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TRANSLATOR**

“DAYS OF GLAD TIDINGS” vol. III

PENTECOST

(With Ascension Day)

Dr. Abraham Kuyper

Amsterdam, 1888 - J.A. Wormser
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Amsterdam, J.A. Wormser, 1888

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Translator's Notes:

This book came to my attention when in 2004 I translated an interview that Herman Dooyeweerd gave for the IKOR (Dutch Christian Broadcast Corporation) in 1973.

In that interview he recalled that in 1922 he glanced at a book of meditations that Abraham Kuyper had written, just to see what he had to say, and found himself so engrossed in the text that he read for four hours before he realized how much time he had spent with the book. He said that the discovery of this book was a turning point in his life, because in it Kuyper deals with the centrality of the human heart which is “that central point of your existence where God works in you. At this focal point in your being life is still undifferentiated”, and “I was so moved by what Kuyper had to say in these meditations that I realized that this was a completely different Kuyper from the one I knew from his theological works, ...I can say that this discovery was a turning point in my life”, according to Dooyeweerd.

I soon learned that this booklet had never been translated into English, and I decided to take on the task at that time.

Kuyper's book is the third volume of a series on *Dagen van Goede Boodschap*. After Christmas and Easter, this volume deals with Pentecost and has a brief introduction about Ascension Day.

Kuyper's style is very conversational and directed at the relatively uneducated Christians he addressed in the popular Christian Press in his time. They were written as Meditations.

He is convinced that Pentecost has lost much of its meaning among the people in the church and he wishes to correct that by writing this little book. The chapters are short and to the point, calling his readers to repentance by embracing the Holy Spirit as God, who came to live among us and in us.

Kuyper assumed that his readers knew their Bible and seldom supplied texts that he quoted, nor provided textual references when he alluded to a Scripture passage. I have used () to indicate the texts or comments that he included and [] for the texts and comments that

I have supplied. He also frequently quoted a line or stanza from the Dutch Psalter, which he again assumed everyone knew.

I have used the NIV throughout except where noted.

My friend Dr. Wendy Helleman has done a major review of the initial translation which immeasurably improved the text. My wife Martiny read the text and offered numerous suggestions for increased clarity and my daughter Kathy Russell proof read the final document, and offered suggestions for improving the text for the modern reader. I am indebted to all three for their tireless work to make this a better translation. I could not have done it without them.

Jack Van Meggelen,
Toronto, Ontario April 2008.

FOREWORD

On Pentecost the church of God makes its entry in history as the Universal or Catholic Church into the world.

Once before the church also had a 'Universal' or 'Catholic' character. In Paradise. In the days of Noah. In the days when Terah travelled in the land of Ur of the Chaldeans.

However, since the call of Abraham, this church had become exclusive and confined inside the national boundaries of Israel. From that time on she was no longer Universal or Catholic, but rather the church of a particular people in the narrowest sense of the word, and she remained that way until Pentecost. On that day she shed the confinement to one nation or people and became as of old, the universal church.

All this followed from the Ascension.

The Head of the church no longer ruled just from Jerusalem on mount Zion, but from the Jerusalem which is above, from there he rules his church for all 'people' and nations on the earth.

The holy apostle Paul comes close to serenading the covert fact in his moving letters to the churches in Ephesus and Rome.

Ascension and Pentecost belong together inseparably.

Jesus ascended into Heaven so that the Holy Spirit could be poured out on all.

For that reason this third volume offers meditations about both salvation events.

They will first lead you up to the heavenly Jerusalem, into the Tabernacle made by God and not human hands. From that tabernacle they will lead you back down to the church on earth, this time *with* the Comforter - in the company of the Holy Spirit.

KUYPER

Amsterdam, May 1st, 1888.

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I. ASCENSION

Lift Up, Ye Ancient Doors

Lift up your heads, O you gates;
lift them up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.
Who is he, this King of glory?
The LORD Almighty—
he is the King of glory.
Psalm 24: 9, 10.

David, who wrote this Psalm, desired with heart and soul that he himself would build a temple for the Ark of the Lord. But the prophet came and said, 'Jahweh does not want you to do that.

Not you, but your son Solomon will build the temple'. Once David was persuaded of this, he did not complain. Rather than challenge the edict, he accepted it, and rejoiced in what would be accomplished not by him, but by his son Solomon.

Oh, what a glorious day it would be when the ark of the Lord would be carried into the completed temple. It seemed to David as if the dawn of that day had already broken. He saw all the details as if they were happening right before his eyes. Those beautiful parapets; those majestic walls; and finally the procession of the ark of the Lord, the abode of his grandeur, his majestic presence among his people! It seemed to David, that he could see beyond the ark and temple as if these were only a shadow and symbol of the glory of the coming King for whom the patriarchs already prayed.

Now he envisions the ark of the Lord ascending the holy hill of Zion until it is at the portal in the fortress wall. In that wall are gates, but the doors are too low and too humble for Him for whose entry into glory the accent of the ark is but a symbol. This is why David sings a new song and in the Spirit he shouts, "Ye Gates, rise up from your

humble state, expand, enlarge your entrance way. You, ancient doors expand and open for a royal entrance. For your King of Glory is coming to you, the Lord of all the hosts of heaven. He is the encouragement and delight of my soul!"

It is clear that this Psalm points right at the inadequacy of the doors in the wall of Zion's fortress as David knew it. Jerusalem lies below and the temple is above. Between them is a solid wall with a mighty gate and its ancient doors. While anticipating the arrival of the Ark of the Lord he breaks out in jubilant praise, singing,

"Lift up your heads, ye gates,
And be raised up, ye eternal doors
for the King of Glory to enter!

Who is the King of Glory?
The Lord strong and mighty,
The Lord, mighty in battle."

And again,

"Lift up your heads, ye ancient gates,
Yes, be lifted up, ye eternal doors!
For the King of Glory must go in!

Who is this King of Glory?
The Lord of hosts,
he is the King of glory"

Still this is not yet the real event, because Zion itself was not the final reality.

Jerusalem, the temple, the ark in the temple, and even the wall around Zion separating Jerusalem from the Temple were all no more than signs of what was to come. They were all a mere visual aid;

they provided an image of the real thing, pointing and directing Israel towards that which would always remain, the real and lasting eternal things.

These things are hidden from the wise, but not from the church of God, and especially not from his beloved and chosen ones.

That's why throughout the ages the church of God, with undoubted faith and certainty, has sung the songs of David about the ark of the Lord as a symbol and foreshadowing of Jesus' ascension into heaven.

Jerusalem in David's vision thirsted for the living God, but the Lord lived on Zion. That wall and those ancient doors remained to separate them from God. He saw the Temple and knew of the ark of the covenant within, as a constant reminder of the presence of the Lord in their midst. But those walls were heavy, and the gates of those ancient doors were narrow.

David breaks through those limitations by singing, "Arise, oh my soul, and wake up you slumbering city of Jerusalem! There is a new beginning! A new promise of salvation! He comes, the King of Glory. Already the walls are disappearing and those restrictive doors are lifted up, so that the Ruler of the heavenly hosts can enter in; and all you who long for the coming of the Lord, shout with joy and sing a song of victory".

What do 'those ancient doors' really represent?

They represent everything that separates Jerusalem from the ark of the Lord. And so they also represent everything that creates a barrier between the contrite hearts of the repentant sinners and the holiness of our glorious God.

Normally a door invites you to enter. However, this door is locked, secured with bolts and padlocks. This door keeps you out. The ancient door entices you to enter, yet with all your knocking and

banging, the door remains closed. It does not budge! You finally get the message, that these are ancient doors and they will remain closed to you eternally.

But then comes the Messiah. God reaches out in mercy to sinners and sends a Saviour.

Will those ancient doors also keep him out? Definitely not!

Notice how the Holy Spirit through David prophesied that those ancient doors will drop their bolts and padlocks. They will open wide and be raised up so high that he, the King of Glory, can enter. But note there is still another *door*.

First we encounter the 'ancient door' of our sinful nature, our flesh, which holds us in its grip, and will not let us go. But Christ breaks in through that door and appears to us *in the Flesh*. He has come so close to us, and has become just like a brother.

However, that still does not bring us there.

Indeed the Word has become flesh, and the Messiah *is* with us. But in coming to us we find him on our side of the door, in the place of affliction, and excluded from Zion, banned from the glory of heaven. The wall and the ancient doors are still closed before us.

For this reason, we must go forward in the flesh. We must go up to the mountain. From the lowly earth to the heights of heaven; to the place of God's glory. Though weak on earth, in heaven the Messiah will truly become the mighty King, great in majesty, and fully able to save and rescue.

That's why we celebrate Ascension Day.

Up to *Heaven*! In that abode the weak become strong. There is heavenly power. And that power is exercised. That is exactly where *our flesh* has gone. Our Saviour in our flesh, that very same flesh and blood that hung in shame on the tree of Golgotha.

Notice now how the ancient doors have been raised to their full height!

And the King of Glory enters in.

He is your King, dear people of God, at whose disposal are all the

treasures of heaven to give you salvation, to justify, and to redeem you completely.

He has gone through the ancient doors, into a temple greater than that of Solomon, one not made with human hands. Now your King lets his peace and blessings flow freely; his power reaches far and wide; and Satan slinks off, because the godless are being justified.

And even now the end of the story has not yet come.

There is still another *ancient* door. It is the ancient door of your heart, locked and bolted by Satan.

How often have you banged on that ancient door of your sinful heart in the hope of being freed from the fear and terror inside? You banged on that door hoping for freedom. But nothing came of it.

Nothing you do can free you from the anxiety of your soul.

No one heard you.

Nothing else could open the ancient door of your sinful heart, until....

Until he came, the King of Glory. For when he sent his heralds from before his throne to bang on the ancient door of your heart with the hammer of his Word, you learned that “where the word of the King is, there is irresistible power”. For they broke the lock and knocked its bolts right off and the ancient doors were raised up and the King of Glory entered. The Lord, mighty in deed. Hallelujah!

You Have Ascended on High

When you ascended on high,
you led captives in your train;
you received gifts from men,
even from the rebellious—
that you, O LORD God, might dwell there.
Psalms 68:18¹

Doubt is nowhere more pernicious than when it undermines the Lord’s bodily ascension into heaven. As soon as the precious comfort of our Lord’s Ascension is removed from the soul’s viewpoint, and the ascension is doubted, skepticism, like a worm, also eats its way through all the other truths of our faith.

For God’s children this should be a wake-up call to work at focussing our faith on the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. We should make the full reality of the glorious ascension of our Lord our very own, and not be content to pay only lip-service to it, but completely engross ourselves into the comfort that is poured out liberally from heaven exactly because Jesus ascended there. To be sure, the ascension of Jesus presents an almost insurmountable irritation to our earthly common sense.

With a show of unbelieving wisdom we ask how it is possible, that Jesus should be lifted up bodily, not just a few feet, but up and beyond the highest clouds? How is it possible that Jesus actually reached the stratosphere with his body? There is no air to breathe

¹[“that you, O LORD God, might dwell there”, in Dutch is, “om uit te deelen onder de mensen” - to distribute among the people/nations. (Statenvertaling Ps. 68:19) I could find no English translation that reflects this thought. - JVM]

and no warmth to keep him from freezing. He must have died there from exposure. And more keen intellects will ask how Jesus could go beyond the stars when even a ray of light takes thousands of years to reach us? So how could he arrive in heaven so soon when in less than ten days, he sent his Spirit on Pentecost? And thus our scepticism grows. What, after all, do the heavens really mean for our rational minds? How can an earthly body exist in heaven? How could an earthly body traverse all the heavens, and how might there be found in the highest heaven a right hand of God so that Jesus could take his place there?

To be sure, none of that is possible according to our human understanding. It is all the height of folly; and those who insist on these doubts, will find that, indeed, for them Jesus could not have gone to heaven. But they will also have to realize that if they rely only on human insight nothing at all remains after their death. Their bodies will be deposited into a hole in the ground and there simply decompose to dust.

However, if we have faith and we confess, and rejoice like a child of God, we also know that we are not constrained by our earthly understanding, but that God has broken down that wall. A glorious light now shines through that broken wall and by that light we can see all these matters on earth differently. We will be able to see things in the heavens above that are unknown to us now. We will get to see that our strength does not contain the sum of all power, but rather our strength is only an insignificant small part of it. High above our strength and all the power of nature the glorious power of God shines. The tremendous majesty of God breaks into this earthly life with a sovereign absolute determination to make use of our flesh, of the air, the mountains and the clouds, the stars and

firmament, heat and cold, and all distances in space, indeed, all that is created. Not only that, it also compels all things to obey his divine ordinances.

So, when the Son of God came to earth and had taken on our flesh, the Lord God willed that, though his son did not remain on earth, he would not put off that flesh, but arrive in heaven with the very flesh he assumed here. Now from heaven he can still comfort and care for God's church on earth - as there can be no space, distance, firmament or starry sky, nor any law of gravity that can in any way resist his almighty will. He works his plan for all his creatures exactly as he has determined.

That's why a child of God must not calculate the distance or speed necessary for Christ's ascension. When it is God's pleasure to use one of his creatures in an extraordinary way, for an extraordinary purpose, how can we impose limits on such events? All our 'facts' become relative; our telescopes and scales and measuring tapes become useless in our hands; the only way we can grasp what has happened is through faith penetrating our being.

When you kneel in prayer, it takes less than a heartbeat for the vision of faith to arrive at the destination of heaven where Jesus is. You will see him as the Lamb that was slain, and adore him with an all encompassing love.

Then we no longer take offence and our sinful thinking has no arguments left. It has been silenced by faith, and faith itself has begun to speak. That faith has made Jesus' ascension such a certainty that you can truly see him in all his majesty and can also point him out to others. Now you will also see how for more than eighteen hundred years, day in and day out he has been encouraging, comforting and blessing his own from heaven.

This is the miracle. Even when others see nothing at all poured out from heaven, the eye of faith observes the manna for the soul raining down from on high, scattered abroad by Jesus for his whole church. Just as Jesus once saw Satan fall from heaven like a bolt of lightning, while others saw nothing, so also those who have been quickened by the Spirit see a constant rain of grace falling down from the clouds of heaven upon parched souls.

The person of faith no longer needs to ask whether Jesus has ascended into heaven. Every morning and every night he experiences that Jesus is in heaven and receives a blessing from the Lord.

Of course there are moments when he does not see it, but those are the evil times when the cataract of sin covers the eye of faith. But just as soon as that cataract is removed, Jesus returns in his vision; Jesus' angels once more surround him, and his salvation comes down like rain.

Do I need proof that the sun shines on the earth each day, when I stand in its light and feel its warmth? So what more proof do I need for Jesus' ascension, when I experience the warmth of his love in my heart, and discern that it comes from him?

Our view of Jesus' ascension has been clouded by the distance of our souls from him, who is our Immanuel. It has happened because we were in the wrong, and lived as if Immanuel did not exist, or we tried to call on God in our own power.

But if you know that you are grafted into the body, as a living member, through the mysterious amazing bond with his Spirit, then all distance falls away. All your prayers reach him instantly and his blessings descend as gifts for your soul.

Then a ladder like Jacobs is erected [see Gen 28:10] and on that ladder our soul speeds up to meet him even as messengers of love come to meet us from above.

Everything becomes energized, glowing with heavenly light, and charged with divine life.

The penetrating eye of faith sees earth and heaven as one because of Jesus' ascension.

Certainly there will be times when the light of your eye of faith fades; when sin and shame, guilt and unrighteousness and all manner of evil idolatry, and all kinds of imagination, arrogance and pride will hinder your prayers. Yet even in the deepest night of your gloom you can still listen to the prayer of Jesus above as he pleads on your behalf at the throne of grace, pleading first of all, that the very power to pray again will be returned to you.

Should that prayer for you ever stop even for a moment, there would be no salvation for you at all.

The intercession of your heavenly High Priest is the foundation on which your hope is built.

When you go down to sleep you surrender yourself to that prayer of your Lord; and when you get up in the morning that same prayer of Jesus gives you the confidence to tackle the day's trials and struggles courageously.

That's why you can't live without Jesus' ascension. It is woven right into the fabric of your life and leads to the certain expectation of your soul, that one day you will be with Him who waits for you.

He Travelled through the Heavens

Therefore, since we have a great high priest
who has gone through the heavens,
Jesus the Son of God,
let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.
Hebrews 4:14

Jesus ascended to Heaven. Unlike all the rest of God's children on earth who fall asleep in death here, only to wake up in heaven, Jesus rose from the dead already here on earth and then went up to heaven from here, ascending in such a way that he left us and our world far behind and traversed alone the endless firmament to the highest heaven.

It is really true, that our Lord left *this earth* and then arrived *yonder*. And he not only travelled through the clouds and the atmosphere but also when he arrived in the heavens he continued travelling through that realm until he finally arrived in that region which marks the very heart of the revelation of God, the Throne of God.

He ascended into that heaven and he travelled through the heavens, not as a phantom, a spirit or a 'separated' soul, but as a fully human person, in body and in soul.

Had you been able to watch him make his triumphal journey, you would have been able to distinguish all his physical attributes and even the expressions on his face at any moment of that journey.

And even now, should you die this moment, your glorified body would be taken up into heaven immediately after your death, and you would see Jesus, your Saviour, your Redeemer and your Guarantor, clothed with all the blinding light of his glory, yet always in such a way that each feature of his face would be clearly visible there in the very centre of the highest heaven.

Not one, but two "worlds" were created. One is the world in which we now live, and the other is the heavenly realm to which we are travelling. These two worlds relate to each other in such a way that the world we now live in is like the dark cellar of the resplendent mansion of the heavens where all rejoice and sing praises. That world above is the real world because the Lord God is everywhere present, but our earth is no more than a footstool for his feet. His royal throne on which he sits and rules in glory and majesty is not here below, but above in the highest heaven. And just as one looks up to an earthly king sitting on his throne and not down to his feet on a footstool, so also here do God's children search for their merciful heavenly Father not at the footstool, but at the throne which is in heaven. For that is where our God is.

We ourselves are present in our ankles and feet, and certainly feel it when someone steps on our toe for they are hurting *us*. Yet when we meet the other we don't look at each others' toes but look the other in the eyes. The expressions of the face reflect the soul.

In the same way, God is indeed everywhere present, but we seek him only in the place of his glory where his divine face shines upon his people.

Our God *resides* in the highest heavens.

And that is why our case must be adjudicated not on earth, but in heaven.

Here on earth appearances can be misleading, but there in the highest heaven we find true reality.

But who will go before us through the highest heavens to appear before the very throne of God, to claim forgiveness and an inheritance for us?

That is the question answered by the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He did exactly that!

He has gone there!

He did traverse the heavens and did arrive there in the centre of

God's glory, which in Scripture is called the 'right hand of God'. In that glorious abode of the highest heavens he adjudicates our case. You could not have gone there yourself, and your plea, "Who will ascend to heaven for us?" would have been empty. No human being can do that; no creature of this earth could accomplish that. But *Jesus* could, and Jesus did. He ascended for you, and he did not think, once he got back there, "Now that I am back in heaven I will just live here and forget about the world that offered me nothing but a cross." No, when Jesus arrived in Heaven he continued to love and care and be the gracious representation of that frightfully godless world as well as his thoughtless and thankless people. This is exactly what the Scripture tells us, "We have a great **High Priest** who has gone through the heavens" [Hebrews 4:14]. Not to forget us, but to carry us in his heart. Not to curse us for our lack of love, but to pray for the salvation of our souls. Even in heaven Jesus is working on our behalf. His mediating task is not yet complete. He has made the complete and final *sacrifice*, but history is not yet finished. He is now preparing a place for us.

That magnificent fact relocates the actual place of the spiritual home for every child of God.

When a father of young children goes ahead of his family from the country to a magnificent city, and he buys a house in that city, they are listed as residents even if they have not joined him yet. The father's address is legally theirs. That is their 'home' and they look forward to going there, because that is where their father now lives. They no longer consider their own location as 'home', but look forward to the home their father is preparing for them.

This is exactly the situation for God's children.

There was a time when Jesus lived with us on earth, but now Jesus has moved. He has changed residence from this earth to a completely

different realm. Now he lives up there. And *because* he lives in heaven, all those he has redeemed also consider that their home. Even if they have not yet travelled there to be with him, but remain on earth where Jesus once lived. We are registered there and our citizenship is already there and no longer here below. We belong to the city whose foundations are in the heaven of our God.

For us the journey does not begin until our death, but, like children who anticipate living with their father in an unknown city, we as the redeemed of the Lord begin to think about the new Jerusalem. We confer with other pilgrims about that place. We study the road maps of that place and the layout of the holy city with all the beauty and holiness we anticipate to find there, just as the Scriptures have revealed them. Even now we appreciate and enjoy every good and perfect gift which our Redeemer is sending us as a foretaste and proof of his love.

In that way our earthly walk is already transferring us to heaven. We already consider ourselves citizens of heaven above. We already enjoy the inheritance which has been promised us.

Or rather, let us be brutally honest. That is the way it should be, and may at least be in our most ideal moments of faith. But on a day to day basis, our greatest sin is precisely this, that though we look forward to going to heaven, we nevertheless keep our focus on this earth and its riches, as if these constitute our true reality.

Merciful Lord Jesus, pull us up to be with you in your ascended glory.

Do not let go of us, once you have set us free.

He Ascended Far Above All the Heavens

He who descended is the very one who
ascended higher than all the heavens,
in order to fill the whole universe.

Eph. 4:10.

Do you believe there is a heaven?

Not the sky where the stars shine, or the clouds race along², but the heaven of God's glory and the Jerusalem with pearly gates where the angel hosts present themselves at the throne of God?

We mean the spiritual heaven that did not always exist but which, according to Moses' account, came to be in the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth.

We are talking of a created heaven, with order and measurements, limits and rules, economy and lifestyle uniquely its own, just as we have these on earth. It has nothing in common with the expanse of the firmament and sky which was created on the second day nor the stars and planets which God called into being on the fourth day.

It is not possible to imagine this heaven, even though it presents some similarities with things on earth. For instance we find similarities in the bodies of the saints which, having been glorified, now belong in that heavenly realm. We find such similarities in the tabernacle shown to Moses on Mount Sinai; they can be seen in the ease with which the angels do their work on earth and also from the images of our earthly life which the Holy Spirit uses to describe things in heaven for us. But this does not take us beyond imagery. It does not truly describe the activities of heaven, the type of movement, nor the way that the community is sustained there. We

have only an inkling of how the angels relate to the saints, or both to Christ, and through him with the Triune God. We may have a holy hunch of these things during our earthly pilgrimage, but nothing gives us a clear picture.

This much we know: our existence in that highest, sinless and therefore glorious heaven must never be imagined as similar to our 'resting' on this earth, which might mean 'doing nothing'. Rather, the opposite is true and we must regard our presence on earth as rather dull and uneventful, compared to the rich, exiting and spirited life which soars about the throne of God most High. Judge for yourself. If we can pluck fruit from the same trees twelve times a year [Revelation 22:2] does that impress you as a slumbering ghost-like existence? Does it not reveal a beauty, energy, life and exuberance twelve times beyond what we enjoy on earth?

Heaven is a physical location. This means that somewhere there is a border marking the end of the lower creation and the beginning of the higher heavenly creation. When one crosses the border after death, there will be a moment when everything changes, and one says, "I am no longer on earth. I have entered into an other creation; I am now in heaven."

Even though we make no judgment about its 'distance', since we don't understand it, we must nevertheless establish and confess that heaven is a created realm which is determined by its own boundaries. This also means that we must not speak of God living in heaven if we mean thereby that he does not exist outside of it. "The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you" the Scriptures tell us [1Ki 8:27]. The Lord God is omnipresent, which means God is without limit. Within or outside of his entire creation, we cannot imagine a place where the Lord God is not fully present, always as God Almighty. Even the place of desolation cannot put up boundaries that exclude God's omnipresent holiness.

This does not mean that God reveals himself in the same way in all places. Or that he is visible to all. God is indeed omnipresent

²[In Dutch "heaven" and "sky" is the same word [hemel]; the context supplies the meaning. JVM]

whether that be in Abraham or the donkey on which he rides. But there is a great difference in revelation. Even among people he reveals himself differently. Just consider the difference in his presence for the man who hung to the left and the one who hung to the right of Jesus on the cross.

In the same way we notice a remarkable difference between the way a rock or cliff reveals God's glory and the way his glory is revealed in the firmament above the earth, or in the fragrance of a bed of flowers. In the same way we should consider the enormous difference between the way in which God, even in his omnipresence, reveals himself here on earth only through shadowy appearances, but in heaven in radiant splendour.

We know that a person has a whole body, and his feet are as much part of him as his head; yet, when we want to speak to someone, we look him in the eye, because he expresses his soul most clearly through his eyes. In the same way, when our soul seeks the Lord, it naturally looks up to heaven because from that place, we could say, the all-seeing eyes of God rest on us. And in that place the saints will first recognize him, seeing him in his glorious being by looking into those very same eyes.

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That is the very heaven to which our Mediator rose, fully alive on Ascension Day.

He had been there before; or rather, even while he walked about on earth, he was, and always remained in heaven as well, as the Son of God. For he is God, co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit; and thus the revelation of his divinity was also the clearest and most glorious in heaven.

In those heavens we find God's throne. In other words, while God is omni-present, there is a place where his self revelation is greatest,

close to the angels whom he instructs to carry out his commands.

And for all his creatures too, his throne is the centre of his might and glory.

From that centre of might and glory the Son descended to the lower creation. He descended right down to earth, and entered into our sorrow and bitter humiliation.

In all this he remained God, but in his divine mercy our mediator hid his heavenly glory under a modest cloak of a weak and lowly human nature.

Even in this human state he did not change from glory to greater glory, but rather freely offered himself, lowering himself until at last he was completely rejected and fell away to the depth of death itself. What happened then?

Did the Son of God, by being rejected, let go of his human nature to put an end to his humiliation, and return to what he was before he came to earth?

Absolutely not, dear people of God!

Even when Jesus died, the eternal Son remained united with his human nature, even in the separation of his body and soul. The turning point came only, when he suffered the very depth of his humiliation, and his return to glory began not by casting off his human nature, but rather with a renewal of that human nature after his resurrection.

Yet this was not enough.

His humiliation was a slow gradual progress in which the Son first assumed the form of a servant, then as a servant he entered on a path of suffering and death, and descended into the grave, and finally as a man of sorrows, drank the full measure of the suffering of hell. In the same way there is a slow process of exaltation, progressing from the lesser to the greater, beginning with his exit from the grave in his resurrection, then his triumph over the earth in his ascension, and assuming royal power by sitting at the right hand of the Father in heaven. Finally he will reveal his true glory over all creation when

he returns in judgement.

This humiliation and his glorification are at opposite ends of this spectrum.

The manger in Bethlehem was not the low point from which he steadily increased in glory to reach the full measure at his resurrection. Rather up to the point of his resurrection he steadily lost more and more of his glory; it shrank, faded and melted away, so that he could not possibly suffer greater humiliation. From that depth of shame he gradually entered a state of exaltation, not by himself, but by the mighty power of the Triune God to restore him to honour and majesty once more. And so he was restored in the same way that he had gradually descended into his state of humiliation.¹

The process of exaltation affected the entire existence of the Mediator, not just in his human nature but in his divine nature as well.

I hardly need to mention that it is not as if anything could be added to his divine nature, which always was and remains perfect and complete. Adding to perfection is not possible, and quite unthinkable. However, gold *can* increase in brilliance, not by adding more gold, but by removing the surface dullness, which prevents the real gold from shining through. In the same way Jesus' divine nature gained in radiance, no new aspect was added in the process of his glorification, but the divinity which had remained hidden and internal was once more allowed to shine forth radiantly.

Throughout the time of his humiliation, his divine majesty had been

cloaked with a veil, preventing his glory from shining through.

However, this was the moment when the veil obtained a transparency which revealed his divine majesty, and allowed his divinity to appear in greater glory.

This process of exaltation also touched on his human nature. But, note well, this does not mean that his divine nature only now began to share its traits with the human nature. That is impossible and quite inappropriate. The union of the two natures in one person occurred at the moment of his incarnation, and once the bond was made it was never strengthened or weakened. This very bond assured that the intimate union of the two natures did not lead to an amalgamation of the two natures. His divine nature remained divine and his human nature remained human. Any assumption about the two natures being mingled is out of the question.

Thus the glorification of the Mediator's human nature does not mean something that does not belong, but rather appropriating what is truly human and fitting for human nature. He did not lay aside the outward form of a servant, but did put away the *servant image* of his humanity. In his glorification the Mediator received the most perfect and excellent splendour that could possibly be bestowed upon a human being in body and soul. No more, but also no less!

That is his triumph. He was relieved of all that was weak, miserable and vulnerable, all of which he had assumed in his human nature for our sake. Instead he was clothed with all the strength, glory and riches which were given to him for his eternal rule. He had humbled himself as doormat for the wicked, but now, as King of all, he makes his enemies the footstool for his throne.

Our Mediator was exalted as a reward for all his trials.

There was a reward for fulfilling the law in its entirety. A reward also for his mediating work, for which a reward had been promised.

¹The humiliation continues until Easter morning; it did not end when he died (AK).

“When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied....” [Isaiah 53: 10,11 KJV]. Finally, he received a reward for the inestimable value of his suffering through which he obtained eternal salvation for all God’s elect.

This means that his exaltation must bear the character of the Mediator. In other words, just as he was deeply humiliated not for himself but for our benefit, carrying our debt, so he also ascended from that humiliation, not just for himself, but also for his people. In other words, he was richly crowned with all the gifts of glory not only to adorn *him*, but also to adorn *those for whom he died*. When Jesus arose, all his people rose in him. When Jesus ascended all of God’s people ascended *in him* to heaven. They too are now placed with Christ in heaven, and at the right hand of God. As the Psalmist sings, “*Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them.*” [Psalm 68:18 KJV].¹ So, obviously, the Mediator could not remain on earth. His glorified

¹Kuyper here quotes the Dutch Psalter without giving any reference because people generally had memorized these Psalms in their youth. Below is the English version as it appeared in the Christian Reformed Church Psalter Hymnal of 1976.

“The Lord is great, His might untold, His chariots thousand thousand fold, His armies ne’er confounded.

Among them God with joy displays the glory that in Moses’ days Mount Sinai surrounded.

When Thou, O Lord, in glory bright, ascendeth in the heavenly height Our captive bond to sever,

Rich Gifts from those who did rebel Thou didst receive, that men might dwell

With Thee, O Lord, forever.(# 124, vs 4.)

It reflects Psalm 68:17 - 19. The text is in the public domain.

condition demanded a place of glory. Those who have been freed must exchange their shackles for honorable clothes, but also must be let out of the prison.

For this reason Jesus, once glorified, could not remain on this inglorious earth. He who was totally exalted from within, also needed a totally glorified environment. Thus he ascended.

From a distinct location on the top of the mount of Olives he ascended into the air, through the clouds and firmament into another creation, another home, which we call heaven. From there he traveled through all the heavens to the highest heaven as the place where God’s grandeur is most clearly displayed, the throne of God. There he is honoured in all his glory at the right hand of the Father. He accepted the royal title and began his glorious reign.

All this involves a true relocation, a transition from one place to another. Clearly he is no longer in the place where he once was (earth), and he has now arrived at the place where he was not earlier (heaven). So, in the highest heaven there is a specific place where Jesus now resides, lives and works in our flesh.

In that place, somewhere in these highest heavens all the angels serve at his command. Here also those who died as saints have found him, and here one day we will look for him when, by grace, we enter that holy place and see him as he is.

For now he is absent from the earth, and will not return until the end of time. Only then will he leave his place of glory, and reveal himself as Judge to all the nations.

In the meantime he is the great Caregiver for all of us, the Ruler of all Nations, the King of his church, and the Comforter of all who have lost heart.

To be sure, he may be restricted to his place in the highest heaven, but still he is omnipresent with his grace, majesty, divinity and spirit. So he knows in precise detail everything that happens on earth, as well as what happens in our own hearts. He stretches out his arms of mercy over us, and with his precious wonderful heavenly food he satisfies the hunger of our souls.

He knows the suffering of our hearts; the sins committed in every family; the struggles of every congregation, and the decisions that are made, for or against him, in every church council.

That is exactly why he had to ascend. Now from the highest heaven he can be near all of us, his people, and listen to the pleas and cries of all.

And there is more! Our mediator ascended not only to send us all good gifts, but also to prepare a home for his Bride, his church.

“In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.” [John 14:2]

“My Father is always at his work, to this very day, and I, too, am working.” [John 5:17]

“It is finished” on Golgotha [see John 19:30] finds its echo in “...it is done” in Revelation [21:6].

He Ascended to Where He was Before!

Does this offend you?
What if you see the Son of Man
ascend to where he was before!

John 6:61b,62

When we speak of the ‘Ascension’ we should not ignore the fact that Jesus actually *went up*, nor overlook the act of ‘his rising into the heavens’.

We must not restrict our reflections to Jesus’ ‘being’ in heaven, but we must with the church of all ages continue to celebrate that Jesus ‘ascended’ to that place.

We should also remember what Jesus himself said about his ascension, that, (unlike his earlier descent *from* Heaven), he would once more ascend to the sphere of his glory, where he was before.

We read how Jesus upset the people of Capernaum with a difficult saying when he told them,

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven.” [John 6:51].

After this statement, Jesus continued, “Does that bother you? Well then, what will you say when you see me, the Son of Man, ascend to where he was before?”

It is essential that we focus on his first *descending* from heaven and then *returning to* heaven.

Only from the background of his descending from heaven can we understand his returning to heaven in the proper light.

You may now ask what is at issue here; what deeper meaning can be found in this contrast?

Just think of a rescuer jumping into a lake to attempt to save a child who is drowning. When he goes down, he may not come back up. Then, rather than saving the victim, he also drowns. He did not lack compassion, but sadly lacked the ability to save the drowning child. Our Mediator, too, came down into the mire of our unrighteousness and misery to take a firm hold of us. But the power with which he was able to take us up out of our misery differed greatly from that by which he descended. He was able to come back up carrying us with him in his powerful arms. In triumph he took his Bride, his rightful possession close to his heart.

His going down into our world was an act of compassionate Love, but his return to the realm above was an act of inexhaustible Power. To *descend* from his heavenly glory and enter the womb of a maiden; to become poverty stricken in this impoverished world, and allow himself to be taunted, despised and falsely accused; to accept suffering even unto the cruelest death - that takes compassion and mercy. That shows a deeply felt desire to save, an enormous love for sinners, a self-denial, and the holy triumph of divine grace for an undeserving humanity.

But *Ascension* is something different! Anyone with enough love, concern, self-denial and compassion can jump into the lake to try and rescue that drowning child. It might be another child, a cripple or the mother. But *who* can bring the child back to safety? Only the one *who can also get himself out of the water again!* That depends not on love or compassion but *strength, power, and enormous competence* to control the water, wind and floodwaters with powerful skilled strokes.

So we need two traits: *compassion* and *power*, and where can these two be found together?

On earth these two often seem to be opposites. The powerful lack compassion, and the person who cares lacks the power.

'The suffering servant' of the Lord is more often the appropriate name for those who serve Jahweh, and in their attempt to show

compassion are cruelly defeated by the strong and mighty. Most of those who dare to fight against the powers of this world perish in the attempt.

They will receive the crown of glory, no doubt about that! Yet they succumbed in the struggle.

We recognize the beauty, the tragedy, or emotional elements in these struggles, but recognizing them does not help the cause much. The Lord God is not directing a grand tragedy. To God the struggle to death is not a game. God's dignity and divine majesty are not revealed because he shows the greatest moral indignation with the affairs of his world.

Instead, he is a God who *saves!* Truly saves! Both body and soul, completely and resolutely. There is no beauty in the apparent defeat of saving love, even as a tragedy. His saving love for us is only truly beautiful when it is *triumphant!*

The Lord is not one who just jumps into the lake. He also knows how to come back up out of the water together with those he meant to save, and then to take them **to where he was before!**

That is why, dear readers, Jesus' return to heaven is so grand and majestic.

For in Jesus we find that inexhaustible power. In him we see the complete triumph. In him we see the gargantuan struggle to rescue, his triumphant success, his rising from the dead, and his ascension and return **to where he was before.**

He triumphed in spite of all opposition: the laws of nature, the physical element and human flesh which he assumed. Everything was moved to work against him, including the misplaced love of his disciples, to prevent him from ascending.

Yet nothing could stop him, for he conquered all!

He ascends to **where he was before**, and that is not all! In his divine omnipotence he takes along with him his whole church, all of those he saved from sin. This includes those who are with him, those who now live, and those still to come. *All* God's children are included. Look up and see him standing there with all those who are saved cradled in his arms.

Let all the angels praise him!

Let all the martyrs and prophets praise him!

And God the Father crown him with many crowns!

With Gifts for Our Human Comfort

When you ascended on high,
you led captives in your train;
you received gifts from men,
even from the rebellious—
that you, O LORD God, might dwell there.
Psalms 68:18

For a strong demonstration of power and its execution, one has to be close to the centre of power. Kings cannot rule their country from afar, from an isolated hamlet or far away village. They have to reside in their royal palace and be present in the assembly of their councillors. They must occupy the throne from where they issue commands and rule their subjects with proclamations and decrees. Similarly the captain of an ocean liner must stand strategically on the bridge, not somewhere in the bowels of the ship.

Again, as an enemy approaches, a general places his command post strategically near the front of the army to direct them in battle; he cannot hide in a remote fortress.

What we have said about the throne, or captain's bridge, or a general's quarters applies to any situation of power and command. To command the whole one has to be positioned strategically in the centre.

Thus, when we reflect seriously on the implications of the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ as comfort for our soul, we must ask, "Where is the centre of the spiritual order of the world?"

Is the earth ruled from heaven, or is heaven ruled from the earth? Or, are they possibly like two ships passing in the night? In faith we respond, that heaven and earth are both ruled by the providence and counsel of God. *His throne* is in heaven, and all events taking place on earth are directed from there. In heaven all the lines that control

events on earth are drawn together. The Word goes out and determines the course of history. You will not find the seat of government that determines the fate of heaven and earth anywhere here below. It is only found in the realm of eternal light and the abode of all majesty and splendour.

Once this is clearly understood, we can address the second question, "Was the authority of that government handed over to Jesus or not?" This question also can have only one answer. Indeed, all power in heaven and on earth was given to Christ Jesus. He was given a name above all names, so that at his name every knee should bow. "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." [Ps. 2:6. KJV] The Father has handed all things over to the Son, and so he must reign as King. "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" [Psalm 110:1]. To him is given all authority. It was transferred to him by the Father. He was anointed for that purpose. Because of the promise God had made, Christ received the crown as reward for his labours. Because our Mediator was appointed King, he also needed to be revealed as King. The title alone was not enough. It could not just remain a promise; real exercise of power was necessary. Heaven and earth were both waiting for him to ascend to the throne, anticipating his word of power and the unveiling of his majesty. This is one more reason why the Mediator had to ascend to heaven. He could not remain on earth. The heavenly throne of glory was the only place in all creation where he could reside as divinely appointed King. If the authority of government was his, and the seat of government was in heaven, then he could not remain at a distance, but must hurry to be there and assume his rightful place on the throne. So, the ascension of our Lord is none other than an acceptance of his sovereign rule, and ascent to his heavenly palace, where he is ruling in splendour and glory. Regardless of his greatness, he could not

have ruled the world from Jerusalem nor the heavens from any place on earth. The lines of authority were gathered not on earth but in heaven and from there he had to rule. He did not ascend to leave us behind in poverty, but rather to come nearer to us all as King of heaven and earth. As long as he remained on earth he was able to comfort but a *few*; only from heaven could he reach out and bless *all*.

The ascension of the Lord did not occur through the hidden entry way of death, but triumphantly into the eternal glory of heaven. Yet it was not a radiant public event that would blind the eyes of the world, for even in nearby Jerusalem no one noticed this glorious event. Likewise the Roman Emperor did not appear to have noticed it anymore than the people living along the Tigris and Euphrates. They all went on living as if the power over the whole world still belonged to earthly rulers. Only his church witnessed the stately splendour of his ascent. His church, represented on the Mount of Olives by the disciples, witnessed his royal entry into glory. They saw him fully alive and visible when he departed. They also saw the angels sent to comfort Jesus' friends. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." [Acts 1:11]. Then a cloud hid him from their sight. But no more than ten days later they were once again reminded of his existence when he, fully in charge and ruling from heaven, used his authority to send the Holy Spirit. The apostles who witnessed his ascent told the story of his splendid ascension to their disciples in turn. The church listened to the story and passed it on in writing. Today we still know of this event from God's Word, the Bible. So, each year the faithful gather to remember the drama of his glorious ascension. The church uses the occasion to *reflect* on their

King Jesus. It also *sees* him once again ascending to his royal throne in heaven. It is a celebration of life and joy in his royal power.

There is more to this splendor.

The ascent to heaven was not only a glorious moment for the apostles; it also was a moment of sacred joy for the heavenly hosts. Many centuries before, the Holy Spirit had inspired this song,

“Lift up your heads, O you gates;
lift them up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.
Who is he, this King of glory?
The LORD Almighty-
he is the King of glory.”¹ [Ps 24: 9,10]

Thus, in heaven above there was also an expectation of the returning king. The heavens were concerned about earth. The angels longed to see the mysteries of salvation [1 Peter 1:11-13]. They had welcomed our Mediator in the fields of Ephrathah, when he had left heaven behind; they had served him in the desert after the temptation of Satan; they had supported him in Gethsemane when he nearly succumbed; they had rolled away the stone so he could arise from the tomb; and now at his ascension they came to meet him. They went so far to meet him that those in the front lines were able to talk to the apostles. It is as if they received the Saviour from among the apostles and were taking him back with them to the very heaven,

¹[Dutch: *The LORD of heavenly hosts* (vs10) and thus it implies clearly a triumphal entry into heaven, see ASV which has “Jehovah of hosts” - Kuyper used the words from the Dutch Psalter- JVM].

from which he had once come. The heavens to which he must return were ready for him, and waited for the manifestation of his glory. Once he had assumed the rule of heaven those in heaven too would rejoice over the fulfilment of the promise, and the realization of a most sacred hope.

Now he was becoming the king over Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; also over Moses and Joshua; David and Solomon; over all the witnesses and martyrs of God, as well as the seers and prophets.

Even so, that great day of God Almighty had not yet come, the day when Christ will judge all humanity, when “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.” [Rev 11:14]. But this event was a wonderful anticipation of that day. When Christ entered heaven joyful songs of the heavenly host rang through all the heavens.

Jesus ascended as a *human being*. To be sure he remained the only begotten Son of the Father and of one substance with the Father. But he did not ascend in his divine nature, because his divine nature is already omnipresent; it did not go from place to place, and did not ascend to heaven, because it had never left heaven.

So, Jesus ascended as a man who had assumed our flesh and blood, which he had received in Mary’s womb. The human being seen by the disciples as he ascended to heaven kept the very form that Mary had known from the day he was born. It was the same form in which he appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus and to John on Patmos. This was the form seen by Stephen and when he returns on the clouds, all will see him in that form [Acts 7:56].

That is a mystery.

In Paradise God gave dominion over the whole earth to human beings. But due to sin we lost that role of glory. Human power diminished and faded. The one who should have ruled became a

slave to the mire of our egoistical passion and arrogance.

But what happened then?

Now, on the Mount of Olives, another human being, a second Adam, has recovered the dominion lost in the garden of Eden. And because of the work he accomplished he has been given dominion once again, not just over Eden and over the animals of the field, but a royal dominion over heaven and earth, and also over seraphim and cherubim. Even Satan and his hosts can make no move against his will.

But for whose benefit is this royal dominion that belongs to the man Jesus Christ?

The answer is: for all humanity!

The heavens are prepared, and angels don't need to be sanctified.

The final judgement of the Last Day may be immediate for those who have departed in the Lord. Even the fate of Satan and his hosts is already determined. The only reason why the Lord still tarries is for us, for human beings. The fact that the Kingdom of Christ cannot yet be handed over to the Father, but remains in Jesus hands through all these centuries is to make sure that *no one will miss out*.

The Lord said that he was going to perform a mighty deed in heaven for, "I am going there to prepare a place for you" [John 14:2b NIV]. Not in the sense that he has to fix up a building for us, nor was it meant only for the apostles who heard him. The purpose of Christ's reign in heaven is not for the sake of the angels, but in order to prepare a place for all people called by the Father. Once a place has been prepared for the last of his people, Christ's reign will be concluded, as determined by the Father.

More than any other word, the word *comfort* sums up the depth of

meaning of the ascension of our Lord.

He ascended to heaven with gifts for our comfort¹.

This does not mean that Jesus takes note of every sadness of our soul, to send comfort for that sadness. Of course our Mediator does that too, for he is rich in all kinds of comforts. But the deeper meaning of the text applies to the gifts of comfort which are designed to bring all human beings to live with him. Our Mediator hurries to relieve the needs of his people on earth, but he gives much more!

The gifts of comfort given by our Mediator relate to the grand and finished work of Christ who from his abode on high, governs all things in such a way that one person after another is uprooted from the mire of sin and unbelief and transplanted to the courts of the Lord where they grow like the oaks of righteousness or like palms and cedars.

Comfort is needed to relieve sorrow. The greatest and richest comfort must also be powerful enough to relieve our greatest sorrow. And our deepest sorrow is not due to some pain or loss or disappointment. *Our greatest sorrow is due to the bitter loss of our whole person and our entire soul into eternal death*. So also our greatest comfort is that our Mediator removes us from the path of destruction and provides for the salvation of our soul from death unto eternal life. You, who would have suffered in eternal death, have been saved by him. He has taken you to himself, so that you may now be counted among those who, with all the angels, will sing eternally in heaven before God's throne.

¹ Dutch Psalter uses the word "for our comfort" in relation to the gifts mentioned in Ps 68, stanza 9. See also Ps. 68:20-27, and Eph. 4:7,8, JVM.

Above, Where Christ is

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ,
set your hearts on things above,
where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Colossians 3:1

Our Lord God is a fountain overflowing with all good things. If you confess this, and really mean it, you've got it made!

Nothing but good things come from him, and originate with him. And because we only receive good things we must never complain about them, but rather we must give thanks in all things. If you cannot give thanks, the fault does not lie with God, but with you. Your vision is impaired, because you cannot see what is truly good. He is the fountain of all good things. Therefore there is no good thing but it flows forth from him. Whatever there may be in yourself or in your child that is *not* from him, it is *not* good, it is sinful, no matter how beautiful it may appear on the surface. In the same way, when there is something truly good in yourself or your child, it did not come from you, nor from your child, but it has come to you and yours from the ever-flowing fountain of all good things. This leaves no room for pride, or self-righteousness. We are recreated in Jesus Christ to do good works, which God foreordained, so that we may walk in his ways and give thanks for his gifts. [Ephesians 1:10]. When we do something good, the old self in us quickly wants to take credit, but the new self moved by the Spirit says, "It was the work of God in me".

Of all good things God is the fountain, the gushing well, the mother lode. It is not for you to claim that the good you did was acquired from the Lord after much pleading and effort. Rather, just as water gushes forth from an Artesian well, without any effort in hauling it up, so do good works arise in us from a good and generous God who supplies all these things. You have not initiated anything, but it is God who motivates you by his all-sufficient love.

The Lord is the very abundant fountain of all these good things. Faith can never expect too much. No matter how much you have received, there is always more coming your way. The supply is inexhaustible. No matter how great the need you may have to be saturated with 'good', or even if you have received more than you could imagine, the well continues to overflow with all good. That is why all who recognize this truth '*have got it made*'. That means, you have gotten rid of the pernicious weeds of your self-willed flesh; you have become pure, rich and free as a child of God, and he will reform you into new life.

Briefly stated, what then are those 'good things' which flow from that fountain? Everything that contributes to his glory and the salvation of your soul.

Does this exclude our daily bread, and the fruit of our labour which we enjoy?

Not at all! Why should it? As long as it is not the only thing we always strive for. If your money, possessions and the fruit of your labour distract from your focus on God, they are no longer 'good things'; it would be better for you to starve to death, if that would bring you back to God.

The good things that flow from the fountain are good for your whole person, body and soul. Nor are they perishable temporary goods, but a lasting treasure. So, in fact, those events in your life that you regard as temptations and evil, will prove to be for your good and therefore for thanksgiving.

The good things that flow from this fountain include all that grants escape from eternal death, and leads you to eternal life. Grace flows from this fountain, and the riches of grace takes on many forms like satisfaction and righteousness, reconciliation and sanctification, and a myriad of favours received from your God.

Every warning of your conscience flows from that fountain; every

remorse after sin; every tear of true repentance; every instance of childlike penitence. From this fountain flows every encouragement of love, all relief of anxiety, and all comfort for fear and distress. From that fountain flows every word of warning, every corrective voice, every urging to love, everything that might keep you from sinning and call you back to your Lord.

From that fountain flows every kernel of faith, every work of the Holy Spirit, and every repentance of the heart; all things, in short, that might lead you to become a child of God.

To put it bluntly, there has never ever been the smallest spark of pure upright love welling up in your heart, unless it was given to you from the Father. Never did the robe of humility suit you so well, unless it was put on you by Christ. So, if ever there was anything beautiful or lovely in you for which you could receive praise from God, it was because the Father of all light gave it to you, so that it could shine through you.

The right way ought to be clear by now. Should you strive to become more holy, humble, loving or tender, do not look to the barren depths of your own heart, for it cannot be the source of these things. If it is those 'good things' that you earnestly seek, then you should no longer look for the things that are below, but for what is above. But make sure that you really do look 'above' and know that there you will find the true source of all good things that come to you.

When the Holy Spirit tells you to, "seek the things that are above" [Col 3:2] it means that you are drawn and pulled toward the pure gold and true beauty of the heavenly Jerusalem. And it means even more! It also means that you are not to strive for gold or pleasure or

honour among people, but that you must long for good works, love, purity, for all that is lovely and beautiful, not in the eyes of men, but for God. It also means that you must earnestly desire to bear your burdens with joy if they come your way, so you may truthfully appear before the Lord with a good conscience.

All that is lovely and pure does not grow in the soil of your own heart, but is sent down to us from heaven. Love is born there. When at last the silent prayer of the apostle is heard that the peace of God may fill you completely, then you will know that God's peace is a precious gift, coming from the fountain of all good, cascading down to you.

We still have not exhausted the text. So far we have talked about 'good things above', but we have to add, 'above, *where Christ is*'. This represents a most precious addition to the text, yet in no way does it imply that for Christians all good things flow not from the fountain, but from Christ himself. In that case Christ would replace God in our hearts, and our saviour would become the giver of all good. We must not even dwell on that for a moment. The eternal and blessed Being, who is God, is and remains the Fountain of all good things for all times, for all, and thus also for us.

At the same time, all the waters that flow from that Fountain are gathered up by Jesus Christ to be given to us. Just as surely as our soul is united with one Lord, so also the refreshing gifts of those waters will be ours in abundance. We never need to doubt that. They come to us from the Eternal One, through Christ the Mediator. If you seek love in order that you can love others, you have but to look to Christ Jesus, to whom has been given all good things for you from his Father.

If you want kindness, self denial, humility, then seek these things

from above where Christ is, for in him they are stored up for you. Not as common treasures, but as gifts stored away just for you. He does not use a generic seal, but one made-to-measure just for you with your own initials engraved on it. The robe of righteousness stored up for you, is custom-made for you in heaven.

To Be with The Lord Forever

And so we will be with the Lord forever.
Therefore encourage each other with these words.

1 Thes. 4:17b,18

It was God's pleasure to give his only Son, the precious Immanuel, as a focus for our soul; a centre for our desires, and an object for our love as his children.

Certainly the Lord God himself, as the eternal glorious Being, deserves our love and adoration with all the power and energy that our hearts can muster.

The Lord God continues to require that of all his children. As fountain of blessing and origin of all good things, he wants to be all in all. For every drop of love he pours into our selfish hearts, he watches closely whether the aroma of that love is directed back to him¹. It belongs to him, who has created everything, including our love for him.

There must never be any doubt about that. When we speak of our heart being drawn toward Immanuel, then the Scriptures or God's children can have no other meaning, than what is expressed in the beautiful words of Jesus in Gethsemane, when he said, "He who sees me, sees the Father" [John 14:9]. Then we are truly united with Immanuel, so that through him we have access to the Father.

Those who wander onto the slippery slope of a sickly spirituality may think they should focus exclusively on Jesus as they view him independently from his relationship to the triune God. But when

¹ The word "aroma" appears 42 times in the NIV, mostly in Lev. and Numbers. -JVM

faith works powerfully and the waters of life refresh our soul, we will inevitably let go of such an unhealthy image of Jesus, and cling rather to the true Immanuel who always points us to the Father. True religion drives the soul to seek the eternal Lord God in all we do; our worship must be focussed on the eternal God in order to be fruitful. As the hart pants for the waters, so our souls seek the waters of life which flow freely from God, and are the only source of peace.

We may wonder why our desire is so strongly drawn to Jesus, and in a way that differs from our longing for God. Let me use little children here as an example. You could speak to children about an *Eternal Holy Being*, and they pray to God himself. They may be filled with awe and respect, but do not understand much of it, though they would like to and would try. They can imagine many things but cannot imagine God. To have a clear image of God they need a closer bond with the Almighty. For God the Holy One is too far removed and too exalted. When you speak to those same children about Jesus, the picture changes. The name of Jesus has a completely different sound compared to the name of God. The name of Jesus is sweeter and speaks to their hearts. They find it easy to exercise the imagination at the name of Jesus. Children may not have a complete or even an accurate picture but it will be very real to them. Children can imagine Jesus entering their bedroom, sitting on the side of their bed and kindly stroking their hair, whispering, "Sleep well, little one". Your child could die peacefully with such a picture in mind.

What is the mystery here?

It is simply this.

In order to be able to think about the Eternal Godhead, your child had to imagine something, but cannot. But in Jesus the Eternal One himself provides us his image. Now the child has something concrete on which to base his imagination, a focus for its search. Even if the child can not understand or express it in so many words, it has found the key to the mystery, which is that by looking at Jesus, your child can see God. It happens unbeknownst to the child. The moment the child 'sees' Jesus, he experiences communion with God.

Don't be too quick to say that it might be so for a child, but not for you. For then you would be mistaken. To be sure, you are not a child, and experience things differently. You are more conscious and better able to reflect on what happens in your life. Yet, in the end, what happens within you is the same as what happens in the child. You may have a sense of what the Eternal Godhead is, and some understanding apart from Jesus, but only when you have come close to Jesus, and are united with Immanuel, will you begin to grasp the magnitude of the love of the Lord God for you.

Please note here that you gain such insight not from Jesus' divine nature, but from his *human* nature. Just think it through! Suppose you should meet someone who has walked in the light and has not indulged in sin since his youth, if that person should have power to help you see the error of your way, and lead you into a relationship with God without drawing attention to himself, such a person would have brought you close to God, and this person would be 'like Jesus' to you.

Jesus, whose every word and kindly glance brings holiness and directs us lovingly to the eternal Father, also works a mysterious power in us. We may never fully understand it, but it does allow us to approach the holy One with confidence.

So there is no conflict between choosing for Jesus or God. No need to change our loyalty or focus on one or the other. But our gaze on Jesus has greater clarity, intensity and insight, and as we deepen our focus on him, we gain greater insight into the glory of God.

I pray earnestly that you may always seek Jesus.

Seek him in his Word. Seek him in your prayers. Seek him in the quiet moments of meditation.

The closer you are to him, the closer you will be to the love of the eternal God. To be one with him is to be one with God. When you stray from Jesus, you immediately lose sight of God as well. That is the work of sin in us. That is our spiritual laziness, and the unrighteousness of our corrupted heart.

When we are far from Jesus our soul will also be far from God, lonely and confused, and driven, as it were, by a vicious storm, calling and crying to be comforted. That's why it is a blessing that it will not always be like that. There will come a time, an eternity, when nothing can separate us from Jesus anymore. Then we will be with him *forever*.

And through him we will be with the Eternal One, whom we call, "*Abba, Father*".

Therein we find the eternal *Comfort* for all God's children.

II. PENTECOST

The Comforter Who Will Restore My Soul

"This is why I weep
and my eyes overflow with tears.
No one is near to comfort me,
no one to restore my spirit.
My children are destitute
because the enemy has prevailed.
Lamentation 1:16

"This is why I weep!", the prophet declares, "My eyes overflow with tears, because the Comforter, who would restore my spirit is not near".

Do you know such weeping?

Many tears are shed every day, and even in the night. Our heart longs for many things, hopes for many things, clings to many things. When our hopes are not fulfilled, or our treasures are taken away from us, we sense an enormous emptiness and disappointment in our hearts. We really grieve. Then our hearts are heavy and our eyes overflow. A good cry can sometimes bring relief, while suppressed grief only aggravates our sorrow.

A child cries easier because it is more sensitive. That is the very reason why children tend to be happier. As the tears run down their cheeks, the sadness evaporates. As adults we carry our grief around with us, and it buries itself within our hearts. We seek relief not through the tear ducts of our eyes but in the depth of our soul. That's why our grief is more intense and prolonged.

Those who cry may receive sympathy, but those who bottle up their

grief receive no consolation.

But when you are able to cry, what do your tears mean?

The Lord answers that question when he tells you, "Wherefore does a man grieve? For the punishment of his sins." [Cf. Lamentations 3:39].

Do you know such sorrow? Do you grieve over your sins? Is your soul overcome because of the sins in your life? Do they overwhelm you? Do you know what the Psalmist meant when he cried out in terror, because of the sins which brought him close to death? [Psalm 88:16]

Sad to say, we usually prefer to ignore such questions assuming that the sorrow which overwhelms us is something foreign to us.

Of course, we readily acknowledge our guilt, and confess our sins.

After all, who would say that his hands are clean? But let us remove those blinders. Let us speak the truth, and admit that we usually acknowledge a sense of guilt as a matter of duty, not out of real self awareness. Generally speaking, when all is well, we hardly recognize our sinfulness, except of course right after a specific transgression or when we have fallen into a particular sin.

Therefore if a time should come when you are truly aware of that sinfulness, and you are wasting away in remorse of soul, what other explanation could you give, except that the Holy Spirit graciously worked this in your heart? For the Holy Spirit can teach you, captivate you and make you uneasy with your self. That same Spirit gives you insight into your own heart and thoughts, your past, your birth, and your ancestry, all the way back to Adam. When that happens your soul will be moved, and you will cry out for mercy and forgiveness from your God.

Without such moments of discovery and preparatory grace, your heart is so hard, lethargic and insensitive, that it can dance and

frolic even though your soul is dead. It would sooner laugh at your own folly, than weep with sorrow at your inner decay.

Yet, there is another kind of weeping of which the prophet speaks, "This is why I weep, and my eyes overflow with tears. No one is near to comfort me" [Lamentations 1:16]. This sorrow is not like the flood of tears we cry when we recognize our total depravity which brings renewal. That brings light into the darkness of our innermost soul. It means seeing and enjoying heavenly things. Soothing oil is poured out for our wounded soul, sores are cleansed, medicine is given for our pain; and comfort comes from our God.

But what happened now? That comforter has disappeared again. The wound of Jeremiah's heart is throbbing again, and the hope he had placed on the Lord his God has faded away. Now he is even more desperate than he was before, because the grace once tasted, has escaped him. He enjoyed relief and comfort, but his soul is now once more left in its grief.

"Will the Lord reject us forever? Will he never show his favor again?" [Dutch Psalter 77:6] Was God's salvation only temporary, to leave him in greater sorrow than before? A momentary ray of light making the renewed darkness of his soul all the more oppressive? That's how the soul sinks into despair. Not right away, for he does not immediately note his estrangement from God, and appears to lack nothing.

But as the end of that period of abandonment approaches, and the Lord is about to awaken his soul, then also the sorrow and pain come back to him; and when the Comforter returns an unspeakable grief finally alerts him to the absence of the Comforter.

Please note, that the Comforter had comforted him with delightful *promises*, but he was incapable of acting on them by himself. The Comforter did not say, as a human comforter might have said, "But you must, anyway; just try a little harder". No the divine Comforter whispered in his soul, "Dear child, I know that you can't do it. But I have a solution. You can do it through my power. Come to me and I shall work in you both the will and the accomplishment."

That was manna for the soul and water for those who thirst. The *promise* is precious, because the comforter did not demand this of our empty hearts. He promised that he himself would fill our hearts with the power needed to respond faithfully.

Now the Law is no longer an accuser who would nail us to the cross, but a guide to the beautiful paths in which the Spirit leads us.

And this is the source of true prayer from the heart.

Prayer, not for wealth and prosperity, but for the fulfillment of the *promise*.

Every morning and every evening we should beg to receive from the Lord according to his promise, that he will work in us both the desire and the accomplishment to walk according to the ways He has prepared for us. Then comes a sacred Joy! When God fulfils his promises to us, we may give thanks for his faithfulness.

We experience true comfort when the Holy Spirit comforts us and relieves us of our wicked heart, our evil nature, our helplessness and shameless lack of holiness.

However, all too soon this comfort becomes a habit. God's gifts are so abundantly generous and kind, that we soon forgot our hunger and thirst, and with them also our desire for sincere supplication and true prayer.

Sincere prayer for grace morning and evening, can turn into a habitual request like asking a table host to pass the roast beef. In

response the Lord rations the grace he bestowed on us.
He does not forsake us, but he leads us into a wasteland with a
muddied brook. His promises no longer pour their grace on us. It is at
most a light drizzle.
That's how the Lord removes the shallowness of our soul, and hunger
and thirst return. Then we cry out because 'the Comforter is far from
us', and with such a cry the Comforter returns to us. For he was never
far from us.
He just *seemed* far off because our eyes were blurred with sin.

The Other Comforter

And I will ask the Father,
and he will give you another Counselor
to be with you forever
John 14:16

Among all the Christian celebrations the least well known,
understood or enjoyed is the feast of the outpouring of the Holy
Spirit. It is a truly 'spiritual' feast and offers few details for our
imagination.

Christmas offers many stories to share with your children. There is
the baby in the manger, the shepherds with the lambs, the angels and
wise men, the visit to the Temple and the flight to Egypt, to name
just a few. Similarly, on Easter, one can imagine the sorrowful
women visiting the grave, the lonely wandering of Mary Magdalene,
the angels at the open grave, the travellers to Emmaus, Jesus' entry
through closed doors, and a doubting Thomas invited to place his
finger in Jesus' side.

These details stir our imaginations. They provide lots of material for
discussions, and art can be produced to portray these events in
drawings and paintings.

They provide movement, change and a wealth of variety of figures
which come alive in our imagination and also for our congregation.
Pentecost provides a very different scenario. Now we find people in
and outside an upper room. There is a strange sound, unusual flashes
of light, speech that sounds confused, but which nevertheless breaks
through language barriers, and the climax of a sermon praising
God's great deeds.

These details usually don't inspire our imagination. There are no
grand events to be portrayed by artists, and it is difficult for our
children to grasp. It offers little material for splendid sermons.

Portrayal of Pentecost in the arts ends mostly in failure.

But, we hasten to add, it had to be that way. Pentecost is not less in value than Christmas or Easter, because its spiritual focus places it beyond the reach of our common imagination.

Pentecost is the most noble of the three feast days, but only for those who have tasted the noble gifts of the Lord in the outpouring of his Spirit. Only those who have received the “first fruit of the Spirit” [Rom. 8:23] can truly rejoice on this feast day of the Spirit.

When Jesus speaks about the Spirit, whom he will send us from the Father, he calls him *another Comforter*. This means that the Son thinks also of himself as a Comforter, but one who would remain only for a while and then leave again. That’s why he promised that they would receive *another* Comforter, different from himself. This new Comforter would not leave, but would remain with them forever. We must not think that the new Comforter came only to console the disciples who would miss Jesus. That’s not what Jesus meant and not what he said. To regard the Comforter as no more than a temporary substitute for Jesus demeans the Spirit, radically removes the blessing of Pentecost, and robs God the Holy Spirit of His honour.

For the Holy Spirit too is God. He is not a power, light, or gift, but a divine Person.

His majesty is nothing less than that of the Son, for he is equal to the Son in glory and timelessness. There is nothing temporal about his presence, for he shares the eternal being with the Son and the Father. Clearly, the Son comes first and the Spirit comes after him to ‘comfort’ the Father’s children.

But can one ‘comfort’ those who rejoice; ‘comfort’ those who do not mourn; ‘comfort’ those who do not admit to their sorrow, nor even recognize the misery that surrounds them like a stream? And, indeed,

what do the common multitudes, or even the confessing multitudes know about their ‘misery’?

For most people ‘misery’ comes when things go wrong, when they struggle with worry or illness, when they lose some possession or, worse, when they lose someone who is close to them through death. That’s why they love the confession that their ‘Father in Heaven’ fills their pantry, restores their health, and comforts them in their final days.

For those who live on a deeper level, ‘misery’ comes from the pressures of a sinful life. Their conscience afflicts them, and they are tormented by the question of ‘where they might spend eternity’. They do not live out of love but in fear, and this fear drives them to accept the salvation of the cross, confess the Son who saved them from their sins through his death on that cross, and who also opened the heavens when he rose from the grave.

That’s as far as they go. What more could they ask for?

A ‘two-in-one’ God as Father and Son would be much simpler for them to worship and adore, than the marvel of the triune God as he is worshipped by all who reflect more intently on the mystery. For such ‘two-in-one’ teaching is like a tree trunk without roots, like the mumbling of unintelligible words. It is not a dogma of the church, for dogma means conscious reflection on the Eternal One, and deserves the name only when it is practised in the very depth of our soul and being. To know God, the Eternal One as Father, Son and Holy Spirit; to rejoice in him and enjoy him who first loved us – such is the true, sincere and God-inspired confession of the Trinity. Such faith can not be destroyed by logic or doubt.

To arrive at such a point we must understand the ‘misery’ for which the Comforter is sent, as something more than for the pain of a personal setback, or an attack of conscience, or even the fear of hell. No, to understand the true misery, the depth of sorrow and divine focus of work for the Comforter we must turn to the theme of Divine Love.

God is Love. That’s why God’s work on earth does not rest until

‘love’ is the law for life in his kingdom. Indeed, the grandest imagination cannot begin to guess the glory we will experience once the waters of eternal love fall on us as a stream to drench all that have eternal life.

God is Love. That’s why even in our feeble imitations in marriage, friendship or sexual intimacy we can yet see a kernel of the all encompassing power of the divine love of God.

The Eternal One is Love. That’s why nothing strokes the ego and encourages us more in sin, selfishness and depravity than to be honoured, praised, loved and admired.

He is Love. We arrive at a deeper level of understanding and a real awareness of sin when our souls are torn because we disappoint that love. There is no real sorrow over a personal setback unless we also grieve at the sorrow we have caused him who loves us.

And likewise there is also no true faith and devotion, unless it turns to the love of the Holy One, and finds there an indescribable, irresistible and gripping desire to be near unto God, and to take shelter in his tabernacle.

Do you understand misery to be anything like that?

We are not asking about full comprehension, but just a little understanding, and some longing for his inscrutable ways. Not a longing for a new heaven and earth, but for the One who sits enthroned there, the source of all heavenly blessings. Do you know anything about that?

We are not talking about a passionate imagination, or emotional expression, not even about intense feelings of ecstasy. We mean a calm quiet deep consciousness which will show you with increasingly greater clarity the drought in your own heart, the need of your own passions and the pain of your inner self. This will teach and correct you, indicating what is lacking, what is the foundation and origin of

your all consuming misery. This is the misery which you have hardly recognized as such.

Then you will find laughter among your tears, my brothers and sisters, because that is the sign and proof of the love that ‘has already been poured out into your heart’. It was not yours by nature.

The fatal wound brought on by the fall results in a life of ‘misery’ while we are blind to the real character of that misery. To feel the pain of love means that we have once again received such love.

There is no salvation in ‘the One who loved us first’ unless this was followed by “the love of God poured into our hearts” [Rom 5:5].

Such an awakening of the pain of love is the work of the Lord throughout the ages, as he opens himself up to his chosen, his elect, and we may say even blessed because they are the “afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted” [Isa 54:11]. In their wretched state grace came to them and showed them Gods initiative in bestowing his tender mercies.

In their experience of grace they knew once more that they again belonged to the eternal One. They were once more conscious of their need for God because they were created for the Holy One of Israel. Created, not to be consumed by him, like the sacrificial lamb, but to be cherished as the object of his love, like a friend loves a friend, or a lover adores his beloved; to live with the Eternal One a life in which he communes with them, and the self respond to him.

Of course they never experience the full depth of this love, but they are moved along by that stream, always moving away from what is visible with the naked eye, as they seek and focus on the Eternal One. But they could not find him. ‘The world’ always interfered. As did their life with its needs, its riches, its hustle and bustle. But far more interference came from the ‘old self’ shamelessly prostituting itself to other gods. Then they no longer recognized their own love for the Lord, and did not long for him anymore. They no longer called on him, nor did they pray. These are faithless believers, with only a show of sainthood.

That is a true life of misery, a life of a thousand deaths.

Such it was for the woman for whom “the children come to the point of birth, and there is no strength to deliver them” [Isa 37:3].

For those who cling to superficial lifestyles, or those who live in terror that grips the heart at the thought of having to enter heaven and come face to face with the Eternal One, there is comfort in the knowledge that they will be reined in through chastisement. That is because their situation is unsustainable.

There are two fires raging, the one in front and one behind, to say nothing of the consuming fire within. Such persons are really highly favoured, so much so that the love of God is shed into their hearts. Love is the reason why the grace of God presents itself as a tempest, driving such people on and pushing them until they are too exhausted to endure it any longer.

The world opposes them; their own hearts accuse them, and sin and the devil dance a wicked dance around them to obtain their mortal soul.

If only their souls had wings, they could fly away from this life full of temptations. It is in their power to do so, and they could take their own life in suicide. But there is a strict command against that as well. Once more they face a consuming fire. It is the grim revenge, which curses all suicides as an outrage, a shame, and a violation of God’s holiness.

Walled in from all sides, there is no way out, no escape. There is nothing left but to submit without any comfort, being totally vulnerable to any evil power, which they cannot control, with only a prayer on their lips, “Oh that you might return; that there might be windows into heaven”. They are ‘Like a deer panting for water’.

Great is this thirst for the living Triune Holy God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Such thirsting cannot be quenched until all that obstructs and opposes or clouds the path has disappeared. It will be stilled only when there is no longer a ‘world’ to draw it, nor ‘time’ to exhaust it, no sinful heart to distract, nor the Devil lurking in the darkness to lead us away from the one true God.

The thirsting child only finds what it seeks when there is no longer a ‘partial commitment’, when there are no threatening clouds, or coldness of flesh. Only when ‘tomorrow’ can no longer rob you of what ‘yesterday’ had given, will the soul possess loving admiration and true adoration.

For then your boundaries are no longer a boundary for the Holy One. You will be taken up into the congregation of the saints in heaven; and that congregation in turn is enfolded by the Mediator and by the Spirit pouring forth from the Mediator as the Head drenching his body. That Spirit draws you into himself, to live in you and to fulfill in you all that can be fulfilled with the fulness of God.

Now, that will not happen on earth. It does not even come to completion when we die. It will not be accomplished until that day when He returns in all his glory.

But the Merciful One does not leave it at that. He does not ignore the comfortless condition of his un comforted ones. For, after all, He is your Saviour! His name is Compassion. That’s why he arranged for our salvation, and you, his blessed ones, who know the pain “of the love that was poured out into your hearts” [Rom. 5:5] will never be without a ‘comforter’, because he has sent *the* Comforter.

This same Comforter appeared to the Patriarchs in visions and appearances with judgements and divine messages.

The Israelites in the time of Moses noticed the robe of the Comforter rustling when the waters of the Red Sea parted, when the manna rained down from heaven, and when they saw Him in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. This Comforter continued to appear to the people of the Lord in the symbols of his Holiness in the ark of the covenant, in the hand that saves them, in

dreams and visions, and especially in the word of the prophets. When the era of shadows came to an end, the Son appeared, and every soul that thirsted for God clung to him, and was comforted and blessed by experiencing his love. But he did not stay; the cross appeared, and their 'hearts were troubled again'. The souls of the believers shuddered like the leaves in the tops of the trees shudder in the night breezes. But then they heard the promise, "My dear children, I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever" [John 14:16].

And then Pentecost came, and God himself descended into their hearts, to live in the congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ. He returned to the temple he had chosen, saying, "Here is the place of my rest"[cf. Isaiah 66:1]. That's when rest really came. A rest from our comfortless plodding. A foreshadowing of the eternal rest, which remains for the children of God.

The Living God in your Midst

Hereby you shall know that the
living God is among you
Jos. 3:10a.

The pure, undefiled mystical body of our Lord Jesus Christ on earth, the church, is a wonderful thing.

Nothing impure can enter it, and not one of God's children remains outside. It has the anointing of the Holy One and possesses all knowledge. All the powers of eternal life, and all the glory of the Kingdom are hidden within it. And there is no comfort on earth ever tasted by one of God's children, no lasting spiritual refreshment enjoyed by a pilgrim on the way to the new Jerusalem, or it flowed to them through the arteries of the holy body of our Lord.

The body of Christ is very real. It is not a matter of the imagination. It is not a metaphorical expression of an idealized concept. On the contrary, the body of our Lord Jesus Christ is so real and completely present, that even when everything else disintegrates and all earthly elements melt away at the end of time, this body *only* will remain complete in every way and untouched.

Even more amazing is the fact that this Body of our Lord reveals itself on earth, both in existence and in deed; even though it is revealed through the murky curtain of our sins and spiritual failures. Yet the body itself never becomes tainted or entangled up in them. It is easy to see how sinful and imperfect the church of God on earth has been throughout the ages, and so, this church with all its ingrained corruption, has never been anything but a faulty and veiled revelation of the Body of our Lord. Yet, no matter how intensely the fog obscures the radiance of that body, or how deeply perverted the situation of the church of God on earth, it has never been able to take away anything from the undefiled purity of the holy mystical Body of the Lord.

So, whether you hear St. Augustine or Calvin praise the Lord in their time for the blossoming of the church, or hear Huss and Teelinck and Comrie lament the afflictions of the church, in all instances you will notice that the water of life flows crystal clear, whether they rejoice or lament; they are equally consoled by the same comfort received from the one living God.

The same thing can be said about the *deeds* which are produced in God's children by this Body. These are the 'works of righteousness'. The work of God is done through these insignificant creatures, whom God adopted as his children, and also qualified, so that of their own will they would want to do 'good works' to the glory of his Holy Name.

All these good works were already hidden in the Body of Christ, so that they could come to life in us as members of that Body.

Yet the beautiful flower buds never bloom completely here below. For, just as there is not one pure snowflake that falls to the ground without being contaminated by dust from the earth, so also there has never been a good work coming from the Father of light to his creatures that was not spoiled in its execution. There is nothing perfect on earth.

Rather than skipping lightly over these details, it is better to examine the shameful sin with which we tarnish the most beautiful and wonderful works of the Holy Spirit.

Note well, however, that even when we admit this fully, and do not cover up its truth, this does not hurt the Body of Christ in the least. For even if, with our sinful ulterior motives we tarnish our 'good works' and spoil them with our ungodly motives, that does not spoil those works in the eyes of the Lord. For the good works have come to us from the Body of Christ, which means that they have been produced by faith. And faith sees to it that nothing can distract from the work of God in us. It appears that our 'good works' are tainted, but in fact they are only discoloured on the surface.

These things are wonderful, and the reason why we hear God's children on earth, led by the holy apostles, cry out every morning and

evening, that we all stumble and there is nothing perfect in us [see James 3:2] -- yet you will hear these same pilgrims, led by the same holy apostles cry out triumphantly, "No one who is born of God, will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God" [1 John 3:9]. Note well, his seed remains with him, and those remaining seeds are the *hidden* powers of the *mystical* body of Christ; this *hidden* life remains out of sight, just as the wheat germ remains hidden while it exerts pressure from within.

Just where can we find the key to this holy witness, on which the justification of the godless as well as the peace of God's children depends? Only in the fact that the *Holy Spirit resides* in this body of Christ.

Christ is no longer here on earth. He is seated on the throne of glory in heaven. The crown of glory shines eternally, on the head of David's great Son, as the Psalmist tells us. [see Psalm 132:11]. He, who ascended into heaven, remains there for our benefit. He does not rest in holy inactivity, but just as the Father is always working, so also the Son works. And this divine labour of the Lord Christ in heaven is for the benefit of people.

He prays for his people. He is the assurance of the rich reconciliation in his blood. As our High Priest he attends to the holy of holies in Heaven our one and only sacrifice. He also prepares a place for us, and invites us by calling us with irresistible grace. So he does not do anything just *in heaven* but constantly works from heaven to effect his purposes on earth.

The Lord Jesus Christ stays in one place only. He lives in our human flesh, and cannot be in two separate places at once, even though in heaven so many of earth's limitations fall away. Heaven is not a place of magic, but a real world, and so the law of separation between one place and another remains valid there too.

But even though the Lord Christ is limited to one place at one time, such limitations do not inhibit his work. The Lord's work extends powerfully, and reaches out in various ways to every place for it possesses the glorious ability of the divine '*all-at-the-same-time*'. This is truly a divine attribute; it means that at one and the same moment God reaches out to Asia and Bosnia, to Peru and your town, city or village. And, even though he is omnipresent to all at the same time, he is yet so near to all of us, that he listens to our individual cries in our prayers as if they are the only ones addressed to him at that moment.

This divine '*all-at-the-same-time*' is also an attribute of our Lord Jesus Christ. Even if he is seated on the heavenly throne, his majesty, grace and Spirit are able to extend to all the corners of the earth at the same time. And just as our head can control and respond to any part of our body at any given moment, so also does the exalted Head impact his mystical Body.

No matter how far this Body is spread out, any part of this Body cannot suffer in the least, or Jesus knows about it. Just as when you prick yourself on any area of your skin with a pin, you will know it immediately. In this way, there is no member of this Body, however insignificant, to whom the power of our Lord Jesus does not reach out so that he, our Lord Jesus Christ, will also be a comfort to that poor overlooked soul. In fact that Body does not live its own life, but allows the Lord Jesus to live within it. The Head controls the body, leads the body and energizes it. It is Immanuel who works his will within its members.

But even now, after all this, we have not yet touched the depth of this mystery. It may well be that we share in this Body and that this Body is given life in Jesus Christ its Head, but that does not yet explain the real mystery of how your 'I', your 'soul', your internal hidden self

can have and rejoice in such an intimate relationship with that Mediator and Saviour.

He is our splendid, thoughtful, living, leading and protecting Head, who accompanies us all and does everything for us. We, on the other hand, if left to our own initiative, work not for God but for Satan. If Jesus should ever let go of us in our last hour, we could not expect an entry into Heaven, but we would be lost. This is the real Mystery. The abyss yawns before us, our faith can lift us over it, but still the mystery is not cleared up; we need further explanation. A clarification of this mystery comes to us on Pentecost.

Can you have communion *with the Father*, without a mediator?

Certainly not, because the Father is the origin and creative power of all things. But it is not the Father who descends to his church on earth, "One God and Father from whom and to whom are all things" [1Cor. 8:6].

Again, do you have immediate fellowship *with the Son*? We do not, for no one can affirm that Jesus is Lord, except through the Holy Spirit. Indeed, he took on our flesh, and created fellowship with our human nature, but that definitely does not include fellowship with our *inner consciousness*. That is why it was good that Jesus should leave the disciples, for unless he left them, he could not send another Comforter.

Please note this carefully.

Fellowship with the *Father* is not possible except *through the Son*.

"No one knows who the Father is except the Son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" [Luke 10:22].

And again, there is no communion with the Son, *except through the Holy Spirit*. For no one can say "Jesus is Lord", except through the Holy Spirit [1 Cor. 12:3]. So only when the Holy Spirit has come, can he bring all the treasures of Christ, and begin to exalt him in you.

Once that happens, and the Holy Spirit resides in you, then, through the same Spirit, the Son will come and through him the Father will also come to you. That is why the Lord Jesus could prophesy so

jubilantly that he himself and the Father would come, and live with you, that is, after the Comforter has been sent [John 14:23,26].

Reflect on this prayerfully, and what do you find?

We find that our precious Mediator, who was 'very God in his innermost being', but who assumed our human nature in the unity of his person, was from eternity himself in true personal fellowship with God the Holy Spirit. Before the mountains were formed and the foundations of the depths of the earth were secured in immeasurable space, the Son was eternally in personal communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

One could not say of the Son that he should first receive the Holy Spirit. God the Son cannot receive any power from God the Holy Spirit, because He is equal with him in majesty and splendour. So also the Holy Spirit cannot abide in the Son, because the bond between the Son and the Holy Spirit is not one of indwelling, but of divine communion of being.

Nothing of God the Holy Spirit could ever be delegated to God the Son. Rather we must confess the opposite, that God the Holy Spirit issues forth from both the Father and the Son.

Thus we can not say of God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, that he was filled with the Holy Spirit, received the Holy Spirit or began to communicate with the Spirit, for to say so the Son would first have to stop being the *Son of God*.

We enter boldly into the holy of holies of this mystery, when we recognize that this Son took on our nature, and assumed this human nature in such a way that he truly became human.

This human Jesus is quite different from the Son of God, for as a human he was not in personal communion with the Father, nor with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not come to us from the human

Jesus. And the Holy Spirit definitely was, and needed to be, poured out on the human Jesus.

We see the real depth of the mystery, when we realize that it is very specifically the work of the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity, who inhabits our human heart as God, and who comfort us as God the Holy Spirit.

This means that God the Son did not dwell as God in the soul of the human Jesus Christ. In the incarnation, God the Son related in a miraculous way with human nature. The Holy Spirit is not united with humanity in the same way. But it was peculiarly the work of the Holy Spirit, not the Son, to enter any human soul as God, and thus also to enter the human soul of Jesus Christ.

This explains why the human Jesus Christ needed to receive the Holy Spirit even though he was the Son; why the Spirit poured out his power and energy on Jesus and why Jesus became completely filled with the Spirit upon his return to Heaven, so that at Pentecost he could pour out this same Spirit upon the church, his Body.

Once all this has become clear through prayer and meditation, then light will also suddenly surround you. It then becomes abundantly clear how the Holy Spirit, who lives in Christ as our Head and in us as his members, only began his divine work of comfort on Pentecost. Only from that hour did God the Holy Spirit, who was already indwelling the human person Jesus Christ, meet the Mediator, and all the limitations of his humble state were eliminated once and for all.

Now it is no longer a riddle how the Holy Spirit can work in me long before I notice it. We know that a baby can live in the mother's womb long before the child has any awareness of its own existence, although the mother is fully aware of it. This is also how things

work in the mystical body of our Lord.

It is not about being alive or being aware of life, but rather about Jesus taking note of you. And when he does, your life in this body will at first be like that of the child in the mother's womb. The force of life already flows through you even if you are not yet aware of it, just as the mother gives life to the unborn child. And there is more to it. You may have already noticed that the beauty of the gift of the Holy Spirit working to change the direction of your life is substantially different from the much deeper and wholly other matter of *you* becoming aware of the personal indwelling of God the Holy Spirit.

God the Lord dwells within you by the power of the Spirit. This wonderful God, who holds even the highest heavens in his hands, enters into your unsearchable secret inner self. He sets up his throne in your heart, and surrounds your whole inner being and person with his heavenly faithfulness; he forever embraces you with his tender mercy, and sustains you with his deep and fully satisfying comfort. When this unsearchable miracle is bestowed on you, then and only then will the secret of his divine glory be revealed to you, and will the '*God with us*' in you come to fulfilment.

The victory *is* then assured and the triumph *cannot* fail.

Then, indeed, will death and sin and the Devil be defeated in you, because they cannot stand before a Holy God.

And even if all unrighteousness and corruption of many godless nations should conspire against you, and make a covenant to destroy your soul, they could not and would not be able to defeat you.

Because, if they want to succeed they would have to drive out the Holy Spirit from the hidden core of your inner self, something they cannot do, simply because the power of what is created cannot oppose God the Holy Spirit. Indeed, no powers of darkness can even touch God the Holy Spirit. That's why we encourage all who are oppressed and overcome by the storms of life to be of good cheer. Your Saviour lives to pray for you always and God the Holy Spirit lives and works in you. Your God is in the midst of you, and he will not fail or desert

you.

So, as far as it concerns you, "be strong and courageous" (Jos. 1:18), for you know and can tell your children after you that this is the very work of God the Holy Spirit in you, that he lives in you to work through you. He is the one who allows you to do it, *and you do it through Him*.

The Great Feast of the Holy Spirit

I will pour out my spirit on all people
Joel 2:28

The church of Jesus Christ worships the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and confesses these three to be One Holy God.

As long as the church, as 'the people of Jesus Christ', continues to celebrate the great feast days of the Christian year her celebrative joy can be nothing less than an anticipation of an even greater and more solemn assembly to come. Then she will give thanks and praise and honour with even greater humility and with greater happiness in celebrating the glorious praiseworthy holy name of the Triune God. Even our Christmas praise is directed to that Eternal Being, for only 'God revealed in the flesh', could inspire us to sing praises at the manger. The Eternal God moves us to praise at Easter time, because only the power with which he was shown to be 'the Son of God', can move our hearts to sing jubilant Psalms of life. In the same way, our Pentecost hymns celebrate the Eternal One. For only those who adore the Holy Spirit as God himself, can understand even a little of the endless comfort that comes to us from heaven through the incredible event of Pentecost.

And it is, of course, no accident that the congregation of Jesus Christ, who entered history confessing the Triune God, should express her delight, joy and holy enthusiasm with exactly three great feasts. For it is clear to anyone who cares to notice, that Christmas is the great celebration of the Father, whose creative power gave us the baby Jesus in the manger; Easter is the celebration of the Son himself as Lord of life. But at Pentecost we celebrate, neither the Father, nor the Son, but God the Holy Spirit. Certainly the Mediator, who was born at Christmas time, who assumed life eternal at Easter time, and who poured out his Holy Spirit at Pentecost, is always most near to us. Yet we recognize the differences which clearly show us that we are

dealing with a threefold reflection of the triune Godhead.

And so we celebrate the last of our great feast days, Pentecost. When the people of God are once more challenged to appreciate the grandeur of the miracle that is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and are reminded that they may worship the Triune God in all his splendour.

As children of the Lord we must be sure that above all, the Pentecost miracle means the indwelling of God himself, who came down into us. This is not just as a power or gift, or a radiance of peace, but an outpouring on us of the force of authentic divine life, coming to us as *God Himself*.

Those who do not know or confess that the Holy Spirit is 'eternally and truly one with the Father and the Son' will not understand this. They cannot join the songs of praise and receive comfort. As their souls continue to wander without comfort they cannot give thanks either.

It depends totally and completely on the triune God alone.

Don't let anything distract you from coming closer to the Lord.

Reject everything that does not help you open your heart to him so you can focus more fully on the unsearchable holiness of the Glorious One. Focus on him, so you won't stumble.

Only the knowledge of *God* is important. And please note well, that this knowledge is not just in your head, memory or your thinking, but a knowledge which involves your whole being, to its very depths, becoming as it were *one* with the breath of life within you. Please note also that the form in which the Holy One presents himself on Pentecost, and offers himself as a blessing, as the *Comforter*, one who reaches out not to those who think they have everything, but rather to those who are brokenhearted, dejected and 'poor in spirit'; these know they are poor and miserable.

He is a *Comforter* not because, Jesus is just gone away from us, and sends his Spirit to take his place and comfort us while he is away. Jesus never said anything like that. He did say that he was the first *Comforter*, and when he departed, he promised to send us *another*

Comforter not primarily to console us over his departure, but rather to accomplish the very same purpose of Jesus in his coming, namely to comfort us in our misery.

Jesus does not assign this 'other comforter' a lower status than his own; in fact he speaks of him as the *real* Comforter, whose task Jesus had assumed but for a short time and in very limited circumstances. He adds emphatically, that the Father will send 'another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever' [John 14:16]. Jesus uses even stronger words by telling them, "It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come unto you" [John 16:6].

The Lord makes it abundantly clear that his work of redemption is only a *means*, and that the final purpose is to bring the *Comforter* into our hearts. We might also say that we see the fruit of his death only with the coming of the Comforter.

How could it be otherwise?

Is it not true, dear reader, that our inclination and goal in life, in fact the reason why we were created is to enjoy God and to belong to him?

When we are 'without God' we are empty, poor, miserable and forsaken.

Yet, to 'belong to God' does not mean that we have a God in heaven on whom we can call just in the hour of need, nor does it mean having a God who goes before us on the path of life. Rather, it means having a God *within us*, in our soul and heart, a God who is *our* God, who inspires us, who motivates us from within, and who fills us with his power.

Our soul is impoverished and comfortless, like one driven along by storms [Isa 54:11].

That is when we experience the true catastrophic nature of our sins. And if anything is to save and comfort the comfortless, it must also fulfill our greatest need, namely to have *God himself come to us and make his dwelling in our heart*.

The decree of creation for all humanity affirms, 'your heart as the

temple of God'. But, the lament of eternal love for sinners affirms, 'your heart is desolate, or worse the abode of the evil one'. Even so the joyful song that the congregation of the Lord at Pentecost sings, reflects on the wonders the Almighty has done, 'the Holy Spirit has descended into the empty hearts of the people of God'.

That is why the Holy Spirit is called, and is, our *Divine Comforter*.

We cannot and should not avoid the obvious question, whether the Holy Spirit also comforted *the saints in the Old Testament*? If so, was the Pentecost event really so special?

We could simply dismiss these questions by calling to mind Jesus' own words, 'if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come unto you' [John 16:7]. Or, we can turn to Scriptures own interpretation of this text, '... the Holy Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet glorified' [John 7:39].

However, we realize that even these words may be like an empty noise to many readers, so we do need to go back to the question.

We may take as point of departure that which every Christian confesses, namely, that all the saints of the Old Testament had the same need for salvation as we, and that they, like us, could only receive new life through the grace which is from Jesus Christ, and were made alive in him on earth and sanctified in him after they died.

Yet, now that we have clarity on these essential points and recognize that their situation was the same as ours we may still ask whether God in his sovereignty was in any way limited in how he could accomplish his work at that time, any more than he is now.

Even now, in the days of the New Covenant do we not recognize clearly that the Lord God follows different ways of gathering those little children who died soon after they were born, from the way he calls us to himself and in whom he works out his salvation at a later

age?

Why then should anyone dare to deny that the Lord our God could have used different ways and different means to bring those saints to himself who lived before Christ, from the way he now comforts his people after the appearance of Christ?

Surely there is still a difference between ‘promise’ and ‘fulfilment’? Is there no distinction between living in the period of the ‘salvation of Israel’ and that of ‘*grace that encompasses the whole world*’? And is there not a world of difference if one lives in an age of ‘miracles’, or in a time of gradual, quiet, spiritual development?

If we acknowledge these enormous differences, there can be no doubt in our hearts that the very same Almighty God who had called into being that temporary situation of the family of Israel, can also determine his own ways to give them the comfort of the Holy Spirit, and to do so in a manner appropriate to the limited revelation of that time.

Don’t we know, that the inspiration of the prophets reflects the miraculous and glorious work of the Holy Spirit in an altogether different way, from the work of the Spirit in our soul? And is it really unthinkable that such a manner of direct inspiration was also used by the Spirit to enlighten our forefathers in the faith?

We read of such a working of the Spirit in Balaam [Num. 22:5] and Saul even without saving power. And we notice the power of this work of the Spirit in the life of a Bezaleel [Ex. 31:2], and in Joshua even when it operated for what we might consider non-spiritual concerns.

And in that period of the old covenant we find many claims which expressed clearly and specifically, that something completely different and better will happen, as in the prophets, when we read, “I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring” [Is. 44:3], “will I pour out my Spirit” [Joel 2:29], “and afterward, will pour out my Spirit on all people.” [Joel 2:28], “and I will pour out ... a spirit of grace and supplication” [Zach. 12:10].

Note the strong language of ‘pouring out’ in these promise in stark

contrast to the ‘few drops’ of the gifts of the Spirit in Old Testament times. In comparison with that, the outpouring of the Spirit after Easter is like a flood from heaven.

In the Scriptures the Holy Spirit does not hide from us the great contrast between ‘then’ and ‘now’. Indeed, the Apostle Paul describes the transition from the period of the Old Testament, where God’s focus was limited to Israel, when he writes, “...which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” [Eph. 3:5].

If we take a closer look at the difference, it is not that difficult to see. We might compare the former period to someone’s standing at the top of the stair to a basement and shining a little light down into it, illuminating just a few spots and the later could be compared to taking a torchlight right into the basement and illuminating all its dark corners.

Or again, the difference is not unlike feeling a few drops of rain, instead of the spring runoff from several feet of snow leading to a river running over its banks and onto the fields along its path.

So, I ask you, seriously, are these not good examples of the contrast between the working of the Holy Spirit in the Old compared to the New Covenant?

For under the old covenant we note only a dim light shining from above, enlightening only a few people whom God called into his service. But since the coming of Jesus we experience the enlivening and comforting light, shining into the dark cellars of our misery, to illumine us with direct, full and glorious brilliance of his majesty. Under the old covenant only a few drops of rain fell down; but with the rising of the Sun of Righteousness the snow on the mountains has melted into a stream of living water, flowing to all the nations.

A more suitable metaphor may be to compare the times of the Old Covenant to the digging of a new canal, through which in time all the surrounding fields will be irrigated to produce rich crops. Only with the coming of the Son in this world is the work complete, the dam breeched, the waters fill the canal, and we speak of the Spirit being *poured out*.

What, after all, is the real miracle of Pentecost? It is not the pouring out of the Spirit into the hearts of a *few people*. That happened in the Old Testament times as well. It still happens to a sinner who repents and is reborn.

The outpouring of the Spirit is not just a disturbance of the waters using more or less force to create a few waves in the stream. For there have been times when the Spirit seemed to be stuck in the marshy backwaters of that stream while there were also times of spiritual revival in the Church of Jesus Christ *after Pentecost*, and throughout the ages.

So if we really want to comprehend the miracle of Pentecost, understand and adore it, we must not just look to the conversion of the Apostles, nor even to the spiritual awakening of all who were gathered that day; we must recognize Pentecost as an event that had never happened before, and one that could not have happened earlier, for it was an event as unique as the coming of the Christ child at Christmas, and the resurrection of Jesus from the grave.

This approach to Pentecost is not the result of pious investigation or human ingenuity, but simply the revelation of the Word, which tells us, there are not just a few individual believers, but an entire church of Jesus Christ; the believers were built up to become a coherent organic entity, united by divine design. This congregation grew up into a unity with her Mediator, and with him she has been one living

Body through whom Christ moves, and through whose arteries his blood of life is flowing. As Head of this Body our Mediator moves, feeds and directs his Church.

Of course Jesus knows and loves each individual even the least among those whom he has chosen. Yet he chooses, knows and loves these 'little ones' especially, as living stones of *the holy temple*, and as living parts of *his sanctified body*, integrating and indwelling with *his Bride*, whose arrival he awaits with tender longing, to welcome her to the mansions of eternal light. Even among the people of Israel, the Mediator had a prototype of that congregation as an organism, and the hidden structure of his sacred body, that was to come and rise up as the temple of the Lord. Israel was not yet truly that congregation. Indeed, God's intentions were much richer, much grander and far more merciful.

This congregation of the new covenant was to encompass all nations and the dimensions of this organism were to equal the dimensions of the whole world. The size of his holy body had to correspond to the population of the whole earth. The cedars for this temple of the Lord would be brought together from all the mountains of the nations. This, the apostle Paul tells us, was the scope of God's plan, the council of his good pleasure, and his glorious intention.

All the preceding ages represent the work of preparation to accomplish this plan.

Only when all the preparatory work was completed at Jesus' Ascension and 'the fulness of time had come' [Gal. 4:4], could the doors open for that temple of God into which the Holy Spirit would descend; only then could the Holy Spirit be poured out as a stream in the channel which Jesus had prepared as his community of believers.

Who Placed His Holy Spirit in Their Midst

They have lied about the LORD;
they said, "He will do nothing!
No harm will come to us;
we will never see sword or famine.
The prophets are but wind
and the word (of the Lord) is not in them;
so let what they say be done to them."¹
Jeremiah 5:12, 13

What the living God did on Pentecost can be summed up with these words: He placed his Holy Spirit in our midst. Not in the midst of the *world*, but in the midst of his *Church*.

We must understand this correctly; he did not place him only in the 'midst of an exclusive group', but in the midst of those who confess him, those who are baptized, those who are discipled by the church, and who through the work of the Church come to be in a close relationship with the Lord.

The Holy Spirit descended on all those together. Better yet, the Holy Spirit was placed by God to be God in their midst.

And the Holy Spirit has really and truly taken a stand in the midst of that broad circle of those who are baptized. Not just indirectly through the Word or through the preachers and shepherds of the flock, nor is he there indirectly through the means of grace, like prayer and worship, sacraments and offering; no, he is there directly as God the Holy Spirit, personally, in our midst. And he does not only dwell in the hearts of a few selected members who are reborn,

who repented or are now somehow more sanctified; but this way, the Holy Spirit is present in the congregation, in the company of all those who are baptized. Rather he lives there in such a way that he is present in all baptized, confessing members. It is possible, though highly unlikely, for the Holy Spirit to be present in a congregation at a time when new growth has stagnated completely.

Even there, since Pentecost, the Holy Spirit has remained in our midst, as a quiet witness, in the presence of a devoted senior, a silent admirer, a fearful faultfinder, or a faithful comforter. But he is always in our midst, because he has been placed there by divine decree.

He is present as the Spirit of God, and as the most important person in the whole Body, for he is the one who substitutes for our risen and exalted Lord, and interprets the riches of Christ as the holy Messenger who maintains the quiet relationship between Christ and his Bride.

The world does not see him, because they do not know him.

Similarly the unrepentant among the congregation seldom notice his presence because he does not come to us in a visible form.

Nevertheless he is present, and God's children experience and know him. He also prays for and through these children of God "with groanings which cannot be uttered." [Romans 8:26].

They know him as their encourager, their leader, their spiritual and inward teacher, their comforter and their God. Everything that is accomplished through the Word or sacrament, or through preaching, is primarily done through the motivation of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is not a supplementary presence, simply to bless things so that they all work efficiently. The truth is that the Holy Spirit works as prime mover in everything and accomplishes it all. Closely bound to the Son and the Father, God the Holy Spirit thus *uses* Word and Sacrament and the servant of the Word, to proclaim Jesus Christ to us.

The Father is the one who plans, the Son is the one who prepares, and the Spirit is the one who distributes. These three pillars reflect

¹ Parenthetical comments were added by the author - JVM.

God's ordained plan for the church of Christ. That is why the Holy Spirit does not encourage the preaching of morality, but requires something much deeper. 'To do good' is a common obligation, and he who 'does not do good' is breaking the law. However, if I have made a covenant with you, and you break it, *you have broken trust*, which is worse than 'not doing good'.

And when out of compassion and love, I continue to give you warnings, but you ridicule such counsel, and you harden your heart against the mercy that has been extended, then you are not only wicked, and faithless, but you sinned against the Holy Spirit.

That is the way it is in the Church of Christ.

The Church is known by three characteristics. First of all, whether *she does good deeds*, because it is God's undeniable right to demand that of us. Then, whether she lives *according to the covenant of grace*, by which we are bound. And in the third place, whether the church *listen and respond to the Word of the Holy Spirit* who implores us to renounce wickedness and unfaithfulness, instead of despising and ignoring it. This third point was Israel's error as they violated God's law and broke God's covenant. This was counted against them as *wicked* and being *unfaithful*.

Then when God in his compassion sent a prophet to call the people to repentance because his judgment was coming, they dared to ridicule him, telling him that all his words were just hot air, and that the evil with which he was threatening them, would fall on his own head.

This meant a rejection of the Holy Spirit as they disappointed and despised him. That is why the judgment over Israel had to come.

And today? Now that Pentecost has come and the Holy Spirit resides in the midst of the church, appealing to us in Jesus' name, and steering us away from the world, in order to create in us a burning desire to maintain God's covenant, how do we respond?

Do you think, dear reader, that you could ever gauge the depths of sorrow, or have even the least understanding of how deeply hurt and sorrowful it must be for the Holy Spirit to witness the church's failure in times such as ours?

The Temple of the Holy Spirit

...built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,
with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone

In him the whole building is joined together
and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

Ephesians 2:20,21

Pentecost is the feast of the Holy Spirit, but *what* exactly does the church confess about the Holy Spirit on that day?

The Spirit is poured out, just as Jesus had promised. Poured out from the Father through Christ. Poured out once and for all. He was poured out in a way that has never been repeated; it was a totally unique and a once for all event.

He came down with a mighty rushing wind as if the heavenly spheres were being ripped open. The tongues of fire that came upon the believers gave a reflection of the eternal light separating into individual flames on the heads of all who believed. Even more miraculous was the fact that their tongues were loosened and a sacred energy began to flow. It now appeared that the languages of all the nations were becoming the common property of the church, and all of this turned into praise, worship and thanksgiving for the holy name of the Lord. Certainly we are all agreed on these details.

These are the facts. It was a miraculous event, and this is the content of what we recount and tell our children about this day.

But how do we go on from here? We cannot stop now.

At Christmas time we naturally began to ask questions such as, 'Where did this baby come from?' and, 'Why did he come at this time?' and, 'How was this a miraculous birth?' and, 'Why was he placed in a manger?' Similarly, at Pentecost many questions arise. We want to understand what is happening and just what the outpouring of the Spirit really means. Why did it take place at that time, and how does this event relate to us today as we direct our

hearts to live in faith.

Don't forget, long before the Pentecost event God was at work in Israel, among the Patriarchs and all the way back to Paradise. The Holy Spirit was also active all this time. For in those days too, the elect were called and sanctified. And so now, when a soul turns from death to life in our times, it is only because of the descent of the Holy Spirit and his indwelling. Therefore we give thanks to the Spirit as well as the Father and the Son, every time our cold hearts are warmed and our lifeless condition is quickened and revived.

How do we understand this? We could say it's one or the other.

Maybe Pentecost was only a spiritual awakening of the faithful gathered in the upper room -- but then we face the question of its meaning for us; or, we could regard it as a singular once-for-all event of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, but then we need to explain the work of the Spirit in Israel, in comparison to the waves of spiritual awakening in our own time.

The gospel of John affirms the truth of the second option. John 7:39 tells us that the Holy Ghost was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified. This does not exclude the prior work of the Holy Spirit on earth. It is a mysterious statement, which we encounter at the celebration of Pentecost. And the church must search the Scriptures to find out how we are to understand the distinction between the work of the Holy Spirit before during and after Pentecost, if indeed he was only poured out at Pentecost in Jerusalem as a singular event, now more that eighteen centuries ago. This is the question which we must try to resolve as we reflect on Pentecost, and we hope to do so in a clear, concise and understandable summary.

The salvation of the Lord God and its glorious fulfilment is not a matter of gathering individual, independent, unconnected souls, but

the establishment of a *community*, a *body*, a *people*, a *flock*. All the saints of the past and the believers today form a whole, they belong together, and are united in a bond established by God. However, that does not mean that all people are or should be the same. They are all unique, and differ one from another. Just as in our human body a fingernail differs from an eye and a hair differs from an artery, so also in the body of Christ, the members are different from one another, with their own make up, function and purpose. On Pentecost we must not forget that all the saints together form *one Body* and we really must focus our attention on that one *Body of Christ*.

Scripture speaks frequently about this body of the Lord, and uses specifically two images to describe it, a *body* or a *temple*. A 'temple' represents all the stones that are incorporated into the building which rises up by God's design, and in which the Lord God himself resides. But Scripture itself shows us that the image of a temple is too mechanical and external as an analogy, while the imagery of a *body* is much richer in revealing the deep thoughts of God, for we read "...the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph 2:21), and "you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house..." (1 Peter 2:5). Both these expressions portray the temple as a living organism or body, because only a living body *grows*, and only in a body can we speak of the component parts as *living*.

The reason why the apostles keep coming back to the imagery of a *temple* can be explained from the Old Testament dispensation. We know that for all the nations a temple was really a shell where an idol resided as a body of stone which represented their god. Similarly, Israel also had a temple, but it was empty, without an image of a god, and only the radiance of the Lord filled those halls. This temple was a foreshadowing, nothing more. It pointed to Christ whose flesh and blood would be the real temple in which God would appear on earth. *Temple* thus is the word used for the shadow of things to come, whereas *body* is the word which applies to the same

reality for the time of fulfilment. However, both point to that one great all encompassing fact, that the Lord God does not string his people together like a necklace of pearls, but gathers them together into one great *body*, as church of the living God, the *flock* of the Good Shepherd. These are the people of his own possession, the *congregation* of his saints.

Having established that much, we have to go on to the second point and show that like any other body, this *body* of Christ is not only characterised by growth, but after conception had a period of formation in secret, before being born. When a child is born, we know that it existed before its birth. As an unformed substance it is wonderfully woven in the womb of its mother according to Psalm 139 when, “you knit me together in my mother’s womb” [vs.13]. At a certain point, but months before the baby is born, this unformed substance becomes viable. Yet it continues to be ‘hidden’ in this condition for some time before it finally is born, and will breathe on its own after opening its eyes to the light.

This analogy of the child gives us a simple but accurate example for the birth and growth of the body of Christ. The birth came with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, but that body did not begin to *exist* at Pentecost. For, long before it was born, this body had its existence in secret, hidden in the shadows of what was to come, concealed in the womb of her mother. It existed even from the time of Paradise for that is where this body was conceived. For many centuries afterward it developed as an unformed ‘substance’, until the time of Abraham when we noticed the first movements of new life. This life progressed and grew stronger in Israel.

But this Body of Christ, the body of his church, did not see the light of day until Pentecost. Until that time it had been hidden in Israel’s womb and up to this point it had lived as if unaware of its own

existence. It was not yet breathing on its own, aroused by its own spirit, or discerning the light with its own eyes.

All of these things happened after that first Pentecost Sunday. Before that time the body was completely formed, although it did not yet have its own breath, its own spirit, or the fulness of its own life.

That is exactly what happened when the Holy Spirit was poured out on that day. At that point, when the church threw off the covering of Israel and *received the breath of life*, it appeared as a body, coming out of the shadows of the Old Testament period.

From then on it began its own conscious movement and its eyes were opened to eternal light. Foreknown from eternity, conceived in Paradise, hidden in Israel until it was moving with life the Church of Christ was born on Pentecost as a body which continues to grow and to develop right up to today. Some day this process will be completed and she will be clothed in righteousness, and adorned with jewels like a bride who is to be presented to the heavenly Bridegroom.

If we are not mistaken, this brief but simple description should serve to resolve the question which we posed earlier regarding the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. For now we can see clearly that the Holy Spirit was at work in the time of Israel even though Scripture also says that, “Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.” [John 7:39]

We have to apply the analogy of the as yet ‘unborn’ and the already ‘born’ child. While still unborn it is very much alive, but ‘breathes’ through the body of its mother. Once it is born it lives and breathes on its own. Similarly the church of God was enfolded in the people of Israel, and the work of the Holy Spirit was mediated through the life of the people of Israel. At Pentecost this working of the Holy Spirit came to the church unmediated. The mother’s task was

completed, the child was born, and the breath of the Holy Spirit flowed into its body directly to *inspire it from within*.

The problem of Jesus' own role at the birth of the church can also be solved easily. You might ask why did Jesus have to be involved? Is the Holy Spirit not also fully God, and if so, cannot God the Holy Spirit come directly to his body, the church? But those who speak that way forget one thing! Once born, a body cannot breathe except through its head. Before it is born, the child 'breathes' through the body and blood of the mother, and not through its head. This is why, earlier on, the work of the Holy Spirit could be observed in the body of the mother without Jesus' own intervention. Now that the church has been born, the situation has changed. The people of God are the body, but this body cannot exist without a *Head* through which it must breathe, be fed and receive direction. Just as it is unthinkable for a new born baby to breathe on its own without first opening its mouth (which is in the head) to take in the air, so also is it inconceivable that Christ's body should receive the Holy Spirit except through its *Head*. We might say that the Head had to breathe in the Spirit first, before the Spirit would be poured out into the lungs and blood vessels of the body from the *Head*.

This is the meaning of the outpouring on Pentecost: Jesus has become the head of the church, because of his Ascension into heaven. This is also the moment the body of Christ can be born from the womb of Israel. This is followed by two other events; first, the Head receives the Spirit from the Father and takes it up within himself; and, secondly, after he has taken the Spirit into himself, He now pours that same Spirit out into all the members of his own body, i.e. his church. Thus Pentecost is certainly not an outpouring of something external sent by Jesus. The outpouring of the Spirit simply means the flow of the Spirit from the Head, through the lungs and arteries into the body of the church. And this is the same Spirit which Jesus "had received from the Father" [Acts 2:33].

This explanation also serves to clarify the difference between the working of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, in the course of history and his work among us now.

Just as the air we breathe in affects all the parts of the body *through the body* so also we, as members of the body of Christ, only receive the Spirit *through His body, the church*. Therefore to speak of the repeated outpourings of the Holy Spirit does not make sense. We can understand that an unborn baby lives without breathing by itself, but once *the child is born* that is impossible.

After Pentecost it is equally impossible to think that there would ever be a moment when the church would be without the Holy Spirit. It would mean she is no longer breathing and thus dead. The church can at times *appear* to be lifeless, but never in reality. The Holy Spirit does not come to the church from without, not even during times of a great awakening. He always revives the body by working from within.

When your foot is asleep, or seems to be dead and frozen, the warmth of life can be restored to it only from within with a renewed flow of blood. One can rub the foot and massage it, but the restoration of well-being must come from within to be effective. It is just like that in the body of Christ. A member who may appear to be dead can certainly be revived, but never without the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit only comes from within, originating in the Head flowing into the body, the church.

We have now cleared up all the difficulties that presented themselves. Should someone ask, finally, about the purpose for this body of Christ still living here on earth, that too can receive a clear answer.

Behind the work of the Holy Spirit we *always* find the work of the

Son; and behind the work of the Son we always find the work of *the Father*. The gathering of the elect into a church is not like finding various pieces of cloth which can be stitched into a cloak, but it is more like the gathering of many pieces of broken pottery which we know can be put back together to be restored into one beautiful vase. The picture of the entire church was preordained in God's eternal plan, long before she was conceived in Paradise. Every member who is called is also equipped so that she will be able to fulfil that function of spiritual life which is essential for the growth of the entire body. O, the depth of wisdom and of knowledge. Lord, how unsearchable are your ways!
How boundless is the comfort you give your suffering church.
Comfort also for our soul!

This is What was Spoken of by the Prophet Joel

No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

'In the last days, God says,

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Acts 2: 16, 17a

Our speech is inadequate and we can hardly even stammer as we recount the mighty acts of God. Just ten days after Jesus ascended into heaven, God poured out the Holy Spirit from the heights of heaven over the Apostles and the believers who were gathered with them. Even at the manger in Bethlehem as the Son comes to us, our insight is veiled. We worship but do not comprehend how the incredible miracle of the Incarnation of the Word came to be, even though on that occasion the Word became *flesh* and took on *visible* form. Our eyes could see it and our ears could hear it and our hands could touch that which had become tangible, audible and visible.

The Word had become the Word of life.

Yet, if we did not understand that event, how much less can we be expected to understand when it is the Holy Spirit who descends. Who, unlike the Son, does *not become flesh*, but remains hidden in a spiritual form. The Spirit remains invisible and intangible while finding a home in the bosom of the church, and desiring to make a temple of the hearts of believers. The apostles were gripped by the descent and outpouring of the Spirit, and spoke in foreign languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak. But how can we scrutinize this event and fully explain what happened there when it vanished just as quickly? The apostle Paul confessed that, he "was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" [2 Cor. 12:4].

Reflect on it, but do not try to penetrate it with your questions. Just recognise the beauty of this event, and try to grasp it with your heart.

It presents a stream of the water of eternal life; try to bathe in it! Here a fountain of eternal comfort springs forth; try to quench your thirst in it and find eternal comfort for your suffering soul.

Joel had already promised the pouring out of the Spirit, as did other seers and prophets. Joel expressed it most clearly as he spoke of the promise that was not his word, but the promise *of the living God* for all who are dispirited, bereft of soul and comfort among God's people on earth.

It was a promise of comfort, mercy, and care from our loving God who knows the inner struggles of his people better than those among them who have the deepest insight into these trials. His compassion was even greater for his ancient church living in *the shadows* of the old dispensation than it is for us and that's why he cared for and supported his people with his words of comfort. That ancient 'church' lacked in so many ways, even though she did have access to things inaccessible to us such as direct miraculous revelations in the divine words spoken through the mouths of the prophets. But she did not yet know of the manger, and did not see the cross, and had not yet become the temple of the Holy Spirit. Indeed she had not heard the voice proclaiming that "which we have *heard*, which we have *seen* with our eyes, which we have looked at, and our hands have touched; this we proclaim concerning the Word of life" [emphasis AK – 1 John 1:1].

Yet they lacked in nothing that was necessary for their salvation. The Lord God gave faith to his elect among the people of the old covenant. This faith was focussed on the Messiah, and encouraged them by refreshing their soul. Yet, it was always only by way of shadows. There was none of the clarity, the transparency, or the overflowing measure of everything in which we now take delight.

At this time we, as pilgrims, still take a position inferior to those who have already been translated to heavenly glory and already behold the heavenly Throne. We have not yet experienced that glory and must be satisfied with the *promise* of that which is to come. In the same way, Israel took a position subordinate to ours, for they had only the

promise of a Messiah, and did not know the reality of Bethlehem, Golgotha or Pentecost.

This gave rise to concern and worry in the soul, driving the people of Israel on as through an impending storm. But the Lord our God is compassionate and closely involved with his people. Knowing their fear he sent them prophets like Joel, through whom He spoke the words of promise, and gave them a glorious vision of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which was to come. They did not themselves receive this but saw it from afar, like Moses seeing the promised land from mount Nebo! [Deut. 34:1]. For the Lord refreshed the soul of Moses, before he died, by showing him the glorious fields in Canaan. In the same way this God of mercy also comforted his covenant people by giving them a vision from afar, a *promise* and *prophecy* of the joy of the coming Holy Spirit.

For the people of Israel the fact that their God was far off and not near to them was a source of trouble and downfall. As the deer longs for the gently flowing waters so also Israel thirsted for the refreshing and inspiring communion with the Living God. *That* is exactly what all those in Israel who feared Jahweh longed for. Not all the people but only those who feared God. They longed for their Lord and could not live without him. Their souls succumbed because of the long wait. Yet the Lord tarried, for they could not be perfected without us. In their sorrow and sickness of spirit the Lord came to the rescue, first by promising the Messiah, and later by promising them the Holy Spirit.

That very same sorrow and spiritual despondency is still a source of struggle for God's children today. Indeed, the spiritual suffering of God's people in Israel remains a portrayal of the suffering for God's people throughout all ages. That is not because history repeats itself, or because the *new* covenant can somehow hide itself behind the *old*

covenant. Rather, it is because we find that the history of suffering and comfort in the lives of the elect is repeated throughout the ages. In his church God's people first experience that something is *missing*, and only then discover the glorious riches of God's *gifts*. And that is also the experience of those who are afflicted by the Lord.

Bethlehem, Golgotha, the Mount of Olives and Pentecost, these people know about but they never became real to them. They remained facts that did not touch them. They have never yet tasted the sweetness of the core of these divine actions. They may sing along with the Christmas hymns about the shepherds and the angels in the fields around Bethlehem, but still their souls question, "*Where* is my God?" They may sing a moving song of lament as they reflect on the horrible struggle in Gethsemane and on Golgotha, but still they will ask, "*Who* will deliver me from my sins?" On Easter morning they rejoice with God's people, yet they still question, "*Who* is my righteousness?" On the Mount of Olives they stare after their Saviour ascending into heaven, yet they cry out, "*Who* will open the gates of Heaven for me?" And so at Pentecost they witness the wind, the fiery flames and foreign languages, but their own souls remain comfortless longing still for fellowship with the living God.

In this way we too remain a riddle to ourselves! We are like children playing with pearls and rubies, but remaining hungry for lack of bread. That's why the prophecy of Joel is also for us.

The apostle Paul sums it up concretely, "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" [Romans 15:4]. For the Lord God used the same promises and prophecies to encourage his people in Old Testament times which he still today uses to encourage those in need of comfort. This includes all those who long earnestly for the living God, but have not yet enjoyed the peace that comes through fellowship with the Holy Spirit. Even so, the work of the Holy Spirit will finally penetrate so deep in the soul that at last the channel has been dredged enough to let the waters of life flow freely into our hearts. With that comes the

experience of overwhelming joy; only then will God's foolish children begin to recognize the treasure of pearls and rubies which they had already possessed for so many years. The mystery of the manger and hidden meaning of Golgotha, and the secret of the Holy Spirit now unfold before them and bring them to cry, "*Abba Father!*" to praise and thank the God of mercy who smiled upon them with the comfort of his countenance.

Those who do not have a correct understanding of God's working in history, may think that they themselves have experienced an 'outpouring of the Holy Spirit'. A miniature repeat of the Pentecost event. Some have even given it a specific name and call it '*Baptism of the Holy Spirit*'. Yet, this is quite impossible, for it entails a reduction of the grand feast of Pentecost for the *Church*. In the same way there have been those in the past who place such an emphasis of the birth of Christ *in their own heart* as their own *Bethlehem* that they quickly lost sight of, and then later denied, the actual and original birth of Christ in Bethlehem.

We need to watch out for such exaggerations by spiritualising events of salvation history.

Rather we note that God's business is not first of all directed to individuals, but his attention is on the *church* as a whole, and in and through the church with his people.

He overcomes sin by allowing his children to have again a blessed and sweet communion with Himself, but he effects this by coming first to his people with prophecy, and coming next in his Son Jesus Christ, and finally in a most intimate manner he comes to his *church* through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We know that in creation the Lord God has not given a specific little stream for each and every town or village but instead he opened the floodgates of heaven over the mountains to water them all, for he allows a mighty river to flow

for the needs of all the lands along its path. In the same way God's work of *Grace* does not work piecemeal in individuals one by one, but it flows down like *a mighty stream* from the mountains of his holiness, for all his people to bathe and refresh their thirsty souls, no matter where or when they lived. Pentecost does *not repeat itself*! The event of Pentecost is unique. It is not an event that has come and gone, but it continues to have an influence even in our own time. Anyone who wishes to share in the Holy Spirit comes into fellowship with this Spirit, as it was once outpoured, descended and came to reside among us in his church. This was prophesied by Joel speaking to those who would wish to invoke the Holy Spirit to come down from on high, saying that the Lord God is in you and with you through His Holy Spirit. The church is in no way forsaken, for the Lord lives in her through his Spirit. The Holy Spirit does of course enter into people who had resisted Him up to that point. There is such a thing as a mellowing of the soul which had been stiff and frozen. That which appeared to be lifeless and seemingly dead is now quickened. But our time will not witness another descent of the Holy Spirit as he was poured out on Pentecost.

Perhaps you are wondering what such communion of the Holy Spirit really means and how it differs from the work of God in the individual souls of those who have been chosen by him? My friends, we are not trying to say that the Lord God could not have done his work in individual souls, had that been his will. He is the sovereign Lord after all. It was not a question of necessity or fate. God is sovereign, even when it is a matter of his eternal decree God is not limited or bound in any way. However, it is clear that the Lord did not choose that route. He chose a different way and this way reflects his eternal counsel. Whether we resist his choice or not makes

no difference. The Lord does what he wills.

And he chose to work in a way where his people would find comfort only in the community of the saints. That is in the organic operation of the body of Christ, which is his church.

We know that in a body the hand does not breathe, the foot does not breathe, nor does the eye, but all these parts live and keep fit together through the single operation of breathing in that one body. This is also how the body of Christ, the church, remains alive.

Our Lord God blew the breath of life into the church on the day of Pentecost by pouring out the Holy Spirit. This is why the Holy Spirit now lives as the breath of heaven in the Head as well as in all the organs of the body, and any of its members live only through the same in breathing of the Holy Spirit.

Just how does that work?

Perhaps you can explain the mystery of natural life, by which breathing of the lungs keeps a sparkle in the eye, then you can also explain the mystery how the Spirit of mercy comforts the spiritual life of each member of the church. It is impossible to penetrate into this mystery. It is a matter of worship, admiration and enjoyment. We *worship* by bending the knee in humble devotion, to thank our God and Father, who for more than eighteen centuries has been breathing the breath of life into the body of the church through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We admire by noting the manifold wisdom of God; since the Spirit descended that wisdom has called the church out into the broad arena of the world, and through the church has changed the face of the earth. Therefore we are also called to *Joy*, in as much as each member of the body can revel in the warmth of life that radiates already for more than eighteen centuries into the body of Christ from the breath of the Spirit.

Just what is this comfort, this pleasure, this inbreathing which brings pure joy?

My friends, this blessed joy and quiet comfort has nothing in common with *excitement* or *emotional* cheering. Screaming voices and pompous music do not draw the breath of the Spirit to you, but rather detract from it. No, this comfort is a balm for the quiet pain in your heart, and comes to us in sacred peacefulness. It is because of the sinfulness of our miserable hearts that this comfort and joy is given to us.

Perhaps you have thirsted so long for righteousness, and desired earnestly to have a will to do good and to accomplish goodness, yet time and again you were disappointed, for your heart deceived you. Finally in desperation you called out, because you wanted so much to live a life of holiness, yet could not. Oppressed and pained by this condition you must acknowledge God properly, yet cannot do it. Know then that your heartfelt sadness comes from God, and will lead to inalterable conversion.

When you are filled with doubts, the Holy Spirit comes quietly knocking at the door of your heart and calls you,

“Oh, comfortless one, weep no more. Your prayers and sighing have reached God’s throne, and he has heard you. Your oppression will come to an end, and the burden of your heart will be lifted. For now I know that with an upright heart, you have sought from your God for relief from sin, and power to do what is right. Here I am, your God, who will now come to live in your heart. That which you have not been able to do yourself, I will accomplish in and for you. I will bend your will towards the good; I will cleanse your *affections* and purify your *imagination*, and enlighten your *eyes*, and whatever may still surface out of the impurity of your deceitful heart, *I will see to it that you will walk in my ways*”.

The Holy Spirit not only says this, but also brings it about, and the soul notices that the Spirit within her does accomplish this, for she is

no longer powerless but able to move what seemed to be like *mountains*. This moves the soul to songs of joy and to a wonderful feeling of having been heard. Now she knows the meaning of that statement in the Heidelberg Catechism, that *makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him* [Q. and A. 1].

Tongues as of Fire

They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire
that separated and came to rest on each of them.

Acts 2:3

Kings wear a crown and queens a diadem; geniuses are given laurels and athletes trophies. Even those without royal blood, or those who are neither a genius nor an athlete strive for honour, glory or distinction. Most people strive for the top honour in their own field, and feel a quickened heartbeat when honour is bestowed. Is such an inclination sinful? Should it be discouraged? Should a child of God reject such desire for glory? The apostle Paul answers with a resounding, "NO!" He admits without embarrassment that he himself is waiting for a crown of glory, now that he has become an apostle of Jesus Christ, and that he works hard to obtain that crown, moreover, that hope of receiving a crown motivates him in the struggle. However, he does not expect to receive this crown in the present life but at its fulfilment - and this makes all the difference. Nor will this crown be placed on his head by a friend, but by the righteous Judge himself. Even more important, the crown will not bring apparent vainglory, but will truly make him a king. For he has "made us kings and priests unto God and his Father" [Rev 1:6 - KJV].

For we know that there are two kinds of light, two kinds of glory and two kinds of brilliance.

The first kind of brilliance from here below is ignited by the fire of our heart's desire, stirred into life by the enticement of honour and reflected in the glow of metal and precious stones. Such a brilliance comes from artificial light and its radiance will soon fade. It flickers momentarily as a reflection and is then extinguished. But there is another kind of brilliance, which does not come from the earth below but from above, from the Father of Light, from the depth of the realm of eternal glory, radiating to us from the Eternal Invisible One. His

glory surpasses the brightness of the sun and no eternity of ages can extinguish its light.

Those whose eyes are captured by the brilliance of earthly lights, will be blind to the glory which radiates from above. It does not hold their attention, because they have not even noticed it.

The opposite effect is also possible. A sinner who has been saved and begins to long for that nobler brilliance soon finds the earthly glow lose its sparkle. He turns away from it, no longer entranced by its glory. Its brilliance, once so desirable, now appears but dark and gloomy in comparison.

Please note well, that we are not just using metaphor; we are talking of realities.

If you try to imagine Christ in all his glory it is impossible to think of him with dull or lackluster features. In your mind you have to imagine him as radiant, crowned by soft and holy light, glorious with radiance greater than that of diamonds. This is not just a matter of the imagination but the reality of the radiance of Christ's inner being. His divine person is revealed to those around him and the aroma of his anointed body is spread abroad.

Scripture tells us that even Moses, the mediator in the Old Covenant, came down from the mountain with a face so radiant and so bright that no one could bear to look at it, and he had to cover his face in order to speak to the people [Ex. 34:33]. That is why from its very earliest days, the church of Jesus had the custom of portraying the prophets, patriarchs, martyrs and saints with a halo around their heads. Thus these saints were shown to be pure of heart. They had ascended the mountain of God's holiness, and they had received a reflection of the radiance that surrounds the Eternal One.

It is sometimes said of saintly godfearing, blessed people who are

placed like beacons of light in the midst of the congregation, that one finds something celestial shining from their eyes, and their faces have an expression of holiness. They seem like the angels, messengers from heaven, who never appeared on earth except with the radiant glow of holiness shining from their faces and clothing, blinding like lightning.

So also, when it pleases the Lord to remove one of us from our midst after completing his struggle on earth to enter into the peace of the Lord, one often hears the remark that even on his deathbed one can see an other-worldly radiance on his face, enough to make any bystander jealous as well as happy.

Finally, is there any difference from what happened on Pentecost and people saw *tongues of fire* on the heads of all gathered there, from the experience of the disciples at the transfiguration on mount Tabor?

On mount Tabor the Lord was crowned and shone with the radiance of heavenly glory [Luke 9:28-36]; and on Pentecost the believers gathered as a congregation, were baptised with that same radiance of glory and received the heavenly diadem of light on their forehead, as if they were princes and rulers.

Once in possession of this heavenly crown, those who have been redeemed by Jesus would never be tempted to desire any other kind of earthly crown or garland.

Thus when the church of Jesus Christ becomes too much enthralled with human honour and glory she *diminish*; and she *grows* in spiritual power when the radiance of earthly glory pales, and tongues of heavenly fire as a spiritual diadem of light, are once more seen on the heads of believers.

The cross of Jesus has no power and the blood of reconciliation has no effect, when those who kneel at the cross are adorned with crowns

and laurels given by those who are their companions in sin. But the cross gives blessing and the blood is affective to save if those who kneel at the cross first remove their jewels, crowns and laurels and throw these at the foot of the cross. And so I ask you, my brothers, my sisters, what makes you shine? What is it about you that glitters? Is it based on human glittering? Then be fearful for your soul. If you are receiving only human honour and glory you are not walking in faith and will perish. Then your life is no more than a clanging symbol, a shallow glittering, and the heavenly dew of the eternal morning does not reflect in your face.

Well now, did you receive a Pentecost blessing? If so, allow the fiery tongues to be seen on you, and allow the expression of heavenly glory to shine from your face. That light is not harsh but soft, and it does not glitter, but reflects kindness and care.

Tongues of fire showing on each of us would be the most wonderful sermon of God's gracious mercy and love. It would also be a gracious example when a deathbed is marked by the soft light of grace. Such a deathbed will be like mount Tabor, a place of transition into the heavenly Jerusalem, this time through the dark portal of death.

Full of New Wine

Some, however, made fun of them and said,
"They have had too much wine."

Acts 2:13

There is a deep rift that entered our human existence in Paradise and, sad to say, cannot be healed until the fulfillment of the *Maranatha* [Lord, come quickly]. For then the Lord will return on the clouds of heaven, as King of Glory. Now he still resides in the Highest Heaven, and rules our world from there. But then he will demonstrate his grace in action one last time, leaving his heavenly home for the second time to return to this earth. That is when finally the deep rift that now cuts through our human lives will be healed. *But no sooner!* Then Paradise, or even something better than Paradise will come. Then we will not only hear the angels singing, "Peace on earth" as a prayer and the beginning of the fulfilment of the promise, for then will come that promised *eternal* peace for this world, never again to be disrupted. Tender love will then have an endless sovereignty, for it is the sovereignty of the Prince of Peace. The heavenly *son of David*, will reign throughout the entire earth from one city of peace, the new *Jerusalem*.

But this has not yet come about for it is still *not* possible. Whenever people try to pretend that this heaven on earth is already here they cover up the rift, and our Lord God will punish them dreadfully for their guilt in denying his *decrees*. Their attempts are really nothing but a denial of the work still to be done by the King of peace. It is like saying that the second coming of Jesus is *not really necessary*. "LORD, you establish peace for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us." (Isaiah 26:12). This is the prophetic song of praise, with which the church awaits the return of the Bridegroom. But woe to us if we pretend that the eternal peace will be given in any

way other than his return on the clouds of heaven. This peace will not come sooner!

'Full of new wine', in that mocking laughter of the crowd, we find the tension of the great rift among us, even now on Pentecost Sunday.

The human heart searches and longs for new life. Our very being looks for stimulation, anything to take away our desperate and feeble feeling of weakness. You may at times sense a tingling in your blood, only to discover that you are too luke warm to respond in faith. That's why our hearts cry out for more devotion and holy zeal. And yet there are so many ways in which our merciful God has already granted such stimulation as a gift of grace. Long ago at the Red Sea the Israelites, as a people freed from slavery, sang the joyful song of deliverance. Jubilant songs of praise rose up from hearts overwhelmed by God's goodness. And from that moment on songs of praise accompanied the people of Israel as they travelled. God's salvation surrounded them like a fortress. The desert bloomed! The fragrance of roses permeated the wilderness.

Yet, the most important event was yet to come. It tarried even after the manger in Bethlehem. For the great songs of praise of the angel choirs in the fields of Ephratha around Bethlehem faded and seemed to disappear at Gethsemane and at Golgotha.

However now, at Pentecost, the moment had really come. At last the Spirit of the Father and of the Son himself had descended! Rich, gentle, and yet as an overflowing stream is he poured out over the flock of the Lord. And now we see a most blessed awakening, as the Spirit generates a glorious zeal, and in the passionate language of these ordinary fishermen from Galilee, who proclaimed the glory of the Lord with manifold praises from the very Temple of the Lord in

Jerusalem. Just what impression did the people in Jerusalem get from this event? They turn to accusations that these men of Galilee have had too much new wine. That their language was the language of drunks. This was sin against the Holy Spirit!

It was infuriating, and yet so understandable! Remember, those people of Jerusalem longed for renewal just as much as anyone. They too sought encouragement in their times of desperation. Desperation due to sin is an inseparable part of life for any of us. Then in Jerusalem, and today for us here, what is still for many the greatest relief from desperation? The answer is now, then, and until the end of time, 'wine and liquor!' Wine has the power to relieve and help us forget. Certainly the Lord God also created the vine. And the intent as well as the result of wine is indeed to renew the strength of the depressed and motivate those who are dejected. So why should we be surprised, if the crowds in Jerusalem who never knew any other cause for excessive exuberance except from the use of wine, could find no other reason for the excitement of the apostles, and thus accused them of 'being full of new wine'? Yet such accusations reveal the depth of our sinfulness and depravity. When we are left to our own devices, without light from above, we only recognize the work of the *Spirit of grace*, as the work of the *spirit of Satan*! Only God's grace and loving-kindness protects us from this error.

And that is what happened here. For wine gives strength and wine is a source of God-given encouragement. (Proverbs 31:6) ["Give beer to those who are perishing, wine to those who are in anguish"]. It can prevent the depressed from becoming a prey to despair. But wine has its *limitations*, and can also have a devilish power.

If you "need a drink", and limit it to one occasion, taken with proper moderation, you will be encouraged and inspired. But if the 'need' is intemperate and too frequent, and becomes a habit, the drink will no longer be a source of strength and encouragement, but destroy you, and unleash a demonic power in your heart which can only be overcome by incredible human will power.

That's why the strong drinks which stimulate us can be a precious blessing, but also a very real danger. It is like fire, which is so helpful when used appropriately. But as soon as it gets out of control it will burn and scorch and cause painful wounds.

Drunkenness comes from the Devil; it is a satyr from Satan, which sneaks into human hearts and souls.

When people are not moved to sing the praises of the Lord of Heaven, they express the inner poisoning of their souls enslaved by the evil desires of their depraved hearts. And the people in Jerusalem compared the outpouring of the Holy Spirit with such a demonic expression of slavery to sin.

Such is the bitter fruit of human sin.

Amazing! Two stimulants have been offered to us. God created the vine to encourage us when our bodies feel depressed, and offered his Holy Spirit as a gift of pure grace for the weariness of our mortal souls. But if our evil heart claims that, the stimulant of the vine is enough for the quickening of both our body and our soul, body and soul are both poisoned. God's Spirit wants to turn things around.

The Spirit offers encouragement for the soul, and lifts us out of our spiritual malaise, and when we are thus *spiritually* encouraged, He at the same time also revives our bodily powers and thus encourages our whole being.

At present these two powers are opposites. On the one side is the still unrepentant world, seeking its pleasures in the realm of what is visible. It cannot understand the Spirit. On the other side are the faithful of the Lord, filled with spiritual power, who reject such unholy pleasures. Thus we see the rising tensions from the two sides, both resulting in encouragement, but from wholly opposite sources. That small flock is encouraged by the Holy Spirit, while the crowd's source of encouragement comes from their earthly pleasures and joys. This leads to inevitable clashes.

To a child of God, the world gives the impression that many walk around in a daze of confusion. On the other hand, to the world a child of God who *has taken a stand for the Lord* will appear as one who should be mocked for being 'filled with new wine'. Such tensions should cause God's child to feel compassion for those same people of the world who engage in mockery and condescension.

You and I are called to endure such mockery. We are not to step aside, but rather to take a degree of delight in it, because of Jesus and his Name. And above all, we must oppose such ridicule by ever more diligently proclaiming *the great deeds of the Lord*.

The Comforter

And I will ask the Father,
and he will give you another Counselor
to be with you forever
John 14:16

This year, and every year we celebrate Pentecost, the sacred commemoration of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Once more our hearts are revived and lifted up above the mundane ordinary events of earthly life when we hear the blessed sounds of praise for the coming of the Holy Spirit, who opposes the impure spirit of this age. We no longer wait for the Holy Spirit to be sent, but know he is here, and provides us with an overflowing fountain of mercy and comfort to sustain us.

Those who tread the broad highway of this world cannot understand the Spirit nor do they know the joy he gives in our lives. They may know the Holy Spirit by name. He is like a mysterious apparition, whose presence never penetrates to their heart. They have heard of the tongues of fire, and people speaking in different languages, but they are not captivated by these signs, because they do not know the One of whose coming these signs testify.

That's why those who travel the broad highways may well celebrate Pentecost¹, without really knowing the Holy Spirit himself. They may celebrate the day as a spring festival, or make it a day to visit family and old friends, or they may take this day for enjoyment at home with their children, and does not wish to dishonour this feast day of the Holy Spirit with overindulgence or intemperance.

Yet it was for such situations the Lord Jesus gave his warning

¹ In Kuyper's time Pentecost was a public holiday and a long weekend including Monday. - JVM

concerning the Holy Spirit when he said, “the world cannot accept him, because it neither *sees* him, nor *knows* him” [Emphasis AK – John 14:17a]. Until the end of this age the *Holy* Spirit and the spirit of this *world* will remain opposites.

But not everyone will drift away with the spirit of worldliness. There are those, now and throughout the ages, who have divorced themselves from the world. It is not that they in arrogance cry out, “depart from me you evildoers because I am holier than you”. Rather because they have become afraid of the world, aware of its deadly influence, and of the terrible power of temptation. They have shaken off the temptations of the world just as one shakes off a poisonous snake from the hand.

These are men and women walking on the path of the apostles of whom Jesus had said, “but *you* know him; for he lives with you, and will be in you” [John 14:17b]. Now, on this narrow road, they continue to live with many fears, for they still carry the desires of that world in the depth of their heart. They are dismayed because Jesus had told them that they would have the Holy Spirit living in their hearts, but when they “pulled their hand out of their cloak it was white with leprosy” [cf. 2 Kings 5:27] and the evil smell of death clung to it.

Indeed, that is the reality we face daily! Our reality is not divided between a wide road where all the godless sinners walk, and a narrow road where the ‘saints’ walk as if they were already angels. No, that is a fantasy. The real truth is that the thousands who travel through the wide gate appear to have found a lot in life that one could well envy, while the hundreds who travel through the narrow gate, and are indeed on the right road, still carry the yeast of the ‘world’ within them and in the seams of their clothing.

This is the reason for the ups and downs, the contradictions and the strife in our soul. Where will these men and women find the anchor for their life? If there is no reward for it anyway, will they not wish to

return to the wide road? Bless¹ God and die as Job’s wife said to him in his distress [Job 2:9].

By all that is holy, and by God’s covenant which remains steadfast, they can’t and they do something different and better. For we find that in the midst of their sorrow they rejoice in the presence of the Holy Spirit, and even when all hope seemed to have evaporated, they still praise their divine Comforter.

So, what does it mean to say that the Holy Spirit is a Comforter? Does it mean that the Holy Spirit heals wounded hearts, encourages in sadness, restores from grief and upholds through all the bitter assaults on life?

To be sure, it *includes* all these. There is nothing that burdens our heart for which the Holy Spirit cannot give relief. No one who approaches Him will ever be turned away empty-handed. Even when death enters our lives and takes away someone we considered indispensable, then it is not the spirit of this world, but the Holy Spirit from on high needs to encourage us, refresh us, and restore our hope.

It is the Holy Spirit who lifts us into a more inspired life, so that we do not feel deserted if a dear friend has gone before us. For the Holy Spirit allows us to experience a taste of heaven, so that even though we may be separated by death, the bond of communion is not fully severed. And the Holy Spirit corrects the selfishness of our hearts helping us discern that even those who are most dearly beloved do not belong to us, but that we live together with them in our calling before the Lord.

¹Kuyper used the Dutch Statenvertaling of 1637. It has “bless” (zegen) in this text.

There is one thing about which there can be no doubt: only the *Holy Spirit* gives the truly divine balm of healing comfort for our broken hearts.

Whatever one seeks or promotes outside of Him is no real cure, only a makeshift bandage to cover up a festering wound without healing it. It is no more than an opiate to make one forget his sorrow.

If those are not the cures we seek, if we want to live to the full, whatever burden the Lord has placed on us, if we want to drink the bitter dregs of the cup that the Lord has put in our hand, if we are willing to dive into the waves of our suffering, until we realize that, 'now we truly have experienced it all', then we must also know that we *cannot* do this without the help and comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Even so, this is not the main cause nor the root of the joy given us by the Holy Spirit. If comfort in a time of trial were the only purpose for our thanksgiving and praise at Pentecost, then only the bereaved would be happy and the sorrowing be blessed. Pentecost only for those frustrated and defeated in life.

But that is not the real reason for Pentecost! Pentecost is for all God's children. It has meaning for everyone, old and young, who know the Holy Spirit. Some at first have only heard of the Father, then hear about the Son, and only later begin to get to know God the Holy Spirit. The mystery of the Comforter is, understanding that those bereft of their possessions, and those grieving over the loss of dear ones, are not experiencing the worst of human suffering!

There are woes which strike far more deeply. There is a suffering that eats into our souls far more deeply, like a cancer, and overcomes us like a storm threatening to drown us in all the waves and bellows as the Almighty passes over us. Such suffering can overwhelm us even when we are surrounded by all our loved ones, and the heavens

above remain blue and tranquil.

We are talking of the struggle of the soul, torn between life and death, between God and Satan, between hell and heaven. When this strife is recognized it can cast the soul into a bottomless pit of despair. In such a state the soul longs for the living God, for justice, even though it knows that justice alone cannot take the soul to God. It needs a miracle, the miracle of saving grace, and a gracious miracle of God's sovereign power.

What would you feel if suddenly, fully conscious, you found yourself at death's door? Would the recognition of all your sins and godless living stare you in the face? And might the Lord your God hide himself from you at the very moment you need him most, because of the way your soul accused itself? Helpless, you would cry out like the murderer on the cross, "O God, have mercy on me, a sinner" [Luke 18:13]. Blessedly this is not a frequent scene at the deathbed of Christians. First because at the time of death most have already lost the energy and spirit for conscious reflection on their lives; moreover, it pleases our God in his endless mercy to spare his children such terrifying agony at the time of death.

But, even if such anxiety seldom occurs at the time of death, it can occur *before* we die. It can come to us whenever the Lord God challenges us and calls us to account, revealing the deepest needs of our souls. He confronts us with the image of his Child, and our hearts must admit that there is hardly a trace of his likeness in us. Sometimes this struggle comes to us with a compelling and terrifying confrontation, one that overcomes and humiliates us in the middle of the night, or over the course of a few weeks. But the struggle is so intense that our memory of it stays with us for the rest of our life, reminding us how the Lord our God took us through fire and the tempest, and compelled us to finally realize that our lives belong to him, just like Jonah in the belly of the whale [Jonah 2:1]. Of course this does not happen to everyone.

More typically the struggle goes on continually throughout our lives as God's children; there are moments of respite, but time and again

we feel ourselves drowning as if we are tangled up in seaweed and pulled under by tentacles from the depths.

That is not living in the Spirit; and it hardly deserves to be called living at all. The holy attributes of God are clear to the soul; there is no doubt about how to obtain them and how to find them. Likewise we do not desire to depart from God, rather, we experience a strong desire to cling to the living God. But we know that innate human goodness cannot bring us to Him, and our weak heart which ought to place its hope in the holiness of the living God, is only tormented by evil thoughts. A deep chasm appears between our mumbled prayers and the living God. The soul asks itself, 'What do I have that distinguishes me as a child of God?' And it finds nothing, not one ray of hope, and so it cries out in despair, 'It were better for me that a millstone were hung about my neck, and that I were drowned in the depth of the sea, for *I* have offended one of your little ones' [cf. Matt. 18:6].

Frequently we hear about suicide, and it is said that many tormented souls become insane. Well, if there were no Pentecost, and a child of God should suffer day in and day out, for many years, always in doubt and self incrimination then indeed insanity would be true relief and such a soul can hardly be blamed for committing suicide.

Without the Holy Spirit, such wretched souls would remain twisted and tormented in their distress, never becoming contented children of a loving Father.

Note well, that exactly at this point we meet the glory of the Comforter. We manifest exactly those kind of wounds for which the Holy Spirit has prepared his balm. He comes for the children of God, who are plagued by inner torment; for the upright of heart, who are powerless to overcome their own unrighteousness, both men and

women who want to work for God and his righteousness, and yet know that they can't. For all of them the work of the divine Comforter is unspeakably precious. He is the Holy Spirit, God Almighty himself. All around us we find an unholy world, but the Holy Spirit does *not* say, 'I want nothing to do with this evil world, and with the unholy hearts of men'. No, this Holy Spirit speaks to you *from within the depths of this unholy world*, into the depravity of your unholy heart.

He does not remain far off, but has come down to our earth, and on this earth chooses a community of people and enters their hearts as if finding there a holy temple for himself. That is where he now lives, no longer approaching us from a distance. On the day of Pentecost he has been poured out, never to return to heaven. And the church of Jesus Christ has not lacked his presence for one moment since that day.

Yes, the Holy Spirit is *with and among us*, and is the greatest comfort for our souls! The divine Holy Spirit who penetrates all things and knows everything came to us and has never left us. He remains with us and, even when all else seems to be headed for destruction, he remains near us, never leaving and calling, 'Do not fear, I will never leave you not forsake you'.

Is that not indescribably wonderful? You may be laid up on your sickbed, doubled up with pain because cancer is consuming your body, yet even when your soul can hardly take it, you still know the unbroken presence and protection of God's holy angel, nay, his Holy Spirit, who is God himself, guarding you as you fall asleep, and giving comfort when you are choked up in your anguish. We have the sure knowledge that in spite of the impurity and depravity of our heart, the Holy Spirit does not desert us. When everything around us freezes up and we are stone cold, we can yet look to the comforting warm embrace of the Holy Spirit, glowing with love, and breathing new life into our anxious breast.

Can you already sense this comfort? Is there any other comfort more precious? Is not this Comforter like the best of guides to accompany

you through this present dark world, with all its deadly temptations?
Does your heart not leap for joy when once again you notice that
Holy Spirit guiding you from within?

Even so, this is not yet the complete fullness of his comfort.
It is not enough that the Spirit remains right with you and shares your
oppression, for he does much more. He not only comes *to* you, but
dwells *in* you, and comforts you by pouring out a wonderful faith into
your heart. For what else does it mean to say that the Holy Spirit *lives*
in you than that he shares your lot in life, your weal and woe. He
comes to live with you even as you are stricken in poverty to share
his overwhelming riches with you.
Is that not a wonderful comfort?
Imagine if you can, a truly miserable and poor family, where all the
cupboards are bare and the clothes worn to threads. Even worse, a
disparate mood has set in as well. Then an incredibly rich stranger
comes along and moves into their hovel, bringing cheer and
happiness as well as his suitcases full of riches and wealth to share.
Certainly, that family would be comforted. Could one think of
anything better for such a family?
This is exactly what the Holy Spirit accomplishes for God's children.
He does not presume that you are rich, but knows that you are dirt
poor. He does not assume that you are well-dressed, but knows you in
your nakedness. He does not expect you to be beautiful and have a
silky smooth skin, for he knows all the sores that exude from your
heart.
This same Holy Spirit who has access to all the riches of heaven, has
nevertheless come down to live in you, and share in your life. This
means that when the collection agent knocks at your door and you
don't have money to pay, he will pay for you; when there is no food

in the house, he provides bread; and when you are too embarrassed
to go out because of your threadbare clothes, he provides a brand
new cloak to cover your shame.

Knowing all this, would you not expect that on Pentecost the church
raises a jubilant song of praise to God for such faithfulness?
May Pentecost always remain a new celebration! For we know that
we are always inclined to regress in our understanding, and forget
with our sinful imagination that the Holy Spirit has actually come to
live with us. Instead, every time when church bells call us to
worship on Pentecost, our sleepy souls revive and experience anew
the saving touch of the Holy Spirit, the hand that lavishes us with his
riches and the heavenly voice that whispers gently in our ears,
'Don't be dismayed, all of you driven by the storms of life, for I,
your divine Comforter, will always abide with you, and share with
you all my heavenly riches, always!'

The Anchor for the Soul

We have this hope as an anchor for the soul,
firm and secure.
It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain
Hebrews 6:19

Jesus has ascended into heaven which, like this earth below, was created in the beginning and therefore did not exist from eternity. Heaven has created properties completely different from this earth. It presents us with much richer dimensions of a Kingdom. There a life and activity, an enjoyment and beauty prevail which are much more magnificent in comparison to the life here on earth. It is not a nebulous, purely spiritual reality, but a rich varied world, one even more 'real' than the world in which we now live. It was created with a sound foundation. Our true homeland. It is the beautiful creation where all God's good angels reside, together with the saints, the multitudes who no one can number. A home where they will be in the presence of the Lamb eternally. It is the true destination of all believers.

Jesus' ascension to heaven does not mean that he, being God, pulled himself back, reverting to the throne of his former glory. That would be quite impossible for the simple reason that, as God, he is omnipresent and while an omnipresent God can reveal himself or take his appearance away from us, he cannot in fact move *from* one place *to* another.

This is why it was not God who ascended, but the Son who, as the divine Mediator was united with the human *Jesus Christ*, who ascended into heaven. That is how his 'ascension' was even possible. The *human* Jesus Christ in his humanity is limited by space and time. As *human*, Jesus was not in Heaven when he resided on earth. To put it even stronger: before he came to earth he had not ever been in

heaven, and as *human* he could not be simultaneously in heaven and on earth, only in one or the other. His ascension makes it clear that, as Mediator between God and humanity, Jesus was the *human being* who from Jerusalem walked to the Mount of Olives, and from the top of the Mount of Olives he ascended through the atmosphere, ascending ever higher until he finally arrived in that other aspect of the creation which we call 'heaven'.

We don't know exactly how one can enter heaven and whether it only begins beyond what we call the far-away Milky Way. It could be that the creation of heaven involves a very different reality which even penetrates into our observable creation, just as Jesus, in his glorified body, was able to pass through walls and closed doors. It is equally impossible for us to guess how much time it might have taken Jesus to arrive in heaven. We must only reject the temptation to say that 'it took no time at all'. The ten days between Ascension Day and Pentecost suggests the opposite.

Transition from one place to the next always takes time.

Astronomers may suggest that if the ascension was at the speed of light, it would take thousands of years to reach the end of the Universe. We respond to this claim, that first of all, as we stated above, the created 'heaven' may very well penetrate into our observable creation, and secondly, we note that Scripture repeatedly hints at movements much faster than the speeds with which we are familiar. Think about the movement of angels, and the incredible speed with which Elijah moved when he tried to avoid Ahab [1 Kings 18:46], or rushed off to mount Horeb [1 Kings 19:8], as well as the speed of Elisha when he was taken to Samaria [2 Kings 6:19]. And as Jesus departed from the travellers of Emmaus he also 'vanished out of their sight' [Luke 24:31]. Very little can be said with certainty about these events, except that we must avoid all attempts to spiritualize the matter, and not lose sight of the fact that the *human* Jesus Christ was limited as he travelled physically from one place to another. One moment he was still standing on the Mount of Olives but at the next moment he began an interval in

which he was moving towards heaven, and finally the wonderful moment came when he arrived at the gates of heaven, entered through them, and came to reside in a place where, as a human being, Jesus Christ had never been before. In that totally different, much grander, and richer place, he accepted the crown which the Father had reserved for him.

The precise condition of that heaven, details about the relationship between angels and the saints in heaven, and the relationship among the saints and between all of them and their Lord Jesus Christ -- these are all matters which have not been revealed to us. But we do know that in heaven Christ does not 'hover' about like a spirit, but in his humanity, bearing our flesh and blood, he exists in only one place at a time. If we were to find ourselves in heaven, we would be able to see him, in all his glory, yet also in such a way that we can distinguish the form of his body.

In heaven God's presence is quite different from his presence on earth. The most holy, supreme Being is omnipresent there. He is everywhere, and at any point he is fully God. By far the largest part of his creation is like a veil which covers his face. This countenance of God is not covered by this veil in heaven. It does not cover his face, and so God's presence is revealed in unimaginable glory. That is why when anyone calls upon the Lord, they lift up their head toward heaven, for Scripture teaches us that we must not look for the throne of God on earth, but in heaven. The glory of the most Holy One is not fully revealed here, but in heaven, and the human Jesus Christ entered heaven to receive all power. Moreover, Scripture teaches us that this same Jesus Christ, whose person is essentially that of the eternal Son of God, this very *human* Jesus Christ, was raised to sit at the right hand of God, and ever lives at the Father's side to intercede for us.

In this new, exalted state of glory and majesty the human Jesus Christ received from God complete sovereignty over his church. Now, since it is impossible to think of the church except as part of society at large, nor of society except as part of the world of nature, it follows

that Christ received absolute power over all the rulers of the earth, over all people and nations, and over every element of nature itself. God remains God, even after the ascension of Jesus. However, from that moment a completely new situation has arisen, for God no longer rules all things directly, but through the mediating power of *the human Jesus Christ*. This would not be possible if the human Jesus Christ were not also *himself God*. For no matter how highly we think of the power and the speed of movement of a person in heaven, it is never absolute power, and its speed is never omnipresent. The church, society and nature cannot be ruled except by absolute power and omnipresence. Therefore the governance of the human Jesus Christ over the church, society and nature is unthinkable unless the "divinity, majesty, grace and Spirit"¹ can work unhindered, all powerfully and everywhere from and through him.

So just as the Mediator used his divine power to support his humanity in such a way that it did not succumb to the trials of his state of humility, so now this same Mediator, who has ascended and resides in Heaven, still equips his humanity through his divinity. In this way he governs the church in God's name and at his request, and indirectly he also rules over society and nature. This is what he himself has said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" [Mt. 28:18]. Once we clearly sense the great significance of Jesus' ascension and entry into heaven, we will also recognize that from that moment on, the church on earth must exist in a condition different from the way it existed before.

The church had its existence from the beginning of the world. Adam represents the church in Paradise. Then Adam and Eve and Abel. And so it continued throughout history. Our Almighty God carried his people by the power of his Word. He cared for his people, not as if they were individuals strung together like a string of pearls, but as a community belonging together in one organic union, namely the

¹[See Heidelberg Catechism L.D. 18. - Q and A 47. - JVM]

body of Christ.

However, we must add immediately that this 'church' of the Old Testament did not yet have the human Jesus Christ as Mediator, nor did he rule his church then, *because this Jesus had not yet entered into the inner holiness of heaven.*

The ascension is an actual event. And before Jesus ascended the human Jesus Christ was not in heaven. Thus the church of the old covenant could never affirm, that which we now confess that in our flesh and blood Jesus Christ lives to intercede for us, and rules over us as our king [cf: Heidelberg Catechism L.D. 12].

This does not mean that the Son of God had no special relationship with his church from the very beginning. If there were signs of the passage of time in heaven we would say that this relationship was already marked in the eternal counsel of God. Moreover we know, that already during the time of the Old Covenant, the Son of God very specifically guarded and protected his 'church' as the angel of the Lord's presence.

However, no matter how greatly we appreciate this Old Testament relationship, it was no more than a temporary and preparatory relationship. It was meant to make the transition to a tangible reality in the fullness of time, when the Word would become flesh, would suffer on Golgotha, victoriously ascend as Saviour and Mediator, and as the human Jesus Christ would be seated at the powerful right hand of God in the highest heaven. Therefore on Ascension Day the management of the church was radically changed. The shadows were moved aside and disappear once the reality they foreshadowed has emerged. The fire on the altar is doused, the lamp of eternal light is extinguished, the curtain of the temple is rent in two, and already the Roman legions approach to carry out God's command to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple.

The church no longer needs the visible Jerusalem as a point of departure on this earth, for she now has a solid connection in heaven in the human Jesus Christ, as her King and Mediator.

For centuries the embryonic church was found in the ark of the

covenant in the Holy of Holies on Mount Zion, but she has now been released from that place and is secured instead to a completely different cornerstone, namely the human Jesus Christ who has become for her unchangeable surety in the highest heaven. This also means that after Jesus' ascension, the church was also released from the constraint of its earthly and national character in Judaism. It could reach out to the gentiles, and become the church for all the people on earth.

Earlier she resided on earth in the Holy of Holies. Now that her master, her All in All has gone up to heaven, she herself has also been carried into heaven with him, as it were. Just as a royal court is where the King resides, even if most of his subjects live far away, so also the church is present wherever the Lord resides, even if most of his people still live on the earth.

The government of the church has been transferred. The reign of the earthly David, has been replaced by that of the heavenly Son of David. From this it also follows inevitably and necessarily that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the church, *after* Jesus' ascension into Heaven, is quite different from his earlier presence. Before the church had the human Jesus Christ as her Head and King in heaven, the work and indwelling of the Holy Spirit could only be sporadic and temporary, for it had no operational centre. The glory and majesty of the Lord of Hosts did reveal itself above the seat of atonement on the ark, but this shadowy revelation only pointed to and prophesied of a better future, when the seat of atonement would be located in the very heart of the true heavenly High Priest. In Him, the centre and head of the Church, the Holy Spirit would find an eternal glorious temple.

The temple in Jerusalem was only a foreshadowing of that greater heavenly temple. That's why when the latter arose, the first temple had to be destroyed. From now on the human Jesus Christ has become the true actual temple, which he was eternally destined to be. Before Jesus suffered in Gethsemane and on Golgotha, this temple had hidden all its treasures in the pitch darkness of the night.

But now, after the ascension of Jesus, the eternal light was lit in that temple and, at once, all the treasures of its beauty glittered and shone, so that even the angels in heaven were astounded at the sight.

Christ is the Church. Christ, the *human* Jesus in whom the Holy Spirit dwells and from whom the Spirit radiates, could not have assumed his rightful place in the heavens, and establish the relationship with his church, unless at the same time the Holy Spirit also exercises his influence and radiates his glory in the Church, never to leave her again.

That is the essence of what happened on Pentecost.

The sound and light that penetrated into the upper room in Jerusalem on Pentecost morning was actually a signal that the human Jesus had arrived in heaven. Now the radiance of the Holy Spirit was lit in him as the temple of God. And now he could enter into the completely normal relationship with his church, a relationship which was always meant to be so and was prophesied from of old. Now the church was lifted out of her preparatory, ethnic and temporary identity, and raised up to “sit together in heavenly places” [Eph. 2:6].

No longer was the church anchored on earth, but anchored in him. A heavenly anchorage. From now on, the Spirit would no longer show his influence from outside, but work and live powerfully inside the church. The Spirit was poured out as a spirit of life from Jesus, the head, and for all the members of the church, his body.

Given Power from on High

until you have been clothed with power from on high.

Luke 24:49b

Jesus ascended into heaven to *inherit a Kingdom*. The time that has elapsed since that ascension has not been a time of idleness, but of struggle and warfare, as well as victory. Jesus has ascended his throne. The sceptre of the kingdom was placed in his hand. Christ has reigned in majesty and glory right in the midst of all his enemies.

He does not rule like an earthly king, with *earthly* power. “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place” [John 18:36].

No, the Kingdom of Jesus Christ does not come with the visible radiance of an earthly kingdom. His conquests take place *inside of us*. His glory is spiritual. He does not come with the force of sword, but by gently bending our conscience to change our heart.

Of course the kingdom of Jesus does have a visible side. But the visible aspect of this kingdom is derived from the part of the creation which we call *heaven*, and not from the lower part of the creation which we call the earth or ‘the world’.

If only we could be transferred for a moment to the heavenly sphere above and see the beauty and splendour, of all that sparkles in unseen light, we would be amazed and delighted by the impressive glory of Jesus’ heavenly kingdom, and would be moved to fall down in admiration and worship. The mightiest rulers on earth today maintain magnificent courts and luxury palaces where everything glows in splendour to impress all who enter. Yet all this glory pales in comparison with the majesty that surrounds Jesus on his throne. St. John saw a little of it on Patmos, and its glory caused him to fall down as if dead at the feet of Jesus. Isaiah enjoyed just a glance, when he saw the brilliance of the seraphim around the throne.

Ezekiel saw a little of it through the vision when he was called. St. Paul also saw a ray of glory when, 'breathing out murderous threats' [Acts 9:1] he went up to Damascus. There are none among the people on earth who are not completely overwhelmed when seeing even a glimpse of the shadow of this heavenly splendour.

So do not be mistaken. In heaven, Jesus is no longer a 'babe wrapped in swaddling cloths'; nor is he the travelling prophet, the son of man, who did not have a place to rest his head. He is no longer the man of sorrows who was himself like a bent reed along the riverside. Quite the opposite is true now. In heaven He is the honoured victor, the king of Glory, who has a crown of purest gold for his head. He is the mighty ruler who fills all the heavens with his magnificence.

And that is not all. The glory of Jesus' kingdom reveals itself not only in heaven above, but it also is reflected here on earth. At some point, when God's time is right, the glorious day will break forth when all the kings and rulers of the earth will *visibly and distinctly* acknowledge the magnificence of our heavenly King. They may as yet ridicule him, laugh at him, and refuse to acknowledge his lordship and his anointing. Nonetheless he who sits on the Throne knows that the Lord God has anointed him king over all, and that one day all people of the earth will be given to him as an inheritance.

Those who over-spiritualize their salvation will be only spectators of this great event. Their fanatical spiritualizing will bring them into open conflict with the Scriptures, misleading people into believing something that is not true in *heaven* now or ever and which, in the future, will be revealed to be quite different on *earth* as well.

For their spiritual mysticism accords no value for what is physical and true, and reduces everything to an inner spiritual event only, as if only spiritual details are important. They suggest that there really never was a need for the incarnation, no reason for Jesus' physical death or resurrection, nor any need for a *visible* sacrament.

Such ideas can lead one quickly along the path of the Antichrist. For the apostle John said that anyone who denies that Jesus came *in the flesh* is of the Antichrist [see 2 John 1:7].

I pray that the Church of our Lord will always avoid such sinful one-sidedness. Our Heidelberg Catechism has taught us to make the beautiful confession that Christ is our only comfort for soul *and body*, in death but also in life [H.C. Q and A. 1]. Let us therefore remain in Christ, and remind ourselves of the fullness, richness and completeness of his majesty. This is a glory that we *experience* in the Spirit, but also a glory known in what is visible. A glory in us inwardly, but also very apparent on the outside. Even if that external glory is presently only revealed fully in Heaven, it is nevertheless also meant to be shown on earth below, when the time is full, when the Anointed One of God shall appear in glory on the clouds.

The life of the children of God is not meant to be an endless time of simply existing, or of worrying from one day to the next. One generation dies off, the next takes its place as if there were nothing better awaiting us than a spiritual residue after our departure. Instead, our life's energies have a goal, a vision, and a firm hope with confident expectation.

Of course we need to recognize that the battle rages on for a long time. It could well continue for centuries yet to come. As such there is need for much 'patience of the saints' [see: Rev. 14:12], as we expect that great and wonderful day of the Lord. Even so, if that admirable patience were not an integral part of the glorious expectation of the coming of Jesus' Kingdom, it would soon become an unholy business. This applies to those who think that all these ages past have been non-productive for the coming of the Kingdom, and that only after many centuries our anointed king will wake up from his slumber, and finally establish his kingdom on earth. But he who watches over Israel never slumbers nor sleeps [Psalm 121:4]. Now already, and all through the ages, there has been only

one mighty coordinated work of God, one majestic ongoing battle, one restless effort to reach the final goal. God's glory is never absent. But triumph comes in stages. Yes, there is steady progress, historically and daily, (and even in the night), a constant going forward to his long established purpose. We must never even for a moment be distracted by the thought that the battle of our King Jesus might have gotten waylaid in the ongoing development of his Kingdom.

Our Lord and King will never negotiate a truce with his enemy. Nor will he retreat from the battle field. He maintains his forces against his opponents, and never waivers. That's how it was when you and I were children. So it remains now that we are adults, and it continues into our old age. When we die and depart to the greener pastures, the battle will continue over our graves, and there will be no end until *he*, who will open all graves, returns.

In this way all the children of God remain involved in the battle and continue to fight the good fight as they progress towards the glorious victory and obtain a lasting crown. Their entire struggle is only a preparation for that one glorious New Day to come, when the clouds of heaven will part, and our heavenly King also will claim his kingdom on earth.

It is equally true that a child of God is not to think of the Kingdom of God as already existing in fulness here on earth, as if heaven were only a reserve fortress, to protect and aid this Kingdom on earth. The opposite is true. We must live here and now, and engage in the ongoing struggle knowing that this is *not* our own country, and that for now we reside as aliens *outside* the realm of the Kingdom of God. At the most we may think that we have been sent to an outpost of the Kingdom, from there to defend the rights of our King. At no time

should we think that the glorious triumph will be celebrated on that far off outpost, or that the colony is the actual homeland of the Sovereign. Once the battle is won, the triumphal parade will be held in the true capital of the King, which is heaven above.

For us, people of the Netherlands, this is easy to understand. Our kingdom is based in Europe, and our land is here. Our King lives where he holds court. But far, far away, our king has colonies, and subjects there pay homage to him. Those who serve the king in Holland travel to those colonies, to live and work, *not* for themselves or the colonial residents, but to serve the king. They are called to serve him, based on the laws the king has enacted here. Directions and orders come from the king in Holland. They send their payment of tribute to Holland where the king lives. They live far away but they live for the homeland and work for the king. If ever we should lose our colonies all these ministers and workers would immediately flee back to the homeland. For their king lives here, and here is where they belong.

That's how it is for the children of God on earth with respect to their King in heaven. He is head of the kingdom. They receive their orders from him. They do not live for themselves, or even for this earth. The kingdom comes down from Heaven, and returns there. The Kingdom for which they battle and work is not on *earth*, but above, in the heavens. Jesus does not exist for the world, but the world exists for him.

That is why Pentecost came right after Ascension Day.

He ascended to inherit the Kingdom, and no sooner had he ascended to his throne or an *unbelievable miracle* happened: from his royal throne, he once and for all, and irrevocably established his rule and reign on earth, and made preparation for the sure triumph of that

great and glorious day.

Surely, if he is indeed the true King on the heavenly throne, and the church on earth must do battle for him, and he is to be revealed as conquering king on earth, there should be an intimate communion between the king and those of his subjects below who have already been saved by him.

The battles for his kingdom here on earth, and the triumph of that kingdom in heaven cannot be a matter of our *imagination*. They do not exist just in a *fictional* world, and are not maintained by make-belief or day dreams. No, the battles are actual and real, and have power to exist and energy to conquer.

That's what happened when the Holy Spirit was poured out. This outpouring of the Spirit was not a matter of rearranging or exchanging spiritual realities, but a thrusting of the *power from on high* into the world of our hearts! And this is a power that overcomes all existing powers on earth, without competition.

Our King himself told us of it before he ascended to his throne. He said to his disciples that they were to "be endued with power from on high" [Luke 24:49].

All our battles are a struggle between one *power* versus another. The rulers of this world will unite all *their* power to oppose his honour and glory, and (as if it were possible), to stand in the way of the victory of Christ. So, obviously, over against the great 'power' of this world, our King too must set up a mighty power that is *even greater*. And just as the world gathers up all her powers to establish a kingdom, so too Christ our King must mobilize all his power and put it to work for *his* Kingdom. Those who are of the world will be endued with power welling up from *below*, while those whose citizenship is in heaven and have been redeemed by the King will receive *power from on high*.

It will come 'from on high', but it will be a very real, very reliable power. It is a *power* that does not wield a sword, nor does it have physical energy to compel spirits to do its bidding, but it is a *power* which penetrates into the inner life of a person entering through every

pore into our soul. From that inner centre of the self, this power will work on our emotions and consciousness, and from there on our circulation, our muscles, and even on all that our hands accomplish. It is not a power from the outside to force us, but from the inside to convince us. And for that reason it is an invincible power. It is the power of *the Holy Spirit*, the same Holy Spirit who, together with the Father and the Son, one holy God, is worshipped and adored by the whole church now and for all eternity.

Pentecost therefore represents the inflow of the power of the Lord of lords into the hearts of all his people in order to first conquer and rule those hearts, and then through them, the whole world. It is not a matter of some higher power for a brief moment. No, the rule of our King Jesus in the world of human hearts progresses steadily, resolutely. Never, since that great Pentecost event, has the power of the Holy Spirit been absent from our lives, or from the church of Jesus Christ, not even for a moment.

What once was poured out has remained, and will remain as an inseparable indwelling in the church of our Lord. Certainly there are times when all that has glittered as gold is dulled, and we might assume that the church has been totally devastated. Yet it has always proven from hindsight that the power of the Spirit was never absent. If perhaps not visible above ground, still at work beneath the surface. The ongoing triumph of the rule of Christ in the hearts of his people cannot be stopped.

We must also remember, that the *principle* of Jesus' glory does not depend on numbers. The power and the glory of our King would remain just as strong and wonderful, if he transformed only one human heart on earth from death to life as a beautiful pearl in his diadem. The salvation of a countless number of saints only multiplies his glory.

All human power on earth has indeed been shown to be powerless to turn around even a single human heart if it resisted such change. All of the most cruel tortures ever devised by tyrants and despots have proved to be useless in the attempts to force people to change their mind. Quite contrary to this is the 'power from on high' which, from the day of Pentecost right to the present is able to change the heart, transforming even the most obstinate antagonist into a bosom friend. It changed Saul into Paul, and has changed unnumbered thistles into myrtle trees, creating for himself in human hearts a precious and imperishable sign, and an indestructible monument.

The stream of this power from on high still runs freely. The determining question for your and my life is whether the work of our souls and the struggle of our lives are primarily focussed to cooperate with the power from on high, or whether, using the power from *below*, from the depth of a heart set against God, we seek to use our energy to obstruct the flow of power from above, even if we do so only subconsciously. All those who follow that stream of power have experienced Pentecost. Their lives have become a pilgrimage from Pentecost to their heavenly Paradise.

The opposite is also true. Those who resist this stream, find that their resistance to the King leads to drowning, for that stream overpowers them, and they will not be able to survive.

Being 'clothed with power from on high' has such a rich meaning. It is not just a matter of feeling good, as if the heavenly King has pointed the sceptre in your direction and bestowed his favour on you. We must not despise our feelings, but we must keep in mind that our positive feelings are the *result* of the power we receive, they do not represent that power itself. The blessings of a life of rich emotions where we experience the love of the Lord are not to be ignored.

We are clothed *with power*. That means that we can escape our spiritual exhaustion. No more weak hands and trembling knees, but rather, hands made strong and knees that give firm stride to our legs. We are encouraged once more and our blood rushes through the veins of our soul. We are filled with *power*!

No more trembling like a reed every time Satan rears his head. No more giving in to temptation. You have received *power* to resist, to give battle, and to overcome in the name of your God. When help is needed, don't assume that someone else will take care of it, because you feel you are powerless in your weakness. No, you have been 'clothed with power from on high', so that you can be supportive, caring, kind and encouraging, able to reach out with the love and compassion of a devoted heart.

'Clothed with power from on high' means that even if you have been bereft of children, you have now been filled to the brim by those who have been won over to the cause of the Lord. Where you once were silent, you now speak boldly. Where once your heart was empty of prayer, you now lead the congregation in prayer. In short, 'clothed with power from on high' means that the lame now leap like a deer, and those who were dumb now sing of the goodness of the God of Jacob.

All this is the work of the Holy Spirit, the comforter of our souls. For he comes into our heart as the messenger of the King, and pours comfort like oil onto our heart. The mystery of this wonder is that the Spirit accomplishes two things at the same time. He liberates the meek and girds them with glorious power, while he takes the great and powerful heroes and makes them *as little children* for his Lord the King of heaven.

Abba, our *Father*, who is in heaven!

Receive the Holy Spirit!

that out of his glorious riches
he may strengthen you with power
through his Spirit in your inner being,
Ephesians 3:16.

Once more Pentecost entreats all of us who love the Lord to bring honour, praise and devotion to the Holy Spirit; the one who leads, instructs and comforts us; who prays in us, with us, and for us with inexpressible groaning [Romans 8:26]. Together with the Father and the Son, he is true and eternal God, and is to be praised in all eternity. He has revealed to us the treasures of life and redemption. Through him we have been brought to new birth, and he has glorified the Son in us. He created us anew, because he is our Sanctifier. He inspired our disheartened souls. He is the Power behind any power believers possess. Our Light, which banishes all darkness within us. Just as Emmanuel is 'God *with* us', so the Holy Spirit is 'God *in* us'. We are his temple and he has made his abode in our souls. Sunlight gives little benefit when the moon glides in front of it to darken its rays. So also Christ, the Sun of righteousness gives little comfort and renewal if this light from the Holy Spirit does not penetrate to shine into your heart.

Of course, we do not separate the Father from the Son, nor the Son from the Holy Spirit. But this does not keep us from acknowledging and confessing, that all the love of the Father and the redemption of the Son first come to us only through the Holy Spirit. And if ever we taste the fulness of blessed communion with the Eternal One, it is only because it is the Holy Spirit who worked that sense of joy into our hearts.

That is not meant to place the Father behind the Son, or in a position second to him, because the Holy Spirit is sent out from both the Father

and the Son. And the Holy Spirit, having been sent by both the Father and the Son, also brings glory to them both, never to himself. That's why the Holy Spirit receives so little recognition in our life of faith. He is like the light that illumines everything else, and without which we could not see anything; but because of this light's own translucence, it remains unseen and unnoticed.

The Holy Spirit never appears and never reveals himself for he does not want to be known. Nevertheless in all the circumstances of our lives, the Holy Spirit serves us and serves to reveal the living God of love. Wherever he is found, there is light, and in that light the endless mercy of God the Father is revealed. The inexhaustible goodness of salvation that lies hidden in the Son is also revealed. And the Holy Spirit takes holy joy when those mercies and priceless treasures come to light for us. He wants to direct our eyes towards them, and endow our souls with consciousness, sensitivity and warmth of feeling for them. His goal is to have the flower of our soul open itself to be moistened by the dew of heaven, to drink in the brilliance of the eternal mercies of heavenly love.

It may take a long time before our soul is kindled with love also for the Holy Spirit, because all his work is done behind the scenes. Because of the unnoticed work of the Holy Spirit it may happen that we are overcome by joy in sensing our bond with the Father and the Son. Then our hearts overflow with the mercy of the Father and the self-sacrificing love of the Son. So much so that we may well forget to ask, *who is the One* who prepared this joy for our soul, who made it possible in the first place, and effected it?

Only later will such a question come up for the children of God and via a different route.

Brothers and Sisters, let me tell you about that route on this Pentecost Sunday of the Lord. You see, this quiet, hidden work of the Holy Spirit serves not only to reveal the glory of the Father and the beauty of the Son; he also has another task, a sad and cheerless task. For the Holy Spirit must also help us in the process of self-examination, to discover what is hidden in our heart, that which our

soul hides from view, whatever defiles our walk of life, and dishonours us before the eye of the Lord. The Holy Spirit will even dare to be *unmerciful* to us in order to bring us to the mercy of the Father. He does not spare us in any way.

Whatever we are, and have ever thought and done, and what we have ever so carefully hidden in the innermost corners of our heart or buried in the recesses of our mind, all this the Holy Spirit will haul out, to place it in the light before the face of the Lord. The Holy Spirit will be ruthless, in order to break through our defences and reveal the love of the Son. At first this will repel us. We imagine the Father in heaven to be sweet and dear to our heart. We think of the Son as one who loves us with immeasurable love. Why then this work of the Holy Spirit, who is so close to us, and yet does not spare us, but always delves deeper into our soul? Like a highway robber he steals our false peace of mind, and making us restless inside. We may even have moments when we secretly wish that there were no Holy Spirit at all. That terrible thought may seldom be voiced aloud, yet in the inner struggle of the upright it is nearly always acknowledged. Acknowledged, but also avoided, denied, and later wept over with a hot stream of tears of sorrow, when we recognize this complaint as a terrible denial of the kindest love of God, expressed even in the very *unmerciful* acts of the Holy Spirit.

For we must not forget that the Father and the Son also love the Holy Spirit, and do not accept our praise and adoration if we reject or deny the Holy Spirit. That's why a stronger, more holy love will delight us, and finally helps us realize that all the hardship and apparently merciless acts of the Holy Spirit are in their core precious indications of his altogether self-sacrificing grace. Thus we make a small beginning of discovery into the work of the other person of the Trinity who has been praised by the church throughout the ages as the *Holy Spirit*, together with the Father and the Son.

And yet all this is no more than a beginning. For it marks not the end, but only the initial spiritual stages of the struggle of the Holy Spirit with our spirit. This new awareness occurs in a more fearful

relationship, and uses a method which is very different from the earlier relationship. For at first we experienced the inner urging and prodding of the Holy Spirit to convince us of sin, and to invite us to come to salvation. God the Holy Spirit even begged us to 'let ourselves be reconciled to God' [2 Cor. 5:20]. However, now the situation changes.

You see, thanks to the Spirit, we have received a conviction of our sinfulness, and are able to *drink* from the fountain of salvation which has been provided for the people of God, to defeat sin and unrighteousness. And as we drink we gain strength, and our soul blossoms under the goodness of eternal love. And so we soon begin to expect that the Holy Spirit would also praise us and encourage our efforts, and would now abate his sharp unsparing spiritual critique. Well, guess what, we are in for a disappointment. Instead the same Holy Spirit returns, with an approach that seems just as harsh and merciless, deflating the value of all our good works, and rebuking us sternly, by calling the beautiful white clothes we have woven from all our good deeds, nothing but 'filthy rags' [Isaiah 64:6].

That is not something that we can easily understand or accept. It really is too much! We want to do things right. We denied the world, we confessed our sins, and we worked with a holy zeal to produce fruits worthy of our Lord. Yet now we hear that the Holy Spirit sees all these actions as polluted by sin, drawn from a polluted well. We might want to sympathise with Israel when they complained to Moses saying, "Let us return to Egypt" [Numbers 14:3]. We too almost give up on the journey to the Holy Land.

Or rather, we know that we would have given up long ago and returned to Egypt, or died in the desert, if the faithful loving Holy Spirit, who never deserts us, had not led us through this dark night of the soul with his column of fire.

You know what happens next?

We say to the Holy Spirit, "Well, it is clear that I can do *nothing*. I cannot love, work, pray or even sigh. For if everything I do is polluted with sin, nothing good will ever come out of me." Perhaps

we hope the Holy Spirit would console us and say, “No, it’s not that bad; you can do something!” However, that’s not the answer we get. Instead, He says, “You are right; you can do nothing, child of the Father, redeemed by the Son; nothing good will ever come of all your good works”. But don’t stop listening, for now you will hear the greatest divine mystery, the hidden character of salvation, which you can only now understand. That is *exactly* why the Holy Spirit has been sent to work in you completely and forever, the holiness that is from *God alone*. And he does his work in such a way, that you are able to absorb all its blessings, *as if it were your work*, while the Holy Spirit is the one who works it in and through you, in order to remove any possible boasting that you have any part in your redemption. That point is the beginning of a tender relationship with the Holy Spirit. So that now the child of God will proclaim, “You, O Holy Spirit of God, you have done it all in me, and continue to do it”. And the Holy Spirit responds by quietly stepping back while impressing on our soul a holy glorious spiritual energy, and the evidence of his spiritual work within us.

Then we are no longer able to pray, but the Holy Spirit begins to pray in us. We simply repeat his prayer like an echo of what the Holy Spirit has taught us in the first place.

At that point the Holy Spirit pours his love into us, so that we glow inwardly with a warmth that eliminates all our coldness and we are filled with loving-kindness for all God’s people.

In ourselves we really would not know Jesus, but the Holy Spirit in us glorifies the love of our Redeemer, so that it fills us with compassion for our Lord and King.

In fact the Holy Spirit becomes so tender, caring and helpful that we can only say, “How could I, through all these years, have regarded this Spirit as uncaring and without mercy? There is no-one more gentle and merciful!”

Now the Holy Spirit sees our sorrow coming long beforehand, and has prepared a balm to comfort us before we even knew we needed it for our pain. Nor will there be any temptation that is not already known by

the Holy Spirit. We may know that our faith may be tested in the crucible of life, and that it would not stand a chance of winning. We would be left helpless and forlorn. That is why, unbeknownst to us, the Spirit determined to strengthen us with his power and command his angels, so that we would not strike our foot on any stone [Psalm 91:12]. He does it gently; the way a mother cares for her baby. How can we begin to recount, even briefly, all the kindnesses of the Holy Spirit?

Only those who have experienced it know of such love. Only the guests at the wedding banquet enjoy the radiance of his soft gentle soothing light. That’s why they love the Holy Spirit, and why they long for his fellowship. That’s why they celebrate Pentecost as a great blessing.

It is a blessing, not because it marks the beginning of the organized church. Neither is it a blessing because the Apostles were converted on that day. No, we consider the celebration of Pentecost a blessing because on that day we are once more reminded of the glorious yet tender caring and self-effacing love of the Holy Spirit, which *has always been here*. He is present in the congregation of the living God and he will comfort us with an inner comfort, through the promises of the covenant of grace.

So, let’s not get lost in ideals, but open our eyes to what is real.

What we will find is that even God’s dearest children, the most devout among us will repeatedly lose our connection with the Holy Spirit and for that reason become depressed as we seem to be without comfort. We feel that the Holy Spirit has left. In our unbelief we may cry, “Who will lead me to a safe haven?” We become exhausted, as if the joy of faith had been no more than a dream.

That is why our celebration of Pentecost heralds a quiet blessed comfort, for at Pentecost God’s powerful Word comes again to witness to us, “No, the Holy Spirit is *not* gone, for he has been poured out and *lives* in the congregation of the Lord.”

Pentecost comes to take away our fears, our sorrow in thinking that

the Holy Spirit might no longer grant us his love and comfort. But the Holy Spirit chides us for thinking of his love, his care and mercy in such a limited way. He comes with divine compassion telling us, “I know you. I know the kind of sorrow you have caused me and am not surprised, but I will never leave you, nor forsake you. Here I am, your God, and the inspiration of your soul. Drink in this light, drink in this power, drink in the hope from the comfort of my countenance, which is always here for you.”

Love Poured into Our Hearts by the Holy Spirit

And hope does not disappoint us,
because God has poured out his love into our hearts
by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

Romans 5:5

The Holy Spirit is true and eternal God, together with the Father and the Son.

He is truly God, not one third of the Divine Being, or a part of the total Being. No the *single* highest being is *at the same time* Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit. Therefore God the Holy Spirit is *omnipresent*, near to each of us.

It can never be said that the Holy Spirit is ‘here’, but not ‘there’ for God the Holy Spirit is completely present everywhere. Even in Hell, God the Holy Spirit is present as a terrifying and all ‘consuming fire’ [Hebrews 12:29] to torment the conscience of the unfortunate who reside there [Luke 16:23]. However, even though the Holy Spirit is always to be found in all places, that does not mean that he reveals himself at all times and in all places. He may well be present, even though we have not heard his footsteps or observed his presence. Perhaps his face is hidden from us and we have not heard his voice, so that it seems to us as if he is not there at all. Perhaps you have sinned, and suddenly you may be startled deep within, through the observation of someone who allows you no rest. That does not mean that that someone was absent before. The Holy Spirit was there all along, but hidden from you. Indeed the accuser was the Holy Spirit. Thus the Holy Spirit sometimes reveals his countenance while at other times withdrawing from us and, depending on the occasion, will come in judgement or in comfort. But it is always the same God the Holy Spirit who, with the Father and the Son, remains one single eternal true God. Sometimes he stays completely hidden behind a heavy veil, and at times behind a translucent veil, and then again

reveals his countenance completely. Then we see his beautiful comforting face.

This is also why Scripture teaches and the church of Christ knows from experience that there are people who have never recognized the Holy Spirit, and there are others to whom the Holy Spirit has revealed himself. Then there are those highly favoured who may have times when they think the Holy Spirit absent, but who on other occasions possess the Holy Spirit with all the blessings of a new awakening. When the Holy Spirit reveals himself to someone who is not converted then that person sees a 'consuming fire' which he will try to evade if at all possible, for he experiences the Holy Spirit without the Mediator. However if it pleases God to bring someone to new birth through faith, such a person will also experience the Holy Spirit, but now as a Comforter, gentle, caring, instructing and comforting for the soul. Such is the Holy Spirit sent by the Mediator. We are reconciled! Indescribably energizing and comforting. The thick veil has been displaced by mercy. The eye of faith will now see the Holy Spirit while earlier he was completely hidden. That brings blessings. The one who was lonely, now experiences God's companionship, right in the inner chamber of the heart.

Sometimes the Holy Spirit will reveal himself in somewhat the same way to those who still live in darkness, even without experiencing a second birth. For the moment we will not ask why that is so. Hebrews 6 teaches us that it is so. And there are many who can remember experiencing a series of false conversions before their true conversion. But, such a revelation of the Spirit differs completely from the effect of a true conversion. For in the former experience only a corner of the veil is lifted, and only for a moment, to be let down again soon after. With a real conversion the veil is completely gone and the countenance of the Holy Spirit falls on us. That is a true pouring out. Now the Holy Spirit has come to reside in us, his temple, as he comes into us, to live, and pray, to comfort and to rule.

Even with such a conversion the eye of faith may yet again come to be partly or fully closed, so that it can no longer see clearly. However, the

comforting countenance of the Holy Spirit does not retreat. The *Holy Spirit* never leaves again.

So, what is the true blessing of that 'comforting countenance'? It is, my brothers and sisters, no less than the pouring out of God's love into our hearts, in and through this Holy Spirit.

The holy Apostle Paul witnesses to this, and the church of Christ responds with a resounding 'Amen'. That 'Amen' echos also in our heart. Note however, that we are not talking about a lukewarm, watered-down explanation which reduces the Holy Spirit to a 'better sense', thinking that those who received this 'better sense' can now commit acts of love on their own, in the same way that God is love. Nowhere does it say that. No, the love of God is rather the tender, divine and caring love of the Supreme Being towards us, which like a stream in a parched land nourishes and revives our soul through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

On our own we don't have any love. Our heart is unloving. If love is at work, it is one of only three kinds: either an instinctive love like that of a mother hen for her chicks, which has no special value before the Lord; or a show of love which fades away the moment your personal 'I' is threatened; or, it is true love, which means that it is love at work in your unloving heart through a power from above. It comes from outside to encourage your cold heart, fanning into flame the sacred spark within your heart.

By nature your heart does not believe in any love of God. For if you measure Him against yourself, you would consider the Eternal One just as cold and unfeeling as your own heart.

We may well say that, 'God is love and as Father of all he gladly

forgives all'. However, that is no more than a cheap slogan, a sentimental platitude, lacking root and spine. For what happens when we are destitute? When we have no food, or when someone dear has suddenly been taken from us, or when our honour is at stake, how much will be left of our love for God in our talk? Such despicable mouthing of God's love is also a great sacrilege. Those who speak so glibly of God's forgiveness, do they know anything of the terrible debt for which they themselves need to be forgiven? Such empty talk means nothing! Being cold themselves, they also think of God as cold and calculating; a mirror of their own lifeless souls.

Yet, once the fire of the Lord has struck into your very bone and marrow, when God has beaten you down, and your sins are poured out over your head like a stream of unrighteousness, then suddenly you know that you have discovered God. Then the false image fades away, and the true God appears to you, truly, like a holy devouring fire. The Holy Spirit has finally entered also into your soul and has come to live in the inner chamber of your heart. And from within the Spirit gently and gloriously whispers to you of his unspeakable blessings. Noticing this you immediately also gained insight into the unspeakable tenderness of the 'comforting countenance of your God'!

And that's when real love came to you. The love of God! This glorious warm glow of a new life of love, which is like food and drink for your soul. You can hardly express this love of God, because it is so indescribably beautiful. It's like a flood of many waters, and each droplet opens up an entire ocean of bounty and blessing.

The Holy Spirit certainly is God himself. Without blending into your person, he causes you to sense his presence alongside your own feelings and consciousness of your innermost being, communicating the divine blessings which he himself enjoys and experiences as a divine being. He causes holy peace to descend into your fearful heart, and brings the Eternal One to overwhelm you with divine compassion. This is exactly what the holy Apostle Paul experienced when he wrote that 'the love of God is poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit', and then he added that he had been 'given unto us' [Romans 5:5].

We received all this for nought. This Holy Spirit is given to us through sheer grace, with the only stipulation that each of us, as God's chosen, never cease to give thanks.

It is the Spirit Who Gives Life

The Spirit gives life;
the flesh counts for nothing.
John 6:63.

A tree in which the sap has dried up is dead. The stem may remain standing and the dry branches may still be attached and the withered leaves may still be hanging on, but the tree is no longer alive, it is firewood. Without the life-giving sap the tree is gone.

Do you understand the illustration of the dead tree? The living sap in what God has planted is the Holy Spirit. So, wherever the Holy Spirit has withdrawn his life giving sap from the leaves, the twigs, the branches, the stem, or from the roots, withering, rot and decay is all that remain.

Without the Holy Spirit in the world, one can find only death, spiritual death. Everything is dead and therefore nothing can be found that is not dead. Only when the Holy Spirit enters into this death, and brings life, then will real *life* return and be maintained.

It is not so that life is already present but a little wilted, and now the Holy Spirit sprinkles water on it so that, like a flower, it will lift up its head again. No, at first there is *no* life. There is only an absence, a complete lack of life. All we have is an indication that there should have been life, but in its place we find the reign of lifeless, soulless, powerless death.

Yet, the prophecy gives witness, "Come, Spirit of the living God; travel on the wings of the wind and blow new life into these dead bones, which have no life" [see: Ezekiel 37].

And see, it happened just as prophesied. The Spirit blows and comes. Wherever we find the Spirit, there is life. Where the Spirit has not yet come, there is still death. Death also reigns once more where the Spirit was grieved, and removed his presence.

Please remember well, my brothers and sisters, that the Spirit, and only the Spirit gives *life*. No-one and nothing else can do it. A church where the Spirit is gone is dead. It is like the withered tree, and ready only for the fire. In the same way a generation, a family, or a dynasty in which the Holy Spirit is absent soon sinks away into spiritual death, and dissolution. Just like the withered tree such a dead family will break away at first touch like brittle branches on a tree.

But we must also note, and please note this well, that any circle of believers, and even the individual hearts of those who are considered to be believers, are just as vulnerable. As soon as the Spirit leaves they too revert to death and become welcome carrion for the devil. At such a time the heart shows that for some time at least it knew God's grace, but only as an external decoration, while internally it remained dry and dormant; it remained dead, and ready for the fire, unless it should be regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

All life comes from the Holy Spirit.

Remember, that without the Holy Spirit's work, there would never have been a law or word of prophecy in Israel; no one would have struggled or fought the good fight; no martyr would ever have known the courage to accept death. Without the Holy Spirit no single soul would even have come to life. There would have been no church, no preaching of the Word, no power to resist evil, no discernment of the lie. Innocence would never be avenged, nor the arrogant heart broken without the Spirit. And never would there be even one penitent prayer, or cry, or groaning that could rise up to God's throne in heaven.

Please note well, that as the Lord God looks down from heaven upon this world, defiled with death and its curse, his all-seeing eyes may notice something there that is lovely, pure, and attractive, something virtuous or praiseworthy, or even a demonstration of mercy or compassion. Yes, if there is anything at all that brings a fragrant aroma up to his throne, it is the Holy Spirit who instigates it. Only the Spirit could have inspired it and also carried it up to God's throne. Whether in the church of Jesus Christ, or in our own hearts, whatever good can be found in us, we owe it all to the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit removes himself from us in anyway at all, we will soon experience a spiritual winter, an Arctic chill will grip our hearts, and our souls will freeze over, and death is at hand. But on the other hand, when the Holy Spirit once more approaches and pours out his warming rays to bring life, summer returns to our hearts, and our cold and heartless attitudes change back to gentleness and caring. Once more we reap the fruits of the Spirit in our hearts. If only the world had an idea of her true condition, she would focus her whole being on only one thing, namely to cry out and beg for the Holy Spirit to dwell in her bosom. If only the church on earth could recognize what is truly important, she too would discard all other interests, and focus all her attention on continuously crying out to the Holy Spirit, hoping to receive and keep that Spirit flowing in her. If only all families could recognize what is most important for their salvation, they too would cry out unceasingly, 'Do not let the Holy Spirit depart from us'. Indeed if your own heart had true insight to understand the source of all salvation, its glory and radiance, it would surely cry out and continuously beg to enjoy the sacred presence of the Holy Spirit in its life. If the true value of the presence of the Holy Spirit were known and understood among us, then certainly our love for the Holy Spirit would break forth gloriously, and our hearts would be set aglow, as if awakened from the dead.

But most people still try to live without the Holy Spirit. They have a

heavenly Father who supplies their needs, and who heals their sickness, and on whom they can call in the hour of danger. They have Jesus, who died for their sins and through whose sacrifice they enjoy redemption.

But what of their need for sanctification, the preparation for a holy walk of life? They think they can do that pretty well on their own. At most they recognize that we need a degree of power which originates from an only vaguely understood source, the 'Holy Spirit'.

Such an approach grieves and insults the Holy Spirit. It will not stop his work among us, but does hinder it.

Then a day will come when we have reached bottom, and life returns; once more we will truly love the Holy Spirit, and entrust our whole heart to Him; then we will know that all our blessings are from the Holy Spirit. Then once again there will be new life.

We will have life in our hearts, in the church, and among the nations. Certainly this new life will elicit strife and hatred, because the enmity of death, sin, and the Devil rise up in defiance.

But do not worry! The sap of life is once more flowing. The church is alive again! Once more there is faith, and in faith life will be lived to the full. The angels of the Lord who witness this will rejoice with a sacred joy.

All that receive the breath of life from the Holy Spirit will sing, "*Veni, Creator Spiritus!* Come Holy Spirit, who alone can create life!"

And the Holy Spirit will himself take great satisfaction in his work. And that satisfaction means blessing, also *already here on this earth* for all the children of God.

The Lion has Roared

“The lion has roared -
who will not fear?
The Sovereign LORD has spoken -
who can but prophesy?”
Amos 3:8

We city dwellers know nothing of the mighty roar of a lion. We may have heard that roar from the lion's cage in the zoo, which would send a chill down our spine. When we saw the lion's nostrils open wide and then heard the roar from his throat even the bravest among us would become scared. But the roar of a nearly tame lion safely caged up in the zoo is nothing like the thunderous roar of the wild lion in the jungle, which terrifies all those in his vicinity.

God created that roar. The lion did not discover or invent it himself. The creator of heaven and earth endowed this king of the beasts with its overpowering roar, which originated in the mind of the Creator, and came to majestic expression in the throat of this creature.

The unbridled incredible power of this 'wild animal' has a lesson for us as humankind. It is a lesson about power, a power that far exceeds *human* power. It is a *mysterious* power. Most of the time it is hidden to us, but suddenly it may show its awesome presence and terrify us.

That is why the lion's roar can give us an image of the wrath of God and, at the same time an image of the rage of Satan.

For the terrifying wrath of the Lord of lords, and the rage of Satan both point to superhuman powers, that can be portrayed symbolically for us in the image of such ferocious animals. Therefore among other things, these animals have a calling to remind us human beings of awesome powers which far exceed our own.

Scripture frequently compares the coming of the wrath of God to the sudden roar of the lion in the wild. Hosea tells us, “They will follow the LORD; he will roar like a lion. When he roars, his children will come trembling from the West.” (Hosea 10:11).

Again Isaiah says, “As a lion growls, a great lion over his prey [...] so the LORD Almighty will come down to do battle on Mount Zion and on its heights.” (Isaiah 31:4). And again, John on the Isle of Patmos, “He gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke.” [Revelation 10:3]. When you walk through the wilderness without a care in the world, unaware of danger since no lion ever comes to mind, that doesn't mean that there is no lion hidings in a thicket, waiting for the moment when he can pounce on his prey. Then, when he sees his prey from afar, he opens his mouth and shakes his mane and issues a blood curdling roar that resounds throughout the wild.

This is the image the Holy Spirit brings as an echo of the wrath of God to strike terror among the nations and into the hearts of the people.

Usually the nations and their peoples don't stop to think that in their lives, which resemble a jungle, there could be an awesome God. They just live from day to day, presuming it can go on forever, without knowing any evil, and having no inkling of the power which will judge them.

This may go on from one day to the next, from year to year, until suddenly the life of such a nation or person is confronted with the voice of the Lord. They notice the roar of his holy anger, and then as powerless and insignificant beings, they shudder in fear and trembling before the face of this terrible Lord.

Our conscience gives us the ear with which to hear the roar of the

Lion. Our conscience acts like a wonderful interpreter within us. Radically and suddenly it grips our attention and interprets for us, the meaning of that roar of the wrath of God. Our conscience, like a marvellous inborn memory, can remind us in a instant of a past we would rather forget, bringing back in glorious colours details of our sinful character. Our conscience, like a relentless opponent never allows us an escape, but always and irrevocably judges us. Yes, our conscience within us understands the roar of the lion very well and it makes us shudder, not only because no one can withstand a lion, but even more, because it knows that we have provoked the Lion of Judah. That is the fathomlessly deep root of deathly fear that tears through our hearts. The Lord God is coming! Just listen to the roar of that Lion. And even more, it is I who provoked that fearful majestic God in his wrath.

At that point we must immediately give up all resistance. Trying to escape will not help. And in our fear we will already feel ourselves breaking down and yielding even before you are completely devoured. And that is exactly what will save you! When the roar of the lion overcomes you, and makes you shudder, then immediately all earthly and sinful enticements and egotistic searches for doing things your own way disappear. Gone is your false pretence, and your proud self-reliance. As you cower under that roar, your evil heart will break and your arrogant spirit will be cut to size. That will make for something beautiful. The roar of the Lion has accomplished in just a moment, what all the gentle nudging, and all the words of warning, and all your pious intentions could not accomplish. Then your heart will resound with the knowledge that you are held accountable to Almighty God, the Eternal and all-powerful Creator. And your heart will be lifted up high above

all that is mundane and insignificant, and will no longer be preoccupied with inconsequential things. Now the game is over, and we proceed in earnest. Instead of dragging our feet, we will have a steady and surefooted gait. Even when the roar of the Lion will cease, you will not forget the face of the Lord of lords, but walk in the sure awareness of his presence.

If only the children of God would have the ear of conscience, to hear and understand the roar of God's wrath in his majesty. But many have fallen asleep, and need to be wakened. Not tomorrow but now, for the Lord is calling and *all* his children must take note of his presence. Moreover there are still so many of God's children who, though they remain unrepentant and unconverted, will one day be accepted as his children. But at present their ears are still plugged and their minds slow in turning to faith. They too must be stopped on the path where they walk without a care, so they can hear the roar of the lion. They belong to the Lord, and need to be joined to the people of God. The majesty of the Lord God is indescribable and overwhelming. Does your heart not hear its roar? And even more, when you have heard the roar of the lion of Judah, can you withstand it?

I am the vine; you are the branches.
If a man remains in me and I in him,
he will bear much fruit;
apart from me you can do nothing.
John 15:5

That is your most honorable title and that's all you get in the line of respectability.

O, if only the people of the Lord would set their whole heart on clinging to Immanuel, and stop being satisfied in just feeling close to him, kneeling down before him, or even in looking up to him with pleading eyes. All these external gestures are unprofitable in themselves. One could place a branch on the vine, or even tie it to the vine; but it would soon wither and die, and the gardener would soon remove it and throw it away.

As a child of God we have to be ingrafted and incorporated, so that our life grows together, intertwined with that of the vine, and we are no longer our own, but completely dependent on the vine for life and the bearing of fruit. It is not so that you produce sap for the vine now and again, and carry it for the vine. Rather, because you are completely empty in yourself, it is important that you draw together all your strength, your power, your praise and love, and all your deepest tenderness from your Lord. He alone fills you with the life-giving fluid of his love.

All that lives in you must flow from the life of Christ, your Lord. Before it can arise in your heart, it must be drawn and suctioned from him. To be a conduit for grace, for light and love, for life itself, is all that a branch can do. Being such a conduit to the clusters will bear rich fruit. This means that you must not hold onto the life-fluid for yourself, as if to enlarge your own position to become a stem. No, everything is passed on, and only a minuscule amount of fluid is used to maintain the branch itself. The benefits come in the fruits. The branches know that the heavenly Gardener will soon come to look for the fruit for his Son, and it is the great honour of the branches to offer up the rich and ripe grape clusters, not as products of the branch, but as the *fruit of the Vine*. This is the fruit of Jesus' suffering on the cross, offered to the heavenly Father.

It is like this. The fruit grows and ripens on your branch, and that is to your indisputable honour, and you can never praise and glorify your Saviour enough for that. Nevertheless, *bearing* the fruit is the limit of your calling. Bearing it not for yourself, but for him, who will one day come to harvest it. The fruit *clings* to you, but it belongs to the Father, and comes from the Son. It is your job to take it from the Son and to hand it over to the Father in his name. Of course you may also produce leaves, and may even grow them profusely. But they are not intended to serve your pride and ego, to decorate you in glorious green, but only to help shield the grape clusters and promote their ripening. Not you, but the Father, must be glorified in the leaves as well as the grapes. All glory belongs to the Father, even though it may come through you, but it comes from the Son.

That's how it is for those who wish to be branches. The branch is nothing much in itself, but it constitutes a glorious part of the whole vine when it acts as a conduit for the sap of the plant to benefit the fruit.

So now, *you are the branches!* What is your response to that? Are you branches of the living vine? Or are you still just clinging to the vine for your own sake?

"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit" [John 15:8]. Please note, that you are to *bear* much fruit, but not to produce it. You bear fruit just as a candle stick bears the light, but the fruit is no more yours than the light is produced by the candlestick. You *bear* fruit for Jesus. What you *bear* are *his* fruits. They are the fruit of his labour, his suffering, and the work of his hand. You yourself have no part at all in the production and growth of those fruits.

Love Through the Holy Spirit

And hope does not disappoint us,
because God has poured out his love
into our hearts by the Holy Spirit,
whom he has given us.
Romans 5:5

Pentecost is a wonderful feast. However the reason for our celebration and the divine motivation for our joy at Pentecost is deeply hidden in the spiritual realm.

The Holy Spirit who descended on Pentecost is truly and eternally God. 'See here, O Zion, here is your God'. This is also the joyful refrain at the descent of the Holy Spirit.

Yet it is different from the incarnation of the Son. Now there is no manger, no shepherds, no stable, no swaddling clothes, and no angel choirs. At the coming of the Holy Spirit there is nothing for the eye to see, for the ears to hear, or for the hands to touch. Yes, there were sounds and tongues of fire, but nothing lasting to see. It was just once, briefly, more like an image than reality. More like a sign, not the matter itself, for it was completely spiritual and hidden in mystery. Yet here too we say, 'your God is coming, O, Zion!' Not in weakness and external revelation, but in a sense more intimate, and deeper than in Paradise, on Mount Sinai, or in Bethlehem's manger, for here your God does not come *to* you, but *in* you.

In the Holy Spirit God came, not to live *among* you, but to make his home *in* you. This is not a temporary residence as in Paradise, or one where we were left behind as at the Ascension, but the Holy Spirit remains with us eternally, and without interruption.

This is a mystery of unspeakable majesty. Therefore it surprises us because it is more than we can comprehend. The people of God hardly dare to believe that God has truly come in the outpouring of the Holy

Spirit. We lack the courage of faith to really accept this incredible and glorious fact that God chose us as the temple in which he wishes to reside. That's why we tend to modify this wonderful news of the great deeds of God, reducing and belittling it. Our lack of faith and unbelief tends to suggest that only some of God's divine *power*, not *God Himself* came down to Zion on Pentecost.

Surely our inclination to reduce the Spirit is remarkable is it not? Who would dare to say at the manger of Bethlehem, that 'the one who came here today in the manger is not God himself, but only a *power* of God'? The people of God would considered such an interpretation blasphemy. Yet, if on Pentecost it is not God the Son but God the Holy Spirit who enters his temple, it seems that many feel free to reduce this second miracle of divine compassion, *and the people of the living God seem not to notice it.*

That's why this sin at Pentecost must be opposed with all our energies. We are guilty, deeply guilty when, through a lack of faith we cannot fully comprehend the grandeur of the revelation of God at Pentecost. Thrice guilty, even, for when God comes to live among us we don't notice it. Instead we reduce the good news by babbling about the coming of his power!

No, if we had just been looking for a little more holiness, a little inspired power, or a little more spirituality, Pentecost would not have been necessary. The Psalmist already sang of such power, and the prophets of Jahweh already gave thanks for it. Not a little more spirituality or sanctification, but *the* Holy Spirit came in person to dwell among us on Pentecost.

It is our soul's salvation to be known by God. As a result we begin to know God, now only in part, but at the end of time we shall know Him as we are known [1 Corinthians 13:12]. Therefore as children of

God we must focus all our energy, all our expectations, and all our striving on one thing, namely to achieve a close and intimate communion with the Holy Spirit. This should not just be a pious claim or wish, but an intense longing of the soul, so that we are unable to rest unless and until that goal is reached. Just as hunger pangs can only be stilled with food, so also our soul must hunger for this companion. The Psalmist expresses it well,

“As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, O God.

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

When can I go and meet with God? [Psalm 42:1,2].

In this way too, every child of God must long for the refreshing streams of life, flowing from the living God.

But as sinful people we have sunk so low, that in and of ourselves we do not search for God. Rather, we flee from him. We do not strive after him, but avoid him; we do not love him but hate him. And when God the Lord nevertheless comes in mercy, and instills a thirst for living water in our parched souls, we are inclined to reject the gift, preferring ‘death’ instead. When our souls are finally ready to come into the presence of God, we do not always respond with holy joy, but instead, fabricate an excuse, ‘It is not God himself, but only his power!’ What was said of Simon the Sorcerer by the people of Samaria is now so often said of the Holy Spirit, that he ‘is the divine power known as the Great Power’ [Acts 8:10].

This has its consequences.

If God’s people remain so insensitive at his attention to them, they grieve the Holy Spirit, and thus rob themselves of his influence and comfort.

Yet the root of this sin is clear enough. It lies in our arrogant pride. Have you ever really stopped to think about the difference between the church saying, ‘on Pentecost God himself came to us as the Holy

Spirit’, or, ‘on Pentecost we received *divine power* from on high’? Or perhaps you do not sense at all, that when the Lord God enters his church, the church herself should be silent, should bow down and diminish herself, because God is at work? He sets the pace and completes the task, and only God receives the glory and honour! However, if on Pentecost the people of God say, ‘We received divine power at Pentecost, then God is recognized as the one who supplies the power. But the people are in charge of this power, and then it appears that they begin to work with this divine power to accomplish the work that needs to be done. Then when the task is completed, it is the people who take credit. To be sure, they recognize they had ‘power from on high’, but they still assume that they did it themselves.

Many machines are operated with the power of a steam engine. Hard iron is bent, drilled, shaped and cut with a power that far exceeds human power. Having discovered this power of steam, human beings can now use that power to bend iron as if it were blotting paper. But when a mighty ocean liner is launched, do we hear any engineer praise God for the energy and power of steam? Do they not all proclaim, ‘Look at this beautiful ship that I have built?’

This is the essence of human sin.

When power comes down to help us in our weakness, a power that increases our capacity a hundred-fold, and if we use that power to subdue sin, or to control our body, then the praise is given to the sinner who overcame a weakness, and *we* receives the praise. We may mumble, ‘To God be the glory’, or, ‘All praise must go to God’, but this is more like adding sin to sin. For we only means that in a very superficial way, and in the depth of our soul still maintain, “*God* did not work this, but *I* did.” That makes all the difference.

One other example might serve us here. If a big business was in dire financial straights and near bankruptcy, a clever CEO might find a powerful helper in a business consultant. If through the energy and help of that consultant he can turn the fate of the company around, he would thank the consultant but take the credit for his clever use of

advice offered through a third person. He remains in charge of his business. But if the situation worsens and he cannot find a partner to finance the business someone will come along and say, "I'll save your company, but it has to go under my name, *you* are out of here, and *I'll* do all the work, and will announce the restructuring to everyone".

Your company may still be saved, but you yourself will fade into the background; the one who saved the company gets all the glory.

That's how it is here. If someone says, "I received *power* from the Holy Spirit" it is as if he saves himself with the power he has received. He may even make a generous donation to a worthy cause and consider the case closed, while remaining squarely in control of his life.

Conversely, when the Holy Spirit enters our heart, pushes aside our old self and sorts out our business and our life, and everyone notices that, then we ourselves recede into the background, and it becomes clear that the Holy Spirit saved us, and will receive all the glory.

We either regard the Holy Spirit as a *power* put at our disposal to work all kinds of wonders to build up our ego, or we acknowledge the Holy Spirit as our Saviour, who returns our lost self to us, and who deserves all the glory. There is an immeasurable distance between *sinful* self-advancement and the confession *solī Deo Gloria* at the feast of Pentecost.

All this depends on *love*. Do you love *yourself* on Pentecost, or do you love *your God*?

Don't be too quick to say, 'God, of course'. For if you are pressed to look at the root of the matter, and test your heart to the very depth of your being, then you would know yourself not to be wholeheartedly a child of God, or at least you would feel compelled to confess with heartfelt pain, that indeed, your love of self is still too strong.

It is not that you would never want to bring a sacrifice, deny yourself,

or even make room for God, but all that would still not touch the deepest inner part of our being. Even the desire to be saved is, in the first place, a form of love of oneself. The desire to be a child of God is still loving oneself. Even the fact of being considered among the elect and the saints of God can contribute to our love of self. The real test of love is the extend of one's jealousy for the honour, glory and praise of our God.

This means that the relationship between you and God must be such that he will always be in the right, and you in the wrong; that he be righteous and you unrighteous. You must be willing to admit guilt, to be in the wrong and unrighteous, without trying to get away with anything, not because you lost the struggle and were overcome, but because you know in your heart that God could never be wrong, or that the Almighty could never be at fault.

Love for God means that you love him more than the apple of your eye. It means that you would rather forego your own honour than deny the honour of your Lord. It requires you to be totally consumed with admiration and praise for the virtues of the Eternal One, so that you can't keep your eyes away from him, and your inner being is moved with the magnificence of your God, as he appears shining like the sun in Zion.

Love does not calculate that God did this *for me* and therefore I must also do something for him. You do not premeditate, 'He is *my* God, and that is why I should bow down before him'. Rather, love behaves like a child who is watching beautiful fireworks, and can't help but shout about the beauty it sees, so also in our love for God we exclaim at the beauty of his holiness and the glory of his excellence.

We proclaim the grandeur of him who calls us into his wonderful light. Not because, after careful deliberation, we came to the conclusion that this is right. Rather, it sweeps us along, it grips us and consumes us with admiration.

Love is not being able to do anything but *love*! It is the adoration of the entire soul for the Eternal One. It is like calling the Lord, to

come and speak to our soul. Thirst for the Lord is being unable to live without him. And thus, when he comes, we see nothing *but* Him, think of nothing but *his* glory, and are blessed in loss of self to the Lord our God.

What is the nature of this love? Does it mean that your love will come first, and only *then* will the Lord come, when you directed your expectant love to receive him?

Quite the contrary! Just as the sun cannot be seen unless it first radiates its own light to allow you to see it, so also the church calls out to her God, “Lord, in your light alone do we see light” [see: Psalm 36:9]. No, this love does not come from you, so that you can direct it to God. He himself gives this love to you. He arouses this love in your heart. He pours it into you. The eternal focus of all your most sacred love is also the One who ignites the flame of love, so that it will burn eternally in you. Yes, even when he *hides* himself from you, to test your love, and to see if you will still love him when he is not near, a dim remnant of his love remains in the haze of the clouds and keep his love alive in you.

It is not your precious heart that does so well in loving Him, but it is your most precious God, who knows so well how to enter into the depth of your heart, who with his comforting words effects the blessing of love in you. It is not your eye that finds the light, but the light finds your eye, and even instructs your eye in what it sees. Just notice how a newborn is dazzled by the light, that you have to shield her half opened eyes from the light. So also, when walking from the dark into bright sunlight, you automatically close your eyes until you are used to it.

In the same way the eyes of the soul automatically tend to avoid divine radiance, and close themselves to it. Only through the light itself can

the eye of the soul be instructed to gain insight from the light.

That is why the Apostle Paul glories in the love which has been poured into our hearts *by the Holy Spirit*.

It is not as if that love is a natural part in us. Rather, it is like the light which pours its rays and penetrates into the deepest nooks and crannies in the rocks. The Holy Spirit also pours his light into our whole heart. Wherever that light penetrates, all blight will disappear, and green growth can once again be seen. There seeds will sprout, and wilted flowers lift up their heads. There new life grows in abundance. Indeed then we will see the flower turn to the light. It is the same with love, which pulls the heart towards God, because it is pulled by his love in the first place.

When the sun’s rays enter the water they can make the water evaporate; and these vapours are gathered up from the water to turn into clouds in the sky. In the same way the radiance of Eternal Love works on the forsaken soul. At first it flows like a drop of water, cold and still, but eventually the water of the heart receives a glow and catches a ray of light, enough to give some warmth. This warmth will melt the heart, which is finally lifted up to heaven, to the source of its warmth.

This the glory of Pentecost. It is not God himself coming over you like a quiet wind in Paradise; nor is he coming to you as the Christ child in Bethlehem. No, he is coming right into your heart and inner being, to live in the inner-most chambers of your deepest self.

And that is why it is up to you to answer the question at Pentecost, whether you wish to have your own self dissolved into a life with Christ. And, like the example of the water, do you wish to be changed from cold water into a vapour that goes up to the Source

who attracts it to himself, thereby completely losing yourself in him, to seek no more, only to enjoy the one whose tender love calls you there?

Of course this happens away from the crowds. For many will simply say, “They are full of new wine”. The world calls it ‘fanaticism’, and perfunctory believers call it ‘exaggeration’.

It had to be that way! For these sacred treasures come from his holy place, and these secrets of salvation are revealed only to ‘God’s friends’ [see: John 15:15] and shown only in accordance with ‘his covenant of peace’.
