

# INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP



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## ACTS OF THE APOSTLES TEACHER'S MANUAL

# **INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP**



## **ACTS OF THE APOSTLES**

### **COMMENTARY ON ACTS OF THE APOSTLES**

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## FOREWORD

This work, *The Acts Of The Apostles*, is part of a larger, seven-year Catholic Bible study, *Invitation to Christian Discipleship*. A second component of *The Acts Of the Apostles* consists of a summary of lectures and worksheets designed for the student, published separately under the title of *The Fire Within*. This seven-year study has been developed for the Catholic laity so that the Word of Christ, rich as it is, dwells in them.

*Thus they will be able to grasp fully, with all the holy ones, the breadth and length and heights and depths of Christ's love, and experience this love that surpasses all knowledge so that they may attain the fullness of God himself.*  
(Eph. 3:18-19)

The general motivating force behind this study is the preservation and growth of the Christian Faith as understood and transmitted by the Catholic Church through the centuries. It has four immediate goals:

1. To ensure a true spirit of repentance
2. To foster a deeper commitment in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ
3. To create a greater awareness of the Holy Spirit in believers
4. To encourage a more vibrant participation in the life and mission of the Church

*Invitation To Christian Discipleship* has been accredited by the Catechetical Institute of the Diocese of Orange, California. It is now available to all parishes and at-home study groups. It is designed for a layperson to present.

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# INTRODUCTION TO THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Saint Luke, the author of the Third Gospel account, also wrote the Acts of the Apostles. He intended the two works to be read in conjunction with one another. Luke, as the first Christian historian, presents the Founder and the Foundation of the Christian Church in his two-fold work. He demonstrates how the Church flows from the life and work of Jesus Christ, to the continuation of God's plan for the salvation of mankind. By the time of St. Irenaeus (180 A.D.), tradition identified the author of Acts as Luke, a Syrian from Antioch, a gentile convert, a doctor by profession, and a companion of Paul. It is believed Luke remained with Paul until his death at Rome. From his prison in Rome, Paul wrote Timothy, "*I have no one with me but Luke (2 Tim. 4:11).*"

Tradition maintains that Luke remained unmarried and died at the age of eighty-four at Bocatia in Greece. Irenaeus, in his work "Against Heresies," attributes the Third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles to the authorship of Luke. The Anti-Marcionite prologue to the Third Gospel, written around 160 A.D., and the Muratorian Canon, composed between 170-190 A.D., attribute both works to Luke. Some scholars have called these traditional reports into doubt, but they have never been disproved. The archaeological findings of the present century confirm that the author of Acts possessed reliable information about life in the First Century. The discoveries of the archaeologist Sir William Ramsey (1851-1939) in Asia Minor confirm that the author of Acts possessed precise knowledge, even in unimportant matters, concerning conditions in the First Century. The evidence argues that the author possessed knowledge acquired through personal experience. The author was familiar with the area in which Paul traveled and worked as a missionary.

One thing is certain about the author of Acts – he knew a great deal about the early activities of the Church and, he shared in Paul's enthusiasm for his mission to the Gentiles. Beginning in Chapter Sixteen of Acts, the author

implies he is a participator and co-worker with Paul. Here, he begins to write, "we." He implies, at this point, that he became an eyewitness to the things recorded. The writer joined Paul at Troas, on Paul's second missionary journey. He remained with Paul until the end. These sections are the most lively and graphic parts of the account; they are filled with details, personal names, and chronological data. A man so engaged in the early missionary activities of the Church would have had the opportunity to tap many sources other than Paul for information regarding the activities of the early Church; Paul's letters imply that information concerning other Christian Communities was widespread.

The Church at Thessalonica was held up as an example to the other churches in Macedonia and Achaia. Paul speaks about the obligation these other churches have to the Church at Jerusalem. She was the Mother Church, sharing Her spiritual riches with others. Paul exhorted the other churches to come to Her aid with financial assistance. The Jerusalem Church most probably served as a model, and it would be natural for a constant comparison to be made between new Christian Communities and the Mother Church. A writer and historian of Luke's caliber would have had little problem in presenting a picture of the primitive Christian Church. But we need to remember that Luke was not only a historian, he was also a Christian theologian and apologist. The history he records also reflects, manifests, and substantiates the Church he desires to present to the Gentile world.

Irenaeus says Acts was written after the death of Paul. At the point where the book ends, Eusebius and Jerome believe it to have been written during Paul's Roman imprisonment. Since scholars generally agree that Acts was written shortly after the composition of the Third Gospel, the date for the writing of Acts has been determined largely by the date that would be accepted for the composition of the Third Gospel. Some modern scholars still favor the early sixties, but critical consensus places the date for Acts between 70 and 85 A.D. Since Acts ends with Paul imprisoned at Rome, awaiting a verdict of his case from the emperor, many who prefer the early sixties as a date of composition see Acts as a brief drawn up by Luke in defense of Paul in particular, with the defense of Christianity a secondary matter. The defense stresses the relationship of the Christian Community with Israel and the Old Testament, and demonstrates the law-abiding character of the Christian people.

Acts itself offers no chronology – it gives no time schedule of events. The times of certain events must be estimated. From the first Pentecost to Stephen's death should have been about three to four years (30-34 A.D.). The persecution of the Christian Community at Jerusalem occurred sometime between 34 A.D. and 40 A.D., followed by the scattering of Christians to other areas, the conversion of St. Paul, and the founding of the Church at Antioch.

When the events of Acts are compared with other historical data and sources, certain events can be historically determined. The death of Herod Agrippa occurred in 44 A.D.; the famine in Palestine under the procurator between 49-55 A.D.; the journey of Paul and Barnabas, with a collection for the victims of the famine, can be dated 49 A.D.; and the first general council of the Church is believed to have occurred between 49-50 A.D. Paul was in Corinth at the same time as the Roman, Gallio, between 51-52 A.D. Around 59-60 A.D., Festus replaced Felix as procurator of Judea, and it was at this time that Paul was sent as a prisoner to Rome. The book comes to an end around 63 A.D.

The style of Luke's second work follows a Grecian type of literature called, "Acts." It is a form of literature that narrates the exploits of famous men such as Alexander the Great and Hannibal. The Greek title for Luke's second volume reads simply, "Acts of Apostles." It tells the story of the growth of the Church under the impulsive power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is so prominent in Acts that the book could rightly be called the "Acts of the Holy Spirit." Some refer to it as the "Gospel of the Holy Spirit." The scope of the work is implied in the words of Jesus, which summarize the plan of the book: "You are to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, yea, even to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8)."

In a general sense, Acts divides itself around the activities of the two most prominent members of the early Church – Peter and Paul. The book could also justly be called the "Acts of Peter and Paul." From the very beginning of his account, Luke demonstrates that Peter is the head of the Church – the acknowledged leader and chief spokesman for it. Indeed, he presents Paul as the hero, but not at the expense of Peter, who clearly stands out in Luke's writings as the Rock on whom the whole Church was founded. The first half of Acts paints a picture prior to Paul's electric and dramatic impact upon it. At this time, the Twelve dominate the scene as the former chosen companions of Jesus, the witnesses of His ministry and Resurrection from the



dead, and as the foundation stones of the New Israel. They were the true symbols of the twelve tribes of Israel. The Twelve Apostles were the founding Fathers of the Church, the teachers, the guarantors, and the preservers of true Christian Faith. Luke fills in the portrait of Paul that is gleaned from his letters. He gives Paul his proper place as an apostle, like Barnabas, but inferior to the Twelve. Paul appears as a true Israelite, a Hebrew of Hebrews, but a man destined by God to implement the universal mission of the Church. God uses Paul to bring the Gospel to the nerve center of the pagan world. He enlightens him to understand that the salvation of the world lay in the Cross of Christ, and not in the Law of Moses. Luke closes the Gospel account with a picture of the disciples spending all their time in the Temple at Jerusalem "*constantly, speaking the praises of God (Lk. 24:53).*" Acts ends in Rome. Paul was the bridge builder spanning the Church across ethnic, cultural, and provincial differences. He brings the salvation that had come from the Jews to the Gentiles. Luke demonstrates how after suffering many trials and hardships, the Cross is planted at the heart of the Roman Empire. He reveals a Church on the move; nothing can stop it; man will delay it, hinder it, and persecute it, but in the end the Cross of Christ will triumph.

In Acts, Peter and Paul always proceed along parallel lines. They never appear in opposite camps, even though we know from Paul's letters that he had confronted Peter because of his scandalous actions in Antioch. Even in this matter, it was not a matter of disagreement over doctrine, but over the failure of Peter to put doctrine into practice because of social pressure. History presents those two glorious leaders of the early Church as one in life, and tradition confirms them to be one in death. Even today, in the calendar of the Church, they still appear together: The Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul.

Some divide Acts into three decades: the first from 30 to 40 A.D. when the Church was still a movement within Palestine, the second decade between 40-50 A.D. when the Jewish Christian Community of Jerusalem sent missionaries to the Jews of the Dispersion (those Jews living outside of the Holy Land in the various cities of the empire), and the third decade from 50-60 A.D. when the Church moved to embrace the Gentiles.

Luke does not intend Acts to be read independently of his Gospel account. These two works together impart the teachings he desired to convey to his readers. Luke writes at a transitional time in the Church. From where

Luke stands, he can still see those distant beginnings of the Christian Church – a time that was unique and unrepeatable. His Church already has a history, and it foresees a future life of undetermined time. Luke seeks to bridge this historic primitive Christian Community with the Church of his day; as a result he succeeds in building a bridge between that primitive Church and the Christian Churches of the future. In some distant tomorrow, the Church can return and contemplate in the Gospel and Acts, its roots, its foundation, and its true character, and thereby gauge the genuineness and faithfulness of its Christian principles and values. This does not imply that Luke beheld, in the actual lived experiences of the early Church, the model and criteria for the Church in a future age, or the implications of remaining faithful to Christian principles and values. As Christ is *for* all ages and *of* all ages, so His Church can also be.

### PAROUSIA AND THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH

The Church of the apostolic times expected the end of the world to be imminent. Jesus, the Son of God, had been judged and condemned to death in this age. He left this world as an executed criminal. Jesus would soon return in glory as the Judge of this world. In order to escape the eternal condemnation that will come at the end, people must accept Jesus as Lord and be baptized for the remission of sins. The Christian Community felt an urgent moral responsibility to proclaim a remission of sins through faith in Jesus Christ and baptism, to proclaim it first to the Jews and later to the Gentiles. As Paul expressed it:

*But how shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe unless they have heard of him? And how can they hear unless there is someone to preach? And how can men preach unless they are sent? Scripture says, "How beautiful are the feet of those who announce good news!" (Rom. 10:14-15)*

The Church felt an urgent need to spread the Gospel, the "good news," as rapidly and as far as possible. It preached an oral Gospel, for as yet nothing had been written.

Christian Communities lived in a state of expectancy for the Second Coming of Jesus that would herald the end of the world. Needless to say, the spiritual awareness and psychological effect of an imminent Second Coming colored and controlled the apostolic activities and life of the primitive

**Christian Community.** The expectation stimulated a unique community that the Church, as a whole, would not see again. As already mentioned, Luke does not present the early Church as an example and ideal for the later Church. He merely records the unique characteristics of the community that was already decidedly different from the Church of his own day. Luke paints a picture in Acts of a progressively changing Church.

By the time Luke writes, the Church realized the Second Coming would be indefinitely postponed. The Church, faced with the possibility of a long life on this earth, was forced to re-think its position towards the world, its methods of preaching and teaching, and its organizational set-up. It was necessary for the Church to become more structured and organized, and Christian life would have to adapt itself to living in an unchristian environment, an environment that would frequently prove to be hostile to the Church. Of necessity, moral standards for Christian conduct and behavior would develop. Indeed, many things developed in the Church only with the realization that long life on earth was a distinct possibility. Focus of the Church would switch from the Second Coming of Jesus to the concept of a personal future Judgment, and a final resurrection of the Just, with no fixed date for either. Luke was to assist in this development through the composition of his Gospel, and Acts.

### **THE DIVINE PLAN OF SALVATION**

Luke recognized a Divine Plan of salvation unfolding in the world. This Divine Plan served as the background and blueprint for the composition of both his works. It has been suggested (Hans Conzelmann) that Luke viewed salvation history to be in three distinct but successive stages.

The first stage was the foundation of Israel as God's People. It was the initial and preparatory stage for salvation, with the Prophets and the Law occupying the central role. This first period ended with the ministry and death of John the Baptist. Jesus Himself teaches:

*The law and the prophets were in force until John. From his time on, the good news of God's kingdom has been proclaimed, and people of every sort are forcing their way in. (Lk. 16:16)*

The preaching of John echoed the religious theme of the first stage in salvation history: return to God through repentance, which was a necessary

condition for salvation. This theme will run through all three stages, creating a moral continuity.

The ministry of Jesus of Nazareth was the second stage, the central period of salvation. It was the time of salvation, a timeless salvation accomplished in a historical moment of time. The effects of this salvation flowed back through the ages to Adam. Luke demonstrates the retroactive effects of Jesus' saving act by tracing the genealogy of Jesus back to Adam. Likewise, it would cover men and women in all ages to come.

The third and last stage in the history of salvation would be the time of the Church. The Church would serve as the means by which salvation, achieved through the death and resurrection of Jesus, would be carried and offered to all future peoples.

Even though each of the three stages is unique, there is continuity between them. Each served as the foundation of the other, and the three together form the Divine Plan of salvation. Luke demonstrates continuity between the initial and central stages of God's plan by the baptism of Jesus by John, and Jesus' continuation of the ministry of John. Jesus preached the baptism of repentance unto the forgiveness of sin in the beginning of His ministry, which had been the central focus of John's message.

The Jewish leaders, as a whole, refused the baptism of John, demonstrating their rebellion to God's plan. They were refusing to take the step that would prepare them to receive salvation through Jesus. The rejection of Jesus will naturally follow. Being a Jew was not sufficient for salvation. One must become a true Israelite – one who hears the Word of God and keeps it! As a whole, the Jews would reject this second stage of the Divine Plan. Only a remnant of Israel would form the core group, the nucleus of the final plan of salvation, a New Israel, which some years later in the city of Antioch would be called Christians-- the followers of Jesus, the Christ.

The time of Jesus was unique and distinct from the time of the Church. However, it was necessary for the Church to know and understand the time of Jesus in order to know its own nature and purpose, and to find its own direction. In each new age, the Church must return to its roots--its Founder--to interpret adequately and accurately its mission to its own age. Christ is for all ages; His Church must also be for all ages.

The historical life of Jesus achieves the salvation of the world, making salvation a historical fact. The historical life of Jesus has also a future significance. From it flows the establishment of the Church, and the historical life of Jesus serves as the pattern and way of Christian discipleship. The grace-filled words and deeds of Jesus that remain with the Church continue to influence the present. They have a sacramental quality to produce grace in the lives of the people, and they serve forever as a light to direct the life of the Church.

The ministry of Jesus reveals the presence of God's Kingdom on earth. This Kingdom apparently began with the baptism of Jesus and the bestowal of the Holy Spirit upon Him. The Power of the Kingdom in Jesus proves greater than the power of Satan, the Prince of this world. Jesus demonstrates this power when He overcomes the temptations of Satan, and expels demons from the possessed. Jesus' actions reveal that Satan's hold on this earth is temporary; it is not Satan's by right but has been given to him. He will be overcome in this world by Jesus Christ. The ministry of Jesus demonstrates the power of the Kingdom, and gives a glimpse of what the future Kingdom will be when the world is completely freed from the dominion of Satan; man will then be freed from sin, sickness, and death.

Luke implies that during the ministry of Jesus, the disciples enjoyed a time uniquely free of the influence of Satan. Satan had departed from Jesus and, as the disciples were united with Him, they enjoyed peace in His protection. During this period, Jesus sent them out as trusting children on their first missionary assignments: *"Take nothing for the journey, neither walking staff nor traveling bag; no bread, no money (Lk. 9:3)."* From these first adventures, the disciples returned in joy exclaiming, *"Master, even the demons are subject to us in your name (Lk. 10:17)."* Luke indicates an end to this period in Chapter 22, with the return of Satan to the scene and the subsequent possession of Judas, one of the Twelve. Now Jesus tells the disciples:

*"When I sent you on mission without purse or traveling bag or sandals, were you in need of anything?" "Not a thing," they replied. He said to them, "Now, however, the man who has a purse must carry it; the same with the traveling bag. And the man without a sword must sell his coat and buy one." (Lk. 22:35-36)*

Here we see an example of one thing that was applicable in the time of Jesus

that might not be applicable at another time. Luke does imply that guidelines of behavior and techniques suited for missionary work in the time of Jesus were not necessarily guidelines for the future Church. For the later Church, a certain human prudence is encouraged. It would not be appropriate today to walk into the mission field without any thought of provisions for food and shelter, and the sword should definitely be left at home!

With the Passion of Jesus, Satan had inaugurated a new period of temptation, and it will continue after the death of Jesus. Jesus implies this when he tells Peter:

*Simon, Simon! Remember that Satan has asked for you, to sift you all like wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith may never fail.*  
(Lk. 22:31)

Jesus warns the disciples:

*Wake up and pray that you may not be subjected to the trial.*  
Lk. 22:46)

Although the earthly life of Jesus comes to an end, Jesus does not abandon His disciples. Luke apparently seeks to tie together the return of Satan and Jesus' institution of the Holy Eucharist at the Last Supper. In a special way, the Eucharist appears to be instituted for the period of conflict now beginning for the disciples and the Church. Elijah, exhausted by the trials of his prophetic mission and on the verge of despair, is refreshed by the bread from heaven and was able to walk forty days through the desert to Mt. Sinai where he encounters God. So, too, the disciples of Jesus will find in the Body and Blood of Jesus the power to persevere in Christian discipleship. They will be able to overcome the frustration and hardships of remaining committed to Jesus Christ in a world under the power of the Evil One. They will be able to go through all that lies ahead, and stand erect to meet the Son of Man. The Sacrament of the Eucharist replaces the Presence of the historical Jesus. In this Sacrament, a disciple finds the strength and protection of the Risen Savior. It is forever the sacrament of Faith. Worthy reception of the Eucharist ensures perseverance in the Faith.

Disciples must learn to pray in Jesus' name for the strength to overcome the temptations of Satan. The Risen Lord, exalted to the right hand of the

Father, will intercede for those who pray in His Name. In answer to the prayer of the Church, the Risen Lord will send the Holy Spirit to the Church. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Kingdom of God will be established in the disciples and, through their lives, in the world.

Satan is not invincible. He can be overcome by the power of Jesus Christ. A disciple must never depend on his own personal power and strength to overcome the temptations of the Evil One. Satan will destroy him! A prudent disciple will be able to overcome the Evil One by prayer in the Name of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and through a worthy reception of the Eucharist.

In the Resurrection from the dead, Luke sees the Divine vindication of the murdered Jesus. Jesus is exalted. But, the Resurrection also confirms the reality of mankind's resurrection from the dead, and implies there will be a final judgment of the individual. Luke emphasized the theme of a general resurrection and judgment rather than the Parousia of Jesus. This doctrine emphasizes to men that their ultimate future, their eternal life, will be decided by their repentance and resulting forgiveness of sin, or by their failure to repent, thereby dying in their sins.

### TIME OF THE CHURCH

An interval of time occurs between the Ascension of Jesus and the Coming of the Holy Spirit. This time interval separates the central period of the Divine Plan from the final stage – the age of the Church. The Coming of the Holy Spirit inaugurates the final epoch in salvation history. As already mentioned, the Church expected an immediate return of the Lord Jesus. Luke directs the attention of the Church away from the Parousia, the Second Coming of Jesus, to the Presence of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has been given to the Church in lieu of an immediate return of the Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit's coming fulfills the promises of the Old Testament prophets, and establishes the continuity of the third stage, the Church, with the first stage, Israel. The Holy Spirit does not bring the Kingdom of God in its fullness, but rather, a Divine pledge and a promise that its fullness will come. The Holy Spirit is the power the Church needs to endure earthly sufferings and hardships while awaiting the Coming of the Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit is the Consolation and Hope of the individual Christian, because His Presence within a Christian is a sign of his or her belonging to Christ, and a guarantee of future resurrection from the dead and eternal life.

The city of Jerusalem is the geological focal point of the Divine Plan. The city symbolizes the continuity of the three stages: in Jerusalem was the Temple of Yahweh, the earthly point of God's encounter with man; Jesus died there on the Cross and achieved salvation; there the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the disciples of Jesus, and the Church was born. In a particular way, Jerusalem symbolizes Old Israel. By its destruction of Jesus and later persecution of the Christian Community in Jerusalem, Old Israel brought destruction upon itself, symbolized by the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem.

This third stage is a missionary one. The Christian Community is a mission Church. It is sent into the world to announce the Good News of Jesus Christ in order that all men may be saved. The Church will be able to do this through the abiding Presence of the Holy Spirit. All that the Church accomplishes in the Name of God and His Christ will be done in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The nature and mission of the Church gradually unfolds. The initial phase of the Church was unique. It possessed the authentic witnesses of Christian revelation – the Twelve Apostles. From their presence flowed a unity and peace that would be noticeably absent after their deaths. The Church does not begin with the awareness that it must break away from the Law and Temple worship, and from the city of Jerusalem itself. A conscious awareness of the Church's universal mission for the salvation of the world comes gradually. In those initial days of its existence, the catholicity or universality of the Church was still hidden from the eyes of the Apostles. Time and changing circumstances, plus the interpretation of these events in the light of the Holy Spirit, would bring to the Church the awareness of its true nature and mission. This is the story told in Acts. By the time Luke writes, this has become a reality. The Church had moved from a Jewish Community to a Gentile Church.

A Gentile Christian Community could no longer see itself as an organization indifferent to, and beyond earthly power and government. It needed to subsist within the empire and to be recognized, not as a rebellious and revolutionary element, but as good citizens of the land. It must render to Caesar what is Caesar's. Not until the fourth century would Caesar, in the person of Constantine, render to the Church what is the Church's.



Luke understood this need of the Church. In both his works, addressed to the Gentile Theophilus, he took pains to demonstrate the non-revolutionary character of Jesus and His Church. In the Gospel, Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, not directly into the city, but solely into the Temple area. Jesus exercised authority within the Temple, indicating the religious nature of His mission. Luke stressed that neither Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee, nor Pilate, the Roman Procurator of Judea, found Jesus guilty of any subversive activity. The Jews appeared in Acts as the persecutors of the Church, and the Romans appeared as the ones who halted the persecutions. At this point in history, Rome viewed the Christian Community as a Jewish sect. Luke seeks to demonstrate that the Christian Church is the new and true Israel, and is therefore entitled to the freedom, recognition, and rights granted to Israel by Rome.

Judaism was recognized as a *religio licita*, legitimate religion, by Rome. On the whole, the Jews had a good working relationship with Rome. Rome permitted them limited government through satellite Jewish kings. By request of the Jews, Judea itself was under direct Roman government. They could not bear the rule of Archelaus, the son of Herod the Great. Rome made many concessions to the Jews because of their unique religion, such as exempting them from military service, forced work on the Sabbath, emperor worship, and freedom from Roman taxation while under the rule of Jewish kings. Under Claudius, due to the influence of King Agrippa, an edict of toleration towards Jews was issued for the whole empire.

The Christian Church was approaching a crisis situation within the Roman Government. Emperor worship was viewed by the government as a means of unifying those large numbers of divergent groups under Roman rule. An exemption granted to a particular and ethnic group of people, such as the Jews, would certainly not be granted to a universal, catholic religious group that cut across the natural boundaries of men. New religions were forbidden by Rome. It particularly looked with distrust upon Oriental religious cults. It was vitally important for the Church to convince Rome that it was not a new religion, but the true and genuine continuation of Israel and therefore, entitled to the protection and freedom granted by the government. Acts reveals that Rome did not make any distinction between the Jews and Christians; but the Jews became determined to establish a complete separation between themselves and the Christian Community. We see this intention recorded in John's Gospel account when he relates the reluctance of the Jewish parents of the man born blind to give testimony about their

son after Jesus had cured him. There we read:

*“We do not know how he sees now, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him, he is of age; he can speak for himself.” His parents answered in this fashion because they were afraid of the Jews, who had already agreed among themselves that anyone who acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.*  
(Jn. 9: 22)

If Rome were faced with the difficulty of deciding which two parties truly represented Israel, it would no doubt favor the majority, who still maintained the Temple and the old religious traditions. If the intention of the Christian Community was to spread its beliefs throughout the empire, it certainly left itself vulnerable to the suspicion of being subversive to the present order. When Acts ends, the question is still up in the air. Almost immediately following, Nero makes the choice, and inaugurates a persecution against the Christian Community, not against the Jews. Both Peter and Paul perish in the persecution.

There are certain interesting facts behind the scene of Nero's persecution of the Church, which may explain the forces that turned the tide of tolerance away from the Christian Community, and declared it to be an illicit alien religion. We know from Acts that Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, probably in 58 A.D., under the procuratorship of Felix, while Ananias was high priest. Paul remained in prison for two years in Caesaria until Festus became procurator of Judea in 60 A.D. In 59 A.D., Ananias was replaced as high priest by Ishmael. As high priest, Ishmael was certainly one of those mentioned in Acts:

*Three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem. There the Jewish chief priest and the leaders presented him with their case against Paul--urging Festus to send him to Jerusalem. Their plot was to kill him on the way.*  
(Acts 25:1-3)

Ishmael was personally acquainted with Paul and desired him dead. Paul was probably sent as a prisoner to Rome in 60 A.D. He remained there under house arrest for two years awaiting his trial before Nero.

In 61 A.D., a dispute broke out in Jerusalem over the temple authorities,

who were constructing a wall blocking King Agrippa's view of the temple area. The wall was ordered torn down by the Procurator, but the temple authorities appealed the decision to Rome, sending a delegation of ten men to plead their case before Nero. Among this delegation was Ishmael the high priest and Helcias, the keeper of the sacred treasure. Poppea, the wife of Nero, had great influence over the emperor, and Poppea was very partial to the Jews. Josephus, the Jewish historian, describes her as "*a religious woman.*" She may have secretly been a Jewish proselyte. As a result of the influence of Poppea, the Jewish delegation won its case, and the temple authorities were able to keep their wall. As we read in Josephus, Poppea sent the Jewish delegation back to Jerusalem, but kept Ishmael and Helcias as hostages in her own household. It is highly possible that both these Jews, sworn enemies of Paul, exerted strong influence over Poppea, and it is reasonable to presume that both these men were in Rome and in the household of the emperor when Paul's case was presented to Nero. Through their influence over Poppea, these Jews may well have achieved their desire to not only have Paul killed, but to brand Christianity as an enemy of Rome. Acts itself confirms that this technique had been successfully used before: stirring up persecutions for the Church through the influence of prominent women. When Paul was in Antioch in Pisidia we read:

*But some of the Jews stirred up their influential women sympathizers and the leading men of the town, and in that way got a persecution started against Paul and Barnabas.*

*(Acts 13:50)*

At the trial of Paul before Caesar, it is hard not to see the shadows of Ishmael and Helcias standing in the wings.

## BETWEEN RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION

Luke begins the Acts of the Apostles by immediately stressing the continuity between his Gospel account and his present work. In so doing, he establishes the relationship between Jesus and the Church. He introduces his Gospel account with these words:

*Many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events which have been fulfilled in our midst, precisely as those events were transmitted to us by the original eyewitnesses and ministers of the word. I too have carefully traced the whole sequence of events from the beginning, and have decided to set it in writing for you, Theophilus, so that Your Excellency may see how reliable the instruction was that you received.* (Lk. 1:1-4)

Luke begins Acts by addressing it to this same man:

*In my first account, Theophilus, I dealt with all that Jesus did and taught until the day he was taken up to heaven, having first instructed the apostles he had chosen through the Holy Spirit* (Acts 1:1-2)

Luke implies that the words and deeds of Jesus, as told in the Gospel, will unfold to reveal the birth of the Church. Luke attributes the selection of the first members of the Church to the Holy Spirit, who will dominate this work. The Holy Spirit, who operated in the life of Jesus from the moment of His baptism in a most unique way, will soon operate within the Church in a comparable fashion.

Luke stresses the importance of the previous formation given to those who will receive the Holy Spirit. The Gospel relates to us the effort Jesus took in the formation of His disciples. Luke now relates that the Risen Jesus continued this formation and education between the Resurrection and the Ascension. Obviously, it is not enough to merely believe in Jesus Christ; a Christian must be grounded in Christian truths. Luke emphasizes the care and time Jesus took carefully teaching the disciples His Truth, so that they would understand clearly, and be able to teach it to others. (No doubt He is pleased today with those who also take the care and time to instruct others in these saving truths.)

In his Gospel account, Luke relates that the Risen Savior instructed:

*“Recall those words I spoke to you when I was still with you [no one recalls words unheard or unlearned!]: everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the prophets and psalms had to be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to the understanding of the Scriptures.*

*(Lk. 24:44)*

Again, recall how Luke presented the Risen Christ as a Teacher of two disciples on the road to Emmaus:

*Then he said to them, “What little sense you have! How slow you are to believe all that the prophets have announced! Did not the Messiah have to undergo all this so as to enter into his glory?” Beginning, then, with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted for them every passage of Scripture which referred to him.*

*(Lk. 24:25-27)*

In Acts, Luke records:

*In the time after his suffering, he showed them in many convincing ways that he was alive; appearing to them over the course of forty days and speaking to them about the reign of God. (Acts 1:3)*

No doubt the “*forty days*” intends to recall the forty days Moses spent on Mt. Sinai with God while receiving instructions for Israel.

The period between the Resurrection and the Ascension is a time when the disciples, under the divine guidance of the Risen Lord, received clarification of many things that still troubled them, particularly in light of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus taught them to see how His death and resurrection were in accordance with the Sacred Scriptures, and constituted the great act for the salvation of the world, and entrance to the Kingdom of God for all mankind. Luke emphasizes that the disciples did not receive visions of the Risen Christ; they received the unmistakable visitation of the Risen Lord Himself.

As Luke demonstrates, this fullness of understanding did not come immediately. Only time, circumstances, and the Divine light of the Holy Spirit would bring the disciples to a full grasp of the Divine Plan. Luke relates:

*While they were with him they asked, "Lord, are you going to restore the rule to Israel now?" His answer was, "The exact time it is not yours to know. The Father has reserved that to himself."*

*(Acts 1:6-7)*

**Mark states the same truth even more forcibly:**

*As to the exact day or hour, no one knows it, neither the angels in heaven nor even the Son, but only the Father. (Mk. 13:32)*

**Paul teaches:**

*As regards specific times and moments, brothers, we do not need to write you; you know very well that the day of the Lord is coming like a thief in the night. (1 Thes. 5:1-2)*

**This teaches us that the time of the end of the world, or the Second Coming that heralds it, is not part of the revelation given to the Church, nor will it be! Jesus implies this when He teaches that this knowledge has not been given to the Son. In other words, it is not part of the Word's revelation to the world. In the light of this, what are we to think of these prophets and prophecies proclaiming the end of the world? There are false prophecies and false prophets who make them. Those truly under the Spirit of God do not hearken to such. Any teaching that truly contradicts the Scriptures cannot be of the Holy Spirit. It is not the mission of the Christian Community to proclaim the time of the Second Coming, but to proclaim the Gospel, and to work for the salvation of all men. Such knowledge is in God's hands, and our own hands should be busy about the task assigned to them. Luke writes:**

*On one occasion when he met with them, he told them not to leave Jerusalem, "Wait, rather, for the fulfillment of my Father's promise, of which you have heard me speak. John baptized with water, but within a few days, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. . . . You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes down on you; then you are to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, yes, even to the ends of the earth."*

*(Acts 1:4-5, 8)*

Jesus instructs them to wait in Jerusalem for the fulfillment of God's promise. The prophet Joel foretold that, in the messianic age, there would be a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit into the lives of men. Men were to be bathed and washed in the Holy Spirit of God. Jesus speaks of being baptized in the Spirit and distinguishes His baptism from that of John. John's baptism was an external rite that symbolized the internal turning from sin. Christian baptism would be an external rite that would not only symbolize, but actually cleanse and sanctify the human soul. More than this, the Holy Spirit would empower these frail human beings to accomplish the Divine commission of bringing the Gospel and its salvation to the world. The Gospel and salvation would come forth from Jerusalem as Isaiah foretold: "*For from Zion shall go forth the law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem*" (Is. 2:3).

## THE ASCENSION

With the instruction of the disciples complete, Luke writes:

*No sooner had he said this than he was lifted up before their eyes in a cloud, which took him from their sight. They were still gazing up into the heavens when two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "Why do you stand here looking up at the skies? This Jesus, who has been taken from you, will return, just as you saw him go up into the heavens."* (Acts 1:9-11)

The earthly life of Jesus ends with the Ascension, and the life of the Church begins with the Ascension. Luke's account of the Ascension teaches that the historical earthly life of Jesus has been completed, and now He goes "*to sit at the right hand of God.*" There He shall remain until the work of the Church has been completed. Only then, He shall return to the earth in glory. The Ascension means the final elevation of Christ's human nature into the condition of Divine glory, that was symbolized by the "*cloud*" into which Jesus was assumed--a biblical reference to the Shekinah, the glory of God's Presence.

"*To sit at the right hand of God*" (Ps. 110:1) asserts that Jesus Christ, elevated in His humanity, is over all the angels and saints, and now takes up a place of honor where He participates in the honor and glory, and in the ruling and judging power of God. According to the general teaching of the Church, the souls of the just of the pre-Christian era also moved with Jesus

into the glory of Heaven. Paul, quoting Psalm 68:19, writes:

*Thus you find Scripture saying: "When he ascended on high, he took a host of captives and gave gifts to men." "He ascended" – what does this mean but that he had first descended into the lower regions of the earth? He who descended is the very one who ascended high above the heavens, that he might fill all men with his gifts.*  
(Eph. 4:8-10)

There, as we read in Hebrews, "He is always able to save those who approach God through Him, since he forever lives to make intercession for them (Heb. 7:25)." From there, he sends His gifts of grace, especially the Holy Spirit.

Christ's Ascension is the example and pledge of the disciples' own Ascension into Heaven. As Saint Paul writes:

*Both with and in Christ Jesus he raised us up and gave us a place in the heavens; that in the ages to come he might display the great wealth of his favor, manifested by his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.*

(Eph. 2:6-7)



## CHAPTER 2

### THE FIRST NINE DAYS

#### INTRODUCTION

The Risen Lord had ascended into Heaven, leaving the Disciples of Jesus on their own. For three years, Jesus had been with them; He had called them into an intimate personal relationship with Himself. This relationship must be maintained even at the cost of family and friends--even to the point of death if necessary. Jesus of Nazareth personally taught and trained His disciples; He sought to impart His own Spirit to them. He emphasized the necessity of unity among themselves--a unity founded upon mutual love for one another. He left them an example of self-sacrificing love--a love that lays down its life for the brethren. In their individual union with Jesus, they would find themselves in union with each other.

They would then discover the degree to which they fail in their communal union and in their union with Jesus Christ. The death of Jesus had been a shattering blow to the community of disciples. It had been deadly. The Shepherd had been struck down and the sheep scattered. But then Jesus, risen from the dead, had resurrected the dead hopes of His disciples. His appearance to over five hundred disciples in Galilee had restored the Community to life. Their faith in the Risen Jesus as Lord and Savior reunited them.

The Risen Jesus instructed them afresh, interpreting for them the meaning of His death. His death had been a redemptive act for the forgiveness of sins. The Lamb of God had taken away the sins of the world. Jesus rekindled their faith in the Divine Plan by illustrating from the Scriptures how all that had been willed by God had been foretold. As His departure from this world grew near, Jesus commissioned His disciples to go and make disciples of all men. They must preach forgiveness of sins, and salvation in the Name of Jesus of Nazareth. Those who believed and were baptized would be saved. Jesus cautioned the disciples to wait before embarking upon

their commission, because God's work in them had not yet been completed. He promised to send them One in His place who would give them the internal power to accomplish their Godly vocations. The coming of the Other One would be the fulfillment of a promise made by God through His prophets. It had been foretold that in the age of the Messiah, the Holy Spirit of God would be poured out upon all mankind. Until the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them, the Community must wait in Jerusalem and remain in prayer. Isaiah wrote: "*They who hope in Yahweh renew their strength (Is. 40:31)*".

In today's world, filled with compulsive deeds and frenetic activity, we too must learn to be still and wait on the Holy Spirit. That is, we must wait if we desire our deeds to be divinely inspired and empowered. Every apparent good inspiration does not necessarily proceed from the power of God. "*Test every spirit!*" Human goodwill, at times, opposes the higher Will of God, as evident from Jesus' rebuke of Simon Peter at Caesarea Phillipi. For all of Peter's good intentions, Jesus called him "*Satan.*"

The disciples of Jesus waited in joyful expectation at Jerusalem. The Lord Jesus had painstakingly fashioned the body, now the body must patiently await the reception of its soul in order to become a living body. Only then could they carry out their mission to "(preach) in His name to all nations (Luke 24:47b)."

## SPIRIT OF GOD

*Ruah* is the Hebrew word for spirit. It is also the word for wind or breath. The Hebrews believed the *Breath of God* to be the *Spirit of life*. God breathed forth His Spirit, and life on earth came to be. The Book of Genesis begins:

*In the beginning . . . the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind (ruah) swept over the waters.*

*(Gn. 1:1)*

Life on earth is attributed to this mighty *ruah* of God. Genesis describes the creation of man:

*The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being.*

(Gn. 2:7)

The ancient Hebrews believed life was essentially the property of God and living beings only shared in God's life. When the Spirit of God departed from a creature, so did the breath of life, and the creature ceased to exist. The fact that man only shared temporarily in God's life was due to man's sin, rather than God's Will. Sin destroyed man's capacity for eternal life. Genesis expressed it in these words:

*The Lord said, "My spirit shall not remain in man forever, since he is but flesh. His days shall comprise one hundred and twenty years."*

(Gn. 6:3)

Within the history of the Jews, the *ruah* of God was poured out upon certain individuals in a unique and extraordinary way. The *ruah* of God enables men to perform extraordinary deeds. Certain men were anointed with the Spirit of God, such as Moses, Gideon, Samson, and David. These men became the leaders of the people. Men like Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah and Ezekiel became prophets of Yahweh.

The New Testament teaches that the *ruah* of God, the Holy Spirit, descended upon Jesus of Nazareth at His baptism, and abided in Him (See Jn. 1:32-34). The Scriptures imply a permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit in Jesus. What God had decreed in Genesis 6:3, had now been rescinded. The sinless humanity of Jesus became the permanent receptor of the Holy Spirit and therefore, the permanent receptor of eternal life.

The actions of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament and Jesus' teachings about the Holy Spirit began to reveal the nature of the Holy Spirit and, subsequently, the Nature of God. It is demonstrated that the Holy Spirit is distinct from the Father, and the Father and the Holy Spirit are distinct from the Son. Divine activity is attributed to all Three Persons. It implies that the Nature of the Father, the Holy Spirit, and the Son is Divine. God is

**One. The Divine Nature is One. In this One Divine Nature subsists the Holy Trinity-- Three Divine Persons--Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit Himself revealed the fullness of this Divine mystery to the Church. The mystery of the Triune God is such a brilliant truth it forever leaves the human mind in darkness. Just as the human eye cannot fully contain the light of the sun, so the human mind cannot contain an understanding of God's Nature. Some Divine mysteries are meant to be accepted, not understood!**

**Jesus previously instructed the disciples about the Holy Spirit. Here we see how the Holy Spirit is a real Person--distinct from the Father and the Son. The Divine origin of the Holy Spirit is confirmed:**

*If you love me and obey the commands I give you, I will ask the Father and he will give you another Paraclete--to be with you always: the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept, since it neither sees him nor recognizes him; but you can recognize him because he remains with you and will be within you. I will not leave you orphaned; I will come back to you.*

*(Jn. 14:15-18)*

*This much have I told you while I was still with you; the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will instruct you in everything, and remind you of all that I told you.*

*(Jn. 14:25-26)*

*When the Paraclete comes, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father--and whom I myself will send from the Father--he will bear witness on my behalf. You must bear witness as well, for you have been with me from the beginning.*

*(Jn. 15:26-27)*

*I tell you the sober truth: it is much better for you that I go. If I fail to go, the Paraclete will never come to you; whereas if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin, about justice, about condemnation. About sin--in that they refuse to believe in me; about justice--from the fact that I go to the Father and you can see me no more; about condemnation -- for the prince of this world has been condemned. I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. When he comes,*

*however, being the Spirit of truth he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but will speak only what he hears and will announce to you the things to come. In doing this, he will give glory to me, because he will have received from me what he will announce to you. All that the Father has belongs to me. That is why I said that what he will announce to you, he will have from me.*

*(Jn. 16:7-15)*

*See, I send down upon you the promise of my Father. Remain here in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.*

*(Lk. 24:49)*

**He told them not to leave Jerusalem:**

*Wait, rather, for the fulfillment of my Father's promise, of which you have heard me speak. John baptized with water, but within a few days, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.*

*(Acts 1:4-5)*

**The prophets foretold the Father's gift spoken of by Jesus. The prophet Joel wrote:**

*And you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel . . . I will pour out my spirit upon all mankind. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; even upon the servants and the handmaids, in those days, I will pour out my spirit.*

*(Joel 2:27; 3:1-2)*

**Speaking of the remnant of Israel, we read in Ezekiel:**

*I will give them a new heart and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the stony heart from their bodies, and replace it with a natural heart, so that they will live according to my statutes, and observe and carry out my ordinances; thus they shall be my people and I will be their God.*

*(Ez. 11:19-20)*

God promised through His prophet Isaiah:

*I will pour out water upon the thirsty ground, and streams upon the dry land; I will pour out my spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing upon your descendants.*

(Is. 44:3)

## THE CHURCH

The Scriptures tell us that the disciples of Jesus, filled with joyful expectation, spent the next nine days in prayer: “*They were to be found in the temple constantly, speaking the praises of God (Lk. 24:53).*” “*Together they devoted themselves to constant prayer (Acts 1:14).*” In prayerful joy, they awaited the birth of the Church.

The word church comes from the Greek *kyriakon* meaning the *Lord's* (house). Luke uses the Greek word *ekklesia*, which translates to church in English. It appears twenty-three times. Originally, *ekklesia* signified the assembly of citizens meeting for legislative or deliberative purposes. Only citizens enjoying full citizenship could participate in the *ekklesia*. The title *ekklesia* signified the dignity and legality of the assembly. *Ekklesia* was adopted into the religious vocabulary when the authors of the Greek Septuagint Bible translated the Hebrew word *kahal* into Greek. *Kahal* combined with the word *edah* signified the Assembly of Yahweh, or the Assembly of the People of God. The Greek word *synagogue* carries the same meaning. In the New Testament, *ekklesia* or *church* was first applied to the group of believers in Jerusalem. The Church in Jerusalem signified the Assembly of Jews who believed Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah--the Christ. Of course, the Church at Jerusalem was completely Jewish. In so far as Jesus was truly the Messiah of God, this Assembly was the legitimate, lawful, and true Assembly of Yahweh. Membership in the Assembly involved an acceptance of the claims of Jesus and a belief in the saving power of His redeeming death. The coming of the Holy Spirit upon this Assembly would be its Divine approbation, and a validation of the claims of Jesus of Nazareth. What the Holy Spirit accomplished in the members of this Assembly would testify to the world the truthfulness of Jesus' claims.

## A JEWISH COMMUNITY

A wine must taste of its own grape. The soil in which the vine grows governs the quality of the grape. The Vine of the Church took root in Jewish soil. The more we understand the Jewish background at the time of the Church's birth, the better we'll understand the primitive Christian Community. The Assembly of believers could not envision itself as anything but Jewish.

The form this early community assumed had a striking similarity to the Jewish sect of Essenes found at Qumran. The Essenes probably developed from the Hasideans (the pious ones), as did the party of the Pharisees. The Hasideans came into existence around 172 B.C., during the Maccabean Period. Archaeological findings indicate the Essenes had a monastery established at Qumran from 135 B.C. to 31 B.C, and from 1 A.D. to 68 A.D. Qumran is located high above the Dead Sea in a desert area about ten miles south of Jericho. Here the Essenes lived a strict, tightly governed community life. They considered themselves to be a New Covenant people, the remnant of a faithful Israel. They lived a holy life in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. Apparently, they believed in two Messiahs: one to be a descendant of Aaron, a high priest; and the other a kingly Messiah, a descendant of King David. The Essenes believed themselves to be living in the last days and they, too, expected an imminent intervention of God's power upon the earth. They taught that a period of forty years would intervene between the death of their founder, the Teacher of Righteousness, around 110 B.C., and the intervention of God's power in which all evil men would be destroyed. When the Romans appeared on the scene in 63 A.D., they began to realize that the end times were being prolonged according to the mysterious plan of God.

In order to enter into this New Covenant, members had to undergo a ritual cleansing similar to the baptismal practices of John the Baptist--purification by water that had to be accompanied by purification of the heart. It was written in their documents:

*He shall be cleansed from all his sins by the spirit of holiness . . . and his flesh shall be made clean by the humble submission of his soul to the precepts of God, when his flesh is sprinkled with purifying water and is sanctified by cleansing water.*

One who desired to enter the community became a novice and was placed by

the community on a two-year probation. For the first year, the novice maintained ownership of his property, but during the second year, he turned all his possessions over to the one called the *supervisor*. Only at the end of the second year did he receive full membership. At this point, he was admitted into a ritual community meal of bread and wine, and his property became part of the community's fund. Many of the members lived a life of chastity. Their mode of living--their chastity and ritual cleansing--seems to fulfill the laws of purity demanded of priests before sacrifice. Apparently, the members of this community regarded their whole lives as having sacrificial value. There was a symbolic division of the community into twelve tribes.

The organization of the Essenes was divided into two divisions: the House of Aaron composed of Priests, and the House of Israel composed of the laity. A majority of the authority was vested in the priests, and they settled all matters of justice and property. The general government was carried out through two bodies: the General Assembly (composed of all mature members), and the Supreme Council. The General Assembly was apparently the governing and legislative body for the Community. It convened once a year on the feast of Pentecost to renew the Covenant and to receive new members. The Supreme Council was part of the General Assembly but it was a higher and more permanent body. It consisted of twelve men, who represented the Twelve Tribes of Israel, and three priests. The smaller groups of community members were under the supervision of a priest who was learned in their *Book of Meditations*, and a supervisor who was learned in the Law. The priest took care of the liturgy; the task of the supervisor was to instruct the congregation, act as a good shepherd towards the community, and supervise new members. The documents of Qumran speak of a "*supervisor of the many*" who had important duties at the assemblies, and supervised the community's goods. They also make mention of "*one who presides at the head of the many*," and examines the candidates. He may have been the same as the "*supervisor of the many*."

There are some striking similarities between the Jewish community at Qumran and the early Christian Community. They both considered themselves to be people of the New Covenant. Members entered both communities through a baptismal ritual accompanied by repentance. The Church had its general assembly spoken of as the "*community of the disciples*" We read in Acts: "*The Twelve assembled the community of the disciples (Acts 6:2)*," and, "*The proposal was unanimously accepted by the community (Acts*



6:5).” The Church was governed by a body of Twelve, called Apostles. There is a close parallel between the supervisors in the Qumran Community and the bishops of the early Christian Communities. The word for bishop, *episkopos*, means an overseer or a supervisor. The work of the Christian bishops was similar to the supervisors of the Essenes—chiefly, to be good shepherds of the flock and custodians of community property.

The Essenes were a highly spiritualized and well-developed Jewish Community. Among many pious Jews they certainly were highly esteemed. Their way of life would have been common knowledge. The historian, Josephus, admits to being a novice in the Essene community. Scholars believe that John the Baptist was either a member of the community for a time or, at least closely associated with them. The area in which John worked lay close to the site of Qumran. The baptism of repentance preached by John echoed Qumran spirituality. Certain disciples of Jesus had previously been disciples of John the Baptist. In the writing of John the Evangelist, we find certain expressions and ideas in common with the Qumran documents. It is highly probable that Jesus may have been familiar with the religious principles and organization of Qumran. With this example of holy living before their eyes, it would not be surprising that the early Church modeled itself upon, and adopted certain practices of the Qumran community. Probably some members of the Qumran Community became Christians. In the Providence of God, they may have served as a good example for the early Christian Community. The Christian Church was born within a Jewish environment and spirituality. Here were its roots and, naturally, the Christian wine--the Christian spirit--would of necessity have a strong flavor of Jewish spirituality.

## THE APOSTLES

Luke begins by identifying the members of the Community of believers as “*Men of Galilee*,” not as “*Men of Jerusalem*.” He immediately highlights the witness value of this first Christian Community. Jesus began His ministry in Galilee; He spent most of His days there. He preached and worked signs and wonders in Galilee. *Men of Galilee* are the people with Jesus from beginning to end. There is a necessity for the full revelation of Jesus Christ; *the men of Gallilee* alone can give the complete picture. Luke emphasizes the high quality and standard of the witnesses who first testified about Jesus. As Luke wrote to Theophilus:

*Many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events--precisely as those events were transmitted to us by the original eyewitnesses and ministers of the word.* (Lk. 1:1-2)

The first community of believers at Jerusalem consisted of these original eyewitnesses. Luke enumerates the names of the major eyewitnesses to Jesus Christ; he listed only eleven names...

*Peter and John and James and Andrew (no doubt the big four); Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus; Simon, the Zealot party member, and Judas son of James.* (Acts 1:13)

Luke relates that after they had witnessed the Ascension:

*After that, they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet near Jerusalem--a mere sabbath's journey away (little over a half mile). Entering the city, they went to the upstairs room where they were staying.* (Acts 1:12-13a)

In this very place, Jesus had celebrated the Last Supper with His disciples, described by Luke as "*an upstairs room, spacious and furnished (Lk. 22:12b).*" The Greek word for such a room would be *coenaulum* from whence comes the word *Cenacle*--meaning the *upper room*. The Cenacle was the first home of the Church of Jesus Christ. Tradition confirms the house belonged to the mother of John Mark, the Evangelist.

Eleven are named as being present in the "upstairs room." But Luke also emphasizes that the first Assembly of believers included women and, in particular, the Mother of Jesus. He also informs us that Jesus' other relatives, who had originally refused to believe in Him, were also there. We know by Paul's report that the Resurrected Jesus appeared to James, one of the Lord's kin. The Resurrection of Jesus, no doubt, led them to faith in Him, and they became part of the believing community. Luke relates that this Community devoted itself to constant prayer.

The eleven men mentioned are part of the Twelve chosen by Jesus "*through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:2b).*" One is missing. Earlier, Luke described the selection of these men by Jesus:

*Then he went out to the mountain to pray, spending the night in*

*communion with God. At daybreak, he called his disciples and selected twelve of them to be his apostles.* (Lk. 6:12-13)

Mark speaks of their selection in this fashion:

*He then went up the mountain and summoned the men he himself had decided on, who came and joined him. He named twelve as his companions whom he would send to preach the good news; they were likewise to have authority to expel demons.*

(Mk. 3:13-15)

Matthew adds, “*Jesus sent these men on mission as the Twelve (Mt. 10:5a).*” The Greek word *apostolos* means *to send*. In secular Greek, it was a term used in reference to sending an army or fleet on an expedition, or colonists being sent to settle. Understandably, many scholars have turned to the Hebrew to seek a more proper interpretation of this word. The Septuagint Bible translates the Hebrew *saluah* as *apostolos*. The root of *saluah* does mean *send*. It is used in I Kings 14:6, where the prophet Ahijah speaks of having been *commissioned* by the Lord to deliver a message.

It is believed that the origin of the concept *apostle* is connected with a Jewish institution called the *sheluhim*, which means a commissioned emissary. The Palestinian authorities established a legal institution of the *sheluhim*. These were rabbis, often ordained by Jewish authority with a laying on of hands, who were commissioned and sent by the Jewish authorities to represent them. The *sheluhim* were sent at times to collect tithes, or the Temple tax, and at other times to act with religious authority and proclaim religious truths. When acting within their commission, they had the full authority of the sender. Paul was probably sent to Damascus as the *sheluhim* of the high priest to arrest the Jewish Christians there. Moses, Elijah, and Ezekiel were thought of as the *sheluhim* of God, especially when they performed miraculous deeds. We know Jesus said to the Twelve, “*As the Father has sent me, so do I send you (Jn. 20:21).*” “*Whoever welcomes me welcomes him who sent me (Lk. 9:48).*” Jesus is the *Sheluhim*--the *Apostle*--of the Father. The Twelve are the *sheluhim* or *apostles* of Jesus. They are His commissioned emissaries empowered to act in His Name. The custom of a religious authority sending out apostles in his name was in keeping with Jewish tradition at the time of Christ.

## THE SCRIPTURES

Jewish life was based and governed by the Scriptures. The Rabbis believed the Scriptures covered each aspect of human life. Therefore, the early members of the Church were steeped in the traditions of the Scriptures. Scripture had a most powerful influence over their lives--a constant guide. It had been important for Jesus to demonstrate to His disciples that His life and death fulfilled the Scriptures. When His disciples preached to their fellow Jews, they also had to show how Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Scriptures. This alone would be impressive to the Jews. If a thing appeared in Scripture it was unquestionably the Will of God. A Jew made no distinction between what God merely permitted to flow out of the free will of man, and what God directly Willed Himself. (God may permit moral evil but not will it.) The fact that they could find a reference in Scripture to explain a mysterious occurrence was sufficient explanation for the occurrence. God Willed it! It is evident from the Dead Sea Scrolls that the method of interpreting the Old Testament used by the Essenes resembles the method used in the early Church in many respects.

It is natural that the original disciples sought an explanation for the scandal of Judas Iscariot in the Scriptures. Jesus had chosen the Twelve Apostles as His personal witnesses to mankind. But more than this, these men represented the foundation of the New Israel, just as the Twelve Sons of Jacob (whose name was changed to Israel) were the founding fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. The faith of the Apostles in Jesus as Messiah and Lord was the foundation on which the Christian Church would arise. Scripture confirms that these twelve men had roles to fill other than those they played in the primitive Christian Community. Recall the words of Jesus to these men:

*I give you my solemn word, in the new age when the Son of Man takes his seat upon a throne befitting his glory, you who have followed me shall likewise take your place on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel.* (Mt. 19:28)

The Apostles were leaders in the Community, and others would assume their roles and govern in their places, but the Apostles could never be replaced. Their unique positions were eternally theirs. Because of the importance of the Twelve, Judas must be replaced. Later, we will see that when the Apostle James was martyred no one was appointed to take his place.

Peter assumes the responsibility of having Judas replaced. By his first act in the Community, Peter displays his role as community leader. Luke emphasizes the following incident to define the role of an apostle, and to teach us the essential mission of the Twelve. These men are the foundation stones, for the Church is built on their belief in Jesus Christ. Describing the New Jerusalem the author of Revelations writes:

*The wall of the city had twelve courses of stones as its foundation, on which were written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*

*(Rev. 21:14)*

Luke tells us, "At one point during those days, Peter stood up in the center of the brothers; there must have been a hundred and twenty gathered together (Acts 1:15)." The first members of the Church were called brothers. The title symbolizes the love and unity existing within the Community; members of the Church are a family of brothers and sisters. The number mentioned, one hundred twenty, is not accidental. We already know from Paul's account that five hundred disciples witnessed an appearance of the Risen Jesus. The disciples of Jesus considered themselves to be a Jewish Community--in fact, the New Israel. Now the Jewish law stated (Mishnah-Sanhedrin 116) that in order for a community to have its own governing body--Sanhedrin--it must consist of no less than one hundred twenty members, and of which ten percent could be elected to the local Sanhedrin. The Twelve Apostles would comprise the ten percent of this community's Sanhedrin--its governing body. In the Jewish eyes, this would now give the body the authority to act and render its decisions legally. Again, this illustrates how Jewish in every respect the early Christian Church appears to be.

The picture presented by Luke reflects the organizational set-up maintained by the Essenes at Qumran--a General Assembly of the faithful in conjunction with the Supreme Council, its own Sanhedrin. Peter stands out as the leader of the Community and in this authoritative capacity speaks:

*Brothers, the saying in Scripture uttered long ago by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of David was destined to be fulfilled in Judas, the one who guided those that arrested Jesus. He was one of our number and he had been given a share in this ministry of ours.*

(Acts 1:16)

The terrible tale of Judas' treachery could not be forgotten by the Community. That a man so closely associated with Jesus could come to a state of full possession by Satan disturbed the complacency of others committed within the Community. Stories about his unhappy and tragic ending circulated in the Community. The stories only added to their spiritual uneasiness. Matthew recorded:

*Then Judas, who had handed him over, seeing that Jesus had been condemned, began to regret his act deeply. He took the thirty pieces of silver back to the chief priest and elders and said, "I did wrong to deliver up an innocent man!" They retorted, "What is that to us? It is your affair!" So Judas flung the money into the temple and left. He went off and hanged himself. The chief priests picked up the silver, observing, "It is not right to deposit this in the temple treasury since it is blood money." After consultation, they used it to buy the potter's field as a cemetery for foreigners. That is why that field, even today, is called Blood Field. On that occasion, what was said through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "They took the thirty pieces of silver, the value of a man with a price on his head, a price set by the Israelites, and they paid it out for the potter's field just as the Lord had commanded me."*

(Mt. 27:3-10)

Although the version related by Peter in Acts agrees with Matthew in the essential details, some details are different. The differences in these two accounts serve to illustrate how the traditions concerning those other than Jesus were not preserved with the same exactness. Essentially, the story remains the same. The disciple who betrayed Jesus ended his life in a tragic death and the Scriptures had foretold it. Speaking of Judas, Peter says,

*That individual bought a piece of land with his unjust gains, and fell headlong upon it. His body burst wide open, all his entrails spilling out. This even came to be known by the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who named the property Field of Blood--"Akeldama" in their own language.*

(Acts 1:18-19)

John the Evangelist suggests that Judas came to this bitter end because he was a thief. Others have speculated that Judas lost faith in Jesus. Judas

represented those who desired a Messiah who would lead the Jews to national glory. For the true Jew, the only satisfactory answer for Judas must be found in the Scriptures. The Judas incident affords a good example of how the early Church applied the Scriptures. Peter implies the answer lies in the Psalms of David. (Remember, if the answer could be found foretold in Scripture, that was answer enough.) Psalm 41, verse 10, implies that one of the sufferings of the Just One is to be betrayed by a friend: *“Even my friend who had my trust and partook of my bread (Judas had received the Eucharist) has raised his heel against me.”* The quotations used by Peter suggest Judas personified all those who betray God. Peter calls our attention to Psalm 69, which describes the sufferings of the innocent Messiah, and the curse that falls upon those who have caused these sufferings:

*Pour out your wrath upon them; let the fury of your anger overtake them. Let their encampment become desolate; in their tents let there be no one to dwell . . . Heap guilt upon their guilt, and let them not attain to your reward. May they be erased from the book of the living, and not be recorded with the just.*

*(Ps. 69:25-29)*

Peter also turns our attention to Psalm 109:7-8, *“When he is judged, let him go forth condemned, and may his plea be in vain. May his days be few; may another take his office (Ps. 109:7-8).”*

Luke summarizes Peter’s interpretation of Judas’ case in these words:

*It is written in the Book of Psalms, “Let his encampment be desolate. May no one dwell on it.” And again, “May another take his office”*

*(Acts 1:20)*

It is interesting that the Greek word for office is *episkopos*. The account given by Matthew reflects not only Jeremiah, but also Zechariah. There we read:

*And they counted out my wages, thirty pieces of silver. But the Lord said to me, “Throw it in the treasury, the handsome price at which they valued me!” So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the treasury in the house of the Lord.*

*(Zec. 11:12b-13)*

The basic tradition that underlines both these different accounts is the report that Judas' life ended in suicide--a terrible sin among the Jews.

### ELECTION OF MATTHIAS

The Scripture quotation, "*May another take his office (Ps. 109:8)*," affords the scriptural authority for Peter to proceed with choosing a man to replace Judas as the twelfth Apostle. Peter proceeds with the election of an Apostle. Certain early Greek texts state that Peter himself selected the two men to be voted upon. Luke uses this incident to teach the importance of the Apostles' position in the Community. The fact that only two men (out of a possible several hundred) were candidates for the office, stresses the importance the early Church attached to the historical facts of its faith. These twelve men united, and provided a collective witness to the historical Jesus and His Resurrection. In the Old Testament, a prophet began his career by being introduced in a vision into the heavenly court before God, and then was sent to preach God's Will to the people. The formation and commission of the Apostles had followed a similar pattern.

Within the witness and testimony of these twelve men lay the entire deposit of Christian Faith. Later, the Church confirmed the close of Divine public revelation with the death of the Apostles. Public revelation means a truth revealed by Jesus binding upon the entire Church. The unique witness of the Twelve rested upon their being present with Jesus from the beginning; they *began* with Jesus. Each knew the whole story. Their united witness guarded the Church against the anarchy of private revelations, and against the ungovernable charisms of certain individuals. In other words, no matter how apparently holy future prophets appeared to be, no matter the works they performed, they could neither contradict nor set aside the revelation given to the Church through the Apostles. A person receiving a private revelation could have a moral responsibility to obey it, but never could it be imposed upon the Church as a whole as a matter of faith.

The Christian Community narrowed its choice to Joseph and Matthias. The Community rejected a very famous member, James, who was known as the "*brother of the Lord*." Later, he would become the third Bishop of Jerusalem, but he was rejected as an apostle because of his period of disbelief in Jesus. After choosing these two men, the Assembly resorted to the casting of lots, leaving the Lord to make the final choice. This was an old Jewish



method of choosing people for the service of the Lord. The priest in the Temple cast lots to determine who would participate in the temple services.

Casting lots consisted of writing the names of the candidates on a stone, placing the stones in a bowl, and shaking the bowl until one stone was ejected. The man's name on that stone was elected. This is the account given by Luke. Peter is still addressing the Assembly:

*“It is entirely fitting, therefore, that one of those who was of our company while the Lord Jesus moved among us, from the baptism of John until the day he was taken up from us, should be named as witness with us to his resurrection.” At that, they nominated two, Joseph (called Barsabbas, also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they prayed, “O Lord, you read the hearts of men. Make known to us which of these two you choose for this apostolic ministry, replacing Judas, who deserted the cause and went the way he was destined to go.” They then drew lots between the two men. The choice fell to Matthias, who was added to the eleven apostles.*

*(Acts 1:21-26)*

His name does not appear again in Acts, but we know he inherited a glorious ministry and his future glory is yet to be beheld. As for the man he succeeded, Scripture says:

*The Son of Man is going the way the Scripture tells of him. Still, accursed be that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It were better for him had he never been born.*

*(Mk. 14:21)*

## WORK UNFINISHED

The Church at Jerusalem prayerfully awaits the Coming of the Holy Spirit. That gathering of believers in the Cenacle have come a long way with Jesus, and yet, they are only beginning. The Scriptures clearly teach us that a true disciple of Jesus Christ is not made overnight. Those present in the Cenacle have completed three difficult years as students of Jesus Christ. Their initial religious experience and encounter with Him had to be nurtured by exposure to His teachings and example. Their minds needed enlightenment concerning the mysteries of Divine Nature and the incarnation of God's Son. They had to personally face the mystery of sin and suffering in their own

lives. They had to learn to die daily to self by forgetting self, day-by-day, in the service of others. They had to learn to set aside their personal plans and spiritual ambitions before the demands of the Divine Will manifested through Jesus. Their spirits had to be tempered with humility, which only came slowly as they understood their own personal weaknesses, sinfulness, and propensities to evil. They grew in humility by stumbling and falling along the Way as they tried to follow Jesus. Their humbled spirits had to be uplifted by hope in God's mercy and kindness, a mercy and kindness coming through Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the World.

*Do not let your hearts be troubled – In my Father's house there are many dwelling places; otherwise, how could I have told you that I was going to prepare a place for you? I am indeed going to prepare a place for you. . . .*

*(Jn. 14:2)*

The disciples had to come to understand the importance of membership in the Community. There was such an identification of Jesus with the Community, that outside the Assembly they could hope for nothing, it would mean being outside of Jesus. These religious experiences, teachings, and sufferings were the brick and mortar that built men and women into true disciples of Jesus Christ. They were ready now; their spirits and wills were prepared to go the whole way with Jesus. But like stacks of dry kindling, they must await a spark of fire in order to burn. As yet they were not caught up in a flame of Divine Love. That must be a gift from on high.

The Church had come a long way in three years. But then its Teacher was the Master. The eyes of the Church had seen and ears had heard what kings and prophets desired in vain to see and hear. From heaven, Jesus would soon complete the work He had begun. He would send the Holy Spirit of God upon the Community of Believers, and the Church would be forever alive in God.

The Scriptures do not imply that there was no Presence of the Holy Spirit in the disciples before Pentecost. On the eve of His death, Jesus told His disciples that they were sanctified through the Word Itself. The Angel Gabriel told Mary that she would receive the Holy Spirit and become the Mother of the Messiah. John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit before his birth. Rather, the Gift to come at Pentecost was a gift over and above the gift of sanctification. It was to be a unique empowering and

abiding of the Holy Spirit in the Church--the Body of Believers--similar to the Coming of the Holy Spirit on Jesus at His baptism. The public life of Jesus dates from His baptism, just as the ministry and life of the Church in the world would be dated from Pentecost.

Jesus had spoken of the Community of Believers being baptized in the Holy Spirit. The Community ardently desired this baptism. They sustained and supported this ardent desire through constant and continuous prayer. Jesus had said, "*Remain in Jerusalem until you receive the promise of the Father – Then you will be my witnesses (Luke 24:49b).*" So the Community gathered in the Cenacle around the one who had always led the way in discipleship, the one first to hear the Word of God and keep it--Mary, the Mother of Jesus, who was proclaimed by the Holy Spirit as "*Blessed among women,*" and self-proclaimed as "*slave of the Lord.*"

The Church prayed--a novena of days it prayed--constantly it prayed. In a spirit of joyful expectation and hope it prayed. It longed for the fulfillment of the Lord's words to Isaiah:

*I will pour out water upon the thirsty ground, and streams upon the dry land; I will pour out my spirit upon your offspring and my blessing upon your descendants.* (Is. 44:3)

Perhaps in the words of Psalm 42 the voice of the Church found expression for its heart's desire:

*As the hind longs for the running waters, so my soul longs for you, O God. Athirst is my soul for God, the living God . . . Hope in God! For I shall again be thanking him, in the presence of my savior and my God.*

(Ps. 42:2-3, 6)

The Prayer of the Church enkindled a Pentecostal Fire! Never to be quenched!

## CHAPTER 3

### BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

#### INTRODUCTION

In his Gospel account, Saint Luke etches a vivid portrait of the disciples of Jesus. He pictures men devoted to Jesus of Nazareth to the degree of giving up their personal lives to follow Him. We see men of limited ability and insight – beset with the sinfulness and frailties of humanity: pride, ambition, self-centeredness, intolerance, impatience, dishonesty, cowardliness, and infidelity. Their characters were no doubt improved by their long association with Jesus. Evidently they grew in humility, as indicated by Peter's confession, "*Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man!*" Their mutual love of one another increased as evident from their continued close association after the death and resurrection of Jesus. In Acts, Luke presents a group of disciples filled with joyful expectation that was born out of their renewed and confirmed faith that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah of Israel. Nevertheless, the disciples formed a closed, introverted, prayerful Community of people who looked, not outwardly towards other human beings, but heavenward as they awaited the glorious return of the glorified Jesus who would usher in the glorious Kingdom of God, in which the disciples of Jesus would triumphantly share.

Something happened within the Community, revolutionizing it, transforming its character, turning it 180 degrees. What previously had been as closed as an acorn within its shell now broke forth within the world as a dynamic force of great energy, producing powerful effects on the human environment. There is a law of logic: for every effect there must be an adequate cause. In other words, if a rock weighing a ton is moved a mile away, you do not suspect an ant or a two-year old baby as being the prime mover. A godly thing took place within the disciples, and Luke reveals the Divine Cause. He explains this to us in his Pentecostal account. Luke paints a dramatic and picture depicting and symbolizing the internal transformation occurring in the Christian Community through the baptism

of the Holy Spirit. Luke finds within the Old Testament sufficient background and images for his presentation of the Community being baptized in the Holy Spirit.

### COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

The Gospel of John presents the bestowal of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples in a marvelous but less dramatic manner. Perhaps we could compare the differences between the accounts of John and Luke to the differences in film productions of the same historical event done by Cecil B. de Mille and Franco Zeffirelli.

At the Crucifixion, John attributes the coming of the Holy Spirit to the death of Jesus, symbolized by the water flowing from the pierced side of the dead Jesus. He presents the Risen and Ascended Jesus appearing to ten fearful Apostles in an enclosed and locked Cenacle. To these Apostles, Jesus said, "*Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, so I send you (Jn. 20:21).*" The Father sent Jesus to reconcile man to Himself. First, by removing sin, the obstacle to reconciliation; second, to impart the means of reconciliation, the Holy Spirit of Truth and Love. John tells us that Jesus then "*breathed on them.*" This is an act of creation, of re-creation, of creating life within them. It immediately recalls the creation of man by Yahweh using the same words as in Genesis in the creation scene. John emphasizes that it is a New Genesis. It is the first day of the week, the first day of a New Creation. To the ten Apostles present Jesus said:

*Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive men's sins, they are forgiven them; if you hold them bound, they are held bound.*

*(Jn. 20:22b-23)*

The Apostles received the Holy Spirit in a special manner. They received power to impart the Holy Spirit to other men, thereby freeing them from sin and reconciling them to God. The words of Jesus imply it is not a power to be imparted to all men. There are conditions. Jesus taught them that the world cannot receive the Holy Spirit. He had informed the Apostles that "*if you love me and obey my commandments, I will ask the Father and He will send you another Paraclete.*" Jesus empowered the Apostles to impart the Holy Spirit to those who believe in Him, and desire to love Him and keep His commandments. John's Gospel account appears to emphasize the sanctification of the soul through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

**Our Church teaches us that the souls of the just are made holy through Sanctifying Grace. The Holy Spirit bestows Sanctifying Grace, but our own personal holiness is distinct from that of the Holy Spirit. Sanctifying Grace is both a Divine quality and a created gift within the soul. This quality becomes part of the very spirit of a person giving the soul a kinship and likeness to God Himself. It makes possible a friendship between the creature and its Creator.**

**To be created and divine seems mutually exclusive. Perhaps Sanctifying Grace can best be understood as a divine effect of the Holy Spirit's presence within the created soul of man. The grace is distinct from the Holy Spirit. There could be no sunlight without the sun. Yet light can be said to be distinct from the sun. The presence of the sun fills the whole world with its light. It illuminates and transforms all things. Its presence can so affect a substance as to radically change the substance, and yet we do not say that light is the sun, or that the effects caused by the sun are the sun itself. So it seems to be with the soul and the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit enters the soul and the soul does not willfully resist or place barriers before the Presence of the Holy Spirit, His Presence, like that of the sun, causes amazing results within the creative spirit of the person. The Divine rays of the Holy Spirit touch the spirit of man, producing divine results in the creative substance of his or her spirit. We know that if the Presence of God filled a room, as it did the Temple of Solomon, nothing within the room would remain unaffected. The room would assume a godly beauty, yet it would remain distinct from God. When God came down upon Mt. Sinai, the Presence of God transformed the mountain and the mountain assumed a terrible beauty, yet the mountain remained a mountain.**

**Writing of the Holy Spirit, St. Basil the Great tells us:**

*Shining upon those who have been purified of every stain, He makes them spiritual in heart, through union with Himself. For just as when the sunlight falls on clear transparent bodies, they too become resplendent, and begin to shine from another light within themselves, so the souls that contain the Spirit within them, become themselves spiritual, and their brightness shines forth on others.*

*(St. Basil the Great)*

Writing of the effects of the Holy Spirit, St. John Chrysostom tells us:

*Through Him we obtain forgiveness of sin; through Him are we made clean of every stain. Through the gift of Him we have been changed from men into angels, those among us who co-operate with His grace; not actually changing our nature, but, what is more wonderful, while remaining in the nature of men we show forth a manner of life that is worthy of angels. The soul that a little while ago was stained with the mire of sin, is all at once more splendid than the sun. Such then is the power of the Spirit.*

*(St. John Chrysostom)*

### COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AT PENTECOST

The above two accounts really complement one another, for the Holy Spirit is both the Sanctifier and the Generator of power to be a witness to the Risen Jesus. Luke's account in Acts highlights the witnessing powers of the Holy Spirit in the Apostles and disciples. He sets the stage for the action of the Holy Spirit with these words of Jesus: "*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes down on you; then you are to be my witnesses (Acts 1:8a).*" The Scriptures attribute the same power mentioned in Acts to the Person of Jesus: "*Power went out from Him (Mk. 5:30b).*" It can be expected that the disciples will perform actions analogous to those worked by Jesus Himself.

The setting for the Coming of the Holy Spirit is the Jewish Feast of Pentecost. The word Pentecost means "*the 50th Day.*" The feast of Pentecost is mentioned in Exodus (23:14-17) as a harvest festival, the feast of the first fruits of the grain harvest. It is likewise referred to as "*the feast of Weeks (Nm. 28:26).*" At this feast, the cereal offering in the form of two loaves was made to the Lord. The date of the feast was reckoned by counting seven weeks from the beginning of the grain harvest. It was a day of Sabbath observance; we would call it a holy day of obligation. The three great feasts of the Jews were Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths). Every adult living within a radius of twenty miles was obliged to celebrate the feasts in Jerusalem. When the Jewish feast of Passover received the fixed date of the 14th of Nisan, the middle of April, the feast of Pentecost received a regular date on the Jewish calendar, fifty days after Passover, falling in the beginning of June. Passover fell rather early for sea travel. The feast of Pentecost attracted the greatest crowd of foreign pilgrims to the City of Jerusalem since it was a more seasonal time for travel

Among the Jews, the feast of Pentecost had also come to be a feast to celebrate the establishment of their Covenant with Yahweh – the day God gave the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. It is highly possible that on this day the Jews renewed their Covenant with Yahweh. We do know that the Essenes had the custom of renewing the Covenant on Pentecost. The picture of Moses ascending to God on Mt. Sinai and returning with the Law of the Covenant certainly reflects the idea of Jesus ascending into heaven and returning on Pentecost with the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of the New Covenant.

It was such thought that inspired Leo the Great, around 440 A.D., to preach:

*For as of old on the fiftieth day after the Sacrifice of the Lamb, the Law was given on Mt. Sinai to the Hebrew people, now delivered from the Egyptians, so, after the Passion of Christ, in which the True Lamb of God was slain, on the fiftieth day after His Resurrection, the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles and upon the people who believed; so that an earnest Christian might know beyond any uncertainty, that the sacred rites of the Old Testament had served as foundations for the Gospel, and that by the same Spirit was the Second Covenant laid down, by whom the first had been established.*

*(Leo the Great)*

It is in this same sermon that Leo emphasized that the disciples were already sanctified before Pentecost. He preached:

*They had awaited it in hope, for the Lord Jesus had promised He would come; not that He would then begin to dwell within the sanctified, but that He would then fill more abundantly, inflame more ardently, the breasts that were consecrated to Himself; increasing, not beginning, His gifts to them; not new in operation, but now more abounding in richness.*

*(Leo the Great)*

Luke introduces the Pentecostal scene by using a Greek expression, roughly translated as “when the days were fulfilled,” an expression frequently used by Luke to announce a major stage in sacred history. Luke calls the reader’s mind back to the beginning of the Gospel account, recalling how Mary, the Mother of Jesus, symbolized the life of the Church in her own life. In the



Gospel account Mary is about to give birth to Jesus, Who had been formed by the Holy Spirit within her body. Now, at the Pentecostal scene, the Spirit of Jesus is about to be born through the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Church. Reflecting on this very thought, Gregory the Great wrote (590 A.D.):

*In the one (Mary), God, while remaining God, takes to Himself the nature of man; in the other, men have received God within them as He descends upon them. In the one case, God became man by nature; in the other, men became gods by adoption.*

*(St. Gregory the Great)*

As mentioned earlier, Luke does not appear to emphasize the sanctification of the souls of the disciples as much as the power to witness to the world. He does not, however, ignore the former, for the symbolism of fire used by Luke at Pentecost suggests spiritual sanctification. Jesus previously spoke of the Coming of the Holy Spirit as a baptism in the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the effects of the Holy Spirit upon the Church at Pentecost would be similar to the effects of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus at His baptism in the Jordan by John.

Luke tells us, *“When the days of Pentecost came, it found them gathered in one place (Acts 2:1).”* The disciples probably attended the morning sacrifice and the offering of the first fruits in the temple shortly after dawn. Afterwards, they gathered in a body in the Cenacle for prayer and worship. As it was a day of Sabbath observance; other Jews would be attending their synagogue services. Until such services were completed, between ten and twelve, Jews abstained from eating and drinking.

Luke describes the Coming of the Holy Spirit thus:

*Suddenly from up in the sky there came a noise like a strong, driving wind which was heard all through the house where they were seated. Tongues as of fire appeared, which parted and came to rest on each of them. All were filled with the Holy Spirit. They began to express themselves in foreign tongues and make bold proclamation as the Spirit prompted them.* (Acts 2:2-4)

As the psalmist proclaimed, *“When you send forth your spirit, they are created,*

*and you renew the face of the earth (Ps. 104:30)."*

The picture presented by Luke not only echoes the Old Testament, but also later Jewish traditions. Philo, and certain rabbinic traditions associated the reception of the Law on Sinai with fire, wind, and tongues. A tradition maintained that angels had proclaimed the Law from Mt. Sinai to all nations in their own tongues. Certainly, the divine manifestations on Pentecost recall divine manifestations in the Old Testament. The report of a strong driving wind recalls the morning of creation when *"a mighty wind swept over the waters (Gn. 1:2c)."* Luke likewise intimates that a New Genesis has begun. The whole scene of the Apostles enclosed in the Cenacle, the wind, the shaking of the house, and the fire recall the divine manifestation to Elijah. We read in 1 Kings:

*There he (Elijah) came to a cave, where he took shelter. But the word of the Lord came to him, "Why are you here, Elijah?" He answered, "I have been most zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts, but the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to the sword. I alone am left, and they seek to take my life." Then the Lord said, "Go outside and stand on the mountain before the Lord; the Lord will be passing by." A strong and heavy wind was rending the mountains and crushing rocks before the Lord – but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake – but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake there was fire – but the Lord was not in the fire. After the fire there was a tiny whispering sound. When he heard this, Elijah hid his face in his cloak and went and stood at the entrance of the cave.*

*(1 Kg. 19:9-13)*

The Lord sends Elijah from his hiding place back into the world, assuring him there were still seven thousand faithful men in Israel.

Fire symbolized the Divine Presence in the Old Testament in the burning bush before Moses, and we read: *"Mount Sinai was all wrapped in smoke, for the Lord came down upon it in fire (Ex. 19:18)."* The Holy Spirit, descending as fire upon the disciples, not only symbolized the Divine Presence, but the purifying effects of the Holy Spirit in their souls. As St. Gregory the Great writes around 590 A.D.:

*For on this day the Holy Spirit, with the sound of a mighty wind, descended upon the Apostles, transformed their souls from the love of earthly things to the love of Him, and by outward visible tongues of fire set their own inward hearts aflame; for as they receive God in the vision of fire, they begin to burn with the sweet fire of His love. . . . For our God is a consuming fire.*

*(St. Gregory; Heb. 12:29)*

God is called fire because the rust of sin is consumed by Him. It is of this fire that Jesus speaks, *"I have come to light a fire on the earth. How I wish the blaze were ignited (Lk. 12:49)!"* And by *"the earth"* is meant earthly hearts that have heaped up evil thoughts within them, and are trodden on by the spirits of evil. But the Lord sends fire on earth when, by the breath of His Holy Spirit, He sets fire to the hearts of unspiritual men. And the earth catches fire when the heart of flesh, indifferent to its own evil pleasures, puts away the lusts of its life and becomes inflamed with the love of God. Fittingly, then, the Spirit appeared in fire, because into every heart that He enters He drives out the torpor of coldness, and kindles there the desire for His own Eternity.

St. Gregory asks:

*Why did He appear above the Only-begotten Son in the form of a dove, and above the Disciples in the form of fire, and did not descend upon the Lord in the form of fire, nor appear above the Disciples in the form of a dove?*

Gregory answers the question in this fashion:

*The Only-begotten Son of God is in truth the judge of all mankind. But who could bear His justice if, before drawing us to Himself in mildness, He had willed to search with harsh exactness into our offenses? So for man He became man, revealing Himself to man as gentle. He willed not to crush sinners, but to gather them to Himself. He desired to correct with mildness at first, that there might then be those whom afterwards He would save when He came to judge. And so it was fitting that the Spirit should appear as a dove above Him who came, not now to punish sinners in His zeal, but that He might bear with them yet a while in mildness. But above the disciples it was fitting He should be shown in the form of*

*fire; that spiritual fervor might inflame them against themselves, so that these who were but men, and therefore sinners . . . should through zeal for justice search out our own sins, which the Lord had mildly borne in patience, and consume them in the fire of love (penance). . . . For not even they who followed so closely after the heavenly Master could be without sin, as John bears witness when he says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."*

*(St. Gregory)*

Luke notes the Holy Spirit "*rested upon each of them,*" fulfilling the prophecy the Holy Spirit made through the prophet Joel. "*Yes, even on my servants and handmaids I will pour out a portion of my spirit in those days, and they shall prophesy (Acts 2:18).*" The appearance of "*tongues of fire*" symbolizes the very heart of the Pentecostal experience. Witness would be given concerning the Risen Savior, primarily through speech. Again, St. Gregory observes:

*He is shown in the form of tongues of fire, because the Spirit is Co-eternal with the Son, and the tongue has the closest connection with the word . . . And because a word proceeds from the tongue, the Spirit appears in the form of tongues; because whosoever is touched by the Holy Spirit confesses the Word of God, that is the Only-begotten Son, and is unable to deny the Word of God, since he now has in him the tongue of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit appeared in the form of fiery tongues, because all whom He has filled He has made both ardent and eloquent.*

*(St. Gregory)*

## GIFT OF TONGUES

Acts relates that the Holy Spirit inflamed the hearts of the disciples and loosed their tongues in order to give expression to the faith and love now flooding their minds and hearts. Luke recorded:

*All were filled with the Holy Spirit. They began to express themselves in foreign tongues and make bold proclamation as the Spirit prompted them.*

*(Acts 2:4)*

As one writer put it:

*In the tongue they knew they had been unable to speak of Christ. Now the love of their Creator defeats the power of their bodily fear. And they who had yielded to the dread of their enemies, now dominate them by their authority . . . He has made heavenly the minds of earthly men.*

Some scholars believe Luke based his Pentecostal presentation on an existing tradition within the early Church adopted from the Jews. Luke describes the first public proclamation of the Gospel occurring amidst extraordinary circumstances, involving overwhelming enthusiasm and the disciples speaking in ecstatic speech. This type of speech in Jewish tradition was attributed to the Presence of the Holy Spirit. We read in the Book of Samuel:

*The Spirit of the Lord will rush upon you, and you will join them in their prophetic state and will be changed into another man.*

*(1 Sm. 10:6)*

In the Old Testament, prophesying in the prophetic state implied ecstatic utterances. Apparently, one of the immediate results of the baptism of the Holy Spirit was that disciples immediately began to praise and glorify God in other tongues. These were enthusiastic and ecstatic utterances, and were a direct inspiration of the Spirit. In a moment of intense emotion, simple men, forgetting self, speak tongues beyond their common capabilities. Such a phenomenon manifested in one hundred twenty people attracted attention, and a crowd collected. Luke writes:

*Staying in Jerusalem at the time were devout Jews of every nation under heaven. These heard the sound, and assembled in a large crowd. They were much confused because each one heard these men speaking his own language. The whole occurrence astonished them. They asked in utter amazement, "Are not all of these men who are speaking Galileans? How is it that each of us hears them in his native tongue? We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites. We live in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt, and the regions of Libya around Cyrene. There are even visitors from Rome – all Jews, or those who have come over to Judaism; Cretans and Arabs too. Yet each of us hears them speaking in his own tongue about the marvels God has accomplished." They were dumbfounded, and could make nothing at all of what had happened. "What does this mean?" they asked one another, while a few remarked with a sneer, "They have had too much wine!"*

*(Acts 2:5-13)*

The fifteen nationalities, from whence the Jews and the Gentile converts came, represented the universality of mankind spread over the earth and divided by different languages. The list is but a literary device, describing people more or less geographically from East to West, achieving an impression of the universal world. All those present in Jerusalem would either know Aramaic or Greek. At the most, only two languages would have been needed to communicate with the crowd. It is doubtful that the miracle of tongues implied that the disciples preached in all those languages, or even that, as some have suggested, they spoke in their native language and others heard them in different languages. Probably the miracle consisted of the disciples praising God in an ecstatic way, in a tongue given to them by the Holy Spirit other than Aramaic; in these ecstatic utterances, the visitors recognized their own language being used. Such a miracle of tongues would explain why some listeners sneered at them and attributed their utterances to being intoxicated, not on "new wine," for it would not be available until early autumn, but rather "sweet wine" made from a special grape, and high in alcoholic content. Speaking of this gift of tongues, Paul writes to the Corinthians:

*The gift of tongues is a sign, not for those who believe but for those who do not believe; while prophecy is not for those who are without faith, but for those who have faith. If the uninitiated or*

*unbelievers should come in when the whole church is assembled and everyone is speaking in tongues, would they not say that you are out of your minds?*  
(1 Cor. 14:22-23)

Luke intends to teach that now the Voice of the Spirit speaks through the Church, and the Voice of the Spirit is intelligible to every nation under the heavens. The Holy Spirit not only makes the Church articulate in proclaiming the Gospel, but He empowers the Church to address herself to all nations and be understood by them. The catholicity (universality) of the Church is here, attributed to the inspiration and power of the Holy Spirit, and not to the ambitions of the early disciples, who were content to remain a perfected Jewish community.

Many scholars believe, and early Christian writers agree, that Luke desired men to behold in the gift of tongues the Holy Spirit healing the division caused by the confusion of tongues at Babel. We read in Genesis:

*The whole world spoke the same language, using the same words . . . they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the sky, and so make a name for ourselves. . . ." Then the Lord said, "If now, while they are one people, all speaking the same language, they have started to do this, nothing will later stop them from doing whatever they presume to do. Let us then go down and there confuse their language, so that one will not understand what another says." Thus the Lord scattered them from there all over the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the speech of all the world.*  
(Gn. 11:1-9)

Luke teaches that the lost unity is restored in the Church that speaks all languages in a single unified society. The Pentecostal Spirit overcomes the ancient division of men's tongues that began at Babel. Luke's intentional use of the reference to Babel is strengthened by his use of vocabulary that appears in the Septuagint account. One early Christian writer asked:

*What is revealed to us by this sign (tongues) if not that the Holy Church, filled by the Spirit, shall speak with the Voice of every nation? They who long ago strove to build a tower against God lost the tongue that held them in common. But in those who humbly fear God, tongues are made one.*

In other words, all those who seek to build the city of God will understand each other through the One Holy Spirit.

### THE FIRST CHRISTIAN SERMON

The first public proclamation of the Gospel by the Church occurred on Pentecost. Peter preached the “*good news*” under the power of the Holy Spirit. He was anointed with the Spirit of God. Probably after the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, the disciples made their way into the temple area, there to praise God, attracting an even larger crowd by their enthusiastic behavior. Perhaps Peter delivered his Pentecostal address in the “*porch of Solomon.*”

At this moment, it would be prudent to pause and reflect briefly on the subject of speeches in Acts. Luke has already quoted a speech by Peter in the Cenacle, and recorded the comments of the crowd. Peter’s speech was extremely brief and with an addition rather peculiar for a Jew to have addressed to Jews: “*This event came to be known by the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who named the property Field of Blood – ‘Akeldama’ in their own language (Acts 1:19).*” It suggests the sermon was delivered to a non-Jewish audience. Obviously, the speech given by the crowd in response to the disciples’ behavior was a literary device expressing a point the author desired to make.

The speeches in Acts are not intended to be taken as verbatim accounts of what was actually said at that particular historical moment. The content and style of the speeches indicate a singular author. For authors to compose speeches was an accepted literary device of the time. A speech was used by the author to stress the importance of an event or to highlight a point the author desired to impress upon the readers. Josephus, the Jewish historian and contemporary of Luke, made wide use of this literary technique. Nevertheless, we need not think Luke composed these speeches as we would say, “off the cuff” or “off the top of his head.” Many good scholars believe collections of important traditions and events circulated within the early Church. Luke has been proved to be a faithful transmitter of tradition. It is highly possible that the essences of important speeches given by Peter, Stephen, and Paul were accurately conserved within the memory of the Community. The speeches narrated by Luke maintain sufficient differences to distinguish one speaker from another, and they exhibit something of the character of the one who delivered the speech. This is evident in Stephen’s



speech before the Sanhedrin, and Paul's speeches in Lystra, Athens, and Miletus. The speech given by Paul in Antioch (Pisidian) resembles the speeches given by Peter. This would be understandable when you consider both men were preaching to essentially the same audiences – Jews. It is highly probable that Peter's speech on Pentecost represents an authentic summary of what was preached that memorable day in Church history. Certain words and expressions in this discourse are also found in Peter's first epistle.

The Pentecostal sermon of Peter represents apostolic preaching long before any Gospel or Epistle was written. It was not so much an explanation of doctrine as a proclamation of facts (*"Kerygma"* means proclamation), but the elements of the Christian Faith are there: The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; Jesus is man yet Lord; as exalted Lord He bestows the Holy Spirit upon His disciples; remission of sins is offered in the Name of Jesus and conveyed through baptism.

The sermon falls into three parts. Each begins with a personal address (i.e., *"You who are the Jews," "Men of Israel," "Brothers"*). The changing addresses indicate the growing spiritual ties between Peter and his hearers. Each section concludes with a Scripture and its application. All Twelve Apostles stand forth on Pentecost, but only Peter addresses the congregation. The message of Peter's sermon is the testimony of all Twelve Apostles. Peter gives voice to the faith of the Apostles.

The first part of the sermon deals with the phenomenon that initiated the sermon, an explanation for the joy and ecstasy flooding the disciples of Jesus. Peter refutes the charge of drunkenness with a reference that it is but nine in the morning. These Jews had not yet even broken their morning fast. It was customary for pious Jews to take wine only with meat. A meal with meat would have been eaten in the evening. Peter said that what the people were witnessing themselves was the result of the Holy Spirit coming upon them. This was evident from the prophetic speaking, an activity of the Holy Spirit. Peter does not distinguish speaking in tongues from prophetic speaking. Peter proclaims this action of the Holy Spirit to be the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel. Peter begins the Sermon:

*You who are Jews, indeed all of you staying in Jerusalem! Listen to what I have to say. You must realize that these men are not drunk, as you seem to think. It is only nine in the morning! No, it*

*is what Joel the prophet spoke of: "It shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out a portion of my spirit on all mankind: Your sons and daughters shall prophesy; your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams. Yes, even on my servants and handmaids I will pour out a portion of my spirit in those days, and they shall prophesy. I will work wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below: blood, fire, and a cloud of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of that great and glorious day of the Lord. Then shall everyone be saved who calls on the name of the Lord."*

*(Acts 2:14-21) (See Joel 3:1-5)*

Peter proclaims the fulfillment of this prophecy and announces that the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the disciples of Jesus heralds the end times – *"The coming of that great and glorious day of the Lord."* Luke would have us see the final age of salvation inaugurated at this moment, the age of the Church. Peter sets the stage for the proclamation that Jesus is Lord, in whose name salvation can be obtained.

In the second part of the sermon Peter delivers the apostolic witness to Jesus of Nazareth. Peter proclaims that the miracles, wonders, and signs worked by Jesus were a Divine approbation that God sent Jesus of Nazareth to Israel. Many of his hearers had witnessed these very miracles. They would agree with Peter that it had appeared that Jesus was a man from God. But then came His crucifixion. That put Jesus in a different light; His death proved Him to be a false prophet. Even the Scriptures proclaim: *"God's curse rests on him who hangs on a tree (Dt. 21:23b)."* For the pious Jew, the crucifixion of Jesus made it impossible for Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah of Israel. Peter's rebuttal was that God Himself had ordained all this. No doubt referring to the Suffering Servant passages in Isaiah, Peter illustrated from the Scriptures that *"the Christ must suffer these things and so enter into his glory."*

*Through his suffering, my servant shall justify many, and their guilt he shall bear. . . . Because he surrendered himself to death and was counted among the wicked; And he shall take away the sins of many, and win pardon for their offenses. (Is. 53:11-12)*

Peter, who had himself only recently failed to acknowledge Jesus before a servant girl, displays great courage by charging the Jews with murdering the

**Christ, using pagans to kill him. Peter proclaims that the death of Jesus was not the end of the story; God vindicated Jesus of Nazareth by raising Him from the dead. This is the very heart of the apostolic testimony: Jesus of Nazareth has been raised from the dead. All Twelve Apostles stand behind this truth. Peter demonstrates that the resurrection of the Messiah had been foretold by David in Psalm 16. In this second part of the sermon, Peter says:**

*Men of Israel, listen to me! Jesus the Nazarean was a man whom God sent to you with miracles, wonders, and signs as his credentials. These God worked through him in your midst, as you well know. He was delivered up by the set purpose and plan of God; you even made use of pagans to crucify and kill him. God freed him from death's bitter pangs, however, and raised him up again, for it was impossible that death should keep its hold on him. David says of him, "I have set the Lord ever before me; with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed. My heart has been glad and my tongue has rejoiced, my body will live on in hope, for you will not abandon my soul to the nether world, nor will you suffer your faithful one to undergo corruption. You have shown me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence."*

*(Acts 22:28)*

**In the third section of the sermon, Peter calls his listeners, "Brothers." He fully interprets the prophecy of David. David spoke prophetic words but they did not apply to himself, evident from the fact that David died and decayed. His tomb is in their midst. The "forever" foretold by David could only apply to his descendant, the Messiah. The Messiah was not to be forsaken in the nether world. This prophecy was fulfilled by the resurrection of Jesus. His tomb was empty! This Jesus could no longer be seen by men, for God had exalted Him to His right hand. There, He who had first received the Holy Spirit at His baptism, now pours the Holy Spirit upon mankind. Peter goes back to the beginning of his sermon; what they witnessed in the disciples is a baptism in the Holy Spirit coming from the Risen Jesus.**

**Just as the Resurrection of Jesus is substantiated by the Scriptures, Peter now shows that Psalm 110 proclaimed the Ascension of Jesus. The Resurrection, the Ascension of Jesus, the sending of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples of Jesus, all testify to Israel beyond doubt that Jesus crucified has been proclaimed Lord and Messiah by God.**

Peter concludes the Pentecostal sermon in these words:

*Brothers, I can speak confidently to you about our father David. He died and was buried, and his grave is in our midst to this day. He was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him that one of his descendants would sit upon his throne. He said that he was not abandoned to the nether world, nor did his body undergo corruption, thus proclaiming beforehand the resurrection of the Messiah. This is the Jesus God has raised up, and we are his witnesses. Exalted at God's right hand, he first received the promised Holy Spirit from the Father, then poured this Spirit out on us. This is what you now see and hear. David did not go up to heaven, yet David says, "The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool." Therefore, let the whole house of Israel know beyond any doubt that God has made both Lord and Messiah this Jesus whom you crucified.*

*(Acts 2:29-36)*

### THE EFFECTS OF THE SERMON

It was a weighty truth for the consciences of those men to bear that they had crucified the Messiah of God. The Holy Spirit convicted the hearts of many to the truthfulness of Peter's accusation; many hardened their hearts against this truth. Paul later writes:

*The message of the Cross is complete absurdity to those who are headed for ruin, but to us who are experiencing salvation it is the power of God . . . Christ crucified – a stumbling block to Jews, and an absurdity to Gentiles; but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

*(1 Cor. 1:18; 23-24)*

Those men who were opened to the truth of Peter's sermon were deeply shaken. Having shared in the guilt of crucifying the Messiah of God, where was hope for them? In near despair, they turned to Peter and the other apostles:

*"What are we to do, brothers?" Peter answered, "You must reform and be baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, that*

*your sins may be forgiven; then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. It was to you and your children that the promise was made, and to all those still far off whom the Lord our God calls."*

*(Acts 2:37-39)*

**Luke informs us: "Those who accepted his message were baptized; some three thousand were added that day (Acts 2:41)." Some of the men who asked the Apostles, "Brothers, what are we to do?" probably shared in some direct way in the death of Jesus. What does the Holy Spirit teach through the mouth and actions of Peter but that no matter the seriousness of the sin committed, salvation is possible through Jesus Christ. Those who reject Jesus, are not rejected by Jesus. Jesus loves His enemies, He and died for their sins. Those who reject God are not rejected by God, but are given the same opportunity to come to salvation. They, too, can still become children of the Father and receive the Gift of the Father – the Holy Spirit.**

**Peter tells sinners how to be saved. His answer to these men is the answer of the Holy Spirit. It is the only answer the Church can give to sinners. Peter's preaching brought men to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the Lord. His words convicted them of their sins. It was not enough that they believed in Jesus and knew they were sinners. This was not enough. They must repent, and reform their lives. They must turn their hearts away from the evil they formerly embraced, and with all their hearts they must embrace the Will of God. True repentance is a necessary preliminary step to salvation. Peter teaches repentant sinners that they must be baptized in the Name of Jesus. This implies a sinner recognizes Jesus as Savior, and accepts the atonement Jesus made for sins by His death on the Cross. But much more is implied--the sinner must be incorporated into the very body of Jesus Himself through the sacrament of Baptism. At the moment of Baptism, the sinner receives the gift of the Holy Spirit, bringing sanctifying grace to the soul, rendering the sinner justified and holy in the sight of God. In order to remain in the state of justification, a person must continue to "*hear the Word of God and keep it.*" In other words, the believer must live a life of charity--love God above all things and neighbor as self. It is because of these teachings that the Church must reject the doctrine that faith alone saves. It must declare as erroneous half-truths such as statements as "*Believe in Jesus Christ and accept Him as your personal savior and you will be saved.*" No adult can be saved without personal repentance for sin. The human spirit was made for truth, and it is for this reason that the half-truth is worse than the whole lie. The half-truth deceives the spirit of man.**

There is a lot of guilt in our world today because there is so little repentance. Many people today suffer guilt because they never repent. Many will die in their guilt, and even die because of their guilt. People mistake their sorrow for the consequences of their sins for sorrow for their sins. It is not the same. True sorrow implies repentance of the sin, and turning the will away from it. Repentance produces peace and joy. Guilt is the fruit of unrepentant sin. A child is commanded not to run in the house. He does so and breaks an expensive vase. The child may be sorry he ran through the house because he broke a vase. There is no repentance here. The true sin is not touched. He is not sorry he disobeyed his parents; his will does not now embrace obedience. He is only sorry because his disobedience had unpleasant consequences. He may repent that, and become a more cautious sinner and remain a rebellious child. Such a child will experience a sense of guilt. Confession of sin will bring neither peace nor joy. St. Catherine of Genoa expressed it well:

*It is the will's opposition to the will of God that causes guilt; and as long as this evil will continues, so long does the guilt continue. For those, then, who have departed this life with an evil will there is no remission of guilt, because there can be no change in the will.*

*(St. Catherine of Genoa)*

Luke closes the Pentecostal scene with words that indicate he had only given us a summary of what Peter had said that historic day:

*In support of his testimony he used many other arguments, and kept urging, "Save yourselves from this generation which has gone astray."*

*(Acts 2:40)*

Peter emphasizes the importance our own wills play in the salvation of our souls. For this reason St. Augustine taught, *"He who created thee without thy help does not justify thee without thy help."*

In the ages to come, the Church would celebrate Pentecost as the birthday of the Church. Pentecost would forever symbolize the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church. The Scriptures make it clear that there is no operation in the Church that is not attributed to the Holy Spirit. St. Augustine taught in the

4th century, that as the human soul is to the human body so is the Holy Spirit to the Church. To the Mind of St. Thomas, Jesus is the Head of the Church and the Holy Spirit is the heart. Pope Leo XIII confirmed in 1897, *“Christ is the Head of the Church, the Holy Spirit is the soul.”*

The Church is not just a congregation of men and women who share a common belief about Jesus Christ. It is not just another visible institution of people in this world any more than Jesus was just an ordinary man. The Church is a unique and special organization created by God for the salvation of mankind. Just as the Ark was necessary for the salvation of Noah and his family, so the Church is a necessary means for the salvation of mankind. . . . It brings the saving power of Jesus and the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit into the lives of men.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE CHURCH IN CHILDHOOD

#### INTRODUCTION

Summarizing the childhood of Jesus, Luke tells us “*Jesus, for his part, progressed steadily in wisdom and age and grace before God and men (Lk. 2:52).*” The Church too had its own childhood. Filled with the Holy Spirit, it also progressed steadily in wisdom and age and grace before God and men. In a cameo presentation, Luke shows a picture of the Church in childhood:

*They devoted themselves to the apostles’ instruction and the communal life, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. A reverent fear overtook them all, for many wonders and signs were performed by the apostles. Those who believed shared all things in common; they would sell their property and goods, dividing everything on the basis of each one’s need. They went to the temple area together every day, while in their homes they broke bread. With exultant and sincere hearts they took their meals in common, praising God and winning the approval of all the people. Day by day, the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*

*(Acts 2:42-47)*

The Holy Spirit had come upon the Apostles, and they mightily proclaimed the Good News: forgiveness of sins, and reunion with God in the Name of Jesus and through fellowship with the Holy Spirit. At the first preaching of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit anointed Peter, and touched many hearts of his hearers--healing souls and re-creating lives. The words of the Prophet Malachi were fulfilled: “*But for you who fear my name, there will arise the sun of justice with its healing rays (Mal. 3:20a).*” The Church at Jerusalem grew from 120 to 3000 members. The first members of the Church were probably referred to as *Nazoreans* by others, since they professed Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah.



The Word of God was preached and it was living and effective. It is understandable that men heard and believed. Why then do the spirit-filled words of the Gospel fall upon many hearts like raindrops splashing on a cement walk causing no spiritual effects? St. Paul teaches that unspiritual men cannot understand spiritual things. In his letters to the Corinthians, Paul writes:

*The message of the cross is complete absurdity to those who are headed for ruin. . . The natural man does not accept what is taught by the Spirit of God. For him, that is absurdity. He cannot come to know such teaching because it must be appraised in a spiritual way....If our gospel can be called "veiled" in any sense, it is such only for those who are headed toward destruction. Their unbelieving minds have been blinded by the god of the present age so that they do not see the splendor of the gospel showing forth the glory of Christ, the image of God. It is not ourselves we preach but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts, that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ. (1 Cor. 1:18a; 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:3-6)*

The experiences of the early Fathers of the Church confirmed the teaching of Paul. On a Pentecost Sunday around 590 A.D., in St. Peter's Basilica at Rome, Gregory the Great preached:

*Rightly was it promised of Him, "He will teach you all things," because unless the same Spirit is in the heart of the one who learns, unprofitable is the word of the teacher. Let no one then attribute to the man who instructs him, that which he understands from the mouth of his teacher; for unless He is within who "will teach us," the tongue of the teacher labors in vain. . . Although the voice of the speaker is directed towards all, it is the Master within us Who teaches us what is said, and some more than others . . . We are not therefore instructed by the voice when the mind is not anointed at the same time by the Spirit. . . Unprofitable is the word of the teacher if it is unable to kindle the fire of the divine love.*

*(Pope Gregory the Great)*

*“Were not our hearts burning inside us as he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us? (Lk: 24:32),”* asked the two disciples on the road to Emmaus as they listened to the words of Jesus. St. Gregory goes on to describe what occurs when the hearers are touched by grace:

*At the hearing of religious truths, the soul is enkindled, the cold of mental listlessness departs from the heart; the mind becomes anxious with longing for heavenly things, and a stranger to earthly desires. The true love that fills it torments it with tears; yet tormented by this flame, it is nourished by its very sufferings. It delights in hearing heavenly things; and the precepts that instruct it are like so many torches to inflame it; and where before it was chilled by its natural desires, hearing the words it presently grows warm . . . The elect never hear the words of God with a cold heart, but loving with all their hearts they burn like torches at hearing them. As the word reaches their ear, their mind, angry with itself, is consumed by the flame of its own inner affection.*

*(Pope Gregory the Great)*

Peter and the other Apostles preached the Gospel, but we note that Acts does not attribute the conversions to the Church to the preaching of the Apostles. We read: *“Day by day, the Lord added to their number those who were being saved (Acts 2:47).”*

A young priest at the beginning of his priesthood wrote an entire book to convert one person. At the end of a year’s instruction, the man was as far from the Church as when the instruction began. The priest had failed to convert the man. Shortly afterwards, the priest went away to give a mission during the Pentecostal season. On returning to his home parish, he found the man had undergone a complete spiritual transformation, and beseeched the priest to receive him into the Church. The Holy Spirit had touched the heart of this man. At the very beginning of his ministry, this priest learned the important truth: man must do what he can, but in the end every true conversion is attributed to the Holy Spirit.

New members were received into the Community through the Sacrament of Baptism – a washing of the body with pure water that symbolized, and actually caused, a cleansing of the soul and forgiveness of sins. Repentance was a necessary condition for baptism, and repentance was probably demonstrated by a public confession of sins. We see that such was the

custom from the report given about John's baptism: "*They were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins (Mt. 3:6).*"

### IN THE NAME OF JESUS

Peter urged the believers, ". . . *be baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, that your sins may be forgiven (Acts 2:38b).*" The command given by Jesus and recorded in the Gospel was, "*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations. Baptize them in the name 'of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit!'*" (Mt. 28:19)." Baptism was considered an initiation ceremony bringing the baptized into union and communion with Jesus.

As Jesus is the Divine Son of God, baptism brings the baptized into union with God. As God is Triune, baptism unites the person with the Holy Trinity and with the Divine Life. Were early Christians actually baptized in the Name of Jesus rather than in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit? We cannot be certain. Because of that unique moment in salvation history, a divine dispensation may have been in effect allowing baptism in the Name of Jesus. On the other hand, it may imply no more than that the baptized confessed the Lordship of Jesus. One of the earliest Christian records outside of Scripture, a work called the Didache, insists on Baptism in the Name of the Trinity, and two chapters later, speaks of "*those who were baptized in the name of the Lord.*" To be baptized in the Name of Jesus certainly implies that Jesus accepts the baptized as His own, and the baptized person submits to being incorporated into the Community of which Jesus is Head. It entitles the person to pray to the Father in the Name of Jesus, for now the baptized bears His Name, and identifies with Jesus. It is for this reason the baptized is assured that God will hear the prayer offered.

What significance did the members of the early Church give to the expression "*In the Name of Jesus*"? Among the people of the Near East, the name of a person possessed great significance. A name did more than identify one person from another. The name of a person mysteriously represented the personality of the person. To change the name of a person meant to change the person. In a religious cultic situation, to invoke the name of God was to summon God or His power. Having the power to name someone or something symbolized one's power over the person or thing. Man displayed his superiority over the creatures of the earth by naming them. Isaiah proclaimed the sovereign power of Yahweh over creation

when He tells us that Yahweh called the stars, which the ancient believed to be angelic beings, by name (*See Is. 40:26*). When the Old Testament speaks of knowing the name of God, it implies much more than merely knowing the word “*Yahweh*.” Knowing the name of God signifies having experienced the reality of God’s presence, having experienced deliverance through Him. The believer has a firm foundation for hope and confidence in Yahweh.

Since using the name of Yahweh in prayer was believed to summon Him, the highest respect must be given to His Name. It could not be used carelessly, vainly, or disrespectfully without serious consequences. It is said that the Jewish high priest had the sacred name of Yahweh inscribed on his miter, but he dared pronounce the word only once a year. That was when he entered the Holy of Holies to offer atonement for the sins of his people. A prophet of Yahweh identified himself with Yahweh when he prophesied. He used the formula, “*Thus speaks Yahweh*,” and he usually continued prophesying in the first person, signifying that Yahweh spoke through him. The power of Yahweh was committed to the prophet by the prophet invoking the name of Yahweh.

When Jesus said His work was to make the Father’s name known, He implied that His works revealed the true personality of God. In His first petition in the Our Father, Jesus prayed that the name of God be sanctified on earth; this would be accomplished by the perfect fulfillment of God’s will. In other words, the Name of God is truly hallowed or revered when men obey the commands of God. Obedience to the Word of God makes the Name of God sanctified on earth!

What is applied to the Name of Yahweh in the Old Testament, applies to the Name of Jesus in the New Testament. It is a subtle affirmation, but one of the strongest in the New Testament to the Divine personality of Jesus of Nazareth. The New Testament attributes supernatural power to the use of the Name of Jesus: miracles, healings, and expulsion of demons. Peter preached, “*There is no salvation in anyone else, for there is no other name in the whole world given to men by which we are to be saved (Acts 4:12)*.” Paul confesses the superiority of Jesus over every created creature when he proclaims:

*God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name above every other name, so that at Jesus’ name, every knee must bend in the heavens, on the earth, and under the earth, and every tongue*

*proclaim to the glory of God the Father: JESUS CHRIST IS LORD!*

*(Phil. 2:9-11)*

**“In the name of” implies one is acting in the power and authority of the person named. To act in the Name of Yahweh or Jesus, is a summons to God or His Only Begotten Son to be present and to act in the one who summoned. In other words, even though it is the minister who pours the waters of baptism or pronounces the words of absolution over a sinner, it is Jesus who baptizes and forgives sins through the minister. As with the Name of Yahweh, the Name of Jesus must be held in the highest respect, and not be used vainly or lightly. Acts clearly teaches this lesson with an episode recorded in Chapter Nineteen:**

*Some itinerant Jewish exorcists once tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were possessed by evil spirits, saying, “I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.” Another time, when the seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish high priest, were doing this, the evil spirit answered, “Jesus I recognize, Paul I know; but who are you?” Then the man with the evil spirit sprang at them and overpowered them all. He dealt with them so violently that they fled from his house naked and bruised. When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, fear fell upon all, and the name of the Lord Jesus came to be held in great reverence.*

*(Acts 19:13-17)*

**We have noted that Peter connects the Gift of the Holy Spirit with Baptism, but as previously mentioned, the Holy Spirit was operative among people before Pentecost. We do not wish to imply that the Holy Spirit is not active in the souls of the unbaptized. We have examples both in the Old and New Testaments of the Holy Spirit within the non-baptized. But a manifestation of the Holy Spirit within a person before baptism is not necessarily the same as the Gift of the Holy Spirit. Baptism implies the Holy Spirit assumes a permanency of presence within the baptized that relates the person in a unique way with God, to the degree that the person becomes the property or possession of God. The Church speaks of the person being indelibly marked by God. Paul speaks of the person being sealed by the Holy Spirit in much the same way as the artist signs his artwork. Paul also refers to the Community as “*the Temple of God.*” The baptized is adopted into the Family of God, and shares permanently in the life of God. Pope**

John Paul II proclaimed in Washington, D.C., "*When God gives life, He gives it forever!*"

## COMMUNITY LIFE

Baptism establishes a community of believers. It creates a Community between God and man. Likewise, it establishes Community among men. All baptized form the Family of God. For this reason, it calls God "*Father,*" and other members of the Community "*Brothers and Sisters.*" In the mind of the early Church, being baptized into Jesus equated with being baptized into the Church. It would have been completely unthinkable for any member of the early Church to proclaim what can often be heard today, "*One does not need the Church; all one needs is Jesus!*" To them, such a statement would have been idiotic. It would imply one knew neither the Church nor Jesus. This is one of those half-truths that deceive the spirit. We'll examine this whole truth when we deal with the conversion of St. Paul.

We ought to desire the fullest understanding of the early Christian Community possible; it is the foundation Community of our Church. As mentioned in a previous lesson, Jewish life and customs of the time will give us many insights into the early Church. Its first members were totally Jewish.

Community life was the essence of life in the Near East. No greater punishment could be inflicted upon a person, this side of death, than being excommunicated from the Community. Some considered it a worse penalty than death. The word *community* comes from the Greek *koinonia*, which is derived from *koinos*, meaning common. Community implies a fellowship of human beings who share a common life. Christian Community and Christian Fellowship are synonymous. Jesus laid the foundation for the Community when He called the Twelve Apostles into fellowship with Himself. Jesus and the Twelve lived a common life, and kept a common purse of which Judas had custodial care. From the beginning, it was a religious community, never merely a human community, first because of the Divine Nature of Jesus, and secondly because of the Gift of the Holy Spirit to the Community. In the beginning, the personal devotion of these men to the Person of Jesus held the Community together. After Pentecost, the members of the Church experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit

cementing and binding the members in fellowship. The Community experienced the Holy Spirit as the cause of brotherhood. Through union with the Holy Spirit, the Community maintained union with the Ascended Jesus, and with the Father. The Christian Community, therefore, became a Divine Community – truly the Kingdom of God.

Remember, the Holy Spirit can certainly work in individuals within and outside of the Church, but the Holy Spirit is permanently bestowed upon the Church. *“He will remain with you forever,”* Jesus told the Apostles. The only true guarantee a person has of being in the Holy Spirit is by remaining united with the Church. Satan can seduce individuals but not the Church. Jesus promised Peter that the gates of Hell would never prevail against the Church (*See Mt. 16:18*). He told Peter that Satan desired to sift the Church like wheat, but that He had prayed for Peter that his faith would never fail – a prayer that was certainly heard. The Scriptures warn that Satan goes about as a roaring lion seeking whomever he may devour. If he can, he will lead away the elect. Paul warns, *“Test every spirit!”* Only within the harbor of the Church is a person truly safe from the destructive power of the Evil One.

The early Fathers of the Church firmly insisted that membership in the Church was necessary for fellowship with the Holy Spirit. St. Irenaeus, who died around 202 A.D., writes: *“Where the Church is, there is also the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and all graces.”* St. Augustine, born 354 A.D., writes:

*Only the body of Christ lives from the spirit of Christ . . . Will you live of the Spirit of Christ? Then be in the body of Christ! . . . The Spirit does not pursue a separated member!*

*(St. Augustine)*

## THE COMMUNITY TEACHERS

The Church today does not interpret certain truths as narrowly as some of the early Fathers. The Second Vatican Council proclaimed:

*Those also can attain to everlasting salvation, who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do His will, as it is known to them, through the dictates of conscience.*

*Nor does Divine Providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, but who strive to live a good life, thanks to His grace.*  
(Church – sec. 16)

But, the underlying truth the Fathers desired to express still stands through the ages: the person who desires to be united fully on this earth to the Holy Spirit of God, must be united in faith and love to the Church founded by Jesus Christ on the Apostles. Membership in the Community involved one's complete life. It involved a persevering adherence to persons and duties.

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' instruction and the communal life, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*  
(Acts 2:42)

*With power, the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great respect was paid to them all.* (Acts 4:33)

Life centered on the Apostles. The Community adhered closely to their teachings and followed their example. Why? As the *commissioned emissaries* of Jesus, they represented Jesus in the Community.

Union with the Apostles brought the disciples into union with Jesus: "*He who hears you, hears me (Lk. 10:1a).*" Jesus commissioned these men to teach in His Name:

*Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always, until the end of the world!*  
(Mt. 28:20)

The early disciples probably attended instructions given by the Apostles in the temple area. Believers underwent a regular course of instruction, later called *catechesis*. When the era of persecution began, a candidate underwent a prolonged catechesis before baptism. Candidates were called *catechumens*, meaning *those under instruction*. Paul speaks of them as the *uninitiated*.

The Apostles taught, as did the Jewish Rabbis, by word of mouth and constant repetition. In the course of time, the instructions would



automatically assume a set form. In this fashion, the deposit of faith would be passed from one generation to the next. The instructions would be called *Christian Traditions*; meaning *matter handed down*. Later, some of this material appeared in the four written Gospel accounts, but some would live on in the oral traditions of the Church. Speeches in Acts echo the apostolic creed; in the epistles and letters, we find the dogmatic and moral teachings of the early Church.

Today, any person who feels touched by the tip of the Spirit's wing feels called and qualified to teach and interpret the Scriptures. Their only authority being that they have the Spirit. Unfortunately, the most ignorant preachers, regardless of how bizarre their interpretation of Scripture, never lack disciples. Such would never have been tolerated in the early Church with its Jewish background. The Scriptures, which were the Jewish rule of life, were not to be interpreted by everyone, Rabbis alone explained the Scriptures to the people. Men desiring to be Rabbis received intense training from Masters, not only in the Scriptures, but also in the leading and respected rabbinical interpretations of the Scriptures. Only after years of study, and only after reaching the age of forty, could a man be ordained a Rabbi – an approved teacher of the Scriptures.

The Twelve Apostles had been the disciples of the Great Master – their Rabboni, Jesus of Nazareth. When their training was complete, He sent them as His *commissioned emissaries* to make disciples of all men, authorizing them to teach only after they had received the Holy Spirit. The first preachers of the Word were fully instructed, commissioned, and Spirit-filled.

St. Paul instructs the Corinthians:

*God has set up in the Church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracle workers, healers, assistants, administrators... Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles or have the gift of healing? (1 Cor. 12:28-30a)*

*To each person, the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good (the good of the Community). (1 Cor. 12:7)*

Paul implies one cannot preach the Word of God unless one is sent, in other words, unless he is a *commissioned emissary* – a *sheluhim*. For this reason,

the Church has insisted that preachers in the Church must be ordained; they must be formally commissioned by the Christian Community.

Of course, there is always the role of the prophet within the Christian Community. We see how highly Paul esteemed this role, placing it only after the Apostles in importance. Prophets are men and women raised up by the Holy Spirit for a divine work in the Community. Often it is the role of the prophet to correct the Community and its leaders. Needless to say, it can be an unpleasant task (read the story of Elijah). Prophets are often persecuted, even killed. Only later are they honored and canonized by the Christian Community.

After the Apostles disappeared from the scene, the early Church seemed to have many of the same problems we have today. We find this sage advice given in the Didache:

*Let every apostle who comes to you be received as the Lord. Do not, however, allow him to stay more than one day, or, if needs be, two. If he remains for three days, he is a false prophet. When an apostle goes forth, let him take only enough bread to last until he reaches his night's lodging. If he asks for money, he is a false prophet. . . . Not everyone, however, who speaks in a spirit, is a prophet, unless he has the behavior of the Lord. By his behavior, then, the false prophet and the true prophet shall be known. (Didache)*

That advice was given about nineteen hundred years ago.

### THE BREAKING OF BREAD

Luke tells us the Christian Community “went to the temple area together every day, while in their homes they broke bread. With exultant and sincere hearts, they took their meals in common (Acts 2:46).” Breaking of bread symbolizes eating together. The Jews baked their bread in cakes. The cakes were apparently broken by the head of the household, who gave thanks over them, and then distributed them to those at the table. Breaking of bread came to denote the beginning of a meal with a blessing.

For Jews, eating together was sacramental. It signified friendship, and dining together cemented the relationship. Since Gentiles were not part of the Covenant People, custom forbade Jews to eat with them. An ancient belief held that eating food sacrificed to God united the believer with God,

the Source of life. The Essenes had a daily meal of bread and wine in which only full members of the community could participate. Apparently, the early Church participated in a daily meal symbolizing and strengthening their unity and love. They called the meal *the Agape*, meaning the love feast. We note from Paul's letter to the Corinthians that the Agape preceded the Lord's Supper – *the Eucharist*. It is highly possible the words *breaking of bread* referred to the Christian celebration – including both the Agape and the Eucharist.

When it no longer became feasible for the Community to dine daily together, the custom developed of meeting on the first day of the week for the breaking of the bread. The events described by Paul, written around 53 A.D., tell us about these customary Christian celebrations. Since sunset heralded the new day, the celebration would be held Saturday evening, with the ending of the Sabbath at sunset. Paul confirmed that the Eucharistic celebration followed the Agape, and this led to certain abuses in the Corinthian Community where factions, selfishness, and drunkenness occurred at the Agape. Paul sought to correct the abuses without suppressing the practice. The practice continued for many years, even with the Agape being eaten in Church. In time, no doubt due to abuses, the Agape became separated from the Eucharistic celebration. The Agape was then held on Saturday evening and the Eucharist early Sunday morning. At this time, the Eucharistic fast came into practice – fasting from midnight until the reception of the Eucharist. We already find mention of this separation in a letter written by Pliny, governor of Bithynia in 110 A.D. In Egypt, outside of Alexandria, the old custom of celebrating the two together continued until the Fourth Century. The rest of Africa celebrated the Agape and the Eucharist together only one day in the year – Holy Thursday. The practice died out slowly; even in 692, at the Council of Trulla, it was necessary to forbid the Agape from being held in the Church.

### COMMUNITY PRAYER

Prayer life in the early Christian Community followed Jewish practices. The hours for common prayer in the Temple were 9 A.M., 12 noon, and 3 P.M. Offering prayers in the Temple were considered especially efficacious. The heart of Jewish religious life was centered in the synagogue (Assembly). The synagogue preserved the unity of faith and worship of the Jews. The Temple was the place of God's presence, as well as the place of sacrifice under the direction of the priests and Levites. The synagogues

were meeting houses for prayer, and the study of Scriptures under the direction of the laity. Here the Jews gathered on the Sabbath. The Cenacle served as the Christian Synagogue. The synagogue service opened with the Jewish profession of faith, the *Shema*:

*Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength . . .*

*(Dt. 6:4-5)*

A long formal prayer followed. Following the prayer, there was a reading in Hebrew from the Law and the Prophets, with a translation given in Aramaic. After the readings, a member of the congregation gave a homily on the texts read. The Jews had so arranged the readings that the entire Pentateuch would be read over a three-year cycle. The service concluded with more prayer and the singing of psalms. If a priest were present, he gave the congregation the priestly blessing:

*The Lord bless you and keep you! The Lord let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you! The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace!*

*(Nm. 6:24-26)*

The Christian Community would have followed this format. In time, this service replaced the Agape and preceded the Eucharistic celebration.

The description of the Christian service as given by Paul occurred as mentioned, in about 53 A.D. A hundred years later, we find the following account of the Christian service, by St. Justin Martyr (150 A.D.):

*And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country come together at one place, and the Memories of the Apostles, or the writings of the Prophets, are read, for as long as time permits. Then, when the Reader has ceased, he who presides instructs us by word and exhorts us to the imitation of these beautiful things. Then we rise together and pray, and when our prayer is ended, bread and wine is brought, and he who presides, with all fervor, offers up prayers and thanksgiving, and the people present say, "Amen." Then there is a distribution to each one, and a partaking of that over which thanks have been given, and, to*

*those who are absent, a portion is sent by the deacons. . . . Among us, this food is called the Eucharist; of which no one is allowed to partake but the one who believes that the things we teach are true, and who has also been washed with the washing that is for the forgiveness of sins, and unto regeneration, and who is living as Christ has taught us. For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but as Jesus Christ our Savior, made Flesh by the Word of God, took flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught, that the food which is consecrated by the prayer of His words . . . is Flesh and Blood of that Jesus Who became Flesh and Blood.*

*(St. Justin Martyr)*

## A COMMUNITY OF HALOS

There are two words in Greek for good: *agathos*, which implies a thing is good in itself; and *kalos*, which implies a thing is more than just good, it is attractive. *Kalos* indicates a certain attractive beauty that catches the eye and holds the attention. The word *kalos* best describes the early Community of disciples. Two outstanding characteristics of the Community were Joy and Unity of Spirit. These two virtues signified a proper relationship to God and man. Their Joy expressed itself in the spirit of Divine Praise flooding their hearts. Their unity was evident from a singleness of purpose, a sincerity of heart that characterized the Community's relationship with one another. "*They shared all things in common*" expressed more a common life than a life of poverty; we are told "*dividing everything on the basis of each one's need.*" In a word, they did all things with a gladness of heart and a singleness of purpose. They were a community with *kalos*, and they had an effect on others. They won the "*approval of all the people,*" and the Community grew in the eyes of the Lord. "*Day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved (See Acts 2:44-47).*"

## PETER'S SECOND SERMON

Luke speaks of the Community being filled with awe and wonder for the great miraculous powers displayed by the Apostles. Such power was first limited to the Apostles, but after they laid hands on Stephen and Philip, this power began to be seen in other members of the Community. Miracles were the credentials of the Apostles. Luke describes one of their miracles,

and the effect it had on others. He demonstrates to us how the lives of the Apostles follow the life of Jesus:

*Once when Peter and John were going up to the temple for prayer at the three o'clock hours, a man crippled from birth was being carried in. They would bring him every day and put him at the temple gate called "the Beautiful" to beg from the people as they entered.*

*(Acts 3:1-2)*

The *Beautiful* gate was probably Nicanor Gate of fine Corinthian bronze; it was kept so highly polished that when catching the rays of the sun it blinded the beholder. This gate led from the Court of the Gentiles into the Court of Women. The Court of Women was the customary place to gather for evening prayer.

*When the lame man saw Peter and John, he begged for alms. Peter fixed his gaze on the man; so did John. "Look at us!" Peter said. The cripple gave them his whole attention, hoping to get something. Then Peter said, "I have neither silver nor gold, but what I have I give you! In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarean, walk!"*

*(Acts 3:3-6)*

Peter's words do not intend to emphasize their poverty, but to highlight that the gift he has to give is far more precious than silver or gold.

*Then Peter took him by the right hand and pulled him up. Immediately, the beggar's feet and ankles became strong; he jumped up, stood for a moment, then began to walk around. He went into the temple with them – walking, jumping about, and praising God.*

*(Acts 3:6-8)*

His behavior recalls the words of Isaiah: "*Then will the lame leap like a stag (Is. 35:6)!*"

The man, who was over forty years old, had probably seen and heard Jesus in the temple. Nevertheless, his cure had been delayed. The Apostles realized that the man had faith in order to be cured. Did the news of Jesus'

resurrection from the dead awaken this faith? When the man responded to Peter's command, he demonstrated his faith in the Name that had only recently been placed over the head of an executed man. The cured man continued to cling to Peter and John. His behavior attracted attention, and people recognized him as the man born crippled. This caused great excitement among the people, and a crowd gathered around them in Solomon's Portico. At this moment, Peter delivers his second sermon. Peter's sermons are of great importance, for they illustrate for us how the early Church proclaimed the Gospel.

In his first sermon, Peter proclaims the Holy Spirit had been poured out, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel. The Holy Spirit came upon the Community of Believers through Jesus of Nazareth, who had received the Spirit at His baptism. In his second sermon, Peter proclaims that through this Gift of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles continue the same powerful deeds as Jesus of Nazareth. All done in the Name of Jesus.

By working miracles in the Name of Jesus, these men proved themselves to be the commissioned emissaries of Jesus of Nazareth. Peter and John attribute nothing to themselves. Peter asked, "*Why do you stare at us as if we had made this man walk by some power or holiness of our own (Acts 3:12)?*" What Israel has witnessed is further proof that Jesus is both Lord and Messiah.

The people have witnessed the power of God. It ought to affect something in their hearts. The first effect must always be repentance. Peter moves, once again, to convict the Jews of sin. He emphasizes the gravity of his words by invoking a most sacred divine title which was used by Yahweh to Moses at the burning bush: "*The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his Servant Jesus.*" Calling Jesus the Servant of Yahweh recalls the prophecies of Isaiah concerning the Suffering Servant. Here, in Isaiah 52:13-53:12, are enough Scriptures to explain the death of Jesus on the Cross. Here is revealed that the crucifixion of Jesus demonstrated Jesus' heroic love for sinners. Jesus died in atonement "*for the sins of many.*" This obedient Servant, Yahweh, has risen from the dead. Isaiah had written:

*Because of his affliction, he shall see the light in fullness of days...  
I will give him his portion among the great, and he shall divide the  
spoils with the mighty, because he surrendered himself to death and*

*was counted among the wicked . . .*

*(18.53:11-12)*

**Peter exonerates the Romans in the death of Jesus and places the guilt upon the Jews:**

*You handed over and disowned in Pilate's presence when Pilate was ready to release him. You disowned the Holy and Just One and preferred instead to be granted the release of a murderer.*

**Here, Peter stresses the perversity of their crime in rejecting a Holy and Just person, preferring a convicted murderer:**

*You put to death the Author of life. But God raised him from the dead, and we are his witnesses.*

*Acts 3:13-15)*

**The word used for author also means pioneer. The inference being that by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus has become the Pioneer of Eternal Life.**

**Peter makes the point that the crippled man stands healed today through faith and confidence in the Name of Jesus. The Apostles are but channels of Jesus' power. This healing highlights the fact that there is salvation in the Name of Jesus. This becomes clearer when we realize that the Jews attributed all physical infirmities to sinfulness. In order to be healed, one must first be freed from sinfulness. In Jewish theology, true healing restored one to union with God.**

**The words spoken by Peter were harsh but true. They proceeded from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth. Divine Truth can be quite revealing and devastating to the human spirit. It pierces the soul. As we read in Hebrews:**

*God's word is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword. It penetrates and divides soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the reflections and thoughts of the heart. Nothing is concealed from him; all lies bare and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account.*

*(Heb. 4:12-13)*



The Holy Spirit is also the Spirit of Love, for God is Love. When the Holy Spirit is present, truth and love can never be separated. How terrible a truth can be without love. Divine Truth should never be proclaimed except when balanced by the revelations of Divine Love, otherwise, it can produce guilt, despair, and self-hatred; none of these are ever the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

In revealing truth to others involving their sinfulness, or our own, how dearly we need to follow the advice of Jesus, *“Be as guileless as the dove but as wise as the serpent!”* Oh! The history of broken hearts and lives any marriage counselor could review for you, caused by the imprudent revelation, or chance discovery, of the sins of one’s beloved. How fragile the love of human hearts. How easily human love crumbles before the revelation of another’s sinfulness, particularly when the sinfulness of another reveals the limitations of their love for us, when the actual love they bear us visibly falls short of what we have presumed or fantasized. On the other hand, how often does self-revelation destroy an illusion of love, revealing that we never truly loved the other, but only our fantasies and illusions of them? When another’s soul stands naked before our eyes, how quickly we turn in shame from them rather than embracing them and wrapping them in a mantle of charity and silence. Only men and women of great spirit truly love human beings in the fullness of their sinfulness. They alone are capable of understanding the whole story. Such understanding alone saves one from being scandalized by the lives of others. (By “scandalized” is meant knowledge that forces us to withdraw our love and esteem for them.) Such an understanding and love is a Gift of the Holy Spirit. It takes big souls to receive such a big gift.

Peter was not without this love. As he indicts the Jewish people with the murder of Jesus, he recalls the words of the dying Jesus, *“Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing (Lk. 23:34).”* It was a prayer heard and granted. The Father offers forgiveness, not condemnation. In the Spirit of Christ, Peter proclaims this offer of forgiveness:

*Yet I know, my brothers, that you acted out of ignorance, just as your leaders did. God has brought to fulfillment by this means what he announced long ago through all the prophets: that his Messiah would suffer.*

*(Acts 3:17-18)*

Peter, reflecting the Charity of Christ, demonstrates the largeness of his own spirit by embracing these men as “*Brothers*” from his heart.

The Jews would forever contest the point made by Peter, that the Messiah had to suffer. Peter made a very sweeping statement that all the prophets had foretold this. Peter certainly considered the evidence beyond refutation and, in the face of it, he insisted:

*Therefore, reform your lives! Turn to God, that your sins may be wiped away! Thus may a season of refreshment be granted you by the Lord when he sends you Jesus, already designated as your Messiah.*

*(Acts 3:19-20)*

Peter echoes a popular teaching of the Jewish Rabbis: if all Israel repented together for a single day, redemption through the Messiah would come. The “*season of refreshment*” recalled Israel’s deliverance out of the slavery of Egypt, and being led by God to a place of refreshment (*See Ps. 66:12*). The reference referred to the coming glory of Israel through the presence of the Messiah; in the minds of Christians it would infer the Second Coming of Jesus. Peter implies that the Second Coming is impeded by the failure of men to repent:

*Jesus must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration which God spoke of long ago through his holy prophets.*

*(Acts 3:21)*

For the Jews, the time of universal restoration implied the restoration of Israel to glory, from which would flow the restoration of the world. Israel’s restoration rested upon the condition of repentance. Peter believes this restoration will occur when Jesus returns in glory, but men delay this return by their failure to repent.

The first coming of Jesus was to prepare men for the coming of God’s Kingdom on earth. As Peter said, “*When God raised up his servant, he sent him to you first to bless you by turning you from your evil ways*” (*Acts 3:26*). The Holy Spirit had been sent to continue Jesus’ work of producing the moral conversion of men to God – the necessary condition for the establishment of God’s reign on earth.

**Peter demonstrates that the unique role of Jesus had clearly been foretold in the Scriptures. He quotes the words of Moses, the most famous Jew:**

*The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own kinsmen; you shall listen to him in everything he says to you. Anyone who does not listen to that prophet shall be ruthlessly cut off from the people.* (Acts 3:22-23)

**The coming of such a Prophet heralded a new epoch in salvation history. Peter proclaims this period has come and “all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel onward, have announced the events of these days (Acts 3:24).”**

**Filled with personal enthusiasm, Peter preaches:**

*You are the children of these prophets, you are heirs of the covenant God made with your fathers when he said to Abraham, “In your offspring, all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”* (Acts 3:25)

**Peter teaches the Jews that God’s offer through Jesus Christ is their own spiritual inheritance. A failure to accept Jesus will be the greatest tragedy of their personal lives, with terrible consequences in time and eternity.**

**Motivated by a personal love for the eternal welfare of his Jewish brothers, Peter fearlessly proclaims Divine Truth. He speaks of the Truth that shatters an evil darkness shrouding the minds and hearts of men. Even as he does so, other clouds of darkness appear on the horizon, heralding the coming storms that spell the end of the “Childhood of the Church.”**

## CHAPTER 5

### CHRISTIAN CRISIS AND CONSOLATION

#### INTRODUCTION

The ministry of the Apostles, coupled with the conduct of the first members of the Church, profoundly affected many Jewish people. The Congregation in Jerusalem rapidly grew from 120 to 5000 men. Day by day, through word and deed, membership increased. Luke probably does not intend to imply that mass conversion resulted from a single sermon. More likely that would be a literary device to express the rapid growth that the Church experienced in a relatively short period. The word "*day*" in Hebrew is interpreted as a period of time, not merely the 24 hours we are accustomed to today. At this time, the population of Jerusalem possibly reached a half million. When you add the women converts to the 5000 men, the Community of Disciples represented a formidable minority within the city. When one considers the cohesiveness of the group, it was fast becoming a power to be noted. The Church attracted the attention of the political powers of the city, and they began to keep a watchful eye on its activity.

#### THE SADDUCEES

Jewish political power in Israel resided in the party of the Sadducees. The name is probably derived from Sadoc (Zadoc), the high priest during the reign of King David. The party traces its origin back to the time of the Persian, Antiochus the Great (223-187 B.C.). The Persian authorities accepted the Jewish high priest as the representative of the people. This greatly increased the prestige and political power of the priestly families. In the beginning, the office of high priest was for life, but it later became a political plum. In the hundred years preceding the destruction of the temple, twenty-eight men held the office. After the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., the party ceased to exist. (The monkey was dead and the show was over!)

The membership in the Sadducees came from the powerful priestly families that controlled the office of the high priest (along with the temple), and from the prestigious and wealthy families of the city. Through their political power the party affected all Judea, but the principles espoused by the party appealed only to the rich. Josephus, the Jewish Historian, wrote that the beliefs of the party had no appeal to the majority of the people. The people's party was the Pharisaic party. It had popular support, and exercised great moral power among the people. The political power of the Sadducees and the moral power of the Pharisees were constantly in contention with each other.

The Sadducees were materialistic, practical, and pragmatic men. They believed only in the testimony of the five senses. They rejected the immortality of the human soul, believing the soul died with the body. Therefore, the Sadducees denied a resurrection from the dead, and a final judgment of men and punishment after death. They did not believe that spiritual forces controlled the lives of men – either divine or otherwise. They believed God had no personal interest in the affairs of men; it was all the same to God whether men did good or evil. All men's actions flowed from their own powers, and those actions brought good or evil in the here and now, depending upon the nature of the acts (*WJ, 811, cVII*). The Sadducees taught that only the written Law of Moses obliged the Jewish people. They rejected the writing of the Prophets as false and the traditions of the fathers as meaningless. Josephus describes their interaction among themselves:

*The behavior of the Sadducees one towards another is in some degree wild, and their conversation with those that are of their own party is as barbarous as if they were strangers to them.*

*(Josephus)*

Indeed, they appear as soulless men. Men of such spirits naturally despised those in disagreement with them – the Pharisees and common people. They had their enemies: the party of Pharisees because of their religious differences, and the party of Zealots who despised them for their political alliance with Rome.

The Sadducees had their invested interest of wealth in the economy of the time. The stability of the economy depended upon a stable political climate. As the amassing and the maintaining of wealth was the prime concern of

these men, because their power flowed from it, they were dedicated to the preservation of the status quo – to public law and order. They were noted for their demanding exactness in the observance of the Law, and for their harshness in punishing offenders. It was not the love of the Law itself that motivated their zeal, but a love for what the law protected – their wealth and power. The Law provided walls protecting their wealth and security. When the Jews obeyed the laws, a political peace existed between them and the Romans. The Sadducees needed this environment to maintain and increase their wealth. They had no interest in the spirit of the Law.

Once, before His trial, Jesus encountered the Sadducees. They came to Him with the question about Levitical marriages, to illustrate the foolishness of the belief in the resurrection from the dead. Jesus informed them that they were entirely wrong, and their ignorance and error flowed from the fact that they knew neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. These men exemplified Jesus' teaching that a man cannot love both God and money – he ends up loving the one and hating the other, whether he is consciously aware of this or not. The Sadducees were closed to God and divine revelation.

In the hundred years before the fall of Jerusalem, political power resided in about five powerful priestly families: the Houses of Phiabi, Boethus, Theophilus, Annas, and Camith. These families played musical chairs with the role of high priest. Of these families, none was more powerful or notorious than the House of Annas. Annas became high priest under the Roman governor, Sulpicius Quirinus, in 6 A.D. He held this position until 15 A.D., when the new governor, Valerius Gratus, replaced him with Ishmail, son of Phiabi. A year later, Annas had Ishmail replaced with Eleazar, his own son. Subsequently, four more of his sons and his infamous son-in-law, Joseph Caiaphas, would become high priests. The power of this family would extend right to the destruction of Jerusalem; his last son Annas II became high priest in 62 A.D.

The House of Annas controlled the market on the animals that were sold for temple sacrifice. Animals had to be without blemish to be accepted for sacrifice. The priest in the temple inspected and approved the animals for sacrifice. Animals could be purchased much cheaper outside the temple area, but it was probable they would be rejected if they lacked the House of Annas seal of approval and bill of sale. The place of purchase in the temple was known as the Bazaars of Annas. Here, a pair of doves sold for 75

pence; outside the temple, a like pair sold for 4 pence. When Jesus cleared the temple of the money exchangers and animals, He personally touched the invested interest of the House of Annas, and implied that the family were thieves. When Jesus assumed authority in the temple and appeared as the Messiah, He certainly threatened the position and security of the Sadducees, but His words and deed had made a personal enemy of Annas. The House of Annas was so notorious it gained historical mention in the Jewish Talmud:

*Woe to the house of Annas! Woe to their serpent's hiss! They are the high priests; their sons are keepers of the treasury; their sons-in-law are guardians of the Temple; and their servants beat the people with staves.*

*(From the Jewish Talmud)*

Jesus of Nazareth was tried before Annas and Joseph Caiaphas.

Apparently, the Sadducees had no belief in a Messiah. Any talk of a Messiah, any claim to be a Messiah, any so-called messianic movement would be viewed critically by the Sadducees. Considering the emotional climate of the people, the subject of Messiah was volatile, conducive to igniting a political explosion. Jesus of Nazareth caused no concern to the Sadducees as long as He remained in Galilee. Galilee was always a hotbed of revolt. Jesus in Jerusalem was another story. His presence and activities had a deadly effect on the Sadducees. We read in John:

*The result was that the chief priest and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we to do," they said, "with this man performing all sorts of Signs? If we let him go on like this, the whole world will believe in him. Then the Romans will come in and sweep away our sanctuary and our nation." One of their number, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, addressed them at this point: "You have no understanding whatever! Can you not see that it is better for you to have one man die (for the people) than to have the whole nation destroyed?" (There is the cold logic of the pragmatist for you!) . . . From that day onward there was a plan afoot to kill him.*

*(Jn. 11:47-50, 53)*

## THE GREAT SANHEDRIN

The Great Sanhedrin was the Supreme Council of the Jewish Nation. The word "*Sanhedrin*" comes from the Greek "*synedrion*," meaning council. At the time of the Lord, the judicial power of the Sanhedrin extended only over the territory of Judea, but its moral force extended to all Jews. The Sanhedrin consisted of seventy-one men, including the high priest, who was the exofficio president of the Council. Its membership was composed of elders from the high priests' families, elders from the leading families among the laity, and scribes (most of whom were Pharisees). The Great Sanhedrin was established under the Persian, Antiochus. It was granted power in both religious and civil matters. The Jewish Law directed all its decisions. It had its own police force to enforce its decrees. The power of the Sanhedrin to inflict the death penalty without previous Roman consent was withdrawn by the Romans. After the fall of Jerusalem, the Sanhedrin re-established an academic Council in Jamnia composed of seventy-two Rabbis that exercised authoritative influence over the Jewish people; first under the leadership of Rabbi Johanan ben Zakki and later, under Rabbi Gamaliel II whose father, Gamaliel I, had instructed St. Paul in the Jewish religion.

When the Sanhedrin met, it sat in a semi-circle with two recording clerks facing the Council; one clerk recorded the acquittals, and the other the convictions. The accused faced the Council. When the matter concerned a capital crime, certain precautions were taken. Arguments for acquittal were heard first. No one who spoke for the accused could later testify against him. After hearing all the evidence (a man could be condemned only on the testimony of two witnesses), a vote was taken by each member rising and declaring his vote, starting with the youngest member. A simple majority, one half plus one, was sufficient for acquittal; for conviction the required vote was one-half plus two.

The Sadducees and the Sanhedrin thought they were finished with Jesus of Nazareth at Calvary. But, the Spirit of Jesus had returned to disturb their tranquility. This "*last stage being worse than the first.*" Kill one, and a few months later the temple is crawling with Nazoreans. The situation had been ignored long enough. Time had come for action to nip the movement in the bud. The inflammatory speeches in the temple area could stir up the people against the authorities. They were in danger of being accused by the people of murdering Jesus of Nazareth:



*While Peter and John were still addressing the crowd, the priests, the Captain of the temple guard (the Sagan – next in charge to the high priest) and the Sadducees came up to them, angry because they were teaching the people and proclaiming the resurrection of the dead in the person of Jesus. It was evening by now, so they arrested them and put them in jail for the night. Despite this, many of those who had heard the speech believed; the number of the men came to about five thousand.*

*(Acts 4:1-4)*

### CRISIS OF AUTHORITY

The Church had encountered its first external obstacle to its mission. The alien force is directed primarily against the mission of the Church to preach Jesus Christ. The alien force is no stumbling block in its path – the stumbling block is the mountain of religious and civil authority. Jesus forewarned this day would come:

*What I am doing is sending you out like sheep among wolves. You must be clever as snakes and innocent as doves. Be on your guard with respect to others. They will hale you into court; they will flog you in their synagogues. You will be brought to trial before rulers and kings, to give witness before them and before the Gentiles on my account.*

*( Mt. 10:16-18)*

The fulfillment of this prophecy begins.

When the leaders, the elders, and the scribes assembled the next day in Jerusalem, Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly class were there *(Acts 4:5-6)*.

The old gang that lynched Jesus is together again – this time against His Church. Annas and Caiaphas we know well. Alexander is not known, but it has been suggested that Alexander was the Greek name for Eleazare, son of Annas, and high priest between 15-18 A.D. John is probably Annas' son, Jonathan, who will succeed Caiaphas as high priest in 36 A.D. Here, definitely, is a gathering of the Sadducees. At this point, it is chiefly their ax to grind. How closely the shadow of Jesus' life falls over the lives of His disciples.

The Jewish historian, Josephus, relates a most interesting episode about

**this Annas Jr. when he became high priest in 62 A.D.:**

*This younger Annas, who as I have told you already, thought the high priest was a bold man in his temper and very insolent. When, therefore, Annas was of this disposition, he thought he had now a proper opportunity – Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James and some others; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned. (Apparently, apples do not fall too far from the tree!) By this deed, Annas Jr. exceeded his authority. King Agrippa took the high priesthood from him when he ruled but three months.*

*(Ant. B.XX, Ch IX)*

**This Annas later died during the turmoil before the fall of Jerusalem. He was slain by the allies of the Zealots. Annas had hoped to peacefully surrender the city to the Romans. His enemies left his body unburied.**

**Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin, and the interrogation began in this fashion: “By what power or in whose name have men of your stripe done this?” This same question had been put to Jesus after the cleansing of the temple. The Sadducees admitted that a deed of power had been performed, but they questioned the source of the power. The word the Sanhedrin used for power (*dunamis*) does not imply power with legitimate authority (*exousia*). They had accused Jesus of working marvels through the power of Satan. The same implication is made against Peter and John.**

**Jesus prepared His disciples for this day:**

*When they hand you over, do not worry about what you will say or how you will say it. When the hour comes, you will be given what you are to say. You yourselves will not be the speakers; the spirit of your Father will be speaking in you. . . . If they called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household! Do not let them intimidate you.*

*(Mt. 10:19-20; 25-26a)*

*Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke up: "Leaders of the people! Elders! If we must answer today for a good deed done to a cripple and explain how he was restored to health, then you and all the people of Israel must realize that it was done in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean, whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead. In the power of that name, this man stands before you perfectly sound. This Jesus is "the stone rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone." There is no salvation in anyone else, for there is no other name in the whole world given to men by which we are to be saved.*

*(Acts 4:8-12)*

In this episode of Peter speaking to the Sanhedrin, Luke gives a fine example of the distinction between the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who forms the Christian characters of the disciples, and a temporary charism bestowed upon a Christian for a particular work in the Church. We ought to note that the charism is present only in the action--in the work. Only when the Christian steps out in faith, acting upon the word of Jesus, does the charism come into being. We have another example of this when Peter walked upon the water. Peter had to step out of the boat in faith; nothing changed in the natural environment until Peter's foot touched the water. In this present situation, the charism of the Holy Spirit became operative as Peter opened his mouth to speak. He did not hear these words first in his mind then speak them with his lips. They were given to him as he spoke. He, too, had to hear them before his mind could receive them.

In their defense, Peter points to the indisputable evidence of a man born crippled who is now completely healed. Peter proclaims it is through the very person of Jesus of Nazareth that this man stands here perfectly sound. The word translated "*sound*" implies more than legs being straightened and strengthened; it carries the connotation of complete restoration of a human being--in other words, a man experiencing the full effects of the redemption. The cured man symbolizes salvation in the Name of Jesus. Peter proceeds to emphasize the great Christian revelation, later so forcefully stressed by Paul, that salvation neither comes through the works of the Law nor through the good works of men, but through the power of One Person--and One Person alone--Jesus of Nazareth, the Savior of the World. Peter proclaims that salvation is a matter of a personal relationship with the Person of Jesus. As we have already mentioned, "*in the Name of*" implies through the person named. Peter confirms that there is no other

person other than Jesus, in the whole world, “*given to men by which we are to be saved.*”

From this, we must not erroneously conclude, as some have done, that our good works are of no importance. The teaching of the Catholic Church is that the good works of men can neither merit their salvation, nor can they merit (win) the grace of salvation. Good works can certainly prepare the soul for the reception of the grace of salvation. The grace of salvation is merited by only one good act--Jesus' death on the Cross. It is the grace of salvation that brings a believer to be incorporated into the life of Jesus, through baptism and the Gift of the Holy Spirit. Christians, who are incorporated into Jesus, must do good works as did Jesus Himself. The good works of Christians do have meritorious value. The life of a Christian is the continuation of Jesus' life--therefore, a Christian can merit God's grace and gifts *for other human beings*. For their own soul, Christians can merit an increase in the life of Jesus--in other words, they can grow in God. Our good works merit our continual growth and development in the salvation won for us by Jesus. It is for this reason that St. James wrote:

*My brothers, what good is it to profess faith without practicing it? Such faith has no power to save one, has it? . . . You must perceive that a person is justified by his works and not by faith alone . . . Be assured, then, that faith without works is as dead as a body without breath.*

*(Jas. 2:14, 24, 26)*

Peter makes it crystal clear to the Sadducees that it is in the Name of Jesus Crucified that this man stands before them perfectly sound. The dead do not give life--the living do. Therefore, Jesus has risen from the dead. The Man that they disregarded, God has highly regarded. Peter recalls the words of Psalm 118, and implies that Jesus has fulfilled them:

*I will give thanks to you, for you have answered me and have been my savior. The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. By the Lord has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it. O Lord, grant salvation!*

*(Ps. 118:21-25)*

Jesus fulfills the words of Isaiah even more so:

*Thus says the Lord God: See, I am laying a stone in Zion, a stone that has been tested, A precious cornerstone as a sure foundation; he who puts his faith in it shall not be shaken.*

*(Is. 28:16)*

**Jews looked upon Israel as the House of God. Peter echoes the sentiments of the author of Hebrews:**

*Moses, too, “was faithful in all God’s household,” but Jesus is more worthy of honor than he, as the founder of a house is more honorable than the house itself.*

*(Heb. 3:2-3)*

**The cornerstone is the most important stone in a building. It must be the most solid, the strongest. It is upon this stone the two walls of the house meet and rest. It is upon this stone that a battlement must be built in order to protect the house. Calling Jesus the cornerstone implies he is the most important Person in the house. He is the Strong One that sustains the rest. Upon Him, the defense of the House rests. The two walls are Jewish and Gentile. In Jesus, they will come together to form the Temple of God of which Paul spoke:**

*You form a building which rises on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone. Through him the whole structure is fitted together and takes shape as a holy temple in the Lord; in him you are being built into this temple, to become a dwelling place for God in the Spirit.*

*(Eph. 2:20-22)*

**The spirit-filled words of Peter fell upon the ears of the Sadducees as rain splattering on a cement walk – their spirits remained untouched. They gave no credence to the message, but they did note the hard facts. It was of their nature and character to do so. They would leave the philosophizing on the facts to others. They were certain of one fact: this type of preaching would bring them no good. These men must be silenced. Threats would be the most prudent means with which to begin. If the threats failed, more appropriate means could be used. Luke records their reactions:**

*Observing the self-assurance of Peter and John, and, realizing that*

*the speakers were uneducated men of no standing, the questioners were amazed. Then they recognized these men as having been with Jesus. When they saw the man who had been cured standing there with them, they could think of nothing to say, so they ordered them out of the court while they held a consultation. "What shall we do with these men? Everyone who lives in Jerusalem knows what a remarkable show of power took place through them. We cannot deny it. To stop this from spreading further among the people we must give them a stern warning never to mention that man's name to anyone again." So they called them back and made it clear that under no circumstances were they to speak the name of Jesus or teach about him.* (Acts 4:13-18)

The Church faces its first major crisis. The chief priest and the Sanhedrin represented the legitimate religious and civil authority within Israel. Such authority was equated with God's own authority. Even Jesus had not denied that Pilate possessed authority over Him, but acknowledged: "You would have no power over me whatever unless it were given you from above (Jn. 19:11)." Paul wrote to the Romans:

*Let everyone obey the authorities that are over him, for there is no authority except from God, and all authority that exists is established by God. As a consequence, the man who opposes authority rebels against the ordinance of God; those who resist thus shall draw condemnation down upon themselves . . . for the ruler is God's servant to work for your good. . . It is not without purpose that the ruler carries the sword; he is God's servant, to inflict his avenging wrath upon the wrongdoer. You must obey, then, not only to escape punishment but also for conscience' sake.*

(Rom. 13:1-5)

St. Matthew records that on one occasion:

*Jesus told the crowds and his disciples, "The scribes and the Pharisees have succeeded Moses as teachers; therefore, do everything and observe everything they tell you. But do not follow their example."* (Mt. 23:2-3)

The Jewish training of the Apostles, and their moral background, would have led them to see in the commands of the high priest and Sanhedrin, the very authority of God. This authority now commands them to cease

teaching in the Name of Jesus. On the other hand, Jesus had commanded them to do this very thing, and make disciples of all the nations. Wherein lies their moral obligation? Whom must they obey? Their training tells them they must obey the Sanhedrin. Their conscience tells them they must obey Jesus. Is the authority of God in contradiction to itself? They cannot obey both. When a person is faced with two conflicting obligations, only the conflict is apparent. In the face of a higher obligation, the lower obligation ceases to be. It now becomes a matter of conscience to decide which obligation is the higher.

For the command of a lawful superior to be legitimate, and thereby morally binding on a subject, the command must be good and not evil. Only good can be the basis of the moral obligation to obey. An adult ought to be able to see the value, the goodness, and the justice in what is commanded. In order to command obedience, the law must be just. An enlightened and well-informed subject can never be expected obey a superior when the command violates the subject's conscience. When the subject judges the thing commanded to be morally wrong – in a word, sinful – or when a subject, after serious reflection and examination, comes to the conclusion that what has been commanded is contrary to the dictates of his/her conscience, the subject must follow his/her conscience, no matter how painful the result may be. When Henry VIII declared himself the head of the Catholic Church in England, many bishops and priests consented to this and signed a document of allegiance to the King. The layman, Sir Thomas More, could not, in conscience, acknowledge Henry's supremacy over the Church of England. He refused to sign the document that supported the King's declaration, and was subsequently beheaded.

The Second Vatican Council declared:

*In all his activity a man is bound to follow his conscience faithfully, in order that he may come to God, for whom he was created. It follows that he is not to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his conscience. Nor, on the other hand, is he to be restrained from acting in accordance with his conscience, especially in matters religious. For, of its very nature, the exercise of religion consists before all else in those internal, voluntary, and free acts whereby man sets the course of his life directly toward God. No merely human power can either command or prohibit acts of this kind.*

The Council further declared that a human being has a right to religious freedom:

*This freedom means all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any power, in such wise that in matters religious no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.*

The Council also teaches us:

*It is in accordance with their dignity as persons – that is, being endowed with reason and freewill and therefore, privileged to bear personal responsibility – that all men should be at once impelled by nature and also bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth, especially religious truth. They are also bound to adhere to the truth, once it is known, and to order their whole lives in accord with the demands of truth.*

*(IIVC – Religious Freedom, Ch.1)*

The command of the Sanhedrin could be seen as good insofar as it intended to preserve civil order. They saw the preaching of the Apostles to be inflammatory. But such preaching was necessary for the eternal salvation of mankind. To preach in the Name of Jesus was the greater good and therefore, the true moral obligation of the Apostles. The action of the Council objectively sought to suppress religious truth. The command is objectively immoral, even though they may have subjectively considered it moral. There is no moral obligation to obey such a command. In fact, the moral obligation is to defy it, regardless of the consequences to self. Jesus had once taught:

*I say to you who are my friends: Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and can do no more. I will show you whom you ought to fear. Fear him who has the power to cast into Gehenna after he has killed. Yes, I tell you fear him . . . I tell you whoever acknowledges me before men – the Son of Man will acknowledge before the angels of God. But the man who has disowned me in the presence of men will be disowned in the presence of the angels of God.*

*(Lk. 12:4-5; 8-9)*



To the demands of the rulers, Peter and John could have only one moral, conscientious reply:

*Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight for us to obey you rather than God. Surely we cannot help speaking of what we have heard and seen.*

*(Acts 4:19-20)*

The Apostles' words confirm their belief that Jesus speaks in the Name of God. They were morally certain of this, and their consciences demanded they obey the words of Jesus, even if that obedience involved persecution and death. Due to public opinion, the Sadducees had to release them. Luke informs us:

*At this point, they were dismissed with further warnings. The court could find no way to punish them because of the people, all of whom were praising God for what had happened. The fact was, the man thus miraculously cured, was more than forty years of age.*

*(Acts 4:21-22)*

In facing these men of powerful reputation and notorious character, Peter and John displayed great moral fortitude. They were making powerful enemies for themselves in the Name of Jesus. How ironic this seems. Yet this, too, fulfills the words of Jesus:

*Do not suppose that my mission on earth is to spread peace. My mission is to spread, not peace, but division . . . in short, to make a man's enemies those of his own household.*

*(Mt. 10:34-36)*

## CONSOLATION IN THE SPIRIT

Between the established Jewish religion and the Disciples of Jesus, the first division has occurred. It has occurred over preaching in the Name of Jesus. The Jewish leaders had rejected Jesus. In time, they would completely reject His followers. They would expel them from their synagogues. They would force the Church of Jesus Christ to go its separate way.

No doubt the whole incident was a traumatic spiritual experience for Peter and John. They had committed the Church to active resistance against the Establishment. That, done in a moment of fervor, must now be supported

with Community assistance and prayer. They immediately returned to the Cenacle where the Community prayerfully awaited them. They told “*their own people*” that it had been declared illegal to proclaim the Gospel. They had no alternative but to disobey. They needed assurance and confirmation to sustain them in this decision. The Community prayed, and the Holy Spirit confirmed that this, too, had been foretold--willed by God:

*All raised their voices in prayer to God on hearing the story: “Sovereign Lord, who made heaven and earth and sea and all that is in them, you have said by the Holy Spirit through the lips of our father David your servant: ‘Why did the Gentiles rage, the peoples conspire in folly? The Kings of the earth were aligned, the princes gathered together against the Lord and against his anointed.’ Indeed, they gathered in this very city against your holy Servant, Jesus, whom you anointed – Herod and Pontius Pilate in league with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel. They have brought about the very things which, in your powerful providence, you planned long ago. But now, O Lord, look at the threats they are leveling against us.”*

*(Acts 4:24-29a)*

The prayer of the Church echoed in the prayer of King Hezekiah, who was chided and insulted for relying on God’s power rather than give obedience to the King of Assyria. Hezekiah prayed in the temple:

*O Lord, God of Israel, enthroned upon the cherubim! You alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made the heavens and the earth. Incline your ear, O Lord, and listen! Open your eyes, O Lord, and see! . . . O Lord, our God, save us from the power of this man, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God.*

*(2 Kgs. 19:15-19)*

For the first time the Community faces the possibility of persecution, as it determines to follow a set course that runs contrary to the will of the powers that be. Spiritually, they have made a very mature decision that may well usher in a difficult time for the Community, a time of spiritual growth that spells the end to the simple and uncomplicated days of the Church in its childhood. The Community assesses its own human weaknesses and limitations; they pray for needed spiritual support, and for

assurance that God blesses their efforts in the Name of Jesus. They pray for the consolation of seeing miracles and wonders result from their ministry.

Luke records their prayer:

*But now, O Lord, look at the threats they are leveling against us. Grant to your servants, even as they speak your words, complete assurance by stretching forth your hand in cures and signs and wonders to be worked in the name of Jesus, your holy Servant.*

*(Acts 4:29-30)*

The disciples refer to themselves as God's slaves (*doulci*), but to Jesus as God's servant (*pais*). Since miracles are performed through the hands of the Apostles, they truly imply their lives are but extensions of God's own presence.

As the Church prays, God confirms and ratifies what has been done through a visible sign:

*The place where they were gathered shook as they prayed. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak God's word with confidence.*

*(Acts 4:31)*

Many see this as another Pentecost. As the Church – and the Church is always people – moves into a more challenging time, a greater presence of the Holy Spirit is needed. The Church had the wisdom to realize this, and the faith to pray for it. “*Ask and you shall receive.*” The grace of yesterday may not be sufficient for the Cross of today. What grace has inspired, only grace can accomplish!

If we desire to speak the word of the Lord in confidence, we should learn from the example of the early Church: pray to the Holy Spirit and do not be afraid to specify your needs and assurances. “*Ask and you shall receive!*”

## CHRISTIAN COMMUNISM

This crisis resulted in a more intense expression of faith and love among the members of the Community. Luke gives us one last glimpse of the Church still aglow in the Pentecostal flame:

*The community of believers were of one heart and one mind. None of them ever claimed anything as his own; rather, everything was held in common. With power, the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great respect was paid to them all; nor was there anyone needy among them, for all who owned property or houses sold them and donated the proceeds. They used to lay them at the feet of the apostles to be distributed to everyone according to his need.*

(Acts 4:32-35)

This is the second time Luke mentions the spirit of Christian communism that existed in the early Church. The description given recalls Josephus' account of the common life among the Essenes:

*Nor is there anyone to be found among them who hath more than another; for it is a law among them, that those who come to them must let what they have be common to the whole order – insomuch that among them all there is no appearance of poverty, or excess of riches, but everyone's possessions are intermingled with every other's possession; and so there is, as it were, one patrimony among all brethren.*

(W.J. 811, Ch VIII)

There was one difference--in the Christian Community there was no compulsion to do this. Luke presents a picture of common life, not a picture of a life of poverty. Other Churches sent money for its relief. This form of communal life may prove beneficial in stable environments in which people live and work together, but time and experience have proved it is not wise practice for a Christian Community living amidst turmoil and persecution. The Church learned this lesson anew after the French Revolution, when nuns were turned into the streets penniless. The Church then insisted that new religious communities require their subjects to maintain the so-called "*naked ownership*" of their personal property. Apparently, this practice developed as a communal expression of faith in

the immediate return of Jesus in glory. If the Second Coming of Jesus is imminent, a superfluous amount of riches is not needed. Members of the early Christian Community demonstrated their belief by getting rid of the wealth upon which their future security relied. Even recently, on a local TV program raising money for a satellite, the lady evangelist exhorted all “the little ole grandmothers out there” to send in all that money they had stored away for a rainy day, because Jesus was coming soon and they wouldn’t need it, and right now that money could be put to use for Jesus!

### CRISIS OF SCANDAL

Up to this point, the center of attention within the Community focused on the Apostles. Luke spotlights a member of the Community other than an Apostle:

*There was a certain Levite from Cyprus named Joseph to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (meaning “son of encouragement”). He sold a farm that he owned and made a donation of the money, laying it at the apostles’ feet.*

*(Acts 4:36-37)*

This Joseph was kind to Mary, the mother of John Mark the Evangelist. The Cenacle was in her home. The very fact Joseph’s action was singled out implies that the practice described by Luke may not have been a universal practice. In the Old Testament, Levites were forbidden to own property. Apparently, with time and experience, the practice of communal ownership disappeared.

We have an illustration here of the importance of a name, and how it ought to truly express the personality. When Joseph became a Christian, the Apostles were so impressed with his unique personality they changed his name to fit his personality. Luke interprets for us what Barnabas means. It certainly suggested he was indeed a spirit-filled young man. The word Luke uses to describe the meaning of Barnabas is “*Son of paraclesis.*” It is the same word used by Jesus to describe the Holy Spirit--“*Paraclete.*” The many shades of meaning are lost when this word is translated into English. It denotes the spiritual help one can receive from another, sometimes as an advocate, as a counselor, or as one who exhorts and encourages. Apparently, the Apostles saw this young man as one filled with the Christian spirit and gave him a name implying he was a son of the Holy

## **Spirit.**

The external opposition to the Community knitted it closer together. United in prayer to the Holy Spirit, He cemented the bonds of unity even closer. With such unity and courage, the Community prepared itself to endure persecution from without. History confirms that external hostile forces seldom can destroy great movements of the spirit; they are more likely to disintegrate from internal corruption. As in a human body, a cancer cell can develop and ultimately destroy the physical body; this also can occur in a social body. It is the enemy within one's own household that truly does the damage. Like termites, they secretly destroy the foundation of the Community.

The episode of Ananias and Sapphira demonstrates the seriousness of sin to the Christian Community – the Body of Christ. The early members of the Church lived such a grace-filled life, expressed in great zeal and mutual love, that the awareness of sin in its midst would consciously shock it.

It is a rule of human behavior that a continuous stimulus fails to stimulate. For example: we hear a loud noise and jump, but if the noise repeats every five minutes, we soon fail to react to it. We are born in a world, and live in a Christian Community, where sin is a constant stimulus. We have grown accustomed to the face of sin in our environment. We accept it without too much thought. "That's life!" "That's the way things are and we must be realistic." "Human nature is weak." But sin is not in God's order. Sin opposes the Will of God and destroys the reign of God. God and man do not use the same measure. What is evil in the sight of God is eternally evil. A million evil acts do not make the last evil act any less evil than the first. God does not grow accustomed to sin.

Luke records the story of sin entering the Christian Community:

*Another man named Ananias and his wife Sapphira likewise sold a piece of property. With the connivance of his wife, he put aside a part of the proceeds for himself; the rest he took and laid at the feet of the apostles. Peter exclaimed, "Ananias, why have you let Satan fill your heart so as to make you lie to the Holy Spirit and keep for yourself some of the proceeds from that field? Was it not yours so long as it remained unsold? Even when you sold it, was not the money still yours? How could you ever concoct such a scheme?"*

*You have lied not to men but to God!" At the sound of these words, Ananias fell dead. Great fear came upon all who later heard of it. Some of the young men came forward, wrapped up the body, and carried it out for burial. Three hours later, Ananias' wife came in, unaware of what had happened. Peter said to her, "Tell me, did you sell that piece of property for such and such an amount?" She answered, "Yes, that was the sum." Peter replied, "How could you two scheme to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? The footsteps of the men who have just buried your husband can be heard at the door. They stand ready to carry you out too." At that, she fell dead at his feet. The young men came in found her dead, and carried her out for burial beside her husband. Great fear came on the whole church and on all who heard of it.*

*(Acts 5:1-11)*

**It is the retelling of the ancient story in Genesis – the story of the Garden of Eden. The coming of the Holy Spirit within the Community of believers re-established that relationship between man and God that characterized human existence in the Garden. Into that Paradise had quietly, slowly crawled the Evil One. Into this new Garden of God's grace – the Christian Community – the same Ancient Enemy had found entrance.**

**As Peter indicated, there was no obligation within the early Church to sell one's property in order to have membership in the Church, as had the Essenes. As stated, this common practice was a practical expression in the Community of its belief in an imminent Second Coming of Jesus. Barnabas' act had been singled out. He stood forth as a shining example of the Community's faith and love. Probably, there would be some moral pressure for others to imitate him. Ananias and Sapphira, likewise, desired to have the high esteem of the Community. This of itself was good. But they lacked the faith that Barnabas had in the Word of God. They really couldn't bring themselves to completely entrust themselves to the hands of God, and believe that God would care for their material needs. They couldn't seek first the Kingdom of God before all else; they needed the security of money. This is spiritually where they were. They needed to grow in God's grace; they needed to humbly accept the fact that they lacked the spirit of Barnabas, because they were babies in the spirit. In time, by persevering effort and prayer, their spirits would grow, and confidence in God's love would increase, freeing them more and more from the attachments of this world with its many allurements to sin. This would**

have been the proper course for that Christian couple, but they chose to take another path.

We must not look solely at the deed itself, for that is to concentrate on the symptoms. We must seek the root of the sin, for only therein can we discover its true evil, and detest it – in ourselves and in the Community. The origin of sin is in the heart.

The heart, for the Hebrews, signified the source of human activity corresponding to our idea of the human spirit or soul, the source of knowing and willing. This is usually the spirit-filled dimension of one's life. For a Christian, the heart ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit. When this is so, the life of a Christian produces activities identified as fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, peace, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and chastity. We know that the inner house can be cleansed and purified, and that the spiritual cleansing is but the beginning. A vacant house becomes an invitation to persons to enter and make their home there. Our Lord related how evil spirits can be driven out of our spiritual house and all be cleansed, but the evil persons – spirits are persons – can return; and, if the house has not been filled with the Holy Spirit, the evil spirits will enter the house they vacated, but this time with reinforcements, and the state of that house becomes worse than before the cleansing.

As Satan hated Jesus and used the available external forces to destroy Him, so he hates the Church and uses the same weapons in order to destroy it. The fires of persecution have been enkindled, and he now concentrates upon the internal corruption of the Community in order to stifle and curtail the operations of the Holy Spirit. Scripture tells us that Satan found an entrance into the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira. What door? What window gave him entrance? The same door that gave him entrance into the house of Judas--a love of money. An inordinate love of money expresses itself in the soul as greed or covetousness. Underlying it would be a disbelief in God's word, and putting one's trust and security in material wealth. Satan stirred the fires of greed in their hearts, and when aflame, he inspired them to express it. They were greedy for the esteem given to Barnabas – for the image of faith and love he demonstrated to the Community. They were greedy to share in the Community's goods as if their lives depended upon Community support, and as if they had faith in God and in the love of the Community. In reality, they had little faith in either. They were two greedy foxes, a pair well matched for togetherness;



they were little Christian foxes who tried to out-fox the Holy Spirit, but were out-foxed by God. They were playing with Hell-fire! They decided to live a life of hypocrisy within the Christian Community in order to gain all the benefits this life could bring them – benefits for their greed.

Let us stand back and look at the picture of the early Church and its members:

*The Community of believers were of one heart and one mind. None of them ever claimed anything as his own; rather, everything was held in common.*

*(Acts 4:32)*

What a beautiful picture of Christian life! The Christian Community has been called the Icon of the Holy Spirit, a portrait of the Holy Spirit Incarnated! But wait a minute! Look closer at the picture. Luke says the believers are one heart and one mind. Has Luke lied? That picture is not honest. That Christian Community only has the appearance as such; two members wear masks that only give the impression of oneness of spirit. The simplicity of the picture is destroyed by the duplicity of Ananias and Sapphira. Their oneness of mind and heart with the group is a pretense; they have other thoughts and intentions. They wear a mask. That is what it means to be a hypocrite--to be one thing deep down, and to present an entirely different picture on the surface--a lie. For the hypocrite, every day is Halloween!

Ananias and Sapphira did not just lie; they *were* a lie. If the Christian Community were a reflection of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, the presence of Ananias and Sapphira in the Community would be an abomination to the Holy Spirit. What they were personally reflects upon the Holy Spirit, and distorts His Image in the world. This couple was a lie within the Body of Christ, a stain on the Image of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, through the ministry of Peter, purged this ugliness out of the Community.

There was Judas among the Twelve. There was Ananias and Sapphira in the early Christian Community. Wheat and weeds together! We could indeed grow accustomed to hypocrisy within the Church, and we would accept it. But examples stand out from the beginning of Church history that God demands holiness in His Church, and He does not accept any compromise:

***“Be you perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect!”*** The death of Ananias and his wife symbolize that God will one day purge the evil leaven of hypocrisy from the Church. ***“Scandal must indeed come but woe to him through whom it comes!”*** There will always be those foxes in the Christian Community, but in the end, the foxes must one day see themselves in the light of the Holy Spirit, in the blinding truth of light that pierces beneath the symptoms of sin to reveal the real evil in the human heart.

When Luke writes, ***“Great fear came on the whole Church and on all who heard it,”*** he refers to the Christian Community as the Church for the first time. Time, with its trials and tribulations, has brought the Christian Community into its own. The childhood has passed, and the Community has matured to be the Assembly of God on earth. The episode of Ananias and Sapphira has confirmed to the Community that the inner source of power and holiness within the Church is the Holy Spirit of God. Satan could and would war against the Church, but the Gates of Hell will never prevail. ***“And know that I am with you always, until the end of the world (Mt. 28:20)!”*** The Church now knows its battles are where its Enemy is--without and within!

Luke painted a portrait of a true spirit-filled Community. It was as fragile a picture as a reflection on the face of a tranquil lake. Ananias and Sapphira shattered that image. Throughout history, others would try in vain to recapture it. Perhaps they could capture it for a moment, but never hold it. Yes, our Lord has told us that He sowed good seed in His field, but the enemy came in the night and sowed his weeds. Now the wheat and weeds grow side-by-side. Shouldn't we pull out all those weeds? The Lord answers:

***No, pull up the weeds and you might take the wheat along with them. Let them grow together until harvest; then at harvest time I will order the harvesters. First collect the weeds and bundle them up to burn, then gather the wheat into my barn. (Mt. 13:29-30)***

This is the realistic picture of the Christian Church – His Church. That is what it is and will be until the end. We have not been called to be weeders, but lovers. Love the wheat and the weeds; for that is the only way we can be sure we love all the wheat. We leave the final decision to the Lord – who of us is the wheat, who the weeds?

# CHAPTER 6

## THE SPIRIT-FILLED CHURCH

### INTRODUCTION

St. Luke describes the Church still in the after-glow of Pentecost. It is a Holy Spirit-filled Community. Members in the Church have been referred to as brothers, servants, company, their own people, Community of believers, and Community of disciples. Jesus had often spoken of the *Kingdom*, but since the word had dangerous political overtones and was capable of being misunderstood by the Romans, the Community never referred to itself with this term. In Chapter Five, Luke refers to the Community for the first time as *Church*. It is called *ecclesia* in Greek and the *edah kahal* in Hebrew. The organization has been formally described. Soon *Church* would become the common title to designate the gathering of the Christian Community. We recall that in Greek, the word signified the legitimate gathering of the citizens of the city in judicial and legislative session. In Hebrew, two words were combined to express and signify all Israel gathered together for a significant religious intention and experience. The *edah kahal* signified all Israel gathered before God. Its very definition implied there could be only one *edah kahal* – One Church. In Israel's case, they were all gathered in one geographical location. In Christian usage, it would later be applied to the *Church at Jerusalem*, the *Church at Antioch*, and the New Testament would even speak of the *Churches*, but this usage was never intended to imply that these were separate and different Christian Communities. Though they were physically and geographically separated, they formed one corporate Body, One Church:

*Just as each of us has one body with many members, and not all the members have the same function, so too we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members one of another.*

*(Rom.12:4-5)*

## THE SPIRIT-FILLED COMMUNITY

Luke, the author of Acts, has demonstrated that the life of the Church flows from the operations of the Holy Spirit within the organization. Let us identify some of the main works of the Holy Spirit in the Church. First of all, The Holy Spirit witnesses to men the truths about Jesus of Nazareth:

*The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his Servant Jesus. . . . God has made both Lord and Messiah this Jesus whom you crucified. . . . When God raised up his servant, he sent him to you first to bless you by turning you from your evil ways. . . . The Holy and Just One! . . . The Author of Life. . . . There is no salvation in anyone else, for there is no other name in the whole world given to men by which we are to be saved.*

*(Acts 3:13; 2:36; 3:26; 3:14; 3:15; 4:12)*

This is the witness of the Holy Spirit to Jesus of Nazareth within the Church.

The Holy Spirit teaches that the first blessing which faith in Jesus brings to the Community is repentance: "He sent him to you first to bless you by turning you from your evil ways (Acts 3:26b)." In the light of their belief in Jesus, the disciples see the darkness of their own sinfulness--"The real light which gives light to every man . . . (Jn. 1:9)". The grace to detest their own sinfulness is given to them--"The light shines on in darkness, a darkness that did not overcome it (Jn. 1:5)." In the revelation of personal sin, the Holy Spirit reveals to each their need for Jesus the Savior. No matter how good we may seem on the surface, when we truly see ourselves without our usual masquerade we experience the truth of St. John's words:

*If we say, "We are free of the guilt of sin," we deceive ourselves; the truth is not to be found in us. . . . If we say, "We have never sinned," we make him a liar and his word finds no place in us."*

*(1 Jn. 1:8, 10)*

Sinners enlightened by the Holy Spirit profess with St. Paul:

*I know that no good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; the desire to do right is there but not the power. What happens is that I do, not*

*the good I will to do, but the evil I do not intend. But if I do what is against my will, it is not I who do it, but sin which dwells in me. This means that even though I want to do what is right, a law that leads to wrongdoing is always ready at hand. My inner self agrees with the law of God, but I see in my body's members another law at war with the law of my mind; this makes me the prisoner of the law of sin in my members. What a wretched man I am! Who can free me from this body under the power of death?*

*(Rom. 7:18-24)*

Without faith in Jesus, the question echoes a heart's despair. But to those in faith, the words of the Holy Spirit come, *"There is no other name in the whole world given to men by which we are to be saved."* To the question, the person of faith makes this reply, *"All praise to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 7:25)!"* The Holy and Just One of whom John writes, *"But if we acknowledge our sins, he who is just can be trusted to forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrong (1 Jn. 1:9)."*

With faith in Jesus and personal knowledge of sins comes the voice of the Holy Spirit,

*Save yourself from this generation which has gone astray. . . . You must reform and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ, that your sins may be forgiven; then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

*(Acts 2:40; 2.38)*

Reformed sinners composed the membership of the Community – sinners regenerated into saints through baptism and the Gift of the Holy Spirit. As St. Paul wrote Titus:

*He saved us through the baptism of the new birth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he lavished on us through Jesus Christ our Savior, that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs, in hope, of eternal life. You can depend on this to be true.*

*(Titus3:5b-8a)*

From these saints, the Holy Spirit makes a Community, a perfect Community: *“The community of believers were of one heart and one mind (Acts 4:32a).”* A Community at peace. Peace! One of the first fruits of the Holy Spirit. The perfume of the Holy Spirit’s presence permeates this Community. There is peace on earth where minds and hearts are one. When minds and hearts are one in union with the one Mind and Heart of God, there is the foundation of eternal peace! A peace the world can neither give nor receive. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The early Church glistened with the fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, peace, joy, a prayerful spirit, and docility. *“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ instruction and the communal life (Acts 2:42a).”* The community life centered on praying and the breaking of bread. *“They went to the temple area together every day”* for their public prayers, while in the privacy of *“their homes, they broke bread”* – celebrated the Eucharist (See Acts 2:46). The Holy Spirit created a loving family:

*Those who believed, shared all things in common. . . . None of them ever claimed anything as his own; rather, everything was held in common. . . . With exultant and sincere hearts, they took their meals in common, praising God. . .*

*(Acts 2:44a; 4:32b; 2:46b-47)*

This Community, born first in the Heart of Jesus, came into being through His prayers:

*. . . I pray also for those who will believe in me through their word, that all may be one as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; I pray that they may be [one] in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. I have given them the glory you gave me that they may be one, as we are one – I living in them, you living in me – that their unity may be complete. So shall the world know that you sent me, and that you loved them as you loved me.*

*(Jn. 17:20-23)*

At the dawn of its birth, the Church could truly be seen as reflecting a corporate image of Jesus. The early Fathers pictured the birth of the Church as Genesis had presented the birth of Eve. As Eve came forth from the side of the sleeping Adam, so the Church came forth from the side of Jesus in the sleep of death. John caught this symbolism when noting that

*blood and water* flowed from the side of the pierced Jesus – symbols of the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. Of the Church, Jesus could say, *“This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh . . . and the two become one body (Gn. 2:23-24).”*

As Israel was called the Bride of Yahweh, so the Church has been called the Bride of Christ. The Church was created to be a suitable partner for the New Adam. It is for this reason that sin within the Community is viewed as a true abomination to the Holy Spirit, who Himself creates the Bride of Christ. The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira demonstrate that God may tolerate sin for a time in the community, but never condone it. One day, the Church will be purified of all sin. The Book of Revelation describes this day:

*For this is the wedding day of the Lamb; his bride has prepared herself for the wedding. She has been given a dress to wear made of finest linen, brilliant white. (The linen dress is the virtuous deeds of God’s saints)*

*(Rv. 19:7-8)*

The sin and death of Ananias and Sapphira shocked and filled the Community with dread. Nevertheless, it served as a consolation to know that the very life of the Community was being preserved by the Holy Spirit. A realistic awareness of the dangers from Satan, without and within, served to solidify the organization. The Community now had what we may call the ego strength, a corporate self-confidence, to be an evangelizing force in the world without fear of its own disintegration. At this point in history, the disciples are recognized as the Church; it was the coming of age of God’s people. As yet, the Church had no awareness that it would become a distinct entity from the Old Israel. It still dreamed of Israel being restored and glorified. This would occur when Jesus returned in glory. (Israel impeded this return by its failure to repent) The Church recognized that its work was to bring Israel to repentance. The unbelieving Jews referred to the Church as the sect of the *Nazoreans*, with the implication, *“Can any good come out of Nazareth?”*

Filled with the Holy Spirit, the Church is indeed the helpmate of the Lord. The shining example of Christian lives attracted new members to the Church. The courageous proclamation of the Gospel that God is reconciling the world to Himself in Jesus Christ moved many hearers to believe the

good news, and “*the number of the men came to about five thousand (Acts 4:4).*” The wonders worked through the Apostles attracted people to the Church:

*Through the hands of the apostles, many signs and wonders occurred among the people. . . . The people carried the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mattresses, so that when Peter passed by, at least his shadow might fall on one or another of them. Crowds from the towns around Jerusalem would gather, too, bringing their sick and those who were troubled by unclean spirits, all of whom were cured. . . . More and more believers, men and women in great numbers, were continually added to the Lord.*

*(Acts 5:12a, 15-16; 5:14)*

Peter identified Jesus as “*a man whom God sent to you with miracles, wonders, and signs as his credentials. These God worked through him in your midst (Acts 2:22).*” Peter implies that miracles, wonders, and signs proved Jesus’ Divine origin. In our study of the Gospel, we learned that these works of Jesus testified more to the reign of God than to the Divinity of Jesus. They reveal that God’s reign on earth has come in Jesus of Nazareth. The works of Jesus reveal to us what should be, and what will be, when sin and its effects are finally destroyed. The miracle of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead was the proof par excellence that Jesus was the Messiah and Lord. We know the disciples asked God to reassure them in their ministry:

*Grant to your servants . . . complete assurance, by stretching forth your hand in cures and signs and wonders to be worked in the name of Jesus, your Holy Servant.*

*(Acts 4:29b-30)*

Their faith in Jesus did not need these, but their faith in themselves did. It was their confirmation that they were right in disobeying the Sanhedrin’s order to cease speaking in the Name of Jesus.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT AND CHURCH MINISTRY

The Holy Spirit not only worked within the disciples of Jesus to create the Christian Community, but He worked mightily within the Apostles, making them fearless evangelists. When the Holy Spirit shook the Cenacle as the



Community prayed, He brought forth a spirit of great fortitude in the hearts of the believers. Jesus told His disciples not to be intimidated by political powers and social pressures. They were to fear God's judgment upon their behavior, not man's judgment. Not even threats of death must intimidate them:

*What I tell you in darkness, speak in the light. What you hear in private, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who deprive the body of life but cannot destroy the soul.*

*(Mt. 10:27-28a)*

The gift of physical life is precious. For men without faith, it is to be preserved at all cost. But for those who believe that Jesus arose from the dead, physical life is but a brief moment of ones' life. But it is a most precious moment, and the only time allotted in which to determine ones' eternity with God, or without God. The disciples have been well instructed on this point. The Holy Spirit fortifies them to act according to their faith. The early Christian Community was no shrinking violet, hiding away in some cranny in the wall, quietly trying to catch the attentions of a passerby. No indeed! That is not a picture of a Spirit-filled Community!

The Sanhedrin had declared it illegal to evangelize in the Name of Jesus. What did the Apostles do? They pitched their tent for their evangelizing meetings upon the front lawn of the high priest's house!

*By mutual agreement, they used to meet in Solomon's Portico. No one else dared to join them, despite the fact that the people held them in high esteem.*

*(Acts 5:12b-13)*

One would need the virtue of fortitude to identify with the Community at this point. Fortitude is a gift of the Holy Spirit that enables a person to live in this world without losing eternal life. It gives one the moral strength to live the truth and incarnate it in one's life, and the courage to live and declare the truth in word and deed. Unless Fortitude is balanced by Wisdom, which is another gift of the Holy Spirit, it can become foolhardy, or perhaps watered down to be no more than human prudence. Wisdom grants the soul God's vision of the situation. The wise spirit sees things from God's vantage point and knows the means necessary to achieve the goal. The course charted by human prudence may be foolishness in God's

sight and morally sinful. St. Paul writes:

*Scripture says, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and thwart the cleverness of the clever." . . . Has not God turned the wisdom of this world into folly? . . . For God's folly is wiser than men, and his weakness more powerful than men.*

*(1 Cor. 1:19-20, 25)*

Israel considered Jerusalem to be the center of the world, and the temple to be its heart. The Scriptures foretold that from Zion (a part of the city that came to symbolically represent the entire city of Jerusalem) truth would go forth unto the whole world: "*For from Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Is. 2:3c).*" Again, "*He shall come to Zion, a redeemer to those of Jacob who turn from sin, says the Lord (Is. 59:20).*" The book of Hebrews refers to Mt. Zion as "*the city of the living God.*" In the minds of the Apostles, it was their duty to proclaim the Gospel in Jerusalem, and not only in Jerusalem but right in the temple. Where else should the word of God go forth other than from the House of God? They did not realize that they now *were* the House of God.

From the point of view of the Sanhedrin, the presence of the Apostles in the temple added insult to injury. They disobeyed, and defiantly so. Each day the Apostles marched right up to the temple, and would enter through one of three or four gates into the Court of the Gentiles, so called because non-Jews could enter up to this point. The Court of the Gentiles encircled the remainder of the temple, and was the location of all activities other than prayer and worship. Colonnades bordered the court on all four sides, forming a protective porch about twenty feet wide. The colonnades were approximately forty feet high, formed entirely from one piece of marble. The roof was adorned with engraved cedar. The court of the patio was approximately another fifty-five feet wide. The royal porch lay on the south side of the Court, and the porch of Solomon on the east. A Gentile would go beyond this section only under pain of death. Here on the porch of Solomon, the disciples gathered daily to teach, to heal the sick, and to free those troubled with unclean spirits. Whether the Jews realized it or not, the Apostles were in many ways replacing the temple. They were certainly upstaging the priest of the temple. The toleration of the temple authorities was reaching a breaking point. The Apostles' success with the people incited jealousy in their hearts.

## THE APOSTLES BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

It was in keeping with Jewish legal custom to first warn offenders and, if they persisted, to punish them. Luke relates, "*The high priest and all his Supporters (that is, the party of the Sadducees), filled with jealousy, arrested the apostles and threw them into the public jail (Acts 5:17-18).*" The struggle was still between the disciples and the Sadducees. As yet, the Pharisees have not been alienated. The Apostles may have been imprisoned in the temple compound. Luke relates:

*During the night, however, an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the jail, led them forth, and said, "Go out now and take your place in the temple precincts and preach to the people all about this new life."*

*(Acts 5:19-20)*

Jesus has already been referred to as the Author, or Pioneer, of Life. *Life* refers to eternal life, and discipleship becomes known as *The Way* to eternal life through Jesus Christ.

The word *angel* means *messenger*. In the Old Testament, the term *angel of the Lord* can apply to Yahweh Himself, when the messenger is a true manifestation of God. (In truth, Jesus is the *Angel of the Lord*, as He is the Word of God expressed in the flesh.) Jesus is not only a messenger; He is the message! At other times, an *angel of the Lord* may be a celestial being acting as God's agent, as were Gabriel and Raphael. In the third Gospel, "*the angel of the Lord*" appeared to Zechariah and said, "*I am Gabriel, who stands in attendance before God. I was sent to speak to you and bring you this good news (Lk. 1:19).*" (This same Gabriel appeared to Mary; apparently no introduction was needed. It was not his presence, but his message, that disturbed Mary.) The prophets themselves could be considered *angels of the Lord* as they delivered God's message to people. Lastly, an *angel of the Lord* could be any impersonal agent that accomplishes the Will of God – a storm, a plague, or even the disease that struck down Herod Agrippa. In this particular case in Acts, since no further details have been given, the freeing of the Apostles from prison may have been an inside job. It is possible one of the sympathetic Levite guards on duty released them and encouraged them to continue preaching to the people. The next morning:

*When the high priest and his supporters arrived, they convoked the*

*Sanhedrin, the full council of the elders of Israel. They sent word to the jail that the prisoners were to be brought in. But when the temple guard got to the jail they could not find them, and hurried back with the report, "We found the jail securely locked and the guards at their posts outside the gates, but when we opened it we found no one inside." On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the high priests did not know what to make of the affair. Someone then came up to them, pointing out, "Look, there! Those men you put in jail are standing over there in the temple, teaching the people." At that, the captain went off with the guard and brought them in, but without any show of force, for fear of being stoned by the crowd. When they had led them in and made them stand before the Sanhedrin, the high priest began the interrogation in this way: "We gave you strict orders not to teach about that name, yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us responsible for that man's blood."*  
(Acts 5:21b-28)

**Peter is not intimidated by this illustrious gathering, and he does nothing to alleviate their fears; rather, he adds fuel to the fires of their anger. Peter and all the Apostles respond, demonstrating unanimity of spirit, "Better for us to obey God than men!" The implication is that the Sanhedrin does not speak in this matter with the authority of God. Peter continues:**

*The God of our fathers has raised up Jesus whom you put to death, hanging him on a tree. He whom God has exalted at this right hand as ruler and savior is to bring repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.*

(Acts 5:30-31)

**The rulers feared the Apostles would bring the blood of Jesus down upon them. Peter proclaims that this blood does fall on them, but as a laver of redemption. This Jesus whom they destroyed has not risen from the dead to destroy His enemies, but to save them. When Abraham Lincoln was criticized for his leniency towards the defeated South, and told by a lady he should destroy their enemies, he responded, "When I make them our friends, I have destroyed our enemies!"**

**Jesus Crucified and Risen brings a twofold Divine gift to Israel: the grace of repentance, and the forgiveness of sins. Through the love of Jesus, God**

still offers Israel the opportunity to repent of this terrible crime, and to fulfill her glorious destiny and mission. This one brief sentence confirms the doctrine that man cannot save himself. Over and over the Scriptures confirm that repentance is the fundamental condition for salvation. Paul speaks of sin as enslavement. A slave of sin is not free to repent. Something, or someone, must come from outside and free the captive. Peter confirms that Jesus is this Someone; He is the Savior. He has merited the grace of repentance for sinners that will lead to the forgiveness of sins. Jesus grants sinners the power to turn from sin, but they must will to repent. In order to be freed, a slave must at least desire his freedom, even though his desire is powerless to effect his freedom. A captive bird must at least desire to fly in the free air!

Peter tells the Sanhedrin that the Apostles are witnesses to this truth, but there is an even greater witness – the Holy Spirit! *“We testify to this. So too does the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those that obey him (Acts 5:32).”* All these works that have stirred the jealousy of the Sadducees are works of the Holy Spirit, proving that salvation comes in the Name of Jesus. Once again, the scriptures have stressed the relationship between the Gift of the Holy Spirit and obedience to Jesus. Our Lord had taught *“if you love me and keep my commands,”* the Holy Spirit would be given to the disciples. The Sadducees can neither love nor obey Jesus. These truths are unbearable to them. *“When the Sanhedrin heard this, they were stung to fury and wanted to kill them (Acts 5:3).”*

The reaction of the Sanhedrin recalls an encounter of Jesus with the Jews in which He addressed them:

*If you were Abraham’s children, you would be following Abraham’s example. The fact is, you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I have heard from God. Abraham did nothing like that. Indeed you are doing your father’s works! . . . The father you spring from is the devil, and willingly you carry out his wishes. He brought death to man from the beginning, and has never based himself on truth; the truth is not in him.*

*(Jn. 8:39b-41, 44)*

The violent reaction of the Sanhedrin apparently was not reflective of all its members, probably only the Sadducees. Their rage was about to drive them

to the illegal action of murdering the Apostles. (Satan desired the death of the Apostles as he desired the death of Jesus.) At this time, a cooler head prevailed. A Pharisee named Gamaliel stood up and addressed the Sanhedrin. In this incident, Gamaliel serves as an angel of the Lord delivering the Apostles from death. We know from other than Scripture sources that this man was one of the most famous Rabbis of the times. He was most learned, and highly respected by all Pharisees and the people. He was known as *Rabban*, the great Rabbi.

A constant power struggle existed between the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The Sadducees had the political power, and the Pharisees had the moral power. In the end, it was the Pharisees who survived. The Sadducees did not survive the fall of Jerusalem. After the fall, the Pharisees re-established the Sanhedrin in Jamnia as an academic body of seventy-two Rabbis whose moral influence extended to all Jews. For years, the Sanhedrin in Jamnia was under the direction of Gamaliel II.

As some of you remember, the name *Pharisee* probably means the separate ones. They were lay people who considered the heart and essence of the Jewish religion to be the Law. From this party came most of the Scribes, the teachers of the Law. They demanded a strict interpretation of the Law. They accepted the Prophets, along with the oral traditions, as imposing legal observance upon all Jews. These oral traditions were a series of teachings claiming to go back to Moses. These traditions of the elders served as a protective fence around the Law, and the observance of them protected a Jew from breaking the Law. They believed in the soul's existence after death, in reward and punishment after death, and in a final resurrection of the Just from the dead. But even among the Pharisees there were two famous schools of theology: the school of Hillel who gave a broader interpretation to the Law, and the school of Shammai who adhered to the strictest interpretation of the Law. Tradition holds that Gamaliel was the grandson of Hillel. No doubt he would lean toward the more lenient interpretation of Law. This is the man that now speaks in defense of the Apostles.

It would be understandable that the Pharisees would be more sympathetic toward a group of people who faithfully practiced the Jewish religion and taught a theology in keeping with Pharisaic beliefs. Gamaliel may have been in doubt about whether this movement, the Nazoreans, was truly of God. In such a case of doubt, one cannot morally act until the doubt is

resolved. Gamaliel takes the line of argument that if this movement is from men, it could be made worse by making these men martyrs; on the other hand, if the movement is from God, one could find oneself contending with God. He gave a couple of examples. His admonition to the Sanhedrin was a hands-off-wait-and-see policy. Luke recorded Gamaliel's speech to the Sanhedrin:

*Fellow Israelites, think twice about what you are going to do with these men. Not long ago, a certain Theudas came on the scene and tried to pass himself off as someone of importance. About four hundred men joined him. However, he was killed, and all those who had been so easily convinced by him were disbanded. In the end, it came to nothing. Next came Judas, the Galilean, at the time of the census. He too built up quite a following, but likewise died, and all his followers were dispersed. The present case is similar. My advice is that you have nothing to do with these men. Let them alone. If their purpose or activity is human in its origins, it will destroy itself. If, on the other hand, it comes from God, you will not be able to destroy them without fighting God himself.*

*(Acts 5:35-39)*

Some scholars use the speech of Gamaliel to prove that Luke was not historically accurate since, according to the historian Josephus, *Theudas* did not come on the scene until some time after this recorded incident. If both men are speaking of the same incident, it cannot be presumed that Josephus is right and Luke wrong. Josephus himself corrected many of the errors he made in his earlier works. On the other hand, the name *Theudas* was also a nickname for names such as Theodatus and Theodosius. It was a common name, and so were revolts and messianic movements. Josephus and Luke may be referring to two different incidents in Jewish history.

Gamaliel's reasons prevailed, but the Sanhedrin, no doubt to appease the Sadducees (as Pilate had tried in the case of Jesus), ordered the Apostles punished for their disobedience. The punishment ordered was in keeping with the Law of Deuteronomy.

*When men have a dispute and bring it to court, and a decision is handed down to them acquitting the innocent party and condemning the guilty party, if the latter deserves stripes, the judge shall have him lie down and in his presence receive the number of*

*stripes his guilt deserves. Forty stripes may be given him, but no more.*

*(Dt. 25:1-3a)*

Custom, therefore, limited the punishment to thirty-nine stripes, in order not to break the Law by exceeding forty lashes.

Luke gives this account of the end of the trial and its results:

*This speech persuaded them. In spite of it, however, the Sanhedrin called in the apostles and had them whipped. They ordered them not to speak again about the name of Jesus, and afterward dismissed them. The apostles, for their part, left the Sanhedrin full of joy that they had been judged worthy of ill treatment for the sake of the Name. Day after day, both in the temple and at home, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news of Jesus the Messiah.*

*(Acts 5:40-42)*

It is difficult for us to understand joy in suffering. We have been conditioned to understand that to take pleasure in pain is sick, even masochistic. But joy is not pleasure. Pleasure is that good feeling when the senses are gratified, when they are pleased, filled and contented. Deprivation of the senses causes discomfort, disturbance, and unrest, identified as pain. It would not be normal to prefer pain to pleasure; this would require some perversion of the proper order of things in the personality. Masochism can rightly be called sickness of personality. Joy, on the other hand, is exhilaration in the human spirit, not in the body. It occurs when the ambitions of the spirit begin to be realized and fulfilled. Since in this life the spirit and body are wedded, the effects of great spiritual joy flood the entire person – body and soul – rendering the person wholly indifferent to bodily pleasure or pain.

This is the joy the Apostles experienced. In their hearts, they so loved Jesus that they desired, more than anything else, to imitate Him and to be completely identified with Him. It was the burning ambition of their lives. When they were innocently condemned and beaten, they experienced a close association of their own earthly lives with Jesus, who had likewise been innocently condemned and flogged. It was their close association with Jesus, not their flagellation that was the source of their joy.



We have another good example and explanation of joy in suffering in the life of Oliver Plunkett, the Archbishop of Armagh from Ireland. He was the last man to be martyred for the Catholic faith in England. In July of 1687, Oliver was condemned to death in Westminster Hall of London for high treason. The Lord Chief Justice sentenced him in these words:

*. . . you must go from hence to the place from whence you came, that is, to Newgate; and from thence you shall be drawn through the city of London to Tyburn; there you shall be hanged by the neck, but cut down before you are dead, your bowels shall be taken out and burnt before your face; your head shall be cut off, and your body divided into four quarters to be disposed of as his majesty pleases. And I pray God to have mercy upon your soul.*

Following this sentence, the last two weeks of Oliver's life were filled with peace and joy. He wrote this letter to a relative, Michael Plunkett:

*Sentence of death passed against me on 15th without causing me any fear or depriving me of sleep for a quarter of any hour. I am innocent of all treason as the child born yesterday. As for my character, profession, and function, I did own it publicly, and that being also a motive of my death I die most willingly; and being the first among the Irish, I will teach others with the grace of God, by example, not to fear death. But how am I, a poor creature, so stout, seeing that my Redeemer began to fear, to be weary and sad, and drops of blood ran down to the ground? I have considered that Christ, by his fears and passions, merited for me to be without fear. . . . Joy in suffering is indeed a gift from the Holy Spirit.*

*(Plunkett letter)*

St. Gregory the Great writes that when pleasure is absent we desire it, and when present we tire of it; but when joy is absent we do not desire it at all, however when present we never tire of it. We truly ought to pray for the gift of Joy – particularly the Joy described in the Scriptures.

## A VISIBLE SOCIETY

Luke has presented a picture of the Church. Some men teach that the Church is purely a spiritual and invisible society, established in the souls of men by faith in Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit, and The Holy Spirit personally directs the soul through the revealed words of the Scriptures. Such a teaching is hard to maintain in the light of St. Luke's account. Here we have a society among men that is very visible, possessing structure, leadership, and authority. Jesus' own teaching of how to deal with an offensive brother certainly imply His Church will be a visible society on earth:

*If your brother should commit some wrong against you, go and point out his fault, but keep it between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. If he does not listen, summon another, so that every case may stand on the word of two or three witnesses. If he ignores them, refer it to the church. If he ignores even the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector.*

*(Mt. 18:15-17)*

The early disciples certainly considered themselves to be as visible and as organized as any Jewish synagogue community. They were visible enough to impress their environment profoundly. Men and women, who formed a close and closed communal life in which they shared food, material blessings, and worshipped in common, did not reckon themselves to be a purely spiritual and invisible society. The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira demonstrated that living the Christian life, at least in some aspects, was not left to individual interpretation. For certain behavior, members of the Church had to be ready to answer before God and Community. In the early Church, some members appear to have the role of Teachers, Wonder-Workers, or Leaders. The Holy Spirit worked mightily within the Community, but certain works He performed only through certain designated members of the Church. Everyone possessed the Gift of the Holy Spirit, but not every one possessed the same gifts from the Giver. We have but to read Chapter Twelve of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians to have this truth confirmed. It is only in the Community, as a whole, that one can find all the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

What is the picture presented in Acts so far? The offices of teachers,

miracle-workers, and leadership all reside in twelve men. We have read:

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' instructions. . . . With power, the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. . . . Through the hands of the apostles, many signs and wonders occurred among the people. . . . An angel of the Lord said, "Go out now and take your place in the temple precincts and preach to the people all about this new life." Accordingly, they went into the temple at dawn and resumed their teaching. . . .*

*Day after day, both in the temple and at home, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news of Jesus the Messiah.*

*(Acts 2:24; 4:33; 5:12; 5:20-21; 5:42)*

The Twelve certainly appear in this first history of the Church as men possessing special powers and authority within the Christian Community.

Sometimes it appears that Christians will accept that the Church is a visible body on earth, as long as it is a headless body. They will go along with apostles, teachers, preachers, and miracle workers – but don't let one of the apostles appear in the Community as its visible head!

It has been clear from the beginning of Acts that of these Twelve men, Peter appears in the leadership role. His name heads every list of the Apostles. He called for and supervised the election of Matthias. He spoke for the Twelve at Pentecost. He performed the first recorded miracle in Acts. In both cases, he defended the Church's position before the Sanhedrin. He pronounced sentence on Ananias and Sapphira. It was said that people carried the sick into the streets hoping to see Peter so that "*at least his shadow might fall on one or another of them.*" Peter appears so much more than the "*first among equals.*" He appears as one with unique authority in the Community – an authority that certainly expressed itself in unselfish service to the Community. Regardless of what one may think of the doctrine of papal infallibility, in Acts, Peter certainly acts as if he is infallible! He does not appear as an autocrat or a dictator, but as a leader, sharing and exercising his authority in communion with others. All Twelve Apostles appear as men with authority, but Peter appears as chief Apostle and as the visible head of the Church (and a head that has a mouth!). He willingly exercises this leadership in conjunction with the other Apostles and the Community.

What is related in the four Gospel accounts about Peter only confirms and

clarifies the position he assumed in Acts. At his first introduction to Jesus, Our Lord said to him, “*You are Simon, son of John; your name shall be Cephas (which is rendered Peter) (Jn. 1:42).*” Matthew records that in Caesarea Philippi, when Simon acknowledged Jesus to be the Messiah, Jesus said to him:

*Blest are you, Simon son of Jonah! No mere man has revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. I, for my part, declare to you, you are “Rock,” and on this rock I will build my church, and the jaws of death shall not prevail against it. I will entrust to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you declare bound on earth shall be bound in heaven; whatever you declare loosed on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

(Mt. 16:27-19)

The word for rock (Cephas, or Peter) carries the concept of a foundation stone – substratum rock. (No rolling stone, this Peter!) This is one of only two uses of *church* in the Gospel accounts. There are many accounts in the Gospel where Peter stands out; of the most important are the accounts when Jesus paid the temple tax for himself and Peter alone (See Mat. 17:24-27), and when Jesus confessed he prayed particularly for Peter:

*Simon, Simon! Remember that Satan has asked for you (vos) to sift you all like wheat. But I have prayed for you (te) that your faith may never fail. You in turn must strengthen your brothers.*

(Lk. 22:31-32)

(It was Peter’s nerves that failed him, not his faith.)

Considering the Old Testament concept of shepherd, probably the most impressive scene occurs on the final page of the last Gospel account written. There, three times Jesus asked Peter, “*Do you love me?*” And three times Peter affirmed his love. Jesus responded to each affirmation of love, “*Feed my lambs... Tend my sheep... Feed my sheep*” (Jn. 21:15-17).” Among Semitic people, to pronounce an agreement three times publicly assumed the nature of a contract to be legal and binding. The Risen Jesus declared Peter to be the Shepherd of the Church of God. A shepherd in the Old Testament certainly symbolized authority and leadership. Apparently John, purposefully, ties the previous threefold denial of Peter with his commission to be chief shepherd, in order to teach that human authority in the Church

carries the weakness of human frailty. But Peter's frailty does not make him unacceptable for leadership in the Community. It only goes to prove that the Church is sustained and preserved by the vitalizing effects of the Holy Spirit. Peter and his successors may rightly claim infallibility, but never sinlessness or impeccability. In Acts, Peter appears as a loving, humble shepherd.

## GROWTH AND CHANGE

It will not be until the third century that the successor of Peter appears in history in the role we are more familiar with today. But if this developed role appears on the stage of history, it implies the role has been in the process of developing long before its appearance. It did not just happen as Topsy "just grew" in the musical *Summertime*. Acts presents the Church as a living society that formed its structure and organization as time went on, and as circumstances dictated.

Luke presents just such a moment in Church history. No doubt a few years have passed since the last encounter with the Sanhedrin. The face of the Church is changing. The life style of the Community has adapted to its growing numbers. Two distinct groups now appear in the Church: Christians who speak Hebrew, and Christians who speak only Greek (Jews of the Diaspora); Hebrews and Hellenists. Tension has developed between the groups. This is the first note of disharmony within the Community itself. It appears rooted in that all too common evil, racial prejudice. Many look down upon others as inferior when they speak another language, or speak with an accent, or have a different color. In the Jerusalem Church, the Hebrews were in the majority. Apparently, some of them felt a dislike for the Greek-speaking disciples, and displayed it in the distributions to the widows. A spirit of murmuring and criticism was engendered in the Community that was certainly indirectly, if not directly, aimed against the Apostles. After all, the Apostles were the authorities, and it was their responsibility to oversee the welfare of the Community. The Apostles saw this as one more problem, another burden distracting them from their work. One needs not only time but also energy to perform one's task. Both were being consumed in the business of community administration to the neglect of more essential responsibilities.

When one understands the care and the attitude of Jews toward the poor and widows in the Community, one can better understand the work involved. Two members of each synagogue were assigned to visit the places of business and private homes every Friday in order to take up the *basket* collection of goods and money for the poor of the Community. This would be distributed late the same day. The poor would receive enough for fourteen meals – two a day. For more pressing needs, a door-to-door *tray* collection was made daily. These customs, no doubt, continued in the Christian Community.

Up to this point, all administrative authority resided in the Apostles. A major change needed to be inaugurated. Luke stresses the importance of what follows by describing it as an action of the entire Church. The Apostles have decided to share part of their authority with a selected group of Seven. They desired the Community to select the Seven according to certain standards set by the Apostles. The Apostles apparently reserved the final approval of the men. Luke tells us:

*The Twelve assembled the Community of the disciples and said, "It is not right for us to neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Look around among your own number, brothers, for seven men acknowledged to be deeply spiritual and prudent, and we shall appoint them to this task. This will permit us to concentrate on prayer and the ministry of the word."*

(Acts 6:2-4)

This episode illustrates the unique position and authority of the Twelve. They stress that their special obligation is the ministry of the Word, and they have a special responsibility to pray. They affirm their own uniqueness within the Community when they tell the disciples to choose from "*among your own number.*" Since the Seven will serve the Community, the Community should nominate the Seven. They are to select from their own number those that the whole Church acknowledges to be deeply spiritual, intelligent, and prudent men that would be able to do the work assigned. This admonition recalls the words of St. Teresa of Avila to her sisters, "*God help you if you get a holy but stupid confessor.*"

The Community selects the men; the Apostles alone can ordain them:

*Following this, they selected Stephen, a man filled with faith and*

*the Holy Spirit; Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus of Antioch, who had been a convert to Judaism.*

*(Acts 6:5)*

Stephen and Nicholaus are both singled out for special mention. Luke probably has indicated that there is an important tie between the first and last man.

The first ordination ceremony now occurs in the Christian Community. What they were ordained to is disputed. Some say they were the first deacons of the Church, others say the first presbyters, and others believe they were special and unique – as the Twelve were a unique body in the Church. The Seven were ordained thusly: *“They presented these men to the apostles, who first prayed over them and then imposed hands on them (Acts 6:6).”* First the Apostles prayed. They asked God to impart to these men the power needed to accomplish their new vocation. Their new vocation calls them to share in the mission of the Apostles. The imposition of hands on the Seven symbolized a sharing of power with them, and actually imparted power to them. Jesus had commissioned the Apostles, and empowered them to accomplish their vocations.

You cannot give power you do not possess. For a member of the Christian Community to be a genuine minister within the Community, he must be called to his or her ministry by the Church, and he or she must be ordained by a member of the Church empowered to do so. Ordination is a person-to-person encounter. The one ordaining places his hands upon the head of the one to be ordained and shares his power with him. Through the hands of the ordaining minister, power passes into the spirit of the one being ordained. The custom of imparting blessings and power by the laying on of hands is found in the Old Testament. Blessings were imparted by the laying on of hands; a blessing once given could not be retracted, as seen in the case of Jacob and Esau. When Joshua was selected to take the place of Moses, we read:

*Moses did as the Lord commanded him. Taking Joshua and having him stand in the presence of the priest Eleaza and the whole Community, he laid hands on him and gave him his commission, as the Lord had directed through Moses.*

*(Nm. 27:22-23)*

The people of Israel were directed to lay hands on the Levites as a symbol that their lives were to be sustained by the people of Israel. The laying on of hands, whether in blessing, healing, or ordaining, symbolizes and actually establishes a vital connection between two persons, through which some gift or power flows from one into the other.

The tensions existing between the Hebrews and Hellenists symbolize the innate closeness of the Jews and their resistance to the Gentile world. The Church, flowing out of Jewish culture, carries within itself the seeds of this prejudice against the Gentiles. The Church of Jerusalem had been content to be a Jewish Community concerned with the people of Israel. Quoting even the words and example of Jesus for its behavior and attitude, "*My mission is only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt. 15:24).*"

*Jesus sent these men on missions as the Twelve, after giving them the following instructions: "Do not visit pagan territory and do not enter a Samaritan town. Go instead after the lost sheep of the house of Israel."*

*(Mt. 10:5-6)*

The Greek-speaking Jewish widows represent the vast Gentile world in need of the Church's ministry. This ministry was being neglected because the Apostles were primarily concerned with Israel. This is the human side of the story, a side that is always there. But there is another side, that of the Divine Presence of the Holy Spirit within the Church. Here we see the Holy Spirit leading the Church to take the first step in its direction towards the Gentiles, without even recognizing it. How marvelous it is to see the Holy Spirit working in the human situation, realizing Divine Purpose and Will. Our Lord told His Church that the Holy Spirit would lead it to embrace truth, at one point too difficult to bear. He leads us without our knowing it, and as docile lambs we can but follow.

All seven men spoke Greek and bore Greek names. Nicholas was a Greek convert to Judaism. Without the Church realizing it, the Lord prepared a team in its own midst for the work He designed. But an even more important event occurred. Jesus had imparted His full power to the Twelve. Now it resides in them as God's power had resided in Jesus. All this Divine Power and Energy had been contained and conserved in these twelve men. For the first time, a floodgate of Divine Power is released, as the Apostles'



**hands become channels permitting their God-given power and commission to flow into the spirits of the Seven. And through them and others, the power and commission flows through all the ages in an unbroken series of ordained ministers of every race, tongue, and color.**

**The Church has been One, Holy, and Apostolic, and now it has taken its first step towards being Catholic – a universal Church!**

## CHAPTER 7

### THE WITNESS OF STEPHEN

#### INTRODUCTION

Rooted in Palestine, the Jewish religion nourished the growth and development of the Church. Understanding of truth is conditioned by culture, environment, and the innate gift of human intelligence. It is an ancient truth that the supernatural builds on the natural. In other words, the spiritual life must be constructed upon the gifts of nature. When men have endeavored to build a religious philosophy of life and fail to consider human nature and natural environment, they have built upon sand; their work is doomed to disaster. When the Christian religion teaches that salvation comes through Jesus Christ, and that there is no other person through whom salvation can be achieved, the Church has assumed a very practical and intelligent attitude towards salvation. The Model for salvation is One like ourselves, truly human in every aspect, differing from us in only one major aspect--Jesus is sinless. Sin is commonplace among men, but sin is not part of the definition of man; sin is not of the essence of man. To some degree, all men are sinners, but one does not have to sin in order to be human! In fact, it is not sin that creates humanity – it destroys it. That is precisely the meaning of sin: “to miss the mark.” Human nature misses its proper mark; it strays from its natural course. When a being is free of sin, the person is then most human. When Paul writes that Jesus was like us in everything, sin excepted, Paul teaches that Jesus is the perfect human being. Rightly, Jesus is the exemplar and model for all human beings. But Jesus is more! He is also the personal Savior of Mankind. This is the story of the Gospel; this is the *good news* of how, in Jesus, mankind is saved.

Scripture declares, “*Salvation comes from the Jews!*” The Savior of the world was born to a Jewish maiden. Humanly speaking, Jesus is a Jew. Naturally, to some degree, Jesus was molded by His Jewish heritage. Scripture confirms that He reflected the best of it by telling us, “*he grew in*

*wisdom and age and grace before God and men (Lk. 2:52).*” Jesus’ natural environment, to some degree, curtailed the expression of His Spirit. We certainly know the Will of God curtailed His mission: *“I have only been sent to the lost sheep of the House of Israel (See Mt. 15:24).*” Yet still, He is the Savior of the world.

In the human life of Jesus, God revealed the Divine Personality. Jesus is the perfect example of the supernatural being built upon the natural. While remaining God, God became man. Yet, in every respect Jesus remained a man. (The power of love does not destroy, it creates!) Divinity did not destroy the humanity of Jesus, it was glorified. Jesus, the Incarnate Word, is indeed the Light of the World.

God limited Himself by becoming a man. Having been born among the Jews itself limited Jesus. God used the weak and little ones of this earth to confound the wise and strong. It was entirely fitting that God’s Son should be born among an insignificant and despised nation. Certainly, in the minds of the Greeks and Romans, the Jews were such. Even among the Jews, the people of Nazareth were despised. *“Can anything good come out of Nazareth (Jn. 1:46)?”*

Indeed, Jesus was the Light of the World. The Light shone in the darkness and the darkness could not understand Him. There in Palestine, midst the Jewish culture, the revelation of Jesus was given. Upon good and simple men, like the shepherds in the fields, this celestial Light did shine.

A thing is received in the manner of the receiver. We know the sun is the source of light, and the human eye needs light to see; but the human eye can handle only so much light and no more. If too much light shines in the eyes, they will see nothing but darkness; not because there is no light, but because there is too much light. Some people can only handle a little light, and they no doubt miss things that are seen by people who can tolerate more light. Eyes become conditioned to the light. If the light is suddenly increased, it takes time for the eyes to adjust, as when we go from a darkened room into bright sunlight we say, *“It’s blinding.”*

The human mind is compared to the human eye. Truth is said to be the light of the mind. The human mind remains in darkness until truth is presented to it. Then the person is said *“to see.”* When we understand something, we have a habit of saying, *“Oh, yes! I see.”* As with the eyes,

the human being has been conditioned to deal with only a certain degree of truth. It may be a quality or quantity of truth one is not accustomed to dealing with, or it may be that one lacks the ability to deal with it. We have to develop the capacity to deal with some kinds of truths. Many a new student in scholastic philosophy feels he can understand anything as long as it is in English. That is, until his first day in class when the professor explains there is a real distinction between essence and existence. The budding philosopher is left in the dark. But, after a few months of class, he may be the "Buddha" of the family. We also know that certain minds appear to be limited in their ability to grasp truth. They reach a certain point in understanding, and there they remain. This limitation may arise for many different reasons.

Revelation is Divine Truth revealed to the human mind. Jesus Christ is the Supreme Revelation of God to mankind. Since He comes in a human package, Jesus is capable of being understood and accepted by humans. Each person can receive this revelation in relative fullness. Each child in the family feels he or she fully knows the mother, but perhaps no two children do so in the same way. All people can receive Jesus, the Light of the World, but can *anyone* receive Him in His fullness? Each will understand Him in keeping with his or her own light, diligence, and in keeping with the natural capabilities of his or her own mind.

The Gift of the Holy Spirit brings supernatural powers to the spirit of the person, but the Holy Spirit does not recreate the human nature of the person. After the reception of the Holy Spirit, the natural limitations of the person remain – unless a miracle in the physical order occurs. In other words, if eating oysters sicken you before the baptism of the Holy Spirit, chances are they will sicken you after the reception of the Holy Spirit. If you could not understand Einstein's Theory of Relativity before, you probably will not understand it after the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I say probably, because it *could* happen. What we are trying to explain is that grace builds upon the natural foundation that it finds in the human person. Grace does not normally bypass or suspend human nature.

The Apostles first received the revelation of Jesus--God's Word. They were simple men, which does not imply they were stupid men. Their environment and culture conditioned their ability to understand Jesus. Jesus had to be interpreted against the Old Testament background in order for them to understand Him. Their synagogue training preconditioned their

understanding. When Peter received the revelation that Jesus was "*the Christ – the Son of the living God*," his background colored his understanding of this Truth. When Peter violently rejected the idea of a suffering Messiah, it could be seen that he did not have a correct understanding.

Although many Jews did not accept Jesus as the Messiah, they accepted the disciples of Jesus, because this belief did not clash with accepted Jewish beliefs. The lives lived by the early Christians were non-threatening to Jewish practices and beliefs. In fact, they sustained and supported them. For this reason, the Christians had the support of the people, even the Pharisees looked upon them as harmless. As long as they kept the Law and observed all the traditions of the ancients, there was no harm in their believing Jesus to be the Messiah.

This soon ended. A new stream entered the Church, destined to charter a new course for the Church, setting it on a rough and difficult road for many years to come. The Hellenistic mind became exposed to the revelations of Jesus Christ. In the light of Christian Faith, the Hellenists profoundly affected the Church's understanding of Jesus and His teachings. *Hellen* means Greek. It designated a people with a common culture and language. The Greeks referred to the rest of the world as *barbarian*. The pride of the Greeks rested upon their cultural achievements, chiefly in philosophy, literature, and art. The Greeks sought wisdom. When the son of Philip the Macedonian, Alexander the Great, made his conquering march across the Near East, he brought more than his armies; he exported the culture of the Greeks. With Alexander went the wisdom of his own teacher, Aristotle, and that of Plato. The Greek language, or a common variation, became the spoken language of the world.

At the time of the writing of Acts, Alexandria in Egypt (named after its founder), was one of three great cities of the Roman Empire. It had become the greatest center of Hellenistic culture in the world, with famous libraries and scholars. Alexandria also housed one of the largest, richest, and most influential concentrations of Jews in the ancient world. They, too, were greatly influenced by the intellectual environment of the city. Here, seventy Jewish scholars translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek – the Greek Septuagint Bible. Here lived Philo, the great Jewish philosopher, who endeavored to prove that the Jews were not barbarians, rather that they possessed in the Law the wisdom capable of producing intellectual

growth.

## THE HELLEN SYNAGOGUE

Jews raised in Alexandria would have reflected upon the Scriptures differently from those raised in Palestine. The Palestinian Jews must have appeared mentally dull in comparison. It is understandable that Alexandrian Jews, and others reared in a Greek culture, would form their own cultural community that was centered around their own synagogues. (One report places the number of synagogues in Jerusalem at this time to be around 480.) From this Greek center no doubt came the Hellenistic converts to the Christian Community.

We know there was a considerable number of these converts. Certain problems arose with their presence in the Community. The Apostles ordained seven Greek-speaking men to minister to the Greek-speaking Christians. As noted last week, this was the first extension of apostolic authority and power to other men. For the first time the Church had extended itself beyond its Hebrew environment. The Seven ordained had a Grecian cultural background, and Nicholas was actually a Jewish convert from paganism.

This action by the Church resulted in increased membership. Probably a great number of the new converts came from the Greek-speaking population because of these new ministers within the Community. Acts records, *"The word of God continued to spread, while at the same time the number of disciples in Jerusalem enormously increased (Acts 6:7)."* Luke continues, *"There were many priests among those who embraced the faith."* Since the community of the Essenes had a large priestly membership, some scholars see an indication here of some Essenes entering the Community.

Of the Seven ordained, one stands out as a superstar – Stephen. He bears a royal name, for Stephen means *crown*. After his ordination, Luke writes of Stephen, *"The Stephen already spoken of was a man filled with grace and power, who worked great wonders and signs among the people (Acts 6:8)."* This is the first mention of any member of the Church working signs and wonders, other than the Apostles. It indicates that some of the apostolic power has been passed on. Stephen's behavior certainly indicates a man well trained in the science of logic and argumentation. In Stephen, we have an interesting combination: a young man with not only a good mind, but a mind trained to razor sharpness, and he possessed an ardent faith, and a

spirit filled with grace. What happens when the fine mind of Stephen, under the inspiring light of the Holy Spirit, gazes upon the revelation of the Word; when human reason, enkindled by the light of Divine grace, focuses upon Jesus Christ--Divine Truth Itself? New aspects of the Christian revelation are seen for the first time. Peter has said, "*Surely we cannot help speaking of what we have heard and seen (Acts 4:20).*" Stephen could do no less. When Luke identified Stephen as a man filled with faith and the Holy Spirit, he prepared us to see that the teachings Stephen will give on faith come from the Holy Spirit.

The Greek philosopher Plato had taught that there is a world of reality, and another world of shadows and images. The world in which we live is the one of shadows and images; it is but a reflection of the true spiritual reality that remains hidden. The things that we take for real in this world, Plato taught, are no more real than the shadows cast by the sun. Did Stephen recognize that the true spiritual reality of God had become real and visible in Jesus? That Jesus was no shadow or reflection of God, but God Incarnated? If he came to this conclusion, and apparently he did, then what of the Jewish religion? What of this temple so highly esteemed by all, even the Apostles? Is not the Old Testament but an image, a shadow of the True Sun that has come into the world to enlighten all men? In the True Light, all shadows and images fade away. Yes, the Old Testament is but a foreshadowing of Jesus.

What is the practical consequence of this truth? The Old Testament has been fulfilled in Jesus. With the coming of Jesus, the Old Testament has become obsolete; it is no longer needed. This is a bold and dangerous deduction to make in the city of Jerusalem. And, what of this beautiful temple – the pride of all Israel? Stephen realized that the temple was man's creation, not God's. Did the Jews have more pride in their temple than in their worship of Yahweh? More love for what their hands had made than for the Hands that had made them? No! God could not be contained in a place made by human hands. God dwells in His tabernacle *not* made by human hands. Once the Christian religion could rise above the confines of the Jewish religion, when the umbilical cord to the mother is cut, when once free of its symbiotic relationship and recognizes itself as a separate entity from the mother, it would know its true self, and see its universal mission: Christianity is truly the religion for all men and for all times. It has always been, and would always be, catholic.

Stephen's ministry served to inaugurate the separation of the Church of Jesus Christ from the Church of Moses. The full separation would take much more time and painful soul-searching. It may have been just such religious concepts that caused tension between the Hebrew and Hellenist Christians. It would be some years before certain disciples would willingly accept the full implications of Jesus' life in relationship to the Jewish religion. The leader in opposition to this was apparently James, kinsman of the Lord.

When Stephen returned to his old synagogue seeking to enlighten his fellow countrymen, he ran into violent opposition. Luke tells us:

*Certain members of the so-called "Synagogue of Roman Freedman" (that is, the Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and Asia) would undertake to engage Stephen in debate, but they proved no match for the wisdom and spirit with which he spoke.*

*(Acts 6:9)*

The men attending this synagogue were probably Jews enjoying Roman citizenship, an elite social group. Stephen's argument with these Jews would rest upon the truth that Jesus was the Messiah. He would demonstrate this by showing how the Old Testament prefigured and foreshadowed Jesus. Once he had established his major principle or premise, he would then move to demonstrate that as Jesus was the Messiah, He was the Perfect One. Therefore, it would follow that, with the coming of the Perfect, the imperfect had passed away. The logical deduction of this would be that the Jewish religion and temple worship were now obsolete, a thing of the past! Stephen's whole argument rests upon Jesus being the true Messiah. If this is not true, the rest fails.

Those who fought against Stephen denied his major statement; they should have ignored the rest of the argument. The statement of Jesus being the Messiah was not all that upsetting a concept, but Stephen's deductions from that statement were volatile. His enemies' dishonesty was based on taking statements out of context, out of their logical sequence. But they can only rightly be understood in their proper context. If you said to someone, "*If all Georgians are liars and the President is a Georgian, then the President is a liar*", would it be honest for someone to spread around that you said, "*The President is a liar!*" You could not deny you made that statement. This is case where the half-truth is worse than the full lie. The full lie you could



deny.

At this time, Saul of Tarsus, a man from the Province of Cilicia, lived in Jerusalem. It is presumed Saul attended Stephen's synagogue and was no stranger to him. Saul, who later describes himself as a *Pharisee of Pharisees*, would have been especially alarmed at Stephen's deductions. From what we know of Saul's character, he was probably one of those engaged in the verbal "knockdown-drag-out" fights in the Synagogue of Roman Freedman. He would not have taken being beaten by anyone gracefully. Was Saul's hatred of Stephen enough to make a man of his character stoop to foul play, or perhaps ignore the fact that others were doing so?

The arguments Stephen made began to make enemies for him, not only for Stephen, but for the Christian Community as well. The allegation began to spread around Jerusalem that Stephen was preachin blasphemy. Luke tells us, "*They persuaded some men to make the charge that they had heard him speaking blasphemies against Moses and God (Acts 6:11).*" After spreading this all over town, they were able to undermine the good reputation Stephen had with the people, "*and in this way they incited the people, the elders, and the scribes.*" This mood swung the people and the Pharisees away from tolerance for the Christians, and offered the enemies of Stephen the opportunity to rid themselves of him. "*All together they confronted him, seized him, and led him off to the Sanhedrin (Acts 6:12).*" They charged him with blasphemy. Technically, blasphemy was to willfully sin against God in such a way as to break the Covenant, and included acts of idolatry, breaking the Sabbath, neglecting circumcision, and cursing with the Name of God. Two or three witnesses were needed for conviction. Luke relates:

*There they brought in false witnesses, who said, "This man never stops making statements against the holy place and the law. We have heard him claim that Jesus the Nazarean will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses handed down to us." The members of the Sanhedrin who sat there stared at him intently. Throughout, Stephen's face seemed like that of an angel.*

*(Acts 6:13-15)*

When Moses descended from Mt. Sinai, it is said the glory of God shone upon his face. Stephen truly beheld the glory of God shining on the face of Jesus Christ, and his own countenance is reflective of that glory.

Apparently one man would never forget that face as long as he lived – that man was Saul. Years later Saul would write:

*For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts, that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ.*

*(2Cor. 4:6)*

## THE TRIAL OF STEPHEN

Stephen is asked to defend himself against these charges. When one reads his response before the Sanhedrin, it is somewhat disappointing and appears almost pointless and inane. But that is only on the surface; he knew what he was about. Stephen was not interested in defending himself, but in defending the position of Jesus. Before the Sanhedrin, he proclaims the truth about Jesus. He may have had the face of an angel, but he had a heart as clever as a snake. In what appears to be a long drawn-out defense going a long way around the problem is, in actual fact, a subtle defense of Jesus' claims on the one hand, and a condemnation of the Sanhedrin on the other. In truth, he acts as a clever lawyer, vindicating Jesus and indicting the true criminals. Indeed, it was a work of the Holy Spirit. Stephen willingly had his accusers going down the road with him. They were way down the road before realizing their agreement with him was an accusation against themselves. When they saw what he had done, their violent reaction was anticipatory.

Luke would not have us miss noticing the similarity between the trial of Jesus and that of Stephen. There is one notable exception: Jesus remained silent, Stephen did not. Why? Because one's own witness is not valid in this court. The trial of Jesus truly goes on. Witness now is being given on behalf of Jesus. It is not Stephen who is the witness; it is the Holy Spirit. Stephen is but a mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit. He knew and believed the promise of Jesus: "*The Holy Spirit will teach you at that moment all that should be said (Lk. 12:12).*" "*You yourselves will not be the speakers; the Spirit of your Father will be speaking in you (Mt. 10:20).*"

Let us review the charges against Stephen before the Sanhedrin. First, he had spoken against Moses by substituting a "false prophet", Jesus of Nazareth, in place of Moses. This, indirectly, would be seen as attacking God, who had made Moses His representative. The words of Joshua

recorded in the *Assumption of Moses*, a contemporary Jewish work, reflect the popular sentiments about Moses. Joshua speaks of Moses as:

*...the sacred spirit who was worthy of the Lord, manifold and incomprehensible, the lord of the word, who was faithful in all things, God's chief prophet throughout the world, the most perfect teacher in the world . . . advocate who offers prayers on behalf of Israel, the great angel.*

Second, Stephen was charged with blasphemy against the Law, stating that keeping the Law no longer applied since the Law had been fulfilled in Jesus. Third, he was charged with blasphemy against the temple, teaching that the temple was no longer needed in order to worship God.

Stephen begins his defense by reviewing the history of Israel from Abraham to David. The Jews were fond of this method of defense, as it renewed their confidence and trust in God's providence in the history of Israel. Stephen knew that the secret purposes of God's Will were hidden in the history of Israel. When the veil of these secrets is lifted, the life of the Messiah is revealed. This life coincides with the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Also, the sufferings of the Jews are revealed in their history to be a result of their constant rebellion against the Divine Plan. Of course, only the Holy Spirit is capable of lifting this veil. Paul writes:

*To this very day, when the old covenant is read, the veil remains unlifted; it is only in Christ that it is taken away. Even now, when Moses is read, a veil covers their understanding. "But whenever he turns to the Lord, the veil will be removed."*

(2Cor. 3:14-16)

Stephen addresses the Sanhedrin in a much less formal way than Peter did, suggesting that he had a more intimate relationship with this group:

*My brothers! Fathers! Listen to me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was still in Mesopotamia and before he settled in Haran. God said to him, "Leave your country and your kinsfolk, and go to the land I will show you." So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After his father died, God made him move from there to this land where you now dwell. God did not give him any of it as his heritage, not even a foot of*

*land, but he promised to give it to him and his descendants after him as a possession – although he had no child. These are the words God used: “Abraham’s posterity will be strangers in a foreign land, and they will be subject to slavery and oppressed four hundred years. But I will judge that nation which they serve,” God said, “and after that they will worship me in this place.”*

*(Acts 7:2-7)*

Some of the statements made by Stephen do not completely agree with what can be found recorded in the Scriptures, but the information coincides with the popular teachings of the time. Much of the information now in the Old Testament was still in the state of flux. Stephen subtly demonstrates that the founder of the Jewish people found communion with the *God of glory* beyond the Holy Land, in Mesopotamia. The promises made to Abraham were never to be fulfilled during his earthly life. These promises would come to be realized in his descendants only after a long period of time. Behind this “veiled” account is the revelation that the Presence of God is not restricted to one place. Jesus stands as a veiled image in Abraham, in whose life the promises to the Messiah had not been realized. Jesus too, entered a foreign land without receiving His inheritance. Jesus lived and died in Hope. In the fullness of God’s time, these promises to the Messiah will be fulfilled in Jesus.

Stephen continues:

*God then made a covenant of circumcision with him, and Abraham, who had become the father of Isaac, circumcised him on the eighth day. Isaac did the same for Jacob; and Jacob for the twelve patriarchs. Out of envy, the patriarchs sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt, but God was with him and rescued him from all his tribulations. He granted him favor and wisdom in the court of the Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and made him the governor of Egypt and of the Pharaoh’s entire household. When famine and great trial came upon Egypt and Canaan, our fathers could find no sustenance. Hearing that there was grain in Egypt, Jacob sent our fathers there on a first mission. The second time, Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and his family ties became known to the Pharaoh. Then Joseph sent for his father Jacob, inviting him and all his kinsfolk – seventy-five persons in all. Jacob went down to Egypt and died there, as did our fathers. Their remains were*

*transferred to Shechem and placed in the tomb which Abraham had bought with silver from the sons of Hamor at Shechem.*

*(Acts 7:8-16)*

In this section, Stephen demonstrates that Israel became the people of God prior to the practice of circumcision – in which they put so much stock. Obviously, it could not be absolutely necessary to be circumcised in order to belong to God inasmuch as Abraham belonged to God, and in him all his descendants, before the ritual of circumcision.

The figure of Jesus appears again in the image of Joseph. Just as Joseph had been sold into slavery because of the envy of his brothers, so Jesus, out of envy, had been delivered up to death. As God saved Joseph from his tribulations, so He saved Jesus from the grave – He raised Him up. Pharaoh becomes an image of God who now has exalted this Jesus, despised by his brothers, to His right Hand; in other words, has made Him Ruler, the Messiah, the Lord. From this exalted position, He now acts as Savior of His brethren. Those now coming to Egypt for wheat and wine because of the famine represent the Jews now flocking to Jesus to be fed by Him. Here also we have a beautiful analogy of the Eucharist – the bread and wine of the Body and Blood of Jesus feeding the famished souls of men. Just as Pharaoh had appointed Joseph as head of his house, so God has appointed Jesus Head of His House, the Church.

The second time Joseph made himself known to his brothers may be a reference to the Coming of the Holy Spirit whose coming revealed the true nature of Jesus. The brothers, who first despised their Brother, now come to Him as their Savior – those who are true children of the patriarchs. Their true spiritual ties are recognized in their coming to Jesus. They are the true children of Israel.

As the children of Israel could not remain in the Promised Land at this time, but had to go and sojourn in Egypt, so too must the disciples of Jesus. They are to become pilgrims on the earth. As they have no lasting home here, they too will suffer many trials for a time.

Stephen also notes that the bodies of the holy patriarchs did not lie buried in a place deemed holy by the Jews, but in Shechem – in the land of the despised Samaritans. Those places are made holy by the bodies of the patriarchs. There are holy places other than those recognized by this

present Sanhedrin.

Stephen next turns his attention to Moses:

*When the time drew near for the fulfillment of the promise made by God to Abraham, our people in Egypt grew more and more numerous, until a new king came to power in Egypt, who knew not Joseph. This one dealt craftily with our people and oppressed them. He forced our fathers to abandon their infants to exposure so that the people would not survive.*

*It was at this time that Moses was born. He proved to be an exceedingly handsome child. For the first three months, he was reared in his father's house, but afterward, he was abandoned, and Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. Moses was educated in all the lore of Egypt. He was a man powerful in word and deed. When he was forty, he decided to visit his kinsmen, the Israelites. Upon seeing one of them maltreated, he went to his aid and avenged the victim by slaying the Egyptian. He assumed that his kinsmen would understand that God was using him to bring them deliverance; but they did not. He appeared the next day while some of them were fighting, and tried to reconcile them by saying, "Friends, you are blood brothers. Why are you trying to hurt each other?" At that, the man who was wronging his neighbor pushed Moses aside. "And who has appointed you ruler and judge over us?" he said. "Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?" On hearing this, Moses fled. He took up his residence as an alien in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons.*

*(Acts 7:17-29)*

Stephen sees a comparison between Jesus and Moses, the most esteemed and beloved of all Jews. It is not presented as an allegory, but as a very close comparison. When the time came for the fulfillment of God's promise to bring Israel into the Promised Land, God raised up Moses. The Jewish people were indeed numerous, but they were under a pharaoh who had no regard for them. And so when the time had come for the Messiah to be born – the true deliverer of His people – God raised up Jesus of Nazareth. It was also a time when the people were governed by the Romans who did not know them, and by a satellite king, Herod. As Pharaoh sought

the death of Moses, so Herod sought the death of Jesus. Jesus, too, had to dwell in a foreign house, first in Egypt and then in Nazareth. As did Moses, Jesus grew in age and wisdom. When Moses matured, he presented himself to the Israelites as their deliverer, and they rejected him. When Jesus was about thirty, He appeared in the synagogue in Nazareth and announced that the time had come to free the captives. *“He assumed that his kinsmen would understand that God was using him to bring them deliverance; but they did not (Acts 7:25).”* The people of Nazareth rose up against him, and his kinsmen drove him out. *“On what authority are you doing these things? Who has given you this power (Mt. 21:23)?”* The Jews rejected the authority of Jesus and the deliverance offered through Him. Stephen subtly makes the point that this Moses they so esteem is the same Moses whose authority the Jews had rejected, and whom they had driven away. But what the Jews rejected, God selected!

*Forty years later, an angel appeared to him in the desert near Mount Sinai in the flame of a burning thorn-bush. When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight. As he drew near to observe it carefully, the voice of the Lord was heard: “I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.” Moses began to tremble and dared look no more. The Lord said to him, “Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to rescue them. Come now, I will send you into Egypt.”*

*(Acts 7:30-34)*

God confirmed Moses in his role as savior of his people. The early Christians held Christ to have been present during Israel’s long history. Stephen may have seen Christ the Lord in the image of the angel that appeared in the burning bush. He would have seen in the Divine commission of Moses, a comparison with Jesus’ own Divine commission at His baptism, when the Holy Spirit came down upon Him.

When the Lord said to Moses, *“Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground,”* Stephen saw in this incident a rejection of the Jews’ affirmation that the temple was the only holy place on earth. God makes holy any place that His Presence may be. Stephen continues:

*This very Moses whom they had rejected with the words, "Who has appointed you ruler and judge?" was the one whom God, through the angel appearing to him in the thorn-bush, sent to be their ruler and deliverer. It was he who led them forth, all the while performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, in the Red Sea, and for forty years in the desert. This Moses is the one who said to the Israelites, "God will raise up for you from among your kinsmen a prophet like me." In that desert assembly, it was he who was in conversation with the messenger on Mount Sinai and with our fathers; he too received the oracles of life to pass on to you.*

*(Acts 7:35-38)*

Here, a close parallel is drawn between the ministry of Moses and that of Jesus. Moses, rejected by the Jews, became not only ruler and judge, but also savior. Jesus *"the stone rejected by the builders, has become the cornerstone."* *"God has made both Lord and Messiah this Jesus whom you crucified."* *"There is no salvation in anyone else (Acts 4:11; 2:36; 4:12)."* God proved His Divine approbation of Moses by the signs and wonders worked through Moses. Jesus was a man approved by God:

*Jesus the Nazorean was a man whom God sent to you with miracles, wonders, and signs as his credentials. This God worked through him in your midst, as you well know.*

*(Acts 2:22)*

In that desert assembly--in that Church in the desert--God spoke to the Jews directly through Moses, and through Moses He passed to them the way of life. Moses himself confirmed that these teachings were incomplete, and that this way was not the final one, when he revealed that God would one day send another prophet like himself, and to this prophet all Israel must listen. Moses warned future Israelites:

*And the Lord said to me, "This was well said. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kinsmen, and will put my words into his mouth; he shall tell them all that I command him. If any man will not listen to my words which he speaks in my name, I myself will make him answer for it."*

*(Dt. 18:17-19)*



God now speaks the fullness of truth in the Church on earth, and reveals the perfect Way to His people through Jesus, a prophet like Moses.

This use of Scriptures is somewhat foreign to us today; but it was very common in Our Lord's time, as can be seen from the writing of the Essenes and from Paul himself. The method used by Stephen may have been learned from Jesus Himself. When Jesus joined His disciples on the road to Emmaus, they were in a state of shock over what had occurred to Him. Our Lord instructed them:

*“Did not the Messiah have to undergo all this so as to enter into his glory?” Beginning, then, with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted for them every passage of Scripture which referred to him.*  
(Lk. 24:26-27)

The facts about the life of Jesus would have been known to all the Sanhedrin. The Apostles had been preaching about them quite vocally and publicly for several years. It was the death of Jesus on the Cross, that became the “stumbling block for the Jews”. They couldn't accept the fact that a suffering Messiah could possibly be the Promised Messiah. Stephen had been demonstrating that the Scriptures reveal all this in its own history. The lives of the great Jews – Abraham, Joseph, Moses – had been but images and shadows of this great reality, reflected on the pages of Jewish history.

Stephen goes on to demonstrate that in the case of Moses they still rejected him, even though God had confirmed before the Jews that Moses was His prophet:

*He it was whom our fathers would not obey; rather, they thrust him aside and longed to return to Egypt. “Make us gods that will be our leaders,” they said to Aaron. “As for that Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we have no idea what has happened to him.” It was then that they fashioned the calf and offered sacrifice to the idol, and had a festive celebration over the product of their own hands. But God turned away from them and abandoned them to the worship of the galaxies in the heavens. So we find it written in the Book of the Prophets: “Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings for forty years in the desert, O house of Israel? Not at All! You took along the tent of Moloch and the star of the god*

*Rephan, the images you had made for your cult. For that I will exile you beyond Babylon.”*

*(Acts 7:39-43)*

The Jews accused Stephen of blasphemy against the Law because he had chosen to follow the living oracle of Life – Jesus. From the beginning, the Jews had rejected the Law themselves, and Moses along with it. The source of their rejection was not their failure to know the truth and its source, but their own obstinate wills. They rejected God’s Way in favor of their own wills; they would follow gods of their own creation. Because of this disobedience God abandoned them to their own wills, permitting them to suffer the evil consequences flowing from it.

God had sent Jesus, a man approved by Him, but the Jews had rejected Him for messiahs in keeping with their own desires. Since they refused to accept and obey Jesus, God abandoned them to follow their false messiahs who would lead them down roads of destruction.

Stephen stresses the idea of idolatry, for he has seen in this Jewish worship of the temple an idolatry in itself. The Jews’ devotion to the temple had replaced their devotion to God. It was a work of their own hands, an extension of themselves. In their love of the temple, they loved themselves and not God. Stephen demonstrates that God cannot be confined in anything made with human hands. David had understood this. It was Solomon who built the temple, and Solomon fell into idolatry.

*Our fathers in the desert had the meeting tent as God prescribed it when he spoke to Moses, ordering him to make it according to the pattern he had seen. The next generation of our fathers inherited it. Under Joshua, they brought it into the land during the conquest of those peoples whom God drove out to make room for our fathers. So it was until the time of David, who found favor with God and begged that he might find a dwelling place for the house of Jacob. It was Solomon, however, who constructed the building for that house. Yet the Most High does not dwell in buildings made by human hands, for as the prophet says, “The heavens are my throne, the earth is my footstool. What kind of house can you build me? asks the Lord. What is my resting-place to be like? Did not my hand make all these things?”*

*(Acts 7:44-50)*

As Stephen speaks, he is overcome by the terrible reality of the sin of Israel, the rejection and murder of the Messiah, and the root cause of this sin – the pride of human will! It is the Sanhedrin that has been on trial and in them, the Jewish people. Through Stephen, the Holy Spirit now delivers the verdict:

*You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are always opposing the Holy Spirit just as your fathers did before you. Was there ever any prophet whom your fathers did not persecute? In their day, they put to death those who foretold the coming of the Just One; now you in your turn have become his betrayers and murderers. You who received the law through the ministry of angels have not observed it.*

*(Acts 7:51-53)*

Stephen's trial will not come to an end, but the trial of the Jewish people has ended and the verdict of *guilty* has been handed down. Their own actions will prove the righteousness of the verdict. Jesus had identified Satan as a liar and murderer, and those who follow him as their master will also be liars and murderers. A spirit possessed by a spirit of lying can neither accept the truth nor bear to listen to it. As Stephen lets the light of Divine Truth flood their souls, "*Those who listened to his words were stung to the heart; they ground their teeth in anger at him (Acts 7:54).*" The end has come. Stephen's words have released a diabolical rage and hatred; his physical life will not withstand its onslaught. Stephen has been a man filled with faith. He lived the faith, and he had been willing to die for it. As his faith-filled life comes to an end, he is granted a vision!

*Stephen meanwhile, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked to the sky above and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at God's right hand. "Look!" he exclaimed, "I see an opening in the sky, and the Son of Man standing at God's right hand." The onlookers were shouting aloud, holding their hands over their ears as they did so. Then they rushed at him as one man, dragged him out of the city, and began to stone him. The witnesses meanwhile were piling their cloaks at the feet of a young man named Saul.*

*(Acts 7:55-58)*

It was a requirement of Law that the witnesses against the convicted person throw the first stones. Luke indicates a close relationship between these witnesses and the man Saul. Had he inspired these witnesses?

*As Stephen was being stoned he could be heard praying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." He fell to his knees and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And with that he died*  
(Acts 7:59-60)

The trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin had ended with the sentence of blasphemy when Jesus confessed, "*Soon you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven (Mt. 26:64).*" By referring to Himself as the Son of Man, Jesus identifies Himself as the one spoken of by Daniel, who had prophesied:

*I saw One like a son of man coming, on the clouds of heaven; when he reached the Ancient One and was presented before him, He received dominion, glory, and kingship; nations and peoples of every language serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away; his kingship shall not be destroyed.*  
(Dn. 7:13-14)

The testimony of Stephen before this same Sanhedrin confirms the words of Jesus. Jesus, crucified by them, is truly the glorious Son of Man. The Jews could not bear this witness, and because they could not, Stephen dies. The Greek word for witness is *martyr*. Stephen has witnessed unto death. His name means *crown*. He is the first in the Church to win the martyr's crown. He professed by his life that Jesus is Lord. With his dying breath, his lips had confessed the Lordship of Jesus: "*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.*" This is the first recorded prayer in the history of the Church addressed to Jesus. Stephen beheld Jesus standing in the glory of God, ready to receive his spirit into eternity. He truly died a disciple of Jesus. As the Master had prayed, "*Father forgive them for they know not what they do,*" the disciple prayed, "*Lord, do not hold this sin against them.*"

**It is said that the blood of martyrs sows the seeds of faith. St. Augustine believed that if Stephen had never said this prayer, the Church would never have had a St. Paul. Today, if you go to the Holy Land, the guides will show you the place where Stephen died, and which tradition confirms. A beautiful church marks the place. Likewise, the guides will point to the Mount that looks down upon the spot where Stephen died, and they will show the place where, according to tradition, the Mother of Jesus viewed the martyrdom, wept for her son Stephen, and prayed for him at the hour of his death.**

## CHAPTER 8

### THE WINDS OF PERSECUTION

#### INTRODUCTION

The very fact that Luke devoted one-twentieth of the Acts of the Apostles to Stephen's short ministry, arrest and trial, indicates the importance of this episode in his mind. He views the mission of Stephen as a major moment in Church History. Before proceeding with our study of Acts, let us review Stephen's insights into Christian Revelations and their effects upon the mission of the Church. The Old Testament – its Prophets and Law – found fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth. It had foreshadowed, foretold, pointed to, and led to the Messiah – Jesus of Nazareth.

*Jesus the Nazorean, was a man whom God sent to you with miracles, wonders and signs as his credentials. These God worked through him in your midst, as you well know. (Acts 2:22)*

Salvation comes from the Jews! But the Jewish religion cannot produce salvation itself. It produced the Savior. Salvation must be centered on the Person of Jesus: *“For there is no other name in the whole world given to men by which we are to be saved (Acts 4:12).”* The Jewish religion completed its essential purpose in producing the Savior of the World. If the religion was to continue, it had to be integrated into the mission of the Christ; it had to become His personal instrument for achieving His divine mission as Savior of the World. Eventually, this would demand some drastic alterations in the theology and practice of Judaism.

The picture presented by history indicates a relatively small number of Jews accepted Jesus as the Messiah. The majority of Jews, following their leaders, rejected the claims of Jesus of Nazareth. These two groups, the Jews who believed in Jesus and those who rejected Him, were destined to go separate ways--one to follow the Will of God, the other to follow a course of its own choosing. Stephen revealed that God abandons those who refuse to obey Him. God leaves them to harvest what they sow – to self-produced

bitter fruit. The course taken by the Jews under the guidance of their leaders shortly led to the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple, and the party of Sadducees. As a result of this, the priesthood and sacrificial worship disappeared from among the Jews. Their lives became centered on the synagogue communities run by the laity and under the leadership of a rabbi – a layman trained in the Law and traditions of the fathers. The groups survived through the centuries in an almost cellular existence scattered across the earth. Judaism's continuance in existence, under some extremely difficult circumstances, can only be described as miraculous. They were not totally abandoned by God. Their continued existence seems to imply that the Jews, as a whole, still have an important role to play in the Divine Plan on earth. St. Paul believed it, and spoke of it in his writings.

The remnant of Jews that accepted Jesus as the Messiah, had an entirely different course to follow. Only time made clear the Divine Path that the Holy Spirit pushed the Church to take. The Holy Spirit worked in many aspects of the Body to develop the mission and theology of the Church. Religion came to center on the very Person of Jesus. An awareness that salvation could be achieved only through personal identification with the Person of Jesus developed within the Church. This demanded radical changes in thought, and a conformity of one's personal life to the Way of Jesus. A person expressed his willingness to conform by being baptized. The baptized person became empowered by the Presence of the Holy Spirit to live a life patterned on that of Jesus. Jesus was seen to be living in the baptized. Union with Jesus replaced the Law as a means for salvation. Stephen sowed the seeds of this doctrine, and Paul was destined to fully develop it, and he masterfully expressed it in his Epistle to the Romans. By the time the disciples of Jesus were faced with separating themselves from temple worship, they had been led to see through the ministry of Stephen how Jesus replaced the temple, and how His death on the Cross made temple sacrifice superfluous. The author of the Book of Hebrews, probably an Alexandrian Jew, further developed these theological concepts.

This is a broad and general picture of how one religious source (the Jewish religion) divided to become two divergent religious streams, both of them enduring through the course of nearly 2000 years, and neither being the same as when they parted. Apparently, somewhere along the course of history these two streams, Judaism and Christianity, are Divinely destined to meet and become one again. In the meantime, both have suffered, one more than the other. The disciples of Jesus have experienced the Grace of

the Lord that has made the yoke easy and the burden light. Amidst suffering in the body has been joy of the spirit. No matter the difficulties of being a Christian, when a disciple of Jesus reflects upon the alternatives, the true Christian heart echoes the sentiments of Peter when questioned by the Lord, “*Will you also go away?*” Peter responded:

*Lord, to whom shall we go? (Buddha? Confucius? Mohammed? Hare-Krishna? Joseph Smith? Judge Rutherford?) You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe; we are convinced that you are God’s holy one. (Jn. 6:69)*

Oh! The annals of men may list the name of Jesus alongside the founders of other religions, but Jesus forever remains incomparable. Others may claim to show *a way*, but He alone takes away the sin of the world that makes *The Way* possible.

### THE WINDS OF PERSECUTION

The consciousness of the Church to an awareness of its universal mission is awakened by the world knocking at its door, demanding entrance. If Jesus is the Savior of the world, He must be made available to the world. He must be presented, if possible, to every creature on earth. If the whole world cannot come to Jerusalem, then Jerusalem must go out to the whole world. This was apparently more the logic of the Holy Spirit than of the Body of the Church. The Body seemed to be somewhat contented to sit in Jerusalem and wait. It looks as if religious persecution, no doubt diabolically inspired but permitted by God, pushed the Church down the road towards world evangelization. Religious persecution, as the stimulus causing the spread of Christianity, serves to illustrate how God brings good out of evil, and how even man’s rebellion works for the Will of God.

The early Church sought intensely to prepare itself for the Second Coming by the life it lived, and by its evangelizing activities in and around Jerusalem. Only in time did the Church realize a second coming had occurred in the Coming of the Holy Spirit. The Parousia also means Presence. There was a second Presence of Jesus in the Holy Spirit – another Paraclete promised by Jesus. As Moses had to wait forty years in a foreign land before returning as leader of his people, and as Abraham waited four hundred years before the promise made to him came to be realized, so also the Messiah must wait in heaven an undetermined length



of time before He can return to the earth in glory to receive “*dominion, glory, and kingship; nations and peoples of every language serve him (Dn. 7:14).*”

Through the Holy Spirit, the Church came to realize that this glorious return of Jesus depended upon a restoration of men’s lives. Perhaps the Church first believed a restoration of Israel alone was necessary, but by the time Luke wrote the Acts, the Church came to envision the necessity for universal restoration. Luke places these words in the mouth of Peter: “*Jesus must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration which God spoke of long ago through his holy prophets (Acts 3:21).*” Does this mean the time of universal restoration occurs before the return of Jesus? Or does it mean that at some fixed date, Divinely decreed, Jesus will come and usher in the time of universal restoration? My spiritual instinct tells me the time of universal restoration will occur before Jesus returns. In fact it *must* – and the Second Coming awaits it! The Holy Spirit has been sent into this world to produce the universal restoration. The Church recognizes its mission to prepare men to receive the Holy Spirit, and to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins. Peter delivered and Luke recorded the Church’s basic message to the world:

*Reform your lives! Turn to God, that your sins may be wiped away!  
Thus may a season of refreshment be granted you by the Lord when  
he sends you Jesus, already designated as your Messiah.*

*(Acts 3:19-20)*

Once the Church realized this, it came to the awareness that it must *exodus* beyond Jerusalem. The time had come for the Church to extend beyond Palestine, so that the posterity of Jesus, like that of Abraham, “*will be strangers in a foreign land (Acts 7:6).*” The Christian Community would live in hope of the promise made to its forefathers, the Apostles. It was a People of God sent into the world to bring all men to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. In other words, the disciples of Jesus Christ are essentially a Missionary Church!

The Church discovered many of these truths only after the fact. The Holy Spirit *leads* the Church to truth and understanding of its own nature as Church, of Christian Theology, and of its universal mission. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say the Holy Spirit *pushes* the Church to this awareness. We will now return to our study of the Acts to see some

means used by the Holy Spirit to push the Church into its maturity.

Stephen has been the first disciple of Jesus to shed his blood as a witness to his faith. With his dying breath, he confessed the lordship of Jesus. He heard the summons, *"Take up your cross and follow me!"* He walked in the Master's footsteps to the very end. With his last breath, Stephen prayed for the forgiveness of his murderers. Before his eyes closed in death, they gazed with absolution upon Saul and his associates. Did Saul hear his last words? *"Lord, do not hold this sin against them (Acts 7:60)."* This prayer moved God to mercy. The blood of Stephen did not serve to quench Saul's hatred but rather to inflame it. A fanatical zeal consumed him to purge Judaism of the disciples of Jesus. The very name of Jesus had become despicable to his ears. This gang from the Synagogue of Freedmen formed a band of storm troopers under the leadership of Saul, and they descended like a pack of mad wolves that very day upon the Christian Community in Jerusalem. The death of Stephen sparked a conflagration. Luke writes:

*Saul, for his part, concurred in the act of killing. That day saw the beginning of a great persecution of the Church in Jerusalem . . . After that, Saul began to harass the Church. He entered house after house, dragged men and women out, and threw them into jail.*  
(Acts 8:1, 3)

Saul, reflecting upon his own actions some years later, adds this information:

*I persecuted this new way to the point of death. I arrested and imprisoned both men and women . . . flogged them in every synagogue. While the blood of your witness Stephen was being shed, I stood by and approved it. I even guarded the cloaks of those who killed him. . . . With the authority I received from the chief priests, I sent many of God's holy people to prison. (He first became the sheluhim of bad news.) When they were to be put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time, in synagogue after synagogue, I compelled them, by force, to blaspheme. Indeed, so wild was my fury against them that I pursued them even to foreign cities . . . I went to extremes in persecuting the Church of God and tried to destroy it. (Acts 22:4, 19-20; 26:10-11; Gal. 1:13)*

He probably nearly succeeded. The rage of Paul against the disciples of

Jesus is comparable to that of Jezebel against Elijah and the prophets of the Lord.

Paul devastated the Church in Jerusalem. Through him, a reign of terror descended upon the Church. Those who could escape fled the city. The Twelve Apostles remained behind; this was their post. Perhaps, they were not well known to Saul and his cohorts, who probably concentrated on the Greek speaking Christians. Luke tells us, *“All except the Apostles scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1b).”* Even those remaining in Jerusalem and Judea must have gone into hiding for awhile, waiting for the storm to subside.

Due to the uproar in the city against the disciples, the Community had to leave the dead body of Stephen where it lay. The Lord provided. He moved some devout Jewish men to bury His saint honorably. Luke tells us, *“Devout men buried Stephen, bewailing him loudly as they did so (Acts 8:3).”* No doubt Stephen had been a well-known and loved young man even beyond the Christian Community. If Stephen had died as a convicted criminal, the law would have forbidden such a burial. However, he had not died as a result of a judicial sentence handed down by the Sanhedrin, but as a result of mob violence. Even if he had been guilty in the eyes of the Sanhedrin, its own law demanded they must wait until the following day to pass the death sentence. Convicted criminals that had been put to death were to be buried in a common unmarked grave, or their bodies burned. Jesus Himself had been saved from this ignominy through the courage and love of Joseph of Arimethea, who personally went to Pilate and requested the body of Jesus.

The author of the Book of Hebrews recalls these days of persecution to the minds of the Hebrew Christians, and encouraged those who are afflicted now:

*Recall the days gone by when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a great contest of suffering. At times, you were publicly exposed to insult and trial; at other times you associated yourselves with those who were being so dealt with. You even joined in the sufferings of those who were in prison and joyfully assented to the confiscation of your goods, knowing that you had better and more permanent possessions. Do not, then, surrender your confidence; it will have great reward. You need patience to do God’s will and*

*receive what he has promised.*

*(Heb. 10:32-36)*

**This is precisely the lesson the Church at Jerusalem learned in the persecution following the death of Stephen.**

**Saul's hateful activities inflicted deep wounds upon the Body of the Church, and left deeply embedded scars, scars that were too deep to be entirely erased after his later repentance, and fine reputation. The Church at Jerusalem would never completely trust and receive him with open arms.**

**How did the Sanhedrin and the high priests get away with these activities when Rome forbade them to exercise the death penalty without its permission? The Roman procurator Pilate, resided in the Province of Samaria at Caesarea. He probably ignored fanatical outbursts in Jerusalem that were directed against Jews. The high priest Caiaphas apparently had been able to work well with Pilate, and could bribe his non-intervention. It is also possible all this occurred in 36 A.D., when Vitellius, the Roman legate to Syria, sent Pilate to Rome to stand trial for the murder of some Samaritans, and his replacement had not yet arrived. The Jews may have taken advantage of this interval between the changing of procurators to inflict the death penalty upon certain members of the Christian Community. Subsequently, Vitellius sent to Jerusalem and removed Joseph Caiaphas as high priest. Caiaphas had held this office during the entire ten-year procuratorship of Pilate. Jonathan, son of Ananus, then became high priest.**

**Josephus, the Jewish Historian, related that the son of the old high priest Ananus, Ananus II, did precisely this same thing in 62 A.D. The procurator Festus had died, and his replacement Albinus was on the way to Judea. Ananus II, taking advantage of the interval between procurators, had James the bishop of Jerusalem (kinsman of the Lord), and some others brought before the Sanhedrin. They were condemned and stoned to death. For this illegal action, King Agrippa removed Ananus from the office of high priest, the office he had held for only three months.**

## PHILIP IN SAMARIA

The winds of persecution, arising on the death of Stephen, scattered the disciples of Jesus like seeds across Judea and into Samaria, and the seed of faith was sown wherever they went. Luke records: "*The members of the Church who had been dispersed went about preaching the word (Acts 8:4).*" For example, Luke relates to us the ministry of Philip, one of the Seven ordained by the Apostles. Philip, who probably was well known to Saul, and likewise an object of his hatred, fled Jerusalem and headed north to Samaria; Judea was too unsafe for him. Samaria lay beyond the jurisdiction of the high priest and the Sanhedrin. The city of Samaria itself, the capitol of the province, had long been a center of refuge for those accused of breaking the Jewish law. Herod the Great restored the city beautifully and renamed it Sebaste.

During the time when Israel had been divided into the northern and southern kingdoms, Samaria had been part of Israel, the northern kingdom. Samaria stretched from the Sea on the West to the Jordan River on the East. It divided Judea from Galilee. The Jews considered the Samaritans as half-breeds, heretics, and ritually unclean. They classified them as pagans, but hated them as only members of the same family can hate. They had an interpersonal relationship going back over seven hundred years that fluctuated between cool tolerance to hot hatred, often resulting in the shedding of blood. As late as 50 AD, some Samaritans massacred a group of Galilean pilgrims on the way to Jerusalem; this resulted in retaliatory raids by the Jews. Probably the root basis of the problem came from the rivalry between the Kingdom of Israel and the Kingdom of Judea. The rivalry is reported to stem from the fact that when the Assyrians, under Sargon, captured the Northern Kingdom of Israel, 27,290 inhabitants were deported and replaced by Assyrian settlers. The Assyrians intermarried with the remaining Jews. Sargon renamed the area *Samerina*, thus, its inhabitants were called Samaritans. The Jewish prophets from Judea constantly prophesied ill for the Samaritans. When the Jews of Judah returned from their captivity in Babylon around 408 BC, they contended they had preserved their racial and religious purity, and refused any help from the Samaritans in rebuilding the temple of Jerusalem. They resisted any communication with them. This triggered a series of incidents between the two people having repercussions even 450

years later.

The Samaritans, like the Sadducees, accepted only the Law – the first five books of the Bible called the Pentateuch – as inspired Scriptures. They practiced circumcision and strictly observed the Sabbath. However, they maintained Mt. Gerezim, rather than Zion, to be the mountain of God, and that Mt. Gerezim should be the site for the temple and the rituals of the Law. They exalted Moses and looked for a messiah to come, called the *Taheb* meaning the *Restorer* or *he who returns*. The Messiah would be a prophet like Moses or even Moses reincarnated.

The Jews were deeply prejudiced against the Samaritans. The Gospel account of Matthew reflects some of this prejudice when Our Lord is quoted as telling the Apostles: “*Do not visit pagan territory and do not enter a Samaritan town (Mt. 10:5b).*” As we can see, the Jews looked upon them as pagans although they had much in common. Some have compared the situation to that of the Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. Neither Luke nor John support the implication of prejudice made in Matthew’s account. Luke speaks of the Good Samaritan, and the grateful Samaritan cured of leprosy; he also reports that Jesus tried to enter into a Samaritan town with His disciples. John tells us that He did enter a Samaritan village, and gives us the beautiful encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan Woman and the Samaritans of the town. At any rate, Samaria was a safe place for any fugitive from Judea. Any enemy of the Jews was a friend of the Samaritans. In this environment, Philip began to preach about Jesus in Samaria. The very fact that the Jews rejected Jesus and killed him would awaken a responsive cord in the Samaritans. They could identify with Jesus.

In times of political and religious upheaval, men often turn to the spiritual, looking for a foundation of security in which to root their lives. It can be a time in which the true spirit of religion may blossom, but also it can become a fertile field for spiritualism to take hold. Spiritualism can range from superstition – attributing magical powers to all sorts of material things and rituals – to actually seeking contact with spiritual entities such as the souls of the dead, or good or evil spiritual entities (spirits).

The insecurity of a society can be gauged by the popularity and multiplicity of such things as fortune tellers, palm readers, astrologists, mediums, and

witches; turning to ouija boards and tarot cards and such for divining purposes; publication and purchasing occult books; the formation of occult societies promising its members special wisdom and spiritual powers; legitimate religious groups that cater to signs and wonders – preaching doom for mankind on one hand, and salvation for the “initiated” on the other. It is a time in which true religious faith can develop, and a time that reveals the absence of true religious faith, or the superficiality of faith. *“By their fruits you will know them!”* One is real, the other counterfeit. When we say counterfeit, this does not imply that all such things are charades and fantasies. Oh no! Some are only too real – evilly real. Such things are counterfeit because they delude people – they offer no true foundation for security:

*“Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build (Ps. 127:1)!”* The only true security is to be firmly rooted in God. True religion does this for a person. True religion and spiritualism truly oppose each other; you rarely find anything but animosity existing between the two. They are as similar to each other as a false coin is similar to a genuine coin. There is nothing a false coin dislikes more than to be next to a genuine coin! Often, only the trained eye can distinguish between them, so that many are deluded into accepting the false coins. But the false coins never pay off. With them, the spirit never hits the jackpot of Joy, Peace, and Love!

Such a time as this existed in the Roman Empire when the Church came into being. It would have been natural for the Hebrew Christians to cling to the tried and true ways of their Jewish religion. It was going to take great faith for them to walk away from the light of a setting sun into the darkness, although they knew in their hearts that a new and glorious day for religion was about to dawn. They would have to face the night bravely in order to welcome a brand new day in which they could joyfully proclaim: *“This is the day the Lord has made – Let us rejoice and be glad!”* We can understand if they moved a bit reluctantly. That they did eventually step into the dark, leaving familiar territory, was faith’s miracle!

The faith of the people of the city of Samaria had a less secure foundation than the people of Judea. In our Lord’s day, the Samaritan woman said to Him, *“Sir, I can see you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but people claim that Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship God.”* This statement centered on a sensitive religious issue between the Jews and Samaritans; they had been warring over it for years.

When it comes to religious truth, it is not a matter so much of *who* is right, but *what* is right (true)! The Light of Truth can only reveal the truth. Jesus responded to the woman, “*You people worship what you do not understand, while we understand what we worship; after all, salvation is from the Jews (Jn. 4:19, 22).*”

Because the Samaritans worshipped what they did not understand, they were very vulnerable to what was counterfeit: to spiritualism and spiritual cons and charlatans. Unfortunately, all the spiritual cons and charlatans are not always human. In times of insecurity, they abound. They are the spiritual jackals of society! If they but fleeced the sheep, it would not be all that bad. But they also poison and corrupt the sheep, sometimes feeding them evil doctrines or keeping them on a diet of sugar-and-spice-and everything-nice, until they are too spiritually anemic for true religious faith. (Christians today would do well to contemplate the Jonestown tragedy of Guiana.)

Such was the society of the city of Samaria in which Philip preached. Through Philip, God meets the people where they are. Words would not be sufficient to initiate faith. The Samaritans were raised upon a diet of signs and wonders, and this is what their souls hungered for. The works that accompanied the preaching of the Word far exceeded anything the city had ever witnessed before:

*There were many who had unclean spirits, which came out shrieking loudly. Many others were paralytics or cripples, and these were cured. . . . Without exception, the crowds that heard Philip and saw the miracles he performed attended closely to what he had to say.*  
(Acts 8:7, 6)

The people began to experience a spirit within themselves, one they had never experienced before. It was the spirit of Joy! “*The rejoicing in that town rose to fever pitch (Acts 8:8).*” (It is because the true spirit of the Gospel brings joy that made Teresa of Avila suspicious of sad saints: “*Sad saints are indeed sad saints!*”) Large numbers of the Samaritans embraced the faith and were baptized. Among these converts, Luke centers our attention upon one particular man – Simon.

Simon was a magician. No one can better see through the magic of a magician than another magician. Simon watched Philip closely and was



profoundly impressed. Philip made a believer out of Simon. From the account given, this was some conversion – Simon had been a superstar in his own field. He went from being a master to a disciple. Luke gives this account:

*A certain man named Simon had been practicing magic in the town and holding the Samaritans spellbound. He passed himself off as someone of great importance. People from every rank of society were paying attention to him. "He is the power of the great God," they said. Those who followed him had been under the spell of his magic over a long period; but once they began to believe in the good news that Philip preached about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, men and women alike accepted baptism. Even Simon believed. He was baptized like the rest and became a devoted follower of Philip. He watched the signs and the great miracles as they occurred, and was quite carried away.*

*(Acts 8:9-13)*

This is the first mention of preaching about the kingdom of God. Apparently, this is a necessary preaching, along with the preaching about Jesus, in such a spiritual environment. Another thing we must note about Luke is that in both his Gospel account and Acts, he never leaves the women out. He certainly emphasizes that in Christ *"there is neither male nor female."*

#### CONFIRMATION BY PETER AND JOHN

Luke shifts the scene back to Jerusalem. Reports have come to the Apostles of the conversions in Samaria. This is the first report of anyone entering the Church other than bona fide Jews. No doubt the news caused a little surprise and uneasiness that those detested Samaritans had entered the Christian Community. But, after all, they are circumcised, observe the Law, believe in Moses, and are looking for the Messiah – it is not as if they were pagans! The Church in Jerusalem decided to accept them as true members of the Community. Luke informs us:

*When the Apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. (Acts 8:14)*

Those Christians, who resent the authority of the Bishop of Rome as head

of the Church, often use this episode to show that Peter did not exercise any special authority, or hold any position of supremacy in the Church. It hardly seems the intention of Luke to deal with this matter at all. Truly, the text proves nothing of the sort. It certainly indicates that Peter acts as a servant of the Church to implement a decision made by the Church Council. What Luke truly teaches us in this episode is that the decision to accept the Samaritans into the Church is a work of the Holy Spirit, indicated by the Apostles making their acceptance of the Samaritans a joint decision. And it is the Holy Spirit that sends Peter and John to Samaria. The fact that Peter goes is not without importance itself. Since this is an innovation in Church policy, it is proper that the head of the Church supervise and confirm it.

Philip has, prophet-like, opened this new door to the Church under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Luke ties in what Philip has done in Samaria with the established Christian Community. He indicates that the Church in Samaria is not an autonomous body, but has a dependence upon the Church of Jerusalem – the dependence that a body has upon the head. There is an organic unity in the Church. There is organization and authority in the Church, and each Christian needs to accept this. Even though the Samaritans believe in Jesus and have been baptized, they still need the ministry of the Church's leaders in order to receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit. If we cut ourselves off from the leadership of the Church, we have certainly cut ourselves off from certain ministries of the Holy Spirit, which are vital to our spiritual life.

In the Samaritan incident, the Church has recognized the administration of the Sacrament of Confirmation. The Apostles (the Church) certainly confirm and strengthen what has been wrought through Philip. Luke describes the visit of Peter and John to Samaria thus:

*The two went down to these people and prayed that they might receive the Holy Spirit. It had not as yet come down upon any of them since they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. The pair, upon arriving, imposed hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.*  
(Acts 8:14-17)

It is interesting that John is Peter's companion to Samaria. Recall, that in the life of Jesus, when the Samaritan town refused to welcome Jesus and His disciples, it was John and James who said to Jesus, "Lord, would you not

*have us call down fire from heaven to destroy them (Lk. 9:54)?”* The Lord reprimanded them, telling them they knew not what spirit motivated this question. Now that John has the right spirit, he is permitted to call down fire upon the Samaritans, but this time, it is the fire of Divine Love – the Holy Spirit.

### THE SIN OF SIMON

Luke once again centers our attention on that famous convert, Simon:

*Simon observed that it was through the laying on of hands that the apostles conferred the Spirit, and he made them an offer of money with the request, “Give me that power too, so that if I placed my hands on anyone he will receive the Holy Spirit.”*

Peter is shocked by the request and reacts strongly:

*Peter said in answer, “May you and your money rot – thinking God’s gift can be bought! You can have no portion or lot in this affair. Your heart is not steadfastly set on God. Reform your evil ways. Pray that the Lord may pardon you for thinking the way you have. I see you poisoned with gall and caught in the grip of sin.” Simon responded, “I need the prayers of all of you to the Lord, so that what you have just said may never happen to me.”*

*(Acts 8:18-24)*

Some people still have the nerve to maintain, in light of this incident, that Peter never acted with unique authority in the Church. No matter in what language you read this, it still comes out the same way. The Apostle Peter, the head of the Church, has just told a member of the Church to go to Hell! In one ancient text of Acts, Simon carried on for days after this, mourning and crying in near despair.

Simon has the distinction of doing what is almost impossible – creating a new sin. He has the dubious honor of having it named after him – “simony” (commercial trafficking in sacred things). Simon had carefully noted the signs and wonders worked by Philip; they intrigued him. No doubt Philip explained that he had received the power to do such things from the Apostles; it went with the office. When Simon met Peter and John, he offered money for this office. Peter read that it was his intention

to make money by selling the Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Simon is an example of a person who becomes a Christian without true repentance – without turning away from his old way of life deep down in his soul. The Scriptures describes this as a dog returning to his vomit, and as a man plowing a field and looking back, rendering himself unfit for the kingdom. The Church may maintain that the sacraments work independently of the spiritual condition of the minister, but never independently of the spiritual condition of the recipient of the sacrament. The Church maintains that faith and baptism are not enough for salvation. This incident related by Luke demonstrates this teaching to be true. Luke clearly indicates that Simon believes. He uses the same word to express the faith of Simon that he uses to express the faith of those at Pentecost. Simon received Baptism. He devoted himself to his minister. But when Peter read his soul, he saw deep-seated sin there, sin that was capable of damning Simon: *“I see you poisoned with gall and caught in the grip of sin. Your heart is not steadfastly set on God.”* Peter’s words imply that Simon had not yet repented: *“Reform your evil ways.”* These words filled Simon with fear, and he begged the Community for prayer. These prayers can be of no avail if he stubbornly clings to his sins. Fear is an emotion; repentance is an act of the will. Tradition confirms that when the fear subsided, Simon returned to his old ways, nourishing and abiding hatred for Peter. Apparently, from a report of Josephus, Simon appeared in Caesarea as a friend of the Procurator Felix, posing as a Jewish magician from Cyprus. Felix used Simon to woo Drusilla away from her husband. Simon is also credited with the foundation of the first heresy in the Church: Gnosticism.

Simon’s previous lifestyle indicated a person who used magic to exert influence and power over people, probably bringing a measure of wealth to himself. He used occult powers and trickery to gain power over others. From all reports, he was quite successful. Was it money or power that attracted Simon? Maybe both; money brings power. Luke seems to imply that it was primarily power that attracted Simon. He may well have intended to use power to make money. Being able to take money from others demonstrates one’s power over them. Psychologically, this indicates a weakness of personality, a lack of true ego strength. The person gains strength, not from inner growth of power and talent, but by being in a position to dominate and control others. This usually expresses an inability to truly love others, and an adulation and attraction to those possessing

power. What we know of Simon from other sources indicates he was this type of man.

It has not been uncommon in the Church to find men attracted to the priesthood, not as a means to serve God or people, but as a position of power and status for themselves. Such men use their office to bolster their weak self-images. Many such men left the priesthood when the priesthood lost a lot of its fringe benefits after the Second Vatican Council. Many who have left the priesthood never had a true calling, or if they had, they answered it for the wrong reasons. This also applies to many who became religious sisters and brothers.

Simon was attracted to the *charism* of the Holy Spirit – not to the Holy Spirit. It has been known in our own day that some Christians have used the gifts of the Holy Spirit, not to build up the Community, but to build up their own selves in the eyes of the Community. Some charismatic persons dominate and manipulate the Community through the exercise of their gifts. They become insensitive to the needs of others, or the religious sensitivities of others. St. Paul clearly taught that the gift of tongues was given for personal edification, not for community edification. He implied that it was a gift to be rarely used in public worship. One who exercises the gift of tongues in public should truly examine one's conscience to ascertain what is one's true motivation for doing so.

### PHILIP THE EVANGELIST

Luke relates that Peter and John not only confirmed the Samaritans, but they fulfilled their own essential apostolic role of *“giving their testimony and proclaiming the word of the Lord.”* Luke relates that they evangelized all the way back to Judea: *“They went back to Jerusalem bringing the good news to many villages of Samaria on the way (Acts 8:25).”* We certainly have to credit Philip's zeal for getting the Apostles out of Jerusalem for the first time.

Luke reports another task in which the Lord uses His servant Philip. In these brief glimpses of Philip, we see a certain resemblance to the prophet Elijah, as our Lord moves this docile servant first here and then there. The Lord sends Philip south towards the Gaza strip leading to Egypt. Philip does not know the purpose of his mission, only the direction. The city of Gaza was about sixty-five miles south of the city of Samaria. The ancient city of

Gaza lay in ruins about ten miles east of the coast. The Romans had restored the city, building it along the seacoast. The caravans to and from Egypt passed through ancient Gaza – now a desert region. Luke tells us:

*An angel of the Lord then addressed himself to Philip, “Head south toward the road which goes from Jerusalem to Gaza, the desert route.” Philip began the journey.*

*(Acts 8:26)*

Philip meets a caravan heading south. In the caravan was an important black official, a eunuch who was the treasurer for the Candace – the female ruler of the kingdom of Meroe. The Scriptures refer to him as from Ethiopia, which was a broad description of the area that covered all Africa south of Egypt. We know from the Roman historian Pliny, that Meroe was governed by queens whose royal title was Candake. The man was returning from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He probably adhered to the Jewish religion although he could not, as a eunuch, be received into “*the Community of the Lord,*” according to Deuteronomy 23:2. Isaiah had prophesied an end to this exclusion from God’s Community when he said:

*Let not the foreigner say,  
when he would join himself to the Lord,  
“The Lord will surely exclude me from his people”;  
Nor let the eunuch say,  
“See, I am a dry tree.”  
For thus says the Lord:  
To the eunuchs who observe my Sabbaths  
and choose what pleases me  
and hold fast to my covenant,  
I will give, in my house  
and within my walls, a monument and a name,  
Better than sons and daughters;  
an eternal, imperishable name will I give them.  
...  
For my house shall be called  
a house of prayer for all peoples. (Is. 56:3-5,7c)*

It was a teaching of the rabbis that “*one who is on a journey and without companion should employ his thoughts on the study of the law.*” A black man was reading aloud, as was the custom of the time, from the Book of Isaiah.

Philip now finds out why he is there. The Spirit says to Philip, *“Go and catch up with that carriage,”* and Philip takes it from there.

*“Do you really grasp what you are reading?” “How can I,” the man replied, “unless someone explains it to me?” With that, he invited Philip to get in and sit down beside him. This was the passage of Scripture he was reading: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, like a lamb before its shearer he was silent and opened not his mouth. In his humiliation, he was deprived of justice. Who will ever speak of his posterity, for he is deprived of his life on earth?” The eunuch said to Philip, “Tell me, if you will, of whom the prophet says this – himself or someone else?” Philip launched out with this Scripture passage as his starting point, telling him the good news of Jesus.*

*(Acts 8:29-35)*

The man is brought to faith in Jesus through the Scriptures. Here no signs and wonders are needed. The evangelist had a soul of greater spiritual maturity upon which to work, and faith quickly took root. He obviously possessed a docility of spirit that gave him a spiritual receptivity to truth. *“How can I unless someone explains it to me?”* expresses his humility of heart. The Lord exalts the humble.

The Spirit of the Lord had taken Philip on this long journey to bring one man into the Church. As the Scriptures teach us, *“His eye is upon the sparrow.”* This incident emphasizes the importance of one soul. Some years ago a young priest was assigned to a vast rural parish in Alabama. Someone told the priest that there was a lady over on the other side of Union Springs interested in the Catholic Church. After much effort, he succeeded in locating her home – which was about sixty miles from the parish house. When the priest knocked on the door, a lady of about seventy-three opened the door. The priest said to her, *“I understand you are interested in the Catholic Church.”* The lady replied, *“Interested?! I have been waiting thirty-five years to find someone to bring me into the Catholic Church.”* For six months, the priest drove 120 miles weekly to instruct this lady.

These Scriptures confirm the necessity of the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit, and Christian teachers for the understanding of religious truth. Did not the Holy Spirit explain to the eunuch the mysteries of the Scriptures? Yes, indeed He did, but He did so through a Christian teacher. That is His

ordinary means through which He instructs us. When Philip ended his instruction, the man asked to receive Baptism.

*As they moved along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "Look, there is some water right there. What is to keep me from being baptized?" He ordered the carriage stopped, and Philip went down into the water with the eunuch and baptized him.*

*(Acts 8:36-37)*

In some Bibles, you will find that Philip answers in response to the eunuch's question, "If you believe with all your heart, you may!" And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." This has been removed because it is not to be found in the earliest manuscripts, but it does appear as far back as the second century. This was part of the early baptismal rite that slipped into the text.

*When they came out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away and the eunuch saw him no more. Nevertheless, the man went on his way rejoicing. Philip found himself at Azotus next, and he went about announcing the good news in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.*

*(Acts 39-40)*

For a few moments, two men met briefly and shared a religious experience. The black man continued south towards Africa, filled with the joy of his new faith. Philip headed north working in the ministry along the coast until he brought the faith to Caesarea, where he apparently settled. The next time Philip is mentioned, twenty years have passed. Paul is making his last trip to Jerusalem accompanied by Luke. Luke writes:

*The next day we pushed on and came to Caesarea. There we entered the home of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven, with whom we stayed. This man had four unmarried daughters gifted with prophecy.*

*(Acts 21:8-9)*

At this visit, Luke heard the stories he later recorded for us. Philip now has a new title, and a well deserved one, *Philip the Evangelist*.

Luke presented Philip not because he was rare, but because he was a fine example of how the disciples of Jesus spread the good news. It is beautiful



to behold how much good one willing servant of the Lord can do. Acts emphasizes the importance of the ministry of one individual in the Church – either for good or evil. The Apostles were needed, but where would the Church of God be without its Stephens and Philips?

Philip and the black man would never meet again on earth, but they would meet again in the Kingdom of God. What had occurred so long ago on earth will be a cause of eternal joy to them both.

Once the great missionary priest Thomas Judge asked a young lay missionary, whom he had met at the train station in Columbus, Georgia, what she had talked about to the man who had been seated next to her on the train. She replied that she had not spoken to him. Father Judge said, “You mean you sat next to him all those hours and you never shared any of your faith with him?” The young lady replied, “I did not see any reason to as I would never see him again.” Father Judge said to her, “*Oh yes you will – on Judgment Day!*”

## CHAPTER 9

### SAUL OF TARSUS

#### INTRODUCTION

Saul of Tarsus was a religious zealot. Religion dominated his life to a fanatical degree. It consumed his thoughts, it motivated his actions. What the Lord said of Jeremiah, He may well have spoken of Saul: *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you (Jer. 1:5).”* Saul sensed that God had set him apart even before his birth (*See Gal. 1:15*). The Divine call to righteousness – *“come follow me!”* – resounded early in the soul of Saul. In keeping with the recommendations of the Rabbis, Saul began to learn the Torah at an early age (At five years old, a boy should apply himself to the study of Holy Scripture). An awareness of God sufficiently dominated the conscience of Saul to preserve him from worldly influence in his early environment.

Saul was born no later than 10 A.D., in the city of Tarsus, which today is part of modern Turkey. In 66 B.C., Pompey, after his conquest of Asia Minor, reorganized the area and set up the Roman Province of Cilicia, making Tarsus its capital. Mark Anthony later granted freedom, immunity, and citizenship to the town; the Emperor Augustus confirmed these rights. Saul was born a Roman citizen. He later boasted, *“A citizen of no mean town.”*

Tarsus was a cultural center for philosophy and education. Its schools surpassed even those of Athens and Alexandria, and its students were natives of Cilicia. The famous came to the city. Roman emperors sought tutors here for their children; through its gates came Julius Caesar, Caesar Augustus, Mark Anthony, and the famous orator Cicero. In 41 B.C., Mark Anthony summoned Cleopatra to Tarsus for their first meeting. The city would long remember the royal reception given Cleopatra as she disembarked in Tarsus.

Saul's own testimony confirms he was born "*Hebrew of Hebrews*" – a way of saying that his total background and culture was Jewish. He was born of the tribe of Benjamin, circumcised on the eighth day, and was called Saul (Jews who lived and worked in a Greek and Roman environment often had both Hebrew and Gentile names.). Saul was not an only child. Acts speaks of a sister who lived in Jerusalem. Saul's early life was divided between Tarsus and Jerusalem. In his youth he may have spent a good deal of time in Jerusalem. He himself said:

*The way I have lived since my youth, and the life I have led among my own people from the beginning and later at Jerusalem, is well known to all Jews. . . . I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but I was brought up in this city. Here I sat at the feet of Gamaliel and was educated strictly in the law of our fathers.*

*(Acts 26:4; 22:3)*

In his testimony before King Agrippa, he states that he was born into a family of Pharisees and reared as one:

*Brothers, I am a Pharisee and was born a Pharisee. . . . they can testify to my life lived as a Pharisee, the strictest sect of our religion.*

*(Acts 23:6b; 26:5)*

This background material has led many scholars to maintain that Paul received little, if any training in the Grecian schools of Tarsus. His own writing indicates he was not trained in the classical Greek. But any person with such a nature as Saul's would not have been immune to his environment; he would consciously and unconsciously absorb what it had to offer, if for no better reason than to hate it the more. His environment at Tarsus influenced him and he remained always, in feeling and expression, a city boy.

The philosophy of the Pharisees shaped his moral and religious outlook. Revelation and grace would later alter and temper his personality, but never completely change it. Saul too, as all men, is a product of his environment to some degree. The very name Pharisee probably implied "*the separated.*" They conceived Judaism as a religion centered upon the

observance of the Law. They interpreted the obligations of the Law in a most severe manner, but even among themselves, there existed both the rigorous and the less rigorous schools of thought. As a lay group, the Pharisees stood in opposition to the Sadducees on the one hand, and to the "*people of the land*" on the other. They considered both groups lost ignorant souls, who neither knew nor cared to know the Law as so divinely interpreted by the Pharisees. They held themselves in high opinion, and apparently many of the people they despised respected them. John the Baptist had his own personal opinion of the Pharisees. He called them "*a brood of vipers.*" The mildest thing Jesus of Nazareth said of them was that the righteousness of his disciples must excel that of the Pharisees if they hoped to enter the Kingdom of God. At other times, He referred to them as a wicked and adulterous generation (*see Mt. 12:38; 15:1*). Jesus condemned their exclusiveness as harsh (*see Mt. 9:9-13; Lk. 5:27-32*), and their rigoristic interpretation of the Law as intolerable (*see Mt. 12:2, Lk. 6:2*). The word Jesus used most often to describe them was hypocrites, because they insisted on the observance of mere external formalities while evading the more sacred obligations of the Law. Their basic fault was pride--seeing in their narrow interpretation of the Law the fullness of Judaism. They restricted the saving Power of God and Divine Love to the measure of their own narrow hearts. This is the soil that produced Saul. He graduated from their school summa cum laude. As he tells us:

*I made progress in Jewish observance far beyond most of my contemporaries, in my excess of zeal to live out all the traditions of my ancestors.*  
(Gal. 1:14)

Saul, no doubt, exemplifies the best and the worst in the Pharisees.

### SAUL THE TALMID

At the time of Jesus, Jerusalem was the center of Jewish theological and juridical knowledge and training. From all corners of the known world, young Jews streamed to Jerusalem to sit at the feet of the masters whose teachings were repeated and respected throughout the Jewish communities. At the time of Herod, Hillel came from Babylonia to hear Shemaiah. Later, as Rabbi, Hillel's own school of thought became the rival of the school of Shemaiah. Christian tradition holds that it was Simeon, the son of Hillel that held the Infant Jesus in his arms. Gamaliel is reported to have been the grandson of Hillel. Gamaliel was the most famous Jewish

Scribe/Lawyer of his time. It was written: "*With the death of Gamaliel I, the reverence for the Divine Law ceased, and the observance of purity and abstinence departed.*" Gamaliel was a friend of the great Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria. The school of Gamaliel was more moderate, less rigoristic, than many of his peers. As we recall, it was his advice to the Sanhedrin that saved the lives of the Apostles:

*Have nothing to do with these men. Let them alone. If their purpose or activity is human in its origins, it will destroy itself. If, on the other hand, it comes from God, you will not be able to destroy them without fighting God himself.*

(Acts 5:38b-39)

Gamaliel was a Rabbi teaching between 20 and 50 A.D. During these years, men would have come from all over to sit at his feet. A student was called a *Talmid*. Students learned from their masters, in daily life as well as in the classroom, of all matters of law, traditions, and rituals. They often copied the very actions and gestures of the Scribes. These great Scribes were held in high esteem and their teachings received unconditional obedience, especially from members of the Pharisaic party. Their decisions had the power to bind or loose.

When a young Jew desired to be a Scribe, he had to enroll in a school as a Talmid. He pursued a regular course of studies for several years. When he had mastered all the material and the halakic method to where he could make capable decisions in religious and penal matters, he reached the status of *Talmid Hakam*--a non-ordained scholar. Only when he attained the canonical age of 40 could he be ordained, and be received into the company of the Scribes as a *Hakam*--an ordained scholar. Such an ordination ceremony only implied that he was an official and legitimate teacher in the Community of Israel. Of course it had nothing to do with the Jewish priesthood--for that was hereditary. Once a man became a Hakam, he had full authority to make his own decisions on matters of religious legislation and rituals, to act as judge in criminal proceedings, and to pass judgment in civil cases, either as a member of the court or as an individual. He received the title of *Rabbi*. In our Lord's day, this title of Rabbi was somewhat loosely applied; it later became restricted to a Hakam. As mentioned before, Gamaliel was called *Rabban*, a title of special honor; he was acknowledged as a great teacher.

Saul came from Tarsus to sit at the feet of Gamaliel. Before coming to Jerusalem, Saul probably had been trained as a tent maker. This does not detract from the fact that he most likely came from a wealthy and aristocratic family. It was the rule of the school that if a young man intended to be a Rabbi, he must first learn a trade by which he could support himself. They had a saying: "*He who taught not his son a trade taught him to be a thief.*" Strictly speaking, Rabbis did not charge their students for their lessons. Of course, there were ways of getting around this custom; contributions were gladly accepted. Students did have to pay the owners of the buildings that housed the schools.

No doubt when Saul went to Jerusalem to sit at the feet of the most famous Gamaliel, the mysterious longing within his soul began to assume shape and take direction. His soul thirsted for righteousness before God, and he discovered in the Law the road to satiate this thirst. Saul heard the words spoken by Moses to Israel as if they were spoken directly to him:

*For this command which I enjoin on you today is not too mysterious and remote for you. It is not up in the sky, that you should say, "Who will go up in the sky to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?" . . . No, it is something very near to you, already in your mouths and in your hearts; you have only to carry it out.*

*Here, then, I have today set before you life and prosperity, death and doom. If you obey the commandments of the Lord, your God, which I enjoin on you today, loving him, and walking in his ways, and keeping his commandments, statutes and decrees, you will live. . . . I call heaven and earth today to witness against you: I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the Lord, your God, heeding his voice, and holding fast to him. For that will mean life for you.*

*(Dt. 30:11-16; 19-20a)*

With all his heart, Saul chose life.

Fully obeying the Law as decreed by Moses expressed an Israelite's true love of God. Saul desired to love God as the Scriptures decreed; he embraced the Law and channeled the energies of his soul, not only to obey,

but also to excel in his zeal for the Law:

*I made progress in Jewish observance far beyond most of my contemporaries, in my excess of zeal to live out all the traditions of my ancestors.*

*(Gal. 1:14)*

Many a true religious spirit has been stifled, corrupted, or retarded by faulty religious training. The teachers who mold the religious spirits of others unfortunately can give only what they have. Many of them are mediocre and retarded spirits themselves. They have become birds in a cage that are not aware of the freer air. They are unable to direct the fledgling eagles of the spirit wherein to fly. They have become like fish in a bowl with no awareness that they were meant to swim in the sea. They can only train others to adapt to the bowl. A priest once reported that it took him fifteen years to recover from the deformation he suffered during the years of his formation in the seminary. His restoration to normalcy was aided by a dream in which three people appeared--a young boy, a young man, and an older man. In the dream the young boy appeared to be a spontaneous and free spirit. The character of this young boy disturbed the somber and self-controlled young man very much, and the young man harshly rejected and corrected the young boy. The older man saw how wrong all this was and came to the defense of the young boy, telling the young man to leave him alone--*"He is beautiful as he is."* This dream was interpreted for the priest. All three persons in the dream were the same person--the priest. The priest recognized in himself the young boy that he had rejected when he became a young man, but now he was able to accept the true personality that his unrealistic seminary training had forced him to reject.

The spirit of Saul was subjected to intense religious training under Gamaliel. His Rabbi may have been the best, but he still was a product of the religious culture of the day. The very fact that he was so well accepted testifies he kept well within the traditional bounds of accepted teachings. By this time, the traditions of the ancients had assumed an importance equal to the Law itself. There were many hedges erected to protect the Law. The Pharisaic section of Judaism defined 248 commandments and 365 prohibitions to be observed in order to be righteous before God. The Law and the hedges had become indistinguishable as far as moral responsibility went; they were all on the same level. They made religion an insufferable

burden; certainly no longer something light enough to be always in the mouth and on the tongue. The Rabbis taught that to break one law was to break the whole Law, and one lost righteousness before God and became subject to the full penalty of the Law. In those days, the Pharisees did not distinguish between evil done intentionally and evil done unknowingly or accidentally. They made no distinction between the physical aspect of man and the spiritual. If a person violated the ritual regulation of walking over a grave, whether conscious of the fact or not, the person became physically and spiritually impure in the eyes of God, and was thereby cut off from the worship of God until subjected to a purifying ritual.

The Scribes elaborated all kinds of methods of getting around the traditions and the Law. The Scribes satisfied the consciences of men, but in the end no one kept the Law. No one truly had the spirit of the Law. For example, the Law clearly stated that creeping things were ritually unclean. But the Talmud informs us that no one is appointed a member of the Sanhedrin who does not possess sufficient ingenuity to prove from the written Law that a creeping thing *is* ceremonially clean. One famous disciple of Rabbi Jabne could produce 150 arguments in favor of the ritual cleanliness of creeping things. Another example is that the Law called for the canceling of all debts in the Sabbatic year (every seven years) towards all Jewish brothers. Rich Jews refused to lend their money the year before the Sabbatic year. This was bad for the economy. The Scribes devised the Prosbol, a legal fiction voiding the Law. The moneylender said to the debtor:

*“In accordance with the Sabbatical year, I remit you the debt,” and the debtor replied, “Nevertheless I wish to pay it.” The creditor was free then from the obligation of Deuteronomy that commanded: “At the end of every seven-year period you shall have a relaxation of debts . . . every creditor shall relax his claim on what he has loaned his neighbor”*

*(Dt. 15:1-2)*

Saul’s educational training perverted into legalism everything that had been genuine in him. Such a spirit does not foster love of God or love of neighbor. Such a religious spirit often finds expression and release in hating others in the Name of God, of espousing causes that truly express contempt and hatred of others. The religious life of such a person reflects a very negative attitude about God.



Saul evidently possessed a spirit of great national pride. Roman domination of Israel would be difficult for him to bear. Concepts of the glorious Messiah that would destroy the hated enemies of Israel would be dear to him. The teaching of the Rabbis that faithful adherence to the Law would bring the Messiah, would have stirred the personal zeal of Saul, and encourage others, to keep the Law of Moses. To a man of his pride and training it would be absurd to believe a crucified Jew capable of being the Messiah of Israel – the pride and glory of Israel! Such thoughts would be blasphemous. By the very fact of Jesus' crucifixion, the Law confirmed Jesus could not be the Messiah. *"Cursed be he that hangs upon the tree!"* The curse of God rests upon Jesus of Nazareth. Likewise, anyone who supported His claims or fostered the teachings of this false prophet was cursed of God. The perverted religious spirit of Saul expressed its zeal for the Law in a relentless persecution of the disciples of Jesus, which probably lasted three to four years.

Did Saul's rigorous obedience to the Law make him a man at peace with God? His life did not produce the fruits of peace. His actions suggest a man hiding from a conscious awareness of the poverty of his own soul. The words Saul quotes from the Scriptures to the Romans perhaps expressed, to some degree, his own spiritual state at this time in his life:

*There is no just man, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one in search of God. All have taken the wrong course, all alike have become worthless; not one of them acts uprightly, no, not one. Their throats are open tombs; they use their tongues to deceive; the venom of asps lies behind their lips. Their mouths are full of curses and bitterness. Swiftly run their feet to shed blood; ruin and misery strew their course. The path of peace is unknown to them; the fear of God is not before their eyes.*

*(Rom. 3:10-18)*

## THE CONVERSION

Saul first appears on the Scripture scene as an enemy of Stephen. Saul silently watched as Stephen was stoned to death; he guarded the cloaks of those who stoned him. In his self-confession, he said, "*While the blood of your witness Stephen was being shed, I stood by and approved it. I even guarded the cloaks of those who killed him (Acts 22:20).*" At that time, he appeared as the great persecutor of the disciples of Jesus. He, more than any other, had understood the danger to Judaism in the teachings of Stephen. It had enkindled his fanatical zeal against the Christian Community, inaugurating a bloody persecution and a reign of terror lasting for several years. As he said:

*I once thought it my duty to oppose the name of Jesus the Nazorean in every way possible. . . . With the authority I received from the chief priest, I sent many of God's holy people to prison. When they were to be put to death I cast my vote against them. (Acts 26:9-10)*

Saul's statement indicates he had been a member of the Sanhedrin. Only such members could cast votes for a death penalty. He was probably on the Sanhedrin due to his family position. He would have to be over thirty in order to be on the Council. He never speaks of himself as a scribe; he probably had attained the status of a Talmid-Hakam.

That the persecution begun by Saul lasted several years can be deduced from Saul's statement, "*I pursued them even to foreign cities.*" He had become the *sheluhim*, the apostle of the high priest, extending the persecution to Jewish Communities in foreign cities. It was not unusual for the Jewish high priest to exercise power in these Jewish Communities beyond Judea. In 1st Maccabees 15:15-21, we read that the Romans sanctioned the extradition of Jews who had fled to Egypt, and ordered Ptolemy to hand them over to the power of the Jewish high priest. Julius Caesar issued an edict in 47 B.C., decreeing special privileges to the Jewish high priest and his descendants stating, among other things, that if any questions arose that touched Jewish policy, he desired final determination be referred to him. Other emperors re-confirmed the privilege that gave the high priest certain jurisdiction over Jews wherever they lived. Whether

such a privilege would be honored would depend on the political climate at the time.

Luke records:

*Saul, still breathing murderous threats against the Lord's disciples, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus which would empower him to arrest and bring to Jerusalem anyone he might find, man or woman, living according to the new way. (Acts 9:1-2)*

Damascus is located on the fertile plains at the foot of Mount Hermon, about 136 miles north of Jerusalem. Being about 3700 feet above sea level, it enjoys a cool temperate climate. It was the most ancient city in Syria and many Jews dwelt there. Damascus was under Roman domination until 37 A.D. when control passed to King Aretas of Petra, thereby becoming an Arabian city. Under the reign of Nero, Damascus again returned to Roman dominion. At the time of his reign, King Aretas was hostile towards Herod Antipas of Galilee, who had divorced his daughter to marry Herodias. He would have courted the good favor of the Jews in Judea, and cooperated with the wishes of the Jewish high priest.

On such an expedition, Saul and his companions probably rode on horses or mules rather than walk, but Luke seems to imply they were on foot. As they headed for Damascus, Saul was "ambushed" along the road. As they would say in the old westerns, he was "bush-whacked" along the way. Luke had heard this story many times. Here he relates, as a Church historian, the incident as it relates to Church history rather than to Saul personally:

*As he traveled along and was approaching Damascus, a light from the sky suddenly flashed about him. He fell to the ground and at the same time heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, sir?" he asked. The voice answered, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting. Get up and go into the city, where you will be told what to do." The men who were traveling with him stood there speechless. They had heard the voice but could see no one. Saul got up from the ground unable to see, even though his eyes were open. They had to take him by the hand and lead him into Damascus.*

*(Acts 9:3-8)*

Saul is knocked off his feet. Saul, who was *“a man filled with arrogance (see 1Tm. 1:13)”*, in the power of young manhood, riding high in the eyes of the Jerusalem authorities, leaving town *“breathing murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples,”* lies in the dirt. When raised to his feet, he is unable to see the way before him. Completely helpless, others must lead him by the hand down the road to Damascus. He is a pitiful sight, stumbling into the city, keeping close to those holding his hand and leading him down its streets. The Scriptures tell us that the Lord resists the proud, and Mary sang: *“He puts the mighty down from their thrones.”* The proud Saul met the meek and humble Jesus of Nazareth, and the meeting was a total humiliation for Saul. As a lord commands a slave, Jesus said to him, *“Get up and go into the city, where you will be told what to do.”*

When Saul had eyes he could not see; now that he was blinded he began to see. The light shone in the darkness, and what Saul began to see left no heart in him to live. No exterior blackness could match the dark despair rising out of his crushed human pride. People in their ignorance and pride make mistakes; Saul made catastrophes. He had thought himself so close to righteousness, but after what he beheld in the blinding light he saw that all had been blasphemous. Totally and absolutely wrong! In truth, he had become a blasphemer of God. Would that the stones that fell upon Stephen could now fall upon him, hiding his shame and releasing him from the terrible pain gripping his soul. With his own eyes, he beheld this crucified Jesus of Nazareth in the glory of God. He is the Messiah of Israel! Those men and women he had imprisoned, had flogged, had forced to blaspheme – they were right! They had possessed the righteousness for which his soul thirsted. Now his spirit savored only the bitterness of wormwood.

Gamaliel had been right. He had refused to follow his advice, and he had contended against God. What are the consequences? The Voice had said, *“You will be told what to do.”* In awful silence, Saul waited. Three days he remained entombed in interminable darkness, haunted by despairing and deadly visions. *“For three days,”* writes Luke, *“he continued blind, during which time he neither ate nor drank (Acts 9:9).”* A strange voice broke the silence – the soft sounds of a voice falling like the words of an absolution over his tormented soul: *“Saul, my brother . . .”* Ananias, a disciple of Jesus, had come to bring Saul out of his darkness into the light.

Ananias hadn’t come without first expressing his own misgivings and fears

to the Lord about this man. He certainly would not have been here now if he had not been commanded to do so by his Lord.

*The Lord had appeared (to Ananias) in a vision. "Ananias!" he said. "Here I am, Lord," came the answer. The Lord said to him, "Go at once to Straight Street, and at the house of Judas ask for a certain Saul of Tarsus. He is there praying." (Saul saw in a vision a man named Ananias coming to him and placing his hands on him so that he might recover his sight.) But Ananias protested, "Lord, I have heard from many sources about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. He is here now with authorization from the chief priests to arrest any who invoke your name." The Lord said to him, "You must go! This man is the instrument I have chosen to bring my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I myself shall indicate to him how much he will have to suffer for my name."*

*Acts 9:10b-16)*

The Lord chose Ananias because He knew he would go, and he would go in love. At this point, Saul was in need of a bit of human warmth and understanding.

*With that Ananias left. When he entered the house, he laid his hands on Saul and said, "Saul, my brother, I have been sent by the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the way here, to help you recover your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight.*

*(Acts 9:17)*

Ananias, no doubt, instructed Saul in the faith; told him of the revelation God had given to him about the Saul's destiny, that he was the chosen instrument of the Lord to make Him known to the Gentiles. Ananias baptized Saul, and we are told that his strength returned. He began to live again — a new life. Saul experienced baptism as a death and as a resurrection. This he would later preach:

*Through baptism into his death we were buried with him, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life. If we have been united with him through likeness to his death, so shall we be through a like resurrection. This we know: our old self was crucified with him so*

*that the sinful body might be destroyed and we might be slaves to sin no longer.*

*In baptism you were not only buried with him but also raised to life with him because you believed in the power of God who raised him from the dead. Even when you were dead in sin . . . God gave you new life in company with Christ. He pardoned all our sins.*

*(Rom. 6:4-6; Col. 2:12-13)*

Saul preached this out of his personal experience.

The Lord revealed to Ananias that Saul would suffer much for Christ. All the days of his apostolic life he would be persecuted by two groups of people: the Jews who considered him the arch-traitor and the renegade; and certain members of the Christian community who never trusted him, his vision, or his message. Later, he was to preach, again out of his experience: *“We must undergo many trials if we are to enter into the reign of God (Acts 14:22).”*

Luke believed Saul was an instrument of God. He had shared in Saul’s suffering. It is Luke’s intention to set the Church records straight. He does precisely this in this recorded incident. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself called Saul to the Apostolate to the Gentiles.

Saul had been duly received into the Church by Ananias, who was a Christian minister appointed by Jesus, and was well respected in the community at Damascus. Again, we must note how the Lord insisted upon using members of the Christian Community for his work. We say to ourselves, *“certainly God does not need me!”* When we should be saying, *“Why not me? Here I am, send me.”* Ananias came up with a few good reasons why he shouldn’t go over to Straight Street to the house of Judas and talk to that sinner Saul, but the Lord said to Ananias, *“You must go!”*

Luke has presented the conversion of Saul from the historical point of view as well as its importance to the Church. The conversion of Saul is a turning point in Church History. Luke lets Saul tell of his conversion to others in his own words. It is interesting how Saul alters the story to suit the audience whom he addresses. We will present the two other accounts at this time in order to deal more completely with the story of Saul’s conversion. Saul’s first account appears in a speech given in the temple area to a group of Jews:

*I set out with the intention of bringing the prisoners I would arrest back to Jerusalem for punishment. As I was traveling along approaching Damascus around noon, a great light from the sky suddenly flashed all about me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" I answered, "Who are you, sir?" He said to me, "I am Jesus the Nazorean whom you are persecuting." My companions saw the light but did not hear the voice speaking to me. "What is it I must do, sir?" I asked, and the Lord replied, "Get up and go into Damascus. There you will be told about everything you are destined to do." But since I could not see because of the brilliance of the light, I had to be taken by the hand and led into Damascus by my companions.* (Acts 22:5b-11)

The dialogue of Jesus to Saul was extensive; the companions saw the light but heard nothing. Luke said they heard but did not see. Perhaps the companions heard a sound but could not distinguish what was said? Saul now emphasizes the role of Ananias because his witness would have been impressive to the Jews:

*A certain Ananias, a devout observer of the law and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came and stood by me. "Saul, my brother," he said, "Recover your sight." In that instant, I regained my sight and looked at him. The next thing he said was, "The God of our fathers long ago designated you to know his will, to look upon the Just One, and to hear the sound of his voice; before all men you are to be his witness to what you have seen and heard. Why delay, then? Be baptized at once and wash away your sins as you call upon his name."* (Acts 22:12-16)

Here we see Ananias explain Saul's mission to him and give him an instruction about baptism.

The next time Saul describes his conversion, it is to Festus, the Roman procurator, King Agrippa and his sister Bernice:

*On one such occasion, I was traveling toward Damascus armed with the authority and commission of the chief priests. On this journey, Your Majesty, I saw a light more brilliant than the sun shining in the sky at midday. It surrounded me and those who were traveling*

*with me. All of us fell to the ground and I heard a voice saying to me in Hebrew, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goad." I said, at that "Who are you, sir?" and the Lord answered, "I am that Jesus whom you are persecuting. Get up now and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to designate you as my servant and as a witness to what you have seen of me and what you will see of me. I have delivered you from this people and from the nations, to open the eyes of those to whom I am sending you, to turn them from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God; that through their faith in me they may obtain the forgiveness of the sins and a portion among God's people."* (Acts 26:12-18)

Here Saul omits many details – there is no mention of Ananias, and he adds much dialogue from Jesus. He seems to have rewritten Jesus' part giving him some better lines. What we really see is that Saul accommodates his conversion story to teach religious truth that might be able to reach these people. He speaks of darkness and light – the dominion of Satan.

### SAUL IN THE DESERT

Since it is not Luke's intention to give us the life of Saul, he omits details not important to his narrative, details we do find in Saul's letters. He writes to the Galatians:

*But the time came when he who had set me apart before I was born and called me by his favor chose to reveal his Son to me, that I might spread among the Gentiles the good tidings concerning him.*

*Immediately, without seeking human advisors or even going to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before me, I went off to Arabia.* (Gal. 1:15-17)

As the Spirit had led both Moses and Jesus into the desert, Saul too is led into the desert of Arabia, to spend time in prayer and meditation, enabling God's spirit to prepare him for the task before him. Here he contemplated the vision he had received and sought to grasp all it implied. Saul said to the Galatians:

*I assure you, brothers, the gospel I proclaimed to you is no mere*



*human invention. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I schooled in it. It came by revelation from Jesus Christ.*

*(Gal. 1:11-12)*

The theology of Saul primarily developed from the revelations experienced on the road to Damascus. Saul speaks of the experience as revelation in which God revealed to him His Son. Saul saw the Crucified Jesus to be the Lord of Glory. Nothing could have been more astounding to him or more destructive to his previous religious foundation. He realized that his own religious light had kept him in total darkness. On the road to Damascus, the God who said, "*Let light shine out of darkness*" had shone in his heart, giving him the light of knowledge to see the glory of God shining on the face of Christ (*See 2Cor. 4:6*). Saul spoke of himself as being grasped by Christ Jesus (*Phil. 3:12*) and pressed into His service, unable to kick against the graces that drove him on. When the skilled mind of Saul, touched by the grace of the Holy Spirit, considered what he had seen in vision, it led him to behold the mystery of Christ in which all men can be brought to righteousness in Jesus Christ.

Saul finally understood the Crucifixion of Jesus – the curse that now rested upon Jesus. By his death on the Cross, Jesus accepted the curse that fell upon all breakers of the law, all sinners. Jesus became, in a sense, sin, in order that sinners could become sinless. The innocent Jesus, bearing the curse of the Law, redeemed all men under the Law by atoning for their transgressions of the Law. Saul wrote in Romans:

*The law was powerless because of its weakening by the flesh. Then God sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sin offering, thereby condemning sin in the flesh, so that the just demands of the law might be fulfilled in us who live, not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit.*

*(Rom. 8:3-4)*

*You died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to that Other who was raised from the dead, so that we might bear fruit for God.*

*(Rom. 7:4)*

Saul saw that the Cross that had been his stumbling block, was the very Wisdom and Love of God. Saul knew now why Jesus Crucified was the glorious Lord. And he found it impossible not to proclaim it!

## THE CHURCH IS JESUS

The revelation of Jesus on the road to Damascus sowed another seed in the heart of Saul, destined to bear abundant theological truth, a truth so unbelievable that many who profess to believe in it with their lips, constantly deny it in their actions. Jesus said to Saul, "*Why are you persecuting me?*" During the historical life of Jesus, Saul had not been present in Jerusalem. He did not know Jesus in the flesh. And yet Jesus accused Saul of personally persecuting Him. Saul personally persecuted the disciples of Jesus, men and women alike. Jesus identified Himself with each of them to such a degree that Saul did to Jesus what he had done to them. This is not some dramatic and poetic fashion of speaking. This reveals the intimate union existing between Jesus and His disciples, a union that is created by baptism. The disciples, through their own lives, are an extension of Jesus' own life on earth. Jesus continues to live on earth in them. He still teaches; He still preaches; He still forgives; He still feeds the multitude; He still raises the dead; He still suffers, and He still dies.

Many members of the Christian Community fail to equate their lives with that of Jesus. It must be that their own sins so dominate their conscious awareness, they are unable to see, experience, and rise to that level of faith that enables them to believe what their being in Christ means, and what is truly the consequences of their lives. Being in Christ means that when they love, Jesus loves; when they pray, Jesus prays; when they serve, Jesus serves; when they suffer, Jesus suffers; when they die, Jesus dies; and yet, *when they die in Jesus*, they can never truly die, for Jesus has died once for all.

Christians who understand the mystery of Christ, realize that their sufferings fill up the suffering that is lacking in the body of Christ. They understand that the redemption continues. Jesus continues to redeem the world through them. Saul perhaps was the first to understand and teach this great revelation:

*Even now I find my joy in the suffering I endure for you. In my own flesh, I fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of his body, the church.*

(Col. 1:24)

*As we have shared much in the suffering of Christ, so through Christ do we share abundantly in his consolation. (2Cor. 1:5)*

*I wish to know Christ and the power flowing from his resurrection; likewise to know how to share in his sufferings by being formed into the pattern of his death. Thus do I hope that I may arrive at resurrection from the dead. (Phil. 3:10-11)*

*Rejoice instead, in the measure that you share Christ's sufferings. When his glory is revealed, you will rejoice exultantly. (1Pt. 4:13)*

The Christians who truly understand their life in Christ and accept it will never, in the face of personal suffering, say, "Why me?" They will say, "Why not me?" And the bravest of them will say, "Oh yes, Lord, me!" If we can catch a true glimpse of this doctrine, then we can understand why the saints found joy in suffering – joy, not pleasure! Even the least of us can be a bit more patient in suffering when we understand it has redemptive value.

By this doctrine, we can escape that immature concept of faith that equates Jesus only with the historical and physical Christ. It is this narrowness of faith that rebels against the role of Mary, the saints, the priests, the teachers, the bishops, the Popes in the Church. Cannot we see that it is all Jesus? Jesus is in all, and all is in Jesus. May God deliver us from such a crippling spirituality. Is Mary outside of Jesus? Are the saints? Are the ministers of the Church? Are the Sacraments? Are any of these outside Jesus that we should consider the honor and respect paid to them as robbing what is due to Jesus? When you love the ministers of the Church, you love Jesus. When you love your fellow Christians, you love Jesus. When we fail to love any of them, Jesus could say with equal force to us what he said to Saul: "Why do you not love me? Why do you persecute me?" But we can answer, "But, O Lord, I always praised your name. I was jealous for your honor. I made sure no one would steal what belonged to you. I love, honor and serve you alone!" He will answer, "When you failed to do it for the least of mine, you failed to do it to me." How did you fail to understand the mystery of Christ when the Scriptures made it so clear, and the Church has taught it so forcefully?

*So too we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually*

*members one of another.*

*(Rom. 12:5)*

*Christ cares for the Church – for we are members of his body.*

*(Eph. 5:30)*

*You, then, are the body of Christ. Every one of you is a member of it.*

*(1Cor. 12:27)*

Yes, Saul understood this mystery of Christ and expressed it so clearly. While there is still time, we must love Jesus entirely if we do not wish to hear Him say some day, “*I do not know you!*” Jesus has broadened His Personality – He equates Himself with the Church. We must indeed broaden our spirits to embrace Jesus in the Church. There truly lies the greatness of Saul. He made the effort to embrace the whole Christ!

After his stay in Arabia, Saul tells us:

*Later I returned to Damascus. Three years after that I went up to Jerusalem to get to know Cephas, with whom I stayed fifteen days. I did not meet any other apostles except James, the brother of the Lord.*

*(Gal. 1:17-19)*

### SAUL'S FIRST FERVOR

Luke now tells us about the three years in Damascus:

*Saul stayed some time with the disciples in Damascus, and soon began to proclaim in the synagogues that Jesus was the Son of God. Any who heard it were greatly taken aback. They kept saying, “Isn't this the man who worked such havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoke this name? Did he not come here purposely to apprehend such people and bring them before the chief priests?” Saul, for his part, grew steadily more powerful, and reduced the Jewish community of Damascus to silence with his proofs that this Jesus was the Messiah.*

*(Acts 9:19-22)*

We are not told whether Saul made many converts, but we do know he made enemies. Saul had a way of putting things that would not be called

diplomatic. Later, we will see he addresses the Magician Elymas:

*You are an impostor and a thoroughgoing fraud, you son of Satan and enemy of all that is right! Will you never stop trying to make crooked the straight paths of the Lord?* (Acts 13:10)

With the passing of time, he didn't seem to improve too much. When he was before the Council of the high priest, who ordered him struck on the mouth, Paul responded:

*You are the one God will strike, you whitewashed wall! You sit there judging men according to the law, yet you violate the law yourself by ordering me to be struck!* (Acts 23:3)

Luke now tells us:

*After quite some time had passed, certain Jews conspired to kill Saul, but their plot came to his attention. They went so far as to keep close watch on the city gates day and night in an attempt to do away with him.* (Acts 9:23-24)

In one of his letters, Saul tells us that it was the representative of King Aretas that sought to capture him, no doubt to get in good with the Jews of the city. "Some of his disciples, therefore, took him along the wall one night and lowered him to the ground, using ropes and a hamper (Acts 9:25)." Saul escaped in a basket. Probably there was some fear involved, but whatever motivated it, Saul later speaks of it as one of the worst humiliations that he had to suffer for Christ. It just went against his manly pride to hide in a basket.

Saul's first apostolic ministry stemming out of his first fervor, had not been too successful. It succeeded in almost getting him killed. Saul now headed south to the city of Jerusalem to see Cephas, the head of the Church.

Luke relates that the return of the prodigal son was not received with open arms:

*When he arrived back in Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples there; but it turned out that they were all afraid of him. They even refused to believe that he was a disciple.* (Acts 9:26)

After all, Jesus told them to be on their guard with others, and to be as cunning as serpents. The most obvious suspicion would be that Saul was a spy, a wolf in sheep's clothing. One of the disciples read his spirit correctly – Barnabas. Saul was certainly now in a friendless situation. He couldn't return to his old friends, and the Christian Community avoided him. Barnabas stepped out of the shadows to take his hand, living up to his name: "*Consolation.*" Barnabas believed in Saul, and he took him to the Community.

*He explained to them how, on his journey, Saul had seen the Lord, who had conversed with him, and how Saul had been speaking out fearlessly in the name of Jesus at Damascus. Saul stayed on with them, moving freely about Jerusalem and expressing himself quite openly in the name of the Lord.*  
(Acts 9:27-28)

One day, while he was in the temple praying, he had a vision of the Lord and Jesus said to him:

*"You must make haste," he said. "Leave Jerusalem at once because they will not accept your testimony about me." I answered, "Lord, it is because they know that I imprisoned those who believed in you and flogged them in every synagogue. While the blood of your witness Stephen was being shed, I stood by and approved it. I even guarded the cloaks of those who killed him!" At that, he said to me, "Be on your way. I mean to send you far from here, among the Gentiles."*  
(Acts 22:17:21)

Saul felt a need to atone for these sins; he wanted to make reparation in his own way. Perhaps it would bring a certain satisfaction to his wounded pride. But it was the Will of the Lord that he should live with his guilt, and accept the penance the Lord provided.

Nevertheless, Saul couldn't resist returning to see his old friends the Greek speaking Jews, and as Luke tells us, he "*debated with them.*" With his own unique diplomacy, he probably pointed out that they had been murderers and he had been an accessory to the fact. He did have a way of bringing out the worst in some people. Luke says, "*They, for their part, responded by trying to kill him (9:29).*" At this point, the Church took things into its own hands. Saul had started one persecution for the Church at Jerusalem, but it had since died down after he had left town. Now he was poking a stick in

the embers, trying to get things going again. He told us in his letter to the Galatians that during this time, he was a houseguest of Cephas. Peter probably told Saul to return to Tarsus and wait until things quieted down. Don't call us, we'll call you! Luke says, "*When the brothers learned of this, some of them took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.*" Finally, with the departure of Saul for his home Luke writes, not too subtly:

*Meanwhile, throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, the church was at peace. It was being built up and was making steady progress in the fear of the Lord; at the same time, it enjoyed the increased consolation of the Holy Spirit*

*(Acts 9:31)*

For Saul, the period that followed was a strange interlude; it appears to be the Limbo of his apostolic career. For the next ten years, nothing is heard of Saul. In his letter to the Galatians, he made a brief mention of this time:

*Thereafter, I entered the regions of Syria and Cilicia. The communities of Christ in Judea had no idea what I looked like; they had only heard that "he who was formerly persecuting us is now preaching the faith he tried to destroy."* *(Gal. 1:21-23)*

For ten years, Saul was outside the mainstream of Church activity. Perhaps he was being ignored. It was a long time of inactivity for a man who had seen Jesus face-to-face and burned with zeal to spread His kingdom. Yet that is what God planned for Saul, a period of preparation that followed the pattern of the Lord. Saul was to be the greatest of all missionaries, and it was necessary that he prepare for his public life by long periods of prayer, silence, and obedience, as Jesus Himself had done. After all, the Church had to be prepared for Saul, and that was what the Holy Spirit would be about in those next ten years!

# CHAPTER 10

## CATHOLICITY OF THE CHURCH

### INTRODUCTION

It is around the year 38 A.D., the Church has taken root in Palestine. Luke mentions an environment of peace for the Church in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. A peace that is no doubt largely attributable to the fact that Saul now resides outside of Palestine in Cilicia. In Acts, the Church is acknowledged in Galilee, but there is no mention of any missionary activity there. Jesus Himself had evangelized Galilee, the home of the Apostles, and the Church's presence there was initially due to Jesus' ministry. Scripture confirms an appearance of the Risen Jesus to five hundred disciples in Galilee.

The Apostles had first understood that their mission was to be directed towards Israel, according to the command Matthew attributes to Jesus: "*Do not visit pagan territory and do not enter a Samaritan town. Go instead after the lost sheep of the house of Israel*" (Mt. 10:5-6). The catholicity of the Gospel had yet to dawn upon them. They were too much a part of the present Jewish culture to be able to understand and interpret the worldwide dimensions of their apostolic vocation. During the early years of the Church, all apostolic activity was localized around Jerusalem, and was restricted to the House of Israel. It was not the Apostles, but the evangelist Philip, one of the Seven, who brought Christ to Samaria.

The Lord had spoken of the Kingdom of God as being like a bit of leaven, or as a tiny mustard seed, that would spread and grow. What would take place in the world would have its reflective counterpart in individual Christian lives – first and primarily within the Apostles themselves. The Gift of the Holy Spirit was the divine leaven permeating their souls – the dynamic seed growing and developing within them. With the passing of time and the demands of concrete circumstances, the Spirit formed the Mind of Christ within them.



Many things are clear to us today because we possess the Scriptures of the New Testament. We need to bear in mind that the early Church had no recorded Gospels to guide it; the Gospels had not yet been written. The Apostles had only their memories of Jesus to guide them (albeit guided by the Holy Spirit). Many of the memories lay buried deep within their subconscious, arising at times in quiet prayerful moments, to stimulate the memory and recall things Jesus did and said. These memories would give direction to Christian discipleship. With the passing of time, others collected these memoirs of the Apostles, and they became the living Christian Traditions within the Community. Only when the Church came to be about thirty years of age would the written Gospels, as we know them, begin to appear. The letters of Paul were the first of the New Testament Scriptures to be written.

If you were able to return in a time machine to within the first twenty years of the Church's life, you would have to accept the authority of the Church as the grounds of Christian beliefs. If you asked, "*Where does it say that in the Bible?*" the early members of the Church would think you meant the Old Testament, the only Bible they knew. Jewish Christians certainly sought confirmation for Christian Truths in the Old Testament, and they constantly referred to the prophets of the Old Testament in attempts to prove to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel. But in truth, their faith rested upon the reality of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, rather than on the Bible. The Apostles had eaten and drunk with the Risen Lord, and the faith of most Christians rested upon their testimony. Saul, who did not accept the testimony of the Apostles, had to see the Risen Lord himself in order to believe. The teachings of Paul stress the importance of the Resurrection:

*If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is void of content and your faith is empty too. . . . and if Christ was not raised, your faith is worthless. You are still in your sins.*

*(1Cor. 15:14, 17)*

The Old Testament offered little support for the Resurrection of the Messiah. Only one explicit verse from Psalm 16 can be quoted: "*You will not abandon my soul to the nether world, nor will you suffer your faithful one to undergo corruption*" (Ps. 16:10). The faith of the early Church rested upon the fact of Jesus' resurrection, not upon Scriptural prophecy and its fulfillment.

The Church acknowledged a living teaching authority in the Name of Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus designated the Apostles as infallible Christian Teachers within the Church:

*“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations . . . Teach them to carry out everything that I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always, until the end of the world!”*

*(Mt. 28:19-20)*

Truth itself abides in the Church from its conception, for He who said, “*I am with you always,*” likewise said, “*I am the Truth*” (Jn. 14:6). Jesus gave no command to write, but to teach. His words imply that the power to teach would endure in the Church until the end of time – “*Know that I am with you always, until the end of the world.*” The Catholic Church experiences and professes this truth. The Catholic Church constantly confirms that the living teaching authority is the Church, not the Bible. The very fact of writing the Scriptures could not replace the ministry to teach established by Jesus in the Church. Jesus commanded the Church to teach *everything*. The New Testament confirms this on the last written line of the last written Gospel account:

*There are still many other things that Jesus did, yet if they were written about in detail, I doubt there would be room enough in the entire world to hold the books to record them.*

*(Jn. 21:25)*

Who can confirm for us that the Scriptures are authentic, reliable, and inspired? Many books claiming to be divinely inspired never appeared in the New Testament because the Church rejected them. What is the role of the Scriptures in the Catholic Church? It is a very exalted role! The inspired Scriptures are an authentic source for the authoritative teachings of the Church. The written Scriptures, along with the living apostolic traditions, are the sources of Divine Revelation, and are the divine reservoirs from which the living authority within the Church draws its teachings and guidelines for moral conduct. The highest authority in the Christian Church is not that the Scriptures reveal a truth, but that the Church teaches it!

## THE LAW OF CIRCUMCISION

The Law of Circumcision was a divine command given to Abraham when Yahweh established a covenant with him. We read in Genesis:

*God also said to Abraham . . . “This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you that you must keep: every male among you shall be circumcised . . . that shall be the mark of the covenant between you and me. Throughout the ages, every male among you, when he is eight days old, shall be circumcised . . . Thus my covenant shall be in your flesh as an everlasting pact. If a male is uncircumcised . . . such a one shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant” (Gn. 17:9-14).*

The necessity of circumcision is confirmed in Leviticus 12:3. Exodus makes circumcision mandatory in order to celebrate the Passover:

*If any aliens living among you wish to celebrate the Passover of the Lord, all the males among them must first be circumcised, and then they may join in its observance just like the natives. But no man who is uncircumcised may partake of it.*

*(Ex. 12:48)*

Circumcision was a sign of the covenant of Israel and Yahweh. The obligation was serious, and failure to fulfill it meant separation from the covenant. The rite was a physical one performed upon the body, but it was meant to bear spiritual fruit. The Scriptures encouraged the Jews: *“Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and be no longer stiff-necked” (Dt. 10:16).* Circumcision of heart implies submission to the Will of Yahweh. Speaking through Jeremiah, the Lord says:

*See! Their ears are uncircumcised, they cannot give heed; See, the word of the Lord has become for them an object of scorn, which they will not have.*

*(Jer. 6:10b)*

Jeremiah accused the whole house of Israel of being *“uncircumcised in heart” (Jer. 9:25).* Ezekiel clearly proclaims the expulsion of the uncircumcised from temple worship:

*Thus says the Lord God: No foreigners, uncircumcised in heart and in flesh, shall ever enter my sanctuary; none of the foreigners who live among the Israelites.*

*(Ez. 44:9)*

Within the temple precincts, an uncircumcised person who ventured beyond the Court of the Gentiles was subjected to the death penalty. The title “*uncircumcised*” was a contemptuous one among the Jews.

## JEWS AND GENTILES

To the Jews, a Gentile was the alien (stranger), the heathen. The Gentiles surpassed the Jews in military power, commerce, wealth, and art, but the Jews maintained a moral superiority in their covenant with God and the possession of His revealed Word and Will. They had a nearness to God denied to the Gentiles. It was the mission of the Jews to mediate the blessings of the Covenant to all nations. From the first, God had promised that in Abraham’s seed “*all nations of the earth should be blessed.*” To Isaiah, the gods of the Gentiles were non-gods, and Israel had the mission to bring to them the knowledge of the one true God. Deuteronomy confirms Yahweh’s love of the Gentiles and urges the Israelites to love them:

*For the Lord, your God, is the God of gods . . . who has no favorites, accepts no bribes; who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and befriends the alien, feeding and clothing him. So you too must befriend the alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt.*

*(Dt. 10:17-19)*

The Psalmist sings: “*The Lord protects strangers*” (Ps. 146:9).

Leviticus commanded the Jews to love the alien: “*You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the native born among you; have the same love for him as for yourself*” (Lv. 19:34).

The Law demanded: “*You shall not violate the rights of an alien*” (Dt. 24:17).

Gentiles living in Israel had a right to recourse in its courts, but they were expected to subject themselves to certain Jewish laws: to forgo the worship

of idols and sorcery, and to refrain from incest, eating blood, and working on the Sabbath. These were all considered serious crimes in Israel.

In actual practice in apostolic times, it was not the Scriptures that directed the Jews attitude towards the Gentiles, but rather the moral directives of the rabbis. The teachings of the rabbis serve as a good example of how the spirit of sectarianism and legalism perverted the true spirit of the Law. Under the guidance of the rabbis, the Jews focused on Israel as the elect nation of God – alone worthy to receive the Law. All other nations were condemned to worship false gods. The rabbis destroyed any missionary zeal. The Talmud prohibited teaching the Torah to Gentiles. Rabbi Johanan taught that *“such a person deserves death.”* R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus taught that the mind of every non-Jew was bent on idolatry, and even their cattle were unfit for sacrifice. Gentiles had no share in the life to come. He taught that whatever charity the Gentiles practiced was actually sinful – the motive being self-glorification. Gamaliel held the same opinion, adding that Gentiles, by their impure motives, incur the penalty of Gehenna. Certain Rabbis permitted Jews to use property stolen from Gentiles. The School of Hillel attributed to Gentiles the same impurity as a corpse. Jewish midwives were forbidden to attend the births of Gentile women or to nurse their children.

It was generally held that Gentiles resembled easy-going, selfish dogs whose flesh was as the flesh of asses, and whose issue was like the issue of horses, unable to claim a father. The Rabbis considered all Gentile children to be bastards. Even when a Gentile converted, no child born before the conversion could inherit his property. The presumption of the law was that they were illegitimate. All Gentile women, even married women, were suspected of having practiced prostitution, so that in principle it was assumed that no Gentile knew his father. Leviticus 21:7 stated that no harlot can marry a priest, therefore all female converts were considered unfit to marry a priest, since they had probably practiced prostitution. R. Simon ben Yohai gave one exception: a proselyte woman who converted before the age of three years may one day may marry a priest. It was only in that one circumstance that it was certain they were virgins. Gentile men fared no better. They were so strongly suspected of unnatural crimes that it was prohibited to stable a cow in their stalls. Simon ben Yohai had these three sayings: *“The best of snakes ought to have its head crushed. The best among Gentiles deserves to be killed. The most pious Gentile women are addicted to sorcery.”* The rabbis maintained that even when a Gentile

became a convert, he had no part in the various merits and virtues of Abraham, for these were reserved for the blood descendants of the patriarchs. The proselyte had to rely on his own merits for justification.

Against such a background, we can better understand the dilemma the Jewish Christian Community faced over the reception of Gentiles into the Church. Perhaps the following incident recorded in Matthew reflects the early doubt of the Church about the advisability of receiving Gentiles into the Church, even if it was the Will of Jesus to do so. Matthew records an incident occurring in Gentile territory:

*Then Jesus left that place and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. It happened that a Canaanite woman living in that locality presented herself, crying out to him, "Lord, Son of David, have pity on me! My daughter is terribly troubled by a demon." He gave her no word of response. His disciples came up and began to entreat him, "Get rid of her. She keeps shouting after us." "My mission is only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," Jesus replied. She came forward then and did him homage with the plea, "Help me, Lord!" But he answered, "It is not right to take the food of sons and daughters and throw it to the dogs." "Please, Lord," she insisted, "even the dogs eat the leavings that fall from their masters' tables." Jesus then said in reply, "Woman, you have great faith! Your wish will come to pass." That very moment her daughter got better.*

*(Mt. 15:21-28)*

Mark's Gospel account of this incident tempers the position maintained in Matthew by having Jesus say: *"Let the sons of the household satisfy themselves at table first."* (Mk. 7:27a). In actual Church practice, this is what seems to have occurred. The Apostles concentrated on the Jews in Palestine first, then on the Jews of the Dispersion, and only when the Jews refused the Gospel did the Church turn towards the Gentiles. God would have to raise up a special instrument to accomplish this task: Saul of Tarsus. But in the meantime, He must inspire Peter, the Keeper of the Keys, to open the door through which Saul would lead the multitudes.

## PETER AS CHRIST

During the time after the Resurrection, Luke tells us that Peter was making numerous journeys. Luke implies that Peter visited the different Christian Communities. He appears to be exercising his office of Chief Shepherd by touring the areas already evangelized, *"...one place after another and eventually came to the saints living down in Lydda (Acts 9:32)."* This finds Peter about twenty-eight miles northwest of Jerusalem – not too far from the sea. For the second time, Luke refers to Christians as saints (holy people). St. Paul often used this term to designate his fellow Christians. The word comes from the Greek *hagios*. It denoted an object of awe or reverence – something distinctly different from anything else. *Hagios* had the connotation of being purified, immaculate. It was used to describe the innermost nature of God. Our English word *holy*, seeks to convey this meaning. Calling the Christians saints appears to signify, on the negative side, that they were purified of sin, and, on the positive side, that they had an intimacy with the very Person of God.

Peter's activities definitely appear to be an extension of Jesus' own life. Luke relates two incidents involving Simon Peter that are definitely reminiscent of Jesus' own ministry. John writes that Jesus said to a paralytic by the pool of Bethesda, *"Stand up! Pick up your mat and walk!" The man was immediately cured; he picked up his mat and began to walk (Jn. 5:8-9).* Luke tells us that Peter was in Lydda:

*There he found a man named Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years. Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ cures you! Get up and make your bed." The man got up at once.*  
(Acts 9:33-34)

From the words used – *"Jesus cures you!"* – Peter emulates the activities of Jesus. Peter is aware that Jesus lives and operates through him. The narrative seems to indicate that Aeneas was non-Christian. This miracle, and the one to follow, may be both symbolic and prophetic of what is soon to occur among the Gentiles. Those eight years of Aeneas' paralysis may symbolize the eight years of Church existence during which time the Gentiles had been ignored. The cure symbolizes the forgiveness of sins that paralyzed the spirit of man. Remember the words of Jesus:

*Which is less trouble to say, 'Your sins are forgiven' or 'Stand up*

*and walk?’ to help you realize that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” ... he then said to the paralyzed man – “Stand up! Roll up your mat, and go home.” (Mt. 9:5-6)*

The cure of Aeneas had a profound effect upon people in the area – many conversions resulted in Lydda and nearby Sharon.

Just twelve miles northwest of Lydda lay the coastal town of Joppa, the present city of Haifa. It was the only port city on the sea ever held by the Jews. The Maccabees occupied the city in 148 B.C., and made it a Jewish city. At this time in Joppa, a beloved member of the Christian Community named Tabitha (*Dorcas* in Greek, which means *gazelle* in both Hebrew and Greek) fell ill and died. The Community was sorely distressed over the loss of Tabitha.

*Her life was marked by constant good deeds and acts of charity . . . They washed her body and laid it out in an upstairs room. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples who had heard that Peter was there sent two men to him with the urgent request, “Please come over to us without delay.” Peter set out with them as they asked. Upon his arrival, they took him upstairs to the room. All the widows came to him in tears and showed him the various garments Dorcas had made when she was still with them. Peter first made everyone go outside; then he knelt down and prayed. Turning to the dead body, he said, “Tabitha, stand up.” She opened her eyes then looked at Peter and sat up. He gave her his hand and helped her to her feet.*

*(Acts 36-41a)*

It is not without significance that Peter does not touch the dead body of the woman. To touch a corpse would render him ritually impure. Only when life returned to the body did he give his hand to her. The miracle resembles the incident in which Jesus raised the daughter of Jairus, but unlike Jesus, Peter first kneels and prays. The miracle no doubt symbolizes the power of the Church to give life to the spiritually dead – the Gentiles. Again, the presence of Jesus’ power appears to be operative through Peter. Yes, it is the power of Jesus that restores the life of Tabitha to the Community, but the life is restored only through the prayers of the Community. Tabitha is returned to the Community to continue her service. Apparently, she was needed and she still consented to serve.



Once a priest was severely stricken while celebrating Mass. Shortly afterwards, he entered into the valley of death. Death became inevitable for him. At one point all suffering ceased as his spirit separated from the body. He stood on the other side of life experiencing the reality of his immortal soul, eternal life, and the existence of God. He sadly realized his work had been left unfinished. Apparently, a final decision hung in the balance. With full awareness of what it implied, he consented to return to life, but he knew he could not effect this himself. The Spirit recalled to his mind the story of Dorcas, and he realized only the prayers of the Christian Community could cause his return to earthly life. He knew he had made no garments for the widows as had Dorcas, but perhaps the Community had something to show the Lord on his behalf. He prayed, "*Lord! Hear the prayers of those who pray for me;*" the Community was at that moment in prayer for his recovery. His spirit reentered his body and his earthly life continued. His earthly life, for better or worse, had been restored through the prayers of the Christian Community. Christian Prayers still can raise the dead!

The raising of Tabitha from the dead became known all over Joppa. Many came to believe in the Lord. Peter never permits himself any identification other than as a servant of the Lord Jesus. The Lord works mightily through his humble servant, and Peter never leaves any doubt about the source of his power: "*Jesus Christ cures you!*" And Jesus is enabled to do so because of the docility of His servant Simon Peter.

Luke relates "*that Peter stayed on in Joppa for a considerable time*" (Acts 9:43). This could possibly mean a couple of years. With these long absences out of the city of Jerusalem, it would be understandable that someone else would assume the leadership of the Community there. James, the kinsman of the Lord, apparently was now the presiding leader of the Church in Jerusalem.

Luke mentions that Peter stayed "*at the house of Simon, a tanner of leather.*" This sounds innocent enough to us, but in the context of the Jewish culture, it is quite significant. Tanners of leather and collectors of dung were forbidden occupations to Jews. Such a work left a man continually unclean as it involved handling the skins of unclean animals and contaminating substances. Dung was used in the process of tanning leather. Because of the odor involved, the work was not only religiously,

but socially offensive. Understandably, Simon lived down by the sea! It is interesting that out of all the places in Joppa Peter could have stayed, he dwelt with Simon. Was it his Christ-like character that made him inclined to identify with the *lost sheep* of the house of Israel – the social outcasts? It also indicates some growth in Peter's understanding Jesus' teachings on purity and contamination. If the Lord had not become contaminated by associating with sinners, then a servant of the Lord, in whom the Spirit dwelt, could not be contaminated by his association with the sinners the Lord had sent him to save. The Lord had been preparing Peter, psychologically and spiritually, for the giant leap in faith that he must now make. It was a leap in faith that people of lesser faith and spirit would find extremely difficult to make.

### PENTECOST OF THE GENTILES

Luke momentarily transports us from the town of Joppa to the beautiful seaside city of Caesarea, thirty miles north of Joppa. We know this city to be the home of Philip the Evangelist – one of the Seven. The place had once been a small village known as Strato's Tower. It owed its greatness to the fact that Caesar Augustus gave the site to Herod the Great, who constructed a harbor there. (The remains of his immense breakwaters can still be seen.) Here, Herod built a Greek style city, with a theater, amphitheater, baths, and a great palace for himself. He named the city *Caesarea* after his patron. After the time of Herod, it became the Roman capital for the province of Palestine, and the resident of the Roman Procurator. According to Josephus, five cohorts and a squadron of cavalry were stationed in Caesarea. As a cohort consisted of six hundred soldiers, this means over three thousand soldiers were stationed in the city. The officer in charge of a cohort was called a *tribune*. Each cohort was divided into six units of a hundred men called a *century*. A *centurion* was in charge of each unit of a hundred men.

Luke introduces us to one of these centurions in Caesarea who is destined to make Church history. Luke writes:

*Now in Caesarea there was a centurion named Cornelius, of the Roman cohort Italica, who was religious and God-fearing. The same was true of his whole household. He was in the habit of giving generously to the people and he constantly prayed to God.*

*(Acts 10:1-2)*

**A God-fearing Gentile** was the religious title given to Gentiles who accepted Judaism to the degree of identifying with its belief in God and practicing many Jewish customs, but stopping short of becoming a convert. They could attend synagogue services, and a section was reserved for them. Cornelius was just the opposite of the pagan described in Romans 1:18-32. He followed the natural lights that led him to discover God; he cooperated with the grace of God's spirit, and prepared his soul for greater graces from God. He was truly a religious man, and his life bore the fruits of a genuine religious spirit. He had the spirit of fear of the Lord, which implies he diligently observed the Will of God as he understood it. He avoided sin because it separated him from God – this being his greatest fear. People who carelessly sin have no fear of God, which is another way of saying they either fail to love God, or their love of God is subordinated to the love of self. Fear of God does not imply servile fear, fear of being punished, but the fear of a lover of hurting the beloved! Again, the genuineness of Cornelius' religious spirit was proven by his charity to man, his generosity in giving alms, and love of God that called him to prayerfully seek union with God – *“he constantly prayed to God.”* This man was a Gentile, and in the eyes of the Jewish Rabbis, he was a hypocrite who gives alms for selfish motives, unworthy to know the Will of God – no better than a dog. So runs the judgment of men!

While Cornelius was at evening prayer, at three when evening sacrifice was offered in the temple:

*He had a vision in which he clearly saw a messenger of God coming toward him and calling, “Cornelius!” He stared at the sight and said in fear, “What is it, sir?” The answer came: “Your prayers and your generosity have risen in God’s sight, and because of them he has remembered you. Send some men to Joppa and summon a certain Simon, known as Peter. He is a guest of Simon the leather-tanner whose house stands by the sea.”*

*(Acts 10:3-6)*

At the time of sacrifice in the temple, the priest would take a handful of flour mixed with oil and incense, and throw it upon the fire to ascend as a pleasing fragrance to the Lord. As a Gentile, Cornelius could not participate in the evening sacrifice. Cornelius' prayer at the hour of evening sacrifice echoed the psalmist:

*O Lord, to you I call; hasten to me; hearken to my voice when I call upon you. Let my prayer come like incense before you; the lifting up of my hands, like the evening sacrifice.*

*(Ps. 141:1-2)*

The Lord answered his prayer in a way undreamt of.

The evangelist Philip lived in Caesarea, but he was not the one sent for. This is a mission only the Chief Shepherd, Peter, can undertake. A monumental decision in religious matters must be made, and only the representative of Jesus Christ on earth is qualified to make it. Later, others would approve and ratify the decision, but they do not establish the religious principle. God does, through Peter! The Lord prepares Simon Peter to accomplish His Will.

Since the Lord respects the wills of His servants, it is not always easy for Him to communicate with them. All channels of communication are often jammed or occupied. As one poet wrote: *"God is not dumb that he should speak no more. If you hear not his voice, tis thy soul that is poor."* The human spirit must indeed quiet itself in order to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit. Elijah heard Him in a whisper. Noisy souls *do* need spiritual directors (those men and women who professionally listen to the Spirit of God), who possess the grace to discern the echoes of His voice in the human heart. For the activist, perhaps visions and dreams are God's best avenue of approach. It is interesting how the Lord uses the natural things around us to speak to us. Only rarely, in the case of the most difficult subjects, does He use the force of lightning and blinding light to catch our attention, as in the case of Saul. Jesus speaks to Peter through the stuff of which dreams are made.

Our dreams often weave their messages out of our most recent stimuli, incorporating sounds and smells subliminally sensed. The men sent to Peter by Cornelius, approach Joppa around noontime. Peter, meanwhile, had gone up on the roof terrace for his noontime prayer. These roof terraces were often covered with a white awning for shading purposes. Peter was hungry and while waiting for his food to be prepared, he was probably lulled by the gentle sea breeze into the Twilight Zone. In his spirit he suddenly:

*. . . saw the sky open and an object come down that looked like a big canvas. It was lowered to the ground by its four corners. Inside*

*it were all the earth's four-legged creatures and reptiles and birds of the sky. (It was filled with creatures the Scriptures condemned as unclean and unfit to eat.) A voice said to him, "Get up, Peter! Slaughter, then eat." (No one would ever accuse Peter of blind obedience.) He answered, "Sir, it is unthinkable! I have never eaten anything unclean or impure in my life."*

*(Acts 10:11-14)*

Peter's reply echoes the sentiments of Ezekiel when commanded by God to eat unclean food. Ezekiel cried, "Oh no, Lord God! . . . never has any unclean meat entered my mouth" (Ez. 4:14). Ezekiel put up such a fuss the Lord softened his command to him. In Peter's case:

*The voice was heard a second time: "What God has purified you are not to call unclean." This happened three times; then the object was snatched up into the sky.*

*(Acts 10:15-16)*

The scene, repeated three times, emphasized to Peter the solemnity of the vision and the message it carried. It seemed to proclaim a new creation, an echo of Genesis before sin on earth, when God called all His creatures good. The vision stimulated the memory recalling the day Jesus had taught:

*Hear me, all of you, and try to understand. Nothing that enters a man from outside can make him impure; that which comes out of him, and only that, constitutes impurity. . . . Wicked designs come from the deep recesses of the heart: acts of fornication, theft, murder, adulterous conduct, greed, maliciousness, deceit, sensuality, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, an obtuse spirit. All these evils come from within and render a man impure.*

*(Mk. 7:14-15; 21-23)*

Peter had been slow to understand this. Peter may even have suppressed it, along with the rest who had heard the teaching. The teaching would open up such a can of worms for a practicing Jew that it was best not to be thought about. As Peter wrestled with the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius arrived at the gate of the house and inquired after him.

*Peter was still pondering the vision when the Spirit said to him: "There are two men in search of you. Go downstairs and set out*

*with them unhesitatingly, for it is I who sent them.”*

*(Acts 10:19-20)*

The unique and distinct personality of the Holy Spirit is demonstrated in those words: “...it is I who sent them.”

*Peter went down to the men (as yet the vision remained mysterious) and said, “I am the man you are looking for. What brought you here?” They answered, “The centurion Cornelius, who is an upright and God-fearing man, well thought of in the whole Jewish community, has been instructed by a holy messenger to summon you to his house. There he is to hear what you have to say.”*

*(Acts 10:21-22)*

In Peter’s mind, as the pieces of the puzzling vision began to fall into place, the picture grew clear. The animals were a symbolic representation of all those people called unclean by the Jews, and considered unfit to socialize with Jews. Peter was requested to enter the house of a Gentile and preach the Gospel. “Set out with them unhesitatingly,” the Spirit had commanded. “What God has purified you are not to call unclean.” Was Peter reminded of Jonah who had been commanded to preach to the Gentiles of Nineveh, but instead went to Joppa and took a boat trying to escape an unpleasant Divine mission? In the end, Jonah had had to preach to the Ninevites, and his worst fears were realized--they repented, and God didn’t destroy them, as Jonah would have preferred. The charity and obedience of Peter was greater than that of Jonah. He took the first step toward attacking his inherited prejudice towards Gentiles: “Peter invited them in and treated them as guests” (Acts 10:23).

Peter did not know what the outcome of his meeting with Cornelius would bring. He realized the revelation he had received would alter the Christian Community’s relationship with Gentiles. He was embarking upon a course under Divine inspiration, contrary to the tradition of the Jews. Where it would end for the Church, only God knew. The next day, Peter left for Caesarea with the men sent by Cornelius. Wisely, he took six Christian Jews with him to be his witnesses concerning the happenings in Cornelius’ household. Important documents of Rome at the time bore seven seals as proof of authenticity. These six disciples demonstrated their confidence in Peter’s wisdom by following him into a relationship alien to their Jewish upbringing.

Cornelius, on his own part, had also anticipated the importance of his meeting with Peter. He called his relatives and close friends to his house. Peter entered the house of Cornelius with conscious deliberation that he was breaking Jewish tradition and taboo. Cornelius received Peter as an angel of God, falling at Peter's feet in an act of worship. Peter helped Cornelius to his feet as he said, "*Get up! I am only a man myself.*" Apparently, Peter himself was quite excited by the whole affair. Luke says:

*Peter then went in, talking with him all the while. (Peter first explained his presence among them.) "You must know that it is not proper for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or to have dealings with him." (Peter realized this ancient prohibition has been rescinded, revoked. He went on to explain.) "But God has made it clear to me that no one should call any man unclean or impure. That is why I have come in response to your summons without raising any objection. I should, of course, like to know why you summoned me."*

*(Acts 10:25-29)*

Perhaps Peter has best explained why God had used a dream to reveal this religious truth to him; it was the best means of bringing the truth clearly to his mind. Cornelius repeated the story of his own vision, clarifying that both Peter and Cornelius were meeting in such a fashion because God had commanded it. They both had acted under Divine Inspiration. This is a moment of great grace for all involved. Cornelius then revealed the grace-filled hearts of all present with their docility and openness to the spirit of the Lord: "*All of us stand before God at this moment to hear whatever directives the Lord has given you.*" (See Acts 10:30-33) Such openness of spirit can anticipate an outpouring of God's Spirit.

A story is told that in 1978, a Protestant Pentecostal Community in Los Angeles prayed in such a manner. They told God they were open to receive whatever He would reveal to them. The Church minister reported on public TV that the Virgin Mary had since appeared twice in that Church – no doubt leaving a somewhat confused Community! Peter delivered the "good news" for the first time to a Gentile congregation. According to the mind of Luke, this sermonette contained the approved method and outline for evangelizing Gentiles.

Peter began by proclaiming the universal goodwill of God towards all men. God's peace is offered to all men of good will. The Scriptures revealed this religious truth but the Jews ignored it.

*I begin to see how true it is that God shows no partiality. Rather, the man of any nation who fears God and acts uprightly is acceptable to him.*

*(Acts 10:34-35)*

These thoughts of Peter echo Deuteronomy 10:17-19. Even though God had indicated a divine predilection for his "Chosen People", He did not infer that He withdrew His grace and love from the rest of mankind. "God so loved the world," wrote John the Evangelist. Israel's election was an expression of God's love for mankind. Israel should have been God's servant to bring His Truth and Love to all mankind. Instead, they impeded it. In Jesus, the Divine Plan would be realized, and the Church was Jesus' means to implement it.

*This is the message he has sent to the sons of Israel, the good news of peace proclaimed through Jesus Christ who is Lord of all.*

*(Acts 10:36)*

Peter preached the universality of the lordship of Jesus--"Lord of all!" And therefore, the catholicity of the good news. Peter summarized the ministry, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus. He presented Jesus as the Holy Spirit-filled Agent of God's saving activity. He proclaimed that the Apostles are the chosen witnesses of the Resurrection; they are Divinely commissioned to preach and bear witness that this Jesus Christ will one day judge the living and the dead. Jesus is the Judge of all mankind. Peter emphasized that men who fear God and act uprightly make themselves acceptable to God, but their righteousness is not yet complete. Grace has but prepared them to receive the fullness of salvation coming only through Jesus. Peter proclaimed, "Everyone who believes in him has forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:43).

Peter's preaching to the household of Cornelius recalls the beautiful words of Paul:

*But how shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe unless they have heard of him? And how can they hear unless there is someone to preach? And how can*



*men preach unless they are sent? Scripture says, "How beautiful are the feet of those who announce good news!"*

*(Rom. 10:14-15)*

The hearts of the listeners were moved to faith in Jesus. As Peter spoke those words, *"everyone who believes in him has forgiveness of sins through his name,"* an undreamed of phenomenon occurred: the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out upon all who listened to Peter's words; they all began to speak in tongues and glorify God. The Holy Spirit was poured out upon the Jewish Christians who had accompanied Peter, and upon Cornelius, his household and visitors. The Holy Spirit united them all into one Community, praising and glorifying God. The Pentecost of the Gentiles had occurred! These Gentiles had not been baptized, and yet they had received the Holy Spirit just as the Jerusalem Community of believers had on Pentecost. This was indeed rare, and Peter must interpret the significance of this unique phenomenon.

Up to this moment, it had generally been presumed that all members of the Church must first be Jews in order to enter the Community of believers. These Gentiles had been united to the Community through the Gift of the Holy Spirit. The first step in becoming a Jewish convert had been bypassed by the Holy Spirit. Peter clearly read what this implied--there was no necessity for Gentiles to become Jews in order to belong to the Church of Jesus Christ. He knew he must follow his conclusion to its logical application: He must receive these people formally into the Church.

*The circumcised believers who had accompanied Peter were surprised that the gift of the Holy Spirit should have been poured out on the Gentiles also, whom they could hear speaking in tongues and glorifying God. Peter put the question at that point, "What can stop these people who have received the Holy Spirit, even as we have, from being baptized with water?"* *(Acts 10:45-47)*

They all agreed there was none. It was a momentous moment in religious history. Peter was about to abrogate the law of circumcision as a necessary condition for entrance into a covenant relationship with God. Jesus had told him, *"Whatsoever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."* Peter displayed tremendous faith and moral courage: *"So he gave orders that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 10:48a)."* He gave the order that uncircumcised people would be received into the Church, affirming their

total equality with Christian Jews, but also confirming the necessity of water baptism, even for those baptized in the Holy Spirit. It is water baptism that incorporates a person into the Body of Christ – the sign of the New Covenant. The door of salvation in Jesus Christ has been opened to the Gentile world.

News of what took place in Caesarea spread rapidly throughout the Jewish Community of believers. Luke writes, *“All through Judea the Apostles and the brothers heard that Gentiles, too, had accepted the Word of God (Acts 11:1).”* The disciples were greatly disturbed by the news. Not because the Gentiles had received the Word of God, but because it had been reported that Peter, the Chief Shepherd of the Community, had entered the houses of uncircumcised men and ate with them. What did this mean to them? Was this much more than the Community was prepared to believe and accept? Peter’s actions implied that either he had lost his sense of moral judgment, or else he was teaching by his behavior that those uncircumcised Gentiles were on the same religious and social standing as the Jewish disciples. This is what was implied! Peter must explain and defend his position before the Community. As it stood now, his conduct was a source of scandal.

When Peter arrived back in Jerusalem, certain members of the Community attacked him for his behavior.

*Peter then explained the whole affair to them step by step from the beginning. When Peter came to what has been called the Pentecost of the Gentiles he shared with them: “Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’”*

*(Acts 11:16)*

Peter proclaimed that the Holy Spirit Himself purified these people. If this were true, Peter had only one course of action:

*If God was giving them the same gift he gave us when we first believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to interfere with him?*

*(Acts 11:17)*

His six friends were with him. With Peter, they were the *seven seals* witnessing to the truth of what had occurred. Peter’s explanation silenced the opposition for a time. They replied, *“If this be so, then God has granted*

*life-giving repentance even to the Gentiles (Acts 11:18)."*

Nothing in the New Testament reveals more powerfully the leadership of Peter than this episode. He alone received the grace of inspiration and instruction. He alone could act in this matter that revolutionized the Church. Peter acted infallibly! It is difficult for us today to appreciate the docility of spirit and the heroic obedience demonstrated by Simon Peter in this episode. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he set the Church on a course that men of lesser spirit would have been unable to follow.

The groundwork for the first real schism within the Community had been laid. Pharisees and Jewish priests had entered the Church. Many would bitterly contest and fight against Peter's decision. They would formulate within the Community the *party of the circumcision*: those who demanded all Gentiles who embrace Judaism must be circumcised in order to be full and true members of the Church. Needless to say, they refused to associate with any Christian who was not circumcised.

Peter's actions affirmed that the Old Covenant had ended, and the New Covenant, not of the flesh but of the Spirit, had been inaugurated. It was to be left to another great man of the spirit to fully understand and develop the principles of religious truth proclaimed by Peter's action – Saul of Tarsus. Peter, the Keeper of the Keys, had now opened the door for the great apostolate to which God called Saul of Tarsus, and for which He had prepared him: the conversion of the Gentiles!

# CHAPTER 11

## CHURCH OF THE NATIONS

### INTRODUCTION

The first ten years of Church life was centered in Jerusalem. Jewish culture colored and controlled its formation. It could not conceive itself other than Jewish. Its lifestyle and organizational structure followed its Jewish model. The community life of the disciples reflected the life that was centered in the Jewish Synagogue. Probably the communal life by the Jewish Essenes influenced the early life of the Community. The Twelve Apostles appear as a governing body similar to the Jewish Sanhedrin, with Simon Peter presiding as head. What truly differentiated the early members of the Church from the rest of the Jews was their acceptance of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. The Jews referred to them, not without contempt, as the sect of the Nazoreans, and to their Assembly as the Synagogue of the Nazoreans. As the Spirit of Jesus of Nazareth increased within the disciples, His teaching began to dominate their conscious awareness. The implications of His teaching became clearer and more meaningful, and the differences between the followers of Jesus and the rest of the Jews became magnified. The narrowness of their faith began to give ground to a more expansive vision with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The Pentecostal experience became the Divine leaven determining the life and growth of the Church founded by Jesus of Nazareth.

In 1895, the archaeologist Sir William Ramsay wrote:

*Luke shows true historical insight in fixing the reader's attention on Pentecost. For the permanence of a movement of this kind, much depends on the successors of the first leader; and the issue is determined in the period following the leader's removal. Has the leader shown that electrical creative power that remolds men and communicates his own spirit to his disciples, or will the movement*

*be found leaderless and spiritless when the originator is taken away? While the leader is with his disciples, they have little or no opportunity of showing independence and originality and capacity for command. When he is removed from them, the first effect must be discouragement and a sense of emptiness, proportionate to the influence exerted by the leader. Then came the real test, which determines the vitality and permanence of the movement. Has the spirit of the founder descended on his followers? With Luke, and with all the great leaders of the first century, that was the test of every new man and every new congregation; had the Spirit been granted to them?*

*(St. Paul The Traveler And The Roman Citizen,  
W. M. Ramsay p. 364)*

Many believe that the Apostles immediately went out on missions to the world after Pentecost. This is a popular misconception. Their immediate departure from Jerusalem after Pentecost would have been premature and ill advised. An ancient tradition affirms that Jesus commanded them to remain for twelve years in Palestine before carrying the Gospel to the known world. Whether consciously aware of it or not, the Apostles had to lay the foundation of the New Israel – the Church. They must determine the principle teachings of Jesus upon which Gospel faith would be based. The elementary principles of Church worship and organization must be determined. This would only be achieved over a period of time, through mutual collaboration among those twelve men chosen as foundation stones of a New Creation, and empowered by Jesus its Creator to inaugurate it on earth.

As mentioned earlier, the narrowness of Vision in the early Church changed with the conversion of some Hellenistic Jews. With a fuller and deeper understanding of the revelation of Jesus, the beliefs and teachings of the Church expanded. The faith, the worship, and the life of this Community became more differentiated from the Jewish Community. With the preaching of Stephen, the Jews began to grasp the potential threat to traditional Judaism existing in this *Nazorean* party. While the more conservative members of the Church remained relatively safe, the Hellenistic converts with their more scandalous teachings about Jesus of Nazareth, suffered an intense persecution, resulting in their being driven from Judea. This persecution resulted in the spreading of faith in Jesus beyond Judea, beyond Palestine. The force of persecution scattered the

body of believers, and therefore the faith itself. Wherever the disciples went, the Spirit urged them to proclaim their belief in Jesus. Luke wrote: *“The members of the church who had been dispersed went about preaching the word (Acts 8:4).”*

## A GROWING CHURCH

As an example of these early evangelists and their work, Luke records the evangelization among the Samaritans by Philip, one of the Seven. Philip's missionary work extended the Community to embrace people considered to be half-Jew. The authorities in Jerusalem approved the reception of these circumcised Samaritans into the Church. This episode was the first outreach of the Church to evangelize people other than pure orthodox Jews. Later, Philip baptized a Jewish proselyte. This action represented a further extension of Church membership, to include those of Jewish faith but not of Jewish origin. This man, who was African, represented the spreading of the faith into Africa. Luke drops this thread of thought and turns the attention of his readers away from Africa by sending the evangelist Philip north towards Caesarea. The intention of Luke's work is to show the growth of the Church from Jerusalem to Rome, the center of world power and influence. At Caesarea, Simon Peter received the Roman centurion Cornelius and his household into the Church. Cornelius was called *a God fearing Gentile*, implying his openness and conformity, to a degree, to the Jewish religion while remaining outside the Jewish Community. His entrance into the Church symbolized the acceptance of the uncircumcised into the Community. In Cornelius' case, he came to the Church; the Church did not seek him. At that time membership in the Church was restricted to Jews, and to those who adhered to Judaism to some degree. The Church had yet to take the ultimate step of actively seeking converts among the Gentiles. Up to this point, the Church had concentrated its attention in converting Jews. Only when the Church, by force of circumstance, extended itself beyond Palestine, did it face and accept its Divine mission and responsibility to bring the Gospel to all Nations.

The Lord Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God as being like leaven. It is interesting to see how almost secretly and imperceptibly the Church began to grow. The growth of the Church can be primarily attributed to the Holy Spirit, not to the vision, ambition, and zeal of the Apostles. It is certainly to the credit of the Apostles that even though they did not directly lead Church expansion, they never used their authority to impede it; rather,

when growth occurred, they recognized it to be an operation of the Holy Spirit.

The general expansion of the early Church resulted from the zeal of many unknown men and women; Philip appears as their representative. Acts teaches the important part individual members of the Church played in the spreading of the Gospel. The leaders have their roles, but the Holy Spirit extends His kingdom on earth primarily through the body of the faithful. When the faithful are content to leave the spreading of the Gospel to Church officials, and the officials are content for the laity to sit in the pews, the Spirit's voice grows weak in the world, and the Church grows feeble. In the early part of this century, Father Thomas Judge, C. M., had a vision in which he beheld the laity as a sleeping giant to be awakened. He preached, *"An awakened and enlightened laity will save the Church!"* He had a dream – every Catholic a missionary! In 1909, he founded the Missionary Cenacle Apostolate, a lay organization, for this purpose. He once confessed, *"I have had many converts during my priestly ministry, but everyone, without exception, initially came to me because of the influence of some good lay person."*

Acts strongly emphasizes the dependence of the Holy Spirit upon the cooperation of human beings. Both the Holy Spirit and the Evil One depend upon the willingness of human beings, and the good and evil of this world is wrought through their willing cooperation. The Incarnation of God's Son demonstrates that even God makes Himself dependent upon human nature for the redemption of mankind. Some people cast God in the role of a fairy godmother, and demand He come waving a magic wand, making everything right in their lives and their world. When God insists upon acting as God, they become angry and unfaithful. Nothing from without will change this world or mankind. It all comes, for better or worse, from within man. It all depends whether men acknowledge God or Satan as their father. . . .

Acts draws the first part of the history of the Church to a close: the birth and development of the Church within the heart of Judaism, and its full flowering into the New Israel. Luke returns now to Chapter Eight to pick up a forgotten thread with which he will begin to weave the second stage of the history of the Church – the evangelization of the Nations. As the first part centered on the activities of Simon Peter, the Apostle to the Jews, so the second part will center upon the activities of Paul of Tarsus, the Apostle to the Gentiles.

## CHURCH AT ANTIOCH

In Chapter Eight, Luke had written, *“The members of the Church who had been dispersed went about preaching the word (Acts 8:4).”* He told us that all but the Apostles fled Jerusalem, scattering throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria. For Greek speaking Jews, Judea would no longer be a safe place. They must seek refuge in areas beyond the influence of the Sanhedrin. Picking up that lost thread, Luke writes:

*Those in the community who had been dispersed by the persecution that arose because of Stephen went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, making the message known to none but Jews.*

*(Acts 11:19)*

These dispersed disciples had headed north along the coast, entering the safer Roman province of Syria, Cilicia and Phoenicia. Twenty years later communities of believers would be found along the path they traversed – in Ptolemais (today the Israeli city of Akko), and in Tyre (today part of Lebanon). From these seaport cities, some disciples crossed over to the island of Cyprus, while others pushed north along the coast to the port of Seleuceia. They traveled inland from there, along the Orontes River, and arrived at the great city Antioch (today called Antakya – part of modern Turkey). In the city of Antioch a great page of Church History would be written.

Around 300 B.C., Seleucus, a general in the army of Alexander the Great, founded and built this city, making it the royal city for the Seleucid Kingdom. In 64 A.D., Antioch came under Roman rule. Rome declared it a free city and made it the capital for the Province of Syria. After Rome and Alexandria, Antioch was considered the greatest city of the empire, rightly called the Queen of the East as it exerted a ruling influence over the Mediterranean world. Antioch lay about fifteen miles from the sea, built on the River Orontes, and surrounded by wooded mountains. Its main street was over four miles long, paved with marble and floodlighted by night. The city housed racecourses, theaters, nightclubs, great baths, swimming pools, central heating, and plumbing. Outside the city was the Temple of Daphne, devoted to the cult of Apollos. The temple was a popular and famous center of prostitution. Many a Roman official desired to be posted in Antioch. When a certain Roman poet desired to lament the corruption of Rome, he wrote, *“The Syrian Orontes has flown into the Tiber.”* A certain Englishman



described Antioch as having *“a climate that would satisfy a modern Californian; it was as fashionable and pleasure-loving as Hollywood.”* After unnamed refugees of Jesus Christ came to Antioch from Palestine, Antioch would never be the same, and neither would the Church. At that time, the city housed about 800,000 people. Many Jews lived in the city, for Seleucus settled a large population of Jews there. As in Alexandria, the Jews lived in a certain quarter of the city, and were largely left to their own government.

In Antioch, the Church came face to face with the Mediterranean world dominated by Greco-Roman culture. It found itself in an environment completely alien to its concept and birth. Could the Church survive in such an environment? It not only survived – it flourished. Here arose the Mother Church to the Nations. From here, the Mediterranean world would come to know Christ. This Church would produce great martyrs and saints like Ignatius and John Chrysostom. Four centuries later it would be the home of a great school of theology, influencing the Church for centuries to come. The Church, rooting itself in such an alien environment as Antioch, confirmed the universality of the Gospel message. It testified to the truth that nothing could stop the spread of the Gospel. Hinder and impede it? Yes! Stop it? Never! The Word would win the World for the Father!

*“Where evil does abound, grace does more abound!”* A culture that caters only to the flesh of man leaves him with a hungry spirit. Man experiences an inner emptiness that the pleasures of the world cannot fill; he is aware of a loneliness that drugs cannot destroy. This unquieted spiritual hunger drives many to the pleasures of the world in vain pursuit for inner peace. Often health and life are lost before realizing that road dead-ends. Some survivors live on in bitter cynicism, some seek a release in suicide. Yet, under grace, others recognize the vanity of their former ways, and embark on a spiritual quest. This quest can have a glorious ending, but it can also end disastrously. Many ships leave from the same port, but all do not arrive at the same harbor. It is sad when the human spirit remains retarded; it is evil when the human spirit becomes perverted. The corruption of the highest is the worst. A spiritual quest on the wrong road leaves a soul more tightly in the arms of Satan than before. The disciples who came to Antioch knew Jesus to be The Way of a spiritual quest leading to Truth and Life. He was the Way not only for them but for all mankind.

Luke tells us that some of these disciples preached the Word only to Jews,

but others, who came from Cyprus and Cyrene, began to preach to Greeks. The Island of Cyprus lay about a hundred miles from the mainland. Cyprus means *copper* in Latin, and Cyprus was famous for its mines. Cyrene was a Grecian city in North Africa (part of Libya today), and it too had a large Jewish population. Jews reared in such cities as Alexandria, Cyrene, and Antioch were considerably influenced by Greco-Roman culture. These Jews had a wider outlook on the world than those reared in the Palestinian area. They were not burdened with a lot of the inherited prejudice of the Palestinian Jews. Their own spirits gave them greater freedom in dealing and associating with Gentiles. Because of their greater experience in relationships with foreigners, they had a more realistic view of the non-Jew. When some of these disciples came to Antioch, free from the cultural and moral restrictions of the native Jews, they began without hesitation to preach the Gospel to the Greeks.

Many people in Antioch, reacting against the immorality of their environment, found the Jewish religion a refuge. As mentioned earlier, the pagans adhering to the Jewish religion to a limited degree were called, "*God fearing Gentiles.*" It was to these God-fearing Greeks that the disciples successfully addressed the Gospel. Luke tells us:

*Some men of Cyprus and Cyrene among them who had come to Antioch began to talk even to the Greeks, announcing the good news of the Lord Jesus to them. (Acts 11:20)*

This was a departure from the accepted missionary activity of the Church. Peter's reception of Cornelius into the Church appeared to be more an exception than a policy. Nevertheless, a precedent had been established. Luke immediately indicates that this new missionary thrust was under Divine Grace and with Divine approval. He indicated this by saying, "*The hand of the Lord was with them.*" This implies that signs and wonders accompanied their ministry. As a result, "*a great number of them believed and were converted to the Lord (Acts 11:21a).*" Many Gentiles entered the Church through the Synagogue at this time.

At Antioch, we have the congregation composed of Jews and non-Jews – the circumcised and the non-circumcised. It is about the year 40 AD., and the Church is in its tenth year. For the first time in its history, the Church becomes concretely Catholic. Interestingly, it was a member of this Antiochian Community, Ignatius the Martyr who died in 96 A.D., who first

referred to the Church as the Catholic Church in writing.

### JERUSALEM SENDS ENCOURAGEMENT

The Mother Church in Jerusalem hears that a flourishing Community of believers has taken root in Antioch. It also hears about the mixed congregation. Luke writes, "*News of this eventually reached the ears of the Church in Jerusalem, resulting in Barnabas' being sent to Antioch (Acts 11:22).*" There is concern, but no reaction, on the part of Jerusalem. The Church refrains from making a judgment about the community in Antioch until it has an official report. The man chosen as its official representative to the community in Antioch best demonstrates The Church's attitude. The Church sends Barnabas, its *son of encouragement*, who was a Greek speaking Levite from the Isle of Cyprus.

Barnabas came to Antioch; he saw, and he rejoiced. The very same evidence that convinced Peter to accept Cornelius also convinced Barnabas to bless the Church in Antioch. The Community manifested the Presence of the Holy Spirit. Living up to his name, Barnabas becomes a source of great encouragement to the disciples there. No doubt this innovative move of accepting Gentiles in large numbers into the Community caused anxiety among many of the more traditional Jewish believers. Luke tells us, "*He encouraged them all to remain firm in their commitment to the Lord, since he himself was a good man filled with the Holy spirit and faith (Acts 11:23b-24a).*" Barnabas recognized this Community in Antioch to be the work of the Lord. He encouraged them to continue in their openness to the Gentiles. If the Community hesitated to baptize or lay hands upon these converts, he encouraged them to act. If any were reluctant to accept uncircumcised men as brothers, he urged them to accept them. Barnabas recognized that people become one through faith in Jesus Christ, and through fidelity to His Holy Spirit. Faith in Jesus Christ, and communal love create the Church. As a result of Barnabas' ministry, the evangelistic spirit within the Community increased, and "*thereby large numbers were added to the Lord (Acts 11:24b).*"

Luke, by a mere word, can cover an epoch. He indicates and subtly suggests many things. He highlights only those moments significant to the story and the message he desires to impart to the readers. He expects them to read between the lines.

## THE RETURN OF SAUL

Barnabas has analyzed this growing ministry in Antioch. He notes the progress being made, but he likewise sees the potential not being achieved. This work demands certain qualifications, and certain characteristics. The missionary field demands men who have a good working knowledge of the Septuagint Bible, men who understand foreign customs and can easily adapt to them, and, if God should call them, men who have the spirit for the wider world of other great cities of the Mediterranean. As Barnabas thought over these things, the Spirit of the Lord kept bringing to mind the face and name of a man he knew some ten years before, Saul of Tarsus. Barnabas had heard he was still in Tarsus.

Because Barnabas *“was a good man filled with the Holy Spirit and faith,”* he left Antioch and went north to Tarsus searching for Saul. The Church of Jerusalem had exiled Saul to Tarsus ten years before. It is a representative of this same Jerusalem Church that now goes to Saul, asking him to assume a ministry with the Community at Antioch. Barnabas located him, but the ancient Bezan text of Luke indicates that Barnabas encountered a reluctant Saul. Once again, he had to exercise his unique charism of encouragement. He prevailed upon Saul to return with him. Perhaps the reluctance of Saul stemmed from a sense of rejection by Church officials, or his own personal sense of failure. No mention is made of a community of believers in Tarsus where Saul had dwelt, off and on, for the last ten years.

Due to the persuasive power of Barnabas, and Saul’s cooperation with Divine grace, Saul enters into the mainstream of Church life. Saul’s arrival in Antioch was a historical moment in Church History, destined to change the course of that history. He gradually entered into his ministry. Saul assumed a role of teacher along with Barnabas. Luke writes, *“For a whole year they met with the Church and instructed great numbers (Acts 11:26b).”* In this sentence, Luke recognizes the Community in Antioch, at this point in its development, to be a Church. He also indicates the blessing of God upon the ministry of Saul and Barnabas.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Shakespeare once wrote, *“What’s in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.”* He implies that names are but arbitrary symbols, expressing no intrinsic relationship to the things named. Such is not the case in Semitic culture. Names given to persons ought to express an essential aspect about them – perhaps a secret and hidden quality of character. We see an example of this at the Annunciation to Mary. The angel told Mary to call her son *Jesus*. *Jesus (Joshua)* means *Yahweh is salvation*. The name *Jesus* is to express her Son’s essential relationship to mankind – the Divine Savior. Early members of the Church referred to themselves as *“the disciples of the Lord,” “the Community of believers,” “the brethren.”* The unbelieving Jews referred to members of the Church as *Nazoreans*. In Antioch, members of the Church received a new name. It came from the unbelieving Antiochians. These people had a reputation for wit and bestowing nicknames. The Community of believers had become visible enough in the eye of the general public to be recognized as distinct from the general Jewish community. They heard the disciples so often speaking and arguing about *“the Christ,”* that the word *Christ* came to be associated with this particular group. The word *Christ*, being Hebrew in origin, had little significance to the Greeks. In Hebrew, it meant *the Anointed One*. It signified the divinely anointed king of Israel who would exalt Israel above all enemies. Such a meaning would be lost upon the Greeks. The Greeks had a similar word, *Chrestos*, meaning *a good worthy person*. So making a play on the words *Christos* and *Chrestos*, the Antiochians nicknamed the members of the Church *Chrestianoï*. Today, we might roughly translate that to mean *“those goodie goodies.”* What was given as a joke stuck, and members of the Church came to be called *Christians*. Luke recorded, *“It was in Antioch that the disciples were called Christians for the first time (Acts 11:26c).”* The original form probably was *Chrestians* and later corrected to *Christians*. The Jews would never have called the disciples *Christians*. The members found in the corrected version of their nickname, that which essentially expressed their religious beliefs: *Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ – the Messiah – their anointed King*. The word *Christian* not only expressed their faith in *Jesus*, but their obedience to Him. It is ironic that the name began as a joke. Today, many who call themselves *Christians* have made the name a joke again. Many so-called *Christians* neither believe in, nor obey, *Jesus Christ*. Obedience to *Jesus* is the first fruit of true faith in Him. When we call ourselves *Christians*, we can well ask, *“What’s in a name?”*

## PROPHETS AND PRESBYTERS

Luke tells us, “*At about that time (it is around the year 43 A.D.), certain prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch (Acts 11:27).*” This is Luke’s first mention of prophets in the Church. In fact, in the next few verses, he casually mentions two groups that have developed within the Church. Prophets held a recognized position in the early Church. They ranked next to Apostles. Prophets had a charismatic office; Paul speaks of it as the best of charisms for building up the community. They had a regular place and function in the early Church life. The word comes from the Greek, meaning, “*one who speaks for others.*” In Greek, *prophet* normally denotes one who communicates divine revelation. This does not imply that a prophetic utterance must foretell the future. Prophecy is not synonymous with prediction. A prophet delivers a message from God. It may be an exhortation, or it may be a prediction. Paul describes the work of a prophet: “*The prophet . . . speaks to men for their upbuilding, their encouragement, their consolation (1Cor. 14:3).*” Prophets appear to have exercised a distinct role within the Church until around the end of the second century. As the Old Testament prophets yielded to the scribes, so in the New Testament, the prophetic role seemingly disappeared with the development of the hierarchical offices within the Church. Of course, the role can never completely disappear – prophets serve as a divine check upon hierarchical authority within the Church. Needless to say, the role of a true prophet remains a difficult one, and as the life of John the Baptist testifies, a deadly one. Many receive recognition only after their death. The role of a prophet may have decreased and all but disappeared in the Church today, because of the great number of false prophets appearing on the scene, successfully seducing the people.

We note in the Didache a teaching about discerning true and false prophets, and how to deal with them. In his first epistle, St. John tells us:

*Beloved, do not trust every spirit, but put the spirits to a test to see if they belong to God, because many false prophets have appeared in the world.*  
*(1 Jn. 4:1)*

The Church of Antioch received the prophets from Jerusalem with open arms. The Bezan text of Acts states that at their coming, *“there was much gladness. And when we collected together, one of them was named Agabus . . .”* In our standard text of Acts, the “we” sections do not appear until Chapter Sixteen.

This ancient text indicates Luke’s presence in the early Church at Antioch. Our standard text goes on to say that the prophet *“Agabus was inspired to stand up and proclaim that there was going to be a severe famine all over the world (It did in fact occur while Claudius was emperor) (Acts 11:28).”*

Claudius reigned from 41 to 54 AD. The Roman writers Suetonius and Tacitus speak of famines during his reign. Josephus records a famine in Judea between 46-48 A.D. However, no known famine occurred *“all over the world.”* No doubt this was a literal expression meaning it was *widespread*, or it could have implied *“all over the land”* of Palestine. From the reaction of the Church of Antioch, this seems to be the implication.

The poverty of the Church at Jerusalem was well known. Perhaps it was because of the early practice of selling off property, and it certainly was a result of the persecutions suffered by the Community. The knowledge of further hardship being placed upon the Mother Church moved the Church at Antioch to compassion. As an expression of their concern and responsibility, *“the disciples determined to set something aside, each according to his means, and send it to the relief of the brothers who lived in Judea (Acts 11:29).”* This concrete expression of Church unity impressed Saul. It would later serve as a pattern of behavior in the Churches established by him. The money would have been collected over a period of time and would not have been sent before the famine. Luke relates only that the Church did send aid to Judea: *“They did this, dispatching it to the presbyters in care of Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:30).”*

Elders or presbyters are mentioned for the first time within the Church. Luke implies the money was sent to officials in the Church other than Apostles. We know this matter concerned material necessities, and the Apostles earlier defined their ministry as one of prayer and preaching the Gospel. Time and human energy have limitations. A prudent person must

recognize priorities, and conserve their time and energy for the ministry

God called them to exercise. The Apostles, therefore, appointed others to attend to these matters within the Church.

We know that elders played a prominent role in the Old Testament. We can best understand their position in the Church by understanding the concept and role of elders within the Jewish religion. The Jewish elders would have served as a prototype for the Christian elders who appear as a distinct group from the Apostles (*Acts 15*). Our Christian elders would certainly be a religious and cultural inheritance from Judaism.

The elders, *Zaken*, appear in the Old Testament as a distinct social and ruling body with political and religious duties. In these duties, they represented the entire people (*See Ex 3:16; 4:29*). They appeared as associates and companions of the political or religious leader, particularly when the leader exercised authority (*See Ex. 3:18; Dt. 27:1*). At times, they appear as a governing body (*See Jos. 9:11; Jgs. 8:5*), and frequently as a judicial body (*See Dt. 19:12; 21:3; Jos. 21:4*). During the reign of the early kings of Israel, the elders appear as the heads of tribes, clans, and families who formed the King's council, as representatives of the people they served and as a check upon his ruling power. Their functions were determined more by custom than by law, but we know that in the Semitic world, custom had the force of law. The appearance of elders in the Christian Community indicates the organizational development of the Church. Apparently, their roles developed within the Community.

In Acts 20, Paul gives his farewell address to the elders of Ephesus, and he exhorts them:

*Keep watch over yourselves, and over the whole flock the Holy Spirit has given you to guard. Shepherd the church of God . . .*

He pictures them as guardians and shepherds within the Church. The gift of prophecy that was given to Timothy is attributed to the laying on of hands by the elders (*See 1 Tim. 4:14*).

Paul tells Timothy that:

*Elders (presbyters) who do well as leaders deserve to be paid double, especially those who work in preaching and teaching . . . Pay no attention to an accusation against a presbyter unless it is supported*



*by two or three witnesses.*

*(1 Tim. 5:17, 19)*

In James, we see that the elders pray for the sick and their prayers have the power to restore the sick to health (*See James 5:14-15*). Peter's epistle exhorts young men to be subject to the elders (*See 1 Pt. 5:1-5*). By the time the epistle to Titus was written, the role of elders had apparently evolved into the role of bishop and priest, as we find it in the Church today.

### DARK CLOUDS OVER JERUSALEM

Luke has already directed the minds of his readers towards the second part of his historical presentation with the founding of the Church at Antioch, and the return of Saul into the mainstream of Church life. He now directs our minds back to the Jerusalem Church, in order to cap and complete this section before entering fully into this second phase, called by some "*the Acts of Paul*." Luke does this by relating the following episode about Herod and the Apostles James and Peter. This is not intended to be in proper time sequence. Probably Saul and Barnabas went with the collection to Judea in 46 A.D., as Herod died in 44 A.D.

Luke tells us "*King Herod started to harass some of the members of the church (Acts 12:1).*" Herod Agrippa was the grandson of Herod the Great, who ruled as King of the Jews from 40 to 4 B.C. Herod Agrippa was born to Aristobolus in 11 B.C; Herod the Great murdered his son Aristobolus. Agrippa and his sister Herodias were reared in Rome. Herodias married her uncle, Philip, a private citizen of Rome. She divorced him to marry another uncle, Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, who murdered John the Baptist. In the meantime, her brother Agrippa courted the favor of Caesar Augustus and his heir. When Caligula became emperor, he awarded his friend Agrippa the title of King, and gave him the territory of Iturea and Trachonitis in 37 A.D. This aroused the jealousy of Herod's sister Herodias who urged her husband to go and seek the title of king from Caligula. An angry Caligula banished Herod Antipas to Lyons, and gave Galilee and Perea to Agrippa. When Caligula died, King Agrippa went into the Roman Senate and persuaded them to accept Claudius as emperor. For this, Claudius had Agrippa rule over Judea and Samaria, formerly under Roman procuratorship. A man who had had to flee from his creditors only a few years before, in 41 A.D., at the age of 52, had become ruler of almost as much of Palestine as had his grandfather Herod the Great. Once Herod Agrippa became King of Judea, he left Rome and took

up residence in Jerusalem. He sought to gain favor with the people. He especially desired to ingratiate himself with the Pharisees. When the Pharisees accused the Apostle James of disloyalty before Agrippa, he ordered James to be beheaded. James was the brother of John, and a son of Zebedee, among the first to follow Jesus. Along with Peter and John, he had received special attention from Jesus. Our Lord once assured these two brothers, *“from the cup I drink of, you shall drink; the bath I am immersed in you shall share (Mk. 10:39).”* Herod killed James to please the Jews, and when he saw how pleased they were with him, he arrested Peter and intended to try him publicly before the people after the feast of Passover. Luke relates a vivid account of what took place. He may have heard the story from John Mark, who heard the account given by Peter himself at his mother’s home, the night Peter escaped from prison.

Luke tells us that while Peter was in prison . . .

*The church prayed fervently to God on his behalf. During the night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, fastened with double chains, while guards kept watch at the door.*

Peter was probably chained to the two soldiers. If a prisoner escaped, the guards suffered the punishment intended for the prisoner. Peter lost no sleep because of the situation.

*Suddenly an angel of the Lord stood nearby and light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him. “Hurry, get up!” he said. With that, the chains dropped from Peter’s wrists. The angel said, “Put on your belt and your sandals!” This he did. Then the angel told him, “Now put on your cloak and follow me.”*

*Peter followed him out, but with no clear realization that this was taking place through the angel’s help. The whole thing seemed to him a mirage. They passed the first guard, then the second, and finally came to the iron-gate leading out to the city, which opened itself. (Peter probably had been imprisoned in the Tower of Antonia, the headquarters for the soldiers.) They emerged and made their way down a narrow alley, when suddenly the angel left him.*

*(Acts 12:5-10)*

By this time, Peter was wide-awake and excited. He went immediately *“to the house of Mary, the mother of John (also known as Mark), where many others were gathered in prayer.”* This would be the Cenacle – the place of the Last Supper, and the upper room of Pentecost. They had prayed so earnestly for the release of Peter that when the Lord answered their prayer, they couldn’t believe it.

*Peter knocked at the door and a maid named Rhoda came to answer it. On recognizing his voice she was so overjoyed that she did not stop to open the door, but ran in and announced that Peter was outside.*

At this moment, time was precious to him. He must be out of the city before he is missed or spotted by someone. Meanwhile, behind the closed doors, the Church is having a speculative discussion about who is knocking at their door, when Rhoda runs in and tells everyone that Peter is outside.

*“You are out of your wits,” they said to her, but she insisted it was true. All they could say was, “It must be his angel.” Through all this, Peter kept on knocking. (It was probably another miracle that all Jerusalem wasn’t awakened by now.) They finally opened the door and were astonished to see him. He motioned to them to be quiet, and explained how the Lord had brought him out of prison. “Report this to James and the brothers,” he said, then left them to go off to another place.*

*(Acts 12:15-17)*

From Peter’s word, it may be presumed that the other Apostles had left Jerusalem. Peter is leaving Jerusalem also. Apparently, James governs the Church in Jerusalem. With Peter leaving Jerusalem, Luke closes this first part of his narrative. This episode in Church History has ended. This does not imply that Peter never returns to Jerusalem. A few years later it was safe for him to return, and we find him back in the city in 49 A.D., for the Church council. During this period, he may have visited Rome; we do know he resided in Antioch for some time.

Returning to our narrative, Luke tells us:

*At daybreak, confusion broke out among the soldiers, who did not know what had happened to Peter. Herod then initiated a search for him. When it proved unsuccessful, he had the guards tried and executed. Shortly after this, Herod left Judea to spend some time in Caesarea.*

*(Acts 12:18-19)*

Here by the sea, Herod could relax from all those moral and religious pressures of Jerusalem, away from the critical eyes of the Scribes and Sadducees. Luke now relates the end of this man:

*Herod had long been infuriated by the people of Tyre and Sidon, who now, by common consent, came before him in his court. They won over his royal chamberlain Blastus and attempted to placate him, because their country was supplied with food from the king's territory. On an appointed day, Herod, arrayed in royal robes, took his seat on the rostrum and publicly addressed them. The assembled crowd shouted back, "This is the voice of a god, not a man!" The angel of the Lord struck Herod down at once because he did not ascribe the honor to God, and he died eaten by worms.*

*(Acts 12:20-21)*

Jewish historian, Josephus, gives this account of Herod's death:

*The king went to Caesarea and gave a splendid spectacle in honor of Caesar, at which all the chief personages were present. On the second day, he put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a texture truly wonderful, and came into the theater early in the morning; at which time, the silver of his garment, being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays upon it, shone out with surprising manner, and was so resplendent as to spread a horror over those that looked intently upon him; and presently, his flatterers cried out . . . that he was a god; and they added, "Be thou merciful to us; for although we have hither to revered thee only as a man, yet shall we henceforth own thee as superior to mortal nature." Upon this, the king did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery. As he looked up, he saw an owl sitting on a rope, and realized that the bird, which had once been a messenger of good fortune to him, now foretold evil. He was seized with*

*violent internal pains. He had to be carried to the palace where he lingered in agony for five days. And when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life, being in the fifty-fourth year of his age.*

Such was the end of the man who murdered James the Apostle, and sought to destroy the life of Simon Peter.

As always, Luke implies much more than he says. In a special way, the Apostles represent the Church. The Church must go the way of its Lord.

Members of the Church must not only live and work for the Lord but, if it be the Will of God, must die for the Lord. The Church is in God's hands, and no matter what evil hands might grasp the Church, God will deliver the Church out of those hands. The evil powers of this world will have their day – they will persecute the Church, and they will destroy some members, but the Church will be delivered out of their hands.

Those who seek to destroy the Church – the reality of God in this world – may indeed appear to be fortunate by the standards of this world and in the eyes of men. In Herod Agrippa, they may behold their prototype. One moment they dazzle the world as a sun of glory, a peacock of splendor, but in the next moment comes the judgment of God. From His Hands there is no deliverance. Herod's death represents this judgment of God. It symbolizes what will be the final end of all those who make themselves an antichrist--an Angel of the Lord struck him down. He became food for worms; where the worm dies not and the fire is not quenched.

When Herod had had his day and all had been said and done by Him, Luke subtly concludes with: *“Meanwhile, the word of the Lord continued to spread and increase” (Acts 12:24).* No one can stop the Gospel!

As the curtain falls upon the first great episode in the life of the Church, dark clouds shroud the future. Religious leaders and rulers oppose its existence on earth. Persecution has fallen heavily upon the Community; Stephen and James are dead; many of its finest members have been driven away; poverty grips the Community; with Peter fleeing for his life, the last Apostle has been driven away from Jerusalem. The Church faces an uncertain and doubtful future. In all this gloom and darkness, Luke sees a glimmer of light. There, on the road back to Antioch, are Saul and

Barnabas, and a third young man has joined them – John Mark. Their hearts are filled with the Spirit of Jesus of Nazareth. The fire He came to cast upon the earth is far from being extinguished. A new and brighter dawn is about to break. A torch has been lit and a sheep has been led. Tomorrow will be a brand new day for the Church – The Gospel goes on!

## CHAPTER 12

### MISSION TO THE GENTILES

#### INTRODUCTION

The Church is now on the road to Rome from where it will reach out to embrace the world for Jesus Christ. The center of Church life moves from Jerusalem to Antioch. The Church of Antioch sends out the first missionary expedition into the pagan world. Luke's opening scene, in this new center of Church life, pictures an established Christian Community with its prophets and teachers:

*There were, in the Church at Antioch, certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Symeon known as Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch), and Saul.*  
*(Acts 1:1)*

The Greek text appears to imply that Barnabas, Symeon, and Lucius are prophets, and Manaen and Saul are teachers. But in all probability, the five represent the ruling body in the Church at Antioch, in which they all taught and prophesied.

The first letter to Timothy speaks of those fulfilling the roles of preachers and teachers as the leaders in the Church. They are referred to as the presbyters and elders of the Church: "*Presbyters who do well as leaders deserve to be paid double, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching (1 Tim. 5:17).*" The epistle to the Ephesians tells us that Christ Jesus "*gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers in roles of service for the faithful to build up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-12).*" The Church never appears as a flock in which the sheep were internally directed by some divinely synchronized radar equipment. The Church never appears in the Scriptures without its visible shepherds and guardians.

The listing of Barnabas as first among the leaders appears to be recognition

of the authority of the Jerusalem Church. Barnabas was the apostolic delegate sent by the Mother Church. Luke makes no mention of the Community in Antioch as a Church until after the arrival and ministry of Barnabas. Luke perhaps implies that Barnabas truly founded the Church at Antioch. Even though the Church of Antioch has ties to the Mother Church, its own freedom and independence are evident.

Of the other leaders mentioned, Symeon may have been an African, as he bore a surname meaning *black*. Some believe he may have been Simon the Cyrenean who carried the Cross of Jesus. We know his sons Alexander and Rufus were known to John Mark (*Mk. 15:21*).

Lucius of Cyrene no doubt was one of those who first preached to Antiochian Greeks. Some have suggested that Lucius was Luke our author. Manaen was called the *foster-brother* of Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee. "*Foster-brother*" appears to be a court title, designating one who has the favor and friendship of the king. Manaen may have been reared in Herod's household; the Essene, Menaen, may have been his father. Menaen had foretold to the young boy Herod (Herod the Great) that he would one day be king. When Herod did become king, he bestowed special attention upon Menaen. Saul appears last in Luke's list, probably indicating he was the latecomer to the Church at Antioch.

## THE LITURGY

These five men presided over church worship. Luke speaks of them as ministering to the Lord: "*They were engaged in the liturgy of the Lord.*" The Greek word that is translated as *liturgy*, signified public worship or service. Originally it meant a service rendered to the state by an individual. In Egypt, *liturgy* signified service rendered to God in the temple. It carried this meaning in the Septuagint Bible. Luke speaks of Zechariah as fulfilling the *liturgy* in the temple (*Lk. 1:8*).

In the early Church, the liturgical celebration would have been the Eucharistic service called "*the breaking of the bread,*" and traditional prayers and readings. We find the Didache instructing the Church: "*Elect for yourselves bishops and deacons, for they also perform for you the liturgy of the prophets and teachers.*" The Greek Christians have, for centuries, referred to the Eucharistic celebration as the liturgy.



Luke mentions fasting along with the liturgy. The Jewish Law demanded fasting only once a year – the Day of Atonement. A pious custom encouraged them to fast twice weekly on Monday and Thursday. The Pharisees criticized the disciples of Jesus for not keeping these fast days. The Didache implied it became a Christian practice to fast twice weekly, but on Wednesday and Friday. Based upon the words of Jesus that His disciples would fast “*when the bridegroom shall be taken away (Mt. 9:15)*”, the early Church fasted on Good Friday and Holy Saturday. Fasting in the early Church was not so much a Christian teaching as it was an asceticism highly prized and encouraged in all the eastern religions. The practice came more from their environment than from the Church. Fasting later had heretical overtones when the practitioners implied the evilness of physical nature. When Luke tells us that the Church was fasting while offering the Liturgy, it could imply the Pascal celebration of Holy Week.

From the very beginning, the worship of the Church was considered a liturgy – a public work in which the community actively participated, and it would have been offered in a working language. The Jerusalem Church celebrated in Aramaic; the Church of Antioch in Greek. When the Church arrived in Rome, the official language of the liturgy became Latin, as it was the common language of the Roman people.

When only the officials spoke the official language of the Church’s liturgy, the true spirit of the liturgy suffered. It became more or less of a spectacular, by which I mean it became something more to be viewed than participated in; people became spectators at the liturgy. In modern times, under the Holy Spirit’s inspiration, the Church began a reform of the liturgy. Part of that reform consisted of putting the liturgy back into a working language – the language of the people – and putting the people in the pews back into the work of public worship. Many people naturally resented this. The hour of public worship had become a time in which Christians came together to do their own thing for the Lord. Some in spirit entered into the liturgical celebration. For many, it was an hour of private devotion like reciting the Rosary, and for some it was a time for passive worship – quietly meditating or contemplating. For many, it was the one quiet hour of the week in which the body and soul rested – from time to time even experiencing a spiritual breakthrough. Good and holy as all this may have been, it was not public worship, and out of place during the liturgical hour. Whatever final form the reformed liturgy takes, it must afford all the people a more perfect participation in the public act of

worshiping God.

To those who complain they get nothing from attending the liturgy of the Church, it may well be asked of them: *“What are you putting into the act of worship? What are you giving more than a warm body and an occasional hour of time?”* Indeed, we come together as the People of God to make a return to the Good Lord who has given us all. Liturgy is a time to give to God. There are twenty-four hours in a day – one hundred and sixty-eight in a week. All this time the Lord gives to us, and some begrudge giving one hour back to the Lord. At a wedding reception, a lady guest once said to the priest who officiated at the service, *“I do not believe in going to Church. I prefer to pray to God in the mountains. I feel so much closer to Him there.”* The priest ended the conversation by asking the lady, *“When was the last time you were on a mountain?”*

### APOSTLES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Luke reports:

*...on one occasion, while they were engaged in the liturgy of the Lord and were fasting, the Holy Spirit spoke to them: “Set apart Barnabas and Saul for me to do the work for which I have called them.” (Acts 13:2)*

Luke suggests that the Holy Spirit inspires every step the Church takes. For Luke, the Holy Spirit does not appear as merely some divine inspiration or spiritual experience. Luke presents the Holy Spirit as a Person, and sees the Holy Spirit as distinct from the Father and the Son. Luke applies the personal pronouns as *I* and *me* to the Holy Spirit. Father Thomas Judge, C.M. often referred to the Holy Spirit as the forgotten God – the forgotten Person of the Holy Trinity. All of his life he sought to spread a personal devotion to the Third Person of the Trinity. He understood, along with other great spiritual men and women, that the source of human sanctity was personal. When the individual encounters the Sanctifier personally, he or she could become holy.

This Holy Divine Person now moves in a direct and dramatic way into the life of the Antiochian Community, and by so doing charters the direction and destiny of the whole Church. The Holy Spirit reaches into the

Community and takes Barnabas its leader, and Saul its most promising and gifted member, for a predestined divine work. The command, *Set apart*, was a sacred one. Yahweh had ordered the first-born, the Levites, and Aaron and his son to be *set apart*.

Saul later realized that God predestined him from his mother's womb to do this work. At his conversion, Jesus revealed his destiny through the prophet Ananias:

*This man is the instrument I have chosen to bring my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. (Acts 9:15)*

Ananias said to Saul:

*The God of our Fathers long ago designated you to know his will, to look upon the Just One, and to hear the sound of his voice; before all men you are to be his witness to what you have seen and heard.*

*(Acts 22:14-15)*

In a vision, Jesus had said to Saul, *“Be on your way. I mean to send you far from here, among the Gentiles (Acts 22:21).”* The hour for Saul to be sent has arrived. From his birth, Saul has been preparing for this moment. *“God writes straight with crooked lines”* go the words of a Portuguese proverb. As the universe proclaims, God is a Lord of order and design. Within the confines of the established Church, God brings the vocation of Saul to its fruition. Saul later boasted that his authority and position in the Church came directly from God, rather than from Church officials. In the sense intended, he was right. Probably he was not the type the Church would have chosen to be its representative. He was no Barnabas. But Luke is at pains to demonstrate that the Lord works His designs within the Church structure. He makes it clear that the Church recognized the vocation of Saul, called him to it, and formally commissioned him. Saul can act, not only in the Name of God but also in the name of the Church, for he has been authorized by the Church. Later, many questioned this commission, insinuating that Saul was an upstart usurper of apostolic authority. Luke silences these men.

After the command from the Holy Spirit to *set apart Saul and Barnabas*, the Church obediently conducted a farewell service: *“Then, after they had fasted*

*and prayed, they imposed hands on them and sent them off (Acts 13:3)."* The young Christian Community made a great sacrifice in giving up Barnabas and Saul to the mission.

The Laying on of hands signified that some blessing, gift, or office was being bestowed. The solemnity of this occasion signifies that something important is occurring. Since both men were already prophets and teachers, they probably were ordained to be Apostles. Both Barnabas and Saul were called Apostles after this ceremony, never before it. The Twelve Apostles were unique within the Church. They could not be replaced. Having been with Jesus from His baptism to His ascension into heaven, they were unique witnesses for Jesus Christ and the Christian Faith. This role could not be passed on. But, the Twelve were more than witnesses – they possessed authority and power for the governing and building up of the Church. This office and power, being essential to Church life and structure, must be passed down. The apostolic commission empowered Barnabas and Saul to proclaim the Gospel, to work signs and wonders, to lay on hands, and to establish and govern new churches; they had been ordained. Their ordination was exceptional, resulting from a special intervention and empowering of the Holy Spirit. Barnabas and Saul rightly could be called the *sheluhim* (apostles) of the Holy Spirit. Saul later appears in the Gentile churches with a prominence close to that of Peter. The Church leaders of Jerusalem never denied Saul's claim to the apostolate; they acknowledged it.

Many great men enter into a moratorium within their careers. It may be a time of psychological escape from a destiny for which they have the talent and ability, but lack the emotional maturity, to withstand the demands and stresses of the vocation. The moratorium often takes the form of another career that affords them a release from the emotional pressure of their true vocation. In this escape career, their ego strength develops sufficiently to bear the burdens of their true destiny. The revelation of their true greatness and contribution to society will necessarily be somewhat latent. Perhaps those ten silent years served as such a moratorium for Saul. The revelation on the road to Damascus was emotionally devastating for Saul. It destroyed the ego that was inflated with human pride. Psychologically, Saul experienced a death followed by a rebirth, which had to be followed by growth and maturity.

Probably no man under God is more responsible for the making of the great

Apostles to the Gentiles than that “*good man filled with the Holy Spirit and faith*” – Barnabas the Levite from Cyprus. From the moment he met Saul, he had been an encouragement to him. Only God knows how much Saul needed that human encouragement. It may have been for this reason the Holy Spirit chose Barnabas to be Saul’s closest companion for the next few years. He probably still needed the encouragement only Barnabas could give in order to come to the full power of his apostolic vocation. Saul’s writings give the impression that he may have been unconscious of his need for the psychological support Barnabas gave to him. For men of Saul’s character, dependence on anyone other than God would be difficult to acknowledge. The Holy Spirit would have been well aware of the need, and supplied it beautifully through the loving friendship of Barnabas.

### MISSION TO CYPRUS

Sailing season did not begin before March 5th. Probably in the early spring of 46 A.D., Barnabas and Saul left Antioch to evangelize. As Luke emphasizes, they were Apostles of the Holy Spirit: “*These two, sent forth by the Holy Spirit, went down to the port of Seleucia (about seventeen miles from Antioch) and set sail from there for Cyprus.*” Cyprus was an island that lay about one hundred miles west of the mainland, an island sixty miles at its widest and one hundred and forty-five miles in length. Since they were not impeded by the westerly winds that blew during the summer months, they were able to sail directly to the harbor of Salamis (Famagusta) on the south coast – a journey of about 130 miles. Cyprus was an easy beginning for the mission. The climate and resources of this copper island were perfect; many called the island *Makaria* meaning a happy place. Cyprus was a Roman province under the rule of the Roman Senate, rather than the emperor. On this happy isle, that happy man Barnabas had been born and reared. Being on his native soil would enable the two missionaries to test their missionary methods and techniques without too much anxiety. It served as a good trial run before moving into deeper and more uncertain waters.

Barnabas and Saul followed the standard missionary technique started by Jesus of going to the synagogue and preaching. We read: “*On their arrival in the Salamis, they proclaimed the Word of God in the Jewish synagogues (Acts 13:5).*” The presence of more than one synagogue indicated a large Jewish population in Salamis. In the synagogue, they found a ready-made audience of Jews, and those Greeks who would be most open to their

message. In the synagogue worship after the invocation, prayers, and Scripture readings, the head of the community would request some member of the congregation to give a commentary on the Scriptures. Saul's dress, no doubt, indicated his rabbinical training, and the congregation would welcome hearing from a learned visitor. Apparently, the preaching of the apostles met no opposition from the Jews.

Luke reveals the presence of John Mark only at this point: *"John accompanying them as an assistant (Acts 13:5)."* At the beginning of the expedition, Luke deliberately omitted mentioning John Mark. By so doing, he signifies John Mark was not selected by the Holy Spirit for this mission, nor delegated by the Church at Antioch. His presence was due to the personal decision of Barnabas and Saul. They brought John Mark along to assist them personally, and perhaps to train him in the apostolate. Being a cousin of Barnabas, it would have been an opportunity for him to meet his relatives living on the island.

Luke summed up the work by telling us they traveled over the whole island as far as Paphos. In the mind of the historian Luke, only one incident occurred on the island of historical note. This took place at Paphos, the capital of the province, which was located ninety miles west of Salamis. The place was famous (or infamous) for the temple of Aphrodite – Venus the goddess of love. At Paphos:

*...they came across a Jewish magician named Bar-Jesus, who posed as a prophet. He was attached to the court of the proconsular governor Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence who had summoned Barnabas and Saul and was anxious to hear the word of God.*

*(Acts 13:6-9)*

We know from a Roman source that Sergius Paulus possessed a scientific mind and interest in natural history. It was the fashion for such people to have men like Bar-Jesus in their company. Such men were an interesting combination of philosopher, scientist, theologian and magician. Bar-Jesus probably exerted considerable influence over the governor. It was just such men who capitalized on the spiritual hunger of others, diverting their quest for spiritual truth to perverted paths. It was an age in which signs and wonders impressed men, and they were vulnerable to men like Bar-Jesus, whom Luke calls a false prophet.

A summons from a man of Sergius Paulus' station would be a command. For the first time, through Sergius Paulus, the Church addresses itself to Rome. Sergius Paulus listens to their words with great interest and pleasure. Their teachings opposed those of Bar-Jesus, and threatened his hold over the governor. With a powerful gift of words and oratory, Bar-Jesus gives a rebuttal to the apostles, giving a different account of Jesus and His teachings. Sergius Paulus would be in no position to distinguish the truth from the false. It is a critical moment, and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit Saul acts. Since Bar-Jesus willfully resists and perverts the truth, he sins against the Holy Spirit. Saul demonstrates that an apostle can curse as well as bless. Luke tells us:

*Saul, also known as Paul, was filled with the Holy Spirit; he stared at him and exclaimed, "You are an impostor and a thoroughgoing fraud, you son of Satan and enemy of all that is right. (His name Bar-Jesus meant Son of Salvation. Saul implies this to be hypocrisy and strips away the mask, revealing his true sonship – son of Satan). Will you never stop trying to make crooked the straight paths of the Lord? The Lord's hand is upon you even now! For a time, you shall be blind, unable so much as to see the sun!" At once, a misty darkness came over him, and he groped about for someone to lead him by the hand. When the governor saw what had happened, he believed; so impressed was he by the teaching about the Lord.*

*(Acts 13:9-12)*

In this incident, the Gospel has been effectively preached to a man who symbolized Rome, Sergius Paulus. The Gospel had been believed and appreciated by Sergius Paulus, and had been opposed by the Evil One, symbolized in Bar-Jesus. The Evil One had been overcome. In this episode, Luke would have us see the future success of the Church. The scene is prophetic. Confident and reassured by their success, the apostles leave Cyprus and move into uncharted waters.

## SAUL TO PAUL

During the Paphos incident, Luke referred to Saul as Paul for the first time. It was fashionable for every Syrian or Cilician who had a Greek education, to bear a Greek name and at the same time have another name in his native tongue. The role he played at the time – a native son, or man of the world - determined the name used. In the Greek world, only one name was sufficient for legal transactions. The Romans demanded a first and surname for legality. The Jews who also lived in two worlds had two names – one name for the Jewish society, and another for the Gentile world of business and politics. When Saul described himself as being born of the tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee, the son of Pharisees, educated at the feet of Gamaliel – he was indeed the Jew Saul. When he boasted to be a citizen of Tarsus “*no mean town*” and before the Roman commander, of being a Roman citizen by birth, he was indeed Paulus.

Up to this point, Saul dealt with Jews; he had lived and worked within the shadows and the influence of the synagogue. It was at Paphos where he stood for the first time as an Apostle in a completely Roman environment. As customary, the proconsul would have begun the interview with such questions as: “*What is your name?*” “*From where do you come?*” The natural response, in such an environment, would be “*Paul of Tarsus!*” In other words, *Paul the Roman citizen*. Paul later writes to the Corinthians:

*Although I am not bound to anyone, I made myself the slave of all so as to win over as many as possible. I became like a Jew to the Jews in order to win the Jews. To those bound that I might win those bound by the law. To those not subject to the law, I became like one not subject to it – that I might win those not subject to the law. To the weak, I became a weak person with a view to winning the weak, I have made myself all things to all men in order to save at least some of them. In fact, I do all that I do for the sake of the gospel, in the hope of having a share in its blessings.*

*(1 Cor. 9:19-23)*

Psychologically, Paul takes a momentous step at this moment. He assumes leadership, and directly confronts and silences the enemy of the Gospel. He identifies himself with the wider world of Rome, projecting himself as its citizen and assuming the responsibility of preaching the Gospel to it. As we follow his missionary footsteps, we can note that he never steps outside of



Roman territory. The presence of the Holy Spirit in Paul's actions signifies in the mind of Luke, God's approval of Paul's new course. From now, Saul will be called Paul.

Up to this point, Paul stood in the shadow of Barnabas. Luke placed the name of Barnabas before that of Saul. Barnabas introduced Saul to the Apostles, Barnabas brought Saul to Antioch, Barnabas and Saul carried alms to Judea, Barnabas and Saul brought John Mark back to Antioch. In the list of the leaders at Antioch, Barnabas appears first and Saul last. The Spirit selected Barnabas and Saul, the proconsul invited Barnabas and Saul. But, when they sail from Cyprus, Paul is in the lead. Paul's star would be of such magnitude that no man would ever overshadow him. He was destined to be one of God's superstars – *“for me to live is Christ!”* From this time on, Luke places Paul's name first except for two incidents, and we will note the reason for this when we meet it in the narration (*Acts 14:12; 15:12, 25*).

#### MISSION IN PISIDIAN ANTIOCH

After this episode with Bar-Jesus in Paphos, Luke tells us: *“Paul and his companions put out to sea and sailed to Perga in Pamphylia (Acts 13:13).”* Paul now leads the missionary expedition. The party may consist of more than three, but that point would be of no importance to Luke's narrative. As they sailed towards Asia Minor (today Turkey), Paul and his companions would be able to see the vast bulk of the Taurus Mountains lost in the clouds to the north. This range ran 500 miles from east to west, rising up as high as 12,000 feet. Paul knew the scenery well. Tarsus lies to the south as the eastern end of the mountain range. What he had crossed in his imagination as a lad, he would soon physically traverse. The ship came to Attalia on the coast and entering the Cestrus River, followed it six miles to Perga with its inland harbor. Here the party disembarked.

Something occurred in Perga that Luke covers with silence. No effort is made to evangelize, and John Mark suddenly leaves the group, returning not to Antioch but to Jerusalem. We know from Paul's later reaction that the situation must have been some unpleasant experience involving human frailty. We may have here the charity of silence. There is a lot of speculation over this matter: Did the personalities of Paul and Mark clash? John Mark was young – reared in the heart of the early Church, and Peter had been like a father to him; but Paul would have been another brand of

Christian. Did Mark resent that Paul was replacing his cousin Barnabas in the leadership role? Did Paul's attitude towards Gentiles offend the Jewish sensitivities of Mark? As leader, Paul had probably already charted their course into the Taurus Mountains. Was Mark frightened by this adventure into an area filled with unknown dangers? Luke does not tell us. What he does tell us is that Mark assisted the Apostles in their evangelization while on the Happy Isle of Makaria, and while his cousin was in the leadership role. When the missionaries reached the foot of the mountain, Mark split from them. Luke tells us that he went home to his mother Mary. He went back to the Cenacle from where it all began! It took Paul years to forgive Mark!

Celtic invaders had poured into southern Europe around 278 B.C. and crossed over into Asia Minor. King Attalus of Pergamum succeeded in confining them to the northern part of the great central plateau. The Celts were called *Gauls – Galli* or *Galatae* in Latin. The area became known as *Galatia*. The Gauls had lived in three clans grouped around the cities of Ancyra, Tancum and Pessinus. Rome conquered the area in 189 B.C. Separated from these cities by the great desert Arzlon, lay the four cities of Pisidian – Antioch, Lystra, Iconium and Derbe, which were located in a district north of the Taurus range. The Romans colonized these four cities, maintaining garrisons in them in order to control bandits living in the mountains.

The missionary party set out towards the Galatian Country, with the Roman colony of Pisidian Antioch as the immediate destination. From Perga to Pisidian, Antioch was a hazardous 100-mile journey through rugged canyons subjected to wild floods, robbers and low temperatures. Paul may have been recalling this journey when he wrote:

*I traveled continually, endangered by floods, robbers; enduring labors, hardships, many sleepless nights; in hunger and thirst and frequent fastings, in cold and nakedness. . . (II Cor. 11:26)*

From Paul's letter to the Galatians, we know he did not intend to preach the Gospel in Galatia because of illness. Some say Paul intended to reach Pisidian Antioch in order to reach the Roman road leading to Ephesus, his true destination. If this had been his intention, he would have done better to proceed by sea rather than to attempt such a hazardous journey. A

better theory is that Paul probably took sick in Perga.

During the summer, Perga was considered an unhealthy place because of the marshlands around it. In later times, the city would be nearly abandoned in the summer months as the population moved to a higher altitude. Some believe that Paul contracted malaria in Perga, and the missionary party moved on to Pisidian Antioch seeking a healthier place for him to recover. Pisidian Antioch was a city about 3600 feet above sea level. We do know Paul wrote the Galatians:

*You are aware that it was a bodily ailment that first occasioned my bringing you the gospel. My physical condition was a challenge which you did not despise or brush aside in disgust. On the contrary, you took me to yourself as an angel of God, even as if I had been Christ Jesus!*  
(Gal. 4:13-14)

Luke reports that they arrived in Antioch in Pisidia and:

*...on the sabbath day, they entered the synagogue and sat down. After the reading of the law and the prophets, the leading men of the synagogue sent this message to them: "Brothers, if you have any exhortation to address to the people, please speak up."*  
(Acts 13:14-15)

They were invited to give a homily if they had words of encouragement, otherwise they were to remain silent. That ought to be essential criteria for every homily given in Church!

When Paul rises to speak, we note by his introduction he is quite aware of the audience he desires to reach. He speaks not only to the Jews – "*Fellow Israelites*" – but also to "*you others who reverence our God.*" He addresses the sermon to Jew and Greek, for God offers salvation to both. He calls them "*my brothers,*" acknowledging his love and God's for both the Jew and the Greek.

Presenting this sermon as an example of Paul's preaching in the synagogues, Luke summarizes the text for the readers. The sermon demonstrates Paul's orthodoxy. It has similarities to the sermons of Peter and Stephen, but the Pauline theme is quite evident. Paul gives a survey of Israel's history, as did Stephen. Stephen saw the life of Jesus depicted in

Old Testament personalities, especially Moses. Paul saw in religious history, the continuous unfolding of the Divine Plan of salvation. The Old Testament served as a preparatory stage for the Messiah. Divine power works quietly as leaven in human history, bringing all creation to salvation and perfection. For Paul, it is King David that most perfectly reflects Jesus Christ. He pictures David as a man who *“spent a lifetime in carrying out God’s will (Acts 13:36).”* Paul stresses the Fatherhood of God – he highlights the son-ship of Israel, the son-ship of Christ and lastly, the son-ship of all believers. With Peter, he preaches the remission of sins through Jesus, and that the sanctification through Jesus exceeded that of the law:

*You must realize, my brothers, that it is through him that the forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed to you, including the remission of all those charges you could never be acquitted of under the law of Moses.*  
(Acts 13:38)

Paul proclaims a theme dear to him – salvation through faith! *“In Him every believer is acquitted (Acts 13:39).”* For Paul, as for the Church, the faith that saves is a living faith, a faith enflamed by charity that expresses itself in perfect obedience to the Will of the Holy Spirit. For St. James, the life of saving faith expresses itself in a life of good works by necessity. For these men, there could not be merely intellectual consent to a truth, but a whole-hearted commitment and response to a Person in whom you completely entrust your life and destiny. The fullness of Paul’s faith expressed itself when he proclaimed: *“I no longer live but Christ!”*

At this point, let us read Paul’s sermon as recorded in Acts.

*Fellow Israelites and you others who reverence our God, listen to what I have to say! The God of the people Israel once chose our fathers. He made this people great during their sojourn in the land of Egypt, and with an outstretched arm, he led them out of it. For forty years, he put up with them in the desert: then he destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan to give them that country as their heritage at the end of some four hundred and fifty years. Later on, he set up judges to rule them until the time of the prophet Samuel. When they asked for a king, God gave them Saul, son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled for forty years. Then God removed him and raised up David as their king; on his behalf God testified, ‘I have found David, son of Jesse, to be a man after*

*my own heart who will fulfill my every wish.’ According to his promise, God has brought forth from this man’s descendants, Jesus, a savior for Israel. John heralded the coming of Jesus by proclaiming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. As John’s career was coming to an end, he would say, ‘What you suppose me to be I am not. Rather, look for the One who comes after me. I am not worthy to unfasten the sandals on his feet.’ My brothers, children of the family of Abraham and you others who reverence our God, it was to us that this message of salvation was sent forth. The inhabitants of Jerusalem and their rulers failed to recognize him, and in condemning him, they fulfilled the words of the prophets which we read sabbath after sabbath. Even though they found no charge against him which deserved death, they begged Pilate to have him executed. Once they had thus brought about all that had been written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. Yet God raised him from the dead, and for many days thereafter, Jesus appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. These are his witnesses now before the people.*

*We ourselves announce to you the good news that what God promised our fathers, he has fulfilled for us, their children, in raising up Jesus, according to what is written in the second psalm, “You are my son; this day I have begotten you.” As a proof that the one whom he raised from the dead would never again see the decay of death, God declared, “I will give you the benefits assured to David under the covenant.” That is why he said in still another place, “You will not suffer your faithful one to undergo corruption.” Now David, after he had spent a lifetime in carrying out God’s will, fell asleep and joined his fathers, thereby undergoing corruption. But the one whom God has raised up did not undergo corruption. You must realize, my brothers, that it is through him that the forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed to you, including the remission of all those charges you could never be acquitted of under the law of Moses. In him, every believer is acquitted. Have a care, then, lest what was said by the prophets he realized in you: “Look on in amazement, you cynics, then disappear! For I am doing a deed in your days which you never would have believed even if you had been told.”*

*(Acts 12:16-41)*

How did the sermon affect the congregation? Paul did not alienate the people. He stirred their interest and they desired to look further into the matter. *“The people invited them to speak on this subject again on the following Sabbath (Acts 13:42).”* Grace touched certain people of the congregation, and despair moved them. They received the gift of faith. *“Faith comes through hearing (Rom. 10:17a).”* Luke illustrates their confidence and faith in Paul’s message:

*“Many Jews and devout Jewish converts followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to hold fast to the grace of God (Acts 13:43).”* The grace of God no doubt was the gift of faith. The Scriptures confirm in this text, that such a gift must be nourished and developed. Faith can be lost; every act of disobedience weakens the foundation of faith.

One of the major distinctions between Paul’s sermon and Peter’s is the emphasis upon salvation for the Jew and Greek alike through Jesus Christ. Paul subtly lowers all barriers. Salvation had been viewed as a privileged possession of the Jews, inherited by them from Abraham. They prided themselves upon being God’s chosen people, having a special and unique relationship with God. They had a door that was opened to God, and closed to all others.

Even those who came to the Jewish religion must understand that their faith did not raise them to the same relationship with God that a born Jew had. Righteousness would be credited to the Jew as long as they did not apostatize from the Jewish religion. A Jewish convert, however, could only obtain righteousness through good works. Many Jews were not about to accept Paul’s teaching when the full implication was understood:

*There does not exist among you Jew or Greek, slave or freedman, male or female. All are one in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, if you belong to Christ, you are the descendants of Abraham, which means you inherit all that was promised.* (Gal. 3:28-29)

*Scripture says, “no one who believes in him will be put to shame.” Here there is no difference between Jew and Greek; all have the same Lord, rich in mercy toward all who call upon him. “Everyone who call s on the name of the Lord will “be saved.”*

(Rom. 10:11-13)

Jews, in whom national and religious pride meant more than religious truth, would refuse to believe such teachings. They did not wish to hear it or believe it. They hardened their hearts.

At Antioch Pisidia, the Jews did not refuse to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, but they rejected the doctrine of the universal salvific Will of God. They would not accept that the Messiah brought salvation equally to Jews and Greeks. The Greeks received Paul's teaching, spreading throughout the city, with joy. On the next Sabbath:

*Almost the entire city gathered to hear the word of God. When the Jews saw the crowds, they became very jealous and countered whatever Paul said with violent abuse. (Acts 13:44-45)*

The jealousy among the Jews was stimulated, not because the crowd came to Paul and Barnabas, but because they came to salvation. Salvation that belonged to the Jews was being offered in the market place to Gentile "dogs."

Luke implies that this refusal of the Jews to share salvation led them to reject Jesus as the Messiah, who offered salvation to all. The awareness of this on Paul's part created a moment of crisis—a historical moment in evangelization. Luke relates:

*Paul and Barnabas spoke and fearlessly, nonetheless: "The word of God has to be declared to you first of all; but since you reject it and thus convict yourselves as unworthy of everlasting life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For thus were we instructed by the Lord: "I have made you a light to the nations, a means of salvation to the ends of the earth." The Gentiles were delighted when they heard this and responded to the word of the Lord with praise. All who were destined for life everlasting believed in it. Thus the word of the Lord was carried throughout that area.*

*(Acts 13:46-49)*

The Enemy of the Gospel is not idle—forces are continuously being marshaled to stop the spread of the Gospel. It is often said that behind every good or great man stands a woman. Such proverbial expressions more often than not express a truism. Because women are more intuitive,

they often are more open to spiritual dimension. The proverb implies that when the spiritual qualities of a man are sufficiently developed, bringing him to greatness, some woman stimulated and fostered them in the man. If we accept one side of the coin, we must accept the other side. Really evil men are men whose spiritual dimension has been stimulated and perverted. We would have to say that behind every evil man stands a bad woman. There is a saying among the French police that whenever a crime has been committed, "*Search for the woman.*"

Whether we can accept the above or not, we do have to admit that women greatly influence men—for good or for evil. We have such a case at hand in the history of the Church. No New Testament writer is more conscious and more concerned about the role of women in the Church than is Luke. He knew from experience their great power for good in the Church, or their great ability to do evil to the Church.

In order to put an end to the missionary activities of Paul and Barnabas in the Pisidian Antioch area, some leading Jews went to some influential women of the city, no doubt Roman. These women were not Jews, but were sympathetic toward the Jewish religion. By some means the Jews convinced these women that the teachings of Paul and Barnabas threatened their social, religious, moral, and emotional security. Once this was done, woman's nature would do the rest. They must be protected from this danger. Probably, the women brought their fears and anxieties and projected them onto their unwitting husbands. This, in turn, aroused the protective spirit that is in men. The leading men of the city would view Paul and Barnabas, and their doctrine, as a threat to the social order. The Apostles were driven from the area, but not before they had succeeded in leaving behind disciples who were filled with the peace and joy of the Lord. Persecution would only succeed in spreading the Gospel. Luke records the incident with these words:

*But some of the Jews stirred up their influential women sympathizers and the leading men of the town, and in that way got a persecution started against Paul and Barnabas. The Jews finally expelled them from their territory. So the two shook the dust from their feet in protest and went on to Iconium. The disciples could but be filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. (Acts 13: 51-52)*

The shaking off of the dust was a symbolic gesture that the Apostles were



not responsible before God for the salvation rejected.

This does not imply that Paul and Barnabas would abandon their method of preaching first in the synagogue, but now the synagogue would not be the only door through which one could enter the faith. They would take the Gospel message into the market place, and present it to the Gentiles who had no relationship with the Jewish religion. Because the Father of Jesus Christ is the God of the street and the market place, as well as the God of the temple and synagogue: *“No one who believes in Him will be put to shame. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. (Rom. 10:11,13).”*

The Spirit of the Gospel has been freed from its narrow cage – free at last to fly where the Spirit blows!

## CHAPTER 13

### THE DOOR OF FAITH

#### INTRODUCTION

The Scriptures teach, *“unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build.”* Luke demonstrates in Acts that the Holy Spirit builds the Church. From the feast of Pentecost, this has been evident. Likewise, it has been evident of the dependence of the Holy Spirit upon human beings. The Kingdom of God comes through human beings docile to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit calls people into the divine work of salvation, making them partners with His Spirit. As the history of the Church unfolds, this essential partnership of the Divine and the human becomes more manifest. We witness a marriage between the heavenly and the earthly. Through cooperation with the Holy Spirit, a human life reaches a glorious dimension of existence. This union works for the good of the beloved – there is total respect for the persons involved. This means the Holy Spirit always leaves His partners human and free.

The Holy Spirit normally operates within the limitations of humanity, and within the peculiar and unique limitations of each individual human being. Under the power and influence of the Holy Spirit, an individual person operates in a normal human fashion. The activities of a Spirit-filled person normally will be no different from those of others. The effects of their activities, however, will be decidedly different. They will produce abundant spiritual fruit, and their fruit abides. Their lives do not become a series of marvelous and extraordinary events, but rather lives filled with ordinary human activities, activities that have been inspired and filled with the Spirit. Great men and women of the Spirit appear quite normal. No extraordinary happenings may ever be attributable to them. That they do the normal things extraordinarily well may go unnoticed. The really extraordinary thing about them will be the overall picture of their lives that manifests faith, hope, and charity in a high degree. More than anything else, their extraordinary perseverance in these virtues over the years



reveals their lives to have been Spirit-filled. For this reason, the Church never canonizes its saints before death.

The really marvelous thing about this divine-human relationship is how the Holy Spirit operates within the natural gifts, talents, abilities, and temperaments that make up individual human personalities. And how He also operates within the weaknesses, the frailties, and the limitations of individuals. The Spirit taught Paul that such things serve as the background highlighting His holy Presence within the person. It is the nature of Divine Power to be able to bring good out of evil, to create something from nothing. The Scriptures confirm: "*All things work for the good of those who love God.*" And we might add, for the good of the apostolate.

Just as the Holy Spirit works within the assets and liabilities of each human being, He likewise operates within the external circumstances of those lives. Apparently, God does not interfere directly in the deeds of the human will. Things within the moral order come into our world and lives because human beings, consciously or unconsciously, will them. God permits them to be. For those that love God, He is present in each situation, bringing good out of them, whether the circumstances are objectively good or evil. The saints never despair, even when evil flows from their own human weakness and frailty. The saints trust the all-loving and powerful God to bring good, even from the bitter fruits of their faults and failings. The visible evidence of their human frailties brings a deepening of their humility rather than despair, causing them to depend even more upon God. The Holy Spirit does not insist His partners be perfect, but only that they possess good will. Needless to say, the more perfected person becomes a more perfect instrument of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is neither a silent nor inactive Partner. It may appear so at times because we listen only to the sound of our own voices. The crashing of our own thoughts upon the shore of conscious awareness drowns out other voices. Usually, the Spirit of God quietly inspires and softly whispers, but He also has loud and clear moments. When the situation demands it, the Spirit dramatically takes over and produces some extraordinarily divine spectacular, for example the blinding of Bar-Jesus. But normally, the Holy Spirit quietly and secretly works within the limitations of the human being, and within the concrete circumstances, be they good or evil, of that human life. Those tales that relate one miraculous event following upon another

are products of human fabrication. They do not tell us how God acts, but how human beings think God ought to act. The Acts of the Apostles reveal to us how the Holy Spirit does act! As the Acts unfold, we understand more clearly why the work has been entitled *The Acts of the Holy Spirit*.

We saw how God entered the life of Saul in thunderbolt fashion. How, through many human circumstances and situations, the vocation of Saul unfolded. How God uniquely used Barnabas to bring Saul to his divine mission. We noted how the Holy Spirit used the Church to call Barnabas and Saul to their missionary vocation, and send them on the mission to the Gentiles, where their success was guaranteed by having been "*sent forth by the Holy Spirit*." We also saw how John Mark accompanied them on his own, without being "*sent forth by the Holy Spirit*." He lacked perseverance and abandoned the missionary enterprise. Luke demonstrated how human prudence and talents are used to accomplish the work of the Spirit: the missionaries going to preach to a ready-made audience in the synagogues, presenting Jesus to the Jews within an Old Testament framework, their good working knowledge of the Scriptures and the Greek language. Then, Paul and Barnabas possessed the human courage needed to undertake a hazardous journey into the Taurus Mountains, and to stand their ground in the face of "*violent abuse*" from powerful people. As men closed one door in the face of the Gospel, Paul and Barnabas were sensitively attuned enough to the Holy Spirit to be directed in another direction, and heroic enough to take it. "*We now turn to the Gentiles!*" they cried."

#### MISSION TO ICONIUM

Paul understood well the marriage of the divine with the human in the work of salvation. We see this when he wrote the Romans:

*I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God leading everyone who believes in it to salvation, the Jew first, then the Greek. For in the gospel is revealed the justice of God which begins and ends with faith; as the Scripture says, "The just man shall live by faith."*  
(Rm. 1:16-17)

*Faith in the heart leads to justification . . . Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how shall they call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe unless they have heard of him? And how can they hear unless*

*there is someone to preach? And how can they preach unless they are sent? Scripture says, "How beautiful are the feet of those who announce good news!" But not all have believed the gospel. Isaiah asks, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" Faith then comes through hearing, and what is heard is the word of Christ. I ask you, have they not heard? (Rm. 10:10, 13-18)*

Through experience, Paul quickly learned some men would be delighted when they hear the word of the Lord, and respond with praise. *"All who are destined (or disposed) for life everlasting believed in it (Acts 13:48)."* But others remained unconvinced (*Acts 14:2*) and accordingly rejected the Gospel, a rejection that stemmed more from their disobedience than from their disbelief. Men, by their willingness to obey God, preconditioned themselves to accept the Gospel. Others by their unwillingness to obey God harden their hearts, and the words of the Gospel become like seeds falling on rock. Paul understood by his preaching to all men that he had become a *"light to the nations,"* and his preaching a necessary *"means of salvation to the ends of the earth."* God called him to proclaim the Gospel. He must preach this Gospel in order to have a share in its blessed promises. He had a moral responsibility to proclaim the Gospel. Those who heard had the responsibility to believe. If they refused to do so, and Paul had done his best in presenting it to them, he shook the dust of their town from his feet – a sign he was not responsible before God for their losing salvation.

God, not man, called Paul and Barnabas to preach the Gospel. Man could not stop them from preaching the Gospel. *"If they persecute you in one town, flee to the next."* Having been driven out of Pisidian Antioch, Paul and Barnabas went about 100 miles southeast along the imperial highway, until they came to Iconium (today Konia). Iconium was the chief town of the region known as Lycaonia, which included Lystra and Derbe. In Iconium they went to the synagogue, as was their custom. Paul had preached earlier to the Jews: *"The word of God has to be declared to you first of all."* Luke relates:

*In Iconium likewise, they entered the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way as to convince a good number of Jews and Greeks. But the Jews who remained unconvinced (the word implies disobedient) stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.*

*(Acts 14:1-2)*

Again, we hear that persecution came from the Jews. A mind is poisoned with lies. Despite all opposition, Paul and Barnabas operated for some time in the city:

*...and spoke out fearlessly, in complete reliance on the Lord. He, for his part, confirmed the message with his grace and caused signs and wonders to be done at their hands. (Acts 14:3)*

They looked at the opposition against them, and because they knew the Lord was with them, they stepped out in complete reliance upon the Holy Spirit. As a result of their trust in Him, He completely supported them.

An ancient Christian legend found its way into a work called the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. It claimed to have been written by Paul, but actually a certain Christian priest from Iconium wrote it about 166 A.D. He was deposed from office for this forgery. Tertullian claims he did not invent the story but compiled it from an existing legend. Many scholars believe the work has some merit, and is probably based on a foundation of facts. The story relates that a certain young lady named Thecla heard Paul preach one day by chance (from her bedroom window). Paul's preaching converted her to the Lord, and she dedicated her life to God by taking a vow of virginity. She became a devoted disciple of Paul. Thecla belonged to a famous family of the city and was engaged to one of the leading citizens of Iconium. Her conversion had serious repercussions within her family. They accused Paul before the magistrates of disturbing the family life and social order of Iconium. The magistrates scourged him and expelled him from the town. Thecla suffered great persecution but eventually followed Paul back to Antioch in Syria. In Antioch, she was eventually accused of treason, and sentenced to be thrown to the wild beast in the amphitheater. Before this could occur, Tryphaena, a powerful woman who had once been Queen of Pontus and was related to the emperor Claudius, rescued Thecla from prison. Tradition relates she later retired to Seleucia, where she continued to preach the Gospel until her death. She became the symbol in the Church of the virgin saint, and was called the first Christian martyr among women.

The story confirmed the extraordinary personal devotion Paul was able to inspire in others such as Timothy, Titus, and Luke. In the *Acts of Paul*, we also find a physical description of Paul: *"He was of moderate height, scanty hair, bow-legged and strongly built, with large eyes and eyebrows meeting in the*

*middle and a rather long nose; of gracious presence, for sometimes he looked like a man and sometimes he had the face of an angel.”*

Luke does relate that Paul and Barnabas succeeded in dividing the city into two camps. Apparently, it was difficult to remain indifferent to Paul. Luke says,

*Most of the townspeople were divided over them, some siding with the Jews and others with the apostles. (This being the first reference in Acts to anyone other than the Twelve as being apostles – by now Luke believed they had earned the title.) A move was made by Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to abuse and stone them. When Paul and Barnabas learned of this, they fled to the Lycaonian towns of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country where they continued to proclaim the good news.*

*(Acts 14:4-7)*

As the legend of Thecla had suggested, accepting the Christian faith was bound to cause problems and strife within families, and within the social order. Jesus had preached: *“I have not come to bring peace, but the sword – to set one member of the family against another – ones enemies will be in ones own household.”*

### MISSION TO LYSTRA AND DERBE

Luke referring to Lystra and Derbe as Lycaonian towns has been cited as an excellent example of Luke’s accuracy and exactness. This statement was historically and geographically accurate only during the period of 37 A.D. to 72 A.D., while King Antiochus ruled. It distinguished the Roman part of Lycaonia from the part ruled by Antiochus.

Lystra lay about 25 miles southwest of Iconium and Derbe about 30 miles southeast of Lystra. By coming into this area, the apostles entered a more primitive and pagan area. Luke mentions no synagogue. The population spoke mainly Phrygian until the third century. Such an environment offered new challenges and difficulties for Paul and Barnabas. What had been safe and acceptable to do in an area more culturally and religiously developed, could be misunderstood and wrongly interpreted in the Lycaonian towns, which could be considered *“the backwoods”* of the empire.



Environment preconditions people to receive external stimuli in a particular way. To express it philosophically – a thing is received in the manner of the receiver. For instance: the earth, a vessel, or a man all receive water differently. To work signs and wonders in an area dominated by the Jewish religion would be one thing, but to do so in an area steeped in pagan superstition and mythology would be another. Our apostles quickly learned this lesson the hard way.

The Latin poet Ovid told the tale about the gods Jupiter and Mercury visiting this same area, seeking hospitality. As expected, because they were strangers, everyone rejected them but an old couple called Baucis and Philemon. The gods rewarded the couple royally, but severely punished the rest of the people. Having been brought up on such legends, the people of Lystra were programmed to misinterpret an apostolic sign or wonder.

After arriving in Lystra, Paul preached publicly. One listener was a man born crippled from birth. Looking at him, Paul knew he had faith to be cured. *“He called out to him in a loud voice, ‘Stand up! On your feet!’ The man jumped up and began to walk around.”*

In Luke’s mind, this miracle was the Divine approval to preach the Gospel in such a pagan area. The deed electrified the audience, and lapsing into their native language, which Paul and Barnabas did not know, they excitedly announced, *“Gods have come to us in the form of men!”* In truth, the Spirit of God had come to them through men. *“They named Barnabas Zeus; Paul they called Hermes, since he was the spokesman (Acts 14:11-12).”*

In this incident, Barnabas is mentioned first. Being the silent one and perhaps the older, the people mistook him for Zeus and Paul was considered to be Hermes – the divine messenger of the gods. The whole town gathered to offer sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas before the men even realized the situation. When they did, they tore their clothes, a symbolic gesture of stress, ran into the crowds shouting frantically: *“Friends, why do you do this? We are only men, human like you.”*

It was at this point that Paul addressed his first sermon to a pagan audience. He diplomatically indicates the foolishness of their religious practices, without accusing them of the sin of idolatry. Paul implies God permitted them to go in this religious direction for a time, but now called them, through His Son, to true worship. Luke gives only a brief summary

of Paul's sermon:

*"We are bringing you the good news that will convert you from just such follies as these to the living God, 'the one who made heaven and earth and the sea and all that is in them.' The past ages he let the Gentiles go their way. Yet in bestowing his benefits, he has not hidden himself completely, without a clue. 'From the heavens, he sends down rain and rich harvests; your spirits he fills with food and delight.'" Yet even with a speech such as this, they could scarcely stop the crowds from offering sacrifice to them.*

*(Acts 14:15-18)*

In the light of Paul's explanation, the people felt somewhat foolish and disappointed. Their good intentions had been frustrated. Frustration easily leads to depression and anger. At this precise moment, certain Jews, probably corn merchants, arrived from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium. They took advantage of the situation and turned the crowd against the Apostle, no doubt convincing the people that the cure resulted from black magic: *"By the power of Satan, they cast out demons."* Because Paul had given the sermon, the people stoned him. He fell down stunned. Thinking him dead, they dragged him outside the walls of the city. *"His disciples quickly formed a circle about him, and before long he got up and went back into the town (Acts 14:20)."*

The incident certainly demonstrates the fickleness of humanity. One moment they deify you, the next they stone you. No doubt a lady called Lois, her daughter Eunice, and Eunice's young son Timothy would have been among those disciples. Eunice, a Jewess, was the widow of a well-known Greek in the area. Since her husband's death, she had lived with her mother Lois, and attended to the education of her son Timothy. Sometime later, Paul speaks of Timothy sharing a faith *"which first belonged to your grandmother Lois and to your mother Eunice (II Tim. 1:5)."* Luke avoids any statement indicating that Paul had been killed and raised from the dead. He does suggest an extraordinary occurrence when he tells us that a man reputed to be dead one day, makes a thirty-mile journey on foot the next day to Derbe. Paul later refers to the incident in his letter to the Corinthians: *"Once was I stoned (2 Cor. 11:25)."*

## MISSION REVISITED

The apostles had success in Derbe – the only city in which no trouble is reported. Perhaps Paul's enemies believed him dead, and perhaps Paul presented the Gospel more prudently. In a sense, Derbe came to be the end of the line for this missionary expedition. To the south lay the territory of King Antiochus. Through the mountains there was a pass called the Cilician Gate leading to Tarsus about 150 miles away. Instead of returning to home base by the fastest route, the Apostles decided to retrace their steps and revisit the newly established Christian Communities in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. By this time, new magistrates would have been elected within the cities making it safer to return. Nevertheless, Paul and Barnabas display great fortitude and courage revisiting those cities so soon.

We know the Christian Communities established in Palestine and in areas with a large Jewish population followed the organizational structure of the synagogues. With new Churches being established independently of synagogue influences, some organizational structure had to be established to regulate and promote Christian life. Paul does precisely this on his return trip. Luke records:

*They retraced their steps to Lystra and Iconium first, then to Antioch. They gave their disciples reassurances, and encouraged them to persevere in the faith with this instruction: "We must undergo many trials if we are to enter into the reign of God." In each Church they installed presbyters and, with prayer and fasting, commended them to the Lord in whom they had put their faith.*

*(Acts 14:21-23)*

The Greek word translated as *presbyters* is "*episkopoi*" – the word for bishop, meaning an overseer or supervisor. From Luke's description, he implies Paul and Barnabas ordained men to these positions of authority and leadership within the Communities. As mentioned previously, the Christian Churches, even from their mustard seed days, have never been without religious authority residing in particular designated members of the Church. Each Community possessed a shepherd or shepherds ordained to their roles within the Church.

Luke masterfully summed up the Christian life with one quotation attri-

buted to Paul: *"We must undergo many trials if we are to enter into the reign of God (Acts 14:22)."* To enter into the reign of God implies that the human soul is permanently at peace with the will of God. The Spirit of God and the spirit of man have become one. The prayer, *"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,"* has been realized in a person's life. The human spirit constantly faces three enemies against this reign of God: the world, the flesh, and the devil. Paul and Barnabas have confronted all three, and will continue to do so. Perhaps we find in *II Timothy* a good commentary on this verse:

*You have followed closely my teachings and my conduct. You have observed my resolution, fidelity, patience, love, and endurance, through persecutions and sufferings in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra. You know what persecutions I have had to bear, and you know how the Lord saved me from them all. Anyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus can expect to be persecuted. But all the while, evil men and charlatans will go from bad to worse, deceiving others, themselves deceived. You, for your part, must remain faithful to what you have learned and believed, because you know who your teachers were. Likewise, from your infancy, you have known the sacred Scriptures, the source of the wisdom which through faith in Jesus Christ leads to salvation. All Scripture is inspired of God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, correction, and training in holiness, so that the man of God may be fully competent and equipped for every good work. (11 Tim. 3:10-16)*

Scripture is put into its proper place in the life of a Christian. It is not given a role that replaces the living authority within the Church.

### BACK HOME

Paul and Barnabas make their way back to the coast. This time they preach in Perga. They had to move on to Attalia before the closing of the sailing season on November 10th. Sometime before this date, they set sail back to their home base at Antioch to *"where they had first been commended to the favor of God for the task they had now completed (Acts 14:26)."* This is Luke's way of saying that by the grace of God they have completed the task assigned them. It has been estimated that the missionary expedition took about eighteen to twenty-four months.

*On their arrival, they called the congregation together and related*

*all that God had helped them accomplish, and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. Then they spent some time there with the disciples.*  
(Acts 14:27-28)

Again, Luke emphasizes the successful missionary partnership – God and man. “*They related all that God had helped them accomplish.*” “*Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.*” But even God needs laborers to build His house. Jesus recognized this when he said:

*Lift up your eyes and behold the fields are ripe for harvest, but the laborers are so few. Pray that the Lord of the harvest send forth laborers into the fields.*

May many have the grace to pray, “*Here I am Lord. Send me!*” so that they too, may share in the promised blessings of the Gospel. Sinners, especially, should seek this grace – for as the Scriptures tell us:

*Remember this – the person who brings a sinner back from his way will save his soul from death and cancel a multitude of sins.*  
(James 5:20)

From the standpoint of Church History, the highlight of this missionary expedition was how God “*had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.*” The Evil One quickly seeks to close this door . . .

Many religious people are not always ready to follow the will of God. They often do not realize they have put their trust in things other than God. These things may be good and religious, but nevertheless, they are not God. When God asks them to give these things up – die to them – their security is threatened, and they oppose the will of God. Sometimes, in their opposition, they may even commit a mortal sin against the Holy Spirit by attributing His works to an evil source, calling light darkness, and proclaiming their own darkness to be light.

## PRELUDE TO THE COUNCIL

The acceptance of the Gentiles into the Church created a major crisis in the Christian Faith. The first members of the Church were all sincere members of the Jewish religion. Their acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah was but the full flowering of their Jewish faith. They firmly believed that salvation comes from the Jews. They had to reinterpret this truth in the light of the life, death, and teachings of Jesus Christ. Salvation came from the Jews only as Jesus the Savior of the World was a Jew. The Church came to realize that in Jesus any person, Jew or Greek, could find salvation. The death of Jesus atoned for the sins of all men. By identification with Jesus, a sinful man could come to righteousness before God. This demanded that one believe Jesus to be the Messiah and the Son of God, and identify with Jesus by becoming His disciple. This demanded a spirit of repentance, in which one turns from the old way of being, and receives the sacrament of baptism. It was referred to as being "*baptized in the Name of Jesus.*" In other words, being baptized into Jesus meant being born anew. Through this baptism, all sins were washed away, and the baptized person appears righteous before God. To this baptized soul, Jesus imparts a special gift that is His alone to give – the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, working in cooperation with the baptized person, enables the person to grow in the life of Jesus Christ, and to mature in holiness.

The Church came to understand that faith in Jesus had become the key to salvation. Righteousness, sanctification, and salvation all came through faith in Jesus. A person became enough of a Jew through Baptism into Jesus – we might say the baptized spiritually became a Jew – a perfected Jew. This new relationship, inaugurated through Jesus, was above that granted by the Law, or by the Jewish religion. The Christian leaders understood that the Law had been unable to save, or to produce righteousness. In reality the Law had only produced a sense of sin, and a conscious need for a Savior. To insist that Christians must become Jews was an unnecessary and futile burden to place on them, and implied that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ had been inadequate of itself, no more than a super addition to the Law.

However, many of the Christian Jews believed the works of the Law *and* faith in Jesus saved, and both were needed for salvation. Many of the early members of the Church had previously been Jewish priests, and members of the party of the Pharisees. Some of them firmly believed that salvation

came through the works of the Law, *and* through faith in Jesus Christ. The practical application of this belief would be to insist that all Gentile converts be circumcised and baptized. By becoming circumcised, the converts would be obliged to keep the Law of the Old Testament, which was much more than the Ten Commandments. Of themselves, the Ten Commandments are the natural moral obligation of all peoples. The Law of the Old Testament included all the regulations, precepts, and commands found in the first five books of the Bible called the Torah. Many members of the early Church became very zealous for this doctrine, and they took it upon themselves to promulgate it by becoming preachers and missionaries of it. Standing directly in their path stood Paul of Tarsus. Clearer than anyone he saw the error of the doctrine and the grave implications about Jesus implied in it. It was an insidious doctrine, capable of completely dividing and destroying the Church. It was one of the first great efforts of the Gates of Hell to prevail against the Church. Truth had an ardent champion in Paul. Up to this point, all enemies of the Gospel had been outside the Church. Now the enemy was within.

Luke tells us that Paul and Barnabas remained some time with the Church at Antioch. During this time,

*...some men came down to Antioch from Judea and began to teach the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to Mosaic practice, you cannot be saved." This created dissension and much controversy between them and Paul and Barnabas. (Acts 15:1-2)*

It is possible that these Jewish "Christians" had already visited the churches founded by Paul and Barnabas in Galatia, or some of their party went there while others came to Antioch. We know from Paul's letter to the Galatians, written sometime around this period, these men had sown the seeds of their evil doctrine among the disciples of Paul in Galatia. Paul was forced to write a letter to the Galatians, for he found himself in the thick of battle in Antioch, and unable to go to Galatia and leave Antioch to the enemies of the Gospel. Paul wrote them:

*I am amazed that you are so soon deserting him who called you in accord with his gracious design in Christ, and are going over to another gospel. But there is no other. Some who wish to alter the gospel of Christ must have confused you. For even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel not in accord*

*with the one we delivered to you, let a curse be upon him! I repeat what I have just said: if anyone preaches a gospel to you other than the one you received, let a curse be upon him!*

*(Gal. 1:6-9)*

Little doubt Paul was putting a few curses upon those men in Antioch, and they upon him. They were doing more than discussing the matter in Antioch. Apparently, these men who espoused this false doctrine were attempting to destroy Paul's credibility in the Church through vilification. They accused Paul of teaching what he did in order to be popular with men, and to be more acceptable to others. We see in his letter to the Galatians that Paul is forced to defend himself, and reveal his credentials as a teacher of the true Gospel. After leveling curses upon his enemies, Paul asks the Galatians,

*Whom would you say I am trying to please at this point – men or God? Is this how I seek to ingratiate myself with men? If I were trying to win man's approval, I would surely not be serving Christ!*

*(Gal. 1:10)*

From this letter to the Galatians, we come to know of a private discussion that Paul held on this doctrinal point with the leaders in Jerusalem. This meeting took place fourteen years after his conversion, and could hardly have been his version of the council related by Luke in Chapter Fifteen of Acts.

In the same letter, Paul tells us that he had made his first visit to Jerusalem three years after his conversion. From there, he returned to Tarsus: *"Thereafter, I entered the regions of Syria and Cilicia. The communities of Christ in Judea had no idea what I looked like . . . (Gal. 1:21)."*

The second trip Paul makes to Jerusalem had occurred after his coming to Antioch, and he wrote to the Galatians regarding the essentials of his private meeting in Jerusalem with the Leaders:

*Then, after fourteen years, I went up to Jerusalem again with Barnabas; this time taking Titus with me. I went – prompted by a revelation, and I laid out, for their scrutiny, the gospel as I present it to the Gentiles – all this in private conference with the leaders, to make sure the course I was pursuing, or had pursued, was not*



useless.

(Gal. 2:1-2)

Apparently, Paul had already conducted his own missionary activities in the areas around Tarsus – Syria and Cilicia. It had been reported during this time: *“He who was formerly persecuting us is now preaching the faith he tried to destroy (Gal. 1:23).”*

Paul goes on to explain:

*Not even Titus, who was with me, was ordered to undergo circumcision, despite his being a Greek. Certain false claimants to the title of brother were smuggled in; they wormed their way into the group to spy on the freedom we enjoy in Christ Jesus and thereby, to make slaves of us, but we did not submit to them for a moment. We resisted so that the truth of the gospel might survive intact for your benefit. Those who were regarded as important, however, made me add nothing. On the contrary, recognizing that I have been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter was for the circumcised . . . and recognizing, too, the favor bestowed on me, those who were the acknowledged pillars, James, Cephas, and John gave Barnabas and me the handclasp of fellowship, signifying that we should go to the Gentiles, as they to the Jews. The only stipulation was that we should be mindful of the poor – the one thing that I was making every effort to do.*

(Gal. 2:1-10)

Paul reiterates to the Galatians the Gospel he had preached to the Gentiles. This teaching he had laid before the Jerusalem leaders:

*We are Jews by birth, not sinners of Gentile origin. Nevertheless, knowing that a man is not justified by legal observance, but by faith in Jesus Christ, we too have believed in him in order to be justified by faith in Christ; not by observance of the law; for by works of the law no one will be justified. But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we are shown to be sinners, does that mean that Christ is encouraging sin? Unthinkable!*

(Gal. 2:15-17)

Paul's statement would be an argument against those who held Christians who sought justification outside the Law to be sinful. Paul's argument is that this accuses Jesus of encouraging sin since He has made himself the source of justification. Rather, Paul sees insistence upon the Law as means

of justification to be sinful.

Paul goes on to say:

*If, however, I were to build up the very things I had demolished, I should then indeed be a transgressor. It was through the law that I died to the law, to live for God. I have been crucified with Christ, and the life I live now is not my own; but Christ living in me. I still live my human life, but it is a life of faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I will not treat God's gracious gift as pointless. If justice is available through the law, then Christ died to no purpose!*  
(Gal. 2:15-21)

This, in summary, would be Paul's doctrinal teaching. What proof does he give to the Galatians that his teaching is truthful? He offers them irrefutable evidence. He had preached this doctrine to them, and they accepted it in faith. As a result, they had received the Holy Spirit. In Paul's mind, there was no better proof. He goes on to say to them,

*You senseless Galatians! Who has cast a spell over you – you before whose eyes Jesus Christ was displayed to view upon his cross? I want to learn only one thing from you; how did you receive the Spirit? Was it through observance of the law or through faith in what you heard? How could you be so stupid? After beginning in the spirit, you are now to end in the flesh? Have you had such remarkable experiences all to no purpose – if indeed they were to no purpose? Is it because you observe the law or because you have faith in what you heard that God lavishes the Spirit on you and works wonders in your midst?*  
(Gal. 3:1-5)

When we study Paul's letters to the Corinthians, we can see that some of his converts in Corinth go the opposite direction, refusing to accept any restraints on the freedom they have in the Lord. He accuses them of scandalizing the weak, and failing in charity. He has to say to them:

*If I have the gift of prophecy and, with full knowledge, comprehend all mysteries; if I have faith great enough to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.*  
(1 Cor. 13:2)

A leading Catholic scripture scholar, Raymond Brown, recently said at a meeting of the clergy of the Orange Diocese in California: *"I have only two enemies – those to the right and those to the left."* Since he knew well the famous dictum of Thomas Aquinas: *"Virtue lies in the middle,"* he suggests his Biblical teachings lay in the virtuous middle. Some may disagree with that, but we do know that heresies lie in the extremes – whether to the right or the left. Paul certainly held the virtuous middle and heroically so!

We know from the Jewish historian Josephus, that Herod Agrippa died in 44 A.D. Shortly before the death of Agrippa, Peter was forced to flee Jerusalem. The famine prophesied by Agabus occurred in 46 A.D. At that time, Paul and Barnabas went with the collection to Judea. Apparently, by that time Peter had returned to Jerusalem. We certainly find him back in Jerusalem around 49 A.D. Sometime before his return, and probably after Paul's talk with him in 46 A.D., Peter spent some time in Antioch.

Again, we are indebted to Paul's letter to the Galatians that described the incident that occurred while Peter was in Antioch. It is one thing to know the truth; it is another thing to incarnate that truth, to express it in our daily lives. Many people who were raised in the heresy of racism came to see the error of their ways, but still found it difficult on a social level to put into practice what they believed. We can be preconditioned to feel guilty even about doing the right things. Many converts in the South actually felt guilty about their conversion to the Catholic Church around their Protestant parents. In the days of the early church, a Jew raised in traditional Judaism never associated socially with a non-Jew. They would not sit down to table with them. Apparently, some Christian Jews believed it was not necessary for Gentiles to be Jews, but it was still necessary for Christian Jews to remain Jews, and to keep Jewish customs. They lacked the spiritual freedom to act otherwise. It seems that James, the bishop of Jerusalem, was one such Christian, at least at one point in his life. Apparently, Peter was not such a scrupulous person; he was freer, but He greatly admired James and was influenced by James when around him.

Paul relates to the Galatians:

*When Cephas came to Antioch, I directly withstood him, because he was clearly in the wrong. He had been taking his meals with the Gentiles before others came who were from James. But when they arrived, he drew back to avoid trouble with those who were*

*circumcised. The rest of the Jews joined in his dissembling, till even Barnabas was swept away by their pretense. As soon as I observed that they were not being straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I had this to say to Cephas in the presence of all: 'If you who are a Jew are living according to Gentile ways rather than Jewish, by what logic do you force the Gentiles to adopt Jewish ways?!*

*(Gal. 2:11-14)*

No one can doubt Paul's courage. In this incident, he performs the role of a prophet in the community. He calls the leader of the Church to account for his behavior. The Church has proclaimed that the Leader of the Church is safeguarded from doctrinal error in certain circumstances, but it has never proclaimed that the Church Leader is free of sin – except in one case – that of Jesus Christ! Paul accuses Peter and the Jewish Christians of being cowards.

While visiting the Antiochian Community, Peter had quite freely associated with the Gentile Christians. This involved having meals in common, celebrating the agape. Strictly speaking, the Law of Moses did not forbid eating with Gentiles, but it became a traditional practice in order to avoid becoming contaminated by eating unclean food, and using utensils already contaminated by such food. Peter knew as well as Paul that such things had nothing to do with being a Christian, and

*...until some people arrived from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles, but when they came, he drew back and separated himself, because he was afraid of the uncircumcised. (Gal 2:12)*

But Peter had been intimidated by the new arrivals; he was trying to be all things to all men. It doesn't always work – especially where Christian principles are involved. Whatever may have been the motivation, Peter changed his public behavior after the arrival of these men from Jerusalem. Barnabas and the rest of the Jewish Christians followed Peter and they withdrew from the common table. Whether they went off by themselves to another room or another house we are not told. In any event, Christian fellowship ended for the time being.

For Paul, this was an implied heresy – a sheer betrayal of the Gospel. It struck at the very roots of what it meant to be a Christian. Whatever principle Peter felt he was upholding, it had no significance compared to the gospel principle being violated:

*There does not exist among you Jew or Greek, slave or freedman, male or female. All are one in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, if you belong to Christ, you are the descendants of Abraham, which means you inherit all that was promised.* (Gal. 3:28-29)

This was a public issue affecting the life of the congregation. It could not be smoothed over or dealt with by a word in private. Paul could not have challenged Peter openly if he had not been sure that basically they were of one mind on the subject. In a moment of weakness that could destroy Church unity, Paul objected to Peter's policy of expediency. For the chief Apostles to yield to the supporters of Jewish traditionalism could lead to the demand that all Gentile Christians totally accept the Mosaic Law, including circumcision. This could result in two parallel churches, or abandoning the effort to evangelize the Gentiles. Christianity would have become a Jewish sect with a doubtful future. Apparently, Peter repented, and acknowledged Paul to be in the right. This incident probably prepared Peter to handle the subject when the Church demanded an official Church statement on the doctrine of salvation. It was a subject so vital to the life of the Church that it was to be the subject of the first ecumenical council of the Church.

The men who arrived in Antioch teaching, "*Unless you are circumcised according to Mosaic practice, you cannot be saved,*" did not represent the teaching of the Church; nor did they come with official sanction of the Jerusalem Church. We know this from the letter to be written later:

*We have heard that some of our number without any instructions from us have upset you with their discussions and disturbed your peace of mind.* (Acts 15:24)

## SOURCE OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

In Acts we learn the source of Church unity. All involved in the controversy of acceptance of Gentiles into the Church could quote the Scriptures. Those in error had the strongest Scriptures on their side of the fence. Recall these words of God to Abraham in Genesis:

*On your part, you and your descendants after you must keep my covenant throughout the ages. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you that you must keep: every male among you shall be circumcised . . . If a male is uncircumcised . . . such a one shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.*

*(Gen. 17:10, 14)*

If the written Scriptures had been the source of Christian authority, we would have had a divided Church before 50 A.D. The Scriptures are a source of authoritative teachings, but when you make the Scriptures *the* authority in the Church, you destroy true Church authority and Christian unity. History proves this to us. If you are familiar enough with the Bible, you could substantiate almost any known and accepted heresy with quotations from Scriptures. The devil cannot only quote Scriptures, he often does. He has his own joyless Bible-toting disciples.

The Church of Antioch recognized that the authority in the Church is alive as Jesus Christ is alive. The Church in Antioch knew the source of religious authority within the Christian Community:

*This created dissension and much controversy between them . . . Finally it was decided that Paul, Barnabas, and some others should go up to see the apostles and presbyters in Jerusalem about this question.*

*(Acts 15:2)*

Before Father Thomas Judge, C.M. died he wrote to the Cenacle Family he had founded: *I know not what evils the future will launch upon us, but remember, never be found in any faction or schism opposing Rome. If an Angel of heaven were to come down on earth and war against the Papacy, refuse to surrender your allegiance to the Pope. Rally around the Pope, for he is the standard bearer of the Cross.*

## CHAPTER 14

### COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM

#### INTRODUCTION

In about the twentieth year of its existence, the Christian Church faced its first major internal crisis over Church doctrine. The question was: *“What must a person do in order to be saved?”* The Church became sharply conscious of this problem with the large influx of Gentiles into the Church. As long as most Church members remained Jewish, this question and the theological problem it involved, laid dormant. Around 40 A.D., the problem began to surface when Simon Peter permitted the Roman Centurion Cornelius and his household to be received into the Church, without demanding they first be circumcised. Peter acknowledged by his social practice of eating with them, their full membership within the Christian Community. Certain members of the Judean Community took exception to this conduct and accused him: *“You entered the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them” (Acts 11:3).*

Peter defended his action by explaining that these people had received the Gift of the Holy Spirit just as the Community had at Pentecost. If the Holy Spirit entered into fellowship with these Gentiles, by what right could he deny them fellowship within the Christian Community created by the Holy Spirit? Peter interpreted what took place in the home of Cornelius to be a fulfillment of Jesus’ words: *“John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 11:16).* Peter’s explanation silenced his critics and they responded, *“If this be so, then God has granted life-giving repentance even to the Gentiles” (Acts 11:18).*

The real problem still remained beneath the surface. Cornelius and his fellow converts, as God-fearing Gentiles, lived in close contact with synagogue life and Jewish customs. Only when Gentiles began to enter the Church with no affiliation with the synagogue or Jewish customs, did the problem become fully within the Church. Even if God granted *“life-giving*

*repentance even to the Gentiles,”* this would be but the initial step towards salvation. Repentance leads to salvation. Repentance and salvation are not equated with each other. Following repentance, a new life must be embraced. John the Baptist preached to the crowds: *“Give some evidence that you mean to reform”* (Lk. 3:8). Repentance is the road to salvation. On what then does salvation depend? A traditional school began to form within the Judean Christian Community; its members were strongly tied to Jewish traditions. They viewed the Church as having been founded upon the Jewish religion and the Messiah of Israel, Jesus of Nazareth. They believed that salvation could be achieved by fulfilling the Mosaic Law, as well as by accepting Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah and the Son of God. It would be a natural conclusion for those of this belief to expect that all Gentile converts must be circumcised. This group became known in the Church as the party of the circumcised (Acts 11:2). From Judea, they went forth, preaching their doctrine to Christian converts in Antioch, and to the Galatian Churches: *“Unless you are circumcised according to Mosaic practice, you cannot be saved”* (Acts 15:2). They would have strongly supported this teaching with many Biblical arguments.

Others in the Church held a decidedly different opinion. They saw the Church as a New Creation – the New Israel flowing from the sacrificial death of Jesus of Nazareth on the Cross. This New Israel, inaugurated by Jesus, sends down the Holy Spirit upon all believers. The sinless Jesus Christ atoned for the sins of all people by His death on the Cross; Jesus merited righteousness for all mankind. This atonement must be personally applied to the individual souls of human beings. In order for a person to become righteous before God, the person must identify with Jesus Christ through faith. The gift of faith gave a person the power to believe Jesus of Nazareth to be the Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father, who redeemed mankind by His sacrificial death on the Cross. Faith gave the power to identify one’s life with Jesus through being incorporated into Jesus through water baptism. The gift of the Holy Spirit was bestowed upon all those who identified with Jesus in baptism, producing sanctification within the soul and righteousness before God. Cornelius and his household receiving the Holy Spirit prior to baptism was but an exceptional sign to the Church that such people must not be denied membership in the Church of Jesus Christ.

When understood in this light, salvation came to be seen as having no relationship whatsoever with the Mosaic Law. Therefore, salvation had



nothing to do with whether one did or did not keep the Mosaic Law. Salvation had nothing to do with being circumcised or non-circumcised. This truth is encapsulated in the expression: *“We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from observance of the law”* (Rm. 3:28). It became even more succinctly expressed in the formula: *“Faith alone saves!”* As many other Scriptures confirm, this expression never intended to abrogate the necessity of the good work of repentance. John the Baptist preached a repentance that led to the forgiveness of sins. The Twelve went forth *“preaching the need of repentance”* (Mk. 6:12). It was never intended to imply that a subsequent life of charity would not be necessary. Paul preached that faith without charity availed nothing. James taught: *“Faith without works (of charity) is dead.”* Later, when this teaching was taken out of context, it became a slogan implying heretical teachings.

Peter, Paul, and Barnabas championed the doctrine of faith. They were convinced of its truth; not so much by Scripture arguments, but by the concrete evidence of people coming to Jesus in faith, and consequently receiving the Gift of the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Holy Spirit became the divine witness testifying to the truthfulness of the doctrine. Peter said to his Jewish companions in Caesarea:

*“What can stop these people who have received the Holy Spirit, even as we have, from being baptized with water?” So he gave orders that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.*

*(Acts 10:47-48)*

In our last lesson, we heard Paul asking the Galatians:

*How did you receive the Spirit? Was it through the observance of the law or through faith in what you heard? . . . Is it because you observe the law or because you have faith in what you heard that God lavishes the Spirit on you and works wonders in your midst?*

*(Gal. 3:2, 5)*

## CHURCH COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM

Around 49 A.D., the controversy between these two opposing groups fully flowered. Coming out of Judea, the party of the circumcision spread their error: "*Unless you are circumcised according to Mosaic practice, you cannot be saved*" (Acts 15:1). Their teaching caused fear, anxiety and much dissension with the Church. Paul's words to the Galatians testify to heat of anger engendered by the controversy:

*Would that those who are troubling you might go the whole way, and castrate themselves. . . . The very ones who accept circumcision do not follow the law themselves. They want you to be circumcised only that they may boast about your bodily observance.*  
(Gal. 5:12, 6:13)

From what Paul says to the Galatians we get a good idea of how seriously he viewed the problem:

*Pay close attention to me, Paul, when I tell you that if you have yourselves circumcised, Christ will be of no use to you! I point out once more to all who receive circumcision, that they are bound to the law in its entirety. And you who seek your justification in the Law have severed yourselves from Christ and fallen from God's favor. It is in the spirit that we eagerly await the justification we hope for, and only faith can yield it. In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor the lack of it counts for anything: only faith, which expresses itself through love.*

(Gal. 5:1-6)

Paul equates the teaching of the party of the circumcision with apostasy from the faith. Some in the early Church considered Paul's position to be unforgivable.

Seeking peace for the Christian Community in Antioch, the Church decided to send a delegation, composed of Paul, Barnabas, and some others (no doubt from the opposing side) to the apostles and presbyters in Jerusalem about this question. Luke records:

*The Church saw them off and they made their way through Phoenicia and Samaria telling everyone about the conversion of the*

*Gentiles as they went. Their story caused great joy among the brothers.* (Acts 15:3)

On the way to Jerusalem, they visited the Church established by the Evangelists who had been scattered by the Jerusalem persecution. To these members of the Church, the entrance of the Gentiles into the Christian Community caused no problem but joy; joy being one of the effects of the Holy Spirit. No mention is made of visiting the Judean communities. There the news would have caused more anxiety than joy.

When the delegation from Antioch arrived in Jerusalem, the entire Christian Community convened to listen to the report from the brothers from Antioch. It was a general assembly with the apostles and presbyters presiding over the meeting. We can deduce from Paul's letter to the Galatians that the apostle John was also likely to be present, along with Peter and James. James appears to be the leading presbyter of the Church in Jerusalem. Traditions confirm him to have been Bishop of Jerusalem during this period in history. James held a reputation of being a most pious and prayerful Christian, devoted to the practices of Judaism. He was the kinsman of Jesus, probably a cousin. He apparently did not follow Jesus during his lifetime, but came to faith through an appearance of the Risen Jesus to him. Subsequently, he assumed a very prominent role in the early Christian Community. He, more than any other, would be in a position to demand respect and obedience from the Judean Christians. Due to his piety, he was called James the Just. As mentioned earlier, Josephus recorded the high priest Ananias II had James stoned to death in 62 A.D.

The delegation from Antioch reported "*all that God had helped them accomplish.*" No doubt they told of the large number of Gentiles who had embraced the Christian Faith in Antioch, Cyprus, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and Perga. After they finished their report, "*some of the converted Pharisees then got up and demanded that such Gentiles be circumcised and told to keep the Mosaic Law*" (Acts 15:5). Their words implied the work had been only half completed. The delegation should go back and finish the task. The text certainly implies a central authority existing in the Church, and members were expected to obey that authority. The Gentile Christians were to be commanded to receive circumcision and "*told to keep the Mosaic Law.*"

A free and hotly debated argument no doubt quickly followed upon this

statement. After the heat of the argument had expended itself, the public meeting was adjourned, and the apostles and presbyters accordingly convened to look into the matter. After much discussion, the entire assembly met together for a formal decision on the matter. The Church used no extraordinary means by which to reach its decision. The Lord worked no sign or wonders indicating who was in the right. They dialogued and discussed the problem. "After much discussion," Peter finally rises and gives the decision that ends the controversy, bringing peace to the Church:

*Brothers, you know well enough that from the early days, God selected me from your number to be the one from whose lips the Gentiles would hear the message of the gospel and believe.*

*(Acts 15:7)*

In this assembly, there were those who were in the right and those who were in the wrong. But in the eyes of Simon Peter, they are all brothers – those who were in the right and those who were wrong. Paul, in his exasperation with those in the wrong and in his zeal for the truth, would not go so far as to acknowledge heretics as brothers. He actually referred to them in his letter to the Galatians as "*certain false claimants to the title of brother*" (Gal. 2:4).

#### PETER SPEAKS

Peter carried his listeners' minds back to some ten years ago when, inspired by a revelation, he preached the Gospel to the household of Cornelius, and how they had believed the Word preached to them. As a result,

*God, who reads the hearts of men, showed his approval by granting the Holy Spirit to them just as he did to us. He made no distinction between them and us, but purified their hearts by means of faith also.*

*(Acts 15:8-9)*

Peter implies that if one has received the Holy Spirit, nothing more would be needed. This great gift came as a result of their faith in the Gospel. When Peter said that God "*purified their hearts by means of faith,*" he does not imply that faith itself actually purifies the soul. No, purification comes through baptism and the reception of the Holy Spirit. In baptism, the blood

of Christ washes away the sins in the soul and brings purity from the stain of sin.

*We have been justified by his blood. ... It is in Christ and through his blood that we have been redeemed and our sins forgiven, so immeasurably generous is God's favor to us.*

*(Rm. 5:9; Eph. 1:7-8)*

Peter addressed this question to the opposition:

*Why then do you put God to the test by trying to place on the shoulders of these converts a yoke which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear?*

*(Acts 15:10)*

Peter stressed that God showed his approval of the household of Cornelius by His gift of the Holy Spirit to them. He gave the Holy Spirit to them as a result of their faith in Jesus Christ. Now are these men to bring God to trial, making Him prove the rightness of His action? Must God answer for sanctifying uncircumcised men?

*"Are thou jealous because I am good?"*

These converted Pharisees fulfill the words of Jesus:

*They bind up heavy loads, hard to carry, to lay on other men's shoulders, while they themselves will not lift a finger to budge them.*

*(Mat. 23:4)*

Peter clearly and firmly now declares the Christian Dogma:

*Our belief is rather that we are saved by the favor of the Lord Jesus and so are they.*

*(Acts 15:11)*

This statement of Peter affirms that no man earns or merits salvation. Salvation is a free gift of the Lord Jesus to all who believe. Peter states the belief of the Christian Community--*"our belief."* This belief must be accepted in order to be part of this Christian brotherhood. Peter's words

ended the matter of discussion. An infallible decision has been given. Luke pointedly writes: *“At that, the whole assembly fell silent”* (Acts 15:12). At this moment, the words of Jesus to Peter come to mind:

*Simon, Simon! Remember that Satan has asked for you to sift you all like wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith will never fail. You in turn must strengthen your brothers.*

(Lk. 22:32-32)

This is the last act of Peter recorded by Luke. He had staged a grand act for Peter’s exodus from the written pages of the first Church History. As the Chief Shepherd he leaves the stage!

The whole congregation now respectfully listened:

*to Barnabas and Paul as the two described all the signs and wonders God had worked among the Gentiles through them.*

(Acts 15:12)

Their testimonies substantiate the words of Peter by demonstrating the great manifestations of the Holy Spirit among the Gentiles. Barnabas, no doubt, spoke first. Luke lists him before Paul. The Church of Jerusalem would have recognized Barnabas as senior to Paul, so it was expected he would speak first.

### JAMES THE PRESBYTER

James the Just agreed with Peter’s doctrine. Nevertheless, being a Judean Christian steeped in Jewish customs and more, he saw certain practical difficulties in the application of the decree. It could be a source of possible scandal. Jewish dietary laws were well known in the world. Certain Gentile practices were so abhorrent to anyone raised a Jew, that they could cause serious impediments to Church unity. As already noted, one of the big practical problems of having Jews and Gentiles in the same Church was the need to eat together. Eating a common meal was closely tied to the celebration of the Eucharist. The problems created could have serious repercussions for Church worship and fellowship; especially where there would be large gatherings of converted Jews and Gentiles. According to the Old Testament, there were certain prohibitions that foreigners must observe if they wish to dwell with Jewish People. We read in Leviticus:

*“Tell them, therefore: Anyone, whether of the house of Israel or of the aliens residing among them, who offer a holocaust or sacrifice without bringing it to the entrance of the meeting tent to offer it to the Lord, shall be cut off from his kinsmen. And if anyone, whether of the house of Israel or of the aliens residing among them, partakes of any blood, I will set myself against that one who partakes of blood and will cut him off from among his people. . . . Anyone hunting, whether of the Israelites or of the aliens residing among them, who catches an animal or a bird that may be eaten, shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth. Since the life of every living body is its blood, I have told the Israelites: “You shall not partake of the blood of any meat. Since the life of every living body is its blood, anyone who partakes of it shall be cut off. . . .”*  
(Lev. 17:8-15).

*“None of you shall approach a close relative to have sexual intercourse with her.”* (Lev. 18-6)

These four prohibitions were, no doubt, in the back of James’ mind when he spoke to the assembly. The address of James is decidedly Jewish. Luke indicates this by having James refer to Peter with his Hebrew name of Symeon. James agrees with Peter and holds that the Old Testament prophets do also:

*“Brothers, listen to me. Symeon has told you how God first concerned himself with taking from among the Gentiles a people to bear his name. The words of the prophets agree with this, where it says in Scripture, ‘Hereafter I will return and rebuild the fallen hut of David; from its ruin I will rebuild it and set it up again, so that all the rest of mankind and all the nations that bear my name may seek out the Lord. Thus says the Lord who accomplishes these things known to him from of old’* James quoted the prophet Amos  
(9:11-12)

He quotes from the Septuagint Bible. It reads differently in the Hebrew version of the text. It referred to the restoration of the House of Israel and reclamation of its lost territories. In Hebrew, it reads: *“that they, Israel, may possess the remnant of Edon and all the nations who are called by my name.”* In the Septuagint, that same sentence reads: *“that the rest of men*

*may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name.”* This is quite different from the original Hebrew, but it supports James statement *“how God first concerned himself with taking from among the Gentiles a people to bear his name.”* James seeks to emphasize that the Christian Church has inherited the promises made to Israel, and the present life of the Church is but a fulfillment of these promises.

James moves on to the practical matter of implementing this decree. Since the Jewish Christians had conceded to waiver circumcision for the Gentiles, then the Gentile Christians should be asked to abide by certain Jewish convictions, without which Christian union and fellowship would be nearly impossible. James goes on to say,

*It is my judgment, therefore, that we ought not to cause God’s Gentile converts any difficulties. We should merely write to them to abstain from anything contaminated by idols, from illicit sexual union, from the meat of strangled animals and from eating blood. After all, for generations now, Moses has been proclaimed in every town and has been read aloud in the synagogues on every Sabbath.*  
(Acts 15:19-21)

James insists that Jewish traditions which meant so much to Jewish Christians should be respected by their Gentile- Christian brethren.

The problem of eating food that had been offered to idols later became a problem in the Corinthian Christian Community. Most of the meat for sale in the pagan cities had been offered in idol worship before its sale in the marketplace. It had been dedicated or offered to some god. For a Jew to consume such food would be idolatrous, and an act of sacrilege. Paul once said,

*The Gentiles sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to become sharers with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and also the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and likewise, the table of demons.*  
(1 Cor. 10:20-21)

Paul well understood that the problems resulting from James’ directives would find their solution in Christian Charity. Paul beautifully teaches the Romans that it is not so much our freedom that we must preserve, as our Christian Charity:



*You should resolve to put no stumbling block or hindrance in your brother's way. I know with certainty on the authority of the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; it is only when a man thinks something unclean that it becomes so for him. If, then, your brother feels remorse for the food he has eaten, you have ceased to follow the rule of love. You must not let the food you eat bring to ruin him for whom Christ died; neither may you allow your privilege to become an occasion for blasphemy. The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating or drinking, but of justice, peace and the joy that is given by the Holy Spirit. Whoever serves Christ in this way pleases God and wins the esteem of men. Let us, then, make it our aim to work for peace and to strengthen one another.*

*(Rm. 14:13-19)*

**It is in this spirit, echoed by Paul in his Letter to the Romans, that the first council of the Catholic Church ended. The council had proclaimed the Gospel truth, and it taught that this truth must be lived in a way that works for peace, and strengthens one another.**

#### **AFTER THE COUNCIL**

**Luke relates that complete harmony and unity had been achieved:**

*It was resolved by the apostles and the presbyters, in agreement with the whole Jerusalem church, that representatives be chosen from among their number and sent to Antioch along with Paul and Barnabas. Those chosen were leading men of the community, Judas, known as Barsabbas, and Silas. (Acts 15:22)*

**These men are to deliver to the Church in Antioch a written reply to their request. They select two outstanding men of the Church of Jerusalem to go to Antioch to verify the authenticity of the letter and to be able to verbally clarify and explain it. They prudently sent both the written and the living word. Human prudence is quite evident by not sending the reply merely with the delegation from Antioch. We know from Acts 15:32 that both Judas and Silas were prophets. Judas may have been the brother of the Joseph who had been in the run-off with Matthias for Judas Iscariot's replacement. They both had the name of Barsabbas. Judas may have been the representative from the Hebrew party. Silas, or Silvanus, was a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37) who later teams up with Paul for the next missionary**

expedition, and probably acted as the scribe for Peter's first epistle (*1 Pt. 5:12*). He probably represented the other faction in the Jerusalem community.

We are indebted to Luke for the letter the Council sent to the "*brothers of Gentile origin in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia*," who had referred their problem to Jerusalem. He himself may have been one of the recipients of this letter he now records for us:

*The apostles and the presbyters, your brothers, send greetings to the brothers of Gentile origin in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. We have heard that some of our number, without any instructions from us, have upset you with their discussions and disturbed your peace of mind. Therefore, we have unanimously resolved to choose representatives and send them to you along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, who have dedicated themselves to the cause of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those whom we are sending you are Judas and Silas, who will convey this message by word of mouth: "It is the decision of the Holy Spirit, and ours too, not to lay on you any burden beyond that which is strictly necessary, namely, to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the neat of strangled animals, and from illicit sexual union. You will be well advised to avoid these things. Farewell"*

(Acts 15:23-29)

Luke gives this description of Antioch's acceptance of the decree from Jerusalem:

*Thus were the representatives sent on their way to Antioch; and upon their arrival there they called the assembly together to deliver the letter. When it was read, there was great delight at the encouragement it gave. Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, strengthened the community and gave them reassurance in a long discourse. After passing some time there, they were sent back with greetings from the brothers to those who had commissioned them.*

(Acts 15:30-35)

## REFLECTIONS ON THE COUNCIL

These episodes in Acts clearly illustrate that there has always been authority in the Christian Church. The Twelve Apostles possessed teaching and governing authority, which have remained in the Church to the present because they are essential for the structure and permanence of the Church. At the time of the Council in Jerusalem, probably only two of the original apostles were present--Peter and John. Luke makes no mention of the number, but merely the presence of apostles. But each time he mentions them, he places presbyters side by side with the apostles. The apostles and the presbyters appear together as the authority in the Jerusalem Church. By so doing, Luke subtly indicates a transfer, or a continuance of apostolic power within the Church. This would be in direct contrast to the Church twenty years earlier, when we saw all authority residing in the Twelve. Peter still remains in Jerusalem, and all this transpires under the supervision of the Chief Shepherd. In the mind of Luke, the Jerusalem Church certainly serves as a model for the Universal Church.

At the Council in Jerusalem, Peter proclaimed the doctrine of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul preached it, explained it, fought for it, suffered greatly for it, and would have died for it; but, the Church accepted it because Peter confirmed it to be true. We are indebted to that great and wise theologian, Paul, for the understanding and defense of the doctrine, but nonetheless, the Church accepted it because Peter decreed it. Theologians have a respected place in the Church; they often render a great service to it, but their teachings and explanations of doctrine do not take precedence, nor supersede, nor replace the teaching authority of the Popes, regardless of how brilliant they may be. No human brilliance equals the brilliance of Satan. It is from the deception of that brilliance that the Pope must protect the Church. That is why the great theologian St. Augustine held the judgment of Pope Innocent I, in the Pelagian controversy (belief that denies original sin), to be decisive. Augustine wrote:

*In this matter, the resolutions of two councils were sent to the Apostolic Chair. Replies have arrived from these. The matter is ended. Would that the error were also ended!*

At the council of Jerusalem, Luke highlights the position of Peter in the Church. When Peter gives the final decision on the doctrinal matter, he symbolically passes from the Church scene. Peter has performed his last

act in the Acts. Luke highlights the role of a presbyter, James the Just, who appears to rule the Church at Jerusalem. It is he that sends directives to the troubled Churches. The substance of his decision was not made arbitrarily, nor by a consensus of opinions or majority ruling. It was neither autocratic nor democratic--although the democratic methods aided the final formation of the decision.

Luke described the formula for settling interpersonal problems within the Christian Community and preserving unity. He gave the example of a serious issue concerning Christian faith and morals. Differences of opinion existed among the faithful and the theologians, and serious dissensions resulted within the Community. The troubled Community recognized an authority higher in these matters than the local Church. The Community appealed to the highest recognized authority within the Church--the Church of Jerusalem, the Church of the Apostles. A delegation was sent to Jerusalem where both sides of the argument were well represented. At the hearing in Jerusalem, each side had the opportunity to speak and present their case. The whole Church there listened and gave its opinion. The voices from the pews were not silent, but were loud and clear. The leaders listened intently. After all sides had been heard, the leaders discussed the matter fully among themselves. After all this, the final decision rested upon one man. Peter spoke and the argument ceased. The discussion was over. There was peace because there was obedience to proper authority. That is the picture Luke presents to his readers.

Luke also illustrates how James implemented the decree within the Church. We see that James accepted the decree of Peter. He makes reference to it, and he substantiates it from the Scriptures, showing its agreement with prophetic teachings. He prudently decrees the implementation of the truth with charity. He demands that certain concessions be made by the winners, in favor of the opposition, concessions that do not violate the principle involved. For the good of communal life and worship--a most high good--he asked for the renunciation of certain individual rights and goods. This same type of charity Paul expounded to the Corinthians:

*Now food does not bring us closer to God. We suffer no loss through failing to eat, and we gain no favor by eating. Take care, however, lest in exercising your right you become an occasion of sin to the weak . . . If food causes my brother to sin, I will never*

*eat meat again, so that I may not be an occasion of sin to him.*

*(1 Cor. 8:8-9, 13)*

Luke makes clear that it is not merely a human decision that has been given: *“It is the decision of the Holy Spirit, and ours too.”* We see again an acknowledgement of that human partnership with the Divine. It is a decision of the Holy Spirit, but it also is a decision of the Church officials. They worked hard to arrive at it, and within their hard work, the Holy Spirit manifested His Will. It is also the decision of the Holy Spirit; otherwise it could not have produced heavenly fruit: peace and joy.

The Church understood that those whom God called to guide and rule the Church as shepherds in his name, He gave the grace of office. They received a special charism of the Holy Spirit to fulfill their task. It is not surprising that we find as early as 110 A.D., St. Ignatius of Antioch, the third bishop of Antioch, writing to the Christians in Smyrna:

*You must all follow the bishop as Jesus Christ follows the Father, and the presbytery as you would the Apostles. Reverence the deacons as you would the command of God. Let no one do anything of concern to the Church without the bishop. Let that be considered a valid Eucharist which is celebrated by the Bishop, or by one whom he appoints. Nor is it permitted without the bishop to baptize or to celebrate the agape; but whatever he approve, this too is pleasing to God, so that whatever is done will be secure and valid.*

We find St. Irenaeus writing around 200 A.D.:

*Polycarp, however, was instructed not only by the Apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, by the Apostles in Asia. I saw him in my early youth . . . He always taught those things which he had learned from the Apostles, and which the Church had handed down, and which are true . . . It is necessary to obey those who are the presbyters in the Church; those who, as we have shown, have succession from the Apostles; those who have received, with the succession of the episcopate, the sure charism of truth according to the good pleasure of the Father. But the rest, who have no part in the primitive succession, and assemble where-so-ever they will, must be held in suspicion (against heresies).*

Luke illustrates for us that even those who have a special charism of the Holy Spirit for the offices they hold, they work hard to discern accurately the Spirit of God. He leaves us a good lesson for discerning the Will of God. Many people feel whenever they get a pious feeling about a particular thing, it has to be the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They confuse the pious feelings with divine inspiration. In actual fact, many such inspirations have a most ignoble source, which they fail to discern. In a matter of time, many such souls are led into sin, which they continue to convince themselves are inspirations from the Holy Spirit. Pride comes before the fall.

The Scriptures warn: *“I will deliver the proud up to the lust of their flesh!”* They have ignored the Scripture warning: *“Test every spirit!”* God desires us to be obedient in testing every spirit. If the inspiration is truly from God – wait! He will send two or three witnesses of verification. The Holy Spirit has patience and persistence. The Lord did not object to calling Samuel three times before Samuel replied: *“Speak, for your servant is listening”* (1 Sam. 3:10). When Samuel went to Bethlehem to anoint the son of Jesse as King of Israel, he had an inspiration to anoint the wrong son.

*“Surely, the Lord’s anointed is here before him.” But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not judge from his appearance or from his lofty stature, because I have rejected him. Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart.”*

*(1 Sam. 16:6-7)*

It took Samuel seven tries before he heard: *“There – anoint him, for this is he!”* (1 Sam. 16:12).

Father Judge, C.M., gave this advice to those who seriously desired to discern the will of God:

*Write down three reasons for doing the thing, and then write down three reasons for not doing the thing. Then take these in prayer to the Holy Spirit seeking his guidance.*

If we should do this we may more rightly be able to say, “It seems good to the Holy Spirit and me . . . .” To encourage Christians to seek spiritual direction to discern the spirit, St. Ignatius of Loyola gives this interesting

advice:

*The enemy also acts like a false lover who wishes to be hidden and does not want to be known. For when this deceitful man pays court, with evil intentions, to the daughter of some good man or the wife of a good husband, he wants his words and suggestions to be kept secret. He is greatly upset if the girl tells her father, or the wife her husband, his deceitful words and depraved intentions, for he sees clearly that then his plans will fail. In the same way, when the enemy of our human nature tempts a just soul with his tricks and deceits, he wants and desires that they be received and kept secret. When they are revealed to a confessor or some other spiritual person who understands his deceits and evil designs, the enemy is greatly displeased, for he knows that he cannot win in his evil plan once his obvious deceits have been laid bare.*

Returning to our narrative, Luke tells us that the Church in Antioch continues to grow and flourish in the environment of Christian unity and peace. He writes:

*Paul and Barnabas continued in Antioch, along with many others, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord.*

*(Acts 15:35)*

We know that Paul had been anxious about the Churches in Galatia, and the bad effects produced there by the party of the circumcision. A journey into this area from Antioch would only be possible when the paths through the mountain were accessible. When the snows began to melt, Paul was anxious to visit those areas. Luke records:

*After a certain time, Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back now and see how the brothers are getting on in each of the towns where we proclaimed the word of the Lord."*

*(Acts 15:36)*

Paul feels responsible for those he has converted. Missions are people--not numbers. If you love them, you have care and concern for them. As we read in the Little Prince: "You are forever responsible for that which you tame!" As one minister complained about a famous American evangelist and his team: "They get the crowds and their money and they leave us the work."

## ADIEU TO A GREAT TEAM

Barnabas and Paul! Paul and Barnabas! Two great spirits – forged by God’s grace into one of the Church’s greatest missionary teams. Indeed, it was their individual union with the Holy Spirit of God that became the foundation for the mutual union of their two spirits, forging them into a missionary team with one mind, and one heart. Their unique talents and abilities blended harmoniously and made a power for good, seldom to be seen in the history of the Church. What they were as a team, they could never be as individuals. They were, in spirit, Missionaries of the Holy Spirit. *“Set apart Barnabas and Saul for me to do the work for which I have called them.” (Acts 13:2)* Such a union of spirits creates the deepest and highest degree of human friendship. Therese of Lisieux spoke of their friendship as two blossoms on the same stem.

Luke tells us:

*Barnabas wanted to take along John called Mark. But Paul insisted that, as he had deserted them at Pamphylia, refusing to join them on that mission, he was not fit to be taken along now.*  
(Acts 15:38)

Paul places Barnabas in a position in which he must choose between John Mark and himself. Barnabas cannot turn his back on John Mark, deserting him. Therefore, Paul rejects Barnabas, and they go their separate ways.

*The disagreement which ensued was so sharp that the two separated. Barnabas took Mark along with him and sailed for Cyprus. Paul, for his part, chose Silas to accompany him on his journey, and in this, he was commended by the brothers to the favor of the Lord. He traveled throughout Syria and Cilicia, giving the churches there renewed assurance.*

(Acts 15:39-41)

Paul and Barnabas were Luke’s favorite missionary team and he reports this breakup with a heavy heart. They were indeed great spirits, but they were also human beings. Therefore, their spirits must be expressed through their human natures. In every human being, we find the three



dimensions of the physical, the psychic, and the spiritual. Through these dimensions, human beings express themselves. One dimension dominates a life over another, which gives a specific character to the personality. Some human lives are almost totally dominated by physical needs and expressions. Others develop an intense intellectual life in which analysis, reason, logic, and rationalization dominate. The rarest group of individuals is that in which the powers of the spirit dominate; here you find your saints. Most human actions have a degree of all three dimensions, but one dimension generally dominates, giving individual character and identity to the acts of each person.

Sigmund Freud discerned that human beings are caught between their basic physical needs and desires to be one kind of person, and a pressure and pull from some higher force to be another kind of person. He taught that the "I", the Ego, is pulled between the Id and the Superego. In this tug-of-war, the individual may become physically ill and at times, the "I" becomes an emotional wreck. Teresa of Avila takes over where Freud left off, and identifies a higher dimension in every human being called the *pneuma* – the spirit, or the higher part of the human soul. Whatever one may call it, this is the divine dimension wherein resides the Spirit of God. Here, in this dimension, is where the sanctification of the human being must begin. In the spirit of the baptized lies a person's finest powers – the infused virtues of faith, hope, and charity. These powers often lie completely dormant. When the spiritual powers remain dormant, the person experiences "existential despair," a feeling of the emptiness and futility of life, that often leads to the expression, "There must be more to life than this!" This phenomenon found expression in a popular song some years ago--"Is this all there is?" This condition sometimes prepares a person for a spiritual experience, a spiritual conversion in which the spirit rises from slumber, awakens, and experiences itself as alive for the first time. Some call this being "Born Again." In short order, such souls often reach a spiritual maturity comparable in the psychic order to a child in the terrible twos. Unfortunately, many never mature further.

We never grow simultaneously on all three levels. Growth in one dimension often exceeds growth in another. Certain persons do make rapid progress in spiritual growth. Therese of Lisieux taught that it did not take much time to grow spiritually, only much love. Often people, very advanced in the spirit, do not have a corresponding growth on the emotional level. It takes more than prayer and contemplation to cure a neurosis stemming out

of childhood. Many saints had their neuroses. They had to live with them a long time, and others had to put up with them. One old nun, on her fiftieth anniversary as nun, was quoted as saying, *“After living fifty years with saints, I now know why Jesus spent all His time with sinners.”* St. Gertrude knew St. Hildegard to be such a neurotic she could not understand what Jesus saw in her. In one of Jesus’ appearances to Gertrude, she asked Him: *“How can you stand that Hildegard?”* Jesus responded to Gertrude, *“Gertrude, what you hate in Hildegard, she even hates more.”*

Even a saint must operate within a totally human nature. That nature will always remain imperfect to some degree. That imperfect human nature will always color, alter, and at times block the manifestation of spirit--human and divine--within man. Only at the Resurrection of the Just will human nature be completely spiritualized--perfectly holy in body, soul, and spirit. Until that day, the frailty of humanity will always be evident. The saints, too, had to live in hopes of perfection. Most saints, like prophets, only became objects of devotion after their deaths!

What does Luke permit us to see in Paul and Barnabas? Human frailty! Their human frailty revealed the imperfections of their human hearts. Yet we see human hearts still striving to perfectly love God, who is the One perfect object of Love. The God of Love promised to bring good out of evil for those who love Him, and even love out of the evil of not loving . . . Evil won a battle, but Love won the war.

Two missionary teams came into being instead of one. Two other men were brought deeply into the apostolate, catching the fire of zeal burning in Paul and Barnabas. Barnabas’ confidence in John Mark was not misplaced. The second time around he would not fail. It was he that stood surrounded by the sound of the roar of lions, and urged the Roman Christians to embrace martyrdom for the faith. Paul’s missionary star would rise in the ascendancy as he relentlessly proclaimed the Gospel across Asia, into Europe, and on to Rome. With the passing of time and with reflection, Paul mellowed. He speaks defensively of Barnabas to the Corinthians. He even came to appreciate John Mark. We find him later, writing to the Colossians:

*Aristarchus, who is a prisoner along with me, sends you greetings. So does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. You have received instructions about him: “If he comes to you, make him welcome.*

*(Col 4:10)*

**He writes to Timothy:**

*I have no one with me but Luke. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he can be of great service to me.*

*(2 Tim. 4:11)*

**Even saints can be wrong, and saints have no trouble admitting it. But most of all, Paul grew in love, and it was in the sad personal failures of the heart that he came to realize:**

*Love is patient; love is kind. Love is not jealous, it does not put on airs; it is not snobbish. Love is never rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not prone to anger; neither does it brood over injuries . . . There is no limit to love's forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure. Love never fails. There are, in the end, three things that last; faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love.*

*(1 Cor. 13:4-5, 7-8, 13)*

## CHAPTER 15

### THE APOSTOLIC SPIRIT

#### INTRODUCTION

The Council of Jerusalem has ended the internal crisis within the Church. The dogmatic teaching of the Council, that salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ rather than through the observance of the Mosaic Law, re-established unity and peace within the Church – church unity being a favorable climate for Church growth and expansion. The Council confirmed the catholicity of the Gospel message and the catholicity of the Church's own character. All nations could find entrance into salvation through the Church – it could house both Jew and Greek. A Jew could be in the Church without ceasing to be a Jew. A Gentile could enter the Church without the necessity of becoming a Jew. Confirming the catholicity or universality of the Gospel Spirit freed the Church from the narrow confines of Judaism to embrace all mankind with divine love. The decision of the Council made possible, in a concrete way, the words of Jesus: *“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples (Mk. 11:17).”* *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have faith in God and faith in me. In my Father's house, there are many dwelling places . . . (Jn. 14:1-2).”* The Church could now concentrate its energy on its external expansion.

Through the missionary activities of Paul, Luke illustrates the rapid expansion of the Church through Asia Minor, into Europe and on into Rome. Luke dedicates the remainder of Acts to this purpose. In so doing, he will highlight only certain incidents. He will illustrate how this new faith stirs the hatred and persecution of the old faith of Judaism; how the faith is subjected to the criticism and snobbery of the accepted philosophical systems in the world; how the cultural circles of Greco-Romans world treat the new faith with indifference; how the new faith confronts the superstition of the common people and inflicts a decisive defeat upon perverted and false spiritualism. Luke always has an eye for recording the attitudes and reactions of secular authority toward the Church. We see

Paul appearing before magistrates (*duoviri*) of the Roman colony; before *politarchs* of the capital of a province; before the Athenian *areopagus*, the leading religious tribunal of the Grecian world; and before a Roman proconsular, the supreme secular authority. In all this, the genius of Luke gives us a glimpse into the world of that time, and the profound gift the Church had to offer it. Luke records the history of the first pages of world evangelization with its methods, its obstacles, and its triumphs. He leaves this record for future evangelists to contemplate and, to find inspiration.

Luke prepares us for this final stage of his presentation with the separation of Paul and Barnabas, and Paul's leaving Antioch with a new team member, to revisit the Churches previously established. The breakup with Barnabas cut whatever psychological ties Paul may have had with the Antiochian Christian Community. Antioch never again would be his home base. Some three years later, he returns for a visit only. As for Barnabas, he departed with John Mark to his home island of Cyprus, and there he supervised the Churches that had been established through the missionary activities of Paul and himself. Tradition confirms he died in Cyprus sometime before Paul's death in Rome. Apparently Paul never returned to Cyprus, even though he sailed within sight of it some years later. He left Cyprus to Barnabas and John Mark.

## THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Probably in the spring of 50 A.D., Paul begins his second missionary journey. This time, Silas joins Paul's team. Silas was well qualified for the new mission because he was both a leading Jew from the Church of Jerusalem, as Barnabas had been, and a Roman citizen, as was Paul. Even though Silas qualified for the work, he probably could not fill the void in Paul's life left by the loss of his friend Barnabas. Apparently, Timothy would fulfill that role.

Paul and Silas traveled north by foot, stopping at Tarsus, Paul's hometown. From there, they went northeast into the Taurus Mountains. The party would have headed for the Cilician Gates – which engineers of 1000 B.C. had built as an east-west short cut through the Taurus Mountains. Through the Cilician Gates had passed the armies of Alexander the Great. Later, the Crusaders also passed this way. Paul and Silas made their way to Derbe over this same road. From Tarsus this would have been an arduous but scenic 120 miles. Luke only mentions Derbe and then has the party move

on to Lystra, where Timothy joins the missionary team. Luke tells us,

*Paul arrived first at Derbe; next he came to Lystra, where there was a disciple named Timothy, whose mother was Jewish and a believer, and whose father was a Greek. Since the brothers in Lystra and Iconium spoke highly of him, Paul was anxious to have him come along on the journey. Paul had him circumcised because of the Jews of that region, for they all knew that it was only his father who was Greek.*  
(Acts 16:1-3)

Paul did not have Timothy circumcised for religious reasons, but because of the practical problem of working with Jews. In the eyes of the Jews, Timothy would be considered a Jew since he had been born of a Jewish mother. The decree on circumcision that Paul had fought so hard for in Jerusalem, concerned Gentile converts, not Jews. By having Timothy circumcised, Paul is not violating the principle laid down by the Council, rather, the circumcision would make Timothy socially acceptable to Jews. Paul then would have no fear of bringing Timothy into the Jewish society in which he usually lived and worked. This was more a matter of expediency and prudence than religious necessity. Timothy was circumcised not in order to make him more pleasing to God, but to make him more acceptable to Jews. Paul would later write to Timothy, *"To Timothy, my own true child in the faith (1 Tim. 1:2)."* He probably received Timothy into the Church during his first visit to Lystra.

We know that Timothy's grandmother Lois first believed, and her daughter Eunice, Timothy's mother, followed her in the Church. When Paul returned to the area, he heard such good reports concerning Timothy in both Lystra and Iconium, that he called Timothy to accept a missionary vocation. Paul's later letter to Timothy implies that certain prophecies had been given about Timothy, and as a result of these prophecies, he had been ordained by the presbyters. Paul wrote:

*I have a solemn charge to give you, Timothy, my child. This charge is in accordance with the prophecies made in your regard, and I give it to you so that under the inspiration of these prophecies you may fight the good fight, and hold fast to faith and a good conscience. . . Do not neglect the gift you received when, as a result of prophecy, the presbyters laid their hands on you.*

(1 Tim. 1-18, 4:14)

We know that Paul also laid hands on Timothy, for he writes in another place: *“For this reason, I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God bestowed when my hands were laid on you (11 Tim. 1:6).”* In time, Timothy became as dear to Paul as his own son. He writes to Timothy,

*. . . to Timothy, my child whom I love . . . I thank God, the God of my forefathers whom I worship with a clear conscience, whenever I remember you in my prayers – as indeed I do constantly, night and day. Recalling your tears when we parted, I yearn to see you again. That would make my happiness complete. (11 Tim. 1:2-4)*

Paul’s letter implies he prepared Timothy to take his own place in the apostolate:

*So you, my son, must be strong in the grace which is ours in Christ Jesus. The things which you have heard from me through many witnesses you must hand on to trustworthy men who will be able to teach others. Bear hardship along with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. (11 Tim. 2:1-3)*

Paul would later send Timothy as his personal representative. He writes to the Thessalonians:

*This is why, when we could endure it no longer, we decided to remain alone at Athens and send you Timothy. He is our brother and God’s fellow worker in preaching the gospel of Christ, and so we sent him to strengthen and encourage you in regard to your faith lest any of you be shaken by these trials. (1 Thes. 3:1-3)*

To the Corinthians, Paul writes:

*Granted you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you have only one father. It was I who begot you in Christ Jesus through my preaching of the gospel. I beg you, then, be imitators of me. This is why I have sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful son in the Lord. He will remind you of my ways in Christ, just as I teach them in all the churches. (1 Cor. 4:15-17)*

Paul teaches us how important it is not only to receive the Spirit of Jesus

into our own life, but also to impart that same Spirit to others so that the work of evangelization may go on. As Christians, we are called to be apostles and more. We are called to be makers of apostles!

We can see from Paul's words that Timothy's coming into his life and joining his missionary team was a great blessing. After this, Luke tells us:

*...as they made their way from town to town, they transmitted to the people for observance the decisions which the apostles and presbyters had made in Jerusalem. Through all this, the congregations grew stronger in faith and daily increased in numbers.*  
(Acts 16:4-5)

Some people are fond of speaking of the autonomy of the early Christian Churches in a way that implies criticism of the centralization of Church authority today. This autonomy is more a presumption on their parts rather than a proven fact. Acts gives us an example of a decree issued by the Jerusalem Church to the Gentile Communities many, many miles removed from Jerusalem and its influence. The letter itself had been carried from Jerusalem to Antioch in the hands Paul and Barnabas, who were accompanied by Silas and Barsabbas. The letter read: "*to the brothers of Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia of Gentile origin (Acts 15:23).*" Paul left Antioch, accompanied by Silas, and traveled through Syria and Cilicia. Paul and Silas promulgated the same decree that had been sent to Antioch: "*they transmitted to the people for observance the decisions which the apostles and presbyters had made in Jerusalem (Acts 16:4).*" This certainly implies some form of central authority in the Church that could command obedience of other Christian Communities. Luke implies that the acceptance of this decree and the obedience to it had certain good effects: "*the congregations grew stronger in faith and daily increased in numbers (Acts 16:5).*" That was precisely the role Jesus gave to Simon Peter and to his successors – to strengthen the faith. "*But I have prayed for you that your faith may never fail. You in turn must strengthen your brothers (Lk. 22:32).*" When faith is strengthened, when it is strong, what is the result? "*The congregations grew stronger in faith and daily increased in numbers (Acts 16:5).*" In our own day we have seen that in Catholic areas where the voice of apostolic authority has been silent or shunned, faith has grown weak and countless numbers have fallen away from the Church.

Acceptance by the Churches of Galatia of "*the decisions which the apostles and presbyters had made in Jerusalem,*" brings the section of Acts dealing



with the internal crisis within the Church to a conclusion. Luke now directs our attention, and his narrative, toward the external expansion of the Church. Paul has completed his original intention, expressed to Barnabas: *“Let us go back now and see how the brothers are getting on in each of the towns where we proclaimed the word of the Lord (Acts 15:36).”* Should the party return to Antioch, or continue on west seeking new opportunities to proclaim the Gospel? Their zeal for spreading the good news urged them to move on.

Paul moved and worked within the vastness of the Roman Empire. The entire empire had been divided into provinces for governing purposes. A province was either under the direct rule of the emperor or the Roman Senate. At that time, Paul traveled and preached in what is now the middle of modern Turkey, in the particular section called the Province of Galatia. Turkey itself was divided into more than six provinces. To the east of Galatia was the Province of Cappadocia; to the north and northwest of Galatia was the Province of Bithynia, and Pontus bordered on the Black Sea; directly west of Galatia lay the large Province of Asia bordering on the Aegean Sea; directly west across the Aegean was Greece. In the Province of Asia, we find the cities of Troas, Ephesus and the Churches mentioned in the Book of Revelations; to the south of Galatia were the smaller provinces of Lydia and Pamphylia. Tradition confirms that the Apostle John evangelized greatly in the Province of Asia. We know from Peter’s address in his first epistle that apparently others evangelized in Pontus, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, for he addresses Christians in these areas as well as in Galatia (*1 Pt. 1:1*).

### OPPOSITION FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT

After completing their work in Pisidian Antioch, Paul and his companions decided to extend their missionary efforts further west. Only twenty miles west of Pisidian Antioch, lay the Province of Asia. Perhaps it was their intention to reach Apamea about 60 miles away and then take the highway that ran straight to Ephesus some 190 miles from Apamea. When they crossed into Asia, they received a prohibition from the Holy Spirit against preaching the Gospel in Asia; they probably received it shortly after crossing the border. At that time they perhaps altered their western course in Lydia, and headed directly north into the Phrygian territory of the Province of Asia, to the city of Dorylaion – about 100 miles away. They then headed northwest into the Mysia area – the pre-Roman name for the

territory in the northwestern section of the Province of Asia. Since they were forbidden to preach in Asia, they intended to cross over into the Province of Bithynia. Here again, they ran into a wall of opposition. The Spirit of Jesus forbade them even to enter into the Province of Bithynia.

Our missionary party has set out from Pisidian Antioch heading west with high hopes and great expectations. These hopes are frustrated. Doors suddenly close in their faces. The Spirit of God seems to checkmate their every move. In docility of spirit they move on, but they must have wondered what they had done wrong. Should they have returned to Antioch? Is traveling on westward within God's will? In darkness of faith and in hope of enlightenment, they move on. God's Will lay shrouded in a Divine silence. Only what they must not do is clear: they must not preach in Asia, and they must not set foot in the Province of Bithynia. The Will of God has restricted them to silence. The only course remaining open was to pass through Mysia – a wild and lonely country. Whatever road they took would lead them down to Troas on the Aegean Sea; directly west across the sea lay the land of Greece and the continent of Europe.

Paul and his companions had probably traveled some 300 miles on foot by the time they wearily arrived in Troas. Luke describes it all in a few words:

*They next traveled through Phrygia and Galatian territory because they had been prevented by the Holy Spirit from preaching the message in the province of Asia. When they came to Mysia, they tried to go on into Bithynia, but again the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them. Crossing through Mysia instead, they came down to Troas.*  
(Acts 16:6-8)

This beautiful city was a Roman colony and the port to Europe. Only a few miles from the city lay the ruins of the city of Troy – made famous by the Greek poet Homer, where once had lived Helen – the lady with a face that launched a thousand ships.

When Paul arrived in Troas, did he feel he had come to a dead end? Was it God's will that they should return to Antioch? Through divine intervention they had arrived at Troas – a place they had not intended. Apparently, they had traveled many weary miles in vain. God was frustrating their holy ambitions. At times, Paul saw the hand Satan in such hindrances, but this time it was the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Jesus who placed barriers

before them. We are not told how they received these Divine inspirations. Usually, the Holy Spirit manifests His Will through prophecy – both Paul and Silas were prophets. Visions and revelations from the Lord often directed the course of Paul’s life. After the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead, His body was completely spiritualized, and His visions to men were considered manifestations of the Spirit of Jesus. When we read that *“the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them,”* it may be a reference to a vision Paul had received. We also know that men of the Spirit can detect the Providence of God working in external events and circumstances of everyday life; they can also detect, at times, the spirit of Satan working in those same external events.

Here we see the importance to all missionary and apostolic activity, of always submitting our plans to the Lord in prayer. We need to keep ourselves open to external manifestations of God’s spirit. Ideas may come from co-workers, superiors, spiritual directors, or circumstances that indicate the will of God wants us to terminate an effort, take a different direction, or use another method. Good ideas and inspired plans are not enough. What we envision as a goal and purpose may be entirely different to the Mind of God. We will not be attuned to God’s Will if we do not take time to meditate, pray, and seek counsel. We can never truly reason *“Why?”* with the Divine Plan, for God’s ways are not man’s ways. It is not just that God’s ways are reasonable, but rather because they are supremely so – they are wise!

As Paul and his group waited and rested by the shores of the Aegean Sea and wondered about the Will of God, the positive Will of God manifested itself to Paul one night in a vision:

*A man of Macedonia stood before him and invited him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” After this vision, we immediately made efforts to get across to Macedonia, concluding that God had summoned us to proclaim the good news there.*

*(Acts 16:9-11)*

With the reference *“that God had summoned,”* Luke indicates their mission to Macedonia to be the Will of the Triune God: The Son and Holy Spirit brought them to Troas – The Father calls them to Macedonia.

This is the first of the *“we”* passages in Acts. It is generally presumed that

the author of Acts joined the missionary team at this point. Tradition maintains that Luke and Titus were brothers converted to the faith in Antioch. It is not impossible that Luke had been with the party since leaving Antioch. At any rate, whether he came with them to Troas or met them there unexpectedly, Luke now joins the missionary team that sails towards Macedonia.

## MISSION TO MACEDONIA

The greatness, that had once been Macedonia's under Philip and Alexander the Great, had passed. Greece was now part of the Roman Empire. The northern part of Greece was the Province of Macedonia and the southern part of the country was the Province of Achaia.

The missionary party sets sail for northern Greece to the port of Neapolis. They had favorable winds and were able to make Samothrace, a mountainous island of 5,000 feet, on the first day. The next day, they sailed into the port of Neapolis. Later, the return trip would take five days instead of two (*Act 20:6*). Neapolis (Cavalla today) was the port city for Phillipi.

A famous highway called the Via Ignatia, beginning in Neapoli, cut straight across Macedonia to the Adriatic Sea. It served as a connecting link between Rome in the West and Asia Minor in the East. The city of Phillipi lay about ten miles farther on along the Via Ignatia. This was the immediate destination of the missionary team. Phillipi gained fame as the site of the historic battle that ended the Roman Republic. Here the armies commanded by Brutus and Cassius, the assassins of Julius Caesar, were defeated by the forces of Octavius and Anthony. The assassins committed suicide after the battle, and the victors granted the city the privilege of a Roman colony, thereby elevating it to the position of a border garrison.

Phillipi is the only city Luke describes as a colony, even though Pisidian Antioch, Lystra, Troas and Corinth were also colonies. The Romans used the creation of "*colonies*" to strengthen their hold on the provinces. The colonies were strategically selected towns. They were often used as settlements for retired soldiers of the Roman army. Two types of Roman citizens would inhabit such a colony: genuine Italians who had been commissioned to live in the colony, and a group that may be called "*political converts*." Both Paul and Silas belonged to this second category, which

entitled them to the same rights as those born as Romans; for example, exemption from scourging, freedom from arrest except in extreme cases, and the right to appeal to the emperor. The people of these cities lived under Roman Law, and were governed by a Roman type of constitution; the colonies were truly “*little Romes,*” transplanted overseas with the Latin culture and languages much in evidence.

The number of Jews in Philippi must have been very small – apparently fewer than the ten male Jews required for a synagogue where services could be held. The Jews in Phillippi maintained only a temporary place of prayer outside the city gate. This was near the river so that the necessary ablutions connected with worship could be easily performed. Foreign religions were required to conduct their worship outside the city gate. In this case, the river Gangites was 1.5 miles to the west of the town.

Luke records:

*We spent some time in that city. Once, on the sabbath, we went outside the city gate to the bank of the river, where we thought there would be a place of prayer. We sat down and spoke to the women who were gathered there. One who listened was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple goods from the town of Thyatira. She already revered God and the Lord opened her heart to accept what Paul was saying. After she and her household had been baptized, she extended us an invitation: “If you are convinced that I believe in the Lord, come and stay at my house. She managed to prevail on us.”*

*(Acts 16:13-15)*

Although it was a vision of a man that had called Paul to Macedonia, the Church at Philippi came into being through the conversion of a wealthy lady named Lydia. The first Church in Phillipi was home of Lydia, and this Church remained always dear to Paul’s heart; it was apparently the only Church from which he accepted financial aid. Lydia was Paul’s first convert in Europe. She came from the town of Thyatira in the Province of Lydia, just south of the Province of Asia. The purple-dyed cloth business had flourished in her native province from ancient days. The dye, used to make purple cloth, came from a small shellfish. Such cloth was extremely expensive. This wealthy businesswoman became Paul’s first convert and benefactress in Europe.

## OPPOSITION OF MEN

Until this time, Paul's opposition had been from the Jews; but now Christianity has its first conflict with the pagan world. The cause of the hostility was not faith, but interference with material gains. Although the Jewish religion was guaranteed by the Roman Law, they were forbidden to actively proselytize pagans. Cities like Phillipi would have been inclined to make an exaggerated show of loyalty to the emperor. In the previous year, 49 A.D., the Emperor Claudius had issued an edict expelling the Jews from Rome. As a result of this, Jews may have fared ill throughout the Empire – especially in a Roman colony. It has already been noted that less than ten male Jews lived in Phillipi.

For a while, the missionaries enjoyed peace. Every Sabbath, the little congregation went out of the city gate to the riverside, where they assembled for worship. One day, as they proceeded to their place of prayer, a young slave girl possessed of the Python spirit met them. Such people were believed to be inspired by the god Apollo, who was thought to be embodied in a snake (python) at Delphi. Anyone so possessed was believed to be able to foretell the future. Plutarch tells us that the word “*pythons*” was used to mean “*ventriloquists*.” We read: “*She used to bring substantial profit to her masters by fortune-telling (Acts 16:16b).*” This she probably did by ventriloquial utterances in a trance-like fashion.

Luke uses this incident to illustrate the problem faced by Christianity in a world filled with paganism and spiritualism. He draws a contrast for us between Lydia and the slave girl. Lydia possesses a good spirit – she revered God in her heart. In other words, she possessed that fear of God that makes a person desire to know God's will in order to fulfill it. This fear of God is the beginning of the love of God. It motivates the human will to become one with the known Will of God. The Spirit of God leads such spirits. Lydia recognized the grace of true religion in Judaism, and she conformed her life to its teachings. A spirit so open to God was a fertile field for the Gospel truth to take root. Lydia listened to the words of Paul, and the grace of God confirmed the truthfulness of what she heard. As Luke wrote: “*The Lord opened her heart to accept what Paul was saying (Acts 16:14b).*”

This incident reveals the true beauty and godliness of the Jewish faith;

when it is accepted by a person, in a true spirit of reverence for God, it prepares the soul to accept its Savior and live a life committed to Him. But even a person so disposed must hear the word in order for Christian Faith to be born in the heart. And so, the words must be proclaimed, and the heart must simultaneously be anointed by the touch of the Holy Spirit. In the conversion of Lydia, we see a soul apparently prepared by a lifetime of openness to truth and the acceptance of it, a soul who acknowledges God's existence and supremacy in her life. To such a person, Paul presents the Gospel truth, and actual grace moves her to believe. True conversion is a matter of the spirit. For this reason, conversion resulting from signs and wonders, and other highly emotional events, often has the endurance and frailty of a flower in a cranny rock:

*Those sown on rocky ground are people who, on listening to the word, accept it joyfully (emotionally) at the outset. Being rootless, they last only a while. When some pressure or persecution overtakes them because of the word, they falter.* (Mk. 4:16-17)

As Paul moves further from people under the influence of the Jewish faith, he finds people more and more lacking the good foundation upon which to build a life in Jesus Christ. Probably, the fullness of this truth only came with time.

Luke symbolized the serenity of Lydia's spirit by picturing her quietly at prayer by the river. He sharply contrasts this picture with the slave girl possessed by the evil spirit. The picture of the slave girl symbolizes the spirit of the pagan people that the Christian Gospel must encounter:

*It was while we were on our way out to the place of prayer that we met a slave girl who had a clairvoyant spirit. She used to bring substantial profit to her masters by fortune-telling. The girl began to follow Paul and the rest of us shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God; they will make known to you a way of salvation."* (Acts 16:16-17)

In this girl we see the human spirit at its worst – alive, active, but perverted; a spirit that does not lead to God, despite the vocabulary it may use, but uses its power to corrupt the true spiritual relationship with God. A spirit that is possessed and motivated by evil spiritual forces bent on deceptions. Deception is the means to the end, the tool to destroy a soul's

true relationship with God in faith, hope, and charity. A human spirit under such power has lost the eye to see and the ear to hear the Spirit of God. Even when such spirits attach themselves to the True Religion, it is only with evil in view – to use and pervert the truth. Such souls must first be exorcized before they are free to hear and believe the truth. You must not mix spiritualism and Christianity! What does the Light have to do with the occult? Any Christian that trifles and dabbles in spiritualism seriously risks the salvation of their soul, because faith, hope, and charity do not survive in such environments. You cannot serve two masters. You will come to love one and hate the other.

The evil spirit in this slave girl had its own evil intention in seeking to identify with Christianity. Just as Jesus rejected such testimony and witness, so must the Church, and so must each Christian. Paul's patience finally comes to an end as *"she did this for several days."* Luke tells us:

*Finally Paul became annoyed, turned around and said to the spirit,  
"In the name of Jesus Christ I command you, come out of her!"  
Then and there the spirit left her. (Acts 16: 18)*

This is Paul's first exorcism on European soil. It symbolizes that the power of the Gospel is greater than the power of evil that holds Europe in its grasp. Paul demonstrates the power of Jesus Christ. Note that Paul cries, *"In the name of Jesus Christ I command you!"* He puts the power of Jesus between himself and the evil spirit. No human spirit can equal the power of evil spirits; they are of a higher order of creation than human beings. Man will always lose in any head-on encounter with them. Such actions like those of Paul invoke their hatred. They fight back with the human agents at their command, and will defeat any human being who does not have the power of the Holy Spirit within him.

Many people prey on the spiritual needs of others. Things of the spirit become a means of profit. One of the greatest enemies the Church would face in seeking to bring the True Faith to pagan people, would be the hatred and hostility engendered in men and women who profit financially, socially, and emotionally from false beliefs and practices. Luke symbolizes the evil Christianity must face in the reaction to the exorcism by men who had profited from the possession of those false practices. These men seek to destroy the true faith, and they use whatever means available, particularly political power. They manipulate political power. In this incident, we see



what the bearer of Christian Truth must be willing to endure. *“You will be hated by all for my name sake (Mat. 10:22)!”* Men will use truth and rightful authority for their evil purposes. They will use the letter of the law to destroy the spirit of truth and love. They prey upon the prejudices and fears of the crowds in order to blind them to the true issues involved. (In our own day how well the advocates of abortions fit into this picture!) Luke catches all this in the episode that follows. It will be a pattern that repeats itself in the life of Paul and the Church. Paul later writes:

*Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. It comes as no surprise that his ministers disguise themselves as ministers of justice of God. But their end will correspond to their deeds.*

*(2 Cor. 11:14-15)*

*When her masters saw that their source of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the main square before the local authorities. They turned them over to the magistrates with this complaint: “These men are agitators disturbing the peace of our city! Furthermore, they are Jews, which means they advocate customs which are not lawful for us Romans to adopt or practice. The crowd joined in the attack on them and the magistrates stripped them and ordered them to be flogged.*

*(Acts 16:19-22)*

Paul and Silas were stripped naked in the public square – this would have been a suffering most keenly felt due to Jewish modesty. In writing to the Thessalonians especially, Paul mentions the shameful treatment they had received at Philippi. In the panic and emotional tumult engulfing them, it would have been useless to plead their Roman citizenship; they accepted the beating with rods.

*After receiving many lashes, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was given instructions to guard them well. Upon receipt of these instructions, he put them in maximum security, going so far as to chain their feet to a stake.*

*(Acts 16:19-24)*

Men who have but proclaimed truth, out of love for God and man, truth that brings salvation, have been falsely accused and condemned by civil authority to be beaten and imprisoned, where they are chained like animals. Evil revenges itself on God’s servants.

## GOOD FROM EVIL

What Paul and Silas suffered did not result from man alone, but from man's partnership with evil. Paul and Silas suffered such punishment because of their partnership with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is in prison with them. He brings consolation to their spirits, and fills their hearts with praise that escapes their lips in prayer and song. Paul and Silas filled the prison with their prayerful songs, and their fellow prisoners listen intently. They turned the dungeon into a chapel. Perhaps they were inspired to sing the words of psalm 102:

*Hear my prayer, O Lord; and let my cry come to thee! Do not hide thy face from me in the day of my distress! . . . From the heaven, the Lord looked at the earth, to hear the groans of the prisoners, to set free those who were doomed to die.*

(Ps. 102:2-3, 20-21)

The jailer may have dozed off listening to the songs of his prisoners, when suddenly a severe earthquake jolted him awake. Seeing the prison doors open, he completely despaired, thinking the prisoners had escaped. Paul's calling to him out of the dark dungeon stopped his intent to commit suicide: *"Do not harm yourself! We are all still here (Acts 16:28)."* Paul and Silas had fallen out of favor in the city only in the last few hours. All the city had heard them and proclaimed: *"These men are servants of the Most High God; they will make known to you a way of salvation (Acts 16:17)."* In the eyes of the jailer, the earthquake confirmed the power of these men. There was no doubt in his mind, it had occurred through their power. Filled with superstitious fear, he went to Paul and Silas. They had saved his physical life, and now he asks them: *"Men, what must I do to be saved?"* The Church of Jerusalem firmly answered his questions; he had asked the right ones. He had been frightened in the right direction. God meets men where they are. No doubt the jailer represented the spiritual condition of many pagans who will come to Christ. They may come out of an uninformed sense of the Divine Being, and a fearful sense of some unknown damnation, but a true experience with Christ can change that. Paul and Silas answered the jailer: *"Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, and all your household (Acts 16:31)."* They proceeded to announce the Word of God to him and to everyone in his house. He believed; the jailer and his entire household were baptized that very night. This incident has often been quoted to support the

baptism of children, and baptism without submerging under water. The presumption is that children would have been in the household, and such a baptism would have been impossible in such a prison environment. The converted jailer tended to the wounds of Paul and Silas and *“led them up into his house, spread a table before them, and joyfully celebrated with his family his newfound faith in God (Acts 16:34).”* A day that had started out so badly had ended in a joyful agape, with Paul and Silas celebrating Christian fellowship with new Christians. Once again, the Lord brings good out of evil for those who love Him. Perhaps Paul and Silas discovered from this incident some of the fruit of all they would have to suffer for the Gospel. Perhaps the results would not always be visible, but they would know it in faith; their sufferings would increase the numbers at the banquet of the Lord. God would use their very sufferings to spread the Gospel. For evangelists such as Paul and Silas, this would be enough to cause rejoicing in their sufferings for Jesus’ name.

No doubt, the city officials had been impressed by the earthquake. They sent word to release Paul and Silas from prison. It was now Paul’s moment as a Roman citizen. These men, vowed to uphold Roman law, had violated the law by condemning two Roman citizens without trial, and publicly beating them before the crowd. Insult had been added to injustice, and Paul demanded a public apology. It was not only for his sake, but also for the sake of the Gospel and the Christian religion, that he demanded to be publicly exonerated. Luke records:

*When it was day, the magistrates dispatched officers with orders to let these men go. The jailer conveyed the information to Paul: “The magistrates have sent orders that you are to be released. Get started, now. On your way!” Paul’s response to this was, “They flogged us in public without even a trial, then they threw us into jail, although we are Roman citizens!” They came along and tried to quiet them; then they escorted them out with the request that they leave the city. Once outside the prison, however, the two first made their way to Lydia’s house, where they saw and encouraged the brothers; afterward they departed.*

*(Acts 16:35-40)*

It is believed that Paul left Luke in Philippi to continue the formation of the Church. Luke apparently remained there for some years, joining Paul towards the end of the third missionary journey. The Church in Philippi

was the one community founded by Paul that he never expressed any disappointment with. No doubt that was in large measure due to the teachings and directions of Luke.

The missionary party continued along the Via Ignatia passing through Amphipolis and Apollonia, until they reached Thessalonica. The distance between each of these towns is approximately thirty miles. Thessalonica (today Saloniki) was the capital of the Province of Macedonia, and a free city of the Empire, with a large population. Thessalonica was made a free city like Athens in gratitude for the cooperation that the inhabitants had offered Antony and Octavius in the struggle against Cassius and Brutus. This meant that there were no Roman soldiers stationed in the city, and the government was in the hands of an assembly of people, from whom the magistrates, known as politarchs, were chosen.

An old pattern was to resume itself in Thessalonica. When they arrived in the city they found a synagogue, and Paul and Silas preached there on three successive Sabbaths. This resulted in the conversion of some of the Jews, a great number of God-fearing Gentiles, and a number of leading women. But it also resulted in the indignation of the rest of the Jews. According to Luke's account, Paul preached on many things, *"showing that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead: 'This Jesus I am telling you about is the Messiah!'* (Acts 17:3)." In addition, however, we learn from Paul's own letters that he spoke about the glory of Christ's kingdom. One of the accusations brought against the missionaries was that they proclaimed *"another king, Jesus."* From his letters, it is evident that this message of the kingdom was central to his preaching. He reminded the Jews that his only purpose was to help them live lives *"worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory (I Thes. 2:12)."* He must have taught a great deal about the Second Coming of Jesus. He referred explicitly to his preaching in Thessalonica when he asked them later, *"Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you this (II Thess. 2:5)?"*

Paul devoted three weeks to reasoning with the Jews. This period of time devoted exclusively to work among the Jews was probably only the beginning of a prolonged stay, indicated by the familiarity of his later correspondence with the congregation. He probably turned, at some point, to work exclusively among the Gentiles. This once again provoked the jealousy of the Jews.

*(They) engaged loafers from the public square to form a mob and start a riot in the town. They marched on the house of Jason in an attempt to bring Paul and Silas before the people's assembly. When they could not find them there, they dragged Jason himself and some of the brothers to the town magistrates, shouting: "These men have been creating a disturbance all over the place. Now they come here and Jason has taken them in. To a man, they disregard the Emperor's decrees and claim instead that a certain Jesus is king." In this way, they stirred up the crowd. When the town's magistrates heard the whole story, they released Jason and the others on bail. As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas off to Beroea.*

*(Acts 17: 5-10)*

### MISSION TO THESSALONICA

**Back on the road again, Paul and Silas continued on the Via Ignatia until they reached Beroea – about fifty miles from Thessalonica. On their arrival, they went to the Jewish Synagogue. They found good reception in Beroea.**

*Its members were better disposed than those in Thessalonica, and welcomed the message with great enthusiasm. Each day they studied the Scriptures to see whether these things were so. Many of them came to believe, as did numerous influential Greek women and men. But when the Jews of Thessalonica learned that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Beroea also, they hurried there to cause a commotion and stir up the crowds. The brothers sent Paul off directly on his way to the sea, while Silas and Timothy stayed behind.*

*(Acts 17:13-15)*

**When Paul left Beroea, he was uncertain of his future movements. He intended to come back and collect Silas and Timothy as soon as he could. We know that he had to leave Thessalonica hurriedly, in the dark of night. His desire to revisit them is he stated in his letter:**

*Brothers, we were orphaned by separation from you for time in sight, not in mind. We were seized with the greatest longing to see you. So we tried to come to you. I, Paul, tried more than once, but Satan blocked the way.*

*(1 Thes. 2:17)*

The Jews of Thessalonica were no doubt the instruments used by Satan. Paul wrote of them: *“displeasing to God and hostile to all mankind, they try to keep us from preaching salvation to the Gentiles (I Thess. 2:15b-16a).”* From his defensive letter, we can deduce the motives the Jews ascribed to Paul for leaving and failing to return. They insinuated that Paul was a man who loved to have a fuss made over him – he sought only praise and adulation. He was displeased with his converts in Thessalonica because they had failed to flatter him. Also, he had come to this rich city for the sake of material gain. When he found that no substantial payments were coming his way, he left for more profitable fields. The substance of the Jewish accusation was: Paul had not come back to a place where he received neither praise nor pay . . .

A six-month period follows which Luke passed over in silence. While Silas and Timothy remained in Beroea, expecting Paul’s return any day, Paul continued his work of preaching the Gospel along the Ignatia Way – coming to Dyrrachium on the Adriatic Coast. From there, Paul turned north preaching the Gospel in Illyricum – part of Albania today. He later wrote to the Romans:

*I have completed preaching the gospel of Christ from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyria. It has been a point of honor with me never to preach where Christ’s name was already known . . . to fulfill the words of Scripture, “They who received no word of him will see him, and they who have never heard will understand.”*  
(Rm. 15:19-21)

Paul had written to the Thessalonians:

*Pray for us that the word of the Lord may make progress and be hailed by many others, even as it has been by you. Pray that we may be delivered from confused and evil men. For not every man has faith, but the Lord keeps faith; he it is who will strengthen you and guard you against the evil one.*  
(2 Thes. 3:1-3)

As Paul was impeded by the return of those *“confused and evil men”* to Thessalonica, he doubled back south to Nicopolis. From there, he made his way to Athens with his Macedonian guides, Aristarchus and Secundus of Thessalonica, and Sopater of Beroea. He sent them back to Beroea with

word that Timothy was to go with them to Thessalonica, to see about the state of the Church there. Then Timothy was to pick up Silas and the two were to join Paul in Athens. Meanwhile, Acts tell us that Paul was alone in Athens.

### NOT AGAINST FLESH AND BLOOD

Paul later writes:

*As I see it, God has put us apostles at the end of the line like men doomed to die in the arena. We have become a spectacle to the universe, to angels and men alike. We are fools on Christ's account. Up to this very hour, we go hungry and thirsty, poorly clad, roughly treated, wandering about homeless. We work hard at manual labor. When we are insulted, we respond with a blessing. Persecution comes our way; we bear it patiently. We are slandered and we try conciliation. We have become the world's refuse, the scum of all; that is the present state of affairs.*

*(1 Cor. 4:9-13)*

Spreading the Gospel is more than preaching the good news about the Kingdom of God. It is more than introducing people to the Christian Faith. Whether we realize it or not, it is an assault – an attack upon the kingdom of darkness. It is a battle with Satan and his hordes. God help the unsuspecting Christian that confronts the kingdom of darkness without being clothed in the Armor of God. Fools rush in where angels fear to tread!

*Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil. Our battle is not against human forces, but against the principalities and powers, the rulers of this world of darkness, the evil spirits in regions above.*

*(Eph. 6:11-12)*

## CHAPTER 16

### THE APOSTOLIC SPIRIT

#### INTRODUCTION

Paul had been driven out of Macedonia, but not before he had succeeded in establishing the Church in the Province of Macedonia. Agents of Satan prevented him from returning to visit the churches established there. By force of circumstance, he finds himself alone in the city of Athens. It appears to have been a discouraging and depressing moment in his ministry. He indeed needed the support of his companions in the Lord. He sent word for Silas and Timothy to rejoin him in the city of Athens as soon as possible.

Athens lay in the Province of Achaia. A Roman proconsular governed the province, because it lay under the jurisdiction of the Roman Senate. Corinth was the capital city of the province. Paul of Tarsus had arrived in Athens, the city of Pericles, Demosthenes, Sophocles, Euripedes, Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato. All were stars of the first magnitude – luminaries of the human spirit. Yet, when all was said and done, the little Jew from Tarsus would cast a longer shadow over the history of man, and his words would be held to be more sacred. Long after the popular philosophies of Athens ceased to inspire men, the words of Paul would inflame their souls, and inspire them to heights where spiritual eagles fly. Paul's star, being of such a different and foreign quality, was destined to be ignored and disdained in the city of Athens, where the foolishness of God was wiser than the wisdom of men.

Athens was not only the intellectual and artistic capital of the Roman Empire, but the religious capital as well. The pagan world looked to Athens for authentic accounts of its pagan gods. Her artistic expression of religious works made her the religious center of the Empire – a city full of idols and altars. Xenophon described Athens: *“the whole of it one altar, one sacrifice and votive offering to the gods.”* Pausanias writes: *“Humanity is not the only*



*characteristic of the Athenians, they are also more pious than other people, for they have altars to Modesty, of Rumor and of Impulse."*

Visitors came to visit the intellectual shrines of the city – the Lyceum of Aristotle, Academy of Plato, the Porch of Zeno, and the Gardens of Epicurus. The whole world was under the spell of Athens. Students flocked to her from Italy, Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt. Even the Jews were not immune to her spell. Herod the Great made numerous offerings to the city; Philo, the Jewish philosopher, esteemed highly the home of Plato; the city had honored the Jewish high priest John Hyrcanus. Yet in truth Athens' fame in Paul's day rested upon her past, rather than her present. Her beautiful external surface hid her growing spirit of internal poverty. In fact, the cities of Alexandria, Tarsus, and Rome possessed a more genuine intellectual spirit that did Athens.

Philosophy had come to occupy the place of religion in the lives of the more enlightened people. They could no longer give serious credence to the gods and goddesses, or to the ritual worship connected with them. Under the spirit of Socrates the virtue of knowledge became the highest good, and ignorance the essential vice. The relationship between the human will and knowledge remained nebulous. Philosophers seem to ignore the fact that man could know the truth, without carrying the known truth into action; that man could refuse to know truth even when knowledge of it lay within his grasp, and that this refusal to know the truth resulted in deterioration of the human spirit. The spirits of Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato fostered a speculative and ethereal search for truth. The Athenian spirit sought truth for truth's sake – knowledge for knowledge's sake. Academic and speculative philosophies, in which the love of beauty and the pursuit of knowledge expressed the highest good for the Athenian spirit, dominated the spirits of men. This pure, arid, Athenian spirit did not withstand the needs of the time.

Two opposite forces came crashing down upon the Grecian spirit like great waves, producing essential changes. The Romans demanded a way of life enabling people to possess a measure of happiness and fulfillment; the demands of the flesh were evident in the Roman spirit. The Romans had a pragmatic spirit that expected a practical philosophy by which one could *live* in the world, not merely exist. And from the East came the call of the spirit that was in need of a philosophy to feed the souls of men, and develop a sense of mystery in life again.

These two forces channeled philosophical thought away from the speculative to concentrate its energies on developing philosophies men could live by. Out of this, two popular philosophies were born: Epicureanism and Stoicism. These would be the two philosophical systems confronting Paul and Christianity in Athens. Both offered a guide for life and a moral creed, leading man to some measure of fulfillment. Other more academic and speculative philosophies remained, but they survived only in a rarified academic environment. Stoicism and Epicureanism became the philosophies influencing and directing the lives of men.

Epicurus, who lived around 300 B.C., developed a philosophy that taught human happiness, or human pleasure, to be the greatest virtue attainable to man in this world. Happiness could be attained by living a life free from excess of any kind. Common sense and enlightened prudence, based on the practical experience of living, guided life's activities. Pleasure or happiness were not so much the gratification of sensual desires, but a sense of well being that comes from being freed from the distractions of life. Devotion, in time and energy, to the pursuit of intellectual enlightenment and loving friendships led to fulfillment. Epicurus believed friendship to be the greatest pleasure in life, and the cultivation of friendships was an essential factor in man's achieving the highest degree of happiness. But in order for man to be happy, he must be freed from fear. Intellectual pursuits were pursued to this end – to free the human spirit from popular superstitions and the fear of death.

The philosophy accepted the existence of gods, but banished them into a distant celestial splendor, where they remained unmoved by the cares of this world. Man is left to himself in this world where things occur because of chance. Man could control the force of chance to some degree through human prudence. Epicurus believed in an atomic theory in which the human soul, and all existing things, were composed of material made up of indestructible atoms. At death, these atoms dissipated and man's personal existence ceased. Death ended all.

The purest pleasure in life was that pleasure that brought no pain in its train. To live without pain would be the negative ideal of this philosophy. The followers of Epicurus were called Epicureans. They were very much the materialists, the pragmatists – the men of the world bringing the best out of life's circumstances. A true perversion of Epicurus' doctrine was to see

life's fulfillment as the gratification of sensual pleasure. Many modern pagans today appear to be Twentieth Century Epicureans, following the Epicurean philosophy in its most perverted form – fostering a life so selfish in its restless pursuits of pleasure that it destroys the foundation for any true friendship, thus destroying the highest good in ideal Epicureanism.

Stoicism clothes the spiritualism of the East in a workable and livable philosophy. Zeno of Cyprus founded this school around 300 B.C. This philosophy received its name from the place in which Zeno taught in Athens – the Stoa Paekile, a section in the Athenian *agora* (marketplace) enclosed by *stoas* (colonnades).

Zeno's teachings fostered a strong belief in God and in the spiritual. The order and design of the universe demonstrated that throughout the universe there was a pervading spirit, a universal reason, a created word of God. Zeno taught that a great Purpose existed in the universe, shaping nature and mankind to good. Insofar as man recognized this purpose and allied himself with it, he fulfilled his purpose in life. This demanded that man fulfill his duty by strictly obeying the fixed laws of the universe, that he practice virtue for the sake of virtue. By so doing, man became wise, and rose superior to all the changing circumstances of life and to human passions and desires. He became self-sufficient – like unto a god himself. What actually happened in daily life, good or evil, was of little moment. All that mattered was that the human person continued in the midst of all these changing circumstances in the pursuit of goodness.

Zeno believed God to be a fiery spirit – the Divine Reason that abided in all men. All human souls shared in the immortality of God. In reality, this divine spirit existed in all things, but as the spirit pervaded matter, it grew dull. Zeno beheld an *Anima Mundi* – a world soul permeating all existence. Stoics possessed a real religious fervor that addressed its god in the language of personal devotion and worship. Stoicism taught that man could have faith in a divine providence that governed his life at all times. Since all human beings were fragments of the divine spirit, all men were brothers.

Stoicism was a religious philosophy breaking down the barriers of cities and races that divided the ancient world. Zeno anticipated the Christian concept that perceived the entire world as the “*city of God*.” Stoicism believed that at certain intervals cosmic conflagrations occur, when the universe, inclu-

ding the spirit of man, is reabsorbed into the fire of the divine spirit. The noble Roman Cato embraced this philosophy, as did Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius.

It is obvious that Christianity would have been more sympathetic to Stoicism than to Epicureanism. Many early Christian scholars saw in Stoicism a philosophy preparing the world for the Christian religion. Christianity had to reject the Stoic concept of God and man, for it was pure pantheism. Teaching that the spirit is refined to a matter pervading all existence reduced God to matter, and made all things a material extension of God. As the Stoic poet Aratus sang, "*In him we live and move and have our being.*" A Christian may say the same thing but mean something entirely different.

Christianity had to maintain the spiritual purity of God. "*God is Spirit!*" And that God is personal, distinct from all created things. Even though the Spirit permeates all things, the Spirit of God always remains separate and distinct, and above all created things. Along with the Stoics, Christianity could perceive the universal Presence of God in the universe, a divine providential power directing the lives of men and creation to a final good. Christians, with the Stoics, could behold the world as the City of God, and all men as brothers.

Having been born in a university city, Paul was no stranger to these philosophies. Some scholars go so far as to say that Paul was a Christian Stoic. Apparently, he had studied its doctrines, and it would not be surprising that he had been affected by its teachings. All human beings are to some degree products of the world in which they live. No persons survive in a vacuum, but are formed and shaped by their physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual environment.

### PAUL IN ATHENS

Paul, and his companions no doubt, sailed from Neapolis in Macedonia to the port of Peraeu. Long walls connected Peraeu with the city of Athens. The first sight of Athens would have been from the sea. Paul would have first seen the gilded point of the spear, which the statue of Athena Promachos, goddess of Wisdom and patroness of the city, held high on top of the Acropolis.

The statue was seventy feet high, covered with ivory and gold plates that shone and flashed in the sunlight. The Acropolis, a vast bulk of rock rising 512 feet in height, dominated the city. On top of the Acropolis stood the Temple of Victory, the beautiful Erechtheum, and the magnificent cream-colored Parthenon, a temple in the sky. Rising high above the Parthenon rested the statue of Athena.

Not far from the Parthenon, on the western slope, was an open-air auditorium known as the Areopagus. It was the meeting place for the Council of Areopagus, which possessed the power to appoint or invite lecturers to Athens. It exercised some general control over the lectures given in the city in the interest of public order and morality. Apparently, teachers who had been accepted in the city could bring strange and unlicensed lecturers before the Council for a decision on their teachings. The government in Greek cities exercised strict control over the entire system of education for its youth.

In the literary work called "*The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*" by Philostratus, we find a description that could well apply to Paul's own entrance into Athens. Even though a hundred years separated the visits of Apollonius and Paul, the city itself was very much the same. Philostratus records of Apollonius:

*Having come to anchor in the Peraeus, he went up from the harbor to the city. Advancing onward, he met several of the philosophers. In his first conversation, finding the Athenians much devoted to Religion, he discoursed on sacred subjects. This was at Athens, where also altars of unknown Gods are set up.*

Coming into the city, Paul would have entered through the "*Dipylon*," the Double Gate on the west side. Passing through the Gate, the Temple of Demeter with statues of the goddess and her daughters would have greeted him. A little further he would pass the statue of an equestrian Poseidon; beyond this stood the statues of Zeus, Apollo, and Hermes. North of the Acropolis, Paul would have entered the agora, covering several acres almost completely enclosed by stoas. The agora contained buildings for business and numerous temples; the altar of Mercy stood in a grove of laurels and olives. There he saw temples dedicated to Apollos, Aphrodite, and Hephaestus – the Mother of the gods. If Paul looked to the right, to the left, or raised his eyes up, he saw statues, altars, and temples to paganism.

One ancient proverb held that there were more gods and goddesses in Athens than men and women. In this forest of gods and altars, Paul found one altar to which he could relate – an altar dedicated to the Unknown God.

As Paul walked through the rich and beautiful city of Athens, his Semitic heart could not but be appalled by its idolatrous spirit. Over and over he must have heard echoing in his heart the words of Exodus 20:3: “*You shall have no other gods before me.*” How pure and perfected the religion of Judaism appeared in comparison.

Luke relates that while Paul was waiting in Athens for Silas and Timothy to join him,

*He grew exasperated at the sight of idols everywhere in the city. In the synagogue, he used to hold discussions with the Jews and those sympathetic of Judaism, as well as daily debates in the public square with ordinary passers-by.*

*(Acts 17:16-17)*

Paul began to take to street preaching in the agora, and this drew him to the attention of the philosophers who began to dispute with him. Luke writes:

*Epicurean and Stoic philosophers disputed with him, some of them asking, “What is this magpie trying to say to us?” Others commented, “He sounds like a promoter of foreign gods,” because he was heard to speak of “Jesus” and “the resurrection.”*

It was probably the Epicureans who referred contemptuously to Paul as some kind of a bird. The word used – “*spermologos*” – was an Athenian slang expression. Literally, it meant “*seed picker*,” referring to the little birds that went around busily picking seeds off the ground. It became a slang expression applied to people; first to beggars who went around the city trying to pick up food wherever possible, and second to pseudo-intellectual people who went around picking up threads of philosophical thoughts, weaving them into some illogical “mishmash” that they tried to peddle as a new philosophy. When *spermologos* was used in this last context, which was intended for Paul, it implied a man to be an ignorant babbler, using words and ideas that he lacked the ability to understand. Such an insult must

have burned the soul of Paul, trying his patience.

It would have been the Stoics that saw Paul as a herald of a new god and goddess – Jesus and *Anastasis* (the Greek word for resurrection). To have the Gospel so misunderstood, and perhaps deliberately misinterpreted, only added to the exasperation already plaguing the spirit of Paul. At this point, Paul would have welcomed the opportunity to make a formal presentation of the Gospel before the leading men of Athens. This opportunity was given to him:

*They led him off to the Areopagus saying, "We are curious to know what this new teaching is that you propose. You are introducing subjects unfamiliar to us and we should like to know what it is all about."*  
(Acts 17:19-20)

In this very agora, Demosthenes had once rebuked the Athenians for spending their time seeking news and gossiping while their way of life was being threatened. Luke implies that things have not changed. He writes:

*Indeed, all Athenian citizens, as well as the foreigners who lived there, love nothing more than to tell about or listen to something new.*  
(Acts 17:21)

### SPIRIT OF ATHENS

The most difficult barrier to the acceptance of the Gospel is the pride of the human mind. A proud mind feeds upon itself. It finds within itself the measure of truth to which all else must conform in order to be accepted and appreciated. There is no openness to a truth that goes beyond the mind's grasp or understanding. Even God stands in judgment before the tribunal of the mind. The only gods to be acknowledged and loved will be those "imaged" – created by the human spirit. Before men fashion their gods of clay and metal, they must first form them in the mind from thoughts and ideas. What the mind makes, the mind can unmake. The Creator is greater than the creature. Men create gods in order to exalt themselves above God. Few men are atheist who have experienced the true God, who goes beyond man's mind and all that is man. Many men have become atheist because they lost faith in gods created in the furnace of the human mind.

The Athenians believed they possessed religious truth. Their conceit closed their mind to any truth not already enshrined in the temple of their own minds. They did not come to learn, but to be entertained – to exercise their intellectual faculties in debates, arguments, criticism, and ridicule. In other words, they desired only to reinforce within themselves their own cherished beliefs, and to demonstrate before others the beauty of their own minds. The spirit of Lucifer had settled over the city of Athens. Satanic pride blossomed in the hearts of men. The hearts of the people could no longer serve a God greater than their own minds.

A spirit as simple and honest as Paul's could hardly conceive the degree to which the hearts of these men had been hardened to Divine truth and love. His own experience was that of a human mind opened to the Spirit of God. Paul's mind was ready to submit to the overwhelming experience of the true God that surpasses the faculties of man to grasp and understand. Such an experience produces profound humility in the human spirit, humility that blossoms into docile obedience to the Will of God.

Obedience to a Will that expresses *The Way* – not the way of man – reveals thoughts unthought by the mind of man. Paul knew that the Divine Mind is further removed from the mind of man than is the most distant star from a grain of sand in the ocean's depths. He was beginning to understand the Divine mystery at work in the humble of heart. It is only there that the nothingness of man opens to the *allness* of God – infinity calling to infinite, the human infinity of nothingness calling to the infinite *allness*, bringing about a friendship of God and man.

### PAUL BEFORE THE AREOPAGUS

Paul stands in the middle of the Areopagus, amidst unsurpassed classical splendors of architectural masterpieces. He addresses the Council of Areopagus, a council of men that represent the glorious development and expansion of the human mind that dazzled the world with its productions of religion, art, and literature. According to Aeschylus, the Council of the Areopagus was founded by the goddess of Athena herself. It had received its name from the Hill of Ares – the god of War – on which its meetings convened. Who would be less conscious of the need of salvation than men in such a milieu. Here rested the incarnated belief that man was a god and



his own redeemer. Athens was a Tower of Babel that had reached the heavens...

Paul preached to the astonished Greeks that they were indeed in need of salvation, and God offered this salvation to them through Jesus Christ. He skillfully delivered the Gospel message on the Hill of Ares. Interestingly enough, a tradition maintains that the name came from *Arae*, which means *curses*. The first trial held on this spot was that of Orestes, whom the Furies cursed and hounded for the murder of his mother. Here, Paul preached to the Greeks redemption from the curse of sin hounding all men.

Luke presents a summary of Paul's address before the Athenian Council. The summary well reflects the heart and essence of his message. Paul speaks with an awareness of the place from which he speaks, and of the audience he addresses. His opening remarks compliment them, and Paul seeks a common ground upon which to build his message.

Here we see the Christian philosopher addressing pagan philosophers who seek to be all things to all men. Paul knows the philosophical ideas his message will confront, and he seeks to blend these opposing ideas into his message. When possible, he uses the arguments of Greek philosophers to make his point. There were certain types of idolatry that had been attacked by the philosophers. For this reason Paul avoids introducing ideas essentially Jewish, such as the Messiah and the crucifixion. These he considered unnecessary stumbling blocks to his hearers at this point in their instruction.

Paul seeks to build his message upon a natural theology – the God that reason could discover; God the Creator with providential care for the world, and His presence within it. To support these teachings, he used the teachings of the Stoics and the Epicureans. Once the premise of a personal God that was involved in the affairs of men had been established, he moved to religious behavior and judgment – teachings that could also be found in a natural moral theology.

From this point, Paul attempts to stir their consciences, and awaken a fearful concern in their hearts. To this point, he has not mentioned any teaching completely foreign to them. The Stoics would have had little disagreement with Paul up to this point. In essence, the message now follows the Gospel presentation to the Gentiles as preached by Peter to

Cornelius, and by Paul to the pagans at Lystra. Once the love and concern of God for men has been established, Paul declares Divine Judgment.

At this point, Paul preaches the essential Gospel message – repentance and salvation through faith. He declares Jesus to be judge of the world through his resurrection from the dead. It would logically flow that if Jesus is the Judge, His Way and His teachings bring a way of life that becomes the means to escape condemnation at judgment.

Let us now reflect more minutely upon Paul's sermon: *"Men of Athens, I note that in every respect you are scrupulously religious (Acts 17:22b)."* This expression, *"scrupulously religious,"* could be a subtle implication that they were truly superstitious. Paul probably intended it in the sense taken – a compliment to the audience. *"As I walk around looking at your shrines, I even discovered an altar inscribed, 'To a God Unknown (Acts 17:23).'"* The presence of such an altar would have been an acknowledgement that the Athenians, who so prided themselves upon their knowledge, believed there was something that yet remained unknown to them, and that there could be a divine relationship they had left unfulfilled.

Against this Athenian backdrop, Paul reveals the true God. *"Now what you are thus worshipping in ignorance I intend to make known to you (Acts 17:23)."* He seeks to stir humility within their spirits, making them acknowledge the logical deduction from the existence of such an altar. They externally admitted their possibility of ignorance. Could they now internally accept the fact that they were possibly ignorant about God? Paul proclaimed that God sent him to free them from this ignorance. *"For the God who made the world and all that is in it, the Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in sanctuaries made by human hands; nor does he receive man's service as if he were in need of it (Acts 17:24-25)."*

These were fundamental teachings of Jewish theology. God is One and Creator of all. Therefore, He remains above all and distinct from all. These truths demolish idolatrous worship. God transcends creation and remains independent of it. Both the Stoics and the Epicureans would disagree and agree with part of this teaching. This teaching strikes at the idea that God can dwell in temples made by human hands or that He needs and finds pleasure in human offerings. Again, Old Testament theology supports these teachings. We read in Isaiah:

*Thus says the Lord: The heavens are my throne, the earth is my footstool. What kind of house can you build for me? What is to be my resting place? My hands made all of these things when all of them came to be, says the Lord. This is the one whom I approve: the lowly and afflicted man who trembles at my word.*

*(Is. 66:1-2)*

Again in Psalm 50, we read:

*I take from your house no bullock, no goats out of your fold . . . If I was hungry I would not tell you, for mine are the world and its fullness . . . Offer God praise as your sacrifice and fulfill your vows to the Most High; Then call upon me in time of distress; I will rescue you, and you shall glorify me.*

*(Ps. 50:9, 12, 14-15)*

Temples and offerings are for men, not God. Walls built by man cannot contain God, but they can be a place of his divine manifestation. Services of the human hand that express the love of human hearts are acceptable and pleasing to God. Once Paul establishes God's superiority and independence of all creation he preaches, contrary to the Epicureans, God's providential concern for His creation:

*Rather, it is he who gives to all life and breath and everything else. From one stock he made every nation of mankind to dwell on the face of the earth. It is he who set limits to their epochs and fixed the boundaries of their regions.*

*(Acts 17:25-26)*

Paul teaches that man has a corresponding relationship with God.

*They were to seek God; yes to grope for him and perhaps eventually to find him – though he is not really far from any one of us. In him we live and move and have our being, as some of your own poets have put it, 'for we too are his offspring.'* *(Acts 17:27-28)*

In these teachings, Paul gave approval to Stoic teachings and corrected their errors. With them, he held to the universal brotherhood of man – not because we were made of the same divine substance but because we all came from the same human stock. He used their own teaching to demonstrate the personal distinction between man and God: Man is pictured

as God's offspring separated from God as a child is from his father. As the father is not subjected to the child but the child to the father, so it is with God and man:

*If we are in fact God's offspring, we ought not to think of divinity as something like a statue of gold or silver or stone, a product of man's genius and his art. God may well have overlooked this in bygone periods when men did not know him; but now he calls on all men everywhere to reform their lives. (Acts 17:29-30)*

At this point, Paul preaches repentance; it would be impossible to accept the Gospel message without first coming to a spirit of repentance. Paul indicates the sinfulness of pagan worship, and the necessity to turn from it in order to please God. This he does before preaching the Gospel to them. To be willing to take this step is essential for preparing the soul to accept the Gospel. Paul gently accuses them of sin. He sees that God permitted a time of ignorance in their lives and history. It was, in a sense, a time of religious childhood, a time of ignorance of the will of God and therefore, a time God would not impute sin to them. Yet, in all this time, neither God nor his Will has been absent in their lives. The truth was available to them, and they are not totally free of blame for their lives of idolatry. They must stand before the tribunals of their own enlightened consciences, and they are guilty to the degree that they have sinned against their own inner lights. Paul encourages immediate repentance by going on to teach the immediacy of judgment: *"He has set the day on which he is going to judge the world with justice. . . ."* How can God, removed from this world, judge men justly when they have to live in the human state in this world? Paul seeks to explain the justice of God through Jesus Christ:

*(who) though he was in the form of God, emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men . . . He was known to be of human estate . . . (Phil. 2:6-8)*

God, through His Son Jesus Christ, judges mankind justly. Paul teaches that the Divine confirmation of Jesus took place by his physical resurrection from the dead:

*... 'judge the world with justice' through a man he has appointed; one whom he has endorsed in the sight of all by raising him from the dead. (Acts 17:31)*

## REACTION TO PAUL'S MESSAGE

Though the Epicureans denied life after death, Greek logic deduced the necessity of spiritual survival after death. However, physical resurrection of the dead was an absurdity to their minds. Up to this point, Paul received a courteous hearing, but with mention of the resurrection of the dead, certain hearers began to openly ridicule him, and to sneer at the teaching. His opportunity to speak had ended.

The decision of the Council was probably *"We must hear you on this topic some other time."* Apparently, seeing the Gospel had not produced faith in Athens. *"(at) that point, Paul left them (Acts 17:33)."* So ended Paul's sermon to the philosophers of Athens. It was not a total loss: the seed of faith took root in a few hearts, even in one member of the Council. Luke records:

*A few did join him, however, to become believers. Among these were Dionysius, a member of the Court of the Areopagus, a woman named Damaris, and a few others* (Acts 17:34)

Generally speaking, Paul experienced a serious defeat and rejection in Athens that apparently left him shaken. Luke wrote: *"After that, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth (Acts 18:1)."* The Greek words used seem to imply expulsion from the city. A later session of the Council may have expelled him from Athens – as a fool for the sake of Christ! There is a tradition that maintains Paul was driven from Athens. We know he departed without waiting for Silas and Timothy. Something unusual must have caused this departure; he left Athens without being able to establish a church in the city. The great vice of the Athenians was intellectual pride. An incompatibility exists between the Christian spirit and the spirit of pride. When intellectual pride dominates the spirit of a human being, it's nearly impossible for such a person to submit to the Lord, who said, *"Learn of me for I am meek and humble of heart."* This is unfortunate, for the end result is peace of soul – *"and you will find peace for your spirit."* Athens became almost the last city in the Roman Empire to accept Christ. It took almost 500 years before the city became Christian.

## ATHENS' EFFECT UPON PAUL

Paul's defeat in Athens came at the end of a long series of trials and difficulties suffered over a six-month period. All of it took its toll on his human nature. In a letter he later wrote to the Corinthians, he gives the impression that when he arrived in Corinth, he was nearly an emotional wreck: "*I came among you in great fear and trembling (I Cor. 2:3).*" Out of these apostolic failures and sufferings, God would bring good.

The Athens experience taught some bitter lessons which Paul learnt well. He analyzed the negative effects his missionary efforts produced, and he studied the causes of failure. The experience affected his future methods of evangelizing people. If he had not already solidified in his own mind how the Gospel should be presented, the experience in Athens, and the subsequent work in Corinth did. He learned from his experience, and he shared his new insights into evangelism in his letter to the Corinthians.

When Paul arrived in Corinth, he did not address his teachings to the intellectuals and the wealthy of the city. He said of his converts,

*Brothers, you are among those called. Consider your situation. Not many of you are wise, as men account wisdom; not many are influential; and surely not many are well-born. God chose those whom the world considers absurd to shame the wise; he singled out the weak of this world to shame the strong. He chose the world's lowborn and despised those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing, those who were something, so that mankind can do no boasting before God.*  
(1 Cor. 1:26-31)

From Paul's words, he must have addressed his message to those reckoned among the lower classes of society. It was said that more than half the population of the city was composed of stevedores and slaves.

Paul gives us a description of the content of the Gospel message presented in Corinth:

*When I came to you, it was not with any show of oratory or*

*philosophy, but simply to tell you what God had guaranteed . . . for Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the good news, and not to preach that in the terms of philosophy in which the crucifixion of Christ cannot be expressed. The language of the cross may be illogical to those who are not on the way to salvation, but those of us who are on the way see it as God's power to save. . . During my stay with you, the only knowledge I claimed to have was about Jesus, and only about him as the crucified Christ. Far from relying on any power of my own . . . in my speech and the sermons that I gave, there was none of the arguments that belong to philosophy: only a demonstration of the power of the Spirit. And I did this so that your faith should not depend on human philosophy, but on the power of God.*

Here, Paul speaks of his method of evangelizing people. He admits to them that there is a Christian wisdom that apparently he did not teach them. He writes: *“There is, to be sure, a certain wisdom which we express among the spiritually mature. It is not a wisdom of this age, however, nor of the rulers of this age, who are headed for destruction. No, what we utter is God's wisdom: a mysterious, a hidden wisdom. . . Of this wisdom it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it so much as dawned on man what God has prepared for those who love him’”* (1 Cor. 2:6-7, 9). The Book of Hebrews urged the more mature Christians on the possession of this wisdom when it exhorted:

*Let us, then, go beyond the initial teaching about Christ and advance to maturity, not laying the foundation all over again; repentance from dead works, faith in God, instructions about baptisms and laying-on of hands, resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. And, God permitting, we shall advance.*

*(Heb. 6:1-3)*

No doubt some of this wisdom has been shared with us in Hebrews, Ephesians, and other Scriptures.

Paul came to see the personal problem faced by many intellectuals in the acceptance of the Gospel. He asked the question, *“Where are any of our thinkers today?”* Apparently, to the mind of Paul, they were not on the side of faith. They rejected the faith. The reason for this the Scriptures explain to Paul's satisfaction:

*Scripture says, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and thwart the cleverness of the clever." Where is the wise man to be found? Where is the scribe? Where is the master of worldly argument? Has not God turned the wisdom of this world into folly? Since in the wisdom of God the world did not come to know him through "wisdom," it pleased God to save those who believe through the absurdity of the preaching of the gospel. Yes, Jews demand "signs" and Greeks look for "wisdom," but we preach Christ crucified – a stumbling block to Jews and an absurdity to Gentiles; but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's folly is wiser than men, and his weakness more powerful than men.* (1 Cor. 1:19-25)

*We speak of these, not in words of human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit . . . the natural man does not accept what is taught by the Spirit of God. For him, that is absurdity. He cannot come to know such teachings because it must be appraised in a spiritual way. . . . The Spirit we have received is not the world's spirit, but God's Spirit, helping us to recognize the gifts he has given us.* (1 Cor. 2:13-14, 12)

**In his letter to the Romans, Paul expresses his true sentiments about the "wise," who reject the Gospel presented to them. He attributes the rejection to a perverse spirit within men that hinders the truth. Paul teaches:**

*In fact, whatever can be known about God is clear to them; he himself made it so. Since the creation of the world, invisible realities, God's eternal power and divinity, have become visible – recognized through the things he has made. Therefore, these men are inexcusable. They certainly had knowledge of God, yet they did not glorify him as God or give him thanks; they stultified themselves through speculating to no purpose, and their senseless hearts were darkened. They claimed to be wise, but turned into fools instead; they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images representing mortal man, birds, beasts and snakes. In consequence, God delivered them up in their lusts to unclean practices; they engaged in the mutual degradation of their bodies, these men who exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator – blessed be he*



*forever, amen! . . . They did not see fit to acknowledge God, so God delivered them up to their own depraved senses to do what is unseemly . . . One sees in them, men without conscience, without loyalty, without affection, without pity . . .*

*(Rm. 1:18-32)*

**The Book of Wisdom teaches:**

*For all men were by nature foolish who were in ignorance of God, and who from the good things seen did not succeed in knowing him who is, and from studying the works did not discern the artisan . . . For from the greatness and the beauty of created things, their original author by analogy, is seen.*

*(Wis. 13:1, 5)*

**Paul clearly teaches the Gospel truth is a mystery. It is the Wisdom of God. Of this Wisdom, we read in the Scriptures:**

*She is the wealthy of the Power of God – pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty. Hence nothing impure can find a way into her. She is the reflection of the eternal light, untarnished mirror of God's active power – Image of his goodness.*

*(Wis. 7:25-26)*

**It may be referred to as the “simple Gospel truth,” but its light escapes the wisdom of the human mind unaided by divine grace. It goes beyond the human mind to comprehend it. The faculty of the human mind has its limitations. The Wisdom of God goes beyond the reaches of the power of the mind. It leaves the human mind in darkness, and for this reason the wisdom of God may appear foolish and incomprehensible to the mind of man. It was this knowledge that prompted Paul to declare: “*The foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men*”**

## **PRIDE BEFORE THE FALL**

**Our lesson clearly indicates there are certain internal conditions in man that block an appreciation and understanding of the Wisdom of God, and a true understanding of the Gospel. This blockage impedes the union of the human spirit with the Divine, leading to terrible consequences. God withdraws grace, and the flesh of man dominates the life of person who is without union with God. The domination of the flesh leads to deterioration of the soul, and destruction of internal and external peace. True human**

relationships deteriorate into selfish exploits. But worse still, the person opposes God. Even in this life, that person leans upon the Gate of Hell.

On the other hand, Paul teaches that these same Scriptures open up to us, revealing the Wisdom of God, only under the power of an internal grace of God. Only the Holy Spirit can discern the things of God. Only if the Holy Spirit moves within the heart can the soul spiritually see, hear, and respond to God. Only through the Holy Spirit can the life lived by that soul express the Mind and Heart of Christ. The soul finds internal and external peace by learning the meekness and humility of Christ Jesus. It must be a constant concern of the Christian soul that the Holy Spirit grows within his or her own spirit.

The spiritual person must be constantly vigilant for signs of intellectual and spiritual pride. Intellectual pride insists that all God's plans and purposes have the "Why?" and "Why not?" clearly manifested and understood by the human spirit. A prideful spirit unconsciously demands the light of reason by which to live, rather than the light of faith. The spiritual person must detect the spiritual pride that produces spiritual complacency, justification of self, and disdain of others. It is vital to recognize a spirit that is quick to throw the first stone of criticism at another brother or sister. If one of us stands morally or spiritually higher than another, it is due to the Grace of God. Once His grace is withdrawn, we do not know to what depths of sin our own spirit will sink. God withdraws His grace from the proud. One ancient spiritual writer has said:

*If you permit yourself the liberty of severe judgments on your neighbors, God will permit you, for your punishment and amendment, to fall into the same faults for which you condemned others – in order that, by such humiliation, you may discover your own pride and rashness, and then you can find proper remedies for both.*

Even though we have reached the Spirit, we must still grow in the Spirit. We know that the Corinthian Christian Community was very charismatic. That is not to be equated with spirituality. Charism are gifts given to people for building up the Church.

**Spirituality refers to the personal spiritual growth of an individual. The Christian measure of spirituality is Christ; a person becomes spiritual in the Christian sense to the degree he or she puts on the mind and heart of Jesus. A person may possess all kinds of spiritual charism without being a deeply spiritual person. Such a person however, will not possess the Gift of Wisdom, for that gift manifests itself within the soul, as evidenced by personal growth. For this reason, Paul speaks of a wisdom not shared with the Corinthians – a wisdom reserved for the more spiritually mature:**

*Brothers, the trouble was that I could not talk to you as spiritual men, but only as men of flesh. As infants in Christ, I fed you with milk and did not give you solid food because you were not ready for it.*  
(1 Cor. 3:1-3)

**Christian saints discovered the spiritual phenomenon that as they grew in humility, they grew in Wisdom. The saints used prayer and meditation in order to grow in humility. Prayer brings to the soul the gentle light of God, enabling a person to discover bit by bit, the sinfulness within himself, and to understand the foundation of sin. Prayer allows a person to discern the rebellious condition within their soul in regard to the divine Will. They discover the cause of their spiritual blindness:**

*Wisdom will never make its way into a crafty soul nor stay in a body that is in debt to sin; the Holy Spirit of instruction shuns deceit, it stands aloof from reckless purposes, is taken aback when iniquity appears.*  
(Wis. 1:4-5)

**Spiritual illusions and fantasy upon which self-justification arises, begin to crumble under the divine light that comes in prayer. An increase in personal humility brings an increase in the natural ability of the mind to discern truth. The Holy Spirit moves over the spiritual void created by the destruction of the false and lying self, and brings the Spirit of Wisdom, as the soul knows and experiences God to a greater degree. The journey to humility becomes the journey into Wisdom. This is the end of the road of prayer. The author of the Book of Wisdom writes:**

*And so I prayed, and understanding was given me; I entreated, and the spirit of Wisdom came to me.*  
(Wis. 7:7)

# CHAPTER 17

## GOSPEL POWER

### INTRODUCTION

Leaving Athens Paul arrived in Corinth, the capital of Achaia. Only fifty geographical miles separated the cities, but when Paul arrived in Corinth he entered a world apart from Athens. Academies and schools dominated Athens where people lived in a rarified intellectual atmosphere, where the wildest things were ideas, and gossiping the most engrossing pastime. Corinth brought a person down to earth and was capable of bringing one down to his/her lowest depths. Athens, the university city; Corinth, the universal city! Corinth was the veritable crossroads of the east and west. A busy metropolitan city that served as port and hostess to the Mediterranean world of trade moving to and fro from east and west. The city teemed with Roman officials, soldiers of the Empire, merchants, sailors, stevedores, and slaves. The sound of Greek in the market place had long since drowned out Latin, the official language.

Corinth was a rich city and ideally located to become rich. A narrow isthmus of about five miles separated Northern Greece from the southern section called the Peloponnese. On this isthmus Corinth lay nestled beneath the commanding Acrocorinth--a sheer cliff towering 1,800 feet above the blue sea. Corinth was called the "*Bride of Greece*," as all commerce and travel between the north and south passed through this city. Likewise the city was known as the "*City of two seas*" with the port city of Cenchreae on the east, facing the Gulf of Aegia, which opened to the Aegean Sea, and the port city of Lechaenum on the west, facing the Gulf of Lepanto, which opened to the Adriatic Sea. Nero failed in the attempt to join the two seas by constructing a channel between Cenchreae and Lechaenum. This engineering feat would have to wait until the end of the 19th century.

Voyages around the Greek peninsula were long and dangerous. The point of this peninsula had rightly been called "*Cape Malea*". It was a proverb

among the Greek sailors, *"Let him who thinks to sail round Malea make his will."* Rather than risk the hazardous journey, most mariners preferred to transport their cargoes across the Isthmus of Corinth. Ships that were too large to carry were set on rollers and dragged over the land. No doubt such work as this accounted for the fact that slaves composed a large part of the population of Corinth.

The commercial importance of Corinth gave birth to a flourishing industry and consequently great wealth. Bronze factories produced bronze valued higher than gold and silver. *"The Gate Beautiful"* of the Temple of Jerusalem was made of Corinthian bronze. Earthenware vessels were manufactured from the excellent supply of white clay in the area. Tile factories and shipbuilding industries thrived. There was great wealth in the city but great misery also, as over half the population was slaves. Alcephron, a second-century writer wrote: *"Never yet have I been to Corinth, for I know pretty well the beastly kind of life enjoyed there by the rich and the wretchedness of the lives of the poor."*

Another source of fame and wealth for Corinth lay in the famous Isthmian Games held every two years in honor of Poseidon, god of the sea; and the boy-god Palaimon. Delegates, athletes, and visitors flocked into the area for the games. They had the conventional track events, wrestling, boxing, and charioteers. The Isthmian Games were second in the Empire only to the Olympic Games. The site for the games was about ten miles east of the city. Such a sports festival would have offered Paul a wonderful opportunity to preach the Gospel to people from many different places. Likewise he might have profited financially, as large numbers of tents would have been needed to shelter the visitors. In a letter to the Corinthians, Paul makes reference to the crown of victory received by the athletes in the Isthmian Games. He calls it *"a perishable wreath,"* and indeed it was. In the Olympics the victors were crowned with wild olive and laurel, and in the Isthmian Games they were crowned with withered wild celery. Apparently the real reward was the glory of victory. Pausanias, the historian, mentions that statues of victorious athletes were erected in the sanctuary of the god at the site of the Isthmian Games. It was these very games that stimulated Paul to write to the Corinthians:

*You know that while all the runners in the stadium take part*

*in the race, the award goes to one man. In that case, run so as to win! Athletes deny themselves all sorts of things. They do this to win a crown of leaves that withers, but we, a crown that is imperishable. I do not run like a man who loses sight of the finish line. I did not fight as if I were shadowboxing. What I do is discipline my own body and master it, for fear that after having preached to others I myself should be rejected.*

*(1 Cor. 9:24-27)*

The rich in Corinth enjoyed various modes of entertainment, the most famous being the Isthmian Games. Corinth boasted also an outdoor theater with a seating capacity of about twenty thousand. The Romans remodeled it to be used for the popular gladiator bouts. Later a roofed theatre seating three thousand was erected. If Paul entered Corinth from the western side, he would have entered the city by a beautiful colonnaded road lined with busy shops, temples and baths that terminated at a radiant arch crowned with two bronze chariot; one driven by Helios, the sun god and the other by his son, Phaeton. Passing under the arch he would have entered into the agora and found himself standing on a paved central square 300 feet wide and 500 feet long. To the south was a colossal *stoa* (portico) of 71 columns. To the right stood the impressive and stately temple of Apollo--175 feet by 75 feet in area, and supported by 38 columns. To the left, dominating the entire scene was the Acrocorinth suddenly rising 1800 feet heavenward; at the top of the sheer cliff rested a Roman garrison and the famous temple of Aphrodite, Venus Goddess of Love.

Paul would not have been long in Corinth before he realized why it had become known for its immorality. The south side of the marketplace was lined with taverns. To call a man a "*Corinthian*" was considered an insult outside of Corinth. The name had become synonymous for a lustful person--one in whose life the lust of wealth and sensual pleasures dominated to such a degree as to veritably characterize one's personality. On the Grecian stage, a drunken character usually depicted a person from Corinth. The city canonized its immorality. The temple of Aphrodite housed a thousand sacred prostitutes that tradition maintains came into the city in the evening to seek worshipers of Aphrodite. (The same tradition omits telling how they got back up the Acrocorinth after a night's "*worship*".) Needless to say, the city attracted "*religious*" pilgrims from all over the Mediterranean world. One visitor from Amasia in Pontus, named Strabo, wrote:

*The sanctuary of Aphrodite was so wealthy that it possessed as slaves of the temple more than one thousand courtesans, who were dedicated to the goddess both by men and women. And so by reason of them, the city was thronged and enriched for the sailors spent their money easily, and on that account the proverb says: "Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth."*

*(Strabo)*

In this same immoral environment, Paul studied first-hand the full results of paganism upon the human character. From Corinth (on a later visit) he wrote his letter to the Romans. The description he gives to the Romans probably mirrored the lives of the people before his very eyes:

*They are filled with every kind of wickedness: maliciousness, greed, ill will, envy, murder, bickering, deceit, and craftiness. They are gossips and slanderers, they hate God, are insolent, haughty, boastful, ingenious in their wrongdoing and rebellious toward their parents. One sees in them men without conscience, without loyalty, without affection, without pity.*

*(Rm. 1:29-32)*

According to Paul, Corinth housed its share of fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, misers, drunkards, slanderers, and robbers. Not a very likely environment to preach the Gospel with any hope of success. Paul himself listed the above as a group of people who would not inherit the Kingdom of God. By that he meant people who abided and died thus. He testified that the Christian Community in Corinth consisted of people converted from lives of such terrible sinfulness. After giving the above list Paul said:

*And such were some of you; but you have been washed, consecrated, justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.*

*(1 Cor. 6:9-10)*

Perhaps no place on earth more than Corinth witnessed so well to Paul the power of the Gospel to save. Looking at the Corinthian Christian Commu-

nity and realizing their former lives leaves no doubt in the mind that Jesus Christ came to call sinners, and that the Church must remain always the refuge of sinners and not merely the citadel of the saved.

On one occasion a young soldier, attached to the honor guard at the White House in Washington, D.C., attended Sunday service at a very respectful church in Arlington, Virginia. During the course of the sermon, the minister announced that he wanted all sinners in the Church to stand up. Much to the surprise of the young soldier, out of a congregation of about 400, he turned out to be the only sinner in the Church. He alone had stood up (of course the minister was already standing...). As he was over 6 feet 6 inches he stood out like a pine tree in the middle of a cabbage patch. The minister directed the tall sinner to come to the front of the church. As he stood before the congregation, the minister led the "saints" in prayer for the sinful soldier's conversion. The young soldier never returned to worship with that Arlington Christian Community--he felt out of place. Later, when he took instructions in the Catholic Church and related this incident to the priest, the priest told him, *"God has led you to where you can now be at home. In the Catholic Church we are all sinners. We begin our worship with an acknowledgement of our sinfulness."*

When the Pharisees asked the Lord:

*"Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick do. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."*

*(Lk. 5:31-32)*

Jesus sent His apostles not to judge the world but to save it. He sent His disciples into the world not to condemn sinners but to have compassion for them--to bring them the good news.

In Corinth Paul saw clearly another portrait of man without the redeeming grace of God. He learned in the lives daily appearing before his eyes the extent the human soul could be corrupted by immoral behavior. Athens had presented the other side of the coin: there the pride of the mind exalted the human spirit above God. Athens had a satanic purity about it. Here in Corinth the lust of the flesh reduced human beings to depths of degradation unfairly referred to as animalistic. Animals act in keeping with



their nature, whereas human beings corrupt their nature, and sin against it.

Certainly according to our standards of measurement we would have related far better with the Athenians than with the Corinthians. We wouldn't have wanted to raise our children in Corinth. The Athenians would have indeed been more socially acceptable. In fact they were the social elite who set the standard for social acceptance. Would we have been socially acceptable to them? Would you have? Would I? Our answer should be very telling. Paul of Tarsus was not socially acceptable to them! He was too much the fool to be accepted by the Athenians. Undoubtedly, many Christians have sold their birthright to the Kingdom of God for the porridge of social acceptance among the Athenians of today. We have only to ask ourselves what has been our response to questions about fornication, adultery, aberration, and social justice to know if we have chosen to be fools for Christ's sake!

Not only was Paul accepted in Corinth, but also they also accepted the Gospel. The Athenians and the Corinthians were both far from salvation, but the better of the two was the farthest from salvation. The Athenians experienced no need for salvation. On the spiritual level, beneath the surface of it all, they really were brothers in the spirit with Jewish Pharisees.

Men and women of Corinth experienced the inner emptiness left by their lives of sinful sensual gratification. They had all the meanness and frustrations of animals that realize they have been caged and find an escape to freedom impossible. They had been sold the false coin for happiness, and now they paid the bitter price. Their lives were filled with despair--many of them certainly did not live lives of "*quiet desperation*". They found themselves captives in a vicious cycle impossible to break out of. Their lives produced evil fruit. They could no longer alter the destructive cause-effect process. They were forced to continue their destructive patterns of living in order to deaden the conscious awareness of the inner spiritual pain--the byproduct of their hedonistic lives. For many- only death offered any peace.

Into such lives came Paul of Tarsus preaching a death that led to newness of life. He came as an evangelist of Jesus Christ. He came with little self-confidence in his own ability to evangelize, but still he arrived with faith in the Gospel to save. "*In weakness and in fear and with much trepidation he proclaimed the Gospel,*" to Jews first but to Greeks also. All men have the

right to have the Gospel preached to them even if it is Jews first. To those who listened, Paul told about himself and his early beliefs. How he had come to hear of Jesus of Nazareth--about his preaching and the disgraceful death He died as a crucified criminal on a cursed cross. How he rejected the ridiculous tale of his being the Messiah of Israel and had been raised from the dead. How he hated the claims made in the name of Jesus and the very Name itself. How his hatred extended to the disciples of Jesus to the point of nearly persecuting them and The Way to death. Until one day Jesus of Nazareth appeared to him in glory. In that vision those disgraceful marks of the Cross had been transformed into streams of divine grace and beauty. He came to see that the blood once flowing from those wounds had been Precious Blood--Redemptive Blood--with a spiritual cleansing power to remove the deepest stains of sins, capable of washing away the filthiest moral corruption! What had appeared to be a most foolish waste of a man's life had been in reality the greatest benefaction for the human race. That life--itself innocent of sin, that Jesus--innocent as a lamb, had in truth been the Lamb of God sacrificed to atone for the sins of all men: The Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world. Ah! The foolishness of God revealed to be wiser than the wisdom of man. God now offered remission of all sins in the Name of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God; the Savior of the world.

How does one come to gain this remission of sin? One must believe that Jesus Crucified is the Redeemer of the world, and one must accept Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross as a perfect atonement for one's personal sins. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead verifies all this to be true. This was the divine approval of the heavenly Father of Jesus of Nazareth. This resurrected Jesus was seen by over 500 people, those who had known Him in life and death. All this had been foretold in the Jewish Scriptures; in many ways it was hidden in those Scriptures yet nevertheless always there. To those sincerely seeking Him, God will reveal this truth within the Scriptures, how they testify to His Beloved Son, Jesus of Nazareth. But this is not the end of the story. No! It is but the beginning of the Good News. Those who believe in Jesus and are baptized in His Name receive a most precious divine gift from God: the Gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit enters the soul of a person redeemed-- purified of sin through the blood of Jesus--and begins to create anew the life of the baptized. The baptized is born anew through the Holy Spirit. Such a person has the power to live a new life, to walk in the Holy Spirit. Such a one becomes a child of the Father in heaven, and a builder of God's kingdom among men. The Holy

Spirit imparts special gifts, called charism, to the baptized soul, to aid in the building up of the kingdom of God on earth.

Paul preached an escape from the cage, an opening to freedom, freedom from a slavery worse than man could inflict upon man. Paul brought the Savior to Corinth, the Savior who would free the Corinthians from the vicious cycle in which they remain hopelessly entrapped. This inner longing to be changed, coupled with the grace of God, produced conversions in the lives of the Corinthians. These lives, so dramatically changed, became startling witness to other Corinthians of the power of the Gospel. The good news spread in Corinth--an unlikely spot in man's eyes--but in actual fact, a most fertile field for evangelizing. *"Lift up your eyes,"* says the Lord, *"Behold the fields are ripe for the harvest, but alas, the workers are so few..."* When there are not enough workers the harvest rots in the fields and is lost. It was this vision and this fear that caused Father Thomas Judge to urge every Catholic to be an evangelist--an apostle of Jesus Christ.

The establishment of the Christian Church in Corinth dramatically demonstrates the power of the Gospel. It was one of the greatest triumphs of Paul's career. It was a triumph snatched out of threatening defeat. It was a triumph of the grace of God in Paul. It would remain one of the clearest concrete examples in the life of Paul that God's grace is sufficient, and our personal weakness affords divine grace the environment in which to manifest itself. Paul arrived in Corinth without companions, without friends, without money, and with a heart weighed down by the rejection of Athens, and burdened even more heavily by the sight of the godlessness and vice of Corinth. As was his custom, he would go to the synagogue and preach. He determined within himself only to preach the gospel of the Crucified Christ:

*No, I determined that while I was with you I would speak of nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified.*

*(1 Cor. 2:2)*

In that way, if men came to believe, the foundation of their faith would be in their hearts. What the Spirit worked within their souls, as a consequence of their belief in Jesus, would forever be the foundation for their faith. A few years later, when he wrote to the Romans, he could say out of his profound experience:

*I have complete confidence in the Gospel. It is God's power to save all who believe--first the Jews and also the Gentiles. (Rm. 1:16)*

## AQUILA AND PRISCILLA

Paul's first great blessing in Corinth was the meeting of a great couple, Aquila and Priscilla, who Paul later affectionately referred to as Prisca. Luke tells us that after Paul arrived in Corinth:

*There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus recently arrived from Italy with his wife Priscilla. An edict of Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to visit the party, whose trade he had in common with them. He took up lodgings with them and they worked together as tentmakers. Every Sabbath in the synagogue, Paul led discussions in which he attempted to persuade certain Jews and Greeks.*

*(Acts 18:2-4)*

In a few words Luke relates that Paul went in faith to Corinth, and the Lord provided him a place to live, a job to make a living, friends to sustain and support him, and success in his missionary efforts.

Since Luke makes no mention of Aquila and Priscilla being converted by Paul, the presumption has been they were Christians when Paul met them. We know that they had only shortly before arrived in Corinth, victims of Claudius' edict banishing the Jews from Rome. Most scholars accept 49 A.D. as the year the expulsion of the Jews from Rome occurred. The Roman historian Suetonius wrote that the reason for the banishment was because the Jews were indulging in constant riots "at the instigation of Chrestus." Suetonius probably confused "Christ" with "Chrestus". Most likely the trouble resulted from the Christians trying to prove to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. The edict was not fully enforced, no doubt due to the large number of Jews in Rome. Apparently a compromise was worked out between Claudius and the Jews about a year later. We do know that Christianity had been established in Rome before Paul's arrival there. No doubt Roman Jews, who had visited Jerusalem and had been converted on Pentecost, had brought the Christian faith to Rome. If Aquila and Priscilla were not Christians when they arrived in Corinth, they shortly became so after encountering Paul.

Paul had written to the Thessalonians describing his life among them:

*You must recall, brothers, our efforts and our toil; how we work day and night all the time we preached God's good tidings to you in order not to impose on you in any way.*

*(1 Thes. 2:9)*

Paul was a tent maker or more exactly, a worker in leather. The leading export from Cilicia, where Paul lived, was a felted cloth made of goats' hair called Cilicum. Cilicum was used to make tents, cloaks, rugs and curtains. As a prospective rabbi, Paul had to learn a trade since rabbis were not paid for their teaching. The Jewish rabbis held work in high esteem. They taught:

*Excellent is the study of the law along with a worldly trade; for the practice of them both makes a man forget iniquity; but all law without work must in the end fail and causes iniquity.*

Each rabbi followed some respectable trade. Work was considered not only important as a support for life, but also as a means of ennobling life. Paul expresses his mind even more forcefully on this subject in his Second Letter to the Thessalonians:

*You know how you ought to imitate us. We did not live lives of disorder when we were among you, nor depend on anyone for food. Rather, we worked day and night, laboring to the point of exhaustion so as not to impose on any of you. Not that we had no claim on you, but that we might present ourselves as an example for you to imitate. Indeed, when we were with you we used to lay down the rule that anyone who would not work should not eat. We hear that some of you are unruly, not keeping busy but acting like busybodies. We enjoin all such, as we urge them strongly in the Lord Jesus Christ, to earn the food they eat by working quietly.*

*(2 Thes. 3:7-12)*

It must have been a delight for Paul to have a business partnership with a couple such as Aquila and Priscilla. They became one in mind and heart with him. Paul later writes of them:

*Give my greetings to Prisca and Aquila; they were my fellow workers in the service of the Christ Jesus and even risked their lives for the sake of mine. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Remember me also to the congregation that meets in their house.*

*(Rm. 16:3-5)*

Again to the Corinthians Paul wrote:

*The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the assembly that meets in their house, send you cordial greetings in the Lord.*

*(1 Cor. 16:19)*

This couple is one of our earliest examples of great missionaries. Aquila and Priscilla were noted lay apostles of the first century.

Luke had introduced the couple as Aquila and Priscilla. Further in the narrative he reverses the names, it becomes Priscilla and Aquila. Knowing Luke, we know this change implies something. In the mind of Luke, Priscilla has assumed a more important position than her husband in the Christian Community. It suggests Priscilla may have been the motivating power within the Christian team. Paul certainly gives credit to both of them. If Priscilla excelled in service in the apostolate, Aquila may well have excelled in humility. It may have been the humility of Aquila that kept the team together, because humility in the individual, or within the Christian couple, becomes the best defense against the attacks of the enemy. When a person engages in the apostolate, a person enters into Jesus' war upon the kingdom of darkness. The soul of an apostle must be shielded by Christ in order to withstand the onslaught of the enemy that will now single it out for direct attack. To step outside of this shield, or to lay aside the armor of God, is to invite immediate defeat. But the greatest defense a soul can muster for itself, behind the shield or within the armor, is growth in humility. The victory over the enemy rests upon this point. The temptations of the enemy will be exerted upon the soul to become proud, the inevitable result when a person ceases to rely upon God's armor or the shield of Christ.

Christian couples engaged in the lay apostolate today may do well to seek the intercession of Aquila and Priscilla. Looking at the calendar of saints,

there are not too many couples to choose from. Most couple-saints are probably celebrated under the Feast of All Saints. Perhaps we do not see too many successful teams listed because it is difficult enough to make it as an individual, much less as a team. Teamwork is more difficult because it involves two wills being in complete harmony with God. It is only logical that the enemy seeks to attack the marriage of the individuals involved. He knows, better than the couple involved, how much the emotional and psychological strength of the individual rests upon the support of the other party. Many couples engaged in the apostolate fail to grow in humility, which means a failure to grow more and more dependent upon the Lord, and less and less dependent upon themselves and each other. When their security rests upon each other there is real danger, because security is placed in a man or woman. This of itself is not bad, but it is far from perfect. If the foundation stone upon which the apostolic work rests is the marriage partnership, then all the enemy has to do is to destroy the marriage and thereby destroy the apostolic work. Couples engaged in the apostolate must seek to find their security, as individuals and as a couple, more and more in God, and less and less in self and each other.

The Scriptures certainly tell us that if one loves husband, wife, or child more than the Lord, we are not worthy of the Lord. The road to holiness is growth in detaching ourselves from all that is not God. Attachment itself is not love but an expression of selfishness that we have not yet overcome. Only those completely detached from self can purely love another, whether the other be God, wife, husband, child, or friend. To those God calls to this holiness in life, He sends trials that aid them to achieve this holy detachment. Couples engaged in the apostolate do well to grow mutually in humility and be aware that their marriages will be subjected to attack, to the degree they are working to extend the kingdom of God, and probably to the degree their Christian lives and works depend upon the security of their marriage.

### PAUL BEFORE GALLIO

When spring arrived and the ships began to sail again, Silas and Timothy arrived in Corinth. Their arrival greatly encouraged Paul. Timothy brought good news about the Church in Thessalonica. Paul, at this time, wrote his First Letter to the Thessalonians. The news that the churches established in the North flourished encouraged Paul in his evangelization of the Corinthians. It seems that Paul was now able to devote himself full-

time to the work of evangelizing. Timothy probably had brought a donation from Philippi for Paul. Paul now gave his whole time to preaching the message, testifying to the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah (*Acts 18:5*). But just as before, the Jews turned against him:

*When they opposed him and insulted him, he would shake out his garments in protest and say to them: "Your blood be on your own heads. I am not to blame! From now on, I will turn to the Gentiles."*

*(Acts 18:6)*

We know that by this gesture Paul symbolized he was not responsible before God for the souls of these men. Because of the bitter opposition in the synagogue, Paul left this place and established a Christian assembly in the house next-door belonging to a Jewish proselyte, Titus Justus, whose name indicates that he was a Roman citizen. Titus Justus was able to give Paul a safe refuge and to be an encouragement to the growing number of believers. Among the converts who gathered in the house was Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, his family, and certain other important persons. *"Many of the Corinthians, too, who heard Paul believed and were baptized (Acts 18:8)."*

At about this time, the Lord confirms and encourages Paul's work in Corinth. One night Paul had a vision of Jesus and the Lord said to him:

*"Do not be afraid. Go on speaking and do not be silenced, for I am with you. No one will attack you or harm you. There are many of my people in this city." Paul ended by settling there for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.*

*(Acts 18:9-1)*

Among those Corinthians that entered the Church was Fortunatus (another Roman), Erastus (the city treasurer), and a wealthy lady named Chloe and her household; her servants later were able to travel to Ephesus in order to discuss church problems with Paul. Erastus could be the same Corinthian official whose memory is preserved by an inscription found near the theater: *"Erastus, the commissioner of public works, laid this pavement at his own expense."* If this is the case, it is clear that the church included very wealthy people as well as the *"low and despised,"* Greeks and barbarians, wise and foolish, slaves and free. Many had been rescued from



the lowest depths of pagan vice. It is not surprising that a church composed of such a variety would later have interpersonal problems.

Paul speaks of the "*saints who are in the whole of Achaia (2 Cor.1:1)*" as if there were congregations throughout the province as well as the one meeting in the house of Titus. We know certainly that there was a church in Cenchreae. In his Letter to the Romans, Paul recommends one of the members of this community to the Romans:

*I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon-ness of the Church at Cenchreae. Give her, in union with the Lord, a welcome worthy of saints, and help her with anything she needs; she has looked after a great many people, myself included.*

(Rm. 16:1)

After about eighteen months, the Jews gathered forces against Paul. They brought him before the court and accused him of persuading people to worship God against the Law. Luke writes:

*During Gallio's proconsulship in Achaia, the Jews rose in a body against Paul and brought him before the bench. "This fellow," they charged, "is influencing people to worship God in ways that are against the law." Paul was about to speak in self-defense when Gallio said to the Jews: "If it were a crime or a serious fraud, I would give you Jews a patient and reasonable hearing. But since this is a dispute about terminology and titles and your own law, you must see to it yourselves. I refuse to judge such matters." With that he dismissed them from the court.*

(Acts 18: 12-16)

Roman law gave the Jews the power to deal with internal matters pertaining to their religion. Gallio was the brother of the famous Seneca, the tutor of Nero. Seneca has written of his brother: "*No man was ever as sweet to one as Gallio is to all... Even those who love my brother Gallio to the utmost of their power do not love him enough.*" The office of proconsular was held for one year or at the most two. From an inscription found at Delphi, it is known that Gallio was proconsul of Achaia in 52 A.D.; he had probably taken office in the summer of 51 A.D. It is believed that Paul arrived in Corinth in 50

A.D., and left in the spring of 52 A.D. As for Gallio, his star was tied to that of his brother. When Seneca fell out of Nero's favor, Gallio was forced to commit suicide.

The scene that day at court ended with this vivid little incident:

*Then they all pounced on Sosthenes, a leading man of the synagogue, and beat him in full view of the bench: but Gallio paid no attention to it.*

*(Acts 18:17)*

Was it the dissatisfied Jews who gave vent to their resentment against Paul by beating up their leader, who had presented such a poor case before Gallio? Or did some overzealous converts and friends of Paul take it out on the Jewish representative? The attitude of Gallio has been interpreted frequently as indicating his religious indifference. More probably it should be regarded as an example of religious tolerance, and as a practical declaration that Paul's conduct in no way violated the law of the Roman Empire.

#### THE RETURN TO ANTIOCH

Sometime after the trial Paul leaves Corinth, taking Aquila and Priscilla with him. It is uncertain whether Silas and Timothy remained in Corinth. At the port city of Cenchreae, "*Paul shaved his head because of a vow he had taken.*" Cutting the hair was a religious custom of the time. Sailors shaved their heads after deliverance from a shipwreck, mourners after a death, and pilgrims did not cut their hair until completing their pilgrimage. This custom found a place in Jewish Law in the form of the Nazirite vow as described in chapter six of Numbers. During the vow the hair could not be cut; at the completion of the vow, the hair was shaved off and, along with other prescribed sacrifices, the hair was burnt at the temple. It appears to be Paul's intention to complete this vow in Jerusalem as prescribed by the Law. This intention now hastens him on his journey. By this incident, and others, Luke hints at Paul's own compliance with the customs and laws of the Jews. Paul always maintained that he was a "*Hebrew of Hebrews*".

From Cenchreae the party sailed to Asia landing in Ephesus. Taking Aquila and Priscilla along with him to Ephesus and leaving them in the city seems to indicate that Paul planned to return and work in Ephesus. He leaves his lay apostles there to lay the groundwork for his ministry.

An important and powerful body of Jews resided in Ephesus. The Roman governors and the People of Ephesus passed several decrees guaranteeing Jews the right to fully observe all their religious practices. The temple tax upon all Jews in Asia was sent to Ephesus and shipped to Jerusalem from there by boat.

Paul stopped long enough in Ephesus to attend the synagogue service. The people were not ignorant of the Christian movement within Judaism and desired to learn more about it from Paul:

*They asked him to stay on longer but he declined. As he said goodbye he gave them his promise, "God willing, I will come back to you again." Then he set sail from Ephesus. On landing at Caesarea, he went up and paid his respects to the congregation, and then went down to Antioch. After spending some time there he set out again, traveling systematically through the Galatian country and Phrygia to reassure all his disciples.*

*(Acts 18:20-23)*

The stay in Caesarea (visit to Jerusalem) and Antioch marks the end of Paul's second missionary journey and the beginning of the third.

Some scholars, who maintain that the Letter to the Galatians was written after the Council of Jerusalem, and after Paul's second visit to the Galatians, believe that this trip was made to counteract the damage being done by the party of circumcision in Galatia. This theory certainly solves the problem of why Paul failed to remain in Ephesus, but on the other hand, the theory may cause more problems than it solves. From the way Luke briefly deals with these activities of Paul, we know he centers his attention now on the establishment of the Church at Ephesus.

## APOLLOS IN EPHEBUS

At this point Luke introduces a most interesting character into his narrative: a man named Apollos (Appolonius--his full name) arrived in Ephesus. He was a Jew from Alexandria. This city housed one of the most

famous schools of philosophy. At that very time the famous Philo, who introduced the doctrines of Plato to the Jews, lived and taught in Alexandria. (In this very city a great Christian school of philosophy and scripture would be born; the Christian philosophers of Alexandria introduced Platonism into Christianity.) Apollos probably attended the school of Philo. Acts presents him as a learned and eloquent man--implying that he was a man well learned in the wisdom of this world. No doubt he was a great philosophical preacher. We are also informed that he was powerful in the Scriptures. He channeled his learning and eloquence into teaching and expounding on the Scriptures. But more than all this, he was a man filled with enthusiastic fire. In the original Greek he is described as "*boiling over in the Spirit*". That carries a connotation of being a bit more heated than one who merely "*bubbles over in the Spirit.*" This would be a preacher who could enkindle others. Apollos may have been a converted Jewish rabbi.

We can imagine the surprised joy of Aquila and Priscilla when this eloquent man rose to speak in the synagogue and began proclaiming Jesus the Christ. They immediately detected the limitation of his knowledge. He was accurate in what he said, but he had not been fully instructed. Who could have recognized this better than the two people who had listened to Paul for almost two years! Apparently Apollos had received instruction from some evangelist or possibly read some written work circulating about Jesus. He probably knew the basic facts about the life of Jesus: His baptism by John, his ministry ending in the crucifixion, and His subsequent resurrection from the dead. Apollos may have been acquainted with most of the material found in the Sermon on the Mount--the new Way of righteousness that prepared men for the kingdom of God. He probably was deficient in his understanding of the Holy Spirit and His gifts, and the doctrines concerning the Kingdom of God--the Church. These together would compile the more accurate way of the Lord. Aquila and Priscilla lost no time in remedying this deficit. Thanks to their zeal, Apollos became a fully enlightened Christian and a more powerful evangelist. "*He was vigorous in his public refutations of the Jewish party as he went about establishing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah (Acts 18:28).*" Apollos' zeal, like that of Paul's urged him to reach out to other fields of labor. He desired to go to Achaia:

*And so the brothers encouraged him by writing the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly strengthened those who through God's favor had become*

*believers.*

*(Acts 18:27)*

Apollos represents many in the early Church who were brought suddenly to knowledge of Jesus Christ without adequate preparation or subsequent follow-up. In the case of Apollos, he had received the baptism of John, denoting a conversion of life, and limited instruction about Jesus the Christ. Apollos likewise had good scriptural foundation; he had previously been well grounded in the doctrinal and moral teachings of genuine revelation. Apollos had a solid religious foundation upon which to build a strong Christian life. He is in direct contrast to the Corinthians converted out of paganism.

Paul soon learned the problems faced by a Christian Community not well grounded in the truths of revealed religion; truths that were not well integrated within the members of the Community. Within a short time the Corinthian Church would begin to disintegrate. The charisms of the Holy Spirit led to pride. The gifts were used to build up the individual ego rather than the Christian Community. They formed cliques and divisions; charity grew cold in the Community; the agape celebration became hypocritical and a scandal; the Holy Eucharist was being received unworthily. Sexual immorality was condoned as being in the body rather than in the spirit, and since the Corinthians were "spiritual," what occurred only in the body failed to truly touch them. Paul soon realized that he had left behind infants in the spirit. He was forced to write:

*Brothers, the trouble was that I could not talk to you as spiritual men but only as men of flesh, as infants in Christ.. You are not ready for it even now, being still very much in a natural condition. For as long as there are jealousy and quarrels among you, are you not of the flesh? And is not your behavior that of ordinary men? When someone says, "I belong to Paul," and someone else, "I belong to Apollos," is it not clear that you are still at the human level?*

*(1 Cor. 3:1-4)*

The Corinthians had been born anew of the Holy Spirit. They began in time to live their new life independently of the Holy Spirit. They failed "to walk in the Spirit." To walk in the Spirit means day-by-day, in all one does, to be

consciously aware that the human spirit must be attuned--be attentive and docile--to the influence of the Holy Spirit. The human spirit permits the Holy Spirit to blow where It Wills. By so doing a person abides in grace--in peace and joy; the human life grows, day-by-day, in its expression of love of God and mankind. The natural powers--talents and abilities--are woven into the Will of God and are purified in the process. Holiness becomes integrated within the person; sanctity assumes a "*naturalness*" within him. The person becomes perfectly at home with holiness. Life flows with a peaceful and harmonious force--the spirit being at peace with God, self, and neighbor. This does not mean the person is perfect. Perfection and sanctity are not the same thing. Its sanctity here! (on the earth). Perfection there! (in Heaven). Nevertheless, the holy person becomes a human symphony of beauty--a Masterpiece of the Holy Spirit. No, the Holy Spirit never discards anything human within a person. The Spirit sanctifies each human dimension. God loves humanity. His Son became a human being. It is good to be human. A human can and ought to be holy. Jesus came to save us, not destroy us. The sanctification of humanity is the work of the Holy Spirit. "*Come Holy Spirit!*" ought to be as frequent as our heart beat.

This is all much different from being "*spirit-filled*". People can be as filled with Spirit as a pitcher can be with water. The pitcher and the water remain distinct--non-integrated. Water is in the pitcher but the pitcher is not in the water. The water flowing from the pitcher can be a blessing for others and yet not be an intrinsic blessing to the pitcher. Spirit filled people can be like that pitcher.

We need to be more than "*spirit-filled*." We need to become spiritually integrated in mind, body, and soul. We need to become "*at home*" with holiness--be comfortable with it. That does not mean to be complacent in our holiness. God forbid! We should be clothed in a garment of holiness that becomes as natural to us as fur is to the seal. How beautiful and refreshing to meet people who have become holy. They possess the freshness of a new dawn and the burning serenity of a setting sun; they are Icons of the Holy Spirit--God's finest works! And, all the glory belongs to God, for it is not an accomplishment of the soul. The soul offered its nothingness and docility. As the handmaid's eye is upon the hand of her mistress, and the servant's eye is upon the hand of his master, their eyes are always upon the Lord. The Holy Spirit accomplishes the remainder--renews the face of the earth! "*He who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is His Name!*"

Souls who are spirit-filled but have not yet begun the process of spiritual integration often make spiritual fools of themselves, mistakenly thinking themselves to be Big in the spirit. They possess all the spiritual grace and harmony of a seven-year-old girl dressed in her mother's fancy cocktail dress and high heel slippers. In reality, they are still very much spiritually in the "*jeans and sneakers*" age.

The Corinthians were "*spirit-filled*" but not spiritually integrated. Their lives had been renewed through the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. They had yet to grow to sanctity. In order to know how to grow--what means to use, what things to avoid--the Corinthians needed a spiritual father to guide them through infancy, childhood, and adolescence into spiritual maturity. They possessed the best in Paul, but their spiritual pride blinded them to that fact. They rejected him in favor of "*teachers*" more pleasing and gratifying to their own spirits. The spiritually immature do not want good teachers because good teachers are not always nice. And for the immature that's what it is all about--being nice rather than being good. The difference between being nice and being good is bigger than the difference between a gallon of ice cream and a five-pound box of gold. Understandably, a baby will choose ice cream over gold!

Many of the Corinthians considered themselves grown in the spirit and had no need of direction. As a result they began to depend upon themselves rather than on the grace of the Holy Spirit. From the previous lives lived, they had primed themselves, naturally speaking, toward certain evil ways. Their evil inclinations lay dormant because of the operations of grace. As they withdrew themselves from grace, these evil inclinations revived, but they no longer appeared as evil inclinations. They disguised themselves as angels of light. They deluded and deceived themselves. No matter how much we clothe the wolf in sheep's clothing, he still remains a wolf. Regardless of how angelic our evil desires may appear their spirit remains evil--deceptive and destructive. "*By their fruits you will know them.*" Disguised and deceptive evil inclinations, when permitted to become human acts, produce bitter fruit.

Not long after the departure of Paul from Corinth, the Christian Community ended in spiritual chaos and in a moral mess. Paul soon realized that he had left behind infants in the spirit. He wrote four letters and made two visits trying to improve the situation. The spiritual immaturity of this Community plagued the Church for years to come. Even in 95 A.D. Pope

**Clement of Rome writes an epistle seeking to restore order in the Corinthian Church.**

**Christians not only rejoice in the Spirit, they must grow in the Spirit. If they fail to walk and grow in the Spirit, it is only a matter of time before “*spirit-filled Christians*” begin to tear up the Christian Community in the name of the “*spirit.*” Corinth leaves this sad but well-documented lesson to the Church. The answer to the problem is not to suppress the Spirit, but to put on the Lord Jesus Christ!**



## CHAPTER 18

### THE WAY OF TRUTH

#### INTRODUCTION

Paul promised the Jews in Ephesus, *"God willing, I will come back to you again (Acts 18:21)."* Probably in the summer of 53 A.D., Paul, true to his promise, returned to Ephesus. In the meantime the eloquent and enthusiastic Apollos of Alexandria has come and gone. Presently he preaches in Corinth with considerable success. In fact Paul now appears to many Corinthians, in the shining light of Apollos, as drab and dull, lacking in the grace of eloquence and deficient in *"wisdom."*

Regardless of how the Corinthian *"babes in the spirit"* estimated Paul, Luke never doubts the genuine greatness of the Apostle Paul. To this zealous, tireless channel of God's power, Luke attributes the establishment of the Church in the Province of Asia. He even places this praise in the mouth of Demetrius, one of Paul's enemies:

*Not only at Ephesus but throughout most of the province of Asia, this Paul has persuaded great numbers of people to change their religion.*

*(Acts 19:26)*

Ephesus presented a particular problem to the evangelist Paul. In Athens, Paul faced the intellectual pride of pagans; in Corinth, Paul confronted the moral corruption of paganism; and in coming to Ephesus, Paul enters the citadel of pagan spiritualism and black magic. It becomes a stepping stone to Rome, for the city embodies those *"powers of darkness"* that possesses Rome as its capital.

Ephesus surpassed Corinth in numbers, wealth, and importance. She was the marketplace of Asia Minor. Trade followed the river valleys, and Ephesus stood at the mouth of the Cayster River. Ephesus extended her influence to other great cities of Asia: Smyrna, Pergamum, Thatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicia (the homes of the seven churches mentioned in Revelations), Colossae, Hieropolis, Apamea, and many others. Greek civilization dominated in all these cities. Ephesus, as Athens, was a free city governed by a Greek constitution that was democratic in form. The Assembly of the people gathered in regular sessions thrice monthly. The Assembly had the power to call extraordinary sessions. Rome limited that power to domestic matters. Substantial power rested in the city clerk, or secretary, who summoned and dismissed the assembly, prepared the agenda, kept its minutes, and acted as chairman. He probably belonged to the group of men called Asiarchs.

It has been said that the Greeks of Asia loved displays, titles, and decorations. One orator of the time related that they would suffer any indignity as long as they got a title. Rome appointed certain men in Asia as responsible for the cult of emperor worship--combined with the local religion. This worship preserved the unity of the Empire and served as a test of loyalty to Rome. These men were the Asiarchs. They acted as high priests and supervised the worship and games held during the religious festivals. Rome wisely made them responsible for all the expenses of the celebrations. Many rich men were only too anxious for the position. The wives of these men were called Asiarchess. After their term of office expired they could keep the honorary title and serve on the provincial council under the Roman proconsul. The Asiarchs were the official aristocracy of Asia Minor.

The city of Ephesus prided itself as the custodian of the Temple of the goddess called Artemis by the Greeks, and "*Diana*" by the Romans. This temple, built in the Ionic style, was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world: 418 feet long by 239 feet broad. The platform of the temple supported 120 columns each 56 feet high, and was reportedly held together with gold rather than cement. The temple could accommodate approximately 50,000 worshippers. It dated from the time of Alexander the Great.

Artemis previously had been worshiped for centuries as Anaitis in this area. Anaitis is identifiable with Ashtorith, the chief goddess of the Phoenicians, who appears in the Old Testament as the female partner of Baal. To this goddess Solomon built a temple. She was the mother goddess of Asia who symbolized the procreative and nutritive powers of nature. Artemis was the goddess of fertility and patroness of childbirth. The statue of the goddess was so ancient it was believed to have fallen to earth from heaven. The upper part was carved into the head and body of a woman with many breasts. The lower part was a rude block covered with mystic inscriptions and animals. Woods and springs were likewise associated with Artemis, and the bee was sacred to her. No bloody sacrifices could be offered in her sanctuary, and the temple offered the right of asylum to criminals. The temple was the public treasury, and a vault behind the statue was considered the safest bank in Asia. A whole month was dedicated to the goddess and called Artemisus after her. During this entire month processions, festivals, and games were held in her honor. They would have been held in the late spring (April-May) when planting had been completed. For her worship Artemis enjoyed the service of an army of priests, eunuchs, virgin priestesses, temple-wardens, choristers and acrobats. She had become an object of devotions throughout the whole Greco-Roman world; her festival was ecumenical. In Ephesus the Christian Church encounters an established religion--flourishing and possessing real power and vitality. During the persecution of Diocletian, seven Christian virgins at Ancyra in Galatia were dressed as priestesses of Artemis and condemned to publicly wash the idol annually. Upon their refusal to do so, all seven were drowned in the lake where the idol had been carried to be washed. The Seven Virgins of Ancyra are listed in the annals of Christian martyrdom for their heroic resistance to idol worship.

It is believed by many scholars, and not without merit, that the early Church spread devotion to the Mother of Jesus precisely to counteract this pagan devotion. Certain feast days of Mary in Asia Minor still coincide with the ancient festival dates in honor of the goddess Artemis. Interestingly, at the Council of Ephesus in 421 A.D., Mary was given the title of Theotokos--Mother of God. Mary was proclaimed "*Mother of God*" in defense of the divine nature of her Son, which had been attacked by Nestorius. Of course, this does not imply that Mary is divine, nor that she gave Jesus His divinity.

The title "*Mother of God*" teaches that the Son born of Mary was divine from the first moment of His existence. A woman is a mother of a Person. Calling Mary the Mother of God was in defense of the divine personality of Jesus. When the son of a particular woman becomes President of the United States she may rightly be called the Mother of the President without implying she gave birth to his presidency.

Essentially the worship of Artemis involved the worship of the powers of nature, primarily those mystic and secret forces that men recognized existed in nature, bringing life into being, and annually renewing the earth with new life. It is understandable that hand-in hand with this worship developed both black and "*white*" magic. There was a famous collection of charms and spells in Ephesus called the "*Ephesian Letters*". These guaranteed everything from children to the childless, to success in love and business. People came from all over seeking magic charms, secret potions, and to have their futures divined. One ancient report describes a ritual where the 21 letters of the alphabet were arranged in a circle on a plate placed on a tripod, and consecrated by magic songs and ceremonies. A priest, properly attired, held a ring tied to a slender thread over the plate of letters while chanting a hymn to Apollo, the god of prophecy. The letters in front of which the ring paused indicated the oracle to be given. Such practices are still prevalent today and, unfortunately, not only in so-called pagan societies. Such superstitious practices always indicate a lack of true faith in God.

## GLADIATORS OF TRUTH

It has been said that Paul appeared in Ephesus as a gladiator in the arena contending against the great goddess herself. In the arena of truth this gladiator of the Gospel confronts the Ephesians. Especially in Ephesus, the Church began to manifest itself as a power in the world. The Church proclaims the Way, and this Way possesses the power of Truth. The relationship between the Church and Truth becomes clearer in this section of Acts. It is not so much a matter of who is right or wrong, but what is Truth. Jesus identified Himself as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Therefore, a Church founded by Him, identified in this world as the continuation of His life, must also be identified with the Truth. One must be a champion of Truth, be

willing to be martyred for the Truth. Because Truth cannot be separated from Jesus Himself, to be false or teach falsehood is un-Christian. Insofar as a religious community is in error, to that degree it ceases to be Christian.

Christianity was never intended to be a garden of truth in which people enter and pick the bouquet of truth pleasing to them! Many Christians today have been deluded into ignoring truth, denying it, watering it down in the name of Christian unity. They would reduce Christianity to the least common denominator in order that we could all be one. They fail to realize that it is Jesus that they are watering down and reducing to a little god, in order to be enshrined in the narrowest of human hearts. They foolishly speak and sing of this as being “*One in the Spirit.*” One may certainly inquire “*one in what spirit?*” Certainly not the Holy Spirit. Jesus defined the Holy Spirit:

*When the Paraclete comes, the Spirit of Truth who comes from the Father--and whom I myself will send from the Father--he will bear witness on my behalf. You must bear witness as well.*

*(Jn. 15:26-27)*

When the Holy Spirit comes however, being the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. To be perfectly One in the Spirit means to be One in Truth. The Holy Spirit being the foundation of Christian Unity, we cannot seek Christian fellowship at the expense of truth without betraying the Holy Spirit, and most certainly, without building on sand. Jesus tells us:

*If you live according to my teachings, you are truly my disciples; then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*

*(Jn. 8:31)*

*Whoever is of God hears every word God speaks.*

*(Jn. 8:47)*

To teach or adhere to that which is false is no small thing. We are entering into the realm of darkness. Jesus Christ tells us that Satan is the father of lies and his children live in falsehood and resist the truth:

*Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. The father you spring from is the devil, and willingly you carry out his wishes. He brought death to man from the beginning, and has never based himself on truth; the truth is not in him. Lying speech is his native tongue: he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I deal in truth, you give me no credence.*

*(Jn. 8:43-45)*

Ephesus, with its false religion, science, and spiritualism would become a source of great danger to the Church, a danger that would become an internal problem and enemy. Enemies of Christian truth would appear within the Christian Community. These “*wolves*,” as Paul called them, would seek to destroy the faith with half-truths and the subtlest lies. As mentioned earlier, the half-truth is worse than the whole lie. The whole lie can be totally rejected; the half-truth shields the lie, and permits its poison to follow its destructive course, undetected. Here in Ephesus, the evil and danger of false teachers in the Church assume a prominence in Paul's conscious awareness, as we shall later see in his address to the elders of Ephesus at Miletus. No doubt the situation developing in the Corinthian Church at this very time brought this evil forcefully to the mind of Paul.

### WHAT IS TRUTH?

Because of its intrinsic importance to our lesson, let us analyze the concept of truth, making sure we all have the same understanding of the word “*truth*.” In Pilate the world asked Jesus, “*What is truth?*” In Him it does not wait to hear the answer. John wrote the Fourth Gospel to confirm that Jesus alone can answer the question.

The western mind today represents the Greek concept of truth: a thing is true in itself when it possesses the essential elements that make it what it is, and not something else. Our idea is true when the idea accurately corresponds with the thing as it is in reality. For an example of this kind of truth, let us look at water. The substance we call water is composed of two essential elements, without which it cannot be water. H<sub>2</sub>O, the chemical symbol for water, consists of two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen. Therefore, a substance

composed only of H<sub>2</sub>O is pure water. Such things as dirt, light, and color can be present in the water without changing its nature. Dirty water is still water. You can change the quantity of water and the substance remains the same--one drop or one gallon is still water. You can change the form of water--liquid, ice, or steam--it still is water. Now, certain elements may be added to H<sub>2</sub>O that produce a substantial change in the chemistry of water; then you no longer have water, you have a new substance. It may still look like water, taste like water, smell like water but it is not water. As we have said, an idea, thought, or concept in the mind is said to be true when the thought, idea, or concept corresponds with the thing as it actually exists in the material, concrete reality. For example: I see a clear, colorless liquid in the refrigerator; my mind has a thought, "ice water". I drink it; my thought was right. But on the other hand, if I down it and almost choke to death, the clear, colorless liquid was not water but vodka--"*fire water.*" My idea was false.

What makes a false concept a lie? The distinction between a false idea and a lie is the intention to deceive. The young son in the household drinks up Dad's vodka and replaces it with water. Now you have a lie; a thing has deliberately been misrepresented with the purpose of deceiving someone. The next martini served by the father to his guest will be a lie. The father and guests are the victims of the son's lie. Regardless of the good intentions of the father, he made a bad martini and his guests experience it. Everyone suffers because of the lie. Children have mistaken poison for candy. Their good intentions do not save them from the disaster of their error; the poison killed them. Scientists, with government approbation, encouraged pregnant women to take certain "*harmless*" drugs. These "*harmless*" drugs had devastating effects upon the unborn children. The good faith of the scientist, government, and mothers did not spare anyone from the bitter fruits of the untruth. If the ideas and concepts we have in our minds are erroneous and we carry them out into reality, the results will be damaging to one degree or another.

What is meant by "*truth*" in the Scriptures carries a somewhat different meaning from what the western mind is accustomed to. Here, it is the Semitic mind, not the Greek mind that finds expression. To understand those teachings about "*truth*" in the Scriptures we must understand what truth would mean to the Hebrew mind.

We may be surprised to discover there is no distinct word in the Hebrew language for truth or truthful as we understand it in our western world. Such concepts are expressed by the word "*emet*" and its derivatives. "*Emet*" is more an expression of our idea of faith. The concept of faith is an essential element in understanding the biblical concept of truth. Truth is not some idea or concept in the mind, but a person or thing outside the mind in which a person can trust, put faith in, rely on, or have confidence in. One can trust this thing or person because experience has proven it is steadfast and unchanging. Under test and stress it does not collapse and betray the confidence one has in it. One comes to know that this thing or person can be relied on. This person or thing is true, an object of faith.

Response to Biblical truth is different. One does not assent to the truth; it does not become merely an intellectual acknowledgement that this is right and something else wrong. That is no more than *intellectual* honesty. One must make a personal *commitment* to the thing or person. A refusal to do so implies lack of trust, non-belief, or at least doubt as to its truthfulness, trustfulness. Therefore in the biblical sense, a lie or falsehood is something or someone you could not depend upon, something or someone unreliable, who will let you down. In this sense, when a person believes in a lie, it is like a person leaning against the rail of a ship to look into the sea, expecting support from the rail only to have it break, plunging one into the deep, dark waters of the sea. For the Hebrew, truth is known through trust. Trust is not so much *believing* in something or someone, as it is in *trusting* that something or someone. Experience verifies that the trust and confidence have not been misplaced.

In the Gospel of John the true is the real, the genuine, but more than merely true and genuine. The truth has permanence and eternal endurance, for its roots are heavenly and incorruptible. This is what John teaches when He proclaims Jesus to be the true light (*Jn. 1:9*), and the true vine (*Jn. 15:1*). His Body is true food and His Blood is true drink. All other food and drink are but copies and shades of this true food and drink; you can depend upon this food and drink to nourish life unto eternal life. The truth is that Jesus' presence is experiential and liberating. It liberates, not from ignorance, but from sin. The statement, "*The truth will set you free*", implies that one will be



freed from sin, which is the byproduct of falsity, untruth, the lie. Likewise, truth is synonymous with the Word of God (*Jn. 8:45*). The Word, the divinely revealed reality of God, has been manifested in the Word and Person of Jesus Christ. He is the ultimate and supreme Truth. So therefore, John proclaims Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. "*Who can then be saved?*" the question is asked. And the Church answers, "*Those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and are baptized.*" That answer carries an entirely different meaning when we understand what it means to believe truth in the way intended by the Scriptures. Paul wrote to Timothy that "*the Church of the living God*" is "*the pillar and bulwark of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15).*" We can now understand more fully the importance of the Church in our lives and the role she must play. In summary we may say that scriptural truth, and there is no greater nor truer truth, is the solid and firm reality of God, which is reached through Jesus Christ, preserving our eternal life.

## TWELVE DISCIPLES OF EPHEBUS

With Paul in Ephesus we see the Church's battle for truth. Paul's triumph symbolizes the victory of the Church-- the victory of the Way of Truth leading to life eternal. Paul's first battle is waged within the Christian Community against imperfectly formed truth, against only partial truth. Luke presents a case comparable to that of Apollos who "*knew only of John's baptism.*" When Paul arrived in Ephesus:

*There he found some disciples to whom he put the question, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" They answered, "We have not so much as heard that there is a Holy Spirit." "Well, how were you baptized?" he persisted. They replied, "With the baptism of John." Paul then replied, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He used to tell the people about the one who would come after him in whom they were to believe--that is Jesus." When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. As Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came down on them and they began to speak in tongues and to utter prophecies. They were in the company about twelve men in all.*

*(Acts 19:1b-7)*

These twelve men appear to be the nucleus and foundation for the Church in Asia Minor. Their number twelve could legally constitute a Christian synagogue. Luke describes a little Pentecost at Ephesus. It is interesting that this is the only incident of re-baptism in the New Testament. Paul refers to these men as disciples and implies that they are Christian disciples when he asked them, "*Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?*" As in the case of Apollos they had undergone a conversion of life style, and received the baptism of repentance preached by John. By some means they had apparently come to believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah; they also possessed information concerning the Way. As far as they went they were right, but they had not gone far enough to be fully Christian. Paul proclaims the fullness of Christian truth to them and brings them into the fullness of Christianity.

Paul clearly distinguished between the baptism of John and Christian Baptism. What is the distinction between these two baptisms? John's mission was preparatory; he preached a baptism of repentance leading to the forgiveness of sins. John's baptism did not produce forgiveness of sins. His baptism publicly symbolized the true repentance of a person--a rejection of the former way of life and the deliberate choosing of a new way, either as indicated by John or by Jesus of Nazareth. Apparently Apollos and the 12 disciples sought to follow the Way of Jesus. This they could do in a limited fashion--as far as actual grace and human will could carry them. The fuller Christians truths demand that one must not only imitate Jesus Christ--be obedient to His teaching--but also be incorporated mystically into Jesus Christ Himself. This occurs through Baptism of water in the Name of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the subsequent Gifts of the Holy Spirit. The result of this Baptism is sanctifying grace (not just actual grace), and the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit that makes it possible for the newly baptized to live the life of Jesus. The baptized not only believe in Jesus but in the Gift of Jesus, the Holy Spirit. This belief is demonstrated by the dependence and reliance of the soul on the Holy Spirit to live the Christian life, to accomplish more perfectly the Will of God, and thereby, to enter the Kingdom of God. A great confidence is demonstrated by the soul, not in self, but in the abiding Presence of the Holy Spirit. Certain fruits are thereby

manifested within the life of the baptized.

No doubt, the discerning eye of Paul detected a lack of certain fruits in the lives of the twelve disciples, causing him to question them about their baptism. They probably had strenuously striven to live the Christian Way, living lives of prayer and asceticism, but all the while displaying a certain grim, sad determinism--perhaps an anxiousness and an over self-centeredness. Paul wondered where is the peace, the joy, the forgetfulness of self that should be manifested in their Christian lives? These are the first and finest fruits of the Presence of the Holy Spirit. Where these are absent in a person's life, he or she has either not received the Holy Spirit, or else they are blocking the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in their personal existence, perhaps through a failure to truly repent, or through a failure to have true faith.

This incident related by Luke distinguishes between the reception of the Holy Spirit at Baptism and the reception of the Holy Spirit with the laying on of hands. According to Catholic teaching, Baptism imparts the grace of sanctification by which the soul becomes free of sin and is sanctified through the Presence of the Holy Spirit. We see from this episode that the baptized receive certain charisms of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands: *"As Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came down on them and they began to speak in tongues and to utter prophecies."* Paul's words, *"Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?"* describe in the Greek context neither a gradual process nor a reception at some later interval, but a definite gift at a precise moment in time.

## PROCESS OF CHURCH GROWTH

The growth of the Church in Ephesus, as presented in Acts, probably reflects the process of church growth in other great cities of the empire. As we have already seen, the first step has been the proper instruction of believers. Paul labors to have an enlightened Christian Community. The following episode indicates the next logical step in Church growth:

*Paul entered the synagogue, and over a period of three months debated fearlessly, with persuasive arguments, about the kingdom of God. When some in their obstinacy would not believe, but chose to speak ill of the new way in the presence of the assembly, Paul simply left them. He took his disciples with Him.*

*(Acts 19:8-9a)*

Paul separates the Christian Community from the Jewish synagogue. "You do not put a new patch on an old garment--new wine in old wine skins." It was no longer a spiritually healthy environment for Christians because:

*...some in their obstinacy would not believe, but chose to speak ill of the new way in the presence of the assembly. ...They did not see fit to acknowledge God, so God delivered them up to their own depraved sense to do what is unseemly!*

*(Rm. 1:17)*

Paul felt justified in breaking from the synagogue because Jews there spoke "ill of the new way." In conscience, he could not expose his disciples to false teachers who were contaminating the way of the Lord. The danger of false teachers became an increasing concern to Paul. His warning against them became a prominent element in his goodbye address to the elders of Ephesus. The burden of his Letter to Timothy was to guard and preserve the faith. This cannot be done by exposing oneself to preachers who falsify Christian doctrines, water them down, and preach half-truths or an incomplete Gospel. Many Catholics have lost the fullness of their true faith by seeking for themselves pleasing teachers who preach a gospel other than that preserved and guarded for almost two thousand years by the Catholic Church. Paul knew that Christians must be careful of the well from which they spiritually drink. Paul's disciples had the docility to obey their spiritual father, and they separated themselves from religious communities damaging to their Christian Faith. Many Catholics today lack that docility; they prefer to follow their own judgment in such matters. The water in rural Mexico looks, smells, and tastes the same as the water in Southern California but, despite the appearance, there is a difference in the water. The difference will be discerned too late, after the damage is done.

The next step in Church growth was to bring Christian teaching to the general public. *"(He) began to hold his discussions from day to day in the lecture hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9b)."* There were five gymnasiums in Ephesus, one of which was the School of Tyrannus. These gymnasiums possessed running and wrestling grounds, gardens, walks, colonnades and a number of halls used by teachers, poets, and philosophers to give lectures and recitations. The normal work hours began shortly after dawn, ending before noon, and if beginning again, continued to late in the afternoon. Paul taught between the 5th and 10th hours (11 to 4) for two years. These would be the normal hours for frequenting the gyms. One of the favorite pastimes was to use these leisure hours listening to lectures and recitations. The Greek word for leisure is *schole*, from whence comes the word school. First the word *schole* (leisure) came to be applied to the lecture, then later to the place in which the lecture was given. We refer to halls of leisure today as *schools*.

Teaching in the School of Tyrannus Paul would seek to reach the Greek mind. Before he could bring the Gospel to them, he must bring them to repentance. First, he would have to teach truth on their level. He would have to bring them to see that God is One; God is truly Spirit transcending all creation.

*We ought not to think of divinity as something like a statue of gold or silver or stone, a product of man's genius and his art.*

*(Acts 17:29)*

He would have to be extremely prudent because of the sensitivity of the people to their worship of Artemis. Within these two years men came to Ephesus from all over Asia Minor. Many had the opportunity to hear Paul. *"A great door was opened"* to him. As Demetrius soon testifies:

*Throughout most of the province of Asia, this Paul has persuaded great numbers of people to change their religion.*

*(Acts 19:26)*

It is probably a credit to Paul's work in Ephesus and his disciples that the Churches in Asia Minor were established.

Another means for building up the Church was the great power being manifested through the Christian body. This power appeared extraordinary to a pagan world raised upon magical and occult deeds. Acts now relates: *"meanwhile God worked extraordinary miracles at the hands of Paul."* Recall the prayer of the Church in its first days of existence:

*But now, O Lord, look at the threats they are leveling against us. Grant to your servants, even as they speak your words, complete assurance by stretching forth your hand in cures and signs and wonders to be worked in the name of Jesus, your holy Servant.*

*(Acts 4:29-30)*

Although no mention is made of any persecution of Paul at this time, from other sources we know Paul suffered many afflictions. He wrote that a certain Alexander the coppersmith had done him a great deal of harm. He even spoke of *"fighting with beasts at Ephesus (See 1 Cor. 15:32)."* Acts relates that God not only worked extraordinary miracles at the hands of Paul, but:

*...when handkerchiefs or cloths that had touched his skin were applied to the sick, their diseases were cured and evil spirits departed from them.*

*(Acts 19:12)*

In this text we have a little defense for the custom of applying the relics of saints to the sick.

In this period of history many believed all illness resulted from possession by evil spirits. We know that even the Jews believed illness resulted from personal sins. In such a climate of belief, exorcists were popular people and many charlatans joined their ranks for the profit involved. They were the witch doctors and medicine men of that time. Names were important in the process of exorcism; it was important to know the names of the demons in an exorcism. Jesus asked the possessed man of Gerasa, *"What is your name?"* He received the answer, *"Legion!"* Books were available identifying the specific demon causing certain illnesses. It was important to use a more powerful name in order to drive out the devil. A certain ancient document from the Third Century relating to exorcism called for invoking the names of

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jesus, and the god Sabarbarbathioth.

In Ephesus non-believers began to use the name of Jesus in their exorcisms. In one case, seven Jewish brothers were violently overcome and severely beaten by a possessed person precisely because they had invoked the names of Paul and Jesus. We read:

*Some itinerant Jewish exorcists once tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were possessed by evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." Another time, when the seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish high priest, were doing this, the evil spirit answered, "Jesus I recognize, Paul I know: but who are you? Then the man with the evil spirit sprang at them and overpowered them all. He dealt with them so violently that they fled from his house naked and bruised. When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, fear fell upon all, and the name of the Lord Jesus came to be held in great reverence.*

*(Acts 19:13-17)*

In this episode the power of Paul appears in to be contrast with that of other exorcists. Also, it became clear that this is a power given to the Christian Community, and cannot be used with impunity by those outside the Church. When the story of this episode spread around Ephesus, it stirred the fear of God in many hearts. They saw that no spiritual powers existed greater than those used by the Christian Church. Acts seems to indicate that many of the converted Christians had clung to their superstitious practices. This occurrence convicted them in their hearts:

*Many who had become believers came forward and openly confessed their former practices. A number who had been dealing in magic even collected their books and burned them in public. When the value of these was assessed, it came to fifty thousand silver pieces. Thus did the word of the Lord continue to spread with influence and power.*

*(Acts 19:18-20)*

During all this time in Ephesus, Paul was seriously disturbed over the situation in Corinth. He had paid a brief visit there and at the time, he had been severely insulted and his authority seriously questioned. Paul wrote four letters, and in one of them, he demanded that the Corinthians submit to his authority. During all this time, Paul planned to take up a collection in all the Gentile Churches for the Church in Jerusalem. In Paul's mind this collection assumed great importance. He saw in this collection the means to emphasize the unity and solidarity between the Gentile Churches and the Mother Church in Jerusalem. Luke makes no mention of the collection, only of Paul's intention to revisit the churches in Macedonia and Achaia:

*When all this was concluded, Paul made up his mind to travel through Macedonia and Achaia again, and then go on to Jerusalem. "Once I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome too." So he sent two of his assistants, Timothy and Erastus, into Macedonia ahead of him, while he himself stayed on for a time in Asia.*

*(Acts 19:21-22)*

The Holy Spirit put the inspiration and desire in Paul's heart to visit Rome. In such a way the Holy Spirit prepares the soul to know and desire the Will of God. At times, it is only later that the opportunity arises to accomplish this desire. In Paul's case, this desire would be fulfilled in a way far different from what he dreamed. As the old saying goes: *"God writes straight with crooked lines!"*

## RIOT IN EPHEBUS

From what we can ascertain, this brings us to the spring of 56 A.D. Around the feast of Passover, Paul wrote his second Letter to the Corinthians, known as our First Letter: *"Christ our Passover has been sacrificed. Let us celebrate the feast (See 1Cor. 5:7-8)."* In this letter we know Timothy was sent to Corinth. *"This is why I have sent you Timothy...He will remind you of my ways in Christ (1Cor. 4:17b)."* Paul tells the Corinthians, *"I will stay at Ephesus until Pentecost."* Circumstances however would hasten his departure from Ephesus.



The month of Artemis arrived with its entire month of celebration. Such a festival afforded the opportunity for a great deal of riotous celebration; drunkenness was common. We find this description given by an ancient writer: *"It was the festival of Artemis, and every place was full of drunken men, and all the marketplace was full of a multitude of men through the whole night."* Likewise it was a meeting time for local parliaments, provincial councils, and guilds. A certain silversmith named Demetrios saw Christianity as a real threat to his livelihood. All those conversions made by Paul must have threatened his business, as he made silver shrines of the goddess Artemis. Sales were down and he attributed the slump in business to Paul. He used this opportunity to call a meeting of guild members. He inflamed them by briefly mentioning their lost revenues, and then quickly moved on to the more noble cause for rage--the threatened honor and devotion due to the goddess. He turned his hearers into mobs running to the theater and screaming in the streets along the way, *"Long live Artemis of Ephesus."* Every drunk in the city was in perfect agreement. Unable to find Paul, Demetrios and his companions dragged Gaius and Aristarchus, friends of Paul, into the arena of the theater. (This same Aristarchus, tradition confirms, was the first bishop of Thessalonica, martyred under Nero.) By this time every drunk in the city had joined the crowd at the theater. Pandemonium reigned in the theater. *"Various people were shouting all sorts of things, with the whole assembly in chaos and the majority not even knowing why they had come together (Acts 19:32)."* When Paul heard they had dragged his companions into the area he wanted to go immediately and address the crowd. Wiser heads prevailed:

*His disciples would not let him. Even some of the Asiarchs who were friends of Paul sent word to him advising him not to venture into the theater.*

*(Acts 19:30)*

No doubt they were familiar with Paul's personal courage.

The Jews sought to take advantage of the opportunity, desiring no doubt to disassociate themselves from Paul and the Christians. The Jews pushed a certain Alexander forward:

*He motioned for silence, indicating that he wanted to explain something to the gathering. But when they recognized that he was a Jew, they started to chant in unison, "Long live Artemis of Ephesus!" and kept shouting for about two hours.*

*(Acts 19:33-34)*

Long after the Jews and Christians considered themselves as separate religions, the pagans still continued to see them as sects of the same religion. The prudent town councilor finally saved the day. He wisely warned them that the city of Ephesus was in danger of being accused of rioting. They all knew what that could mean; Rome would not tolerate such behavior. They could lose their status as a free city and have troops garrisoned in their town. Even when Pliny was proconsular of Bithynia, and wrote the Emperor for permission to form a fire brigade for the city, permission was refused. The emperor had responded, "*Societies of this sort have greatly disturbed the peace... Whatever name we give them, and for whatever purposes they may be founded, they will not fail to form themselves into factious assemblies, however short their meeting will be.*" Luke tells us:

*Finally the town clerk quieted the mob. "Citizens of Ephesus," he said, "what man is there who does not know that Ephesus is the custodian of the temple of the great Artemis, and of her image which fell from the sky? Since this is beyond question, you must calm yourselves and not do anything rash. These men whom you have brought here are not temple-robbers. They have not insulted our goddess. If Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen want to bring charges against anyone, there are courts in session for that. There are proconsuls. Let the parties argue their case."*

*(Acts 19:35-38)*

It is interesting that proconsuls are mentioned. Towards the end of 54 A.D., the proconsul of Asia, M. Junius Silvanus, was poisoned at the instigation of Agrippina, the mother of Nero. Being of the family of Augustus, Silvanus was a possible candidate for the imperial crown. Two of his subordinates, Celer and Aelius, the collectors of the imperial revenue in Asia, poisoned him; and as a reward were permitted to govern the province jointly. The town clerk

concluded:

*"If there is any further matter you want to investigate, it ought to be settled in the lawful assembly. As it is, we run the risk of being accused of rioting because of today's conduct. We have no valid excuse for this wild demonstration." With these words he dismissed the assembly.*

*(Acts 19:35-40)*

Ninety years later during this same festival in honor of Artemis, St. Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, was dragged into the theater in Smyrna during the games held in honor of the feast. An eyewitness report confirms that:

*When he was brought in, there was such a tumult that no man's voice could be heard, but as Polycarp entered the arena a heavenly voice was heard: "Be strong Polycarp, and play the man." Then followed the examination by the proconsul. He sent his herald to proclaim three times in the midst of the stadium: "Polycarp has confessed himself to be a Christian." Then the whole multitude, both Gentiles and Jews, cried out with ungovernable wrath and a loud shout, "This is the teacher of Asia, the father of Christians, the puller-down of our gods who teaches numbers not to sacrifice nor worship." They asked the Asiarch Philip to let a lion loose upon Polycarp. But he said that it was not lawful for him, since he had brought the games to a close. They then thought fit to shout with one accord that Polycarp should be burned alive. Their voices prevailed and Polycarp was forthwith burned.*

*(Letters of the Smyrnaeans)*

St. Polycarp, we know, had been a disciple of John the Apostle. He was one of the last living links with the apostolic age.

## GREECE REVISITED

The combined animosity of the Jews led by Alexander the coppersmith, and that of the Gentiles led by Demetrios the silversmith, made it impossible for

Paul to live and work safely in Ephesus. Luke gives only the briefest sketch of the next ten months in Paul's life; Paul's own writings fill in the gaps. Following the riot, Paul took leave of the brethren and went north to Troas. Here he expected to meet Titus with news about the problems in Corinth. He apparently instructed Timothy to send word through Titus of the Corinthian reaction to his latest letter; or more probably, Titus had been the bearer of the third letter, the "severe" letter.

In Troas, Paul found a fertile field in which to work, but he was so personally disturbed by all the troubles in Corinth he was unable to enter wholeheartedly into the ministry. He writes:

*When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, the door of opportunity was opened wide for me by the Lord. Yet I was inwardly troubled because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said goodbye to them and went off to Macedonia.*

(2 Cor. 2:12-13)

The human frailty and limitations of Paul are manifested at this point. He too is a human being. The opportunity to work is there; he has the time but not the heart; he does not have the strength. To spread the kingdom of God one must not only have the opportunity and the time, but the energy. Constant inner turmoil is a fuel hog; it consumes vital human energy needed in the daily demands of life. This is why the worried, the frustrated, the anxious--who may do nothing all day but worry--find themselves completely exhausted at the end of the day. Paul was wise. He knew he had to free himself of this destructive internal condition in order to be his old self. He set out for Macedonia with the hope of finding Titus. In his own words Paul accurately states his personal condition at this time:

*When I arrived in Macedonia I was restless and exhausted, I was under all kinds of stress--quarrels with others, and fear within myself.*

(2 Cor. 7:5)

Now that certainly doesn't sound like the old Paul we know: restless,

exhausted, under all kinds of stress, quarreling with others, filled with inner fears. All that sounds almost too human to be saintly.

Perhaps some would say he wasn't "*spirit-filled*;" nevertheless, we can identify with a saint like that. And yet, Paul is one of the greatest saints. He is not a saint in spite of all that, but a saint because of it all. His human weakness and frailties only taught him that "*truth*" was not in himself; to rely on himself was to lean on a sagging fence. The Word was true; Jesus was true; His Body and Blood were true; the Holy Spirit was true; the Father's love was true. These were the things in this world a person could really lean on and find support. You could count on these to bring you safely through it all. This belief Paul based on his personal experience. Again he wrote:

*Brothers, we do not wish to leave you in the dark about the trouble we had in Asia; we were crushed beyond our strength, even to the point of despairing of life. We were left to feel like men condemned to death so that we might trust, not in ourselves, but in God who raised the dead. He rescued us from that danger of death and will continue to do so. We have put our hope in him who will never cease to deliver us. But you must help us with your prayers, so that on our behalf God may be thanked for the gift granted us through the prayers of so many.*

(2 Cor. 1:8-11)

Paul does not deny that he had reached a low period in his life; even a saintly human nature has its crumbling point. Paul goes on to write:

*But God, who gives heart to those who are low in spirit, gave me strength with the arrival of Titus. This he did, not only by his arrival but by the reinforcement Titus had already received from you; for he reported your longing, your grief, and your ardent concern for me, so that my joy is greater still... Beyond this consolation, we have rejoiced even more at the joy of Titus because his mind has been set at rest by all of you.*

(2 Cor. 7:6-7,13)

The Lord turned Paul's sadness into joy; he was comforted; he was consoled. Out of the depths he cried to the Lord and the Lord rescued his spirit.

Perhaps nothing demonstrates Paul's optimism and unflagging hope in Christian people more than those words he then penned to the Corinthian Christians, "*I rejoice because I trust you utterly (2 Cor. 7:16).*" Here we see the greatest of his humanity: "*Love does not brood over injuries... there is no limit to love's forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure (1Cor. 13:5c-7).*"

With renewed strength Paul wrote this final letter to the Corinthians. He resumed his work in Macedonia taking up his important collection. He goes to Corinth for the winter, and during his three-month visit there he writes the *Epistle to the Romans*, perhaps the greatest Christian treatise ever written. From what depths of experience it now flowed....

When the sailing season reopened, Paul planned to sail from Cenchraea to Syria (Antioch) but a plot of the Jews to kill him was discovered. Many Jews would be sailing to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. They intended to dispose of Paul at sea. Paul was forced to go back into Macedonia where he celebrated the Passover in Philippi. Meanwhile representatives of the other Churches, who were to accompany Paul with the collection to Jerusalem, were waiting for Paul in Troas. Luke now rejoined the party, and he would remain with Paul to the end. Luke records:

*We ourselves set sail from Philippi as the festival of Unleavened Bread was over. Five days later we joined them in Troas, where we spent a week.*

*(Acts 20:6)*

In truth, the time had come for Paul's farewell to his beloved Christian Communities in Greece. This he may not have known, but he could not have said any more than the words spoken in Pisidian Antioch. Now they would have sounded with an even greater ring of authority:

*They gave their disciples reassurance, and encouraged them to*

*persevere in the faith with this instruction: "We must undergo many trials if we are to enter into the reign of God."*

*(Acts 14:22)*

## CHAPTER 19

### FAREWELL TO THE CHURCH

#### INTRODUCTION

The Christian religion, rooted in Old Testament spirituality, could never be merely a religion of abstract ideals. Christian belief could never be merely a collection of ideas and concepts about the nature of God, eternal life and man's relationship with the both of them. Religious faith has to be more than a firm holding in one's mind a creed of religious truths. If religious truths fail to be incarnated in the life of a person, that person lacks faith as understood in the Scriptures. A fundamental belief of the Christian religion is that the Word became Flesh, and the Word was God. The Word came to be identified in the Flesh as Jesus of Nazareth. Equally fundamental to Christian religion is that a disciple of Jesus must, to some degree, become an incarnation of Jesus' own life. In other words, the Spirit of God must be expressed in the daily doings--whatever they may be--of a true disciple of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus could well say to His disciple, "*What you do and what you say must include me as the wine must taste of its own grape.*"

St. James well expressed the spirituality of the Old Testament when he wrote to the Christian Community:

*My brothers, what good is it to profess faith without practicing it? Such faith has no power to save one has it? Faith without works is as dead as a body without breath.*

*(Jas. 2:14, 26)*

*Humbly welcome the word that has taken root in you with its power to save you. Act on this word. If all you do is listen to it, you are deceiving yourselves... Looking after orphans and widows in their distress and keeping oneself unspotted by the world makes for pure worship without stain before our God and Father.*

*(Jas. 1:21-22, 27)*



The Jews closely associated a truly incarnated faith with charity expressed in almsgiving. The angel Raphael gave this advice to Tobit and his son Tobiah:

*Prayer and fasting are good, but better than either is almsgiving accompanied by righteousness. It is better to give alms than to store up gold, for almsgiving saves one from death and expiates every sin. Those who regularly give alms shall enjoy a full life.*

*(Tobit 12:8-9)*

### PAUL'S LAST WORK

The final work accomplished by Paul among his newly converted Christians emphasized the importance of almsgiving in the Christian life. Several months of his time and much energy were dedicated to taking up a collection for the poor in the Church at Jerusalem. He initiated a campaign to raise funds by sending his fellow workers to the churches for this set purpose. He sent Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia and Titus to Corinth. Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

*That is why I exhorted Titus, who had already begun this work of charity among you, to bring it to successful completion.*

*(2 Cor. 8:6)*

Paul gives this instruction concerning the collection:

*About the collection for the saints, follow the instructions I gave the churches in Galatia. On the first day of each week everyone should put aside whatever he has been able to save, so that the collection will not have to be taken up after I arrive. When I come I shall give letters of introduction to those whom you have chosen to take your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems fitting that I should go myself, they will accompany me.*

*(1 Cor. 16:1-4)*

Paul makes a real appeal to the Corinthians to exercise charity. Apparently those "*infants in the Lord*" were so involved in their charisms and their exercises that they were failing to incarnate--to integrate--their spirituality in a concrete way. Not long ago a well-to-do family, who prided themselves on being "*spirit-filled*" Christians, gave their daughter an elaborate wedding in which many demands were made upon the ministers of the Church. The

reception, following the wedding, was held at an exclusive club in Newport, California. This family failed to give even a dollar to the Church. Their spirits were such that if they had been asked to do so, they would have been scandalized. The pastor of the Church could have well have echoed Paul's words by saying to them: *"I could not talk to you as spiritual people but only as infants in Christ (1 Cor. 3:1)."*

Paul puts pressure on the Corinthians by telling them about the generosity of others:

*Brothers, I should like you to know of the grace of God conferred on the Churches of Macedonia. In the midst of severe trial, their overflowing joy and deep poverty have produced an abundant generosity. Indeed, I can testify, it was even beyond their means, and voluntarily they begged us insistently for the favor of sharing in this service to members of the Church. I am not giving an order but simply testing your generous love against the concern which others show.*

*(2 Cor. 8:1-3, 8)*

*I have thought it necessary to exhort the brothers to go to you and arrange in advance for the bountiful gift you have already promised. It should be ready as a precious gift, not as an exaction.*

*(2 Cor. 9:5)*

Paul truly Christianizes almsgiving when he refers to it as showing *"obedient faith in the gospel of Christ (2 Cor. 9:13)."* Paul teaches that Christian almsgiving should attempt to imitate God's own generosity to the Christian. Almsgiving ought not to be controlled by emotions but directed by the virtue of prudence. He established a practical gauge for almsgiving:

*The willingness to give should accord with one's means, not go beyond them. The relief of others ought not to impoverish you: there should be a certain equality. Your plenty at the present time should supply their needs.*

*(2 Cor. 8:12-14a)*

**Paul defines the spirit in which alms ought to be given:**

*Everyone must give according to what he has inwardly decided: not sadly, not grudgingly, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

*(2 Cor. 9:7)*

**Paul gives these motivations for giving alms:**

*Let me say this much: He who sows sparingly will reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will reap bountifully. God can multiply his favor among you so that you may always have enough of everything and even a surplus for good works. As it is written: "He scattered abroad and gave to the poor, his justice endures forever." He will multiply the seed you sow and increase your generous yield. The administering of this public benefit not only supplies the needs of the members of the Church but also overflows in much gratitude to God.*

*(2 Cor. 9:6,8-12)*

**Once the collection had been made, Paul writes this interesting report to the Romans about his future plans:**

*Now I have no more work to do in these regions, and I continue to cherish the desire to visit you, which I have had for many years. As soon as I can set out for Spain, I hope to see you in passing; I trust that you will send me on my journey only after I have had the joy of being with you for a while. Just now I am leaving for Jerusalem to bring assistance to the saints. Macedonia and Achaia have kindly decided to make a contribution for those in need among the saints in Jerusalem. They did so of their own accord, yet they are also under obligation for if the Gentiles have shared in the spiritual blessings of the Jews, they ought to contribute to their temporal needs in return. When I have finished my task and have safely handed over this contribution to them, I shall set out for Spain, passing through your midst on the way. I am certain that when I do visit you, I shall come with Christ's full blessing.*

*(Rm. 15: 23-29)*

From what can be ascertained, Paul's campaign raised a considerable amount of money. He was extremely cautious not to leave himself open to any suspicion about his handling the money. He wrote:

*There is one thing I wish to avoid, namely any blame over my handling of this generous collection. We are concerned not only for God's approval but also for the good esteem of men.*

(2 Cor. 8:20-21)

Representatives from the Churches accompanied Paul with the collection to Jerusalem. Luke lists these representatives as awaiting Paul in Troas:

*Accompanying him were Sopater, son of Pyrrhus from Beroea; Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica; Gaius from Oerbe; Timothy; Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia.*

(Acts 20:4)

Luke, no doubt, represented the church of Philippi and accompanied Paul to Troas after the feast of Passover. There is no named representative from Corinth. Probably Titus represented this community and as he is Luke's brother, the author omits his name. Approximately a party of nine or ten will carry the collection to Jerusalem.

### LIFE GIVING SPIRIT

After Paul and Luke joined the others in Troas they remained a week. Before leaving Troas they celebrated Christian worship with the Community. The Community would have gathered on Saturday evening as the Sabbath ended at sunset. It was a custom among Jews to close the Sabbath with a festival meal eaten on Saturday evening. In the Christian communities, this celebration became the *Agape*--a meal eaten in common before the celebration of the Eucharist--the enactment of the Last Supper. Luke gives a very descriptive account of this celebration because of the extraordinary manifestation of Paul's power manifested during that last evening in Troas:

*On the first day of the week when we gathered for the breaking of bread, Paul preached to them. Because he intended to leave the next day, he kept speaking until midnight. As it happened, there were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were assembled. Paul talked on and on, and a certain young lad named Eutychus,*

*who was sitting on the windowsill, became drowsier and drowsier. He finally went sound asleep, and fell from the third story to the ground. When they picked him up he was dead. Paul hurried down immediately and threw himself on him, clutching the boy to himself. "Don't be alarmed!" he said to them. "There is life in him." Afterward Paul went upstairs again, broke bread, and ate. Then he talked for a long while, until his departure at dawn. To the great comfort of the people they were able to take the boy away alive.*

*(Acts 20:7-12)*

The evening was late when the liturgy of the Word had begun. Perhaps the Agape had been celebrated earlier. The upper room grew warm with all the burning lamps and people. Eutychus, trying to stay awake, sat in the open window. The Greek texts implied he struggled to remain awake but he lost the battle; he fell asleep and fell to his death. Luke, the physician, clearly states the boy was dead. After the example of Elijah and Eliseus and Peter, Paul restored the dead boy to life. Paul has fought many enemies and now his great spirit triumphs over death. Luke clearly dates this to the week after Easter, when the Church was still celebrating the Resurrection of Jesus. Following this incident the Community celebrated the Eucharist. The raising of Eutychus to life would have made the Thanksgiving Celebration even more meaningful. Paul would not let this lesson be lost upon the congregation. Just as the Spirit of Jesus in Paul raised Eutychus, so one day this same Spirit would raise all the Christian dead to life eternal. Paul himself was fast approaching the end of his own life. In retrospect, Luke knew this. He may well have symbolically represented in this incident the triumph of Paul's own spirit over death. Men would destroy his physical life but not his spirit. The spirit of Paul would continue to speak and instruct the Christian Community long after Paul's physical death.

It was customary for ships to sail at dawn and sail from one island to another. The good sailing breeze died with the day and picked up again around dawn. Most of Paul's party departed earlier than Paul in order to be on the ship at sailing time. Paul remained with the congregation until dawn and, after assuring himself of Eutychus' recovery, he went by land to the port of Assos in order to meet the ship. It was ten miles shorter by land to Assos than by sea. Luke tells us:

*We ourselves went on ahead to the ship and set sail for Assos, where we were to pick up Paul. This was the arrangement he had made,*

*since his plan was to travel overland. When he met us at Assos we took him aboard and sailed to Mitylene. From there we took off the next day, and reached a point opposite Chios; on the second day we crossed to Samos, and on the day after that we put in at Miletus. Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so as not to lose time in Asia, for he was eager to get to Jerusalem by the feast of Pentecost if at all possible.*

*(Acts 20:13-16)*

Miletus was about thirty miles south of Ephesus. Having arrived in Miletus, Paul sent word to the presbyters in Ephesus to meet him there. The word used for presbyters in this text is not that customarily used to imply the “elders,” but rather “*episkopoi*” is used. An adequate translation of this word would be “overseers”; in the context used it implied the “rulers” of the Church. The English translation of “*episkopoi*” would be bishops. From this word also comes the word episcopacy. From the time of Ignatius the Martyr, around 110 A.D., a clear distinction existed between presbyters and bishops. St. Irenaeus, writing around 180 A.D., confirms: “*the apostles instituted bishops in the Churches.*” Irenaeus traces the lines of these bishops in the Church of Rome, beginning with Linus, of whom he writes: “*into whose hands the blessed apostles committed the office of the Episcopate.*” Apparently Paul himself later appointed Timothy bishop of Ephesus, and Titus bishop of Crete.

Paul probably arrived in Miletus on Wednesday. By the time the leaders of the Church assembled together, it must have been by the weekend. It is believed many came from other cities. Paul probably delivered his address on the Sabbath or during the celebration of the Christian Liturgy. This remains the only recorded address of Paul to the churches in Acts. From the context of the talk we know Paul anticipated this as his farewell address to the Churches. In actual fact for Luke, it becomes Paul's farewell to the Christian Church itself.

Luke sees Paul as another Christ. In other words, a true disciple who was able to say, “*For me to live is Christ.*” Therefore, Paul's life closely patterns that of Jesus.

Luke pictures Paul, like Jesus, among his disciples at the Last Supper, giving his farewell address to them before going forth to endure the passion. Jesus Himself said that the Enemy would strike the Shepherd, and the sheep would be scattered. Paul had already experienced the reality of this. The faith of

Paul's converts lay upon the solid foundation of Christian truths. He built their faith upon a rock foundation. It could endure the storms of persecution that lay ahead. The Enemy of the Faith sought to destroy that foundation in order to scatter the flock. He must separate them from the protection of their true shepherds in order that his "wolves" could destroy them. The "wolves" of Satan are false teachers, inspired by the father of lies. They have been deceived and they go forth zealously to deceive others. Paul knew the power of truth in the battle of eternal salvation. He encouraged his disciples:

*Stand fast, with the truth as the belt around your waist. In all circumstances hold faith up before you as your shield; it will help you extinguish the fiery darts of the evil one.*

*(Eph. 6:15-16)*

A sustaining faith must be built upon truth itself. Paul taught the truths of the Christian Church, for he knew these alone were the supporting pillars and firm foundations of Christian Faith. To destroy the believers, the Evil One must first strike the Shepherd. He must destroy the credibility of their teacher in the eyes of the faithful. This is exactly what the enemy did in the Galatian Churches and in Corinth; this he intended to do in Ephesus. Throughout the history of the Church he would use this tactic to destroy the credibility of the teachers, the bishops, the Church itself, in the eyes of the faithful. This he does, and it is in keeping with his natural activities: lies and half-lies. This is the first step.

The second step is to enlist his own apostles: false teachers--men and women who in truth become the "*Sheluhims*" of Satan! If they can be found within the Christian Community, so much the better, as they already come clothed in sheep's clothing. All that remains to be done is to indoctrinate them with false teachings about Jesus, His salvation, and His Church. Satan subtly inspires them. This he can do because pride of the mind has already possessed the souls of these former Christians. These inspirations appear to be inspirations of the Holy Spirit in the minds of Satan's disciples. He easily deceives them by appearing as an angel of Light. Humility would have saved them from this deception. They would have seen how these inspirations opposed the teachings of the Church. They would have renounced them. Since pride dominated, their spirit is led to convict the Church of sin. Since the Holy Spirit is the very Soul of the Church, the *Sheluhims* have at least materially sinned against the Holy Spirit. Whether it is a formal sin only God can judge. The Evil One now inspires them to spread their errors among the faithful in order to destroy the

true pillar and foundation of salvation. From the Church of Corinth to the present day, history records the great successes of the *Sheluhims* of Satan.

This does not apply to those born and raised in the light of partial, or incomplete Christian revelation, but to those who once possessed the truth or any portion of that truth and later turned from that truth, perverting it with false doctrines. Of such the Book of Hebrew writes:

*For when men have once been enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift and become sharers in the Holy Spirit, when they have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come and then have fallen away, it is impossible to make them repent again since they are crucifying the Son of God for themselves and holding him up to contempt. Ground which drinks in the rain falling on it again and again receives the blessing of God, but if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless; it is soon cursed, and finally is burned.*

*(Heb. 6:4-8)*

We can deduce from all this how important it is to pray for the teachers and pastors of the Church, for their perseverance in grace. They will be special targets of the Evil One and his agents. He knows well if they fall from grace, many will be scandalized and fall from faith because of it. Unconsciously, many Christians put their faith in men of the Church who are but shadows and reflections of Jesus, rather than having put their faith in The One who is the Enduring Rock. Our membership in the Church of God should be because of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and for what they have promised, and for what they continue to accomplish in the Church of the Triune God!

Satan, through his false teachers, strenuously sought to destroy Paul's reputation in the Christian Church. At that very time, in the places Paul had labored and in places where he was known only by name, his enemies made terrible charges against him; they accused him of pride, ambition, greed, deceitfulness, instability, and of falsifying the truth about the Way. Even when Paul arrives in Jerusalem, James greets him with:

*You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have come to believe, all of them staunch defenders of the law. Yet they have been informed that you teach the Jews who live among the Gentiles to abandon Moses, to give up the circumcision of their children, and to*



*renounce their customs. What are we to do about your coming, of which they are sure to hear?*

*(Acts 21:20-22)*

Paul begins and ends his address defending himself. We should certainly understand why. He defends himself in order that others will not be able to shake the foundations of truth that he laid with solid teachings. He begins by saying:

*You know how I lived among you from the first day I set foot in Asia (by their fruits you will know them)--how I served the Lord in humility through the sorrows and trials that came my way from the plottings of certain Jews.*

*(Acts 20:18-19)*

We need also to note that Paul is presenting himself as a model to these leaders. Just as Jesus said to his disciples, "*Learn of me for I am meek and humble of heart,*" Paul himself gave the example of meekness and humility to be followed by his disciples, primarily by those in the role of leadership. Paul displayed humility by patiently bearing with all those sufferings that came his way. He did not put God to the test by demanding special graces, protection, and deliverances. He patiently bore those sufferings as the cost that must be paid by any soldier in the war against the kingdom of darkness, just as the Master Himself had done. Paul did not spend his energy by seeking revenge upon his enemies; he used his energy wisely to continue his mission in spite of opposition and persecution. The very words Paul begins with imply that he beholds himself as the slave of the Lord. He seeks to render his service with slave-like docility and humility. We may be sure that he served only one Master.

## LOVER OF TRUTH

*"Never,"* he says, *"did I shrink from telling you what was for your own good, or from teaching you in public or in private (Acts 20:20)."* Paul demonstrated his love for the people when he sought their good, not their approval or what was agreeable and pleasing to them. That would have been disguised self-seeking. When you love someone you actively seek his or her good--and we well know that good is not synonymous with *"nice"*. What is good is not always agreeable or pleasant to the heart of the beloved hearer. True love endures whether the love is returned or not. True love has as its source a loving spirit. When one loves another he or she is being true to their spirit. One does what one does simply because of what one is, and what one wills to continue being. When we withdraw our love from one who fails to make a return to our love, we can well afford to ask ourselves if our love has been, in truth, but disguised self-seeking or purely natural love, spiritually unmeritorious, that seldom endures in an unloving environment. Such love stops where Christian love begins!

Again Paul's love is demonstrated by his spending himself to teach others both privately and publicly. He tells them what has always been a fundamental teaching with him, *"With Jews and Greeks alike I insisted solemnly on repentance before God and on faith in our Lord Jesus Acts 20:21."* This teaching indicates that Jesus is the Savior of the World, and that the Church is the true means of salvation in this world.

We know that, religiously speaking, there was no comparison between the Jews and the pagans, but nevertheless Paul teaches that Jews also have not achieved salvation by being Jews. They, too, must recognize the inadequacy of the Jewish religion to make them righteous before God. To obtain this righteousness they must accept Jesus of Nazareth as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. This involved turning away from Old Israel and embracing the New Israel. This doctrine, when heard by the Jews unwilling to repent, inspired tremendous hatred and animosity in their hearts. This hatred they vented against the herald of this truth, Paul, who became the object of their hatred. With full knowledge of what could be the consequence, Paul never shrank from telling the Jews what was for their own good. He loved them even when they violently hated him. That doesn't mean Paul liked them. In the truth that belongs to humility, Paul could say:

*Therefore I solemnly declare this day that I take the blame for no man's conscience, for I have never shrunk from announcing to you God's design in its entirety.*

*(Acts 20:26-27)*

Paul teaches that we who stand in the role of teachers in relationship to others have a responsibility before God for the formation of their consciences that will guide them through life--either to heaven or to hell. This responsibility falls most heavily on parents to teach their children solid truths. As Therese of Lisieux observed, the soul of a child is like soft wax ready to receive any impression, good or evil, true or false. Parents need to guard against trying to win the love of their children by failing to tell them unpleasant truths fundamental to their eternal salvation.

*"What does it profit a person to gain the whole world and suffer the loss of their souls?" "If you love father, mother, husband, wife, children, lands more than me, you are not worthy of me."*

Would that every Christian parent could say at the end of their life to their children: *"I take no blame for your conscience, for I have never shrunk from announcing to you God's design in its entirety."* Would that every Christian mother could do and say as the English woman, Blessed Margaret Clitharow was able to do the night before she died for the faith. Margaret sent her stockings to her daughter with the message, *"May these remind you always to walk in the footsteps of your mother!"*

Paul had a premonition that danger awaited him in Jerusalem and that he was approaching the end of his life. Many prophecies were being given in the Christian communities about what lay before Paul. Yet Paul could not deter from his path. In conscience he believed that God had called him to a work, and he must see this work through to the end, regardless of the personal danger involved or the suffering entailed in accomplishing it. He valued his earthly life only in so far as it was an instrument to accomplish God's Will. He would carry his concept of being the slave of the Lord to its ultimate conclusions. Whether he lived or died, it was for the Lord. As Jesus Himself had once set his face towards Jerusalem, so does Paul. He tells the presbyters:

*But now, as you can see, I am on my way to Jerusalem compelled by the Spirit and not knowing what will happen to me there--except that the Holy Spirit has been warning me from city to city that*

*chains and hardships await me. I put no value on my life if only I can finish my race and complete the service to which I have been assigned by the Lord Jesus, bearing witness to the Gospel of God's grace. I know as I speak these words that none of you among whom I went about preaching the kingdom of God will ever see my face again.*

*(Acts 20:22-27)*

## SHEPHERDS IN THE CHURCH

Paul believed this to be his last opportunity to speak to the presbyters. With them he shares his own prophetic vision, warns them of the dangers to come. Forewarned is forearmed. First he warns them to keep an eye upon themselves. The enemy will come from within the Community. They must guard their own souls by constant growth in truth, in faith, and in love. Paul spoke once of chastising his own body, bringing it into subjection, lest while preaching to others he himself become a castaway. No Christian is so secure in grace in this world that he or she cannot fall from it. Secondly, Paul tells the presbyters that as good shepherds it has become their duty to watch over the spiritual lives of the faithful. They must guard them from the enemies of truth who will enter the community with the set purpose to deceive, to divide, and to destroy. This duty, this office of shepherd, Paul confirms is given by the Holy Spirit. The Community may have selected the men for the office, and the apostles and presbyters may have laid hands upon them, but these are only human means used by the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who called them through this means, and gave them the charism of their office. This office and the charisms that go with it demand that they be good Shepherds. Paul tells them:

*Keep watch over yourselves, and over the whole flock the Holy Spirit has given you to guard. Shepherd the Church of God, which he has acquired at the price of His own blood.*

*(Acts 20:28)*

Paul makes a most powerful statement with profound theological consequences. He speaks of the Church established by Jesus Christ as the Church of God. But he says even more, he speaks of the Church acquired at the price of His own blood. "*His own blood*" refers to God. Paul clearly proclaims the divinity of Jesus Christ. We have an echo here of "*The Word was God and the Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:10).*" With

the previous reference to the Holy Spirit, we find in this address the doctrine of the Holy Trinity clearly implied.

It is the true Nature of Jesus Christ that will be most viciously and violently attacked by these false teachers. Paul prophesied that some of these false teachers would come out of the Churches in Asia Minor. He goes on to warn:

*I know that when I am gone savage wolves will come among you who will not spare the flock. From your own number (presbyters, bishops), men will present themselves distorting the truth and leading astray any who follow them. Be on guard, therefore.*

*(Acts 20:29-31a)*

Paul's words may well call to mind Isaiah's accusation against the Shepherds of Israel:

*My watchmen are blind,  
all of them unaware;  
They are all dumb dogs,  
they cannot bark;  
Dreaming as they lie there,  
loving their sleep.*

*These are shepherds  
who know no discretion;*

*All you wild beasts of the field,  
come and eat,  
all you beasts in the forest!*

*The just man perishes,  
but no one takes it to heart;  
Devout men are swept away,  
with no one giving it a thought.*

*(Is. 56:10,11,9)*

*(Is. 57:1)*

Paul again reminds them of his own conduct--conduct that should be a guide to them in their ministry and office of shepherds of the Church of God:

*Do not forget that for three years, night and day, I never ceased warning you individually even to the point of tears. Never did I set my heart on anyone's silver or gold or envy the way he dressed. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have served both my needs and those of my companions. I have always pointed out to you that it is by such hard work we must help the weak. I commend you now to the Lord, and to that gracious word of his which can enlarge you, and give you a share among all who are consecrated to him. You need to recall the words of the Lord Jesus Himself who said, "There is more happiness in giving than receiving."*

*(Acts 20:18-35)*

This is one of the unique quotations of Jesus not found in the four gospels.

### JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

Luke now describes the farewell between Paul and his disciples. The incident described below reveals how deeply human was the relationship existing between Paul and his disciples. Paul's disciples did not love and esteem him only as a teacher, but they dearly loved him as a human being:

*After this discourse, Paul knelt down with them all and prayed. They began to weep without restraint, throwing their arms around him and kissing him, for they were deeply distressed to hear that they would never see his face again. Then they escorted him to the ship.*

*(Acts 20:36-38)*

Paul sails away on a sea of tears.

It may be difficult to love some saints in this world, but apparently it would have been impossible not to love one so completely integrated with holiness as was Paul. The result of such holiness is beautiful humanity. I'm afraid that too often the picture we derive from reading the words of Paul gives us an inadequate picture of the person. His spirit of truth, having been abstracted from the truly warm human being he really was, deceives us. We hear the truth but we are unable to see how that truth incarnated itself in the person of

Paul. The presbyters of Ephesus testify to the great love that found expression in these religious truths. We fail to understand that many of the letters written by Paul were written during times of stress, when he was seeking to correct some abuse in the Christian Community. To judge him by these letters alone is like judging the love of a mother or father only from seeing them correct their children.

Leaving Miletus, the party sailed south keeping the mainland of Asia on the left, and a chain of islands dotting the horizon on the right. They stopped overnight in Cos and then sailed to the Island of Rhodes. As they sailed into the harbor, they would have been greeted by the Colossus of Rhodes, a huge bronze statue of the sun god Helios, which straddled the harbor--one of the Seven Wonders of the World. From Rhodes they sailed to the mainland landing in Patara, in the Province of Lycia. Here, larger ships were available for sailing across the open sea to Egypt and Phoenicia. Paul and his companions found a ship sailing to Tyre in Phoenicia. This trip carried them about 400 miles across the open sea. Luke records: "*We caught sight of Cyprus but passed it by on our left as we continued on towards Syria (Acts 21:3).*" Cyprus, as we know, was the home of Barnabas. Perhaps they waved in Barnabas' direction, and offered a prayer for him and the churches established there, through his and Paul's efforts. No doubt the sight of Cyprus stirred some deep memories in Paul's soul. Since the days he and Barnabas worked there together, Paul had traveled many miles in body and spirit.

The ship docked in Tyre to unload the cargo. Though no mention had been made of a Church being established in Tyre, Paul knew of the Christian Community there. He located them and spent the next week in their company. Here in Tyre, Paul receives another warning about Jerusalem. Luke goes on to say:

*Under the Spirit's prompting they tried to tell Paul that he should not go up to Jerusalem; but to no purpose. Then, when our time was up, we continued our journey. All of them--wives and children included--came out of the city to see us off, and we knelt down on the beach and prayed. After we had said goodbye to one another, we boarded the ship and they returned home.*

(Acts 21:4-6)

Praying in public was a common practice among the Jews, so praying together on the beach would not have been unusual. Even today when traveling in

Moslem countries, one notices that when the hour of prayer sounds from the minaret, many Moslems kneel wherever they may be and pray facing the east.

Luke goes on to say:

*Continuing our voyage from Tyre we put in at Ptolemais (modern Acre), where we greeted the brothers and spent the day with them. The next day we pushed on and came to Caesarea.*

*(Acts 21:7-8)*

Twenty years earlier our narrative had left Philip, one of the Seven, evangelizing in Caesarea. Paul and his companions are now received into Philip's home. Now he is rightly called Philip the Evangelist. Luke tells us that Philip had four daughters gifted with prophecy. As the Church developed, we know that within the organizational set-up, certain groups appeared; we already know a certain group existed called "*widows*," who dedicated their lives to Christian charity. Likewise, very early in the Church, there appeared another group called "*virgins*," young women who chose a life specially consecrated to God in virginity. Paul gave some instructions about "*virgins*" in his letter to the Corinthians.

Paul later would be imprisoned for two years in Caesarea. Luke remained with Paul during that time. During Paul's imprisonment, Philip and his daughters no doubt became closely associated with Paul and Luke. This association may well have been one of Luke's great sources for his material for Acts, and his Gospel account. He would have had the time to study any written works available in Palestine at that time. It is highly possible that the four daughters of Philip inspired in Luke some of the great appreciation he held for women in the Church.

While they were visiting in Caesarea, the prophet Agabus arrived from Jerusalem. He does not appear to be the "*good news*" prophet. The last time we heard of him was about ten years before in Antioch, when he prophesied a famine all over the land. Now he gives the most formidable prediction about Paul's future. Luke reports:

*He came up to us, and taking Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it. Then he said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit: 'this is how*



*the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and hand him over to the Gentiles!’”*

*(Acts 21:11)*

This prophecy makes the comparison between Jesus and Paul strikingly clear. Just as Jesus went up to Jerusalem and the Jews bound him and handed him over to the Gentiles to be put to death, so Paul also would be bound and handed over to the Gentiles by the Jews. The prophecy was startlingly clear, and it strongly moved all who loved Paul to tears. They begged him not to go to Jerusalem. Luke writes: *"Upon hearing this both we ourselves and the people of Caesarea urged Paul not to proceed to Jerusalem (Acts 21:12)."* These pleas moved Paul deeply and became a strong temptation to be resisted. He responded to them, *"Why are you crying and breaking my heart in this way? (Acts 21:13)"* The words translated to *"breaking my heart"* literally mean *"crushed it to pieces."* On the eve of his entrance into Jerusalem Paul experiences his own agony. He counter-acts the temptation to remain in Caesarea with, *"For the name of the Lord Jesus I am prepared, not only for imprisonment, but for death, in Jerusalem (Acts 21:13b)."*

It had been over twenty years since that fateful day Saul of Tarsus met Jesus of Nazareth on the road to Damascus. That day marked the conversion of Saul. He took his first step towards becoming the great Apostle Paul. The step was true repentance. True repentance does not essentially consist of great feelings and a mighty display of emotions; there need be no tears of sorrow or joy. Repentance consists primarily of the will turning from evil. It consists primarily of the light of truth shining into a life previously locked in darkness of error; a life that has been directed by darkened light along an erroneous and sinful path. It simultaneously consists of efficacious grace touching the spirit--the will--causing opposition to truth to crumble and, in strengthening the will, to reject the former way of life and choose the way now lighted by God's grace. The will determines itself to live a new life in keeping with the lights received. Essentially, this decision is strictly spiritual; it lies beyond feelings, emotions, ideas, reasoning, and all that belongs to the flesh. This does not mean these things must necessarily be absent at the time of repentance, but only that they are not of the heart of repentance.

Repentance becomes the first step towards true holiness, for the human will seeks to follow the known Will of God. As the penitent begins the journey of the spirit, he or she carries along both necessary and excess baggage. The penitents bring along all the old memories--past pains and pleasures.

Tendencies toward evil still remain within the will; in the past, the penitent had developed physical, emotional, psychic, and spiritual addictions. To break an addiction without great grace involves suffering. Many of these addictions were pleasant and gratifying to the body and soul. The penitent truly enters into a veritable war with the impurities within himself, and with external temptations coming from the world of the flesh. Many battles must be fought daily. A battle is not a war; battles can be lost without losing the war. Amidst it all, what remains important is that the will remains oriented towards God, despite the storms that rage within and without. Momentarily, the penitent may be blown here and there and knocked down, but the penitent rises and re-charts the course; the will of God has become his guiding star and he firmly continues his journey. The Lord has promised. *"My grace is sufficient for you."*

Jesus said of Himself that He had not come to do His own will, but the Will of the Father. During His earthly life, He completely obeyed the Will of God as revealed to Him by the Holy Spirit. *"It was thus that he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a Cross (Phil. 2:8)."* This obedience revealed Jesus to be the Son of the Heavenly Father. When Jesus obediently committed Himself to die at His baptism, God acknowledged, *"This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased (Mt. 3:17)."*

Obedience is the heart of sanctity for it is the very soul of love. As has often been said: We love the person whose will we follow. That person we love above all others is the one whose will we prefer and choose above all others.

We have been privileged to follow Paul over twenty years of his life. From that day on the road to Damascus when Paul repented with those words, *"What is it I must do, sir?"* that's the moment he turned his will over to Jesus. Jesus immediately took over: *"Get up and go into Damascus. There you will be told about everything you are destined to do (Acts 22:10)."* The first test came immediately; he would have to accept the Will of God as expressed to him through human instruments chosen by God. Now he must exercise not only love but also faith. To Ananias, God revealed his will for Paul:

*This man is the instrument I have chosen to bring my name to the Gentiles, and their kings and to the people of Israel. I myself shall indicate to him how much he will have to suffer for my name.*

*(Acts 9:15-16)*

Paul learned well the lessons Jesus taught him, "*Brothers, we must undergo many trials if we are to enter into the reign of God.*" We now stand with Paul on the eve of his entrance into Jerusalem where foretold sufferings and imprisonment await him. We are privileged to see the triumph of grace in a man who once said:

*I am least of the apostles; in fact, because I persecuted the Church of God, I do not even deserve the name. But by God's favor I am what I am. This favor of his to me has not proved fruitless.*

*(1 Cor. 15:9-10)*

Paul, with his human limitations and imperfections, loved the Lord Jesus above all things. When it came to the Lord, Paul was a slave with no will but that of his Lord. Paul's willingness to suffer imprisonment and death was his humble submission--"*obediently accepting even death.*" Paul could honestly say with Jesus, "*Not my will be done but thine!*" We have witnessed true repentance, and what it truly means to live a life of repentance.

Paul is about to enter into his final Passion and he finds himself prepared, prepared by love. His heart has been purified. With a purified heart he embraces even more firmly the will of God. Twenty years after his conversion, he still asks and listens to hear, "*What is it I must do, Lord?*" That is what is meant by "persevering in repentance"--to fight the good fight!

By remaining firm in the will of God, Paul brings his companions around to accepting God's will. For his friends, Paul could seek no greater good. All his missionary activities had been undertaken in order to accomplish the Will of God, to reveal and proclaim this same will to all men, and to urge their acceptance of it. As Luke prepares to present the passion of Paul, he closes the active ministry of Paul with these most appropriate words:

*Since he would not be dissuaded, we said nothing further except, "The Lord's will be done."*

*(Acts 21:14)*

## CHAPTER 20

### THE GOSPEL AND THE JEWS

#### INTRODUCTION

Paul's final visit to Jerusalem occurred around the feast of Pentecost, probably in 57 A.D. Already dark clouds gathered over the land of Judea. Only a few years remained before Jesus' prophecy would be fulfilled:

*If only you had known the path to peace this day; but you have completely lost it from view. Days will come upon you when your enemies encircle you with a rampart, hem you in, and press you hard from every side. They will wipe you out, you and your children within your walls, and leave not a stone on a stone within you, because you failed to recognize the time of your visitation.*

*(Lk. 19:42-44)*

*When you see Jerusalem encircled by soldiers, know that its devastation is near. Those in Judea at the time must flee to the mountains; those in the heart of the city must escape it; those in the country must not return. These indeed will be days of retribution when all that is written must be fulfilled.*

*(Lk. 21:20-22)*

The times for the fulfillment of this terrible destiny quickly approach the city of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation. Before another ten years pass, things will have reached the point of no return. When Paul arrives in Jerusalem, it is still the beginning of the end.

Let us now briefly review the political and cultural background against which Paul's last years will be lived. The emperor Claudius Caesar reigned thirteen years, eight months, and twenty-eight days. He may have lived longer if he had not taken Agrippina for his third wife. Claudius had two children by his

second wife, Messalina: Britannicus and Octavia. Claudius killed Messalina out of jealousy. He later married Agrippina his own niece, the daughter of his brother Germanicus. Agrippina was a widow with one son from her former marriage, named Domitius. Agrippina persuaded Claudius to adopt her son and name him heir. He did this, changed his name to Nero, and had him marry his own daughter, Octavia. Agrippina seemingly planned to poison her son, Nero's, way to the throne. We noted earlier that she had had the proconsular in Asia poisoned because of his claim to the throne. A strong and enduring rumor maintained that she had poisoned Claudius herself. Immediately following the death of Claudius, Agrippina ordered Burrhus, Nero's tutor and the prefect of the Praetorian Guard, to have the soldiers proclaim her son emperor on October 13, 54 A.D. Nero was seventeen at the time.

During the first five years of Nero's reign, Seneca and Burrhus administered the empire. It was a time of relative peace and prosperity, but signs of the future soon appeared. Within a year, Nero had his stepbrother poisoned. Soon afterwards, he had his mother put to death publicly, and slew his wife, Octavia, under pretense they had plotted against him. Nero reigned as emperor until June 9<sup>th</sup>, 68 A.D.

On Paul's arrival in Jerusalem, Antonius Felix was procurator of Judea. Antonius Felix and his brother Pallas had previously been Greek slaves of Antonia, the mother of Claudius. Antonia gave Pallas and Felix their freedom. Pallas exercised great influence over Claudius, becoming his chief minister and amassing great personal wealth. From his high position he aided his brother Felix's rise to power. Felix served as an assistant to Cumanus, procurator of Judea. Around 52 A.D., Cumanus fell from power over the massacre of certain Samaritans, a crime that Felix shared, and Felix became procurator in his place. At the time Felix was appointed procurator, the former Jewish high priest Jonathan was exiled in Rome. Jonathan had encouraged Claudius to appoint Felix procurator. Tacitus wrote of Felix: *"He reveled in cruelty and lust, and wielded the power of a king with the mind of a slave."*

Whenever Jonathan returned to Jerusalem he frequently admonished Felix for his behavior towards the Jews. As the historian Josephus wrote: "*Such continual admonitions are grievous to those who are disposed to act unjustly.*" Since Jonathan was a continuous thorn in Felix's side he got rid of him. Josephus gives us the details. Felix bribed Doras, one of Jonathan's best friends, to hire certain robbers to murder him. These men disguised themselves as pilgrims in the temple, and stabbed Jonathan to death in broad daylight in the temple area. Since the death went unavenged, the robbers presumed they had a license to kill; they killed many others in Jerusalem.

We are indebted to Josephus for much of the recorded history of this time. Josephus was born Joseph ben Matthias in Jerusalem around 37 A.D. He became a Pharisee, and when war broke out with Rome, the Sanhedrin appointed him military governor of Galilee. Surviving the war, Josephus became a Roman citizen and friend of the Caesars. In the latter period of his life, he wrote a history of the Jews. Josephus was an eyewitness of the times, and recorded the conditions existing in Judea at the time of Paul's last visit.

Josephus tells us that when Felix arrived in Judea the country was in a bad situation. Robbers abounded, and false messiahs arose deluding the people. Jesus had foretold that when the false messiahs appeared they would be believed. Felix caught and put robbers and false messiahs to death daily. Josephus writes:

*When the country was purged of these, there sprang up another sort of robber in Jerusalem, which were called Sicarfi, who slew men in the daytime, and in the midst of the city; this they did chiefly at the festivals, when they mingled themselves among the multitude, and concealed daggers under their garments, with which they stabbed those that were their enemies; and when any fell down dead, the murderers became a part of those that had indignation against them; by which means they appeared persons of such reputation that they could by no means be discovered. The first man who was slain by them was Jonathan the high priest, after whose death many were slain every day. While the fear created in men was more afflicting than the calamity itself, and while everybody expected*

*death every hour, as men do in war, so men were obliged to look before them, and to take notice of their enemies at a great distance; nor, if their friends were coming to them, dare they trust them any longer; but, in the midst of their suspicions and guarding of themselves, they were slain. Such was the celerity of the plotters against them, and so cunning was their contrivance.*

*There was also another body of wicked men gotten together, not so impure in their actions, but more wicked in their intentions which laid waste the happy state of the city no less than did these murderers. These were such men as deceived and deluded the people under pretence of Divine inspiration, but were for procuring innovations and changes of the government; and these prevailed with the multitude to act like madmen, and went before them into the wilderness, as pretending that God would there show them the signals of liberty. But Felix thought this procedure was to be the beginning of a revolt; so he sent some horsemen and footmen both armed, who destroyed a great number of them.*

*But there was an Egyptian false prophet that did the Jews more mischief than the former; for he was a cheat, and pretended to be a prophet also, and got together thirty thousand men that were deluded by him; these he led roundabout from the wilderness to the mount which was called the Mount of Olives, and was ready to break into Jerusalem by force from that place; and if he could but once conquer the Roman garrison and the people, he intended to domineer over them by the assistance of those guards of his that were to break into the city with him. But Felix prevented his attempt, and met him with his Roman soldiers, while all the people assisted him in his attack upon them, insomuch that when it came to a battle, the Egyptian ran away, with a few others, while the greatest part of those that were with him were either destroyed or taken alive.*

*Now when these were quieted, it happened, as it does in a diseased body, that another part was subject to an inflammation; for a company of deceivers and robbers got together, and persuaded the*

*Jews to revolt, and exhorted them to assert their liberty, inflicting death on those that continued in obedience to the Roman government, and saying, that such as willingly chose slavery ought to be forced from such a desired inclination; for they parted themselves into different bodies, and lay in wait up and down the country, and plundered the houses of the great men, and slew the men themselves, and set the villages on fire; and this till all Judea was filled with the effects of their madness. And thus the flame was every day more and more blown up, till it came to a direct war.*

*(W.J. Bk. II, Ch. XIII, sec.3-6)*

Luke remains with Paul until the end of Acts. Even in prison a man of Paul's status would not have been deprived of servants to attend him. Luke may have attended Paul as his personal physician. The remainder of the narrative is rich in those details that had left a vivid impression in Luke's memory; little things like the soldiers freeing Paul from the crowd by lifting him over their heads, and the tribune taking Paul's nephew by the hand and leading him off to the side to speak in private with the boy. In a sense, this section of Acts corresponds with the last section of Luke's Gospel account, also extensive and rich in detail.

In the passion of Paul, Luke certainly intends for us to note the comparison between the disciple and the Master. Jesus made it clear that the disciple must follow in His footsteps. When that disciple stands in the same place and faces much the same elements as Jesus Himself, we should expect an even more striking comparison.

Concerning the witness of the Lord, Revelation says:

*When they have finished giving their testimony, the wild beast that comes up from the abyss will wage war against them and conquer and kill them.*

*(Rev. 11:7)*



In many ways Paul embodied the Christian religion. In the mind of Luke the defense of Paul before the Jews, the Romans, and the world becomes the defense of the Christian religion.

The city of Caesarea, where Paul had been imprisoned, was about sixty-five miles northeast of Jerusalem. Paul's party, carrying the collection, could make the journey in two days. Members of the Christian Community in Caesarea accompanied them on their first day, seeing them safely to the home of Mnason where they were to spend the night. Luke identifies Mnason as a native of Cyprus, and one of the early members of the Church, perhaps from the first Pentecost. When the party arrived in Jerusalem, Luke relates, "*The brothers there gave us a warm welcome.*" James still presided over the Church at Jerusalem; he held this position until his death in 62 A.D., when the high priest Ananias II condemned James to death by stoning. James and the presbyters invited the party to meet with them the next day in private. At this meeting the collection was safely turned over to the Church. Paul gave a report of all God's work accomplished through his ministry among the Gentiles. Once again the Church acknowledged and confirmed Paul's work among the Gentiles to be of God: "*When they heard it they praised God.*"

*(Acts 21:20)*

### PROBLEM OF PAUL'S PRESENCE

Paul's presence in Jerusalem proposed a serious problem for the Christian Community of the city. Many lies and half-truths circulated throughout the community about this Paul of Tarsus. Most people knew him only by reputation, but he had become a divisive issue in the Church. Perhaps a copy of his letter to the Romans or rumors of it had already been received in Jerusalem. The Church officially recognized in the Second Epistle of Peter that Paul's writings were difficult and subject to misunderstanding. We read:

*Paul, our beloved brother wrote you this in the spirit of wisdom that is his, dealing with these matters as he does in all his letters. There are certain passages in them hard to understand. The ignorant and the unstable distort them just as they do the rest of Scripture to their own ruin.*

*(2 Pt. 3:15b-16)*

Few men of the times were capable of grasping "*the spirit of wisdom*" that was Paul's. Few people would have been prepared to interpret Paul correctly. Paul's writings would certainly have given his enemies much material to misquote, both intentionally and through sheer ignorance.

Even today, we see certain reputable biblical scholars of the Church vilified by members of the Church not qualified to be their judges. They fail to understand the scholarly works produced by the scholars. Many do not even know what the work of Biblical exegesis involves. They draw erroneous conclusions from these works and make unjust accusations against the authors, often damaging the reputation of good Christian scholars. For example, you cannot prove the perpetual virginity of Mary from the Scriptures; you can prove her virginity at the conception of Jesus, but not afterwards. On the other hand you cannot disprove the perpetual virginity of Mary from the Scriptures. We know there are those who seek to do both from Scripture. A good Biblical scholar would have to teach that the Scriptures do not prove the perpetual virginity of Mary. Unlearned people may take that statement to be a denial of the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary, but such a conclusion cannot be honestly deduced from that statement. That same Biblical scholar may well believe, as all Catholics must, the perpetual virginity of Mary through the teaching authority of the Church. The Scriptural scholar does his job when he accurately *translates* to us the meaning of the sacred texts. It is the teaching authority of the Church that gives the *inspired interpretation* of those Scriptures. As long as the scholar does not formally deny those dogmatic truths, he cannot be accused of heresy. If his works and words *imply* a denial, he may be suspected of heresy. In that case, it is the moral obligation of qualified authorities in the Church to make a judgment concerning the credibility of that scholar as a Christian teacher.

## JAMES' SOLUTION

St. James reveals to Paul his concern, and that of the presbyters, over Paul's visit to Jerusalem:

*You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have come to believe, all of them staunch defenders of the law. Yet they have been informed that you teach the Jews who live among the Gentiles to abandon Moses, to give up circumcision of their children, and to renounce their customs. What are we to do about your coming, of which they are sure to hear?*

*(Acts 21:20b-22)*

Many Christians had been led to believe that Paul himself had become an apostate from the Jewish religion. In their minds Jesus came to fulfill the Law not to destroy it. What Paul taught to be true in the case of Gentiles, he was being accused of teaching to be true for Jews as well. This of itself was not true. Paul personally never ceased being a Jew--a Hebrew of Hebrews--and he did not see any contradiction between being a good Jew and a good Christian. Being a Jew was one thing, being a Christian another thing. A person could be a Christian without being a Jew, and also be a Christian without ceasing to be a Jew. That was the truth Paul fought so hard to preserve in the Church and that truth triumphed at the Council of Jerusalem. The question of whether a Jew ceased being a Jew when becoming a Christian, and whether a Jewish Christian was obliged to keep the Law of Moses had not yet become a formal issue in the Church. These were not questions being discussed by Paul or the Church at this time. We know Paul did teach that the observance of the Law of Moses could not bring one to salvation. That the Law had no power to save was Pauline doctrine. This does not imply the Law was useless and without moral value. Every baptized Christian needs to grow in grace and sanctification, whether Jew or Gentile. Salvation and sanctification, though related, are not the same. Keeping the Law of Moses could be of great benefit to the soul's sanctification. Paul's critics did not have the intelligence to distinguish between something that is *essential* for salvation and something that is *useful* for sanctification. Paul's real answer to this charge could be found in his words to Timothy:

*All Scripture is inspired of God and is useful for teaching--for reproof, correction and training in holiness so that the man of God may be fully competent and equipped for every good work.*

*(2 Tim. 3:16)*

Remember that Paul is speaking here of the Old Testament. These do not seem like the words of a man who disdains the teachings of Moses.

From his epistle we know James believed in an incarnational spirituality; the truths of one's life ought to be expressed in one's acts. James taught that the Word taking root in a Christian heart has power only to save that person when the Word becomes Christian action. He commanded: "*Act on this word!*" Paul believed his actions would speak more forcefully and ring truer than the rumors spread about him. James and the presbyters had decided on a prudent plan of action by which to prove the accusations against Paul to be false, and preserve Christian unity while Paul was in town. James said to Paul:

*Please do as we tell you. There are four men among us who have made a vow. Take them along with you and join with them in their rite of purification; pay the fee for the shaving of their heads. In that way, everyone will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you follow the law yourself with due observance.*

*(Acts 21:23-24)*

What James asked was for Paul to pay for himself and for four others under a vow. This would involve Paul paying out a considerable amount of money, which ought to impress the Christian Jews of Paul's piety. Josephus relates that Herod Agrippa I, in order to convince the Jews of his religious piety, made himself financially responsible for the completion of the vows of many Nazirites. These vows usually lasted thirty days, in which time the person abstained from drinking wine and from cutting their hair. At the end of the thirty days, he had to offer two lambs and a ram, a loaf, and cakes, with meat and drink offerings to complete the vow. The hair could then be shaved and

burnt in the Temple. If a person made such a vow and was unable to make the offering, the hair remained uncut. Many of the poor had to depend upon the piety of the rich in order to fulfill their vows. The cost in our day would be about 200 dollars. For five people to fulfill the vow, Paul would have to pay about a thousand dollars. We can see why this would be quite an impressive gesture.

James' request indicates that Paul was a man of means. We know he often spoke of having to work hard to support himself during his missionary activities. He also said he did this as an example to others, especially the weak. In the next few years, Paul would be spending a great deal of money: he had to maintain himself in prison at Caesarea; the procurator Felix expected to be bribed by him (he certainly must have had a foundation for his hope); Paul had to pay for the appeal to Caesar that would be extremely expensive (the poor did not appeal to Caesar); he later rented a house in Rome for two years; and Paul is not treated as an ordinary prisoner, but as a prominent man. There may have been considerable family wealth at his disposal. Some have suggested that Luke may have been the source of the money, but the circumstances seem to imply that Paul himself had money of his own.

At this time James confirms, once again, the Church's teachings about Gentile converts within the Community. He makes clear that observance of the Law of Moses applied to Jews, and not to Gentile Christians:

*As for the Gentile converts, we sent them a letter with our decision that they were merely to avoid meat sacrificed to idols, blood, the flesh of strangled animals, and illicit sexual union.*

*(Acts 21:25)*

## JUDAISM AND THE CHURCH

Even after thirty years and many persecutions by the Jews, we see that the Christian Community of Jerusalem still maintains a close association with formal Judaism. James confirms this with "*You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have come to believe, all of them staunch defenders of the law.*" He speaks of these Christians as Jews, and zealous Jews at that. This close identification would remain until the cultic worship of the temple ceased with the destruction of the temple and the Jewish nation. Not until the Jewish religion was reduced to a religion of the synagogue did the split become formal. Even then, it would not be the Christian Jews in Palestine who fostered the separation, but the non-Christian Jews. After the fall of Jerusalem, the Pharisees sought, as far as possible, to preserve the purity of the Jewish religion. They determined to drive all Christians from the synagogues. They incorporated a curse into synagogue worship upon anyone in the synagogue professing Jesus to be the Messiah. Becoming a Christian was an excommunication from Israel. We may have a reflection of this in the Gospel of John where we read:

*His parents answered in this fashion because they were afraid of the Jews, who had already agreed among themselves that anyone who acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.*  
(Jn. 9:22)

*This too Jesus may have foretold when he said, "Blest shall you be when men hate you, when they ostracize you and insult you and proscribe your name as evil because of the Son of Man." (Lk. 6:22)*

At the time of Paul's last visit to Jerusalem, the Christian Community in Jerusalem had lived in relative peace with the larger Jewish Community. Because of the intense piety of the Christians, their acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah was viewed and tolerated by the Pharisees as a harmless peculiarity of the Jewish sect called the Nazoreans. At this time, to proclaim Jesus to be the Messiah was no longer the volatile issue it had once been. It was Paul himself who sparked the animosity of the Jews toward the Jewish Christian Community when he brought the beliefs of the Christians to the surface.

## PAUL ARRESTED

James' request of Paul regarding the vow had an effect not anticipated:

*Accordingly, Paul gathered the men together and went through the rite of purification with them the next day. Then he entered the temple precincts to give notice of the day when the period of purification would be over, at which time the offering was to be made for each of them. The men must remain ritually pure for seven days prior to the fulfillment of their vows. The seven-day period was nearing completion when some Jews from the province of Asia recognized Paul in the temple precincts and began to stir up the whole crowd there.*

*(Acts 21:26-27)*

These same Jews had seen Paul earlier in the city with Trophimus, one of their fellow citizens from Ephesus, who was a Gentile. They bore a special hatred for Paul. When they saw him in the temple they presumed he brought his Gentile friend within the temple area forbidden to Gentiles, for the set purpose of defiling the temple itself. We know that for Gentiles to go past the Court of the Gentiles was to court death if discovered. When the Jews saw Paul in the temple they took the opportunity to publicly accuse him of a crime serious enough to turn the crowd in the temple violently against him. They ran up and grabbed Paul and simultaneously shouted:

*Fellow Israelites, help us! This is the man who is spreading his teaching everywhere against our people, our law, and this sanctuary. He has even brought Greeks into the temple area and thus profaned this sacred place.*

*(Acts 21:28)*

The smoldering, burning hatred toward the Gentiles was rapidly growing more intense in the hearts of the Palestinian Jews. A cry like that was sufficient to cause mob violence among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. "Before long the whole city was in turmoil. People came running from all sides." Paul became the center of all this hostile and deadly attention. They seized Paul and dragged him into the Court of the Gentiles. The temple guards

immediately shut the gates leading into the area of worship, fearing further desecration by bloodshed. The Jews physically assaulted Paul with the intention of killing him.

The Roman garrison in Jerusalem was quartered in the fortress of Antonia. The fortress joined the northwest corner of the Temple area with steps leading from the fortress into the Court of the Gentiles. Roman soldiers supervised the temple area by placing sentries on top of the colonnades that bordered the Court of the Gentiles; from there the entire temple area could be kept under view. At that time the fortress was under the command of Claudius Lysias, a tribune. He commanded a cohort consisting of 760 foot soldiers and 240 horsemen. During festival time the soldiers would have been especially alert for trouble; festivals were popular times for religious riots. A report reached Claudius Lysias that the entire city was rioting:

*Immediately the commander took his soldiers and centurions and charged down on the rioters. (The presence of more than one centurion indicates several hundred soldiers were involved in the rescue operation.) As soon as the crowd caught sight of him (Lysias) and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Then, when the commander arrived on the scene, he arrested Paul and had him bound with double irons. He tried to find out who he was and what he had been doing, but different people in the crowd shouted out different answers. (From what Lysias could make out he deduced Paul to be a revolutionary.) The commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar, so he ordered Paul to be led away to headquarters. When Paul reached the steps, he actually had to be carried up by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob. A crowd of people was following along shouting, "Kill him! Kill him." Just as Paul was about to be led into the headquarters, he said to the commander, "May I say something to you?" The commander was impressed that Paul knew Greek and responded: "So you know Greek! Aren't you the Egyptian who caused the riot some time ago and led a band of four thousand cutthroats out into the desert?" (Josephus had mentioned thirty thousand, but he is notorious for exaggerations. Luke probably puts the more realistic number of*



*four thousand in the mouth of the commander.) Paul responded, "I am a Jew, a citizen of Tarsus in Cilicia--no mean city; I beg you, let me address these people."*

*(Acts 21:30-39)*

## SERMON IN THE TEMPLE

Paul defends his right to be in the temple by professing to be a Jew; he explains his fluency in Greek by revealing that he is a citizen of one of the great centers of Greek culture in the empire--Tarsus.

Paul, but a moment before, had only narrowly escaped death at the hands of the crowd still breathing deadly threats against his life. He does not seek the sanctuary of the garrison, even to catch his breath, but with the soldiers serving as a buffer between him and the crowd, and with the steps of the fortress serving as a podium, he grasps the opportunity to preach to the Jewish people in the temple. The city lay gathered before him. The simplicity of purpose in Paul is heroic. He has no concern for himself, and is at that moment wounded, bloodied, and disheveled. He stands on the steps of the Fortress Antonia, a veritable fortress of courage himself, and he looks the howling mob straight in the eye. He would not let this chance to reach the hearts of the people slip by. Jesus had said to Ananias, who had taken care of Paul after Paul had been struck blind by his vision of Jesus:

*This man is the instrument I have chosen to bring my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.*

*(Acts 9:15)*

This is Paul's only opportunity to speak to "*the people of Israel*" and he must take it. Paul stands there truly an incarnation of the those words he preached at Miletus:

*I put no value on my life if only I can finish my race and complete the service to which I have been assigned by the Lord Jesus, bearing witness to the gospel of God's grace.*

*(Acts 20:24)*

No doubt moved by divine grace itself, Claudius Lysias grants Paul permission to address the Jews. This was to be Paul's first sermon while in chains:

*When he had been given permission, Paul then stood on the steps and motioned with his hand to the people; and when all was quiet he began to speak to them in Hebrew.*

*(Acts 21:40)*

The charge against Paul is not that he proclaims Jesus to be the Messiah, but that he has betrayed the Jewish people, and speaks against the Law of Moses and the temple. Paul defends himself by affirming his Jewish upbringing in the school of Gamaliel, and his religious zeal for the traditions of the fathers. The chief priest can affirm how, out of zeal, Paul at first had bitterly opposed this new way. However, his entire life had changed when he had a vision of Jesus of Nazareth confirming that He is truly alive, and that He is the Just One of God; Jesus appeared as the Will and Voice of the Father. Ananias, a good and holy Jew living in Damascus, also witnesses to this truth about Jesus and confirms Paul's mission from God. Thus, Paul offered the two necessary witnesses to the truth. Paul's defense of his behavior rests upon the fact of Jesus' Resurrection from the dead, His appearance to Paul, and the Divine commission Paul had received from Jesus. If Paul's course differs from that he had once followed, this new way was not motivated by natural desire, but had been commanded by the Just One of God. Let us now listen to Paul's presentation to the people of Israel:

*"My brothers and fathers, listen to what I have to say to you in my defense." When they heard him addressing them in Hebrew, they grew quieter still, He went on: "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but I was brought up in this city. Here I sat at the feet of Gamaliel and was educated strictly in the law of our fathers. I was a staunch defender of God, just as all of you are today. Furthermore I persecuted this new way to the point of death. I arrested and imprisoned both men and women.*

*On this point the high priest and the whole council of elders can*

*bear me witness, for it was for them that I received letters to our brother Jews in Damascus. I set out with the intention of bringing the prisoners I would arrest back to Jerusalem for punishment. As I was traveling along, approaching Damascus around noon, a great light from the sky suddenly flashed all about me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' I answered, 'Who are you sir?' He said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazorean whom you are persecuting.' My companions saw the light but did not hear the voice speaking to me. 'What is it I must do, sir?' I asked, and the Lord replied, 'Get up and go into Damascus. There you will be told about everything you are destined to do.' But since I could not see because of the brilliance of the light, I had to be taken by the hand and led into Damascus by my companions.*

*A certain Ananias, a devout observer of the law and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came and stood by me, 'Saul, my brother,' he said, 'recover your sight.' In that instant I regained my sight and looked at him. The next thing he said was, 'The God of our fathers long ago designated you to know his will, to look upon the Just One, and to hear the sound of his voice; before all men you are to be his witness to what you have seen and heard. Why delay, then? Be baptized at once and wash away your sins as you call upon his name.'*

*Upon my return to Jerusalem I was praying in the court of the temple, where I fell into a trance and saw Jesus speaking to me, 'You must make haste,' he said, 'Leave Jerusalem at once because they will not accept your testimony about me.' I answered: 'Lord, it is because they know that I imprisoned those who believed in you and flogged them in every synagogue. While the blood of your witness Stephen was being shed, I stood by and approved it. I even guarded the cloaks of those who killed him!' At that he said to me: 'Be on your way, I mean to send you far from here, among the Gentiles.'"*

*(Acts 22:1-21)*

*The Jews are able to listen to Paul's talk to them up to the point when he claimed that God, through Jesus Christ, had sent him from this very temple itself to proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles. This in their eyes was his real crime: preaching the heresy that through faith in Jesus of Nazareth, Gentiles could have equality with the Jews before the Father in heaven. So intense was their religious and national pride, so violent their hatred for the Gentiles, that their hearts totally rejected such a teaching, and they could will nothing but death for the prophets of such teachings.*

*Up to this point in his speech the crowd had been listening to Paul, but now they began to shout, "Kill him! Rid the earth of the likes of him! He isn't worthy to live!" They yelled and waved their cloaks and flung dirt through the air. At that display, the commander directed Paul to be brought inside the headquarters.*

*(Acts 22:22-24a)*

#### **PAUL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN**

*Claudius Lysias did not understand Hebrew. He could not have followed Paul's speech. But he noted the results. At one moment the crowd had become silently attentive, the next moment Paul had turned it back into a howling mob. He needed to know what Paul had said. "He issued that he be examined under the lash to find out why they made such an outcry against him (Acts 22:24b)." What Lysias decreed could easily have resulted in Paul's death. Being examined under the lash was not the same as being beaten with rods. The Romans used this method of gaining information from slaves and aliens. Augustus had outlawed its use except in the case of slaves. The slave was systematically beaten with leather whips often tipped in bone or metal. Death very often resulted from such cross-examination.*

*No sooner had they bound Paul than he said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it legal to flog a Roman citizen without a trial?" (Paul knew they had already violated his rights by tying him up and that it was never legal to scourge a Roman citizen.) On hearing this, the centurion ran to the commander and demanded, "Do you realize what you are doing? This man is a Roman citizen!" (Men would*

*think deeply about making a false claim to citizenship for the punishment was severe) The commander rushed in and asked Paul, "Is it true! Are you a Roman citizen?" (It was hard for him to grasp that this insignificant little Jew could truly be a Roman citizen) "I am," Paul answered. The commander then observed, "It cost me quite a sum to get my citizenship." (It was against the law to sell citizenship but it became a common practice during the reign of Claudius) Paul responded to that: "Ah, but I am a citizen by birth!" At these words, those who were about to interrogate him backed away. The commander became alarmed because he realized that in restraining Paul he had restrained a citizen of Rome.*

*(Acts 22:22-29)*

From this point on, it was to Lysias' advantage to treat Paul with respect. He had already placed himself in a position of being charged with violating the rights of a Roman citizen. Paul's timing in this matter had been perfect.

As a Roman tribune in Jerusalem, Claudius Lysias would be the chief Roman authority in the city, directly responsible only to Antonius Felix, the procurator residing in Caesarea. It was Roman policy for Jews to decide matters pertaining to Jewish practices. Lysias recognized that Paul had a profound negative effect upon the Jewish people. He surmised that any crime Paul could have been guilty of must pertain to Jewish law. Since Paul was a citizen of Rome, and a man well educated, his case was worthy of being presented to the Sanhedrin, the supreme Jewish religious and legal body. Therefore:

*The next day the commander released Paul from prison, intending to look carefully into the charges which the Jews were bringing against him. He summoned the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin to a meeting; then he brought Paul down and made him stand before them.*

*(Acts 22:30)*

Lysias affords Paul the opportunity of speaking before the leaders of the people. Once again we see the unusual means God can use to bring His Will

to be. Paul will be His witness before all Israel.

Paul would have been formally charged before the Sanhedrin. He probably was charged with the crime he had been accused of in the temple the day before--speaking against Moses, the temple, and betraying his people. Paul was expected to defend himself against these charges. He did not deny the charges against him, but refused to recognize them as crimes against his religious faith. Paul saw his actions as the fulfillment of God's will

*Paul gazed intently at the Sanhedrin. Then he said: "Brothers, to this day I have lived my life with a clear conscience before God." (He proclaims his conscience does not convict him of sin.) The high-priest Ananias ordered his attendants to strike his mouth. (This in itself violates the law--inflicting punishment upon a man yet to be proven guilty.) Paul said to him, "You are the one God will strike, you whitewashed wall! You sit there judging men according to the law, yet you violate the law yourself by ordering me to be struck!" At this, the attendants protested, "How dare you insult God's high priest?" Paul answered, "My brothers, I did not know that he was the high priest. Indeed, Scripture has it, 'You shall not curse a prince of your people!'"*

*(Acts 23:1-5)*

Two wrongs do not make a right. Paul immediately recognized that he had been wrong to curse the high priest, he and repented of it. Nevertheless, the curse remained, and the high priest Ananias was later killed by some Jewish rebels when they found him hiding in one of the underground aqueducts.

Paul's whole defense before the Jews for what he believed and preached rested upon the command received by him from the Risen Jesus. Jesus of Nazareth proved Himself to be the Just One of God--to be Lord--by rising from the dead. Paul could do no other than obey Jesus, as Jesus expressed the Word--the Will of God. The Sadducees, who refused to believe in life after death and resurrection from the dead, would have refused to accept Paul's major statement upon which his defense rested--that Jesus of Nazareth had risen from the dead. The Sadducees would find Paul guilty of the crimes

charged against him. Paul cleverly forestalls this by turning the Pharisees and the Sadducees against each other. At most, it could be said the trial ended in a hung jury. The Sanhedrin did not condemn Paul and therefore it did not condemn Christianity itself. Luke gives this report of the incident:

*Paul, it should be noted, was aware that some of them were Sadducees, and some Pharisees. Consequently he spoke out before the Sanhedrin: "Brothers, I am a Pharisee and was born a Pharisee. I find myself on trial now because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead." At these words, a dispute arose between the Pharisees and Sadducees, which divided the whole assembly. (The Sadducees, of course, maintain that there is no resurrection and that there are neither angels nor spirits, while the Pharisees believe in all these things.) A loud uproar ensued. Finally, some scribes of the Pharisee party arose and declared emphatically, "We do not find this man guilty of any crime. If a spirit or an angel has spoken to him..." At this the dispute grew worse and the commander feared they would tear Paul to pieces. He therefore ordered his troops to go down and rescue Paul from their midst and take him back to headquarters.*

*(Acts 23:6-10)*

Claudius Lysias, no doubt, was deeply impressed with Paul's ability to stir people up. Here was a man to whom people could not remain indifferent.

Paul knew God willed for him to bear witness to Israel, although his vision of how this would be done was different from how it actually came to pass. Paul appears only briefly before Israel in a prophet-like fashion. Naturally speaking, this sole presentation of the Gospel would have been a disappointment to him. But what had occurred, God willed. The Lord appears again to Paul to console, encourage, and direct him.

Luke records:

*That night the Lord appeared at Paul's side and said: "Keep up your courage! Just as you have given testimony to me here in Jerusalem, so must you do in Rome."*

*(Acts 23:11)*

The Jews now plot to take Paul's life. About forty men took a vow neither to eat nor drink until Paul is dead. They went to the chief priests and designed a plan by which they would ask the commander to bring Paul once more before the Sanhedrin for further questioning. The plot was to kill Paul between the fortress and the Sanhedrin. Paul's nephew discovered the plot and at once went to the fortress and told Paul. Paul sent his nephew immediately to Claudius Lysias. Luke tells us:

*The commander took him by the hand and drew him aside to ask privately, "What do you have to report?" The boy replied: "The Jews have agreed among themselves to ask you tomorrow to have Paul brought down to the Sanhedrin, on the pretext that they want to question him more carefully. But don't be fooled by them. More than forty of them are lying in wait; they have bound themselves by oath not to eat or drink until they kill him. They are all ready now, waiting only for your consent." The commander sent the boy away with the order, "Don't tell anyone that you gave me this information."*

*(Acts 23:19-22)*

As the commander was responsible for the life of this Roman citizen, he immediately took prudent action to safeguard Paul.

*The commander summoned two of his centurions and said to them, "Get ready to leave for Caesarea by nine o'clock tonight, with two hundred infantrymen, seventy cavalrymen, and two hundred spearmen; also provide horses for Paul's journey, so that you may give him safe conduct to Felix the governor." He then wrote the governor a letter...*

*(Acts 23:23-25)*



Because the commander ordered more than one horse for Paul, the presumption is that Paul was not traveling alone. One of his companions would have been Luke, who noted and counted 570 soldiers forming their bodyguard.

Before the leading religious tribunal of Israel, Paul confessed his innocence of any crime against God or Israel by embracing the Christian Faith. He embraced the faith in hope of the resurrection from the dead. The very hope of Israel was resurrection from the dead. In the name of Jesus alone could Israel's hope be realized: "*Brothers, to this day I have lived my life with a clear conscience before God.*" Paul speaks truth and the Sanhedrin could convict him of no crime against Israel: "*We do not find this man guilty of any crime. If a spirit or an angel has spoken to him...*" The logical deduction of that thought could not be made because of the pandemonium that ensued. The truths flowing from the statement were untenable to Jewish ears.

Paul spoke truth, and next we hear that the Jews secretly seek to slay him. Once again how truly those words of Jesus ring:

*The fact is, you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I have heard from God. Can anyone of you convict me of sin? If I am telling the truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever is of God hears every word God speaks. The reason you do not hear is that you are not of God...The father you spring from is the devil, and willingly you carry out his wishes. He brought death to man from the beginning, and has never based himself on truth; the truth is not in him.*

*(Jn. 8:40,46-47,44a-b)*

Jesus' words imply a state of possession. These men had embraced religious truths revealed by God. These religious truths should have been incarnated in their daily lives, and formed a genuine religious spirit, a spirit manifesting in their daily lives a humble fear of God and a love of their neighbor. Through true revelation, Israel became a house freed from idolatry and false worship. Nevertheless, these men failed to bring to birth within their own lives a spirit of true religion. A vacuum was created within their hearts. The evil spirit filled this vacuum. Pride dominated their hearts. Such a spirit can lead men

to prefer their own religious views to their love of God and mankind. The pride of the human mind leads men into contesting the Spirit of God. It opens the heart to a full state of opposition to the Will of God.

How truly we see that religious truth and membership in a God established religion does not of itself produce salvation. Unless a person possesses a true spirit of God along with truth, that same saving truth can lead to spiritual pride. When the banner of religious truth is held high in the hands of haters, let it be a warning: it is not God that stands before us, but Satan. The wolf has appeared in sheep's clothing. It is time to recall the words of Paul of Tarsus:

*If I have the gift of prophecy and, with full knowledge, comprehend all mysteries, if I have faith great enough to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing! If I give everything I have to feed the poor and hand over my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.*

*(1 Cor. 13:2-3)*

What occurred in city of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., became a prophetic sign to all religions and people who fail to be infused with the true spirit of God. Jesus of Nazareth came full of grace and truth, the incarnation of the true religious spirit. The Jewish leaders, the Sadducees and the Pharisees, who possessed the truth of religious revelation, failed to recognize this truth incarnated before their eyes in Jesus of Nazareth. They called him Beelzebub and sought his death. Later, these same men would seek to do the same to His disciples.

Truly, Israel as a nation stood at the door of doom. Those words St. Stephen spoke before the Jerusalem Sanhedrin sounded an ominous warning: *"You who received the law through the ministry of angels have not observed it (Acts 7:53).: His words implied that God would turn away from them and abandon them (See Acts 7:42).*

## A NATION DOOMED

The death knell of the nation did indeed sound when the Roman army under Titus appeared before the walls of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The city, its temple, its priesthood, and its inhabitants were all about to be destroyed. Shortly before Jesus' death the Scriptures give this account:

*Coming into the sight of the city, he wept over it and said: "If only you had known the path to peace this day; but you have completely lost it from view! Days will come upon you when your enemies encircle you with a rampart, hem you in and press you hard from every side. They will wipe you out, you and your children within your walls, and leave not a stone upon a stone within you, because you failed to realize the time of your visitation."*

*(Lk. 19:41-44)*

Writing within the first century the Jewish historian Josephus painted a dreadful picture of the destruction of Jerusalem. It was within itself a house divided and torn apart. The inhabitants turned upon themselves in a spirit of self-destruction. Evil appeared limitless and men possessed. Titus, the conqueror of Jerusalem, desired to save the temple but they foiled his efforts forcing the destruction of their beloved temple.

## THE END OF THE STORY?

Was this the end of their story? Paul of Tarsus gives this reply:

*I ask, then, has God rejected his people? Of course not!.. I further ask, does their stumbling mean that they are forever fallen? Not at all! Rather, by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles to stir Israel to envy... For if their rejection has meant reconciliation for the world, what will their acceptance mean? Nothing less than life from the dead!... If some of the branches were cut off and you, a branch of the wild olive tree, have been grafted in among the others and have come to share in the rich root of the olive, do not boast against the branches... They were cut off because of unbelief and you are there because of faith. If God did not spare the natural braches, he will certainly not spare you... If the Jews do not remain in their unbelief they will be grafted back on, for God is able to do this... Brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant of*

*this mystery lest you be conceited: blindness has come upon part of Israel until the full numbers of Gentiles enter in, and then all Israel will be saved.*

*(Romans 11:1a,11,15,17,20-21,23.25-26)*

*To this very day, when the old covenant is read the veil remains unlifted; it is only in Christ that it is taken away. Even now, when Moses is read, a veil covers their understanding. But whenever he turns to the Lord, the veil will be removed.*

*(2 Cor. 3:14-16)*

*In respect to the gospel, the Jews are enemies of God for your sake; in respect to the election, they are beloved by him because of the patriarchs. God's gift and his call are irrevocable.*

*God has imprisoned all in disobedience that he might have mercy on all.*

*How deep are the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How inscrutable his judgments, how unsearchable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has given him anything so as to deserve return? For from him and through him and for him all things are. To him be glory forever. Amen!*

*(Rom. 11:28-29,32,33-36)*

## CHAPTER 21

### THE GOSPEL BEFORE THE WORLD

#### INTRODUCTION

In Acts, Luke pictures the case of Christianity before the world. Christianity is not a bastardly religion that sprang up as an illegitimate shoot of Judaism; it comes into being as the full flowering of the seeds of religious truth sown in Israel. It comes forth as the fulfillment of the law and the prophets, and not as a force alien and rebellious to them.

The Jewish leaders and the majority of their people rejected the claims of Jesus of Nazareth to be the promised Messiah of Israel. Jesus claimed that the prophets, Moses particularly, supported His claim to be the Messiah. John the Baptist, the last of the Old Testament prophets, testified to Him. God Himself testified through the signs and wonders performed by Jesus, and supremely so by raising the murdered Jesus of Nazareth from the dead. The Resurrected Jesus was seen by over five hundred believers. The final witness is the Spirit of God, poured into the lives of the disciples of Jesus, and bringing back to life the Spirit of Jesus within the lives of men, a Spirit that is a veritable spiritual fire destined to spread across the face of the earth, inflaming the souls of men with a Divine love, a spiritual fire flowing forth from the Risen Jesus that imparts eternal life to its recipients.

It had become the firm hope of the children of Abraham that Israel would offer to man a way of life--a way to eternal life. Israel assured its believers that the dead in Yahweh would rise from the dead; this was the hope of Israel. The less spiritual among the Israelites restricted their hopes to a national resurrection to freedom, and ascension to political power and glory. Those with a finer faith believed as did Martha of Bethany who expressed this true hope of Israel when she spoke about her dead brother to Jesus: *"I know he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."* The author of Second Maccabees expressed this same quality of faith when he praised Judas

**Maccabee for sending an offering to the temple to expiate the sins of the dead:**

*In doing this he acted in a very excellent and noble way, inasmuch as he had the resurrection of the dead in view; for if he were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been useless and foolish to pray for them in death.*

*(2 Mc. 12:43b-44)*

Therefore, the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead to life was the finest flower of Jewish faith. This was the great hope of Paul's faith long before he came to believe in Jesus of Nazareth. When Paul beheld with his own eyes the Risen Jesus, this vision totally confirmed his Jewish faith. Paul came to see the Resurrected Jesus as the hope of Israel. Jesus rising from the dead was the first fruit of the great harvest to come. The reality of the resurrection greatly inspired the spirit of Paul and colored much of his preaching. The words of Jesus to Martha expressed succinctly the Christian faith:

*I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, though he should die, will come to life; and whoever is alive and believes in me will never die.*

*(Jn. 11:25-26)*

**Faith in Jesus became Paul's pearl of great price! He beautifully expressed this to the Philippians:**

*But those things I used to consider gain I have now reappraised as loss in the light of Christ. I have come to rate all as loss in the light of the surpassing knowledge of my Lord Jesus Christ. For his sake I have forfeited everything; I have accounted all else rubbish so that Christ may be my wealth and I may be in him, not having any justice of my own based on the observance of the law--I wish to know Christ and the power flowing from his resurrection; likewise to know how to share in his sufferings by being formed into the pattern of his death. Thus do I hope that I may arrive at resurrection from the dead.*

*(Phil. 3:7-11)*

When we understand that the resurrection from the dead represented the highest spiritual ambition of the Jewish soul, we can begin to grasp the importance of the doctrine of the resurrection in the faith of the early Church. Jesus became the foundation for their highest spiritual hope. For this reason, Paul could see no reason to be a Christian if it were not in order to have this hope realized. He wrote to the Corinthians:

*If our hope in Christ is limited to this life only, we are the most pitiable of men...If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"*  
(1 Cor. 15:19,32)

Paul reiterates his faith in the resurrection to the Corinthians:

*But as it is, Christ is now raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. Death came through one man; hence the resurrection of the dead comes through one man also.*  
(1 Cor. 15:20-21)

Paul preached to the Thessalonians:

*If we believe that Jesus died and rose, so too will God, through Jesus, bring with him those who have fallen asleep.*  
(1 Thes. 4:14)

When we understand how central the belief of the resurrection from the dead was to both the Jewish faith and to faith of the early Christian Community, it is easier to understand why the Christians did not behold themselves to be other than Jewish, and to see in their faith in Jesus as not something opposed to Jewish faith, but the fulfillment of Jewish faith. This is why the Church ardently preached to the Jews that Jesus was the Hope of Israel. In the light of this, we can see how accurate was Paul's statement before the Sanhedrin: "I find myself on trial now because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:6),"

Three Jewish parties bitterly opposed the spread of the Christian faith, the first being the Sadducees, the aristocracy of the Jewish People. Their faith

seemingly went no further than in a God who blessed or cursed people in the present world. The Sadducees possessed wealth, position, and a measure of power. They chose the bird in the hand and were politically conservative. *"The Sadducees, of course, maintain there is no resurrection and that there are neither angels nor spirits (Acts 23:8)."* They flatly refused to believe Jesus rose from the dead. They refused to consider even the possibility. Their concern over Christian teachings was due to the negative effects they could have on their lives. We read the effect the raising of Lazarus from the dead had upon them in John:

*What are we to do with this man performing all sorts of signs? If we let him go on like this, the whole world will believe in him; then the Romans will come in and sweep away our sanctuary and our nation.*

*(Jn. 11:47b-48)*

The Zealots were another group that refused to accept Jesus. Their souls were bound to this earth and to the things of the flesh. They longed and looked for a Messiah who promised to raise Israel to political and national glory. The Zealots willingly followed such Messiahs, for they incarnated their own erroneous and deceived spirits. This false messianic spirit became a national movement plunging Israel into national and political death. All that these two parties sought to preserve by rejecting Jesus they lost in the end. For such as these Jesus once lamented in tears: *"If only you had known the path to peace this day; but you have completely lost it from view! (Lk. 19:42)"*

The Pharisees were the third and most influential group among the Jews. They believed in the resurrection from the dead, in spirits and angels. Many Pharisees embraced the Christian faith; Paul was the greatest example. Most Pharisees, however, did not become Christian. Paul held that they stumbled over *"Jesus Crucified"*; spiritual pride blinded them to the truth.

These three groups comprised the leading opposition to the Christian Faith. They exerted great influence over the majority of the people. They became the blind guides leading the blind, the hirelings leading the sheep to slaughter.

That Israel rejected Jesus as the Messiah before His death and resurrection,



the Church could attribute to ignorance. As Peter preached: "*Yet I know, my brothers, that you acted out of ignorance, just as your leaders did.*" But to reject Jesus in the face of the resurrection from the dead--before the testimonies of so many witnesses--indicated hardness of heart. Peter preached before the Sanhedrin:

*The God of our fathers has raised up Jesus whom you put to death, hanging him on a tree. He whom God has exalted at his right hand as ruler and savior is to bring repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. We testify to this. So too does the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.*

*(Acts 5:30-32)*

The reaction of the Sanhedrin to this truth was "*they were stung to fury and wanted to kill them (Acts 5:33).*"

It was understandable that the Christian Community felt completely justified in maintaining that it truly represented the Jewish religion. It was not a heretical sect called the Nazoreans. It had legal rights under Roman law not only to exist, but also to be protected.

It was to the advantage of the Jewish enemies of the Church to convince the Romans that Christianity was an outlawed branch of Judaism--that the Nazoreans were an excommunicated group and ought not to be legally recognized as Jews. As such, they would have no legal right to existence within the Empire and should be suppressed. In order to ensure this, the Jews sought to convince the Romans that the Christians were not only illegal but also a subversive organization.

One of the major themes running through Acts is the legitimate claim of the Church to exist under Roman law and be entitled to the protection of the Roman government. Luke carefully noted from the very beginning the constant and continuous association of the Christian Community with temple worship and observances of Jewish customs and practices. Christianity does not appear as a substitution for the Jewish faith but as a super-addition to it. Any deviation from Jewish tradition occurred in the case of Gentile converts.

Luke implies that the Christian teaching that was so infuriating to the Jews was that Gentile converts were equal with the Jews before God; that the Christian Community offered the hope of resurrection from the dead to Jew and Greek alike.

The Christian Community is pictured as intrinsically peaceful--rendering unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. Luke deliberately throws light upon the fact that whenever the Christian Community or its leaders had been the center of disturbance, the Jews directly or indirectly instigated the disturbances for unjust and base reasons. The very tactics used by the Jews against the Church had been previously used against the founder of the Church. Luke, alone of the Gospel writers, tells how the Jews attempted to implicate Jesus of Nazareth in criminal practices against the Roman Empire. Three times he relates that Pilate, the Roman procurator, acquits Jesus of all fault of crime before the law.

Throughout the narrative Luke, with his artistic skill, demonstrated the warm relationship existing between the Christian Community and the Romans. He begins by demonstrating the friendly relationship existing between the Roman centurion Cornelius and Peter, the leader of the Christian Community. During Paul's missionary activities he encounters two important Roman leaders--Sergius Paulus the proconsular of Cyprus, who accepted Paul's message in faith, and Gallio the proconsular of Achaia, who was the brother of Seneca. Gallio upheld the legality of the Christian religion. Throughout the narrative the officials of the Roman Empire appear as Paul's only safeguard from the Jews who desired Paul's death, not so much because he professed a Messiah they could not believe in, but because he taught a doctrine odious to them.

The narrative seemingly reaches its climax when Paul recalls a vision he had of Jesus within the temple in which Jesus told him, *"I mean to send you far from here, among the Gentiles."* The very next night, after Paul revealed this revelation, the Risen Lord appeared to Paul and specified where Paul must go: *"Just as you have given testimony to me here in Jerusalem, so must you do in Rome (Acts 23:11)."* Luke reveals that Paul's presence in Rome is a result of Divine command; it is the Lord that has sent His Gospel into the world. On

the negative side, this vision of Paul might be the handwriting on the wall that the Jews have been weighing and found wanting. God leaves the Jews now to their chosen fate. The time of visitation has come to an end. Most of Israel rejects the Gospel; the path to peace remains hidden. The Sadducees, the Pharisees, the Zealots will all choose different paths as in a house divided, but all will come to the same ending. The Jewish nation now stands at the brink of destruction. It continues blindly on its course. Jesus had warned: "*He who seeks to save his life, will lose it. Even that which he has will be taken away and given to another.*" In a few years all Judea will be declared to be the private estate of the Roman Emperor Vespasian, and all who live and dwell there to be his personal serfs.

### PAUL BEFORE FELIX

When Claudius Lysias sent Paul under heavy armed guard to the Roman procurator Felix, he sent along this message:

*Claudius Lysias sends greetings to His Excellency Felix, Governor. Here is a man whom the Jews seized and were about to murder. When I learned that he was a Roman Citizen, I intervened with my troops and rescued him. I then had him brought before the Sanhedrin, hoping to determine what their charge against him was. I subsequently discovered that he was accused in matters of their own law and was in no way guilty of anything deserving death or imprisonment. When I later came to be informed of a plot against this man's life, I decided at once to send him to you. I have also instructed his accusers to take the matter up with you.*

*(Acts 23:26-30)*

Claudius Lysias informs the governor that Paul had been taken into protective custody because he was a Roman citizen not guilty of any crime deserving imprisonment, much less death. Naturally, Lysias presents himself in a most favorable light as the protector, not the violator, of the rights of a Roman citizen. Claudius Lysias accused the Jews of attempting to murder Paul on two occasions: on one occasion Lysias rescued Paul, and on the other Lysias foiled an assassination plot by sending Paul under heavy armed escort

to the governor Felix. Claudius Lysias' letter exonerates Paul of any serious crime but accuses the Jews of the two attempts to murder a Roman citizen. In the eyes of Lysias, Paul is not guilty of any crime against the Roman Empire; therefore Paul's freedom ought not to be impeded.

Luke records the journey to Caesarea:

*According to their orders, the infantry took Paul and escorted him that night as far as Antipatris. The next day they returned to headquarters, leaving it to the cavalry to go on with him.*

*(Acts 23:32-32)*

Antipatris was about twenty-five miles from Jerusalem. The section between Jerusalem and Antipatris would have been the most dangerous because of the possibility of ambush. Once the party reached the open and level plains of Sharon, it would be relatively safe from there to Caesarea. The infantry could well have been needed back in Jerusalem, as the crowds for Pentecost would still be there.

Antonius Felix was a most unusual man. He is the only man we know of who went from being a slave to becoming a governor of a Roman Province. This was because of the influence of his brother with the Caesars. Felix moved from governor of Samaria to becoming procurator of Judea in 52 A.D. According to Tacitus, even though Felix grew in political power, his spirit remained very ignoble. His activities in life suggest that his early life controlled much of his later behavior. He sought to compensate from having once been a slave by amassing wealth and marrying into royal families. He seemingly exercised his great political power with callous indifference to the rights and lives of others. When the high priest Jonathan criticized Felix for his administration of Judea, Felix bribed Doras, one of Jonathan's best friends, to have the Sicani assassinate Jonathan. Felix married three times. Once he married the granddaughter of Anthony and Cleopatra. His third marriage was to Drusilla, the daughter of King Agrippa I. Drusilla was six years old when her father died. When she was thirteen, Agrippa II, her brother, married her to King Aziaus (king of Emesa) upon his consent to be

circumcised. Around 54 A.D., when Drusilla was sixteen, she left King Aziaus to marry Felix. Josephus gives this gossipy account of the affair:

*Felix fell in love with her; for she did indeed exceed all other women in beauty. He sent her a person whose name was Simon, one of his friends, a Jew, who pretended to be a magician, (this may well be the same Simon from Samaria converted by Philip; Felix previously had been governor in Samaria) and endeavored to persuade her to forsake her present husband and marry him. Felix promised that if she would not refuse him, he would make her a happy woman. Accordingly she acted ill, and because she was desirous to avoid her sister Bernice's envy, for she was ill-treated by her on account of her beauty, was prevailed upon to transgress the laws of her forefathers and to marry Felix.*

*(Ant.Bk.XX,Ch.VII)*

This is the man to whom the soldiers now handed over Paul: "*When the cavalrymen arrived in Caesarea, they delivered the letter to the governor and brought Paul before them.*" Felix immediately ascertains whether he has jurisdiction over Paul's case. Judea and Cilicia, at that time, were within the Province of Syria. Because Paul was from Cilicia, Felix had legal jurisdiction over him. Felix tells Paul: "*I shall hear your case when your accusers arrive. Then he ordered Paul to be kept under guard in Herod's praetorium (Acts 23:33-35).*" This would be within the Herodian Palace, which was the seat of the Roman government of Judea.

The standard procedure of such an arrest would be that Paul would be in the care of a centurion and probably chained by the hand to a soldier. His friends would be able to see and care for him. Five days later a delegation arrived from Jerusalem to press charges against Paul. The chief priest Ananias came to Caesarea with some of the leading elders of Jerusalem, among whom was Tertullus, to act as their prosecuting attorney in the case against Paul. Josephus records an incident about Ananias that reveals the quality of man and priest he was:

*He was a great hoarder of money and he cultivated friendships with*

*the procurator and leading Jews by making them presents. His servants went to the threshing-floors, and took away the tithes that belonged to the priests by violence, and did not refrain from beating such as would not give these tithes to them--without anyone being able to prohibit them; so that some of the priests, those of old who were to be supported with these tithes, died for want of food.*

*(Ant. Bk.XX, Ch. LX)*

In the latter days, charity did indeed grow cold. We ought to bear in mind it is not Paul alone on trial but the Christian Church. It is not only Paul's death they seek but also the death of the Church. Tertullus, the prosecuting attorney for the Sanhedrin, begins his presentation before Felix with flattering lies about the governor and ends with damaging lies about Paul. Felix believed none of this. Tertullus accused Paul of being a ringleader of the sect of Nazoreans. Tying Paul and the Church together would be to condemn both at the same time. Tertullus' charge implies that Paul is a leader in an illegal organization bent upon destroying the Roman peace in the world. With two charges he brands Paul as an enemy of Rome. In his third charge, Tertullus accuses Paul of attempting to desecrate the temple, for which crime the Jews had arrested him. All three crimes carried the penalty of death. These Jews wanted Paul dead. They were not particular about the reason for his conviction as long as it resulted in his death. Tertullus was right when he indicated that Paul was one of the leading men in the early Christian Church.

In this condemnation of Paul, the Jews have publicly disowned and disavowed the Christian Community to be a part of true Israel. They branded it a heretical sect without legal right to exist within the empire. The Christian Community is accused of being a subversive, anti-Roman organization. Only a few years before, Jesus had been accused before another Roman procurator: *"We found this man subverting our nation, opposing the payment of taxes to Caesar, and calling himself the Messiah, a king (Lk. 23:2)."*

Felix motioned for Paul to reply. In his defense Paul claims that his conduct since arriving in Jerusalem refutes the charges that he is a disturber of the peace. His entire visit to the city had been without incident until he had been assaulted in the temple. He had come back to Jerusalem after an absence of

some years as a religious pilgrim bringing alms to the poor within the Christian Community and making offerings within the temple. He acknowledges he belongs to the group the Jews referred to as the "sect of the Nazoreans". But he denies their charge of it's being a sect by affirming its complete fidelity to the Jewish faith. Paul insinuates that if the real charge against him was his belief in the resurrection from the dead, then it is they who have departed from the true faith, not the Christian Community.

Let us listen to Paul's defense before the governor:

*I know that you have been a judge over this nation for many years. I am thus encouraged to make my defense before you, since you are in a position to understand. Not more than twelve days have passed since I went to Jerusalem to worship there. Neither in the temple area, not in the synagogue, nor anywhere else in the city, did my accusers find me debating with anyone or inciting a mob. They cannot substantiate the charges they are making against me. I admit to you that it is according to the new way- which they call a sect-that I worship the God of our fathers. At the same time, I believe all that is written in the law and prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men have that there is to be a resurrection of the good and the wicked alike. In this regard, I too always strive to keep my conscience clear before God and man.*

*After several years' absence, I had come to bring alms to my own people and to make my offerings. That is what I was doing when they found me in the temple court completing the rites of purification without any crowd around me or any disturbance. Certain Jews from the province of Asia are the ones who found me. These are the men who should be here before you to make whatever charge they have against me. Let those who are here declare what crime they found me guilty of when I stood before the Sanhedrin, unless it was what I called out as I stood in their presence: "I am on trial before you today because of the resurrection of the dead."*

*(Acts 24:10-21)*

Felix had lived too long in the area not to know about the Christian Way. Perhaps his friend Simon had once been a member of the community. He knew of its close adherence to Jewish traditions and customs. He was aware of the fact that those referred to as Nazoreans, were Jews far more pious than those that accused them. He also knew these people had caused no problems for the Roman government. Felix was shrewd enough to discern that the real problem existing between Paul and the Jews, between the so-called Nazoreans and the Jews, was strictly one of faith. It was not faith in a belief that was essentially alien to the Jewish religion, but a denial that in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth this faith was being fulfilled. Paul had made it clear that the Nazoreans had not stepped outside the bounds of orthodox Jewish beliefs: *"I worship the God of our fathers...I believe all that is written in the law and prophets (Acts 24:14)."* He publicly confessed to being an orthodox Jew. That profession had not been discredited. It stood as evidence before the court. Luke lets us know:

*Felix was rather well informed about the new way, and when he heard these words he adjourned the trial, saying merely, "I will decide the case when Lysias the commander arrives." He gave orders to the centurion that Paul was to be kept in custody but allowed some freedom, and that no one was to prevent his friends from seeing to his wants.*

*(Acts 24:22-23)*

By so acting, Felix may have spared himself the ire of the Jewish high priest and his associates, but once again he appears an unjust man. He had no legal grounds upon which to keep Paul in prison. He should have permitted him, when safe, to leave the area. There is no report of Claudius Lysias ever coming to Caesarea. In regard to Paul, there was no need for him to do so. Felix had in writing Lysias' own judgment: *"No way guilty of anything deserving death or imprisonment (Acts 23:29)."* Felix kept Paul in prison for a very base motive. Paul was like an innocent bird caught in a legal cage and Felix would not open the door to freedom unless Paul bribed him. In conscience, Paul could not take this road to freedom, and so he remained imprisoned.



## FELIX AND DRUSILLA

A few days after the trial, Felix came with his Jewish wife Drusilla to hear Paul speak on faith in Jesus Christ. No doubt Drusilla's curiosity invoked this private meeting between herself, the governor and Paul. Luke writes:

*As Paul talked on about uprightness, self-control, and the coming judgment, Felix became frightened. Before long he exclaimed: "That's enough for now! You can go. I'll send for you again when I find the time." At the same time, he hoped he would be offered a bribe by Paul, so he used to send for him frequently to converse with him."*

*(Acts 24:24-26)*

Felix and Drusilla, even though they received private instructions from the greatest evangelist in the world, failed to become Christians. They bring to mind another couple mentioned in the Scriptures--Herod and Herodias (both kin to Drusilla). They kept the prophet John the Baptist imprisoned. The Scriptures tell us:

*Herod feared John, knowing him to be an upright and holy man, and kept him in custody. When he heard him speak he was very much disturbed: yet he felt the attraction of his words.*

*(Mk. 6:20)*

Just as John the Baptist before him, Paul preached truth that should lead to repentance. The Scriptures confirm over and over that without true repentance a person cannot come to true faith in Jesus Christ, no matter how the truths of that faith appealed to them or emotionally moved them. Both Herod and Felix were emotionally moved by the preaching of truth. These are cases where faith did not come merely through hearing. In the case of Felix and Drusilla, the ground upon which the seed was sown was indeed entirely too thorny. As we read in the Scriptures:

*Those (seeds) sown among thorns are another class. They have listened to the word, but anxieties over life's demands, and the desire*

*for wealth, and cravings of other sorts come to choke it off; it bears no yield.*

*(Mk. 4:18-19)*

Apparently Drusilla and Felix were two earth-bound souls. They could not rise above the demands of their baser needs. They were indeed prisoners of a different sort, and their souls wore heavier chains. That Felix never came to repentance was obvious by his denying Paul his freedom, and expecting him to pay for that which was his right. The ancient Bezan text of Acts relates he did this at the insistence of his wife Drusilla. Luke informs us:

*Two years passed, following which Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. The former wanted to ingratiate himself with the Jews, so he left Paul in prison.*

*(Acts 24:27)*

From Josephus we learn about the end of Felix's tenure as governor. For some time the Jewish and Syrian citizens of Caesarea had been at odds over whether Caesarea should be a Jewish city or a Syrian city. The Jews had the influence and the wealth, but the Syrians had the numbers, and since most of the soldiers within the Roman army garrisoned at Caesarea had been recruited from among the Syrians, they had the military on their side. At about this time the Jews and the Syrians clashed in the marketplace with the Jews getting the upper hand. When Felix arrived he ordered the Jews to withdraw. When they refused, he ordered his soldiers against them. The soldiers slew many of them and sacked and pillaged the homes of the rich Jews. This no doubt added greatly to the profit of Felix. The Jews sent an appeal to Rome, and Felix was recalled to answer charges of misgovernment. Due to the influence of his brother Felix got off lightly, but nevertheless Porcius Festus replaced him as procurator. Josephus relates how Felix and Drusilla met their final end:

*That young man, his wife (along with their son Agrippa) perished at the conflagration of the mountain Vesuvius, in the days of Titus Caesar.*

*(Ant. Bk. XX, Ch. VII)*

## PAUL BEFORE FESTUS

Porcius Festus arrived in Judea as procurator about 60 A.D. He appears in history to be a fair man who sought to settle the differences between the Jews and Rome in a just manner, but unfortunately he died after only two years in office. One of his first duties as new governor would be to settle all matters left undecided by the former governor. The Jews in Jerusalem had not forgotten about Paul. They endeavored to take advantage of Festus' ignorance about Jewish matters and sought to prevail upon him to send Paul back to Jerusalem for trial. Again, it was their plan to kill him on the way to Jerusalem.

*But Festus answered that Paul was being kept in custody at Caesarea, and that he himself would be returning there soon. "Your leading men can come down with me," he said, "and if this man is at fault, they can prosecute him there."*

*After spending eight or ten days in Jerusalem, Festus went down to Caesarea. On the following day he took his seat on the bench and ordered Paul to be brought in. When Paul appeared, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem surrounded him and leveled many serious charges against him, none of which they were able to prove. Paul's defense was, "I have committed no crime either against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against the emperor."*

*(Acts 25:4-8)*

Paul's enemies could not sustain a case against him. Festus, naturally desiring to please the leaders of the people he must now govern, asked Paul, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges? (Acts 25:9)" Paul would have probably never reached Jerusalem alive. This request must have exasperated Paul. After two years in prison, constantly chained to another human being, things are back to where they were two years before. After all those months of hoping to be exonerated and freed, Paul realized there was only one avenue through which he could escape the murderous intentions of the Jews and finally bear witness in Rome as ordered by Jesus. In desperation he plays his final card. Paul

responded to Festus:

*I stand before the imperial bench; that is where I must be tried. I have done the Jews no wrong, as you yourself realize. If I am guilty, if I have committed a crime deserving death, I do not seek to escape that penalty. But if there is nothing to the charges these men bring against me, no one has a right to hand me over to them.*

*(Acts 25:10-11)*

Paul had made his decision. Nothing but death awaited him in Jerusalem. If he is to live, it will not be as a Jew but as a citizen of Rome. He acknowledges his civil ruler on earth to be Caesar not the Sanhedrin. Luke may well symbolize in Paul's words the cutting of the umbilical cord that has bound the New Israel to the Old Israel. Paul proclaims before the court: "*I appeal to the emperor!*" Thereupon Festus conferred with his council and finally declared: "*You have appealed to the emperor. To the emperor you shall go (Acts 25:12).*" The moment the accused utters an appeal to Caesar all trial proceedings come to an end, and the case is remitted to Rome. Until the case could be heard in Rome, the accused was not to be treated as a condemned man, and he must be protected from harmful treatment under the severest penalties. The Caesars were very jealous of this right and rigidly protected the right of appeal. With two little words, "*Caesarem Apello,*" Paul delivered his life out of the murderous hands of the Jews.

### FESTUS AND AGRIPPA

Festus now faces the problem of sending Paul to Rome and writing the charges against him. Luke artfully expresses the mind of Festus through a dialogue Festus has with his royal guest King Agrippa, and his sister Bernice. Luke informs us: "*A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived in Caesarea and paid Festus a courtesy call (Acts 25:13).*" Agrippa and Bernice were brother and sister to Drusilla. Their visit seemed timed with the departure of Felix and Drusilla from Judea. When King Agrippa I died in 44 A.D., Agrippa II had been seventeen years of age. Because of his youth, Claudius refused to make Agrippa King of Judea in place of his father. However, when his uncle, Herod of Chalcis, died in 52 A.D., Claudius

made Agrippa ruler of Chalcis with the title of king. Chalcis was a small territory north of Galilee. In addition, Claudius made Agrippa responsible for the supervision of the temple of Jerusalem including the power to appoint the high priest. Both Claudius and Nero extended the kingdom of Agrippa. Agrippa II had been reared a Jew, but in the imperial household at Rome. He was a very cosmopolitan young man who was at home both in the Jewish and Roman world. He sought to please the Jews and to prevent a war between them and Rome, however his allegiance always remained with Rome.

Agrippa's sister Bernice was sixteen at the time of her father's death. She had been married to her uncle, Herod of Chalcis (whose throne was later given to her brother). After the death of her husband, Bernice joined her brother in Rome. When reports began to be circulated in Roman society about their incestuous relationship, she left Rome. Josephus relates, *"she persuaded Palemo, king of Cilicia, to be circumcised and to marry her. Palemo consented, chiefly on account of her riches."* The marriage was brief. Bernice soon left her husband and rejoined her brother. We now find them both in Caesarea as the guest of Festus. At this time both Agrippa and Bernice are in their early thirties. Later Bernice will become the mistress of Titus who conquered Jerusalem. She returned to Rome with him. When he became emperor, Bernice was forced to leave Rome because of the scandal caused by their relationship.

Festus now felt he had found a solution to his problem with the coming of Agrippa. Agrippa understood the Jewish religion, and would be able to discern the real problem existing between Paul and the Jewish leaders. Agrippa had removed Ananias as high priest and replaced him with Ishmael only a few months earlier. Agrippa would not have been sympathetic with one of Paul's most bitter enemies, the high priest Ananias.

*Since they (Agrippa and Bernice) planned to spend several days in Caesarea, Festus referred Paul's case to the king. "There is a prisoner here," he said, "whom Felix left behind in custody. While I was in Jerusalem the chief priests and the elders of the Jews presented their case against this man and demanded his*

*condemnation. I replied that it was not the Roman practice to hand an accused man over before he had been confronted with his accusers and given a chance to defend himself against their charges. When they came here with me, I did not delay the matter. The very next day I took my seat on the bench and ordered the man brought in. His accusers surrounded him but they did not charge him with any of the crimes I expected. Instead they differed with him over issues in their own religion, and about a certain Jesus who had died but who Paul claimed is alive. Not knowing how to decide the case, I asked whether the prisoner was willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial there on these charges. Paul appealed to be kept here until there could be an imperial investigation of his case, so I issued orders that he be kept in custody until I could send him to the emperor."*

*(Acts 25:14-21)*

The trial of Paul before Festus had only succeeded in completely confusing the procurator. It involved issues he was in no position to understand. These were issues over which it would be impossible to make a legal judgment. They did not pertain to Roman legal matters, as Festus explained to Agrippa, "*...they did not charge him with any crimes I expected. Instead they differed with him over issues in their own religion, and about a certain Jesus who had died but who Paul claimed is alive...*"

## THE FINAL JUDGMENT

Once again we see that the essential theme of the Gospel is the resurrection of Jesus. To deny this destroys the foundation of Christianity. The Holy Spirit has been sent to confirm this truth in the hearts of believers. The Christian vision confirms that life exists beyond the grave, and even from the grave life will once again come forth to life eternal. It is this life eternal one guards in this transitory physical existence on earth. Paul's thought does not stop at the resurrection from the dead, which leads to the next logical step; following eternal life comes the judgment, the eternal judgment. Paul knew a day of eternal wrath had been decreed, a day in which the just judgment of God would be delivered upon all who have lived on the face of the earth. Only through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ could one hope to escape

the Day of Wrath. Paul realized that some people by their perversity had sealed themselves, signed themselves, for the wrath of God. *"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against the irreligious and perverse spirit of men who, in this perversity of theirs hinder the truth (Rm. 1:18)."*

Paul implies God finally abandons such people and leaves them to their perversity that appears limitless (See *Rm. 1:28-32*). Paul sees eternal death as their final end. To all men Paul writes:

*Do you suppose, then, that you will escape the judgment? Or do you presume on his kindness and forbearance? Did you not know that God's kindness is an invitation to you to repent? By your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up retribution for that day of wrath when the just judgment of God will be revealed, when he will repay every man for what he has done: eternal life to those who strive for glory, honor and immortality by patiently doing right; wrath and fury to those who selfishly disobey the truth and obey wickedness. Yes, affliction and anguish will come upon every man who has done evil, Jew first and then Greek. But there will be glory, honor, and peace for everyone who has done good, Jew first and then Greek. With God there is no favoritism.*

*Sinners who do not have the law will perish without reference to it; sinners bound by the law will be judged in accordance with it. For it is not those who hear the law who are just in the sight of God; it is those who keep it who will be declared just. When the Gentiles who do have the law keep it as by instinct...they show that the demands of the law are written in their hearts. Their conscience bears witness in their hearts together with that law, and their thoughts will accuse or defend them on the day when, in accordance with the gospel I preach, God will pass judgment on the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.*

*(Rm. 2:3-16)*

**The Book of Revelation confirms this teaching of Paul:**

*Let the wicked continue in their wicked ways, the depraved in their depravity! The virtuous must live on in their virtue and the holy ones in their holiness!*

*Remember, I am coming soon! I bring with me the reward that will be given to each man as his conduct deserves. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End! Happy are they who wash their robes so as to have free access to the tree of life and enter the city through its gates! Outside are the dogs and sorcerers, the fornicators and murderers, the idol-worshippers and all who love falsehood.*

*It is I, Jesus who have sent my angel to give you this testimony about the churches.*  
(Rev. 22:11-16)

**King Agrippa became interested in this prisoner Paul by the words of Festus:**

*Agrippa said to Festus, "I too should like to hear this man." "Tomorrow you shall hear him," replied Festus. So the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the audience chamber in the company of military officers and prominent men of the city. At Festus' command Paul was brought in. The governor began to speak: "King Agrippa and all you who are here present with us, look at this man! The whole Jewish community, both here and in Jerusalem, has appealed to me about him, clamoring that he should live no more. But I did not find that he had done anything deserving of death, so when he appealed to His Majesty the Emperor, I determined to send him on. The trouble is, I have nothing definite to write about him to our sovereign. That is why I have brought him before all of you, and in particular before you, King Agrippa, that from this investigation I may have something to set down in his regard. It seems to me a senseless procedure to send on a prisoner without indicating the charges against him."*

(Acts 25:22-27)



Once again Roman authority has declared Paul innocent of any crime against the government. Once more we are to see the problem is a religious one centered on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Luke had painted a final dramatic scene, filled with pomp and circumstance, "...*Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the audience chamber...*" Festus and Agrippa represent the power and the glory of this world. They possess what the kingdom of the world has to offer. What is the price they are paying for it? In contrast to them stands Paul, a prisoner in chains, stripped of all that the world deems as richness, a loss Paul deems as nothing. Paul stands there with the eye of the seer--with the vision of the prophet. He sees for certain, as certain as he is standing before these judges, that he and they and all mankind will one day stand before the judgment seat of God. On that day, the pomp and circumstance of this world along with its drabness and drudgery will have ceased. Only the eternally real will endure. Why does Paul continue to preach the Gospel at the cost of his freedom and life? Why does he continue to bear witness to people who neither respect him nor his message? The Gospel must be preached because "*it is the power of God leading everyone who believes in it to salvation, the Jew first, then the Greek (Rm. 1:16).*" The Gospel is the love of God reaching out to save all mankind. True brotherly love demands that the Gospel be preached. How truly Paul stands before this work, as did Jesus, as one of its greatest lovers:

*I put no value on my life if only I can finish my race and complete the service to which I have been assigned by the Lord Jesus, bearing witness to the gospel of God's grace...I take the blame for no man's conscience, for I have never shrunk from announcing to you God's design in its entirety.*

*(Acts 20:24, 26-27)*

## CHAPTER 22

### NUNC DIMITTIS

### INTRODUCTION

As the Gospel account written by Luke draws to a close, the Risen Jesus says, *"Thus it is written the Messiah must suffer and rise from the dead on the third day (Lk. 24:46)."* The Holy Scriptures have confirmed the death and resurrection of Jesus to be the Will of God. What had occurred in the life of Jesus of Nazareth is part of the Divine Plan. From the death and resurrection of Jesus flows the salvation of mankind. Jesus instructed Nicodemus:

*Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that all who believe may have eternal life in him. Yes, God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes not die but may have eternal life. God did not send the Son into to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.*

*(Jn. 3:14-17)*

The Risen Jesus reveals that through the death and resurrection of the Messiah salvation comes to mankind. The death of Jesus atoned for the sins of all men. From the Risen Lord now flows the power to sanctify all men. Now man can be saved, but no man is saved contrary to his own will. Man must freely cooperate in his own salvation. The initial co-operation is repentance. Men must come to know that the forgiveness of sin and newness of life can flow from their repentance. Jesus told His disciples: *"In his name, penance for the remission of sins is to be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Lk. 24:47)."*

The salvation of the world flows from the love of the Triune God and the cooperation of mankind. The Son of God founded His Church on earth as a means through which to save mankind. The members of the Church were not only to experience salvation, but they were also to become instruments through which God offered salvation to others. Luke begins the history of the Church with these words of the Risen Jesus to His apostles:

*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes down on you; then you are to be my witness in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, yes, even to the ends of the earth.*

*(Acts 1:8)*

With the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Church became a living corporate body--one equally and simultaneously divine and human. Since the soul of this organization is the Holy Spirit, the activities proceeding from the Church ought to exceed those of a mere human organization; just as the operations of the life of Jesus exceed those of a mere human being. The Scriptures behold the Church as the Mystical Body of the Risen Jesus. At Pentecost, a new Creation came into being. The Body of the Glorified Jesus at the right hand of the Father has been mystically extended to include the Church. The Church *is* the Body of Jesus Christ.

To have a proper concept of the Glorified Jesus in heaven today, our minds must cease beholding Jesus in glory as only that unique and individual Person who rose from the dead. We must extend our vision to behold the Glorified Jesus as the Mystical Jesus that is present simultaneously in heaven and on earth. The Church on earth is a part of that Mystical Jesus. There is such a unity between Jesus and members of the Church that it is impossible to separate them. In a sense the Church on earth is already in glory by its union with its Head, the Glorified Jesus Christ. In the same sense, Jesus Christ still lives, works, suffers, dies, and redeems on this earth through the members of the Church. In the eternal reality of things, Jesus truly is one with the Church. In eternity that truth will be verified when Jesus declares that what was done to the least member of the Church was done to Him. You cannot separate the Church from Jesus. The Lord Jesus continues to act, speak, and live today on this earth in His Church. The saving power of the Risen Jesus

**Christ continues to flow into this world through the Church, and the Church is the stream of humanity that unites in faith with Jesus, becoming His living Body.**

**Luke relates the history of the life of the Church through the lives of its members--particularly through the lives of Simon Peter and Paul of Tarsus. In the life of Simon Peter, Luke carries us through the foundation and early beginnings of the Church at Jerusalem, and the first ten years of its growth beyond. By presenting the life and activities of Paul of Tarsus, Luke, in a very incarnational way, depicts the next succeeding twenty years of Church history. In a unique way, Luke saw how the life of Paul embodied and symbolized the divine work of salvation, the divine work that both redeems and makes man an instrument of redemption. We behold the persecution of the Church by the Jewish leaders. When the Jews failed to destroy the Church through their own power, we see how they used devious means to manipulate the Romans into destroying it, by branding the Church as a heretical and illegal religion. Through it all the Church survived through Divine power, and succeeds in fulfilling its Divine mission.**

**Luke saw Paul as a great Christian prophet comparable to Jeremiah of the Old Testament. Both Jeremiah and Paul were chosen instruments to deliver God's word to the Jews and to the Nations. Of himself Jeremiah said:**

*The word of the Lord came to me thus: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you...To whomever I send you, you shall go; whatever I command you, you shall speak. Have no fear before them, because I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord...See, I place my words in your mouth."*

*(Jer. 1:5-9)*

**Paul wrote of himself:**

*But the time came when he who had set me apart before I was born and called me by his favor chose to reveal his Son to me, that I might spread among the Gentiles the good tidings concerning him.*

*(Gal. 1:15)*

**Jesus revealed to Ananias:**

*This man is the instrument I have chosen to bring my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.*

*(Acts 9:15)*

### **PAUL BEFORE KING AGRIPPA**

**Paul addresses himself to the last Jewish king when he appears before King Agrippa. Luke intends the speech to be the final defense of the Church before the Jews. The speech itself represents one of the best-written passages within Acts. Paul's personality permeates the speech but it is more the case of Christianity than the case of Paul:**

*Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to state your case." So Paul stretched out his hand and began his defense.*

*(Acts 26:1)*

**With his very first gesture of stretching out of his hand Paul seeks to reach his listeners--to personally involve them--particularly the king as he represented the Jewish people.**

*Many charges have been leveled against me by the Jews, King Agrippa. I count myself fortunate to be able to make my defense today in your presence, especially since you are expert in all the various Jewish customs and disputes. I beg you to listen to me patiently.*

*(Acts 26:2-3)*

**Paul immediately seeks to reach Agrippa personally before presenting his arguments to him. He wants to establish a working rapport between himself and the king by saying how pleased he is for the opportunity of presenting his case before a man so qualified to value and judge fairly what will be presented to him. Paul's words were a fair compliment to Agrippa's ability to arbitrate between Jewish disputes. Paul intends to demonstrate the natural-spiritual process of growth from being an ardent Jew to becoming a zealous Christian.**

He demonstrates how Judaism was the natural foundation for his present faith, a faith that does not contradict Judaism but compliments and perfects it.

*The way I have lived since my youth, and the life I have led among my own people from the beginning and later at Jerusalem, is well known to all Jews. They have been acquainted with me for a long time and can testify, if they wish, to my life lived as a Pharisee, the strictest sect of our religion.*

*(Acts 26:4-5)*

Paul maintains his previous life conformed to the Jewish religion according to the strictest interpretation of Jewish law and customs. As a Pharisee he adhered to the belief embraced by all devout Jews, a belief in the resurrection from the dead. Paul now maintains that it is this belief that has put his life on trial:

*But today I stand on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers. The twelve tribes of our people fervently worship God day and night in the hope that they will see that promise fulfilled. It is because of this hope, your Majesty, that I stand accused by the Jews.*

*(Acts 26:6-7)*

Paul strongly identifies himself with Judaism by his references "to our fathers" and "our people". He insisted pious Jews have lived their religious lives precisely because they hoped to share, because of the lives they lived, in the resurrection from the dead. If this has been the great hope of Israel and the motivating cause of its intense piety "then let me ask you" Paul says, "of all people how can the Jews find it hard to believe that God should raise the dead? (Acts 26:8)"

Paul proceeds to demonstrate his loyalty to Judaism. He acknowledges that in his ignorance he once zealously persecuted those who believed in Jesus:

*For my part, I once thought it my duty to oppose the name of Jesus the Nazorean in every way possible. That is just what I did in*

*Jerusalem. With the authority I received from the chief priests, I sent many of God's holy people to prison. When they were to be put to death I cast my vote against them. (This may be a reference to the death of Stephen.) Many a time in synagogue after synagogue, I compelled them by force to blaspheme. Indeed, so wild was my fury against them that I pursued them even to foreign cities. On one such occasion I was traveling towards Damascus armed with the authority and commission of the chief priests.*

*(Acts: 26:9-19a)*

Up to this point Paul has demonstrated that he not only adhered strictly to the Jewish religion but he actively placed himself under the chief priests, who were the recognized Jewish authorities, and he persecuted the disciples of Jesus by their authority and command. He was an obedient servant of the high priests, and they sent him as their “apostle” to Damascus to continue their persecution. Paul now describes how he went from being an apostle of the Jewish high priests to becoming an Apostle of Jesus of Nazareth. He likewise serves as one of the finest examples of the power of the Gospel to produce repentance within. Paul relates:

*On this journey, Your Majesty, I saw a light more brilliant than the sun shining in the sky at midday. It surrounded me and those who were traveling with me.*

*(Acts 26:13)*

Immediately Paul's description would invoke in the minds of his listeners, Jews and Greeks, that a divine epiphany is taking place. Only the Light of the Divine Presence would eclipse the brightness of the noonday sun by a greater light.

*All of us fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Hebrew, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goad.” I said to that, “Who are you, sir?” and the Lord answered: “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.”*

*(Acts 26:14-15)*

The very fact Paul mentions that the voice spoke to him in Hebrew keeps the vision with the Jewish context. This vision informs Paul that he has opposed the Lord and resisted the grace of God. The expression "*to kick against the goad*" was familiar in Greek as an expression for resisting the will of the gods. When Paul referred to the speaker as "*Lord*," he expressed his belief in the Divinity of Jesus who subsequently identified Himself. Paul indicates to King Agrippa, and to his listeners, that it was precisely at this point he passed from under the authority of the Jewish high priests to being under the authority of Jesus the Christ. Before that moment, he had given strict obedience to Jewish authorities.

Now Paul's religious provincialism ceases. He no longer speaks of the "*God of our fathers*" but simply "*God*", signifying the Divine Lord of all men, Jew and Gentile alike. At this moment he omits the mention of baptism, as this would only be a ceremony understood in the context of Judaism. With poetic license Paul attributed certain revelations to Jesus that he probably received and understood only over a period of time:

*Get up now and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to designate you as my servant (Paul from this moment would see himself as the slave of Jesus Christ) and as a witness to what you have seen of me and what you will see of me. I have delivered you from this people and from the nations, to open the eyes of those to whom I am sending you, to turn them from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God; that through their faith in me they may obtain the forgiveness of their sins and a portion among God's people.*

*(Acts 26:16-18)*

Herein lies Paul's authority for being an Apostle of Jesus Christ. He has witnessed the Risen Jesus with his own eyes and this Jesus has personally sent him to be an Apostle of the Gospel. Paul is what he is by the command of God, and not by the desire of men. Just as in the case of Jeremiah, he too is destined to meet opposition and strife, but the Lord promised deliverance in order that he complete his assigned divine commission. God has chosen Paul specifically for his work among the Gentiles. This work is the



conversion of the Gentiles, which is signified by the words *"to open the eyes of those to whom I am sending you..."*

The condition of unbelief is represented as a blindness, a mental darkness resulting from error and ignorance. This itself results in moral blindness. In his Letter to the Romans, Paul attributes the source of blindness to a disobedient heart or will that subsequently stimulates darkness in the mind, error and falsehood, which in its turn fosters evil actions and moral darkness. We are taught that the first work of conversion or repentance is *"to turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God."*

Jesus' words to Paul reveal there are two worlds, two spheres, in which people may dwell on this earth; one is of darkness and the other is of light. Just as darkness and light are the antithesis of each other, so are these two worlds. Perhaps it would be better to refer to them as two kingdoms. Paul teaches that Jesus reveals that all men will live in one kingdom or the other. They will either be under the authority of God or Satan; there is no neutral zone of existence.

The antithesis between the two kingdoms is absolute. The kingdom of darkness is under the personal rule of Satan who has his hierarchy of *"authorities and world rulers of this darkness (Eph. 6:12)."* Beyond the reign of God, the Scriptures confirm *"the whole world is under the evil one (1 Jn. 5:19)."* In the temptations of Jesus we read:

*Then the devil took him up higher and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant. He said to him, "I will give you all this power and the glory of these kingdoms; the power has been given to me and I give it to whomever I wish. Prostrate yourself in homage before me, and it shall all be yours."*

*(Lk. 4:5-8)*

The Kingdom of Light has the Son of God as its Lord. Who are those in the Kingdom of Light? The citizens of this kingdom are those consecrated to God through Jesus. They are the saints, the members of the Church. Jesus identifies them as those who have turned from darkness to light, and have

passed from the dominion of Satan to the dominion of God, *"that through their faith in me they may obtain the forgiveness of their sins and a portion among God's people."* Only those who have come through this true conversion process have *"a portion among God's people"*. These alone truly belong to the Israel of God.

Again the picture of true conversion is presented to us. It possesses both a human and divine side. From the side of man it means turning one's whole life to God and rejecting one's former life. The external actions of ones life become but a manifestation of the inner change of mind and will. By true conversion one is designated, as Paul, a servant of the Lord, a servant who obeys the commands of his Lord. We know from other texts that this conversion must have a visible expression in time, and in an outward act. The penitent must receive the sacrament of baptism through which one enters into the divine side of conversion, and *"obtains the forgiveness of sins and a portion among God's people."* Paul expresses these same sentiments to the Colossians:

*"...giving thanks to the Father for having made you worthy to share the lot of the saints in light. He rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of his beloved Son. Through him we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins."*

*(Col. 1:12-14)*

We see from the words of Jesus, and from Paul's example, that faith becomes the instrumental cause of conversion. Once Paul saw Jesus to be Lord, he turned to Jesus and submitted his entire life to Him. Jesus' own words implied that forgiveness of sins and a portion among God's people flows from faith in Him. The faith of conversion has been described as a secret surrender of the will, which transports the life of the person from the dominion of Satan into the kingdom of light and grace.

Paul emphasizes to King Agrippa that his missionary activities have all been out of obedience to the Divine command received:

*I could not disobey that heavenly vision. I preached a message of reform and of conversion to God, first to the people of Damascus,*

*(Paul relates the promptness of his obedience to the vision) then to the people of Jerusalem and all the country of Judea; yes, even to the Gentiles. I urged them to act in conformity with their changed heart.*

*(Acts 26:19-20)*

Here Paul emphasizes that true conversion of heart results in true change in one's external acts. The life one lives now ought to testify to the grace and power received from the Holy Spirit. The baptized ought to "walk in the Spirit," demonstrate newness of life that produces fruits of the Spirit. In Paul's words, the new life of a Christian expresses self in "doing works worthy of repentance." These works are not the cause of new life, but the fruits of it. *"By their fruits you will know them!"* Paul recalls the results of his obedience to God. Because he had obeyed God, as he must, the Jews sought to murder him. *"That is why the Jews seized me in the temple court and tried to murder me (Acts 26:21)."* Just as God delivered Jeremiah, so Paul has been divinely delivered out of their hands: *"But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here to testify to great and small alike (Acts 26:22)."* *"With God there is no favoritism (Rm. 2:11)."*

From this point Paul, turns to the Scriptures to illustrate how they had foretold all these things. This would be the witness of the Spirit within Israel itself to the truth of the gospel. Paul probably quoted from numerous sections of the Old Testament. He knew his whole case rested upon the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, from which flowed the forgiveness of sins and newness of life. The resurrection was the foundation for faith in Jesus. Paul needed to demonstrate that his faith in Jesus was not inconsistent with belief in Judaism, but a fulfillment of it. Even though it was inconceivable to the Jews that the Messiah would suffer, nevertheless the Scriptures confirmed precisely this truth. The Jews chose to close their minds to such sections of the Scriptures as the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. If the hope of Israel is the resurrection from the dead, then death must come as the necessary prelude to resurrection to life. The Messiah identified with his people. As all people must die, the Messiah also must die; but he has been raised to life. His resurrection becomes a guarantee and pledge to all who believe in Him, that they too will rise from the dead:

*I am the resurrection and the life: whoever believes in me, though he should die, will come to life; and whoever is alive and believes in me will never die.*

*(Jn. 11:25-26)*

Luke summarized these arguments of Paul in these words:

*Nothing that I say differs from what the prophets and Moses foretold: namely, that the Messiah must suffer, and that, as the first to rise from the dead, he will proclaim light to our people and to the Gentiles.*

*(Acts 26:22b-23)*

The rabbinical method of arguing from the Scriptures was quite in keeping with the Semitic mentality--very intricate and allegorical--a method most foreign to the practical Roman mind. Paul was trained in this rabbinical method, and using this method he sought to prove to King Agrippa the case of the resurrection of the Messiah from Scripture. No doubt the king could follow Paul's arguments, but Paul had long since lost Festus. All that Semitic logic made Festus' head swim; he was reaching the breaking point of his tolerance:

*As Paul went on defending himself, Festus interrupted with a shout, "Paul, you are mad! And your great learning is driving me mad!"*

*(Acts 26:24)*

At that moment Paul himself relaxed the intensity of his own speech and calmly addressed Festus:

*"No, Your Excellency," answered Paul, "I am not mad. The message I proclaim is the sober truth. The king here is well acquainted with these matters. Before him I can speak freely. I am convinced that none of this escapes him; after all, it did not take place in a dark corner! Do you believe the prophets, King Agrippa? I am sure you do."*

*(Acts 26:25-27)*

Paul's statement to Agrippa implies that the prophets support the belief the Messiah would suffer and rise. Perhaps it was his intention to proceed from this point and prove how the prophets supported this belief. But Agrippa interrupted with "*A little more, Paul, and you will make a Christian out of me!*" With this, Agrippa intends to end the hearing. It was a very diplomatic response to Paul's presentation. Paul has the last word:

*Paul replied, "I would pray to God that not only you but all who listen to me today might become what I am except without these chains!"*  
(Acts 26:29)

As usual Paul had been interrupted before completing his defense but all the necessary things had been said.

Luke now tells us the decision of the court.

*Then the king rose, and with him the governor and Bernice and the rest of the company. After they had left the chamber, they talked matters over among themselves and admitted, "This man is doing nothing that deserves death or imprisonment." Agrippa further remarked to Festus, "He could have been set at liberty if he had not appealed to the emperor!"*

(Acts 26:30-32)

What Agrippa said would have carried little weight with the Jews. However, Luke did not write to convince the Jews, but the Romans. If he had been preparing a brief for the defense of Paul before the Roman emperor, the attitude expressed by Agrippa and his sister, Bernice was not without importance. Agrippa was influential with Nero, and the Imperial Court would consider the opinion of Agrippa as that of a highly respected authority on Jewish matters. Bernice herself was not without influence at court.

## PAUL IN ROME

When the trial ended Festus sent Paul to Rome. Luke tells us:

*When it was decided that we were to sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius from the cohort known as Augusta...With us was a Macedonian Aristarchus of Thessalonica.*

*(Acts 27: 1,2b)*

Sailing upon the sea did not hold the charms for the ancients that it does for many today. They beheld the sea with awe and dread. In their ancient writings the sea became a symbol for rage, restlessness, and confusion. The sea was the abyss, a place of evil that swallowed up the lives of men. Only the power of God could be pitted against the sea and overcome it. In the Scriptures, the Red Sea became the symbol of death through which men must pass in order to enter the Promised Land. How different was the feeling of the ancients about the sea from our feelings today, which can be seen in the Book of Revelation where the ideal earth is the place where "*there shall be no more sea.*" Paul was no stranger to the perils of the sea. He previously wrote to the Corinthians that he had been "*shipwrecked three times; I passed a day and a night on the sea (2 Cor. 11:25).*"

We know the sailing season ended completely by November. The closer to that time, the more hazardous the sailing conditions, and the greater the risk one took by going to sea. Paul's party departed Palestine in September or perhaps in the later part of August. Luke makes mention of the "*fast*"--this would have referred to the Jewish feast of the Atonement, falling in September or October. (In 59 A.D., the feast fell on the 5th of October). By the feast of the Atonement, the party had reached the island of Crete. Sailing between September 15 and November 11 was considered very dangerous.

Paul has been placed under the custody of the centurion Julius. Once again a Roman centurion appears in a very favorable light in the New Testament. Julius not only befriends Paul, but also becomes his admirer. Luke and Aristarchus travel as Paul's companions. After a day at sea they landed at

Sidon, and Julius *“permitted Paul to visit some friends who cared for his needs.”* The Greek word for “friend” implies these would have been personal friends or relatives. There is a suggestion that Paul may have been ill at the time. From Sidon they sailed between the mainland and Cyprus, then sailing directly across the open sea, they landed at Myra in the Province of Lycia. It had been rather smooth sailing from Palestine to Myra. At Myra, Julius located a grain ship from Alexandria in Egypt sailing for Italy. Egypt had become the breadbasket of Rome. The ships supplying grain were larger than most sailing vessels- some as long as 150 feet. Julius and his party brought the ship’s company to 276 souls in all. After leaving Myra, the ship met unfavorable winds and progress was slow. They had to sail again into the open sea and finally reached the port of Fair Haven on the southeast coast of the Island of Crete. At Fair Haven Paul received a strong premonition of danger. Luke writes:

*Much time had now gone by. The autumn fast was over, and with the lateness of the year sailing had become hazardous. It was then that Paul uttered this warning: "Men, I can see that this voyage is bound to meet with disaster and heavy loss, not only to ship and cargo, but to our own lives as well." However, the centurion preferred listening to the pilot and the ship-owner than to listening to Paul. Since the harbor was not fit to pass the winter in, the majority preferred to put out to sea in the hope of making Phoenix and spending the winter there.*

*(Acts 27:9-11)*

Here we have a situation of reason versus inspiration. When this is the case, unless the soul is sensitively spiritually attuned, reason usually wins out. The port of Port of Phoenix was only up the coast of Crete, and it offered a good place in which to winter; Fair Haven was an undesirable place in which to winter. Therefore:

*When a gentle south wind began to blow, they thought they had what they were looking for, so they weighed anchor and proceeded, hugging the coast of Crete. (So far so good for reason, but inspiration turns out to be the winner) It was not long before a*

*hurricane struck, the kind called a "northeaster." Since the ship was caught up in it and could not head into the wind, we yielded and ran before it. We passed under the lee of a small island named Cauda and only with difficulty were we able to gain control of the ship's boat. They hoisted it aboard and then made use of cables to brace the ship itself. (Passing the island of Cauda they knew they were being blown out to sea towards dangerous reefs along the African coast. Luke tells us): We were being pounded by the storm so violently that the next day some of the cargo was thrown over the side. On the third day they deliberately threw even the ship's gear overboard. For many days neither the sun nor the stars were to be seen, so savagely did the storm rage. Toward the end, we abandoned any hope of survival.*

*(Acts 27:14-20)*

The storm raged on for fourteen days. Fourteen days without sun or stars. They had no way by which to chart their course or to know where they were. The ship sailed on, at the mercy of relentless howling winds that threatened to break it asunder by the power of its waves, or dash it to death on some rocky reef. No one could eat, and little by little the ship's company lost the will to live; hope of survival was abandoned. Paul remembered that once God had said to him:

*Keep up your courage! Just as you have given testimony to me here in Jerusalem, so must you do in Rome.*

*(Acts 20:11)*

Are such promises absolute in this life, or are they relative? That depends upon the willing and prudent cooperation of men. Paul had received a warning not to proceed with this journey, that it would entail loss of ship and death of personnel. The warning had not been heeded. Paul, too, began to feel and share this despair. Even if he should survive, what of the others, Luke, Aristarchus, Julius, or the many others on ship he now called by name? Paul prayed to God for deliverance. His prayer was heard. Luke relates:

*All hands had gone without food for a long time when Paul stood up*



*among them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice and not set sail from Crete. Then you would not have incurred this disastrous loss. I urge you to keep up your courage. None among you will be lost--only the ship. Last night a messenger of the God whose man I am and whom I serve, stood by me. "Do not be afraid, Paul," he said. "You are destined to appear before the emperor. Therefore, as a favor to you, God has granted safety to all who are sailing with you." So keep up your courage, men. I trust in God that it will work out just as I have been told, though we still have to face shipwreck on some island.* (Acts 27:21-26)

The Scriptures tell us that the prayer of a just man avails much. The prayer of Paul for his shipmates has saved their lives. Apparently, Paul received a vision in which he saw the ship being wrecked but the ship's company was saved.

On the fourteenth night of the storm they approached the island of Malta. The sailors heard the waves and suspected land was close. They began to take soundings, twenty and then, fifteen fathoms. They dropped all their anchors to hold the ship and longingly waited for the dawn. The sailors decided to take the small boat and abandon the ship. They lowered it under the pretext of checking the anchor. They failed to deceive Paul.

*Paul alerted the centurion and the soldiers to this: "If these men do not stay with the ship, you have no chance to survive." At this, the soldiers cut the ropes and let the boat drift.*

(Acts 27:31-32)

The sailors preferred to trust in their ability rather than in the vision of Paul. They selfishly sought to save their own lives. But they would be needed the next day to steer the ship into the beach; without them the party would be lost. If the others are to be saved the sailors must remain with the ship.

The people were to be saved by Divine Providence. Yet we see this miracle is not to be worked through extraordinary means, but through normal prudent

means, contrary to what we often expect. The hand of God works this miracle, but it leaves it to faith to behold His Hand there at work. Those without faith attribute such things to "chance". How many countless miracles has God worked in the lives of His children, miracles that have been hidden by circumstances that we have named "good luck"?

Paul knew that human strength would be one of the ordinary means through which God would work His saving miracle.

*At dawn Paul urged all on board to take some food; "For fourteen days you have been in constant suspense; you have gone hungry--eaten nothing. Now I urge you to take some food, which will give you strength to survive. Not one of you shall lose a hair of his head." When he had said this he took some break, gave thanks to God before all of them, broke it, and began to eat. This gave them new courage, and they too had something to eat. In all, there were two hundred and seventy-six of us on board. When they had had enough to eat, they lightened the ship further by throwing the wheat overboard.*

*(Acts 27:33-38)*

Usually, when the breaking of the bread is mentioned in the Acts it refers to the Eucharistic celebration. It would have been unlikely that Paul had celebrated the Eucharist before such a group of people. Nevertheless, the Eucharist is probably being symbolized in the incident.

*With the coming of daylight, they did not recognize the land they saw. They could make out a bay with a sandy beach, however, so they planned to run the ship aground on it if possible...and made for the beach; but the ship hit a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and could not be budged, while the stern was shattered by the pounding of the sea.*

*(Acts 27:39-41)*

The first thought of the soldiers was to kill the prisoners because they feared some would swim away and escape. Julius, desiring to save Paul opposed this plan. Instead he ordered the soldiers to reach land first and then the

prisoners were sent safely onto shore. Luke adds: *"In this way, all came safely ashore."*

They had landed on the island of Malta. The storm had driven them 480 miles, in a straight course towards Italy. Malta is located south of Sicilia. The people of Malta, in the opinion of Luke, showed the party extraordinary kindness. When Paul went to add wood to the fire enkindled because of the cold and rain, a poisonous snake bit him on the hand. The people concluded he must have been a murderer whom Justice will not let live even though he escaped the sea. When he had no evil effects from the bite they reversed their opinion; *"he was a god (Acts 28:6b)."* They spent the winter at Malta. They were well received by Publius, the chief of the island. Paul cured the ill father of Publius, and later he also cured many of the sick on the island. After three months when it came time to depart, Luke writes that the people on the island *"...paid us much honor, and when we eventually set sail they brought us provisions for our needs (Acts 28:10)."* From Malta they sailed on another Alexandrian ship that had wintered at the island. With little trouble they arrived at Puteoli, just north of Naples. Rome lay about 140 miles north. Christianity had already been established in Puteoli. Luke wrote: *"Here we found some of the brothers, who urged us to stay on with them for a week (See Acts 28:1-14)."*

Word had reached Rome that Paul had landed in Italy. It was customary that when great generals or heroes approached Rome, the citizens often went out along the Appian Way to meet them and give them a triumphant entrance into Rome. When Paul and his party reached the Forum of Appius about forty miles from Rome, a group of Roman Christians were waiting there to greet Paul. This was indeed a great surprise, and seemingly a needed one for Paul's spirit: *"When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took fresh courage (Acts 28:15b)."* Ten miles further down the Appian Way at the Three Taverns, another group of Roman Christians awaited Paul. The Church of Rome greeted Paul as a Christian hero.

**Luke writes:**

*Upon our entry into Rome, Paul was allowed to take a lodging of his own, although a soldier was assigned to guard over him. Three days later Paul invited the prominent men of the Jewish community to visit him.*

*(Acts 28:16-17a)*

**He explained to them why he had been forced to make an appeal to the emperor. He had appealed to save his own life.**

*"I had no cause to make accusations against my own people. This is the reason, then, why I have asked to see you and speak with you. I wear these chains solely because I share the hope of Israel."*

*They replied: "We have had no letters from Judea about you, nor have any of the brothers arrived with a report or rumor to your discredit. For our part, we are anxious to hear you present your views. We know very well that this sect is denounced everywhere."*

*(Acts 28:19a-22)*

**They arranged a day for a meeting. People arrived in great numbers. From morning to evening he laid the case before them; he sought to convince them about Jesus. Some believed but apparently, as always, most did not. When they prepared to leave, Paul added one final word:**

*The Holy Spirit stated it well when he said to your fathers through the prophet Isaiah: "Go to this people and say: 'You may listen carefully; you may look intently yet you will never see. The heart of this people has grown sluggish. They have scarcely used their ears to listen; their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their minds, and repent: and I should have to heal them.'"*

*Now you must realize that this salvation of God has been transmitted to the Gentiles- who will heed it!*

*(Acts 28:25c-29)*

It has been a constant concern to Paul how the Jews could reject the Gospel in the light of the resurrection of Jesus and the testimony of the Scriptures. In Isaiah (Is. 6:9-10), Paul finds the answer; God has willed it so, in order for a greater good to come to pass. From this moment Paul separates himself from the unbelieving Jews. For the first time he has said "*your father*" not "*our father*". Faith has finalized the split between the Christians and the Jews. Faith is the deciding factor. Faith in Jesus alone determines the true Israelite.

In the beginning of Acts the apostles asked: "*Lord, are you going to restore the rule to Israel now? (Acts 1:6)*" The end of Acts gives the answer to the apostles' question: Israel has rejected the kingdom and it has been given to the Gentiles. "*This salvation of God has been transmitted to the Gentiles--who will heed it!*"

Luke concludes Acts:

*For two full years Paul stayed on in his rented lodgings, welcoming all who came to him. With full assurance, and without any hindrance whatever, he preached the reign of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*(Acts 28:30)*

Luke's detailed account of Paul's journey to Rome reflects the very life of the Church in this world. Luke sees the Church symbolized in Paul. The Church indeed exists in this world, but it is not of this world. The world cannot receive the Church. In the eyes of the world, the Church appears either as a madness to be rejected or as a mystery escaping its embrace. Of itself the Church is beset with a human frailty that forces its members to depend upon the mutual support of each other. Yet, in this world it offers counsel and a vision to its fellow travelers that go beyond the wisdom of the world. The Church offers wisdom capable of saving people from danger and death. Within this world, its own life lies constantly in danger, but the Lord preserves it. When the darkness and terror of certain death comes upon man, and the world can offer no hope, the vision of the Church sees beyond the storm, the shipwreck, even beyond physical death. She offers a guarantee of salvation to those who will trust her vision and remain faithful to her. To

those that believe, she offers nourishment of soul needed to sustain the soul through all that lies ahead, and to aid its safe arrival upon the saving shore. The Church offers the Bread of Heaven, the Eucharist, with a promise "*not a hair of your head shall perish! (Acts 27:34b)*" The winter will come and the grave will have its day, but the days of the grave are limited, be they three days, three months, or three thousand years. "*With the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day!*" But the spring will surely come with a newness of life when all that the Lord promised will come to be. The life and journey of Paul teaches all this in a prophetic way to the Church.

In the beginning of Acts, the Church received a commission:

*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes down on you: then you are to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, yes, even to the ends of the world.*

*(Acts 1:8)*

Rome was the center of the world. Streams of humanity poured into Rome from the four corners of the earth, and flowed back out of Rome to the ends of the known world. For Luke, Paul's coming to Rome symbolized the arrival of the Church in Rome, and prophetically and symbolically fulfilled the words of Jesus. The powers of nature, of men, and of Hell had withstood the spread of the Church and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, all in vain! Acts ends in the triumph of the Gospel. In all its catholicity and power, Paul proclaims the Gospel in Rome:

*Welcoming all who came to him. With full assurance, and without any hindrance whatever, he preached the reign of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*(Acts 28:31)*

Whatever the future holds for the Church, one thing remains certain, nothing will stop the Gospel!

**And what of Paul? The words once prayed by Simon best express the end of Paul's own life:**

*Now, Master, you can dismiss your servant in peace; you have fulfilled your word. For my eyes have witnessed your saving deed displayed for all the peoples to see: A revealing light to the Gentiles, the glory of your people Israel.*

*(Lk. 2:29-32)*

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