The Lord will hear and grant the fervent prayers of a congregation that longs for His word.

The sermon is followed by the celebration of Holy Communion, for which God's word has prepared the way.

SUMMARY

God's will is proclaimed in the divine services. This proclamation of the word is known as the "sermon". (12.1.6)

Jesus taught in the temple in Jerusalem, in synagogues, and in other places. An example of Jesus' proclamation of the word is the Sermon on the Mount. (12.1.6.2)

The first Christian sermon was delivered by Apostle Peter on Pentecost. (12.1.6.2)

The proclamation of the word is accorded great significance in the New Apostolic divine service. It is based on a Bible text. Its interpretation in free discourse constitutes the core of the sermon. It is awakened by the Holy Spirit. (12.1.6.3)

The central element of the proclamation of the word is the gospel, which speaks of Jesus' life and sacrifice, as well as His resurrection and return. Beyond that it offers orientation for a life in accordance with God's will. (12.1.6.3.1)

Apostolic proclamation of the word always testifies of the endeavour to prepare the congregation for the return of Jesus Christ. (12.1.6.3.2)

The proclaimed word strengthens faith and trust in God, imparts comfort and confidence, and promotes knowledge. (12.1.6.3.2)

God's word is perfect, pure, and infallible. Nevertheless it is proclaimed and heard by imperfect human beings. This does not prevent God from filling the sermon with His power. (12.1.6.3.3)

12.1.7 The Lord's Prayer

The Lord's Prayer is a valuable legacy which Jesus gave to those who believe in Him. With it the Son of God gave an example of how we are to pray to the Father in heaven.

This prayer of the Son of God has been handed down in one version containing five pleas (Luke 11: 2–4) and in a more detailed version containing seven pleas (Matthew 6: 9–13).

12.1.7.1 The Lord's Prayer in divine service

In the liturgy of the divine service, the text from the gospel of Matthew in the New King James Version of the Bible is used:

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.
Amen.”

The Lord's Prayer occupies a firm place in our liturgy. This is the only prayer that the believers bring to God together in accordance with a fixed wording.

It is also a prayer of repentance, spoken before the forgiveness of sins, in which the faithful confess before God that they have sinned.

12.1.7.2 The seven pleas

The invocation of God is followed by three pleas that refer to Him: *Your* name, *Your* kingdom, and *Your* will. This is followed by four pleas which, at

the same time, can also be intercessions: *our* daily bread, *our* debts, lead *us*, deliver *us*. The prayer concludes by praising the majesty of God.

12.1.7.2.1 “Our Father in heaven”

The form of address “*Our* Father” identifies this prayer as a communal prayer in which those praying profess to be children of God. In this fellowship, Jesus Christ is the “firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8: 29). Whenever He prayed, He addressed God as Father (Luke 22: 42; 23: 46; John 11: 41; 17: 1).

The relationship between Jesus and His heavenly Father is unique. Since Christ taught human beings to pray to God as the “Father in heaven” He incorporated them into His relationship with the Father.

When human beings address God as their “Father”, this alludes to the reality that God has created them, that He is their Lord, and that He provides for them. God is the source and sustainer of that which He has created. In love and trust, and without fear, human beings can address Him as “Father”.

The words “in heaven” emphasise that God is exalted above all earthly existence. He—God, the Father—is greater and higher than everything, and yet, in His omnipresence, He is close to us human beings (Psalm 139; Acts 17: 27).

12.1.7.2.2 “Hallowed be Your name”

The triune God is holy. Believers speak of Him with deep reverence. By giving all honour to God, by praising and extolling Him, and by endeavouring to conduct themselves in accordance with His will, they contribute to the hallowing of His name. The Lord’s Prayer reminds us of the Second Commandment (*see* 5.3.3), and enables us together to hallow the name of God through words, while bowing down in humbleness and the fear of God before the greatness of the Eternal One.

In the new covenant, God reveals His name in His Son, Jesus Christ. This name must be kept holy. It is the name “by which we must be saved” (Acts 4: 10, 12; cf. Philippians 2: 9–11).

12.1.7.2.3 “Your kingdom come”

The kingdom of God has already dawned in Christ and is present in His church. “Your kingdom come” means that the Lord is to become more and more perceptible in the congregation.

Beyond that, these words allude to the revelation of the future kingdom of God, which will begin with the marriage of the Lamb (Revelation 19: 6–7). In this respect, the plea that the kingdom of God may come refers first and foremost to the return of Christ to take home His bride. However, this plea reaches even further into the future: after the marriage of the Lamb in heaven, the Son of God will establish His kingdom of peace on earth, in which the gospel will be preached to all human beings. The kingdom of God will appear in perfect glory and endure forever once God has created a new heaven and a new earth after the Last Judgement.

12.1.7.2.4 “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”

God is omnipotent. His will stands above everything. In heaven, the domain where God rules, His will reigns supreme.

God wishes to deliver fallen mankind from the consequences of sin and grant them salvation (1 Timothy 2: 4). To make this possible, He sent His Son. Jesus Christ came and sacrificed Himself, wherein the will of the Father was revealed (Hebrews 10: 9–10).

The wish that God may also govern everything on earth in accordance with His will comes to expression in the plea: “Your will be done.” Due to their sinfulness and the power of Satan—which, although broken, is still active—human beings cannot live up to this standard. However, this plea of the

believers also implies the desire that, already today in their earthly lives, they may succeed in acting in accordance with God's will.

This plea of the Lord's Prayer furthermore brings to expression that God may soon complete His work of redemption.

12.1.7.2.5 "Give us this day our daily bread"

In the broadest sense, this plea is directed at the preservation of the creation. These words also express the petition that the Lord may provide food, clothing, lodging, and everything else human beings need for earthly life.

The figurative meaning of the plea is for the word of God as "food" for our immortal souls (Jeremiah 15: 16).

A further meaning behind this plea refers to the bread of life—that is Holy Communion—in accordance with the words of Jesus: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world" (John 6: 48–51). God ensures that this bread is always prepared anew for us.

12.1.7.2.6 "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors"

All human beings burden themselves with guilt as a consequence of their sins. With the plea: "And forgive us our debts", the faithful confess that they are sinners before God and ask Him for grace. Here it becomes clear that the Lord's Prayer also incorporates the aspect of repentance. Believers receive the grace of forgiveness of sins, and have all their guilt erased, on the basis of Christ's sacrifice, because "in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1: 7).

The Son of God bound the fulfilment of this plea to the condition that we first forgive those who have wronged us or are in debt to us. The importance Jesus attached to this condition for obtaining forgiveness is also clear

from the fact that He repeated and affirmed it following the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6: 14–15). The parable of the wicked servant also clearly shows the obligation to forgive those who are indebted to us (Matthew 18: 21–35).

12.1.7.2.7 “And do not lead us into temptation”

With the plea not to be led into temptation, believers beseech God to help them resist sin with all their strength. Furthermore, they ask that the trials of faith may not be too severe and that they may be protected from many of the temptations of Satan. However, God will permit temptations in the form of trials in order to give believers a chance to prove themselves in faith. An example of this is the harsh trial of Abraham when he was told to sacrifice his son (Genesis 22: 1–18).

God watches over our faithfulness to Him so that it does not break: “God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10: 13).

Apostle James wrote as follows concerning the temptation to sin: “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (James 1: 13–15). This reinforces the certainty that our heavenly Father—who through the Holy Spirit moves us to every good work and provides us with the strength to overcome our imperfections through the body and blood of Jesus—never tempts us to sin, but tests us to prove our faith.

12.1.7.2.8 “But deliver us from the evil one”

The plea “But deliver us from the evil one” expresses the wish that God may deliver us from tribulations that lead to sin. Furthermore, the evil from which we ask God to deliver us consists of everything that emanates from Satan. Ultimately this is a plea for final liberation from the evil one himself.

Through His sacrifice, Christ made redemption possible. In the Son of God we have “redemption ..., the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1: 14). Redemption is an ongoing process, which ultimately leads to perfect liberty from all of Satan’s claims. Only then will our redemption be complete.

12.1.7.2.9 “For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever”¹

These pleas are followed by an expression of praise to God (doxology), wherein the Most High is given the honour and glory He is due. He, the Lord of His kingdom, assists the believers with His power, so that they may share His glory in all eternity. This will be fulfilled for the bridal congregation at the return of Christ: “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” (Colossians 3: 4).

12.1.7.2.10 “Amen”

The word “Amen”, which stems from Hebrew, translates as: “So be it!” It concludes the Lord’s Prayer, and once more reinforces every plea and statement that has been brought to God in this prayer.

¹ The doxology does not appear in all translations of the Bible.

SUMMARY

With the Lord's Prayer Jesus gave an example of how one is to pray to God. (12.1.7)

It is the only prayer that the congregation prays together in the divine service in accordance with a fixed wording, as taken from Matthew 6: 9–13. It is prayed in connection with the forgiveness of sins and the celebration of Holy Communion. (12.1.7.1)

The invocation of God is followed by petitions. The prayer concludes with the praise of God. (12.1.7.2)

The believers hallow God's name by giving Him all the glory and by endeavouring to live in accordance with His will. (12.1.7.2.2)

The plea "Your kingdom come" asks the Lord to be more and more perceptibly present in the congregation. Beyond that it refers to the appearing of the future kingdom of God, which will begin with the marriage in heaven. (12.1.7.2.3)

The words "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" bring to expression the plea that God may guide all things in accordance with His will, even on earth. The believers thereby plead that they may succeed in acting in accordance with God's will. (12.1.7.2.4)

"Give us this day our daily bread." These words are a petition for everything a human being needs. In a broad sense, this plea is also a plea for the preservation of the creation. (12.1.7.2.5)

"Forgive us our debts ..." Thereby the believers confess before God that they are sinners, and ask for grace. "... as we forgive our debtors": in order to receive forgiveness it is important for believers to forgive those who have wronged them. (12.1.7.2.6)

The plea not to be led into temptation attests to the believers' desire for God's help in resisting sin and that He may ensure that trials of faith do not become too difficult. (12.1.7.2.7)

The words: “Deliver us from the evil one” express the believers’ wish for God to liberate them from distresses that lead to sin—and in the end grant them ultimate liberation from the evil one. (12.1.7.2.8)

Honour is brought to the Most High in the praise of God. (12.1.7.2.9)

At the end of the prayer, every plea and statement is reinforced with the word “Amen”, which means “So be it!” (12.1.7.2.10)

12.1.8 Forgiveness of sins in the divine service

The fact that forgiveness of sins is possible is solely thanks to the grace of God. His love for sinful mankind is demonstrated in the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ and in His death on the cross. This perfect, eternally valid sacrifice is the foundation for the forgiveness of sins.

The forgiveness of sins (absolution) is not a sacrament but rather the prerequisite for receiving the sacraments worthily. It is pronounced following the Lord’s Prayer, which is prayed collectively by the congregation, with the words:

“In the commission of my sender, the Apostle, I proclaim unto you the glad tidings: in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, your sins are forgiven. The peace of the Risen One abide with you. Amen.”

The congregation confirms its believing acceptance of this forgiveness by saying “Amen”.

12.1.8.1 God—the One who forgives

It is the triune God who erases our sins. Human beings are incapable of doing this by their own power (Matthew 16: 26; Luke 5: 21–24; Romans 4: 8).

Even though the eternally valid sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the foundation for the forgiveness of sins, God in His omnipotence has always been able to forgive sins. Hence Jesus Christ had the authority to forgive sins even before having brought His sinless life as a sacrifice (Mark 2: 5, 10).

12.1.8.2 God's patience—the sacrificial service in the Old Testament

God commanded the Old Testament's sacrificial service (Leviticus 19: 22). Through the sacrifices offered by the priests, the people sought after God's grace. Nevertheless, these offerings could not erase any sins. They merely had a postponing effect until the sacrificial death of Jesus. Up until then, the sinful human beings of the old covenant were covered by God's patience (Romans 3: 25–26). Prophets proclaimed that a forgiveness of sins would one day come that would do more than merely cover sins, but rather erase them completely (Isaiah 1: 18).

12.1.8.3 The sacrifice of Christ—foundation for the forgiveness of sins

The perfect sacrifice of Christ replaced the sacrificial service of the Old Testament. Jesus Christ led a life without sin. Through His sacrifice, the willing surrender of His life (John 10: 17–18), He broke the power of Satan and conquered the Devil and all his works, namely sin and death (2 Corinthians 5: 21). Since then the forgiveness of sins—in the sense of erasing—has become possible (Hebrews 10: 18), as has redemption from sin and death (Romans 3: 24).

12.1.8.4 Prerequisites for obtaining forgiveness of sins

In order to obtain forgiveness of sins and be snatched from spiritual death, the first prerequisite is the sinner's belief in Jesus Christ as the Redeemer (John 8: 24). In addition to the belief that forgiveness of sins is pronounced upon human beings through the Apostles of Jesus Christ (John 20: 23), the following are also required:

- intensive self-examination in order to become aware of one's own transgressions,
- the recognition that one has sinned and is in need of grace,
- the heartfelt longing to be reconciled with God,
- confession of one's sins before God in the Lord's Prayer, with the plea: "Forgive us our debts",
- repentance and remorse with the earnest resolution to overcome one's mistakes and weaknesses,
- the will to reconcile with one's debtors,
- grasping the absolution in faith.

12.1.8.5 Repentance and remorse

Repentance results from recognition of one's own shortcomings or misconduct. It incorporates remorse—the feeling of suffering caused by wrongs committed in deed or omission—and the earnest endeavour to change one's attitude and improve. Just how concrete one's repentance must be as a prerequisite for forgiveness may depend on the awareness that one is a sinner and on remorse for sins committed. In addition, there is a significant difference between conscious and unconscious sin.

Also in view of the remorse associated with repentance, it is not the person, but rather God alone, who determines the required measure. If remorse is genuine and deeply felt, and if the willingness to repent expresses itself in the willingness to change one's attitude and conduct, the believer may genuinely hope in God's grace.

In the case of especially weighty incidents, in which one cannot find any inner peace despite believing acceptance of the absolution, the alternative of confession is available (*see 12.4.4*).

Sincere remorse and willingness to reconcile with one's neighbour belong together. As far as possible, the damage that has been done must also be reversed (Numbers 5: 6–7; Luke 19: 8).

12.1.8.6 Sin that is not forgiven

There is a sin that is not forgiven: blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Concerning this the Son of God said: “But He who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation” (Mark 3: 29). Those who consciously and intentionally depict the Holy Spirit as a devilish or misleading force for hostile and base motives are guilty of blaspheming against the Holy Spirit.

12.1.8.7 Proclamation and authority

Forgiveness of sins must be proclaimed. Jesus pronounced forgiveness of sins upon individuals (Luke 7: 48 et al).

Forgiveness of sins occurs through the absolution, which is proclaimed in the name of Jesus Christ by authorised ministers. It is generally proclaimed in the divine service to the entire congregation. However, it only has its effect on those who grasp it in faith and fulfil the corresponding prerequisites.

The authority to proclaim the forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus is contained in the ministry of reconciliation, namely the Apostle ministry (John 20: 23). The priestly ministries proclaim the absolution by the commission of the Apostle and in the name of Jesus. This has the same effect as if the Apostle had done it in person.

12.1.8.8 Effects of the forgiveness of sins

The absolution proclaimed in authority and in the name of Jesus, when grasped in faith, erases sin (1 John 2: 12) and cancels out the debt that exists toward God (Matthew 6: 12). However, the material, moral, and legal consequences and responsibilities arising from sinful conduct remain unaffected by the forgiveness of sins.

Believers whose sins have been forgiven are also given peace out of Jesus Christ with the words: “The peace of the Risen One abide with you!” When this peace enters, all fear of the consequences of sin with respect to God will retreat.

SUMMARY

The foundation for the forgiveness of sins is the perfect, eternally valid sacrifice of Jesus Christ. (12.1.8)

The forgiveness of sins is not a sacrament, but rather the prerequisite for the worthy receiving of the sacraments. (12.1.8)

It is the triune God who washes away sins. Human beings are not capable of this. (12.1.8.1)

The sacrificial service of the Old Testament was unable to erase sins, but it had a postponing effect until the sacrificial death of Christ. Ever since the sacrifice of Christ, forgiveness of sins—in the sense of the complete erasing of sin and redemption from death—has become possible. (12.1.8.2; 12.1.8.3)

The prerequisite for receiving forgiveness of sins is belief in Jesus Christ as the Redeemer. Recognition and confession of one’s sins, as well as repentance, remorse, and the willingness to reconcile are also required. (12.1.8.4)

The recognition of one’s own sinfulness is the prerequisite for repentance. This includes remorse and the endeavour to improve and change one’s attitude. If their remorse and willingness to repent are genuine, believers may hope in God’s grace. (12.1.8.5)

The sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not forgiven. (12.1.8.6)

The forgiveness of sins must be proclaimed. This occurs through the absolution in the name of Jesus Christ and has its effects on all those who grasp it in faith. The authority to proclaim the absolution lies in the ministry of reconciliation, namely the Apostle ministry. (12.1.8.7)

The sins of those who grasp the absolution in faith are erased, and their guilt before God is annulled. The peace of Jesus Christ is assured them. (12.1.8.8)

12.1.9 Dispensation of the sacraments in the divine service

The dispensation of the sacraments is a central event in the divine service. The imparting of the sacraments allows believers to partake in the salvation and redemption made possible by Jesus Christ's incarnation, sacrificial death, and resurrection (*see 8*). They are holy acts performed in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The sacramental acts of Holy Baptism with water and Holy Communion are performed by Apostles or priestly ministers in the commission of the Apostles, while Holy Sealing is dispensed solely by Apostles.

Holy Communion is celebrated in every divine service conducted by an Apostle or a priestly minister. On special occasions (such as weddings, funerals) verbal divine services are conducted without the celebration of Holy Communion.

The receiving of the consecrated wafer is preceded by the forgiveness of sins. This occurs in order to enable human beings to worthily partake in God's act of salvation effected by Jesus Christ, which becomes accessible through the sacrament.

At Holy Baptism with water and Holy Sealing, the participants in the divine service are witnesses to the sacramental acts of salvation and the vow of faithfulness made before God and the congregation by those receiving the sacrament.

All three sacraments are also accessible to children. Whenever possible, they participate in the celebration of Holy Communion in the divine service together with the congregation.

On Sundays and Christian holy days, the Chief Apostle and the District Apostles or Apostles commissioned by them also dispense this sacrament to the departed after the celebration of Holy Communion with the congregation. On such occasions, two ministers receive the body and blood of Christ on behalf of the departed. Three times a year, special divine services are held in which the Chief Apostle, the District Apostles, or the Apostles commissioned by them dispense all three sacraments to the departed. These sacraments are likewise administered to two ministers on behalf of the departed.

12.1.10 The closing benediction

At the end of the divine service, the blessing of the triune God is dispensed upon all those present. Together with the Trinitarian opening formula, the “closing benediction” comprises the framework which encompasses the divine service event and indicates that everything emanates from, and revolves around, the triune God. This blessing is pronounced over the congregation with the words recorded in 2 Corinthians 13: 13:

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all!”

12.1.11 Acts of blessing in the sequence of the divine service

As a rule, the acts of blessing—with the exception of the prenatal blessing—take place within the divine service. Confirmation is directly linked to the sacraments of Holy Baptism with water and Holy Sealing. It is performed directly before the celebration of Holy Communion. All other acts of blessing take place after the celebration of Holy Communion.

The act of adopting guests—who have received a properly administered baptism with water in another church—into the congregation is to be understood as an act of blessing. In it, the individuals being adopted profess the New Apostolic faith, and they are granted admittance to regular participation in Holy Communion. The adoption is performed prior to the celebration of Holy Communion and in the name of the triune God.

In a broader sense, the dedication of a church building or other meeting place for the congregation is also to be counted as an act of blessing. It takes place before the actual sermon portion of the first divine service.

12.1.12 Ordinations, appointments, reinstatements, retirements

Ordination is the investiture of a spiritual ministry. It is, without exception, performed by an Apostle.

In terms of liturgy, an ordination follows the dispensation of the sacraments and takes place after the celebration of Holy Communion. After an address from the Apostle, those to be ordained are asked whether they accept the ministry and are prepared to exercise it in loyalty to God and the doctrine of Jesus, and in accordance with the New Apostolic Creed, in love for the believers, and in obedience to the Apostles of Jesus. They vow this before God, who calls them into His service, and before the congregation, with a “yes”. Kneeling, they then receive the ministry through the laying on of hands and prayer of the Apostle.

The appointment to rectorship over a congregation or district—which is, as a rule, also performed by an Apostle—likewise occurs under the assurance of divine blessing. It is not to be equated with an ordination.

If a minister moves outside of the working area to which his ministerial commission applies, a reinstatement is needed in order for him to continue exercising his ministry in the new area. This reinstatement can be issued by the Apostle or by a minister commissioned by him.

As a rule, the active exercise of a ministry ends at retirement. This is generally performed by an Apostle in the divine service. The Apostle thanks the

minister for all that has been accomplished in the spirit of the love of Christ, and relieves him of his active ministerial exercise.

SUMMARY

The sacraments of Holy Baptism with water and Holy Communion are dispensed by Apostles or priestly ministers in the commission of the Apostles. Holy Sealing is dispensed exclusively by Apostles. All three sacraments are also accessible to children. (12.1.9)

Holy Communion is generally celebrated in every divine service. On certain occasions (such as funerals) divine services are also conducted without the celebration of Holy Communion. (12.1.9)

At the end of the divine service, the blessing of the triune God is dispensed upon all present with the words taken from 2 Corinthians 13: 13. (12.1.10)

Ordinations, appointments, and retirements in the divine service occur following the dispensation of the sacraments. (12.1.12)

12.1.13 Divine services for the departed

Divine services for the departed take place three times a year, on the first Sunday of March, July, and November respectively. With this in mind, New Apostolic Christians also pray that souls who have died in an unredeemed state may find salvation in Christ.

God's will to redeem encompasses all human beings. Jesus Christ is Lord over both the dead and the living (Romans 14: 9).

Already in the congregation of Corinth, the living were baptised on behalf of the dead (1 Corinthians 15: 29).

This practice is continued in divine services for the departed conducted by the Chief Apostle and the District Apostles: in them, two ministers receive Holy Baptism with water, Holy Sealing, and Holy Communion on behalf of the dead. The sacraments are performed in the same manner as usual. In the

other congregations, the departed are commemorated in a special prayer after the celebration of Holy Communion.

Divine services for the departed have an important place in the New Apostolic calendar. On the preceding Sunday, the congregations prepare themselves for this in a special divine service. Compassion and sympathy are to move their hearts to intercede for those who have died in an unredeemed state.

SUMMARY

Three times each year there are divine services for the departed. (12.1.13)

New Apostolic Christians pray that unredeemed departed souls may find salvation in Christ. (12.1.13)

12.1.14 Music in the divine service

The purpose of music in the divine service is to praise and honour God (Psalm 150). In the divine service, the role of music is always to serve, and it can serve multiple functions: it can deeply move the soul, prepare the congregation for the proclamation of the word, and underscore the word of God. Singing—be it by the congregation or the choir—and instrumental music expresses and imparts courage, strength, and confidence. In times of sadness and hardship, music can provide comfort. Not least of all, music fosters a sense of fellowship among listeners and musicians alike.

In order to reach out to all participants in the divine service, the Church's musical literature encompasses a multitude of categories, styles, and levels of difficulty. The Church, in its worldwide activity, endeavours to preserve and maintain the musical traditions of the various cultures both in the divine service and other Church events.

Music and silent worship before the divine service help those in attendance collect their thoughts and prepare the way for the proclamation of the word. At the beginning of the divine service, the congregation sings a hymn. Thereby all

participants are actively included in the divine service experience. Before the celebration of Holy Communion, the congregation can attest to their feelings of repentance in an appropriate hymn. The singing of the hymn during the celebration of Holy Communion affords an opportunity to express feelings of love and gratitude towards Jesus Christ in response to receiving the sacrament.

Following the closing benediction, the divine service is concluded with the “threefold Amen” sung by the congregation. As a rule, a hymn is then sung either by the congregation or the choir or a musical piece is performed.

In this manner, the experience of the divine service can be deepened: “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” (Colossians 3: 16).

SUMMARY

Music in the divine service has the function of praising and glorifying God. It also has a serving function. (12.1.14)

12.2 Acts of blessing

In the New Apostolic Church, special blessings are dispensed for the following events in the lives of the believers: confirmation, engagement, weddings, and wedding anniversaries. These acts of blessing are, as a rule, performed during the divine service. The prenatal blessing is dispensed outside of the divine service.

During the dispensation of the blessing, God turns to sincerely longing souls and thereby brings to expression His favour upon them. Through Apostles and priestly ministers, God assures the believers of His help, grace, and compassion. An Old Testament model of such a blessing is the Aaronic blessing, which God commissioned the priests to dispense (Numbers 6: 24–26).

12.2.1 Prenatal blessing

Pregnancy and the birth of a child are experienced as a special phase of life by the parents. During this period of time they receive appropriate pastoral care.

Together the parents are responsible for this new life right from the start.

The prenatal blessing is dispensed as the first visible act of God upon a human being. The act of blessing is performed upon the mother at her request. Thereby God strengthens the mother in promoting and cultivating the prenatal development of her child in terms of its faith. The blessing also benefits the unborn soul and thereby imparts to the mother the certainty that both she and her child are secure in the hand of God.

For as long as the child develops within the body of the mother, it is connected to her in all things. It not only absorbs that which the mother supplies to her body, but the soul of the child is also influenced by that which the mother feels and experiences. Thus the mother can do a great deal to contribute to the beneficial prenatal development of her child by consciously involving the growing child in her life of faith.

The prenatal blessing is not associated with the promise of a problem-free pregnancy or the birth of a healthy child.

12.2.2 Confirmation

Confirmation (Latin *confirmatio* = “reinforcement”, “affirmation”) is that act of blessing in which young New Apostolic Christians take upon themselves the obligations which their parents undertook on their behalf at their baptism and sealing. From then on, these Christians, who have reached the age of spiritual majority, bear full responsibility before God for everything they do or neglect to do. They commit themselves to faithfulness to God and publicly profess the New Apostolic faith.

12.2.2.1 Age of confirmation and prerequisites

The age of confirmation varies. It depends on the religious maturity and/or the stage in life at which adolescents are generally able to assess the consequences of their actions on their own and assume responsibility for their life of faith.

Adolescents are brought up in the faith in their parental home, in divine service, and through religious education in the Church. Besides serving to prepare for confirmation, Confirmation Instruction—as the last phase of Church instruction—serves primarily to ensure that the confirmands

- know the essential principles of our doctrine, in particular the ten Articles of Faith,
- increasingly appreciate the value of faith,
- earnestly endeavour to conduct their lives in accordance with the gospel, and
- align their lives with the goal of faith, the return of Christ.

Attending the divine services and Confirmation Instruction is a prerequisite for being confirmed.

12.2.2.2 Confirmation vow and confirmation blessing

Confirmation is celebrated in the context of a divine service. First, the confirmands answer the question as to whether they intend to remain faithful to God with their “yes”. Afterward they recite their confirmation vow together. This vow dates back to the text of an old baptismal liturgy from the third century. It is given before God and the congregation, and states the following:

“I renounce Satan and all his work and ways, and surrender myself to You, O triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in belief, obedience, and the earnest resolution to remain faithful to You until my end. Amen.”

This brings to expression the principle that the confirmands will endeavour to avoid all evil and ungodly things, and diligently follow the path of the

gospel. They profess belief in the triune God and announce their intention to conduct their lives in faith and obedience toward God.

After the prayer of the officiant, the young Christians receive the confirmation blessing, which is dispensed upon them through laying on of hands. This blessing strengthens the confirmands in their endeavour to keep their vow to profess Jesus Christ in word and deed.

12.2.3 Weddings, wedding anniversaries, and engagements

Marriage is the lifelong union of two people of opposite genders, as desired by God. It is based on an act of free will through which a man and a woman accept each other in their physical and spiritual personality. The Church's blessing is of great significance for the couple's future life together. The church wedding must be preceded by a civil or traditional marriage ceremony.

The public promise of fidelity expresses that, from now on, both partners wish to pursue and shape their path of life together. In the wedding ceremony, the marriage is placed under God's blessing.

12.2.3.1 The wedding blessing

The church wedding generally takes place in the context of a divine service. In the address before the wedding blessing, the couple is given instructions for a blessed matrimony. The officiant asks whether they intend to stand by each other in faithfulness under all circumstances and pursue their path of life together in love, under God's blessing. Both promise this, before God and the congregation, by saying yes. In order to keep this vow, they receive the blessing of the triune God.

Love for God and one another is an important prerequisite for keeping the blessing in their marriage undiminished, as well as for finding the strength to lead their life together in harmony and mastering difficult situa-

tions with God's help. Another important task for New Apostolic married couples is to support one another in reaching the goal of faith.

12.2.3.2 Blessing at wedding anniversaries

At the request of a married couple, a blessing is dispensed for the following wedding anniversaries:

- silver wedding anniversary (25 years)
- ruby wedding anniversary (40 years)
- golden wedding anniversary (50 years)
- diamond wedding anniversary (60 years)
- iron wedding anniversary (65 years)
- platinum wedding anniversary (70 years)
- diamond anniversary blessing (75 years)

Again God's blessing is placed upon the marriage, and the married couple is commended to God's continuing care and guidance.

12.2.3.3 Engagement blessing

Engagement represents a serious promise of marriage. If desired, the engagement blessing can be dispensed during a divine service. The engaged couple publicly declares before the congregation their intent to prepare themselves for marriage in a manner pleasing to God. Upon this they receive the blessing of God.

SUMMARY

Special blessings are dispensed in the Church on distinctive occasions in the lives of the believers—for example, confirmations, engagements, weddings, and wedding anniversaries. (12.2)

The prenatal blessing is dispensed as the first visible act of God upon a human being. The blessing serves to the benefit of both the mother and her child. (12.2.1)

At confirmation, young Christians pledge their faithfulness to God and publicly profess the New Apostolic faith. The confirmation vow is given before God and the congregation. The confirmation blessing is then to accompany and strengthen the confirmands in keeping their vow. (12.2.2; 12.2.2.2)

Couples who wish to be married make a vow before God and the congregation to support one another in mutual faithfulness and pursue their path of life together in love. To this end they receive the wedding blessing. Upon request, the matrimonial bond is blessed anew at specific wedding anniversaries. (12.2.3; 12.2.3.1; 12.2.3.2)

12.2.4 Dedication of church buildings

A newly constructed church building is dedicated during the first divine service held there. Aside from the act of dedication—in most cases conducted by the District Apostle or the Apostle—the order of the dedication service corresponds to that of other divine services.

The dedication service is based upon a Bible text that is in keeping with the occasion. The introductory words of the officiant express gratitude to God. In most cases, thanks is also expressed to the members for their willingness to make sacrifices, thus enabling the church to be built, as well as to all those who worked on its construction. The congregation's historical development is likewise addressed.

In the dedication prayer, the house of God is dedicated to its sacred purpose in the name of the triune God. Thus the new church is consecrated as a place where the Holy Spirit reveals Himself. Here the word of God will henceforth be proclaimed, and here the sacraments will be dispensed. All activities performed in this house are to serve for the perfection of souls longing for salvation, and to prepare them for the return of Jesus Christ. The church

building and all who gather there are commended to God's protection and to the service of His angels.

The dedicated church is now a place for the worship of God and a sanctuary for those who seek salvation. It serves to offer them divine comfort, strength of faith, and peace of the soul in the divine services.

When a church building is no longer to be used for divine services, there is a divine service to deconsecrate the building. In this final divine service, the purpose of the church building as a holy place of divine activity, as imparted in the dedication, is lifted. After its deconsecration, it is once again a regular building, which can be used for another purpose.

SUMMARY

At the dedication service, the building is assigned its sacred purpose in the name of the triune God and dedicated as a place of the Holy Spirit's revelation. (12.2.4)

When a church building is no longer used for divine services, there is a divine service to deconsecrate the building. (12.2.4)

12.3 The church funeral

The death of a loved one causes pain and grief for the bereaved. In this situation, they feel the consolation expressed in the loving care of those around them. The funeral service, a divine service with its own specific character, serves to provide comfort and strength for the bereaved. However, the word proclaimed is also directed at the immortal soul of the deceased, which is now commended to the grace of God.

The mourners assembled for the funeral service surround the bereaved to demonstrate their sympathy and impart a feeling of security. Furthermore, last respects are paid to the deceased.

Like all divine services, the funeral service is characterised by the activity of the Holy Spirit. The word awakened by the Spirit conveys divine comfort for both the bereaved and the mourning congregation. This comfort consists primarily of hope in the return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead in Christ associated with it, and the future reunion with them (1 Thessalonians 4: 13–18). The bereaved also find comfort in the certainty of meeting with the departed again in the beyond.

The life of the deceased is usually eulogised in an appropriate manner during the funeral service.

With solemn words, the soulless body of the deceased is surrendered to the earth (Genesis 3: 19). The soul and spirit are commended to the grace and mercy of the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, with the blessed reassurance that He may preserve them until the resurrection to eternal life.

Funeral customs, as well as the significance accorded to the funeral service, may vary from country to country. The question as to whether, and in what manner, a body is interred is of no consequence for the resurrection of the deceased.

SUMMARY

The church funeral serves to comfort and strengthen the bereaved. Above all, this comfort is rooted in the hope of the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead in Christ. (12.3)

The soulless body of the deceased is interred, but the soul and spirit are commended to the grace of God. (12.3)

Whether and in what manner a body is interred is of no consequence for the resurrection. (12.3)

12.4 Pastoral care

The accounts of Jesus' conduct allow us to understand the significance of pastoral care. Without regard for the person, He turned to sinners and allowed them to feel His love. He listened, helped, comforted, counselled, admonished, strengthened, prayed, and taught.

Jesus came for all human beings, but not all of them accept Him. His own have been entrusted to Him by the Father. He seeks to protect and preserve all those in His care and does not want to lose any of them (John 17: 12).

Jesus Christ's words and deeds are the perfect model for pastoral care. Every minister is to take example in this from the Son of God.

To this end, Jesus gives us the image of the good shepherd, who knows his own, talks to them, and leads them: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. ... My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand" (John 10: 11, 27–28).

From this we derive that ministers have the task of "tending" the flock of Christ and of preparing them for the return of the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ. They do this "willingly" and "eagerly" (1 Peter 5: 2–4).

Beyond that, pastoral care is also the task of the entire congregation. This also relates to practical help in life. Here the words apply: "... for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me" (Matthew 25: 35–36).

The objective of pastoral care in the New Apostolic Church is to support our neighbour on the path that leads to redemption from sin and death, and into the image of Christ. The foundation for this and the ability to do this can be only found in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The earnest endeavour of the believers to grow into the nature of Christ is supported by sensitive pastoral care.

According to Matthew 28: 18–20, Jesus gave His Apostles the commission to care for sinners through His merit and allow them to experience recon-

ciliation with God. Apostle Paul stresses this aspect of the apostolic commission to care for souls: “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5: 20).

The Apostles and the ministers commissioned by them have the task of helping the believers to become prepared and worthy for the return of Christ. Until then they will accompany those entrusted to them with pastoral care on their personal path through the most diverse circumstances of life.

SUMMARY

Jesus’ words and deeds serve as examples in pastoral care. (12.4)

The objective of pastoral care is to support the believers and prepare them for the return of Christ. The ministers provide care for the souls entrusted to them in the most diverse situations of life. (12.4)

Pastoral care—which also relates to practical help in life—is a task for the entire congregation. (12.4)

12.4.1 Instruction of children

Children are a gift from the Lord (Psalm 127: 3) and should be brought up and cared for by the parents to the best of their ability. Parents give all their love to the child.

Already in the Old Testament, the Lord commands parents to instruct their children about His deeds and ordinances. This is part of a conscientious upbringing: “For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born, that they may arise and declare them to their children, that they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of

God, but keep His commandments ...” (Psalm 78: 5–7; cf. Deuteronomy 6: 6–7; 11: 18–19).

This directive concerning the religious upbringing of children, established by God, is still an obligation today. In awareness of the responsibilities resulting from this, parents are charged with the task of guiding their children in self-responsible conduct in accordance with the basic values of the gospel. This includes instructing them to love God and their neighbour. They are also required to be examples to them in prayer life and in faithful offering.

It is an important task of the ministers and teachers to support parents in these responsibilities, so that the children can grow up as convinced New Apostolic Christians.

This objective is also supported by children’s services, which are conducted in many District Churches. In these special services, the growing children feel the nearness of God and are instructed in faith in a child-appropriate manner.

12.4.1.1 Church instruction

Church instruction provides guidance for our children and adolescents in leading their lives in awareness of their responsibility before God. The cultivation of fellowship and the feeling of belonging is an important objective.

The teaching material is adapted to suit the children’s respective ages and stages of development, while the learning objective is determined by the gospel.

Teachers are trained for this task and supported in their activities.

12.4.1.1.1 Pre-Sunday School

Wherever possible, Pre-Sunday School is conducted for pre-school age children in the congregations, either before, during, or after Sunday divine service. It has the stated objective of instructing children about God and His

activity at their level. In this manner, a trusting relationship with God and Jesus Christ can come into being and grow within the children, and they will feel: “God loves me! I can tell Him anything. I can trust Him.”

The prime objective of Pre-Sunday School is not to impart knowledge. Rather, it should impart a feeling of security, and instil joy of faith in the children’s hearts.

12.4.1.1.2 Sunday School

Children attend Sunday School when they begin school or reach school age. This class is also conducted either before, during, or after the Sunday divine service.

The objectives of Sunday School are:

- to awaken and strengthen joy in fellowship with God’s children and in the divine service,
- to impart understanding of God’s activities through Bible stories,
- to reinforce belief in divine promises,
- to explain to the children the sequence of the divine service, the meaning of the sacraments and acts of blessing, and the significance of Christian holy days.

The teachers help the children to link the knowledge they acquire with their own experiences: that which the children can comprehend in the context of their own experiences can become a guide for their path of life. However, this result can only be achieved if the parents fulfil their responsibility for the religious upbringing of their children.

Thus both parents and teachers work together in acquainting the children with God and His works.

The children partake of Holy Communion in the congregation on a regular basis. From time to time, however, a priestly minister will celebrate Holy Communion in the circle of the children.

12.4.1.1.3 Religious Instruction

Religious Instruction builds upon Sunday School. It imparts knowledge about biblical history, the emergence and spread of Christianity in general, and the New Apostolic Church in particular, in an age-appropriate way. It reinforces the children's awareness that they are part of God's work of redemption, thereby promoting a willingness to help along in the completion of the work of God. On the basis of the gospel, the children are to be led into "the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (Ephesians 4: 13–14).

In Religious Instruction, they will learn from the accounts of human experiences with God: the history of salvation of both old and new time periods is discussed in reference to the life of faith of the children. Contents of faith are deepened, knowledge is promoted, and the interconnections within God's plan of salvation are explained. In this manner enduring values are imparted. Furthermore, Religious Instruction should enable pupils to freely profess their faith.

12.4.1.1.4 Confirmation Instruction

The content of Confirmation Instruction focuses primarily upon the Creed and the Ten Commandments. Adolescents are thereby prepared for their confirmation day divine service, when they will give their vow of faithfulness to God before the congregation and take upon themselves the full responsibility for their life of faith as Christians who have come of age.

12.4.2 Youth care

Pastoral care and support for our young brothers and sisters is a special focus in the work of our Church.

12.4.2.1 The situation of young people

Young people find themselves in a transition from childhood—during which the course of their lives is significantly determined by their parents—to a self-determined adulthood. Most adolescents experience this as a difficult phase of life. They search for their own goals and standards in life, while critically scrutinising the existing values and norms of their environment. Thus young believers, particularly in the industrialised world, also find themselves caught between the standards of the gospel and the various religious and ethical views of what is, in many parts of the world, an increasingly secularised society. Young people are witnessing the marginalisation of the Christian faith and how churches are losing their significance. Increasingly, churches are becoming anonymous institutions and are no longer accepted as a moral authority. Beyond that, young people often find themselves under the pressure of a secular environment. They must also make choices out of a flood of information and a broad spectrum of potential leisure activities.

12.4.2.2 Goal of youth care

An important goal of youth care in the New Apostolic Church is the cultivation of fellowship among one another. Beyond that, the young people are to be firmly anchored in the values of the Christian faith and are to be inspired by them so that they may serve as the foundation for making decisions in their lives.

Pastoral care for our youth is intended to help them develop into personalities with strength of faith and a sense of responsibility.

12.4.2.3 Offers in youth care

Our youth receive age-appropriate care and support, however, they do not form a separate group within the congregation. They are encouraged to be-

come involved in the congregation's many activities after confirmation, and to practise, profess, and stand up for their faith in their surroundings.

Youth leaders, who are trained and supported for their work by the Church, assist our young members at the congregational and district levels. They stand by them as personal contacts for confidential conversations in various situations of life as well as for questions of faith.

In many District Churches the offer to the young people also includes an annual youth weekend, as well as divine services for the youth on a district level. Youth meetings provide an opportunity for conversations about questions of faith and life in general, as well as a chance to exchange information and ideas.

Committed young brothers and sisters will find multiple opportunities to engage their gifts and talents both within and outside of the congregation, and thereby fulfil the call to love their neighbour.

SUMMARY

Parents should teach their children to act in personal responsibility in accordance with the fundamental values of the gospel. It is the task of the ministers and Church teachers to support the parents in this effort. *(12.4.1)*

In divine services for children the young believers feel the nearness of God and are supported in faith in child-appropriate fashion. *(12.4.1)*

In the various levels of Church instruction the children are taught to lead their lives in awareness of their responsibility before God *(12.4.1.1)*

In Pre-Sunday School children who are not yet of school age are introduced to faith in child-appropriate fashion. *(12.4.1.1.1)*

In Sunday School, children are given insight into God's activity by way of biblical stories. Other points of emphasis in content include: the sequence of the divine services, the significance of the sacraments and acts of blessing, as well as Christian holy days. *(12.4.1.1.2)*

In Religious Instruction, age-appropriate knowledge is imparted concerning the stories of the Bible and the origin, development, and spread of the church

of Christ. The history of salvation is also addressed with reference to the life of faith of the children. (12.4.1.1.3)

Confirmation Instruction prepares adolescents to take over responsibility for their life of faith as Christians who have come of age. (12.4.1.1.4)

Young people receive special pastoral care. The objective is to strengthen them in the values of the Christian faith. They are to develop into personalities who are aware of their responsibility to God, who practise their faith, and who profess it. (12.4.2; 12.4.2.1; 12.4.2.2)

12.4.3 The pastoral care visit

Every New Apostolic Christian is offered personal pastoral care.

This care is modelled on the example given by Jesus. For example, He often visited Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in Bethany. From this a special relationship of trust developed between them: “Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus” (John 11: 5). Likewise Jesus’ visit to Zacchaeus in Jericho was characterised by His serving and helping love: “And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house’” (Luke 19: 5). This visit resulted in blessing: “And Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house’” (Luke 19: 9).

Today we derive the significance and purpose of pastoral care visits from what has been handed down to us about Jesus. All members of the congregation have a Priest who is responsible for their personal pastoral care and also for these visits, during which he is usually supported by a Deacon.

The principal focus in this effort of caring for our brothers and sisters is the endeavour to deepen their love for God and His work, cultivate their life of faith, and enhance their understanding of God’s activity. This is primarily done by way of discussions about matters of faith.

Believers receive special care in all circumstances of life in that they are supported by the ministers in their concerns and questions during the pastoral care visit. Thereby the relationship of trust between the minister and the believers is strengthened. The degree to which brothers and sisters accept the advice they are given remains at their discretion. Personal responsibility, which is incumbent upon every New Apostolic Christian, is respected and encouraged. It goes without saying that pastoral care visits are not made to members against their will.

Praying together is an important element in the pastoral care visit. Beyond that, the members benefit from the intercessory support of their minister.

Special care is given to those who are bereaved and grieving. In cases of sickness, which are particularly burdensome, both physically and psychologically, New Apostolic Christians receive special attention through visits either at home or in hospital. The responsible minister visits sick members and shows his sympathy for their condition. He strengthens their faith, provides comfort, and brings their concerns before the Lord in prayer. If possible, he celebrates Holy Communion with them. In the same manner, elderly, sick, and handicapped members who are no longer able to attend divine service are visited regularly.

Believers who cannot be visited, or only visited in limited capacity—for example sailors, soldiers, or inmates—often also receive pastoral care in the form of written correspondence.

Especially in modern society, which is increasingly characterised by loneliness, isolation, and the marginalisation of many people, New Apostolic Christians receive care and support from their ministers in their daily lives.

SUMMARY

New Apostolic Christians are also offered personal pastoral care through visits. (12.4.3)

An important element in the pastoral care visit is praying together. The personal responsibility of the individual is respected and encouraged. (12.4.3)

Pastoral care is provided especially to those who have come into situations of suffering, grief, or need. (12.4.3)

12.4.4 Confession

In religious language, “confession” refers to the acknowledgement of sins or the admission of one’s guilt in the presence of a clergyman. This is subject to a strict obligation of confidentiality.

No confession is needed for the forgiveness of sins. Nevertheless, if someone is unable to find peace on account of certain especially burdensome events, he has the option of turning directly to the Apostle and confessing to him in person or in writing.

In cases of special urgency in which the Apostle cannot be reached—for example in the case of the dying—any priestly minister can, as an exception, take the confession and proclaim absolution. The Apostle will be informed about this act immediately thereafter.

SUMMARY

In religious language, confession is an acknowledgement of sins or an admission of guilt in the presence of a clergyman. (12.4.4)

No such confession is necessary for forgiveness of sins. Nevertheless, if an individual is unable to find inner peace, he can turn to the Apostle and confess before him. (12.4.4)

In exceptional cases, any priestly minister can take confession. (12.4.4)

12.4.5 Support in death and grieving

Physical death, the end of earthly life, produces anxiety. Death causes pain and suffering for the dying as well as for those close to them. Both the dying and their loved ones require support and comfort.

12.4.5.1 Caring for the terminally ill and dying

Many people suppress the thought of dying and death and therefore avoid any dealings with the terminally ill. This can have various reasons, for example fear of the questions the dying person may ask, or the knowledge of the limited nature of earthly existence.

The death of another person is a reminder of one's own mortality. Often people are overwhelmed when it comes to providing help through love and care to the dying. However, this is exactly what a person near death requires the most. He may be afraid of uncontrollable pain and suffering, an agonising death, the psychological, physical, and perhaps even financial burdens imposed on his relatives, the consequences of the life he has led, uncertainty, and the end of his existence.

Belief in the living God grants a kind of certainty that extends beyond earthly life, namely the assurance of eternal life. This makes it easier to take leave and commend oneself completely to the grace of God.

A New Apostolic Christian who lives his faith does not face death unprepared. On the one hand, he knows that his soul will continue to live. On the other hand, he believes in the resurrection of the dead and in eternal life in everlasting fellowship with the triune God. Grasping grace through Jesus' sacrifice has liberated him from sin. He has been reborn out of water and the spirit. He has the promise of eternal life (Romans 6: 22).

In dying it is a special comfort to know that through grace he has become free from the power of sin, and, with a view to the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ, has been destined for eternal life with Jesus Christ (Romans 6: 8–11).

Ultimately, however, even believers remain afraid of dying and death. This fear must therefore be taken seriously and not be considered a sign of insufficient faith. It is important to keep alive the hope in eternal life with God and the comfort associated with this. The dying person need not be provided with conclusive answers to questions concerning the meaning of life, suffering, or death. Providing support to a dying person entails, first and foremost, accepting him with all his fears and needs. One should be close to the dying person on his difficult path and also admit one's own fears and weaknesses. By humbly acknowledging the magnitude of the inevitable end of human life, it is possible to achieve a truly supportive connection which the dying person can most certainly feel.

The assurance of a reunion with those who have preceded us into the beyond provides support to the dying person during this phase of taking leave.

Part of this support for the dying is the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins and the peace of the Risen One, as well as the celebration of Holy Communion. Partaking in the Lord's body and blood grants the dying person fellowship of life with the Son of God. In this manner, the dying person is comforted and strengthened, making it easier for him to proceed on the difficult path awaiting him.

It is also important to provide care for the relatives. They must come to terms with the loss of a loved one and cope with their feelings and thoughts during this phase. It is strengthening for relatives to be given due recognition for all that which they were able to do for the sick and dying person.

12.4.5.2 Support for the bereaved

Grieving must be allowed, and the bereaved must also be offered support by the minister. It is important to visit the bereaved, to express one's sympathy for them, and to pray with them. It is frequently difficult to reach the heart of a mourner at all. Ultimately, this will not succeed without the endeavour to empathise with the bereaved.

Providing comfort for relatives through pastoral care may require weeks and months, and might in some cases even continue for years after the death of a beloved family member.

Often there is a fear of saying the wrong words to the bereaved and thereby reopen wounds. It is important to impart a feeling of genuine sympathy. Despite possible reservations, persons close to the bereaved—relatives, brethren in faith, friends, and ministers—should reach out to the bereaved. “Fail not to be with them that weep, and mourn with them that mourn” (Ecclesiasticus 7:34).

12.4.5.3 Coping with grief

Support for the bereaved and coping with grief belong together. Support for the bereaved serves to encourage the bereaved to speak about their loss and express their feelings. It should be possible for the bereaved to speak with the minister openly about their sadness, fear, anger, feelings of resentment toward God, and feelings of guilt. At such moments in particular, it is the minister's task to remind the bereaved of the positive and cheering experiences they enjoyed with the departed.

In fellowship with other mourners, the bereaved feel understood and accepted in their grief.

Making the bereaved aware that Jesus Christ also suffered and died is helpful in coping with grief. The resurrection of the dead is also based on the resurrection of Jesus. He shares in Christ's victory over death: "For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living" (Romans 14: 7–9).

SUMMARY

The dying and their loved ones need support and comfort. (12.4.5)

Faith imparts the certainty of eternal life and eases the process of dying and taking leave. (12.4.5.1)

A dying person's fear of death must be taken seriously and not interpreted as a sign of lacking faith. (12.4.5.1)

A special element of pastoral care for the dying is the celebration of Holy Communion with their minister. (12.4.5.1)

Grieving must be allowed. Grieving individuals are offered pastoral care. This may well extend over several years. The important thing is to visit those who are grieving and impart to them the feeling of genuine sympathy. (12.4.5.2)

Pastoral care for the grieving serves to encourage them to talk about their loss and give expression to their feelings. In coping with grief it is helpful to be reminded that Jesus Christ also suffered and died. (12.4.5.3)

12.5 Church holy days

Church holy days refer to particular events in God's plan of salvation. These events are commemorated with reverence and gratitude.

The New Apostolic Church celebrates the following holy days, the importance of which is emphasised by a special divine service. Regional differences are taken into account.

12.5.1 Christmas

Christmas commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ and thus refers to one of the central events in the history of salvation: Jesus Christ, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, was born by the virgin Mary. Through the appearance of Christ on earth, God abased Himself by taking on flesh in Jesus Christ (John 1: 14). The manifold promises in the Old Testament in reference to the expected Messiah were thereby fulfilled. Our commemoration of this miracle of the first coming of the Son of God, which cannot be grasped by the intellect, also reinforces our belief in His imminent return.

12.5.2 Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday marks the beginning of the Passion Week. This festive day reminds us of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on the occasion of the Jewish feast of Passover: in fulfilment of a prophecy by Zechariah, the Lord entered the city riding on a donkey (Zechariah 9: 9). He was triumphantly received by the people, who professed that Jesus was the Messiah and Saviour by shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Matthew 21: 9).

12.5.3 Good Friday

On Good Friday, we commemorate the crucifixion and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. Since His sacrifice, suffering, and death are of central importance to the history of salvation, several languages also refer to this day as "Holy Friday". Through His sacrificial death, the Son of God broke Satan's

power and overcame death (Hebrews 2: 14). Being without sin, He took mankind's sin upon Himself and, through His blood, obtained the merit by which all sin and guilt can be paid. There is no clearer proof of God's love for mankind than Jesus' sacrifice (1 John 4: 9–10). The events of Good Friday marked a turning point in God's plan of salvation: the old covenant was concluded and the new covenant began. When the veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place was torn in two at Christ's death, it became clear that God had now granted mankind salvation and fellowship with Himself.

12.5.4 Easter

This feast is a commemoration of the fact that Jesus Christ resurrected from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus Christ took place on the first day of the week, on Sunday. Therefore the early Christians celebrated Holy Communion in remembrance of Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection on the first day of every week. Later on, a specific Sunday—in the Western Church the first Sunday following the first full moon in spring—was chosen to mark the annual celebration of the feast of Easter.

Jesus' resurrection took place without any human witnesses. It is a miracle and a mystery. Holy Scripture, however, gives account of many who saw the Risen One. Immediately after His resurrection, He appeared to Mary Magdalene and other women, to the Apostles Peter and John, as well as to the two disciples on their way to Emmaus. On the evening of the day He resurrected, Jesus came and stood in the midst of His Apostles. Furthermore, Apostle Paul spoke of over five hundred brethren who had seen the Risen Lord (1 Corinthians 15: 3–7).

The resurrection of Jesus Christ has been proclaimed in the teaching of the Apostles right from the start as the core element of the gospel. It is the foundation of hope for life eternal. Jesus Christ made it possible to undo both death and mankind's separation from God. Belief in the resurrection of "Christ the firstfruits" from the dead is the basis for our belief in the resurrec-

tion of the dead in Christ and the transformation of the living upon His return.

12.5.5 Ascension Day

Jesus Christ referred to His return to the Father in various ways (John 3: 13; 16: 28; 20: 17). On the fortieth day after Easter, He, together with His Apostles, went to the mount called Olivet and gave them instructions for their mission. Then “He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.” From two angels the Apostles received the promise: “This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1: 3–11). This promise is also reflected in the New Apostolic Creed: “I believe that the Lord Jesus will return as sure as he ascended to heaven.”

12.5.6 Pentecost

On Pentecost we commemorate the day on which the Holy Spirit was poured out. We also speak of Pentecost as the day when the Holy Spirit was revealed and as the “birthday of the church of Christ”. The sending of the Holy Spirit—fifty days after Jesus’ resurrection—had been promised by the Son of God to His Apostles in His farewell discourses. A large number of believing men and women had contact with the Apostles in Jerusalem. The miracle of Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, is recorded in Acts 2: 1 et seq. The Apostles and the believers gathered with them were filled with the Holy Spirit.

After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Apostle Peter, the rock appointed by Jesus Christ, preached a powerful sermon which centred on the crucified and risen Christ, who had ascended into heaven. Thereupon some 3,000 people were added to the church. Thus Pentecost is also a model for sermons inspired by the Spirit and for the growth of the church through the activity of

the Apostles. Moreover, Pentecost is a feast of joy over the Holy Spirit's presence and activity in the church.

12.5.7 Thanksgiving Day

Thanksgiving Day commemorates the creatorship of God. On one Sunday of the year—Thanksgiving Sunday—a divine service is held in which gratitude is expressed for God's faithfulness to His creation. On this occasion, believers are called to bring a special offering of thanks.

12.5.8 Structure of divine services on religious holy days

The liturgy of the divine services on the above-mentioned religious holidays corresponds to that of regular divine services that include the celebration of Holy Communion. Beyond that, it may include Bible readings that deal with the respective event in salvation history. The proclamation of the word makes reference to the events of salvation history described in Scripture and to their significance for the present and for the salvation of mankind.

Part 13

New Apostolic Christians
and their life of faith

13

13 New Apostolic Christians and their life of faith

13.1 Prayer

In many religions, prayers are an expression of devotion to a higher being. Praying is generally considered an expression of devoutness.

Christians understand prayer as an opportunity given by God for human beings to enter into contact with Him. In prayer, the believer experiences: God is present, God hears, and God answers. Thus the believing human being bows before God's majesty and love in humbleness. Prayer is closely related to the Holy Spirit (Romans 8: 26).

In the Old and New Testaments, prayer is a verbal expression of belief in the God who has revealed Himself as the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer. God addressed mankind first. For this reason, prayer is always mankind's response to God's word.

The figurative image of prayer as the "breathing of the soul" clearly expresses the necessity of prayer for faith. Faith without prayer is not a living faith. Prayer brings to expression love and reverence for God. Petitions are brought to God in the knowledge that the Almighty will lead all things to the benefit and eternal salvation of the supplicant.

13.1.1 Prayers in the Old Testament

The first biblical references to prayer can be found in Genesis 4: 26: "Then men began to call on the name of the Lord." This demonstrates a funda-

mental characteristic that has been intrinsic to prayer ever since: human beings turn to God and call upon Him in the firm belief that God hears them.

Psalms 95: 6 admonishes: “Oh come, let us worship”. Examples of **worship** of God can be found in many hymns and psalms of the Old Testament, an example of which is the hymn of Moses: “For I proclaim the name of the Lord: ascribe greatness to our God. He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He” (Deuteronomy 32: 3–4).

The psalmist admonishes: “Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever” (Psalm 106: 1). This prayer expresses **thanks** to the eternal God through honour and praise.

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit” (Psalm 51: 10–12). Such **petitions** in particular—in addition to those pertaining to earthly life—attest to that which is of importance to believing supplicants.

“Moses prayed for the people” (Numbers 21: 7) when God sent poisonous serpents in response to the murmuring of the Israelites. Compassion and love for one’s neighbour come to expression in **intercession**.

The book of Psalms reflects the spiritual wealth of Old Testament prayer. It already points in the direction of New Testament prayer. An example is Hannah’s prayer: when she brought her petition for a son to God, Holy Scripture says that she “poured out [her] soul before the Lord” (1 Samuel 1: 15). Her prayer of thanks after God graciously granted her plea is an example of profound praise of God, which is very closely related in content to the praise of Mary in the Magnificat (1 Samuel 2: 1–10; Luke 1: 26–55).

13.1.2 Jesus teaches prayer

The relationship between man and God changed fundamentally through Jesus Christ. On the basis of this new relationship with God, the Lord taught

a kind of prayer that was previously unknown: on the one hand it is the prayer of a child who speaks to God as a loving Father in heaven (Matthew 6: 9), and on the other hand it is a prayer “in spirit and truth” (John 4: 24).

Jesus’ disciples were believing Jews and thus familiar with prayer. Nevertheless, they wanted to learn how to pray like Jesus. One of His disciples asked Him: “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11: 1). In response Jesus gave the Lord’s Prayer (*see 12.1.7*).

The Sermon on the Mount contains instructions on prayer (Matthew 6: 5–8): one is not to make an outward show of one’s prayers or use a lot of words, “for your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.” Our prayers should rather come from the heart.

Jesus emphasised important aspects of prayer by way of three parables: in the parable of the friend at night, he emphasised that persistent prayer will have an effect (Luke 11: 5–10). The parable of the persistent widow admonishes persistent and patient prayer (Luke 18: 1–8). With the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector He demonstrated the significance of humbleness in prayer (Luke 18: 10–14).

Luke 21: 36 records an instruction of the Lord pertaining to prayer in view of His return: “Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.” Thus prayer is also associated with the necessary watchfulness in view of the coming of Jesus Christ.

13.1.3 Jesus prays

The gospel of Luke relates that Jesus prayed especially before decisive events:

- before the Holy Spirit descended upon Him (Luke 3: 21–22);
- before He chose the twelve Apostles (Luke 6: 12);
- before designating Peter as the rock upon which He would build His church (Luke 9: 18–21; in connection with Matthew 16: 13–20);
- before the Father transfigured Him in the presence of the witnesses from here and the beyond (Luke 9: 28–36);

- before His bitter suffering began (Luke 22: 41–46);
- before He died on the cross (Luke 23: 46).

The gospels attest the rich prayer life of Jesus: He would often withdraw into seclusion in order to enter into a dialogue with His Father (Matthew 14: 23; Mark 1: 35). He praised Him (Matthew 11: 25–27) and He thanked Him, even before His prayer had been granted (John 11: 41–42).

John 17 records the Lord’s intercessory prayer. His intercession for the Apostles and the church—“I do not pray for these alone [the Apostles], but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one” (John 17: 20–21)—demonstrates how Jesus Christ approached His heavenly Father as an advocate on their behalf (1 John 2: 1).

Jesus prayed before His suffering. He knelt down and humbly bowed to the will of His Father: “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.” This prayer was a struggle of the soul. God did not allow this supplication to go unanswered: an angel appeared and strengthened Jesus (Luke 22: 41–44). Even as Jesus hung on the cross, He prayed for His tormentors (Luke 23: 34). His last words before death were likewise a prayer: “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit” (Luke 23: 46).

13.1.4 The prayer of the early Christians

Acts 4: 23–31 provides insight into the sincere prayers of the early congregations. Right from the start the early Christians practised communal prayer (Acts 1: 14). Accounts of intensive prayer are also recorded in association with significant events, for example the choosing of Matthias as an Apostle or the ordination of the first seven Deacons (*see* 7.5). The Apostles were also accompanied by sincere prayers in situations of danger (Acts 1: 24–25; 6: 6; 12: 12).

The letters of the Apostles emphasise the significance of prayer (James 5: 15–16). The Apostles also related that they prayed for the church

(Ephesians 1: 16–23), and encouraged steadfastness in prayer (1 Thessalonians 5: 17).

From 1 Timothy 2: 1 it is clear that the prayers of the believers are to include all people: “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men.”

13.1.5 The prayer of New Apostolic Christians

A significant function is assigned to collective prayer in the divine service: the Trinitarian invocation of God is followed by the opening prayer, in which worship, praise and thanks for divine protection and accompaniment, as well as petitions and intercessions, are brought to God. In the Lord’s Prayer the congregation joins together in the prayer of the Son of God. Prior to the consecration of Holy Communion, the officiant offers up the Eucharistic prayer, which expresses thanks to God for the sacrifice of Christ, the forgiveness of sins, the sending of the Apostles, and the promise of Christ’s return. At the close of the divine service, there is another prayer which expresses thanks for that which has been received, as well as the plea for angel protection and accompaniment, and longing for the day of the Lord. The needs of the members, as well as those of all people, find their place in these intercessions. Beyond that, the Lord is asked to accept the offerings and bless those who have offered.

In addition to collective prayers in the divine services, New Apostolic Christians also cultivate an individual prayer life. They begin and end the day in prayer. They likewise pray before meals and turn to God again and again throughout the course of the day in order to feel His nearness and seek His help. In family prayer, parents pray together with their children and thereby teach them to develop their own prayer life.

Prayer is not bound to any external form. Nevertheless, the intensity of a prayer can be promoted by closing one’s eyes, folding one’s hands, or kneeling, for example. The supplicant thereby withdraws from the busy activity of daily life to pause and bow before God in humbleness.

It is not necessary to express oneself in eloquent terms when praying. God knows the heart of the supplicant. If the latter's attitude is characterised by humbleness, faith, trust, and love for Him, the prayer will certainly find favour with the Almighty. The words used by the supplicant do not need to be spoken aloud. Even silent prayers find their way to God.

In terms of content, prayer is generally defined by adoration and worship, thanks, petitions, and intercessions. The knowledge of God's majesty and the grace that allows us to address Him as Father (Romans 8: 15) prompt us to worship God. Thankfulness applies to all the good things that have come out of the kindness of God. Above all, this includes the great deeds which God has performed, and still performs, upon mankind through word, grace, and sacrament. Beyond that, gratitude is expressed for earthly gifts such as sustenance, clothing, accommodations, and angel service and protection. In our petitions, we bring God our concerns as they pertain, for example, to the preservation of our faith and the help of God in daily life. The most important petition relates to the imminent return of Christ, and to the attainment of worthiness for it. Our intercessions are not limited to our own families or the congregation. Rather they include all who are in need of God's help, both here and in the beyond.

Not every prayer needs to contain all four components—God also hears our fleeting prayers in special situations of life. Depression, conditions of anxiety, physical pain, or deep suffering may make it impossible for a person to find the thoughts to formulate a prayer. Even then the supplicant is not cut off from God's help or nearness. Concerning this Romans 8: 26 states: "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." At such times it may also be helpful to pray the Lord's Prayer or recite one of the psalms, for example Psalm 23.

Prayers are concluded with the Hebrew word "Amen", which means: "So be it!" Here it is irrelevant whether one has actually spoken the prayer or simply prayed along in spirit.

13.1.6 Effects of prayer

Conscientious prayer opens a human being's heart to the knowledge: I am dependent upon God in my entire being! The attitude of the supplicant is characterised by childlike trust, humbleness, and fear of the Lord. It also comes to expression in formulations such as: "for Jesus' sake" or "in Jesus' name".

When a plea expressed in prayer is granted, it strengthens faith and increases thankfulness. However, those who pray will also make the experience that not every petition is granted. This does nothing to break the believers' trust: they remain assured that God hears every prayer and that, in His love, He ultimately guides everything for good to those who love Him (Romans 8: 28).

SUMMARY

Prayer is man's response to the word issued by God. In prayer believers experience: God is present, God hears, and God answers. (13.1)

Significant evidence of prayer in the Old Testament can be found in the Psalms. They contain worship of God, gratitude, pleas, and intercessions. (13.1.1)

Jesus Christ taught His followers to pray as a child who addresses God as "Father" and to pray "in spirit and truth". The Lord's Prayer, which was taught by Jesus, is a model for the prayer of all Christians. (13.1.2)

The gospels attest to the rich prayer life of Jesus. John 17 records the intercessory prayer, in which Jesus Christ brought intercessions to expression on behalf of the Apostles and the church. (13.1.3)

The early Christians practiced communal prayer right from the start. (13.1.4)

In addition to collective prayer in divine service, an individual prayer life is also important to New Apostolic Christians. (13.1.5)

In terms of content, prayer is defined by adoration and worship, thanks, petitions, and intercessions. The most important petition revolves around the imminent return of Christ and becoming worthy for it. (13.1.5)

13.2 Willingness to offer and sacrifice

The term “willingness to offer and sacrifice” refers to a person’s inner desire to employ his powers and gifts for the benefit of others, by abstaining—in whole or in part—from realising his own interests.

There are various aspects to the term “sacrifice”. For example, things offered to a higher being, as well as human deeds in service to others are generally described as “sacrifices” in common language. Monetary gifts that are donated for religious purposes are “sacrifices” in the religious sense.

Sacrifices are expressions of worship, gratitude, devotion, and submission to God.

13.2.1 From Old Testament sacrificial service to devoting one’s life to God

Sacrifice and sacrificial service played an important role in practically all the religions of ancient civilisations—as also in Israel. Sacrifice was intended to invoke God’s grace, avert punishment, and bring about reconciliation. Sacrifices were brought in many forms.

The first sacrifice mentioned in the Bible was brought by the sons of Adam and Eve: Cain offered of the fruit of the ground, Abel killed animals of his flock (Genesis 4: 3–4). God looked upon both those bringing the sacrifices and the sacrifices themselves. While He graciously accepted the sacrifice brought to Him in faith by Abel, He rejected Cain and his sacrifice (Hebrews 11: 4 and Genesis 4: 4–5). It follows that not every sacrifice is pleasing to

God. The determining factor in whether He graciously accepts an offering is the attitude of the one bringing gifts to Him.

The Mosaic Law prescribed a multifaceted, strictly ritualised sacrificial service. It included burnt offerings, grain offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings, and trespass offerings that were presented to God (Leviticus 1–7). Apart from the daily sacrifices for the morning and evening, the priests would, on certain days in the calendar, bring special offerings on behalf of the people. The sins of the people of Israel were thereby covered. Furthermore, there were sacrifices which individual Israelites made for various purposes, for example to atone for unconscious trespasses (Leviticus 4 et seq.) or bodily uncleanness (Leviticus 15: 14 et seq.).

All of the Old Testament sacrificial service, as determined in accordance God’s will, lost its significance once and for all through Christ’s sacrifice (Hebrews 8 to 10: 18).

In the New Testament, sacrifice takes on a new dimension. Thus Apostle Paul calls upon the Christians to “present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God” (Romans 12: 1). This means that one should fashion one’s life in accordance with the standards of the gospel: Christians surrender themselves to God with everything they have and are.

13.2.2 Jesus Christ—the model of willingness to sacrifice

The conception of sacrifice demonstrated in Romans 12: 1 is to be seen against the backdrop that Jesus Christ gave His body—that is Himself—out of love, as a gift and sacrifice for us (Ephesians 5: 2; Hebrews 10: 10). For believers, Jesus’ sacrifice is holy and incomparable. They are aware that only Christ’s sacrifice has the power of redemption.

Even though no other sacrifice can be compared with that of the Lord, His willingness to make this sacrifice serves as an example to be emulated.

Already before His suffering and death, Christ’s willingness to sacrifice was revealed in His self-abasement (Philippians 2: 6–8). His devoted love was already evident in the fact that He had left the glory of His Father in heaven,

come to earth, renounced His divine form, and taken on the lowliness of human nature. Apostle Paul made this the measure for every Christian's conduct: "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Philippians 2: 3–4). This demands a willingness to offer and sacrifice that should also be manifest in congregational life.

13.2.3 Willingness to offer and sacrifice based on faith, gratitude, and love

A sacrifice in the Christian sense should not be considered an enforced obligation. Neither should it be made in expectation of reward, but rather freely, out of faith, out of gratitude, and out of love. If one sacrifices with such an attitude, it will no longer feel like a sacrifice, even if it should require great effort. So it is that believers often do not think of it as a burden, but rather a joy, to engage their gifts and talents for the benefit of the congregation and their neighbour.

The willingness to offer and sacrifice springs forth from love.

If the willingness to offer and sacrifice is defined by love, the believer fulfils the will of God and acts in the mind of Jesus.

Those who give of that which they have received—be it in material or non-material gifts—thereby express their thankfulness and love. In Hebrews 13: 16 we are admonished to "do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well-pleased".

The willingness to offer and sacrifice may find its expression in many forms. Much of what takes place in congregational life is only made possible through the members' deep conviction and love for God and His work. Thus many brothers and sisters in faith donate a considerable portion of their free time, energy, and abilities in service to God and the community: many help along in the music and instruction of the Church, others take on tasks relating to the care of the church property and building, decorating the altar, and other duties. With few exceptions, ministers work in an honorary capacity.

Divine services, dispensation of sacraments, acts of blessing, and funeral services are conducted free of charge. Families and sick members receive regular care. The aged, the handicapped, and those living alone are given special attention. Thereby the double commandment of love is fulfilled.

We are also admonished to do good to our brothers and sisters who find themselves in need (Galatians 6: 10). Love for our neighbour also prompts us to support others in situations of need (Matthew 25: 34–46), and to help them in times of disaster. This can also be done by donating money or other goods. The aid agencies which the Church sponsors in the context of its social commitment, and by way of which it provides emergency aid around the world, are generally financed by voluntary donations.

For New Apostolic Christians, willingness to offer and sacrifice is a matter of the heart. Believers also feel the need to express their thankfulness and love toward God in concrete gifts (sacrifices), be it in monetary form or in the form of natural produce. In so doing they can take direction from the tithe mentioned in Malachi 3: 10. Offerings are usually placed in the offering boxes set up at divine services and other Church events, or transferred to the accounts of the Church. In many regions an additional offering of thanks is brought on Thanksgiving Day.

All financial contributions are made voluntarily and mostly anonymously. Thus it is possible to cover all the expenses of the Church without levying a church tax or charging membership fees. Through their offerings, believers give thanks to God and contribute to the development and completion of His work.

With all offerings, the attitude of heart is of decisive importance. Jesus once observed “the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, and He also saw a certain poor widow putting in two mites. So He said, “Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had” (Luke 21: 1–4).

Believers can bring a sacrifice in a broader sense, namely by devoting their own heart. This is understood to include the engagement of all gifts and talents, as well as complete trust in God. In certain situations it can therefore

also be a sacrifice to subordinate one's own will under the will of God. These are spiritual sacrifices as admonished by Apostle Peter (1 Peter 2: 5). Beyond that, a great deal of time and energy is invested in the service of God and His work, and in many ways believers give up personal advantages in so doing. Ultimately everything the believer does or abstains from doing, out of love for God, is a sacrifice.

13.2.4 Sacrifice and blessing

It pleases God when we bring Him our offerings with the proper attitude, and He also associates His blessing with this. "But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work" (2 Corinthians 9: 6–8). From these words we can derive that our offerings will not always result in a tangible material blessing. Faith allows us to recognise that the sacrifices which are brought out of a pure heart attract blessing even if this blessing often remains hidden from our perception.

In the divine services, the officiant prays for God's blessing upon all those who bring offerings, as well as on that which they have offered. God not only blesses material offerings, but also offerings of time, gifts, and abilities brought for Him and His work, including the renunciation of personal advantage. The blessing of God can be experienced in earthly matters, but it is primarily of a spiritual nature. This includes the imparting of divine gifts of salvation out of the merit of Christ (Ephesians 1: 3–7).

SUMMARY

Offerings and sacrifices bring to expression worship, gratitude, devotion, and submission to God. (13.2)

No other sacrifice can be compared with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, Jesus' willingness to sacrifice is an example that calls believers to follow Him. (13.2.2)

Willingness to sacrifice springs forth from love. (13.2.3)

Believers also express their gratitude and love for God and His work in concrete gifts, be it in monetary form or in the form of natural produce. (13.2.3)

The willingness to offer and sacrifice is also expressed in congregational life when brethren in faith dedicate a substantial amount of their leisure time, energy, and talents into the service of God and the congregation without compensation. (13.2.3)

The blessing associated with offering can indeed be experienced in earthly matters, but it is primarily of a spiritual nature. (13.2.4)

13.3 Marriage and family

Marriage is the lifelong union between a man and woman desired by God, upon which His blessing rests. It also forms the foundation for the family. It is based upon a free and voluntary public expression of fidelity by both partners. Mutual love and fidelity are indispensable factors in the success of a marriage.

God's blessing is an important and valuable foundation for marriage and family life.

13.3.1 Marriage as a divine institution

A monogamous marriage is a divine institution and not only a human institution. A polygamous marriage, that is marriage with multiple spouses, is not in accordance with Christian teaching and values.

The fact that God has explicitly anchored the protection of marriage within the Ten Commandments underscores the importance and value of marriage as a divine institution (*see* 5.3.7).

God created human beings as man and woman for one another. Significant statements on this are recorded in the history of creation:

- “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it’” (Genesis 1: 27–28). Both man and woman are thus created in the image of God. Different yet equal before him, they both stand under the blessing of God and live by the Creator’s instruction to procreate, and shape and preserve the earth, as that part of the creation entrusted to them, in accordance with God’s will.
- “And the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him’” (Genesis 2: 18). Human beings are created to have companionship. In their spouses, man and woman have counterparts whom they can support and help.
- “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become *one* flesh” (Genesis 2: 24). By entering into marriage, man and woman are amalgamated into a single entity intended to last for their lifetime.

Jesus also commented on the sanctity of marriage. In the context of the question of whether divorce is acceptable, he referred back to the aforementioned statements: “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall be-

come *one* flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but *one* flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19: 4–6).

Apostle Paul compared marriage to the relationship between Christ and the church. He calls upon husbands and wives to love and honour each other (Ephesians 5: 21–33).

13.3.2 Marriage and the wedding blessing

The legal norms for marriage ceremonies, marital status, and divorce differ from country to country. They are subject to change as a reflection of constant shifts in society. The New Apostolic Church is a proponent of protection for marriage and family.

Receiving the marriage blessing of the Church is of great importance (*see 12.2.3.1*). Such a blessing can have many different effects: it provides strength for enduring love and fidelity, promotes the willingness and ability to serve, help, and understand one another, and it helps partners to forgive each other and reconcile differences. However, these effects can only take hold if a couple conducts themselves accordingly.

It is desirable for spouses to have a common agreement in matters of faith. Grasping God's word and grace, praying together, and making experiences of faith together will solidify the foundation of a marriage and strengthen a family. However, the mere fact that both spouses are Christians does not, in and of itself, constitute a guarantee for a harmonious marriage life.

Before marriage—particularly with a partner of a different culture, religion, or confession—all questions pertaining to their life together should be discussed and clarified in order to favour the success of the marriage.

Adultery is a grave breach of trust and a sin (*see 5.3.7.2*). Sincere remorse and repentance, willingness to forgive, and the grace of God can enable spouses to continue a marriage after adultery has occurred. The Church recommends exhausting all available means of stabilising and preserving a marriage.

If it comes to divorce, harmful statements and actions should be avoided. Especially toward the children from their marriage, the couple should display the kind of conduct that will allow the children to preserve the respect and affection for both parents in the future.

13.3.3 Sex and family planning in marriage

Marriage also serves to perpetuate the human race: “Then God blessed them [the first human beings], and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply’” (Genesis 1: 28).

Sex in marriage should be defined by mutual respect, sensitivity and understanding. If mutual consent and true love stand in the foreground, sex can be an important bond within a marriage and contribute to the wellbeing of both spouses.

Family planning is at the discretion of both partners. Nevertheless, the Church opposes contraceptive methods and means that prevent the continued development of an already fertilised human egg cell. Artificial insemination is generally accepted, however, all measures by which life may be destroyed by human selection are rejected.

SUMMARY

Marriage is the lifelong union between a man and woman desired by God. God has created man and woman for one another. (13.3; 13.3.1)

The relationship between Christ and the church serves as an example for the marital relationship. (13.3.1)

The New Apostolic Church is a proponent of protection for marriage and family. (13.3.2)

The Church wedding blessing is of great significance. It can have a strengthening effect on love and loyalty, but only if both partners in the marriage make the corresponding efforts in their conduct. (13.3.2)

Adultery is a breach of trust and a sin. In the case of a divorce, harmful statements and actions should be avoided. (13.3.2)

Sex in marriage should be defined by love, esteem, and sensitivity. Family planning is at the discretion of the married couple. (13.3.3)

13.3.4 Parental responsibilities

Because children are a gift of God, parents not only have a high degree of responsibility toward their children and society in general, but also toward God. Mother and father bear the main responsibility for the upbringing of their children. Only with love and wisdom can they meet the demands of such a responsibility.

Children need security and loving devotion. Together, parents raise their children in faith and teach them to take orientation from accepted ethical values. Doing so requires a significant commitment of time. Parents should be prepared to put aside their own needs and interests for the benefit of their children.

In fulfilling the important responsibility of raising their children, parents should be aware of the fact that their own behaviour and conduct—not least of all as regards their marriage—serves as an important example for their children.

Within their means, loving and caring parents support the educational and professional development of their children for the purpose of providing them with a solid foundation for the future.

New Apostolic parents bear the important responsibility of raising and consolidating their children in faith and in the fear of God. This includes acquainting them with God's word and will (Deuteronomy 6: 6–7), praying with them, attending the divine services with them, and facilitating their participation in the Church's teaching programmes. In this manner, the necessary foundations are created so that the children can later conduct their lives

as convinced New Apostolic Christians, and prepare themselves for the return of Jesus Christ.

13.3.5 Responsibilities of the children

The fact that children also bear responsibilities toward their parents can be derived from the Fourth Commandment (*see 5.3.5*): they are to show due respect and reverence for their parents. This is demonstrated in a conduct defined by thankfulness, love, trust, and obedience. Even after children no longer live in the parental household, the appropriate love and devotion should be accorded their parents.

If there are several children in a family, all should contribute to a harmonious family life by treating one another with brotherly love.

SUMMARY

Because children are a gift of God, parents have a high degree of responsibility toward their children, society, and—above all—God. (13.3.4)

It is the task of parents to raise their children in faith and the fear of God, and thereby create the foundation for the children to live as convinced Christians and prepare themselves for the return of Christ. (13.3.4)

The obligations of the children toward their parents are derived from the Fourth Commandment. (13.3.5)

13.4 Discharging one's obligations at work and in society

The religious, social, and professional conditions in which human beings find themselves result in various necessary modes of conduct. For Christians, the basis for fulfilling these obligations is belief in God as the One who creates, establishes, and maintains order. The imposition of obligations and the de-

mand for compliance with them are essential characteristics of the Mosaic Law. Even in the new covenant, man is not absolved of discharging certain duties. Fulfilling these is understood as an expression of belief in the gospel.

The Ten Commandments provide orientation for fulfilling one's obligations. From the Fourth Commandment, for example, one can derive both the requirement for children to respect and show gratitude towards their parents, and for parents to take responsibility for their children. Ultimately, the point is to respect and accept authority all the way up to God. The Third Commandment also refers to conduct in everyday life.

The Third Commandment tells us to keep the Sabbath day holy, but the Bible passage goes on to state: "Six days you shall labour and do all your work" (Exodus 20: 9). The individual is therefore obliged to use his energies for his own welfare and that of his family, as well as on behalf of the state and society (Genesis 2: 15; 3: 17). It is the will of God to give mankind their daily bread, but they must also do their part toward this end. Christians are obligated to conscientiously discharge the tasks assigned them in daily life.

Fulfilling one's obligations must take place within certain limits. It must not become a career pursuit that takes on higher priority than one's own wellbeing or that of one's surroundings.

Apostle Paul emphasises the believer's duty to comply with government regulations (Romans 13: 1 et seq.). The following principle stands above everything else, however: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5: 29). Paul adds to this that each one is jointly responsible for the common good (Romans 13: 6).

13.5 The New Apostolic Church as part of society

In the New Apostolic Church the gospel of Christ is proclaimed. This proclamation includes the call for believers to follow Jesus and His example, to love God above all things, and to love their neighbour as themselves (Mark 12: 30–31). For members, this means they are to treat others with respect and

tolerance, regardless of their social background, age, language, or other differences.

Within its capacity and commission, the Church as an institution helps to promote the common good, thus functioning as an integral part of society.

The New Apostolic Church stands for universal peace, appeals for reconciliation, and admonishes forgiveness. It rejects all forms of violence.

New Apostolic Christians are active in public life. The Church does not influence its members concerning their political opinions or activities.

13.5.1 Position regarding the state

The New Apostolic Church attaches importance to open and constructive relations with governments, public authorities, and religious denominations. It is politically neutral. Its activity conforms to the laws of each respective country, in accordance with Romans 13: 1: “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God” (cf. Titus 3: 1 and 1 Peter 2: 13). However this does not imply that all directives from the “authorities” are from God because they can fail in their tasks, and even grossly mishandle them. Even the power of the state must be measured against divine commandments.

The Church fulfils its legal obligations under the laws and regulations of the respective country. In return it expects its position to be respected and accepted.

The Church also expects its members to keep the laws and fulfil the civic duties of their country, as long as they are in harmony with the divine commandments. The account of Peter and John in Acts 4 can serve to provide orientation in this: when they were forbidden to teach in the name of Jesus, they considered their duty to obey God to be greater than their duty to obey the authorities: “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge” (Acts 4: 18–19). Later they gave account of their actions before the council with the words: “We ought to obey God rather than

men” (Acts 5: 29). From this it is clear that, although Christians are, in principle, subject to the authority of the state, the authorities of the state are in turn subordinate to the divine laws. This position is expressed in the Tenth Article of Faith: “I believe that I am obliged to obey the worldly authorities provided no godly laws are thereby transgressed.” This means that there may be points of conflict between human laws and divine commandments. In such cases, the individual must decide, on the basis of his conviction of faith and in personal accountability to God, whether he will resist prescribed regulations that violate divine laws. “Prescribed regulations” are to be understood as orders issued by higher authorities.

13.5.2 Relationship to other religions and denominations

The New Apostolic Church and its members respect the religious practices of other people, and refrain from making derogatory remarks concerning those of different faiths, different religions, and different denominations. They endeavour to have a good and peaceable relationship on the basis of mutual respect. The Church rejects any kind of religious fanaticism.

While respecting the self-conceptions of each, the New Apostolic Church’s relationship with other Christian churches is open, and seeks to emphasise the commonalities of the Christian faith (*see 6.5*).

13.5.3 Social commitment

The New Apostolic Church is committed to the gospel and the imperatives of Christian ethics. Thus it understands its duty to include charitable activity which benefits people irrespective of gender, age, colour, nationality, or religion. Within the scope of its abilities, the Church offers assistance to those in difficult situations of life. This work is supported through the voluntary commitment of many helpers in the congregations, but also through material assistance.

Wherever possible, the Church plans, promotes, and supports non-profit charitable projects that serve the common good, as well as institutions and relief operations around the world. It also works together with relief organisations.

SUMMARY

The Ten Commandments provide orientation in the fulfilment of duties in professional life and society. (13.4)

Believers are obligated to obey the regulations of state authorities. Nevertheless, the principle from Acts 5: 29 stands above everything else: “We ought to obey God rather than men.” (13.4)

To the best of its abilities and commission, the Church as an institution helps to promote the common good. (13.5)

The New Apostolic Church is politically neutral. (13.5.1)

The religious practices of others are to be respected. The Church rejects all manifestations of religious fanaticism. (13.5.2)

The Church is committed to the gospel and the imperatives of Christian ethics. Within the scope of its abilities—and also in collaboration with aid organisations—the Church supports non-profit, charitable projects that serve the common good. (13.5.3)

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The Apostles' Creed (Apostolicum)

“I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day He rose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy universal [catholic] church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.”

The Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople

“We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds (æons), Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the virgin Mary, and was made man; He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; from thence He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spake by the prophets. In one holy universal [catholic] and apostolic church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.”

The New Apostolic Creed

The First Article of Faith:

I believe in God, the Father, the Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth.

The Second Article of Faith:

I believe in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried, entered the realm of the dead, rose again from the dead on the third day, and ascended into heaven. He is seated at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, from where He will return.

The Third Article of Faith:

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the one, holy, universal, and apostolic church, the community of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead, and life everlasting.

The Fourth Article of Faith:

I believe that the Lord Jesus rules His church and thereto sent His Apostles, and until His return still sends them with the commission to teach, to forgive sins in His name, and to baptise with water and Holy Spirit.

The Fifth Article of Faith:

I believe that those designated by God for a ministry are ordained only by Apostles, and that authority, blessing, and sanctification for their ministrations come forth out of the Apostle ministry.

The Sixth Article of Faith:

I believe that the Holy Baptism with water is the first step to a renewal of a human being in the Holy Spirit, and that the person baptised is adopted into the fellowship of those who believe in Jesus Christ and profess Him as their Lord.

The Seventh Article of Faith:

I believe that Holy Communion was instituted by the Lord Himself in memory of the once brought, fully valid sacrifice, and bitter suffering and death of Christ. The worthy partaking of Holy Communion establishes our fellowship with Jesus Christ, our Lord. It is celebrated with unleavened bread and wine; both must be consecrated and dispensed by a minister authorised by an Apostle.

The Eighth Article of Faith:

I believe that those baptised with water must, through an Apostle, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit to attain the childhood in God and thereby the prerequisite for becoming a firstling.

The Ninth Article of Faith:

I believe that the Lord Jesus will return as surely as He ascended into heaven and that He will take to Himself the firstfruits of the dead and living who have hoped for and were prepared for His coming; that after the marriage in heaven He will return to earth with them to establish His kingdom of peace, and that they will reign with Him as a royal priesthood. After the conclusion of the kingdom of peace, He will hold the Last Judgement. Then God will create a new heaven and a new earth and dwell with His people.

The Tenth Article of Faith:

I believe that I am obliged to obey the worldly authorities provided no godly laws are thereby transgressed.

The Ten Commandments

The First Commandment

I am the Lord, your God. You shall have no other gods before Me.

The Second Commandment

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

The Third Commandment

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

The Fourth Commandment

Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

The Fifth Commandment

You shall not murder.

The Sixth Commandment

You shall not commit adultery.

The Seventh Commandment

You shall not steal.

The Eighth Commandment

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

The Ninth Commandment

You shall not covet your neighbour's house.

The Tenth Commandment

You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbour's.

The Lord's Prayer

(according to Matthew 6: 9–13)

“Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.
Amen.”

Glossary

Term	Explanation
Aaronic blessing	“Aaronic”—derived from the name of the first high priest, Aaron Three-part blessing formulation recorded in Numbers 6: 24–26
accidence	From Latin: <i>accidere</i> = “to occur” The term “accidence” refers to the outward manifestation: e.g. at Holy Communion, the wafer is the outward manifestation of the elements of Communion.
antitype	From 1 Peter 3: 21 in the New King James Version of the Bible. In this context, the term refers to an example or foreshadowing of baptism.
apostolicity	One of the four distinguishing features of the church (<i>notae ecclesiae</i>) On the one hand, apostolicity incorporates apostolic doctrine, and on the other hand, the activity of the Apostles.
canon, canonical (adj.)	From Greek: <i>kanón</i> , Latin <i>canon</i> = “standard”, “guideline” Today this term refers to the binding compilation of the writings of the Old and New Testaments.
channelling	A practice in which a medium permits his mind to be controlled by “spirit guides” (often purported to be those of the dead) for the purpose of communicating with them and/or asking them for guidance.

concupiscence	From Latin: <i>concupiscere</i> = “to ardently desire”, “to crave”, “to seek after” Technical theological term describing the human inclination to sin
confession	From Latin <i>confessio</i> = “profession” Creed, church affiliation (originally only in reference to the Christian denominations)
consubstantiation	The doctrine that the substances of Christ’s body and blood are joined to the substances of bread and wine during the consecration of Holy Communion.
creatorship	The status of being the Creator. This term applies to God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, since each of the three divine persons share in the creation of all things.
denomination	From Latin <i>denominatio</i> = “identification”, “designation” A non-judgemental term used to denote a religious community
Didache	Title assigned to a document that came into being in Syria in approximately AD 100, which contains the oldest description of how the Christian church was organised
divine Sonship	The Lord Jesus’ status as the Son of God. The fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.
doxology	Glorification of God For example, the concluding words of the Lord’s Prayer—“For Yours is the kingdom ...”—are designated as a doxology.
Ecumenical Councils	In general, the seven gatherings of Bishops convened in the period between AD 325 and AD 787 are designated as the “Ecumenical Councils”, for example the first Council of Nicaea (AD 325), the first Council of Constantinople (AD 381), and the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451).

Enlightenment, the	Designation for an era (in the eighteenth century) which spread from Europe, in which rational thought was accorded the highest level of priority. Associated with it was a devaluation of the revealed religions in favour of a faith based solely on human reason.
eschatology, eschatological (adj.)	Doctrine of the last things This refers both to the future of the individual human being (personal eschatology) as well as to the completion of world history
Eucharistic prayer	The prayer of thanksgiving in response to God's grace and Christ's sacrifice, which is spoken by the officiant after the absolution is pronounced. The term "Eucharist" is derived from the Greek word <i>eucharistein</i> , which means "to give thanks".
historicity	The fact that a particular biblical personage or event is also rooted in the reality of acknowledged world history.
hypostasis	From the Greek: "foundation", "entity" A manifestation of the divine being, today a term designating "person" in the context of the Trinity; the three divine persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
Hypostatic Union, doctrine of	The teaching that Jesus Christ is both true God and true Man. This understanding is derived from Holy Scripture and enshrined in the creeds of the early church. This is also known as the teaching of the dual nature of Christ.
inaugural vision	First vision associated with a divine calling, for example Isaiah, when he was called to be a prophet (Isaiah 6: 1–8)
<i>logia</i>	"Words of the Lord" This technical term denotes compilations in which the words of Jesus Christ are summarised.

<i>logos</i>	<p>Greek: <i>logos</i> = “word”</p> <p>According to the prologue in the gospel of John—“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1: 1)—the <i>logos</i> is the manifestation of God in His Son Jesus Christ. Christ is thus the <i>logos</i>. In His person He Himself is the eternal Word of God.</p>
Magnificat	<p>Designation for Mary’s song of praise as recorded in Luke 1: 46–55, corresponding to the first few words in the Latin translation of the Bible: “<i>Magnificat anima mea Dominum</i>” (“My soul magnifies the Lord”)</p>
Messiahship	<p>The affirmation that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah—He is the Redeemer sent by God.</p>
necromancy	<p>Derived from the ancient Greek words <i>nekrós</i> (dead body) and <i>manteía</i> (“prophecy”, “divination”); this term refers to the practice of conjuring and communicating with the spirits of the dead. This practice is prohibited by God.</p>
office of Peter / Petrine office	<p>This term refers to the special status conferred upon Simon Peter by Jesus Christ, when the latter referred to him as the rock upon which He would build His church. This special status also brings with it the authority of the keys to the kingdom of heaven (i.e. the authority to bind and to loose; cf. Matthew 16: 18–19). In the New Apostolic Church, this office is exercised by the Chief Apostle.</p>
original sin	<p>The doctrine that all human beings are born into a state of remoteness and separation from God, owing to Adam and Eve’s fall into sin (Romans 5: 12–21). Mankind is sinful by nature, and because of this inclination to sin (concupis- cence), is necessarily distant from God. This state of remoteness is eliminated through baptism.</p>

Paraclete	<p>From Greek: <i>paráklētos</i> = “He who has been summoned to help”</p> <p>This is how the Holy Spirit is described in the gospel of John (John 14: 16, 26; 15: 26). He is the Support, Intercessor, Helper, and Comforter.</p>
personhood	<p>The status of being a person. This term is applied both to human beings and to the individual hypostases of the triune God.</p>
pre-existence	<p>The existence of Christ before time, during time, and forever</p>
propitiation	<p>From Latin <i>propitiāre</i> (“to appease”); the act of appeasing a deity to incur divine favour and/or avoid divine displeasure. In Christian teaching, this was accomplished through Jesus’ sinless sacrifice on the cross, whereby He took the displeasure, wrath, and indignation of God, which resulted from the sinfulness of mankind, upon Himself (Hebrews 2: 14–18).</p>
rapture, the	<p>The moment when Jesus Christ will return and take His bride unto Himself. Both the living bridal congregation and the dead in Christ will be caught up to God at this moment (e.g. 1 Thessalonians 4: 15–17).</p>
real presence	<p>The doctrine that the body and blood of Jesus Christ are truly present in Holy Communion (as contrasted with “spiritual presence”, i.e. presence in the spirit)</p>
salvation history	<p>The past, present, and future account of God’s activity to save mankind. Also known as the “history of salvation”, this term is used in reference to the works of God in human history as opposed to the accounts of secular human history.</p>

salvific	Of, for, or pertaining to, salvation.
-salvific activity	-works of salvation; saving actions; used in reference to the works of God upon mankind for their salvation
-salvific effect	-effect for salvation; saving effect (e.g. the salvific effect of the sacraments)
-salvific power	-capacity for salvation; ability or means to save; the power of God for salvation contained in the sacraments, the word, etc.
self-abasement (of Christ)	The abased and humbled state of the Son of God (Philippians 2: 5–11). This term refers to the fact that Christ left the glory of the Godhead and “made Himself of no reputation”, thus lowering (or abasing) Himself to the level of “bondservant” (i.e. a slave) for the salvation of mankind. This humbled state already began at His birth (for example, He was born in a manger in a stable), but progressed even further, in that He ultimately allowed Himself to be degraded to the level of a criminal, at which time He was scourged, mocked, spit upon, given a crown of thorns, etc., however He remained humble and obedient to God even to the point of death on the cross.
self-revelation	The manner in which God made Himself (i.e. His nature, essence, and will) known to human beings. Examples of God’s self-revelation include the creation, His intervention in history, and the sending of His Son. God reveals Himself as a triune God, namely as God, the Father, God, the Son, and God, the Holy Spirit.
transcendence (noun),	That aspect of God’s nature and power which is completely beyond, and independent of, the physical creation
transcendent (adj.)	Above and beyond this world; having an ongoing and uninterrupted existence beyond the physical creation; free from the constraints of the physical creation
transubstantiation	According to Catholic doctrine, the transformation of the substances of bread and wine into the true body and the true blood of Jesus Christ during the Lord’s Supper

World Council of
Churches (WCC)

Largest worldwide association of Christian churches, established in Amsterdam in 1948 and headquartered in Geneva. Currently there are approximately 340 churches of Orthodox, Anglican, Reformed, and Free Church tradition—but not the Roman Catholic Church—that belong to this organization.

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Notes on the text

Repeated statements reflecting both masculine and feminine pronouns were generally avoided. Neutral forms of expression were employed wherever possible, but otherwise the masculine pronoun was used. This linguistic inequality is not intended to discriminate but was chosen in the interests of smoother reading.

To allow for greater reader friendliness, certain philological and/or scientific citation methods were avoided. Omissions in citations were generally designated using ellipsis points (...), while insertions and explanations within citations were identified by way of square brackets ([...]).

