

THE ASCENT OF THE SON--THE DESCENT OF THE SPIRIT: KUYPER

by Abraham Kuyper

Abraham Kuyper's exploration of church and pentecost in Christian doctrine and practice.

28 Chapters

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The Ascent of the Son--The Descent of the Spirit: Kuyper

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On Pentecost, the Church of God steps onto the world stage as the Catholic World Church.

Originally, the Church was universal or catholic--the meaning is the same. It was so during early days of life in Eden and in the days of Noah , even during the time that Terah, the father of Father Abraham, wandered in the area Ur of the Chaldeans and Haran, that is the modern land of Iraq.

However, since the call of Abraham, the universal Church was narrowed down to one people and nation and, eventually, enclosed within the national borders of Israel. From this point on, the church was no longer universal or catholic but became a volkskerk, a national church in the strictest sense of the word. She retained that status until the day of Pentecost, when she laid down the trappings of a national church and once again morphed back into the original universal Church, catholic in its higher Scriptural import.

This development flowed out of Christ's Ascension into Heaven. From the Ascension on, the Head of the Church no longer has His seat in the earthly Jerusalem on Mount Zion, but in the Jerusalem that is above, from where He rules His Church for all peoples and nations alike. The Apostle Paul especially has abundant praise over this mystery in his touching epistles to the Churches of Ephesus and Rome.

Thus the Ascension and Pentecost belong together in one single unity. He ascended into Heaven in order to pour out the Holy Spirit. It is because of that unity that this bundle offers you meditations on both of these aspects of salvation history together. These meditations first take you into the heavenly Jerusalem, into the Tabernacle made by God

without human participation. From that point, they descend with you back to the Church on earth, but now together with the Comforter, that is the Holy Spirit.

Abraham Kuyper

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Meditation 1*

Lift Them Up, You Ancient Doors!

Lift up your heads, 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

In the depth of his soul, King David had a hankering that he himself be allowed to build the temple for the Ark of God. But a prophet came with a message from God that it was not he but "one of your own sons... is the one who will build a house for Me," the son referring to David's successor King Solomon (I Chronicles 17:11-12; II Samuel 7:12-13). Once David was convinced, he did not complain or try to force the issue but surrendered his heart's deepest desire and comforted his spirit in what his son was to fulfill instead of he himself.

Ah, what a blessed, glorious day it would be when the Ark of God would be ushered into the completed Temple! In Psalm 24, David was so taken up by that vision as if that day had already arrived for him! He envisioned it all as if it were really happening right in front of his eyes. Those magnificent pinnacles, those stately and dignified walls. And then the ascent of the Ark of God as it signified His majestic presence in the Holy of Holies. It was as if David looked beyond the Ark and the Temple, right into the heart of that Other David, for whom his ancestors had prayed so fervently and of whom both Ark and Temple were nothing but a shadow and symbol.

David envisions the Ark of God ascending the slope of holy Mount Zion till the delegation runs dead into its fortress wall. That wall is punctuated by gateways, each of which has doors. For the ark to gain entry, it has to go through one of these doors, but they are too low, too diminutive, too stifling for Him, for whom the ascent of the Ark is a mere symbol of His real ascent into glory. But listen! Now in the Spirit, David sings a psalm summoning the gateway to arise, to open up, to raise its doorposts and broaden its entryway! Oh, ancient doors, expand, befit yourself for royalty, unlock yourself! For look, the King of Glory is about to enter, the Lord of the heavenly hosts, He who revives and delights my soul.

Psalm 24 does thus certainly point directly to the narrow gateway in Zion's wall. Imagine the scene: Here's Jerusalem with the Temple high above it and between these two that fortress wall with its formidable gateway and its ancient doors. That's why, with the Ark as carrier of God's majesty approaching, David sings this psalm in holy ecstasy:

Be lifted up, you ancient doors,
Lift up your heads, you gates;
that the King of glory may come in.

^Who is this King of glory?

The Lord strong and mighty,
the Lord mighty in battle.

And then once more:

Lift up your heads, 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.

However, all this, glorious as it is, is not the really essential thing, because the earthly Zion was not the essence of it. The earthly Jerusalem was only a shadow, as were the Temple and the Ark itself. Similarly, Zion's fortress wall that separated Jerusalem from the Temple was also a shadow. All of that was nothing but graphic teaching, a symbolic representation of the real, pointing and alluding to the future permanent, the real, the eternal.

The "wise" do not understand all of this, but the Church of God and the beloved ones He has chosen do understand it. And that is the reason that throughout the ages the Church of God consciously, aggressively, and with determination declared loud and clear that David, while singing about the Ark in symbolic language, was actually referring to the actual Ascension of Jesus!

In the earthly Jerusalem people thirst after the living God, but He lives high up on Mount Zion. There are that impenetrable wall and those ancient unforgiving doors. Always that separation! To see the Temple; to know the Ark is there; to know there, there is the presence of the Lord and then those impenetrable walls, those narrow gateways and those ancient doors! Ach!

But, arise, oh, arise my soul; arise, oh, languishing Jerusalem! At the real Ascension, those barriers burst open. There flows forth salvation. There comes the King of glory! Now those impossible walls yield; those narrow gateways lift themselves up. Now, rise, rise you ancient doors for Him to enter, He the Lord of the heavenly powers and hosts, while you, who were thirsting after your God, sing and jubilate in victory!

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What then are those "ancient doors?" They represent everything that separates Jerusalem from the Ark. They are symbolic of everything that constitutes a wall between the languishing heart of the wretched and

the holy glory of their God.

A door invites you to enter, but it is bolted and prevents you from entering. It is an ancient door that prevents you from entering. No matter how hard you knock and kick, it remains impenetrable, so that you conclude that it will never open. They seem like eternal doors that will keep you outside forever!

But now comes the Messiah. God has compassion for the wretched and sends you a Saviour. But what will happen? Will those doors, those ancient doors, also resist Him?

It is precisely to this question that David prophecies in the Spirit.

For Him, that Messiah, those ancient doors will fly open; they will open up wide and rise on high to allow Him, the King of Glory, to enter His Kingdom.

Note well: time and again it is a door, a barrier. First, there is that ancient door of the flesh that holds you in bondage and won't allow you to enter, that flesh that suffocates you. But Christ bursts through all of this and comes to you in that flesh Himself through that ancient door of the flesh. And so He is near you already, one with you, become like your brother.

But you have still not arrived. The Word, another name in the Bible for the Messiah, becomes flesh with you, but in such a way that the Messiah and you are both in a position of wretchedness, locked out of the heavenly Zion, banned from the desired glory with that wall and its ancient door still preventing you.

Therefore, it is imperative that out of and with that flesh further steps be taken. Ascend that mountain, from the level earth to heaven on high. That's where the glory is, not here on earth. He is here in weakness, but once He has reached that place, He will become mighty, great in majesty and empowered to rescue you and bring you salvation.

That is the reason for the Ascension.

To Heaven! That is, to the place where weakness is glorified, where there is strength and power. That is where your flesh goes, your Messiah in your flesh, in the same flesh and blood that hung on the cross of disgrace on Golgotha.

It is now finally that those ancient doors widen themselves and rise high. Now the King of glory enters in. Your King, oh Church of God, who alone has the wherewithal to bring you salvation, to justify and sanctify you for full salvation. Now, finally, by having entered those ancient doors into the better Tabernacle not made with hands, your King dispenses salvation and blessing. His power exudes from Him and satan slinks away, because the godless are being justified.

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But even now we have not yet reached the end of the road. There still is one more ancient door, that is, the door to your own heart, the door to your soul that satan bolted shut and sealed. Oh, how many thousands of times have you banged your head against that ancient door to your heart. It was too stuffy; in your anxious heart you could no longer stand it. You had to get out and you banged against that door and shouted, "Open up! Open up! Have mercy and don't let me suffocate in this stuffy place." It didn't help; No one heard you. That door to your heart turned out to be permanent as well.

Until.... until He came, He the King of glory! When He sent His Word from His majestic throne..., it became clear to you that where the Word of the King is present, there is power. For at that moment the locks snapped and the bolts cracked; the doors opened, rose up and He entered, the Lord strong and mighty. Halleluiah!

Meditation 2*

You Ascended on High

When You ascended on high,

You took many captives;

You received gifts from/for people,

even from the rebellious--

that You, Lord God,

might dwell there.

Psalm 68:18

Whenever doubt rears its head, it often begins by casting into doubt the Lord's Ascension into Heaven. The Ascension with its precious comfort must first of all be deleted from one's spiritual eye. Once that has been accomplished, the cancer of doubt will unnoticeably gnaw deeper and deeper into the soul.

For God's dear children the above is an incentive to focus their faith with all their energy especially on the Ascension of our Lord. It is not just a matter of intellectually accepting the Ascension, but they need to immerse their souls in this glorious fact and not allow the fountains of consolation that generally flow from it, be blocked.

For the secular mind, the Ascension of Jesus is an insurmountable offence. How is it possible, the unbelieving pseudo-wisdom in us asks, that Jesus would bodily ascend on high, not just three or four meters, but into and beyond the highest clouds? How is it possible that Jesus bodily escaped our atmosphere, where there is no air to breathe and no warmth to keep that body alive? He would have died up there. How can it be, the rationalist skeptic in us asks further, that Jesus went way out into the universe, from where it takes thousands of years for the light

of stars to reach us? And how could He in a mere ten days reach beyond those distant stars into Heaven, since ten days after the Ascension we celebrate Pentecost, the day He sent His Spirit? That's how that cancer of skepticism within us gnaws on and on. How can we with our human minds even comprehend the nature of the Heavens? How can Heaven contain physical bodies? And how could this physical body move through all these Heavens to the highest of all, where there is something like the right hand of the Father where Jesus took His place?

Of course, measured by purely human understanding none of this would be possible; it is all the height of irrationality. For anyone caught up in this chain of reasoning Jesus could not have ascended into Heaven. But if you want to follow this line, you must realize that, according to the same secular reasoning, death spells the end of you with nothing beyond. You get buried in a hole like an animal and there you decompose. Finish! That's it.

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But to believe, to confess, to jubilate joyfully as a child of God, implies that we do not allow ourselves to be determined and walled in by the limits of our human understanding, for God has burst open those walls. Through the opening in that ancient wall a joyful light descended from above, through which we now see all of reality in a totally different perspective, both things on earth below and in Heaven above.

In that light, we come to see that there is much more power beyond our power. In fact, our power is but a minimal part of the total available power in the universe. Far beyond and above our power and that of nature glitters the mighty majesty of God that breaks into this earthly life with a sovereign power that knows no bounds. With that sovereign power He bends and forces everything to obey His divine ordinances,

everything, whether our bodies, the skies, mountains and clouds, the stars and the firmament, warmth and cold, distance and space, in fact all creation without exception.

And then the Son of God comes to earth, that Son of God who has adopted our flesh and blood. He came but not to stay. The Lord God did not intend for Him to stay here, but, without shedding our flesh and blood, to ascend back into Heaven in order from that vantage point to protect God's Church and to comfort her. There is nothing to restrict His all-encompassing power to deal with His creatures as He wills, not even those factors that seem to make all this talk of Ascension unbelievable and impossible, whether space, distance, the teeming stars, the firmament or atmosphere, or even the law of gravity. All of these are but pseudo-obstacles over against the omnipotence with which He bends them.

For these reasons, a child of God does not calculate those distances, speeds and possibilities. When it pleases God to assign a creature of His to exceptional tasks or to stretch them beyond their normal limits, there is nothing to prevent Him. Then all your normal data and statistics surrender themselves, while all your laboratory paraphernalia suddenly become useless and all you have left is to stare into this holy arena with your faith that empowers your penetrating gaze to see these spiritual verities.

When you fall on your knees, this gaze in faith carries you quick as lightning, within one heartbeat, from your prayer room to the Lord in Heaven. Then you are in the presence of your Jesus, in Whom you recognize the Lamb that was slain, and you worship Him with a love that melts your soul.

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At that point all annoying objections disappear and human understanding

has nothing further to contribute. Faith has rendered it speechless; it is now faith that speaks. Through this faith Jesus' ascension has become such an indubitable and certain fact, that you can see Him in His majesty, that you can as it were point Him out to others. You can see that for all these 2000 years He has from Heaven revived, saved and comforted His loved ones day and night.

This is the miracle: While others see nothing fall from Heaven, those with the eye of faith see the manna of the soul come down, liberally spread out by Jesus over His Church. Just as Jesus at one time saw satan fall down from Heaven like lightning, while others saw nothing, so do those with an awakened soul see the soft rains of grace dripping down from day to day on the shriveled soul. They no longer have to ask whether Jesus has ascended into Heaven, for they experience every morning and evening that Jesus is in Heaven and from there blesses them.

There will be moments when even a believer does not see it, but those are evil moments during which the veil of sin covers his eyes. However, as soon as that veil has been removed, see, Jesus is there again together with His angels, and grace once again pours down upon him.

Does it really require proof that there is a sun in that sky, when I am enjoying its light and bask in it? Similarly, do you really expect me to prove Jesus' Ascension, when I feel His loving warmth stream over me and can taste that it comes from Him?

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It is when your soul is separated from Immanuel that it constantly blinds you to His Ascension. That happens when things go awry with you by moving out of Immanuel's orbit and you try to connect with God on your own by skirting Jesus. But when you know yourself to be

incorporated with Him into one unity, a living member of His living Body through that mystical, wonderful living relationship in the Spirit, ah, then there is no distance, then your prayer rises up to Him constantly and His gifts descend on you every moment.

Then that Jacob's ladder (Genesis 28:12) once again connects you, along which your soul rushes to meet Him, while His messengers of love rush down towards you. Everything is inspired, animated, full of salvific splendour and shimmering with godly life.

There you have it: via Jesus' Ascension, both earth and Heaven become one in the deepest vision of your soul.

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And should there be a time when the light in your soul's eye dims, when guilt, sin, unrighteousness and all sorts of idolatries and images or a mountain of pride block your prayers, then you can still sense in the dark of night those prayers of that supreme Prayer Warrior above, Who pleads on your behalf. He pleads first of all that the gift of prayer be restored to you.

If that pleading prayer for you were to cease for even one moment, you would no longer share in His salvation. The pleading of your High Priest Jesus is the foundation on which your hope rests. It is on that basis that you entrust yourself when you lay down to sleep. When you rise in the morning, the pleading prayers of Jesus are once again the ground of your faith and trust so that you can face the struggle of the day before you with courage.

Hence, you can't do without Jesus' Ascension. It is woven into your entire spiritual life.

One day, and this remains the anticipation of your soul, you will be up there above with Him who waits for you!

Meditation 3*

Who Has Ascended into Heaven

Therefore, since we have a great high priest

who has ascended into heaven,

Jesus the Son of God

let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

Hebrew 4:14

Jesus has ascended into Heaven. It was not like us children of God, who die on earth only to wake up in Heaven immediately after our death. No, He rose from death already here on earth and from here ascended on high. His Ascension was such that He left us and our world and ascended alone to enter that Heaven that is stretched out endlessly above our firmament.

To put it succinctly, the Lord, our Saviour, departed from here in order to arrive there. He not only passed through the clouds and the atmosphere, but, when He arrived in Heaven, He did not tarry in the frontal regions, but traveled on till He finally arrived in that region where the central focus of God's full revelation is located, the very throne of God.

He did not ascend to Heaven or travel through those Heavens as a vague shadow or spirit, nor as a disembodied soul, but as a human being in His full humanity, in both soul and body. If you had been able to follow Him in your gaze as He ascended, you would also have been able to distinguish the different parts of His body and the expressions on His face. Even now, once you die and immediately enter Heaven with a glorified body, you will find there in the very centre of the highest Heaven your Jesus, your Surety, your Mediator. Oh, to be sure, you will

see Him dressed in dazzling glory, but even so you will be able to distinguish His facial features like eyes and mouth.

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God did not create one world but two. That is, this world in which we live and that heavenly world where we are headed. Those two worlds are studies in contrast, with our world here below a vaguely lit cellar, and the Heavens above us a brilliantly lit "great room" where all jubilate and shout with joy.

That world above us is a real world. True, the Lord God is omnipresent, but this earth is nothing but His footstool, while the throne on which He sits, governs and glitters in His divine glory, is not here but in the highest Heaven. When we approach an earthly ruler to speak to him, we do not focus our eyes on his feet but look up to him on his throne. Similarly, God's children do not seek their faithful and compassionate Father by focusing on His footstool, but they seek Him in Heaven, where He sits on His throne. That's the only place where you will find Him.

It is not all that different among us. We have our ankles and our toes that give us great pain when someone kicks or steps on them.

Nevertheless, when we meet we do not stare at each other's feet, but at our faces, through which the soul expresses itself. Again, true, God is omnipresent, but our eyes seek Him only in His glorified Place, where His divine face radiates above all His elect. Our God is in the highest of Heavens.

And so our life's issues must be tried and solved not on earth but in Heaven above. Down here, appearances can deceive, but up there in the highest Heaven we face reality as it is.

Oh, who will pass through those high Heavens before us and on our behalf in order to obtain for us pardon and our inheritance from the very throne of God? That is the question to which the Ascension of our

Jesus provides the answer. He has done that. He is the one who ascended to that height. He passed through those heavens and arrived in the centre of God's glory that Scripture refers to as "the right hand of God." It is there in that court most holy that He advocates for us. You cannot reach those heavens by yourselves. Your sad complaint about who will ascend to heaven for us has no purpose, for not one single person or creature on earth can do that. But Jesus could and did precisely that. He ascended on your behalf and once He arrived there, He did not relinquish the earth, thinking, "Now that I'm back in Heaven, I'll just give up on that world that offered me nothing but a cross. From now on, I'm just going to enjoy myself in Heaven." No, Jesus remained that tender lover of and advocate for this terribly godless world and of his forgetful and ungrateful people.

That is the meaning of Scripture: He entered into the highest Heavens as High Priest, not in order to forget about us, but to carry us in His heart; not in order to condemn us for our lack of love, but to pray for our salvation. Even up there in Heaven, Jesus is working on our behalf. His work as Mediator is not completed by a long shot. Yes, all necessary sacrifice has been fulfilled, but much more must still happen. He is now preparing a place for us!

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The above great reality shifts the spiritual domicile of each child of God. In some nations, all residents are registered in their local government. For example, a father with small children plans to move from Siberia to Moscow. He goes ahead and prepares a place, while his family is still in Siberia. He finds a place and then registers his family with the authorities. Thus the children are already registered citizens of Moscow, even though they are still in Siberia. By law, the father's address is also the children's. That is their official

domicile, their real home.

So it is with God's children. At one time, Jesus was with them on earth--their Siberia--, but then He moved His domicile to a completely other location in the universe--their Moscow. He now lives above and because He lives there, that has also become the real home of His redeemed people. They are now registered together with Him. Even though they did not accompany Him originally, and stayed on earth, their citizenship is no longer here below, but in the city that has its foundation in Heaven.

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We do not finish our journey until our death. But as children who follow their father later but are already considered "living" in the new place, so are the thoughts of the redeemed focused on that new Jerusalem that awaits them.

They question other pilgrims about it. They study the map of that country and the layout of the Holy City and all of its delights as they are revealed to them in the Scriptures. In the meantime, they value with great joy in their souls each blessing and gift that their Redeemer sends them as a foretaste and proof. And so they already now walk in the Heavens and already now enjoy the inheritance that is promised them.

But let's be honest. That's how it should be and so it is in our momentary ideal faith visions, but not quite during our normal daily walk on earth--and that is precisely our sin: We look up to and anticipate Heaven, but still continue to regard the world and its treasures as the real thing.

Oh, compassionate Christ, pull us up to You above through Your Ascension. Don't forsake Your redeemed!

Meditation 4*

Ascended Higher than All the Heavens

He who descended is the very one

Who ascended higher than all the heavens,

in order to fill the whole universe.

Ephesians 4:10

Do you believe there is a Heaven? No, this is not about the heaven we refer to as "firmament," where clouds move about restlessly, nor about that high heaven or space with its twinkling stars. This is about that glorious Heaven, the Jerusalem with its pearly gates, where hosts of angels crowd around the throne of God. Do you believe in its existence, its reality?

That spiritual Heaven was not always there, but it came into being, as Moses told it, when in the beginning God created Heaven and earth. Thus a created Heaven that has its own structures and measurements, appearance, nature and essence as well as housekeeping arrangements and mode of existence as does this world and has nothing in common with either the physical firmament that was created on day two nor with the starry sky that God called into being on day four.

You really can't imagine what that Heaven looks like, even though it definitely has certain things in common with our world. This can be concluded from the fact that the bodies of the redeemed are at home in this heavenly household, though in glorified form. It can also be seen in the design of the Old Testament Tabernacle that God imaged to Moses on the mountain, in the ease with which the angels move about on earth and not the least in the images of earthly life with which the Holy Scriptures describe Heavenly life for us. But that's as far as the

commonalities go. There are all kinds of things and relationships there that during our earthly pilgrimage we can at best vaguely imagine in our hearts, but never with a concrete impression of anything clear and vivid. These things and relationships include the activities and work done in Heaven, the way we move about, the shape of community, or even the nature of the relationship between the redeemed and the angels and both with Christ and through Him with the Triune God.

We only know that we may never compare the life in that higher, sinless and thus more glorious creation to our life on earth. Existence on earth is better described as dull, lackluster, and muffled compared to that rich, dynamic and pulsating life whirling around the throne of God. Does the vision of a tree yielding its fruit monthly throughout the year give you an impression of a slumbering life in the shadows, lacking all dynamics? Does it not much more portray a glorious life, of an internal, pulsating energy many times the dynamism of our earthly style of life?

That Heaven is local, that is, it has its limits in the form of borders where the lower creation ends and this Heavenly creation begins. As the dead cross the border from the one to the other, they experience a moment during which everything tells them, "I am no longer on earth; I am now immersed in a totally different creation. Now I am in Heaven." Although we do not speculate about distances that we do not understand, we may and even must decide and confess that Heaven is a created household with its own borders.

From the above it is easily perceived that God does not live in Heaven in the sense that He lives there, but not elsewhere outside of it.

Twice we read in the Bible, "The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you" (I Kings 8:27; II Chronicles 6:18). God is everywhere, omnipresent. That is to say, God is infinite so that it is

impossible to posit even a single spot either within or outside of His creation where He is not always and fully present as God Almighty. Even the place of perdition has no borders that would keep out the omnipresent God.

That is not to say that the Lord God reveals Himself in all places in equal manner or measure. God is indeed present everywhere, in Abraham the Father of all believers as well as in the donkey on which he rode.

Nevertheless, what a difference in revelation! Even amongst people. For example, there is such a difference between God's presence in the man on the right of the crucified Christ and the one on His left.

Likewise, there is a clear difference between God's revelation in a barren cliff or mountain cave and His revelation in the firmament that declares His glory or in a flowerbed with the aroma of His splendour.

Keeping in mind these differences, it should not be difficult to realize that, regardless of His omnipotence, His revelation here on earth is totally different from that in Heaven.

Though His revelation appears here only in an opaque way, in Heaven the Lord our God reveals Himself with heavenly clarity. When we want to speak to our neighbour, though knowing that he exists with his entire body, including his feet, we look him in the eye, because the soul expresses itself most clearly through the eye. Similarly, the soul that seeks God, instinctively looks towards Heaven, because, in a manner of speaking, it is there that the all-seeing eye of the Eternal opens itself and the redeemed there for the first time gaze upon His complete Being through that eye.

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It is to that Heaven that our Security and Mediator ascended alive on that day. He had already been in Heaven. Better put, while He wandered around on earth, as Son of God He never left Heaven. He was God;

co-eternal and co-extensive with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Hence, the revelation of His Godhead was the clearest and most glorious in Heaven.

There in those Heavens is God's throne. That is to say that God, though omnipresent, there in the place of His clearest self-revelation, is in closest touch with the angels that carry out His will and thus that throne is the centre of His glory and power for all creation. It was from that centre of glory and power that the Son descended into this lower earthly creation and entered in our state of misery and bitter humiliation. Throughout it all, He remained God, but, out of godly compassion, the Mediator veiled His divine splendour and hid behind the somber form of human nature, sunk as it was in weakness and bitter self-humiliation.

The process of suffering and humiliation did not stop there. Once He had entered that phase, He did not develop and promote Himself by ascending from glory to glory. To the contrary, His glory was veiled through voluntary self-sacrifice until at last He fell into the deepest shame and drowned in the depth of death.

And then what happened? Did the Son of God give up on His human nature when He reached the depth of shame? Did He put an end to His humiliation by returning to His former self? In no way, brothers and sisters! When Jesus died, the eternal Son retained His human nature even in death, even as His body and soul separated while He underwent the violence of death. And then, when He finally reached the turning point from where, out of the depth of humiliation, He would begin the road to His exaltation, He did not begin this phase by throwing off His human nature, but rather by a renewed and higher animation of that nature via His resurrection.

But even this was not enough. His humiliation passed through a slow

process that began with the Son of God adopting the form of a servant and then went on to embrace suffering and death, finally to descend into the grave until this Man of Sorrows, in the midst of His suffering, drank from the cup of hell. Similarly, there was also a slow process of glorification, a continuous ascent from the lower to the higher, beginning with His coming out of the grave by His resurrection, followed by His triumphal Ascension from this earth, achieving royal power by taking His seat at the right hand of God, and, finally, the explosion of His glorification over all creation by His return to judge.

His humiliation and glorification thus stand in strong contrast to each other. It was not a case of a gradual positive development that began in the manger and progressed through His resurrection to an ever higher place of honour. Quite the opposite, for until His resurrection, it was a process of continuous emptying of Himself, of decline, of the melting away and shrinking of His honour until He finally reached the deepest humiliation conceivable. At that point, not through Himself, but through an immense display of the majesty of the Triune God, He was ushered into the state of glorification and from here on to climb to higher levels of glorification step by step, just as during His phase of humiliation He steadily descended step by step.

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The Mediator's glorification involved His full person, that is, His divine as well as human nature. It was definitely not restricted to His human nature. But that could bring up a question about whether it is possible to add any glory to that already consummate and complete divine nature, to make Him even more glorious. That, of course, is impossible and unthinkable.

Take gold, for example. Goldsmiths enhance the shine of gold not by

adding more gold to it, but by removing all the stain and tarnish that dampen its full lustre. So also was the glory of Jesus' divine nature enhanced, not that anything new was added to it, but His veiled and inherent divinity got the opportunity to radiate once again His full glory undisturbed and undiminished.

Before His glorification, during the entire period of His humiliation, His divine majesty was hidden behind a veil that prevented the outward radiance of His glow. But now the opposite was happening: The veil took on a transparency that allowed His glorious majesty to radiate outward. That's how the divinity of the Mediator came to shine in a brighter glow.

His glorification affected his human nature as well. Please understand this properly. It was not that His divinity began to share his divine attributes with His human nature. That would be impossible and even absurd. The personal union of both natures took place at the moment of incarnation, His birth, and this relationship has since that time become neither less nor more intimate, but remained unchanged. It was precisely that relationship that caused both natures to be united most intimately without confounding them. The divine remained divine and the human, human, without any carryover of attributes from the one to the other.

In other words, the elevation of His human nature was not a matter of importing or adding elements that were foreign to it, but only of that which was exclusively human and fit human nature. It was not the shedding of His servant stature so much as that of the servant-like posture of His humanity. In His Ascension our Security received the fullest excellence of the spiritual and wonderful in body and soul in the most perfect form to which human nature is susceptible in its highest elevation. Nothing more, but also nothing less.

That is His victory, namely, to shed everything weak, miserable and vulnerable that He had adopted in His human nature for our sake, and to become filled with all that is strong, glorious and rich that was given Him for the purpose of His eternal reign. As everyone's castaway, He had made Himself appear worthless, but see how He now turns all His enemies into a footstool before His throne.

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He was elevated as a reward for all the works He performed. It was for perfectly fulfilling the law as well as for completing his function as Mediator. As the prophet Isaiah put it, "Though the Lord makes His life an offering for sin, He will see His offspring and prolong His days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in His hand" (Isaiah 53:10). It was also a reward for the incalculable value of His suffering by which He earned eternal glory for God's elect.

His Ascension thus had to advance His mediatorial role as well. He descended into the depth of His humiliation, not for Himself but for us, laden with our guilt. Similarly, He had to climb out of his humiliation, not just for Himself but for us. Thus crowned with a glory that reflected not only Him personally, He was richly laden with the gifts of glory reserved for all of God's elect.

When Jesus arose, all His followers arose in Him. When He ascended, all God's elect ascended in Him. They now sit with Christ in Heaven at the right hand of God. As the Psalmist put it, "When You ascended on high..., You received gifts from people, even gifts for people that they might dwell there with You" (Psalm 68:18). [1]

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For this reason, the Mediator could not tarry on earth. The state of being glorified requires also circumstances that reflect that state. A released prisoner must not only exchange the chains of captivity with a

robe of freedom, but he must also be released from his prison. Thus it was that, after being glorified, Jesus simply could no longer stay on this inglorious earth. The state of inner glorification required outward glorification as well. And so He ascended from a specific place through the air, the clouds and firmament, to that other world, that other household, that higher creation we call "Heaven." Once arrived there, He proceeded through the Heavens and ascended to the highest level, to that place in the universe where the Lord's revelation shows up in its clearest and purest form and is therefore the location of His throne. That is where He took on His glory, accepted His kingly status, and, sitting at the right hand of the Father, began to exercise His glorious power.

Thus an actual transfer or displacement occurred from one place to another. He is hence no longer where He used to be, that is, on earth, but now finds Himself in a place different from where He was before. Thus, in that highest Heaven there is a place where Jesus lives and works in our flesh. It is a place somewhere in that highest realm, where all the angels wait for His commands and where those fallen asleep in the Lord have found Him. It is the place where our eye will also search Him out and where we, once having entered into His glory through grace, will see Him as He is.

So, He is presently absent from the earth, but only, at the end of all things, to once again leave that place of glory in order to reveal Himself as the Judge of all nations.

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In the meantime, He is the Guardian of every soul, the Governor of nations, the King of His Church and the Comforter for the weak of heart. For you see, though He is indeed bound to that place in the highest Heaven, with His grace, majesty, divinity and spirit He is

omnipresent. He knows exactly all that happens on the whole earth as well as the thoughts of our hearts. With the arms of His eternal compassion He covers our souls and satisfies the hunger of our souls with His precious and delightful presence. He is familiar with the suffering of every heart, the sin in each family, the fights in each church and the decisions made for or against His glory in each church gathering.

That's why he had to ascend to Heaven, so that He, though located in the highest Heaven, can be near to all of us and hear every voice of His beloved. What's more, our Mediator had to ascend into Heaven not only to send us His gifts, but also to prepare the House for His Bride, the Church.

According to the Bible, Jesus said: "My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?" (John 14:2). Again, "Jesus said to them, My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I too am working" (John 5:17). His cry from the cross, "It is finished!" (John 19:30) finds its initial fulfillment in the declaration, "It has taken place" from John's Revelation.

[1] This version incorporates the NIV's footnotes with this text to convey Kuyper's intention.

Meditation 5*

Ascend to Where He Was Before

Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you?"

Then what if you see the Son of Man

ascend to where He was before!

John 6:61-62

When we consider the Ascension of our King, there are a number of things we need to keep in mind: Heaven, the place to which He withdraws Himself; the Ascension itself, the act of the Ascension and the fact of His rising upward. We must not exclusively focus on Jesus' being in Heaven, but, as it is called and always was, a commemoration of Jesus' Ascension. That should preferably be done according to the way to which our Lord Himself pointed, namely, as a contrast to His earlier descent from Heaven and now a re-ascension or return to the sphere of glory where He was before.

You may remember that touching statement of Jesus to the people of Capernaum who must have found it hard to comprehend when they heard, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven" (John 6:51). That is when the Lord said to them, "Does this offend you? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!"

Thus, the kernel truth on which we have to focus is that initial descent from Heaven and then, later, the re-ascension into Heaven. It is only against the background of the descent that we can see the Ascension in its proper light.

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Perhaps you wonder about the significance of all this, about which deeper thought may be hidden behind it all. Let me illustrate. Someone

jumps into a river to rescue a drowning person, but, unfortunately, he ends up joining the victim and both drown. So it was with our Mediator, a totally different being, who jumped into the river of our unrighteousness and misery to grab us and embrace us. It was a totally different entity that had the power to surface from this stream of misery, with the rescued victim in His arm, with His Bride in His heart, and holding those He purchased close to His breast. His descent was a demonstration of supreme love; His ascent, a demonstration of supreme power.

Just think of all the humiliation He had to suffer. To abdicate voluntarily from the throne of glory, to descend to this earth into a young woman's womb, to become a poor person in this miserable world, then to allow Himself to be slandered, despised and, finally, to die a bitter death associated with contempt and slander. Now that requires deep pity and compassion. Here the passion for saving shines bright along with self-sacrifice and love for sinners. Here is whether you witness the triumph of the divine push for the utmost of grace.

But with the Ascension it is totally different. Everyone with a sense of love, pity, self-sacrifice and compassion can jump into the stream to rescue a drowning child, whether you are a young fellow, a crippled old man or the mother, but who can actually rescue the child? Only He, who can come out of the water on his own strength.

That ability to come out of the water does not depend on love or compassion, but only on strength and power, on strong control of water and wind with sturdy arms. But where do you ever find those two, an abundance of love and of power, together? Here on earth they usually act in opposition to each other. Is the strong muscle man not usually challenged in the area of love and pity? As to him who is tender and loving, does it not seem that everything turns against him, as if all

his strength has melted away and going under is his sure but pitiful fate? Is the term "suffering servant of God" not a beautiful and worthy name for every servant of God who has lost out in the battle between love and power? Do not most who dare to challenge the powers of this world lose out? Oh, to gain a crown with God, ah, yes, definitely! But it is usually at the price of succumbing in the struggle. [1]

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Such a struggle may seem beautiful, tragic or touching to the tearing eye, but in spite of that, it does not help any. The Lord God does not play tragedy. With Him dying is never a game. Even displaying His most majestic and moral greatness, as long as it is mere display, is totally below the dignity of His divine majesty. No, the Lord God rescues; He truly saves both soul and body.

And really, the undoing of saving love, no matter how tragic or touching, is never truly beautiful. The only truly beautiful, genuine and holy saving love is that which also triumphs. It is that love which not only jumps into the river but is also able to come out of it together with the victim, rescuing him from the river of misery and placing him where He Himself was before His earthly birth. That is the reason, my dear readers, that the Ascension of Jesus is so beautiful and majestic, so utterly glorious. For you see, this is that overflowing power. Here is that perfect triumph. Here, through majestic and amazing struggle, we see Him come up from the depth of human misery, climb up again, ascend again until He finally reaches "where He was before."

But it was against every force and power we know. It all went against the laws of nature, including the laws of the human nature He had adopted. It was even against the overflowing love in the heart of His followers! Everything wanted to hold Him down and prevent Him from

ascending. And yet, nothing could resist Him. He was victorious over all and everything. He ascended!

And, oh, the wonder of His divine omnipotence! In His ascent He takes the entire Church of the redeemed with him into the Heavens, including those already living there, those now alive here on earth and those yet unborn--all of God's children.

Look! There He stands in Heaven with the redeemed treasure of souls in His arms. That causes all the angels to worship Him. That drives all the martyrs and prophets to kneel before Him. That's why the Father crowns Him!

[1] Was Kuyper here thinking of the struggle between the two brothers in Yonge's *The Heir of Redcliffe*?

Meditation 6*

With Gifts for the Consolation of His People

When you ascended on high,
you took many captives;
you received gifts for the people,
even for the rebellious--
that they might dwell there. [1]

Psalm 68:18

In order to understand any powerful demonstration of might and industry, one must go to the centre of the place where these forces emerge. A ruler cannot rule his country from a remote, isolated village, but must live and operate out of his official residence, spend time in the council chambers with his councilors and, surrounded by his henchmen, make his pronouncement in a way that inspires the soul of his people. Similarly, for a ship to arrive safely at its destination, it is not sufficient that there be a captain aboard. He must stand at his official command centre, where all crew members can hear his commands and from where he governs his whole marine empire. When an enemy invades your country and your army marches towards your national borders to defend your country, the commanding general does not shut himself up in some remote stronghold, but meets his army, calls his generals into his tent and from there manages the movements of his troops. These examples hold for every development of power and authority. To set the entire entity in motion, one has to be at the centre where the dynamic and movement originates.

Thus, when someone wants to imagine the Ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ in a practical way and with serious spiritual thought, he has

only to ask where the centre of the spiritual world order is located.

Is the earth governed out of Heaven or, the reverse, is Heaven governed from the earth? Or could it be that both run on their own steam?

The answer of faith is, of course, Heaven and earth are both governed by the wisdom of Providence. The throne of this regiment is in Heaven and everything that is and moves on earth is governed out of Heaven. The throne of God is not on earth but there above in the Heavens. It is there that all the spiritual threads holding life together unite. It is from above, not from the earth, that the word goes out that determines the flow of events. The seat of the regiment that governs developments in both Heaven and on earth is nowhere here below but exclusively in the chambers of eternal lights, the residence of glory.

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If the above is all clear to you and you are convinced, then a second question arises: Was that regiment handed over to Jesus or not? The question will not tolerate a double answer. All power in Heaven and on earth was handed over to Him (Matthew 28:19). He was given a Name above all names in order that every knee shall bow in His Name (Philippians 2:9-10). The Lord God has said, "I have installed my king on Zion" (Psalm 2:5). The Father has handed all things over to the Son. And thus "He must reign until he has put all His enemies under His feet" (I Corinthians 15:25). The reign is therefore His. It has been handed over to Him by the Father. He was anointed for this purpose. It was His due because of the reward promised Him for His soul-stretching labour. He, our Mediator, was King and had to also be revealed publicly as King. The title itself was not enough; it could not remain with the promise; it had to come to the point of actual practice of this mighty rule. Heaven and earth were waiting for Him to ascend to the throne; they were biding His royal word and were eagerly looking for the display of

His glory.

This was then the reason that the Mediator had to ascend to Heaven. He could not remain on earth, for the throne of glory was the only place in the entire universe where He belonged as the King appointed by God Himself. Since the Kingdom was His and the throne of that Kingdom is in Heaven, He could not remain far removed from that throne but had to speed His way to it.

Thus the Lord's Ascension is nothing but His accepting His rule, an entry into the Kingdom, an ascension to His royal palace, an elevation to the residence of His majesty and glory. Regardless of His power, Jesus could not rule the world out of Jerusalem and could not reign the Heavens from the earth. The cords and lines of this divine regimen were above, not down here below. Hence it was imperative that He ascend from us, not in order to forsake and impoverish us, but to come closer to us and enrich us gloriously. As long as He was on earth, He could comfort only a few. It was only from the Heavens that all could be blessed by Him.

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This Ascension of our Lord was not a case of furtively stealing into the Heavens through the narrow door of death. Rather, it was an ascension into the chambers of eternal lights with great splendour.

This was not the kind of splendour that would blind the eye of the world, for even in nearby Jerusalem no one noticed anything. Even the Roman emperor noticed nothing. Along the shores of the famous Tigris and Euphrates Rivers life continued its normal flow as if the reign over this world were still in the hands of an earthly ruler.

However, for His Church the Ascension took place with stately and solemn splendour. At the time, that Church was represented on the Mount of Olives by His holy Apostles, who had seen and witnessed the entry of

the King of Glory into His formidable palace. He was taken up while they looked on. Death did not separate them. He took leave from them fully alive. Immediately afterwards, the angels appeared in order to console the disciples. "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). At that point a cloud of lights gently slid in between them and He disappeared. But less than ten days later they saw Him in a different light. Now He ruled and by power of this divine rule He sent them the Holy Spirit.

The Apostles have told of the splendour with which He ascended to their disciples and the Church has listened to this solemn story with quiet reverence. It has been recorded in God's Holy Word. Since then, year after year the faithful gather to commemorate this glorious scene and to remember how impressively solemn it was to witness Jesus ascend before their very eyes. That's when the Church contemplates Jesus deeply again. Then she again sees Him ascend the throne of His Kingdom. Then she once again lives and celebrates His royal regime.

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The full story of His splendour has still not been told; there is more to it. In addition to the Apostles, the splendour of that Ascent into Heaven was also a moment of holy joy for the residents of Heaven. For centuries the Holy Spirit has sung of it:

Lift up, oh portals, now your heads;

Arise, eternal doors, arise.

Welcome your King.

Who is this King, so great in power?

He's head of the heavenly hosts.

With songs of praise we worship Him.

Up there above, there was also a joyful anticipation. The Heavens are concerned about the earth. The angels are eager to witness the mysteries of redemption. They greeted the Mediator in Ephrata's fields when He descended from Heaven. They served Him in the desert after Satan's evil temptations. They supported Him in Gethsemane, when He almost collapsed. They pushed the stone away from His grave for Him to walk out. And now, at His Ascension, they come to meet and welcome Him. They descended so far that those on the front line could talk to the Apostles. They received the Saviour as it were from the Apostles to take Him to Heaven. That's where He came from and that's where He had to return. Everything there was prepared for that return. They all awaited the revelation of His glory, but it would not be till He accepted His reign in Heaven that the fulfillment of the promise would be realized along with that of their joyful anticipation and their most glorious hope.

His kingship was retroactive in that He also became King over Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the three patriarchs, over Kings David and Solomon, as well as all witnesses to God, the great martyrs of the faith and all prophets and seers. True, it was not the illustrious day when the elements will melt and all flesh stand before Him as judge, but it was nevertheless an illustrious day as a blessed introduction to it. So, when He entered Heaven, the voices of the heavenly choir echoed throughout all the heavens.

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Jesus ascended in the flesh as a human being. Of course, He remained the only and natural Son of God, in the words of the ancient Nicene Creed, of "one substance with the Father," one with Him. But He could not ascend in His divine nature, for in that mode He was omnipresent, that is to say, present everywhere. In that capacity He could not move

from place to place and thus could not ascend back into Heaven, because He was there all along.

But as a human being, yes, He ascended in our flesh and blood, the same that He had adopted in Mary's womb. That was in the same form in which Mary recognized Him and in which His Apostles had seen him ascend (Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9-11). Again, in the same form in which he appeared to Paul on the way to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6), to John on the island of Patmos (Acts 1:9-11), and wherein Stephen saw Him when he was martyred (Acts 7:55-56) and wherein all flesh shall one day see him at His return on the clouds.

And that's where the miracle comes in.

In Paradise the Lord said, "Sovereignty belongs to mankind; to mankind authority over Eden." Alas, through his fall into sin, mankind lost his glorious position. His power languished; his strength shrunk. He who was destined to rule, became a slave, while his crown lay trodden in the mire of ambition and self-promotion.

And then what happened? Another flesh-and-blood human appeared, the second Adam. This new human being suddenly receives back the reign that was lost in Eden. As a reward for the labour of His soul, He receives a complete reign, not just over Eden and the animals in the field, but a royal rule over earth and Heaven, including all the angels. Even the devils are no longer able to resist His will.

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And now the question is: Who is the beneficiary of this royal regime of the man Jesus Christ? The answer: The human race. The Heavens were already prepared and the angels did not need to be sanctified. As far as those who had already inherited salvation goes, they immediately passed through the final decision of that youngest of days. The judgment over the devils is also already determined.

But all this had to tarry for the benefit of the human race. The reason that the Kingdom could not yet be handed over to God the Father but still had to remain in Jesus' hands for many centuries, is only and simply that the human race not miss out on Heaven. Jesus said, "I go away to do a mighty work: I am going there to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). That did not mean, of course, that there was a specific room that had to be readied or that this held only for the Apostles. Jesus meant to say that the goal of His royal reign in Heaven is not the angels but finding the place for those elect of God already in Heaven. Once the place for the last of the elect is ready, then His rule will come to its end according to the Father's will.

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Thus you can sum up the central goal of the Lord's Ascension in the one mighty profound word, "comfort." He ascended with "gifts for people, even for the rebellious, that they might dwell there" as Psalm 68:15 puts it. [1] This did not mean that from Heaven He would keep an eye on whether there might be some sorrowing soul somewhere on earth, to whom He would then immediately fire off some comfort. To be sure, the Mediator does do that when the situation calls for it. He is rich in every form of comfort that might be needed. However, this is far from exhausting all that is included in the "gifts for human consolation." There is a much deeper meaning in the words of Ps. 68:15--"Gifts... that they might dwell there" that is, dwell there with Him. In other words, the comfort or consolation refers to the entire great ministry of drawing, preparing and enticing with which Immanuel, through His divine rule, directs from Heaven. The goal is that human after human gets lifted up from the filthy mud of our sinful life and transplanted in the forecourts of our God in order to bloom there as an oak of righteousness.

Comfort counters sorrow. The deepest and richest comfort is that which is able to take away the greatest and deepest sorrow. That deepest of all our sorrows is not found in any specific pain or loss, grief or disappointment, but resides in the pitiful loss of our total person and soul to eternal death. Hence, the primary full comfort coming from your King above is that He rescues your soul from death, that He hauls your person out of the depth of destruction and that He, by means of His kingly reign, rescues you and pulls you to Himself in Heaven in order for you to jubilate together with all the angels of God. Without that, you, as a child of perdition, would have perished.

[1] This version of the text is the alternative given in the NIV note.

It is preferred here because it jibes with Kuyper's version.

[1] According to the alternative reading in the NIV footnote.

Meditation 7*

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

The Lord God is the overflowing Fountain of all that is good! Whoever confesses this, is serious in this confession and lives accordingly, has spiritually arrived.

Of all that is good. Nothing flows or emanates from God to you except those good things, against which you may not complain but for which you must thank Him. If you cannot thank Him or you think to detect something evil, the source for that lies not in Him but in you and you alone. You are suffering from an illusion, if you do not recognize the truly good in what He sends.

He is the Fountain of all good. There is no good that does not flow from Him. Everything within you or your child that does not emanate from Him, is not good, is wrong and sinful, even though it may have the appearance of being good. Conversely, if there is something truly good within you or your loved one, that is not the result of your or your child's efforts. It did not emanate from either you or your child, but flowed out to you from that Fountain of all good. There is not a speckle there to support a false self-image or to feed your self-justification. We are created in Christ Jesus for good works that God Himself has prepared in order for us to walk in, and for which we are to thank Him. The Scripture says, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance

for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10). Therefore, when you do a good work, there is no room for the evil boast of the flesh, "That's what I did," but only for the clean thought of the Spirit, "That's what God the Lord wanted to happen through my work."

All good comes from a Fountain, a Spring. In other words, you do not draw the good out of the Lord God; you do not press Him for the good with your own strength and exertion. As water in a fountain flows towards you by the force within the fountain itself, without any exertion on your part, so, too, does all the good from the Lord your God come to you by itself, without any exertion from you. You do not draw it out of Him, but He sends it to you through the force of His self-sufficient love.

And finally, the Lord your God is the richly overflowing Fountain of all these goods. Faith can never expect too much. No matter how much you have already received, there is always more ready to well up. It is never exhausted; one outflow crowds out the other. Even if you have been saturated the good things, that super overflowing Fountain still continues to well up.

Therefore I repeat that whoever seriously claims that the Lord God is the overflowing Fountain of all his good things and lives accordingly, he has reached the goal. That is to say he is free from that inner cancerous weed of self-sufficiency and has become pure, rich and free as a relaxed and tender child of his God. He has been reshaped by God Himself.

But what are these "goods" that flow out of this Fountain to God's beloved children? In short, they include everything that glorifies Him and that purges your soul. It is not the bread you eat or the abundance of your choice fruit. Well, yes, it includes all that. Why not, provided it is not only that. It does not even always include those. If

your money or possessions, your food or fruit ever draw you away from the Lord God, then these are not the good. Where that is the case, starving from hunger were better for you, especially if that hunger leads you back to God.

Understand well. The good that wells up from this Fountain is a good for your whole person, both body and soul. It is not a transient or temporary good, not something for which you grope around in the darkness; it is an enduring and inner good. It can even happen that your soul is struggling with temptation, but for which you subsequently will be thankful. What seemed at first evil, later turned out to be good for you.

Once again, whatever wells up from this Fountain separates you from death and brings life. Out of that Fountain flows grace and that one rich grace takes on various forms of satisfaction and justice, of reconciliation and holiness, and forgiveness for the countless times you have forfeited the grace of God. Out of that Fountain flow every warning in your conscience, every self-accusation after committing sin, every tear of true remorse and each genuine childlike display of penance. Out of it flow all refreshing love, all lifting up out of the desperation of the soul, and every comforting recovery from anxiety and a fearful heart. There is still more. Out of it flow every word of warning, every call of admonishment, but also all urgings and invitations to love, all that keeps you from sin and draws you back to your God.

Every germ, opening and inner dynamic of faith comes to you from that Fountain. Every movement of the Holy Spirit, every turnover of your inner life, in fact, everything that contributed to your becoming a child of God originated there. To put it even stronger, never, no never has there been even the slightest spark of pure genuine love that did

not come from Him. Never has a robe of humility look so good on you that was not from Him. If there ever was anything in you, however small, that shone or radiated love and attracted honour and praise from God, it was only through Him, the Father of lights, that these good gifts were designated for and came to fruition in you.

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Thus you've been shown the way. When you struggle to become cleaner, holier, more tender and warmer in sacred love, do not dig around in the dry bottom of your own heart, for that is not the source of these waters, but look up to Heaven. If those are the "goods" that you genuinely seek, well, then you no longer seek things that are on earth, but things that are above. But then be sure you seek them there and know the only Source from which they can flow your way.

The Holy Spirit calls on you to "Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things" (Colossians 3:1-2). That means that you need to be enticed and attracted not by the false tinsel and the deceptive enjoyments of the world, but that your soul needs to reach out to the glory of the heavenly Jerusalem.

But there is still more to it. "Setting your heart on things above" also means that you will not thirst after gold or pleasure or public prestige, but that you pine after doing good works, after love, holiness, that sound lovely, not in human ears so much, as in God's. You need to thirst and be eager to bear the cross, have a clear conscience and stand upright and tremble before the Word of God. None of these things are found on earth; they are in Heaven. Love is born in Heaven, not on earth. Everything that is clean, holy, self-denying and pleasing to God, does not grow in the garden of your heart, but comes down from above; it is sent to you. When the peace of

God finally completely fills you, it comes as a precious gift that originally welled up from the Fountain of all good and from there flowed down to you.

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The entire truth is so deep and wide that there are still more treasures to be explored. We have yet to consider the title of this meditation, "Above, where Christ is." This is a gem of a phrase that absolutely does not mean that all good no longer flows from the Fountain of all good, but out of Christ. This could make it appear as if we had replaced God with Christ, who now becomes the Fountain of all good. We may not entertain such a shocking idea for even one moment. The eternal and glorious God is and remains the Fountain of all good forever, for everyone and, thus, also for us.

But it means that the Lord Jesus has already received or collected the waters from this Fountain on our behalf, that He has already gathered them for us and that they are already intended for us. And thus, as truly as our soul is united to the Lord Jesus Christ, so we can be sure we will never lack an abundance of refreshing waters. Yes, out of God eternal, but through the Mediator.

Do you want the capacity to love? It is there waiting for you in Christ, flowing through Him to you out of the Fountain of all good. Do you want a tender conscience, a humble soul, self-denial on behalf of others? Seek all these things above, where Christ is, for in Him they are available there for you, not just as general gems, but as a customized treasure designed specially for you; not just any signet ring, but one that has been customized to fit the circumference of your finger with your name engraved!

A robe of righteousness, made to fit exactly for you!

Meditation 8*

With the Lord Forever

And so we will be with the Lord forever.

Therefore encourage one another with these words.

I Thessalonians 4:17-18

It has pleased God to offer all His children a gravitational point for their soul, a central point for their desires, a focus for the love in their human heart for that single one beloved Immanuel. It was not as if God in all His eternal glorious Being would ***lose something of Himself, be reduced in some way, what with all the tension, effort and all the power of the love that could fall in their human heart. The Lord of Lords continues to encourage all that always and eternally. He, the Fountain of all good and the deepest well of all blessings, wants to be all in all. Never does He give one single droplet of love to the egoistic heart of His creature without keeping track of the direction this love takes. The fragrance of all love must be for Him who created all things only for Himself; all things, thus also the savour of the love of the human heart.

We should never have doubts about the above. The longing in our heart for Immanuel, both in Scripture and with God's children, refer to nothing else but that glorious statement of Jesus Himself during the night of His death, when He said, "Whoever sees me, sees the Father!" (John 14:9). We are to be one with Him, Immanuel, at soul level, but only in order to gain access to and be conducted into the presence of the Father.

So long as we wander along the slippery path of sickly imagination it is possible that we might exclusively hold fast to Christ and think it

is all about Him, not about the divine Being Himself. Where this happens, faith soon loses its refreshing strength and the waters of life no longer flow through the channel of our hearts. We must let go of this false Jesus image that we had formed in your sickly soul. Then, suddenly we will once again cleave to the real Immanuel, He who always points away from Himself to the Father!

That soul is pious that focuses on seeking the eternal Being. True piety consists of seeking God, to realize you cannot do without Him. The image of a deer that, exhausted by the hunt, cannot go further but yearns for the streams of water, has always been the God-given image for the child of God (Psalm 42).

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But why is it that your soul's attraction to Jesus is so different from its attraction to God, not more, not stronger, but different? Let's take your beloved young daughter once again as an example. You can talk to her about the Eternal One and when she prays, she prays to God Himself alright, that most holy Being, Who fills her with solemn respect. Nevertheless, when you speak to her of God, her heart does not fully open, is not completely receptive. She would like to be open; she is inclined towards it, but she is incapable. The Lord God is too high, too distant, too glorious. She will try to imagine Him to her utmost, but to imagine God in Himself is beyond her. When she tries, all connection with God recedes into the distance like a High God as in some other religions.

But now speak to her about Jesus and immediately her reaction changes. The Name of Jesus evokes a totally different picture for her. His Name seems more affectionate and speaks more to her heart. She can imagine that Name so much easier. Ah, Jesus, Him she can picture. Not exactly as He is, of course, not in sharp outline, but she can imagine Jesus

entering her bedroom, sit down at her bedside, place His tender hand on her forehead and whisper, "My dear child, good night." With this imaginative scene in her soul, your daughter can fall asleep in peace. What's happening here? What is the mystery behind all this? In order to think about God, the child has to imagine something, but she is incapable of that. But in Jesus, God now provides her with her own kind of image. Now she no longer needs to feverishly search in her imagination; now she finds a resting place. She may not comprehend the process and is not able to explain it, but that is nevertheless the key to this wonderful mystery: your child can only think about God by looking onto and thinking about Jesus. It happens unconsciously. But as soon as she is in relationship with Jesus, the blessed experience of being in communion with God envelopes her heart.

Please do not think, "That may happen to my daughter, but not to me." You would be wide off the mark. To be sure, you are different from her. You notice more. You are more conscious of your inner experience, but when it comes right down to it, in your soul you experience exactly the same thing your child does. Apart from Jesus, you can only conjecture God from afar. But when you come near Jesus and spend time with the Immanuel, then the eternal love of the Lord of Lords unlocks for you as well.

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It is not Jesus' divine nature that causes this within you, but His human nature. Think about it. Let's say you meet a righteous and holy person, so perfectly pious and holy that from day one no one ever detected a single sinful odour on him. Imagine further that this perfectly holy person has the power to quell the sense of guilt in your soul and to salve your restless conscience with the balm of reconciliation, so that his inexhaustible holiness does not depress you

but lifts you up. If that person could lead you into the presence of the Lord of Lords, he would be like Jesus.

Not a single word emanates or a single look radiates from Him without your experiencing holiness or tenderness. From there, He leads you to the Eternal, where a mysterious power overcomes you that you don't understand but that nevertheless helps you experience something absolutely glorious as you approach God.

This is not a matter of competition, of choosing between the one or the other or of going back and forth between the two. It is not a matter of the soul wavering between the two. It is rather an intense focus on Jesus that grows holier and penetrates deeper. And to the degree that you penetrate deeper into His soul, the glory of the Lord unlocks itself more for you.

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Oh, that you would only seek your Jesus. Seek Him in His Word,; seek Him in your prayers, in the quiet meditations of your heart. The closer you are to Him, the nearer you will feel yourself closer to the Eternal One. To be united with Jesus is to be united with God.

However, when you divorce yourself from Jesus, the Eternal and Glorious God simultaneously disappears from the horizon of your soul as well. Sin does that to you. It feeds upon your spiritual lethargy and upon the unrighteousness in your evil heart. That's when, while far removed from Christ, your soul also finds itself also far from God, turned away from Him and lost in loneliness. When the soul then finds itself pushed around by storms, it calls and screams desperately for comfort and consolation.

It is so glorious to know that there will come a time when this will no longer happen. There will come a time, an eternity in fact, when nothing can again separate us from Christ. Then we will always be with

the Lord and through Him worship that Eternal God whom we call "Abba,
our loving Father." Therein lays the comfort for all God's children!

Meditation 9*

No One Is Near To Restore My Spirit

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.

Lamentations 1:16

The godly person calls out, "This is why I weep! My eyes overflow with tears,' because the Comforter, who was to refresh my soul, is far from me."

Do you ever weep like that? Oh, so many tears flow day after day and often into the night. Our heart desires, hopes for and hangs onto so many things. When these don't come or are taken away from us, an abrasive sense of fear and emptiness, of lack and disappointment goes through our soul. Sadness sometimes overwhelms both our heart and eye. We may experience a release when we weep and our heart can unburden itself by way of a tearful eye. Tearless, dry eyes only double the pain.

A child weeps more readily, because it is more emotional. That is precisely the reason a child tends to be happier, for as the tears well up in its eyes and trickle down its cheeks, its childish sadness also dribbles out of its young heart.

In contrast, we grownups keep our pain inside of us. It digs and bores its way deep into our hearts. It searches for release, not through the eye but via the depth of our soul. That is just what makes our pain and

sadness that much more real, the reason being that shedding tears makes people sympathize, but if you cannot weep and receive no such sympathy, the pain bottles up without comfort or consolation.

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But when at times you do weep, what do your tears call for? The Lord says also to you, "Why should the living complain when punished for their sins?" (Lamentations 3:39). Do you know that pain? Do your sins devastate you? Are you dying in your inner life because of yours sins? Do they oppress and wring your heart? Do you understand the Psalmist's terrified cry, "Your wrath has swept over me; your terrors have destroyed me?" (Psalm 88:16). Alas, that cry leads us to take a penetrating look at each other. It altogether looks like it is too much for us, as if an alien pain has crept into our soul.

Guilt? We acknowledge it. Sin? We confess it! Which person can claim clean hands? But away with that blindfold. Speak the truth and tell us whether or not you should not be accusing yourself nearly all the time? Not just after a specific act of disobedience or a specific sin, but all the time in general, in ordinary life. And when the hour came when you pined away in your inner life and your soul sank away in deep desperation, how did you overcome all that, except through the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit?

Ah, if only that Spirit taught you, gripped you and made you thoroughly dissatisfied with yourself! If only He would make you aware of your own heart and of your own motives, of your past, your family, your birth all the way back to Adam. Then, yes, then your soul would overflow and begin crying for mercy and forgiveness from your God. But outside of that discovery and that introductory grace, you are so hard, so dull, so insensitive that your heart can jump and dance and skip while your soul is dying and laugh at your own stupidity rather than weep and

mourn over your inner depravity.

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But you know, the weeping of which the man of God speaks in his exclamation in the text at the heading of this chapter, "This is why I weep and my eyes overflow with tears. No one is near to comfort me, no one to restore my spirit" is more than simply bursting out in tears for the realization of our status of complete damnation. He who airs such complaints has received refreshment. Light has broken into the darkness of his innermost. He has seen, tasted and reveled in Heavenly things. Oil has been dripped into his wounds; the boils have been pressed out; he has been given medicine; his has become the consolation of his God. Alas, suddenly the Comforter withdrew; the boil in his heart became infected again and the hope that he had cast on the Lord his God faded away. Now he is worse off than before and much unhappier. For he has known grace and mercy, but now it all has escaped him. He tasted consolation and refreshment of the soul, but now the soul is once again enveloped in its suffering.

"Would God forget His grace and never again bless with His mercy?" Was the experience of salvation only something momentary in order to let him sink into even deeper suffering? Was it a mere glimpse of a light beam that would render the dark fears in his heart even more real? And so the soul goes under, defeated.

Oh, no, not so fast, not immediately. At first, when this situation develops, he doesn't know it and is not aware of missing anything. But once this forsaken state ends and the Lord revives his soul again, that's when the regrets and the pain return. And only when the Comforter returns, does he realize with unspeakable pain that the Comforter had left him (temporarily).

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You see, this Comforter had consoled him with glorious promises, for he could not carry all this by himself. The Comforter did not instruct him as human comforters tend to do by urging him, "You've got to do it! You must double your efforts!" No, the divine Comforter whispered into his ear, "Poor struggler, no, you can't do this on your own. With Me, there is counsel and strength. Come to Me and I will enable you to will and to perfect it all in you!"

Now that was manna (Exodus 16:31) for the soul and water for the thirsty (Psalm 42). What a precious promise. Not that He exacts it from our empty hearts, but, instead, He pours it into those empty hearts and somehow arranges that we end up doing it ourselves.

The law was no longer the executioner who hammered us to the cross, but a delineation of the glorious paths along which He would make us travel. And then came the prayer of the soul, prayer not for worldly treasures or prosperity, but for the fulfillment of that promise. To beseech God every morning and evening to receive that promise that He work in us to will and to complete and that we will walk the walk for which He prepared us. Oh, blessed joy when it comes. We yearn to thank Him for His fulfilled promise.

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That was a Comforter, the Holy Spirit, that consoled us with respect to our evil heart, our wicked nature as well as our powerlessness and our heart-rending lack of holiness.

But we became accustomed even to all that grace and mercy. God was so extremely generous. As a result, we lost our hunger and thirst and along with it the desire to pray earnestly and seriously. We no longer begged morning and evening for grace and mercy. We prayed more mechanical prayers without passion or concern. That's the reason the Lord put grace on ransom. He did not forsake you, but put you in

skimpier meadows and gave you to drink from a creek that was almost dried up. The promise no longer poured mercy; at best, a few drops here and there.

That's how the Lord drew the dullness from your soul. That's how you began once again to hunger and thirst. And then the weeping started all over again, because there was "no one ... near to comfort me, no one to restore my spirit." But when the sorrow becomes that intense, the Comforter Himself returns, for He was not far away: It only looked that way to eyes dimmed by sin.

Meditation 10*

The Other Comforter

And I will ask the father,
and He will give you another advocate
to help you and be with you forever.

John 14:16

Among all the Christian celebrations there is none of which the average Christian understands so little, feels so little emotion and enjoys so little as Pentecost, the high feast of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It is all so spiritual and offers so little to the imagination.

In contrast, at Christmas there is so much movement and so many things to talk about with your children: the manger, that Child, the shepherds and their lambs, the angel choir, the murder of the children by King Herod's men, the temple visit, the flight to Egypt and so much more.

Similarly, on Easter you can imagine the weeping women on their way to the tomb, the lonely wandering Mary Magdalene, the descent of the angels, the rolling stone from the grave, the two men walking the road of Emmaus, that evening meeting and then Thomas with his finger in Jesus' wounds.

All of the above is concrete and subject to everyone's imagination.

There's stuff for conversation. These stories can be sketched or painted. There is movement and variety; there's a wealth of human actors. Because everything is concrete to the eye, it all lives in the congregation's consciousness.

But how different it all is with Pentecost. There's little more there than an upper room with people in and outside. Then there are miraculous sounds and mysterious bright lights. What is said confuses

people outside and sounds foreign to those inside. It all ends up with a sermon to God's glory.

Naturally, such a dull scene cannot possibly inflame your imagination. It does not conjure up any surprising images in your imagination; your children cannot enter this kind of world; it does not offer any stuff for a brilliant sermon. Every picture, every drawing, every painting of Pentecost ever produced falls flat. [1]

I must quickly add that they had to fall flat, not because Pentecost has less value than do Christmas or Easter, but because it appeals to a level of imagination and conception too high for the average person and is too spiritual. Pentecost is the noblest of the three feasts, but only for those who have tasted the noblest. Only those who themselves have received the "first fruits of the Spirit" can truly celebrate this Feast of the Spirit!

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Jesus calls the Spirit that He will send from the Father "another Comforter" or "another Counselor" (John 14:16-17, 26). This implies that the Son considers Himself also a Comforter or Counselor, but one who came only for a short time and would then leave again. That's why He would now send them another Comforter/Counselor who would be different from Himself in that this other one would not leave again but stay with them forever into eternity. Thus it should never be said that the Holy Spirit came only to compensate the disciples for the loss of their Jesus. Jesus neither meant nor said anything like that. To denigrate the Holy Spirit in such an unworthy way to the position of a temporary replacement for Jesus is to cut the Pentecost contribution to salvation off at its roots and to deprive God the Holy Spirit of His glory.

The Holy Spirit is also God, not a power, a light or a talent, but a

divine Person, fully equal with the Son in majesty and glory, who does not enter our lives for a limited time. He is not restricted by time, but participates from before the beginning of time to the end that will never come, co-eternal and of the same substance with that of the Father and the Son. The Son came first to comfort the elect of the Father and after Him the Holy Spirit.

But is it possible to "comfort" those who jubilate without ever mourning, who do not confess their pain nor realize the misery that surrounds them? What does the insensitive and ignorant general public know or what even those who confess their misery? The public recognizes misery only when things don't go their way, as when they struggle with worry or sickness, when their wealth is threatened or, worse, when they lose a family member. That's why they may gush about the "Father in Heaven" when He has filled their cupboards, restored their health and supported them in bereavement.

For those who live life at a deeper dimension, it is misery when the load of a sinful life oppresses them, when their conscience is restless and when they are tormented by the question what will become of them in eternity. This attitude does not constitute love so much as fear and that fear makes them accept the kiss of the cross and confess that Son who redeemed from sin through His death and opened Heaven by opening His grave.

But that's it for them. What more do they need? To worship a "biune" God as Father and Son is more than enough for most people, rather than to delve into the depth of that mysterious triune Eternal Being and worship Him.

Like a stump without roots, such a teaching is not true doctrine but mere muttering of unintelligible words. Genuine doctrine, that is, a conscious reflection of the Eternal God, becomes true only in spiritual

practice in the depth of the soul. To learn to know that Eternal Being as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to praise Him and to fully delight in returning love to Him Who loved us first, that is the real thing that cannot be accessed or scathed by mockery, logic, doubt or mental reservation.

To reach this point, the pain and misery for which the Comforter will comfort us, must thus be understood at a deeper level than simply as pain over adversity or a conscience full of angst or fear of hell. No, the true misery, that "deep misery" that is the Holy Spirit's target, lies in the depth of love. God is love. Therefore He cannot rest until love becomes the constitution of His Kingdom. Even the most vivid imagination cannot possibly conjure up the delights and blessings that await our experiences once those waters of eternal love roll over us. God is love. His sovereign power that rules over the human race, is present in a hidden form in the weak copies of earthly arrangements like marriage, friendship and love between generations. Love is that Eternal Being. That is the reason fallen, sinful and egoistic creatures, even while in their state of perdition and encased by sin, are so emboldened by sin and flattered by things like public ovation, admiration, love and endearment.

He is love. And now notice the deeper channel. There is no real sense of sin so long as the sadness flowing out of that love does not rend our heart into shreds. There is no real or genuine pain in mere adversity as long as we do not sense the sadness that arises only from His love that should sadden us. At the same time, there is no faith, no piety, no godly life that, once it has experienced the love from that Holy Being, does not feel the awakening of the indescribable, irresistible and almost desperate impulse to be near to God and to hide under His wings.

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Do you understand anything of this kind of misery? No, I am not asking whether you understand it completely. But do you have any inkling at all, even the slightest, of that homesickness with its untraceable sources? This is a homesickness not for the location of all that glory, but for Him Who lives and is enthroned there and from Whom, as the deepest well of everything salvific, all the blessings of salvation flow.

Do you know anything about this? Not with your passionate imagination, your fanatic emotions, in over-exertion, or as something outside of yourself. No, but in that calm, quiet, deep-going awareness that translates with increasing clarity the waterless pits of your own heart. Along with that awareness come the distresses and needs of your inner feelings and pains which, while all the time teaching and reproving you, show you where you are shortchanging yourself and where your problem lies. That is to say, what is at base the deepest ground of this devouring misery that you never comprehend.

If you're at this point, then, my brother or sister, laugh even while you're weeping, for that is a sign or proof that "love has once again poured into your heart" (Romans 5:5). By nature you did not have it in you. To be in suffering and misery, and at the same time to be blind with respect to the real nature of it, is precisely the deadly wound that through the fall you also share. In order to again feel the pain of love, love has to be more pro-active and dynamic. There would be no redemption in the statement, "He loved us first," if this other statement, "The love poured into our hearts" did not follow the first.

The Lord has been evoking the pain of love throughout the ages with a special fondness for His elect. These were His elect or, if you will, those that had already received grace and were affected by it. They

were the oppressed, tossed about and driven by storms, the discomfited. They were miserable not because of but through which they received grace and therefore, by divine intervention, became beneficiaries of the innermost tender and holy compassion.

These recipients of grace once again felt they should be near that God.

The awareness again awoke in them that they were naturally inclined towards God and were created for the Holy one of Israel. They were created not in order to waste animal sacrifices for Him, but as a friend cherishes his friend, so walk with Him that He can address their soul and that soul respond to Him.

They did not fathom the depth of this love, but they did drift along with its current, constantly farther away from the visible in order to seek Him, the Only. But He wasn't there; the world always stood between them with all of its needs, its wealth and its hustle and bustle. They themselves stood in the way, their own ego, their godless faithlessness, their continued shameless whoring after other gods. They no longer had faith in their own love and no longer thirsted after Him. They no longer called upon Him, prayed to Him, they the hypocrites, the pious pretenders, the faithless ones! That is the life of suffering and pain. It has its thousands of victims. They are like a woman whose time has come, but who does not have the strength to deliver.

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You who love the pathways of superficiality, know where you're at. For one who finds himself in such a situation, it is sweet to succeed, while the very thought of entering Heaven with a faithless heart and to look God in the eye is a horror. This kind of situation is simply impossible.

Such a one is privileged, highly privileged, so high that love has been poured into him. It is precisely that gracious gift of love that

becomes his undoing, that drives him on and presses him, so that bearing this load exhausts him. The world is against him; His own heart provokes him; sin and the devil mock and tease him as they perform the dance of death around his crushed soul.

Oh, if only he had wings, he would fly upwards. Doing so would be within his power. He could even commit suicide, but that is forbidden. There is that same consuming fire, that grim vengeance that curses all suicide as scandal, abomination and offence against His holiness. Walled in all around; no exit or escape. The only remaining option is to lay down without comfort, prey to a power that he cannot restrain with only the prayer on the lips, "Oh, if only You returned and there were windows in the Heavens." Ah, thirsting like a panting deer (Psalm 42).

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That thirsting is a thirst after the living, triune, most glorious God, a thirst after Father, Son and Holy Spirit! It is a thirst that cannot be quenched until everything that separates, prevents and beclouds drops away. It will not be stilled until there is no more world to distract you, no more time to drain away, no more sinful heart to lead astray and no more devil lurking in the dark to lure you away from the One. What that thirsting child seeks will not be found until all its half-heartedness has dissolved, threatening clouds have dissipated and fleshly thought overcome. When that happens, you desire to worship, that is, truly worship from the soul, and the gift you have just received is not overcome by other urgings the next moment. At that point even your personal limits cease to be limits for God and you have been absorbed into the congregation of the justified, into the congregation that has the Spirit and the Mediator as Head, into the congregation in which His body shines through, absorbed you into

Himself in order to dwell in you and to fulfill all that can be fulfilled in you until filled with all the fullness of God.

All the above will not happen on earth. It won't even happen fully with dying. It won't happen before the day of His return, but on that day it will be Him in all His glory.

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That is why the Compassionate One does not just leave things as they are. He does not look at the discomfort and suffering of those without comfort with indifference. After all, He is your Saviour! "Merciful" is His Name! He has designed salvation so that you will never find the recipients of His grace, those that have experienced the pain of the love poured into their hearts, without a Comforter sent by Him!

In the days of the Patriarchs, the Comforter used to come in visions and appearances, in judgements and in divine discourses (Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15-whole chapter; 16:7-12; 17:1-22; 18--whole chapter; 19:1-22; 20:6-7; 21:12-13, 17-19; 22:1-18; 26:2-5, 23-24; 28:12-15; 31:3; 32:22-30; 35:1, 9-15; 46:2-4). In Moses' days the robe of this Comforter rustled in the billows of the Red Sea (Exodus 10:19; 13:18; `15:4). He came in the manna falling from Heaven (Exodus 16; Numbers 11:9), while Israel saw Him regularly in the column of smoke during the day and in the pillar or column of fire at night (Exodus 13:20-22). Thus that Comforter continued to come down to the people of God in the various representations of His works of holiness, in His hand of rescue, in dreams and ecstatic experiences, but above all in the word of prophecy. When the dispensation of shadows came to an end, then the Son came and every soul that thirsted after God, cleaved to Him and was comforted and blessed in the sight of His love.

But He did not stay. The cross came and their hearts were again moved, while the souls of the elect quavered like tree top when the wind moves

through the forest at night. And then, then came the promise: "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever-- the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16-17). Thus came Pentecost Day, when God Himself descended into the hearts of believers, lived in the Church of Christ and entered the temple that He had chosen, saying, "This is the place of My rest."

And then there was rest, rest from that endless toil without comfort. It was a foretaste of that eternal rest that remains for the people of God.

[1] I cannot restrain myself here. This is simply not true. I am a distributor of the Mafa series of African Gospel Art that includes a very lively and colourful reproduction of the Pentecost scene that cannot by any stretch of the imagination be interpreted as "flat."

Either contact me, the Translator, or go to www.jesusmafa.com , a website based in Versailles, France.

Meditation 11*

The Living God Among You

This is how you will know
that the living God is among you....

Joshua 3:10

That immaculate, imperishable and mysterious Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Church, is a miraculous element on this earth. Nothing unclean gets into it and not a single one of God's chosen is outside of it. It has the anointing of the Holy Spirit and knows all things. All the powers of eternal life and all the glories of the Kingdom find protection in it. No child of God has ever tasted a single consolation on earth; nor has any pilgrim to the new Jerusalem ever been blessed by any durable spiritual revival that did not flow through the veins of that sacred Body of the Lord to him.

That Body of Christ is real; it is not a figment of our imagination. It is not a symbolic expression for an idealistic conception. To the contrary, this Body of our Lord exists in the full sense of the word. When at the end of days everything shall perish and even the elements melt down, it is only that Body, but in its wholly pure and unblemished form, that will remain in its integral state.

An even stranger miracle is that this Body of our Lord always appears on earth both in its being and doing in the mist of our sins and lack of spirituality, but without itself ever mixed up with this sinfulness or scathed by this imperfection. Take note of how sinful and imperfect the Church of the Lord has been throughout the ages. In spite of that, with all the corruption and bane that clings to her, she is and never was anything other than the imperfect, veiled revelation of the Body of

Christ. No matter how thick and close the fog obscured the glory of that Body, even in its most degenerate periods, that sacred, mystical Body of Christ has hardly ever surrendered even a minimum of its complete perfection. Whether you praise the Augustines and Calvins of the flourishing periods of her history or mourn the Husses, Teelincks or Comries of her ignominious days, the drops of the water of life sparkled in the eyes of their souls with equal crystal clarity and that those who jubilate and those who mourn both are comforted by the same deep mercy of the one living God.

If the above talks about the Body's being, we must aver the same of the doing or works that emanate from this Body through God's children, that is, the "good works" of which the Bible speaks (Ephesians 2:10). They are the work of God done by His children through His works. God adopted these puny creatures as His children and then empowered them with the will to do the good, that is, that which brings glory to His Name. All these good works originally were hidden potentials in the Body of Christ, but eventually sprouted up out of that Body through us.

That is the reason those beautiful flower buds cannot sprout fully here on earth. As no pure white snowflake falls on the earth without the earth tarnishing it with her dirt and dust, so it has never happened in even one single child of men that a good work descend in him from the Father of lights without the person polluting it. There is thus nothing pure on earth. Rather than avoiding this fact by lightly gliding over it, we should ask whether it is not terribly sinful for us to constantly stain the most glorious and finest artworks of God's Holy Spirit with our polluted fingers.

But no matter how readily we acknowledge this all, it does not hurt the Body of Christ in the least. Whether we stain our good works with all our sinful addictions or spoil them with our unholy intentions, it will

not spoil these works in the eyes of God. If these works have come to us out of the Body of Christ, then they have been established through faith. It is that faith that ensures that the work of God in us is untouchable. It may appear to be blemished, but on closer look it turns out to be merely skin deep, a surface superficiality.

It is there that the mystery resides and the reason that God's children on earth, preceded by the holy Apostles, lament every morning and evening, "We all stumble in almost everything and there is nothing whole in us." At the same time, you hear those same pilgrims, again preceded by those same Apostles, call out triumphantly, "Whoever is born of God, does not sin; in fact, he cannot sin, for His seed remains in him."

Pay attention: His seed remains in him! That resident seed contains those hidden powers of that mystical Body. That is that hidden life that for the present remains in the shadow as the kernel in a grain of seed tarries, but in the meantime pushes and thrives.

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What, it must be asked, is the secret key to this holy and worshipping witness on which the justification of the godless and the peace of God's children depend? The one and only key is that the Holy Spirit lives in that Body of Christ.

Christ is no longer on earth. He sits on the throne of glory in Heaven. As the psalmist exults, the crown of glory blossoms eternally on the head of the great Son of David. He who ascended to Heaven is there above for our benefit. He does not just rest there in blessed idleness, but, like His Father, the Son is always working. That labour, that divine work of the Lord Jesus in Heaven, is always on behalf of His people. He intercedes for His people. He validates that rich reconciliation through His blood for His people. As High Priest He

serves as our only sacrifice in the Most Holy Place (Exodus 26:33-34). In addition, He is preparing our place and is awaiting us, calling us and luring us with irresistible grace. In other words, He isn't just working in Heaven, but He constantly works out of Heaven also on earth. The Lord Jesus is only in one place. He lives in human flesh like ours and thus cannot possibly be in two places at the same time. Even though in the glory of Heaven much of our earthly limitations fall away, Heaven is not a place of magic. It is a real world where it is natural for every place to be separated from all other places; they do not overlap.

Even though Jesus Christ is restricted to one place at any given moment, that restriction does not limit the effect of His working. His working continues to go out in an omnipotent way and reaches therefore everywhere; it simultaneously possesses the glorious power of the divine. The divine here is that "simultaneous!" Simultaneous, that means the same God is at the same moment in Asia, in Africa, in America and in your own city or village and continues His almighty working in all these places simultaneously. He is equally near everyone, but also so near each individual as if He heard only the cry of his soul and only her special prayer.

That divine "simultaneity" is also an attribute of the Lord Jesus Christ. As much as He is restricted to one place, His majesty, grace and Spirit go out to all regions and places in the world simultaneously. As our mind controls each member of our body at the same time, so it is between this glorified Head and His mystical Body. However far that Body extends itself, Jesus notices it every time when any member of this Body suffers, just like when someone pricks your skin with a pin, your consciousness will notice it immediately. Similarly, there is not a member of the Body who is so slight that he

is beyond the reach of the Lord Jesus or that the Lord would not be his soul keeper and comforter. It can be said that this Body does not have a life of its own, but it has its existence and lives its life in the Lord Jesus. The Head controls the Body, leads it and gives sparkle to it. It is Immanuel who blossoms in His members.

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With all this we still have not touched upon the greatest depth of this mystery. Even with all the above being true, that we are members of that Body and that this miraculous Body is animated from out of Jesus, this still does not explain the real mystery, namely how our "I", how our soul, how our inner hidden person stands in this most intimate soul relation with the Mediator and Saviour and exalts in it. He is the glorious thinking, animating, leading and protecting One, if you will, the working Head who alone does it all in all His members and for them. And there we are, in all that we are out of ourselves, working not for God but for satan. Should Jesus forsake us in the hour of our death, not expecting an ascent into Heaven but a descent into hell? That, that is the mystery. There the chasm gapes across which our faith will certainly carry us across, but that nevertheless leaves the mystery unsolved and calls for further explanation.

And then that great light that now brings you to Pentecost. Do you have immediate direct communion with the Father? Of course not, for the Father may be the ground, the origin and the creating cause of everything, but it is not the Father who descends into His Church.

Do you then perhaps have immediate fellowship with the Son? Even that is not the case, for no one can say that Christ is Lord, except through the Holy Spirit. To be sure, He took on your flesh and thus established communion with your human nature, but that is not yet to have fellowship with your inner consciousness. That's why it was beneficial

for the disciples for Jesus to go away, for without doing so, the Comforter could not come.

Do pay close attention. There is no fellowship with the Father for you except through the Son. For no one knows the Father except the Son and to whom the Son reveals Him (Matthew 11:27). Similarly, there is no fellowship with the Son for you, except through the Holy Spirit. For no one can even say that Christ is Lord, except through the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 12:3). It is when the Holy Spirit comes that He takes up all the treasures from Christ in order to glorify Christ in you. Once it has come to this stage, the Holy Spirit comes to live in you and then in the Holy Spirit comes the Son, and in the Son also the Father. That is why the Lord Jesus could prophesy so gloriously: I and the Father shall come and live with you, that is, after the Holy Spirit will have descended.

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Give this some thought with deep reverence and what will you find? This, that our precious, glorious Mediator, who in His deepest being was God, but as God adopted human nature in unity with the Persons and who in Himself stood in personal unity of substance with God the Holy Spirit from all eternity. Before the mountains were born and the pillars of the great abyss were established in immeasurable space, the Son with the Father and the Holy Spirit was/were in eternal personal unity of substance. Thus it could in no way be said that He, the Son, would first receive the Holy Spirit.

God the Son cannot receive any power or working from God the Holy Spirit, for He is equal to Him in majesty and divinity. In addition, God the Holy Spirit cannot take up residence in God the Son, for the relationship between the two is not that of residing in each other but of divine and full unity of substance. God the Holy Spirit could

therefore never contribute anything to God the Son. Rather it must be confessed that it is God the Holy Spirit who, together with the Son, equally proceeds from the Father.

Thus it can in no way ever be said of God the Son, the second Person in the Holy Trinity, that He was filled with the Holy Spirit or received the Holy Spirit or entered into fellowship with the Holy Spirit. In order to achieve any of these, the Son would first have to cease being God the Son.

But--and here we enter an even deeper remarkable step into the Most Holy--that Son adopted our human nature in such a way that He Himself became truly human. With that man Jesus Christ the situation is naturally completely different. The man Jesus Christ is not of one substance with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit did not proceed from the man Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit had definitely to be poured into, on and over the man Jesus Christ.

The real soul mystery is that the entry into a human heart in order to live there, to rule and to comfort there as God, is the peculiar and unique work not of the first or second Persons, but it is the peculiar and special work of the third Person of the Holy Trinity, that is, of God the Holy Spirit.

This goes so far that God the Son cannot live in the soul of the man Jesus Christ as God. God the Son was linked with human nature in the incarnation through a mysterious manner, a link that the Holy Spirit could never form. But to enter the soul of any human being, including that of the man Jesus Christ, was not the work of the Son but of the Holy Spirit.

The above explains that, though He was the Son, the man Jesus Christ still had to receive the Holy Spirit, that the Holy Spirit poured His power and working on Jesus, that Jesus was filled by the Holy Spirit

without measure, but that He nevertheless received the complete and rich indwelling of the Holy Spirit after He ascended into Heaven. Thus He could pour out the Holy Spirit for the first time through all the veins of His Body on Pentecost.

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Once you have seen all this in worship, then suddenly the light surrounds you from all sides. Then it becomes absolutely clear how the Holy Spirit, who dwells in Him as our Head and in us as His members, could finally begin His work of giving divine comfort from that hour on. It is from that hour on that God the Holy Spirit, dwelling in the soul of the man Jesus Christ, meets in that Mediator the Son and lifts all the limitations of His state of humiliation.

Now it is no longer enigmatic how the Holy Spirit can dwell in us long before we notice Him. Though the mother knows it, the child in her womb lives without being aware of anything. So it goes also in the mystical Body of Christ. Whether you are already living or not, whether you have already become conscious of your life, is immaterial. The only thing that counts is whether Jesus has already taken charge of your life. If He has, then the same situation pertains in the Body of Christ. That is to say, then the same animated life already pulsates in your veins just as a mother's blood feeds life into her as yet unborn child.

What's more, then you can feel the great difference between the work of the Holy Spirit becoming noticeable in you, whether it is still merely the potential of the gift of the Holy Spirit, or whether it be that other, totally different and much deeper feature, the personal indwelling of God the Holy Spirit in you.

When is the mystery of godliness perfected in you for the first time and the indwelling of Immanuel in you complete? It can only happen when the Lord God enters the very centre of your being. Within you, puny

being that you are, this majestic God, who holds all the heavens in His hand, works this incomprehensible miracle of entering you, penetrates your unfathomable hidden being and establishes His throne in your heart. And from that throne He embraces your entire person and your innermost being in His tender mercy for now and for eternity, and comforts you with His deep and glorious blessings. Then and only then is all this possible.

At that point, victory is assured and the triumph cannot forever be postponed. That's when death, sin and the devil in you suffer defeat, for they cannot resist God for ever. Even if all the forces of unrighteousness and depravity, like the tribal enemies of Israel in the land of Canaan in the Old Testament, were to unite against you in order to destroy your soul, they cannot and will not defeat you. To be able to do that would require them to push God the Holy Spirit out of the hidden kernel of your innermost being--and that they cannot possibly do, the simple reason being that the power of all that is created cannot resist God the Holy Spirit; those unholy powers are simply incapable of defeating God the Holy Spirit.

And therefore, you oppressed and driven by the storms of life, be of good courage! Your Saviour lives to pray for you, and in you dwells and works God the Holy Spirit. Your God lives deep within you and He will not forsake or leave you. "Be strong and courageous!" (Joshua 1:18). Know this and pass it on to your descendants after you, saying, "The precise work of God the Holy Spirit in you is this, that He dwells in you in order to work through you." He can do that to you and you do it out of and through Him!

Meditation 12*

The Festival of the Holy Spirit

I will pour out My Spirit on all people.

Joel 2:28

The Church of Christ worships the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and confesses these three to comprise one unified God. In so far as she as "Church of Christ" celebrates Pentecost, her joy neither can nor shall ever be anything but a declaration of an even more solemn feast day on which to give thanks, praise and honour to that most perfect, most glorious and triune divine Being, with an even deeper humility and higher degree of happiness.

Our Christmas celebration focuses on that Eternal Being, for it is only "God revealed in the flesh" who is capable of animating us as we kneel at the manger. From that Eternal Being our Easter joy is announced, for only the "powerful proof of His being the Son of God" can fill our heart with living psalms. Similarly, from that eternal Being our Pentecost hymns arise, for only those who worship and understand the Holy Spirit as God Himself, can sense something of the unending comfort that came down to us from Heaven during that mighty event.

It is not a coincidence that the Body of Christ that entered the world with the confession of a triune God, expresses her ecstasy and her holy enthusiasm in a three-fold scheme of celebration. It should be clear to everyone that at Christmas it is the glory of the Father whose creative power delivers us that "holy child Jesus." On Easter the Son Himself appears as the Ruler of life. On Pentecost we celebrate not the feast of either the Father or the Son, but of the Holy Spirit. Notice that the Mediator, whose birth we celebrate on Christmas, who takes His life

back on Easter and pours out His Holy Spirit on Pentecost, stands by us on all three occasions, but on each occasion from a clearly different perspective that we should notice automatically and that clearly constitutes a three-fold reflection of the triune God.

And so began that last of our high feasts, Pentecost. The Body of Christ searches her heart as to whether she has fathomed the depth of this Pentecost miracle at all and out of that depth might worship her God in His glory. Congregation of the Lord, our souls must persist in remembering above all that the Pentecost miracle consisted of a descent, a coming down to us, a pouring out upon us of God Himself, a pouring out over us of a stream of actual divine life; not merely of a power, a gift or a radiation of peace; but an outpouring over us of a stream of real divine life, a coming to us of God Himself.

Anyone who does not know all this or does not confess that the Holy Spirit is "of one and the same essence, majesty, and glory, with the Father and the Son," according to the Belgic Confession, is not part of this. He cannot jubilate along, is not comforted and, wandering around with a discomforted soul, cannot be thankful either. It all depends and is focused only and completely on the eternal God.

Whatever prevents you from coming close to the Eternal Being, keeps you from His heart and from opening your soul's eye, that prevents you from gazing into the unsearchable holiness and magnificence of that perfect Being with a fuller and richer intensity, oh, get rid of it voluntarily. Don't allow it to stop and wear you down. It all depends on the knowledge of God and on that knowledge alone. Understand well. We are not talking head knowledge or knowledge residing in your memory or mind, but a knowledge embraced by your whole person, knowledge in the inner depth of your being that is part of your very breath.

Know that the form in which that Holy Being presents itself to your

soul on Pentecost, offers Himself to you and with blessing bows over you, is that of the Comforter. He does not turn to those who think themselves rich and self-sufficient, but reaches out to those of broken heart, whose souls are in His hand and who know they are poor and lost in misery.

We have a Comforter not in the sense that Jesus is gone temporarily and the Holy Spirit has come to replace him for that time to comfort us during Jesus' absence. Jesus never said anything like that. What He did say was that Jesus Himself was the first Comforter, but when He left us He promised another Comforter, whose function was not to still our mourning over Jesus' leaving but, to the contrary, to do the same thing for which He had come to begin with, namely to comfort us in our suffering.

Thus Jesus does not minimize that other Comforter. Rather, He declares that one as the real Comforter, whose work He only temporarily and in a very restricted circle had looked after. Indeed, he added emphatically that this other Comforter--the NIV also calls Him "Counselor" and "Advocate"--will be with them forever (John 14:16).

Even stronger, He said, "It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you" (John 16:7). The Lord has said it clearly, namely that His work of redemption is a means, the final target of which is to bring the Comforter to our hearts or, if you will, that the fruit of Jesus' death comes with the descent of the Holy Spirit. How could it be otherwise? Understand, my reader, we are inclined, destined and created to "have" God. Without God, human life is empty, poor, deeply miserable and lost.

To "have God" does not mean to have a God in Heaven upon whom we call in times of fear and distress. Neither does it mean to "have a God" who walks ahead of you in your path of life and with whom you stroll about.

It means to have God within you, in your heart and soul, a God who as your God animates and motivates you, who drives you internally and penetrates you with all of His power. To miss that is what renders you poor and disconsolate and makes you as one tossed about by storms. Missing out on that constitutes the deep chaos of sin. If there is anything that can rescue you, save you, comfort you, discomfoted one, it cannot be anything other than refilling that deepest need, namely that God Himself come down into you and make your heart His dwelling place.

"Your heart a temple of God!" That, as a human being, is your creation decree. On the other hand, the accusation of the Eternal Love about the state of sinners is that, "Your heart is a desolate temple or, worse, a dwelling place of the evil one." But the Church of the Lord, when she commemorates the miracle of the Almighty on Pentecost Day, jubilates, "God the Holy Spirit has again descended into that empty temple!" That is the reason the Holy Spirit is and bears the name "Divine Comforter!"

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There's a question we must not avoid: Did the Holy Spirit comfort the saints of the Old Testament as well? If He did, then what was so special about Pentecost? Of course, we could easily do away with the question by citing Jesus' own saying, "If I don't go away, the Holy Spirit cannot come." Or put this way: "The Holy Spirit could not yet come, because Jesus was not yet glorified." However, we sense keenly that without further explanation these words seem to many only an empty shell. So, we need to take this question seriously and find the answer.

To start off with, we may assume without doubt the truth of the confession all Christians share, namely, that the saints of the Old Testament shared the same sin problems we have and that, like us, they would not be made alive and, after death, be saved, except through the

grace of Jesus Christ. But would these crucial similarities restrict God's freedom in choosing the ways and means through which He then as well as now carries out His plans? And is it not even now in the days of the New Covenant completely clear that the Lord God treats infants who die, differently from us whom He calls later and has had time to work on?

That being the case, who would dare to deny that the Lord our God also used different ways and means of gathering the saints before Christ than it pleased Him to use for the comforting of His people after Christ? Don't promise and fulfillment mean different things? Does it not make a difference whether you live under an Israel-specific dispensation or a world-embracing grace? And does not everything change whether you still live in the circle and ages characterized by miracles or were born in the days of gradual, quiet, spiritual development?

If all these situations have brought about differences, should doubt then arise in our hearts as to whether this same Almighty God, who had called this temporary household of Israel into being, would have had ways and means, in conformity with that earlier faith situation, to apply the inner comfort of the Holy Spirit to His chosen ones during the older covenant with Israel? Is not the inspiration of the prophets not a totally different, unique, wonderful and super glorious working of the Holy Spirit that wholly differs and deviates from the way of the Spirit in our souls?

Is it then so unthinkable that there were ways in which the working of the Holy Spirit also in those earlier ages would reach those faithful ones? Don't we read about such workings in the stories of Balaam (Numbers 22) and Saul (I Samuel 10:11-12), though without salvific effect? Do we not observe the power of such workings in the stories of Bezalel (Exodus 31:1-5) and Joshua (Deuteronomy 34:9) with reference to

non-spiritual situations? Do we not find that in those same Old Covenant times it is often and continually declared in the clearest and most emphatic manner that something different, better and higher is coming? Examples are:

"I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring" (Isaiah 44:3).

"I will put my Spirit in you" (Ezekiel 37:14).

"I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on My servants, both men and women. I will pour out My Spirit in those days" (Joel 2:28-29).

"I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication" (Zechariah 12:10).

The multiple use of the strong word "pour" in these texts indicates that such spiritual abundance was unusual in those earlier days and that a situation of spiritual scarcity was more common and thus in sharp contrast to the drencher of the Spirit that would come later.

The Holy Spirit Himself is very open in the Scriptures about this difference between then and now. He expresses it in strong terminology through the Apostle Paul, who spoke of that transition from the national Israel dispensation to the universal in these words: "The revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings..." (Romans 16:25-26).

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If you look at this difference a bit closer, then you may ask whether it really is that difficult to distinguish. Let me try to make this distinction clear with a series of double examples. In the first, you stand at the entrance to a dark cellar below you and shine a torch light into the darkness. You send only a few light beams into the space and don't see all that much. In the parallel example, you enter into

the cellar yourself with your torch light and see the entire space around you clearly.

Another set of examples. In the first case, you feel a few soft drops of water fall on the thirsty ground. In the second, the ancient ice caps on the mountains melt away, the mountain stream increases in volume and the floods descend till the angry turbulent waters pour themselves over farm and meadow. Or the case of a canal that is in the process of being dug. The workers get thirsty and so you have bottles of drinking water brought in so they do not parch. Then there's the final scenario when the canal has been dug and is ready to receive the water flow. As the dam is opened, a torrent of water cascades into the riverbed and soon fills the canal in all its length and breadth.

And now a serious question: Does not each set of examples perfectly illustrate the distinction between the working style of the Spirit in the Old and New Covenants? At first there was that sparse light from above, lighting only a few souls that were called by God into His service. Then comes Jesus with that glorious, refreshing and comforting light into the dark cellar of our misery in order to shine on us directly with a much fuller, majestic brilliance.

In the old days only a few drops fell down. It was only when the Sun of righteousness melted the snow on the mountain tops that the streams began to frolic and the full streams of salvation cascaded down to all nations. And was not the very purpose of the Old Covenant dispensation to dig out that channel and to prepare that canal through which all the fields and plains would bloom? The prepping was completed when the Son came into this world, the dam opened up, and the waters filled the channel. And there were the waters of the Spirit cascading down.

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Just what exactly is this miracle of Pentecost? It was not an

outpouring of the Spirit in the hearts of a few individuals. That had already happened in the previous dispensation. That continues to happen whenever a sinner is born again, even today. Neither was it merely a milder disturbance of the waters of the Spirit in contrast to later violent waves that took place in the history of this sacred stream of the Spirit. Over against ages of marshy spiritual quagmire, the Church knows of powerful spiritual revivals throughout the succeeding ages, also after Pentecost.

If you wish to understand the miracle of Pentecost, then do not search for it in the conversion of the Apostles nor in the spiritual revival of those gathered on that day. You should not rest until you recognize that the event on Pentecost Day had never happened before or can ever happen again, but that it is as unique and single a miracle as the birth of the Child in the manger and His resurrection from the grave.

This view of the Pentecost feast should not lead to pious lamentations or ingenious discoveries on the part of Pentecostals, but only to the revelation of the Word. That Word tells you that we are not dealing with a few individual believers; there is a Body of Christ, that is, a strong cohesive, internal, organic, divinely constructed work of art. That Church has become one with the Mediator, one single plant. A better way of saying it, she has become one Body with Him through which He moves, through whose veins His life blood flows; that He stirs, feeds and leads her as her Head.

To be sure, Christ also chooses, knows and loves individuals, including the least and the smallest amongst them. However, He chooses, knows and loves those individual souls only as living stones in the walls of that holy temple, only as living cells of that glorious Body, as members of and as indwelling in that Bride for whom He is waiting with tender longing in the halls of eternity.

Indeed, the Mediator did already possess a premature form of that Church, of that glorious organism, of the hidden structure of His holy Body, of that coming and rising temple of God! But Israel was not the real thing. God's plans were much richer, much wider and much more glorious. This Church was to include all nations. The extent of that organism was intended to coincide with that of the world. The structures of His glorious Body were to be oriented towards the entire human race. The cedar trees with which that Temple of God was built (1 Kings 5:5-6) came from the mountain of nations! That, said the Apostle, was God's plan, the council of His pleasure, His glorious intention. Throughout the preceding ages that plan was under construction and being worked on.

It was not until Jesus' Ascension that all the necessary preparations were completed and thus reached the "fullness of time." Now the doors of the temple of God could be opened for the Holy Spirit to descend. That finally was the time the stream of the Holy Spirit could pour Himself out into the channel that Jesus had prepared in His Church!

Meditation 13*

Who Set His Holy Spirit among Them

(Isaiah 63:11)

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 is not in them;

so let what they say be done to them."

Jeremiah 5:12-13

This is what the living God, the Almighty, did on Pentecost: He placed His Holy Spirit in our midst! Not in the middle of the world, but in the middle of the Church. Understand well: not exclusively in the "congregation of the elect," but in the congregation of confessing members, those who were baptized, those who are served by His Church and through that official service stand in relationship with Him, the Most Glorious. It is in the midst of that community that the Holy Spirit descended or, to put it stronger, in whose midst God Himself placed the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit now really resides there in the midst of that broad, baptized community. His residence there is not only indirectly in and through the Word or in and through the preachers and shepherds of the flock. Nor is His residence merely indirect and figurative in and through the holy institutions of prayer and liturgy, of sacrament and alms giving. It is also a direct presence as God the Holy Spirit in His very Person stands in our midst.

Yes, He resides in our midst, but not merely in the hearts of some individuals who are born again, who have repented and been sanctified, but He is present in the midst of the congregation, in the community of the baptized members. This is so even in the unlikely but possible scenario in which not a single new convert has come to the Light after the previous generation of God's born-again children have long since moved on to their eternal home.

Yes, even under such circumstances the Holy Spirit stands among us ever since Pentecost Day as a silent Witness, as a barely noticed figure, as a whispering Pray-er, as a fearful Accuser, and as a glorious Comforter, but always in our midst, because that's where He has been placed by God Himself. He stands there as the Spirit of God, as the Head Person in the entire congregation, as the Interpreter of Christ's treasure and wealth, as the Replacement of our glorified Jesus and as the holy Messenger, who preserves the communion between Christ and His Bride.

True, the world does not see Him, because it does not know Him. The worldly person sees something of His presence at best very seldom, because He does not come with an external or physical face.

Nevertheless, He is there and God's children see and know Him. It is in and for these children of God that He prays with inexpressible sighings, He, their Inspirer, their Guide, their spiritual and inner Teacher, their Comforter, their God! Whatever happens from here on, whether the Word does it, the Sacrament or the Preacher, these are all merely subsidiary instrumental workings that always receive their initial push and energy from the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is not a coincidental agent that blesses everything and makes it all flourish. To the contrary, it is the Holy Spirit who does everything: He motivates, causes and mobilizes it all. He uses the

Word, the Sacraments and the Preacher, derives the good news from the Son in order to preach it to you, and all of this in communion with the Son and the Father. The divine order of things as established in the congregation of Christ is as follows: the Father, the Creator; the Son, the Preparer; the Holy Spirit, the Distributor.

That is why the Holy Spirit does not want morality preaching; He wants something much deeper. It is everyone's duty to "do good." Anyone failing to do the good contravenes God's law. But if, in addition, I establish a covenant between myself and you and you contravene the terms, then you do worse. Now you are not merely "not good," but you are unfaithful.

Let's take it a little further. If, driven by love and compassion, I continue to warn you, but you mock my spiritual words of warning and harden yourself against my compassion, then you are no longer merely bad and unfaithful, but you now are committing the sin against the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:39; Luke 12:10). That can become the situation in the congregation of Christ. That congregation will be recognized by three things. First, whether she does good works, for it is God's inalienable right to demand that she do them. Secondly, whether she does the good in the power of the covenant of grace that envelopes us. Thirdly, whether she hears and obeys the Word of the Holy Spirit that warns us against our evil and faithlessness or whether she despises and ignores it.

Israel did the latter. It contravened God's right and thus was bad. It defiled God's covenant and thus was unfaithful. And when the Merciful nevertheless sent preachers to call them to repent, for the judgement is at hand, Israel dared to ridicule them, "The prophets are but wind and the word is not in them; so let what they say be done to them" (Jeremiah 5:12-13). Now, that was to despise the Holy Spirit, to sadden

and insult Him. This was the reason judgment needed to break out over Israel.

But what of now? Now, after Pentecost? Now that the Holy Spirit Himself stands in the midst of the congregation to plead for Jesus, to warn us about the world and to burn God's holy covenant onto our hearts? What do you think, my reader? Could you ever achieve a depth of suffering to even remotely sense how the Holy Spirit grieves, how deeply He suffers and mourns about how we live in our present age?

Meditation 14*

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 is it that the Church confesses about the Holy Spirit on that day?

That Spirit was poured out after having been promised by Jesus, poured out from the Father by Christ. This was an outpouring unlike the way He descends even now, just once for all, never to be repeated, in a totally different and unique manner.

He descended with a sound like a rupture and a shaking of the spheres. The light beams and sparks that accompanied all that descended from on high, formed themselves into divided tongues as of fire, hovering over and cleaving to every believer present. The most miraculous of it all was that tongues were released, holy enthusiasm began to glow, the languages of the nations appeared to have become the commonwealth of the Church. Everything turned into praise and worship and in magnifying the holy name of God.

Isn't this what all of us agree on? These were the facts. These were the wonderful happenings. This is the content of what we tell each other and our children on Pentecost.

But where do we go from here? Surely, we can't leave it at this? After the birth of that Child in the manger in Bethlehem all kinds of

questions arose. Where did this Child come from and why did it come only now. Why was it born in a manger? Similarly with Pentecost the questions multiplied. The spirit of each of God's children tries to live into the story and relive what this outpouring actually was. They ask why it took place only now and how these happenings relate to the life of our own hearts.

Do not ignore that behind the wonder of Pentecost there lies an entire history during which God laboured in Israel, among the Patriarchs, and as far back as the Garden of Eden. During that period, chosen ones were also saved. Today it can only be due to the Holy Spirit and His descent, when a soul arises from its spiritual death. We thank the Spirit of God and of the Son every time the warmth of faith returns to our own lukewarm hearts that had become lifeless and arid but now have once again revived.

What are we to make of all of this? I will put it this way: It's one of two things. What if Pentecost was nothing more than a revival of the souls of the believers in the room where this took place? Of what interest would that be to us? Or: This was the one and only outpouring ever of the Spirit; none before, none after. But then, what do you do with Israel and what of the work of the Spirit in our own day?

We know with certainty from John's Gospel that the second point of the above two is the correct one, not the first. We read, "Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified" (John 7:39). This obviously does not mean that the Holy Spirit was not yet on earth. This is a mysterious statement that always sort of haunts us each time Pentecost comes around.

There is an unavoidable question that the Church constantly struggles to answer on basis of God's Word: Since the Holy Spirit descended on the Jerusalem's Pentecost well over 2000 years ago, how can we

distinguish its manner of operating before, during and after that wonderful point in time? It is in order to find the answer to that question that we ask for your attention for what is hopefully a short and understandable answer.

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The beneficiaries of the Lord's salvation that will one day enter into glory are not mere loose individuals that stand on their own without any relationship to other souls. They constitute a community, a body, a people, a flock. All saved and souls yet to be saved together form one whole, they belong together and exist in a relationship to each other established by God. This does not mean that all souls are, can be or must be alike. Not at all, for they differ from each other in every aspect. Just as in the human body a nail is completely different from an eye or a hair from an artery, so also is every member of the Body of Christ different from everyone else, each having their own function and life purpose. But on Pentecost we may not for one moment forget that, regardless of those differences, the saved are all comprehended in that one Body to which we must pay special attention.

The Scripture constantly speaks of this and has basically only two images of the Church, namely those of body and temple. A temple is the insertion of a few stones in the framework of a building that, as per God's plan, rises high and in which God Himself dwells. But in order to show that the temple image is too mechanical and too external, while the image of body mirrors the deep thoughts of God in a much richer way, the Scripture does not avoid speaking of a temple that rises up (Ephesians 2:21) and of living stones (I Peter 2:5). When you press the point, both expressions really envision a temple as a body, for a body grows, not a temple, and parts of a body can live, but not parts of a temple or building.

The Apostles constantly return to the image of temple, a practice that has its basis in the Old Testament dispensation. When you come right down to it, a temple is merely a shell for an idol, a stone structure in which the idol appears on earth. Relating to that, there was also a temple in Israel, but it was empty, without an idol image, with only the brilliant glory of the Lord filling the roof vaults and arches.

That temple was no more than an example; it pointed to Christ, whose flesh and blood would be the real temple in which God would appear on earth. "Temple" is thus the proper term for the dispensation of shadows, while "body" is the natural word for the dispensation of fulfillment. But both terms point to that one great comprehensive fact that the Lord God does not simply turn His chosen into a string of loose pearls, but He gathers them and unites them into a whole as the Church of the living God, the flock of the Good Shepherd, the people of His possession, the host of His saints.

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If we agree on the above, then it should be pointed out in the second place that the Body of Christ, like all bodies, does not only grow but also has its conception, hidden formation and birth. A child has an existence before it is born. According to Psalm 139:15-16, at first, it is wonderfully woven from an unformed clump in its mother's womb. After that, there comes the moment, still months before its birth, that life creeps into that unformed clump. And after it remains hidden in its secret place a few more months, does it finally exit into the life of the world, begins to breathe on its own and opens its eyes to the light.

The above represents, almost to the smallest detail, the simple and obvious example of the origin and growth of the Body of Christ. The Body was originally born with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, but it

did definitely not begin its original existence on Pentecost. The birth of that body was preceded by a lengthy hidden existence, enveloped by swaddling clothes and bonds in the shadows, hidden in the mother's womb. Its existence can be traced back all the way to Paradise. That's where it was conceived. Since then it developed over the centuries as just an unformed clump. It was not until Abraham's arrival on the scene that its own movement of life, after slowly developing and strengthening, became noticeable.

However, that Body of Christ, that Body of His Church, made its first public appearance on Pentecost Day. That is to say, until then it remained hidden in Israel's womb. Thus far, it led an unconscious life without breathing independently, having its own spirit or seeing the full light with its own eyes.

That is exactly what happened on Pentecost. By this time, the Body was prepared and ready, but it still did not have its own breath, its own spirit or, in general, its own full life. That is precisely the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, that the Body of the Church on that day, freeing itself from womb of Israel, appeared on the scene, receiving the breath of life, consciously beginning to move on its own steam and opening its eye to the eternal light.

Foreknown from eternity; conceived at creation; hidden in Israel till it began to move, and then born on Pentecost--there you have, in summary, the birth record of the Body of Christ. From there on, it grew and expanded itself and at the right time, developed and clothed in righteousness and bejeweled with her fineries, shall be introduced as the Groom.

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If we are not deluding ourselves, then this simple disclosure should put an automatic stop to all demurrals. For one thing, this shows how

already in Israel the Holy Spirit was working in a natural way, while simultaneously it could be said, "Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified" (John 7:39). This is exactly the same as with the child that was not yet born but later was born. Even during its incubation it lives definitely from the air outside, but only through the mediation of its mother. Once it has been born, it breathes directly and it takes in oxygen in its lungs on its own. So the Church of God lived also beforehand in the womb of Israel without experiencing any workings of the Holy Spirit, except those that came to her through the mediation of the national existence of Israel. On Pentecost this working became immediate, direct; the mother's function had reached its goal and fell away; the Child was born and the Holy Spirit now streamed into the Body itself in order to animate it from within.

Then there is the apparent difficulty in the question about Jesus' role in the outpouring of the Spirit. That one solves itself just as easily. What was Jesus' business with this? Is the Holy Spirit not from God? If so, can God the Holy Spirit not come to His Church on His own? Those who speak thus forget one thing: A body once born can breathe only through its head. Before it is born, the fetus obtains oxygen through the mother's blood, not through its own head but through the mother's arteries. Thus in earlier days the Holy Spirit could do His work on the Church in which Jesus played no role, but that is no longer the case after the baby is delivered and the Church has arrived on the scene. Do not forget: the Church is the Body, but that Body is unthinkable without the Head and can only breathe, feed, grow and be governed through the Head. In addition, it is impossible to pour breath into the lungs of a child already born, except it opens its mouth, which is, again, located in the head. Similarly, it is unthinkable and impossible

for the Holy Spirit to infuse the Body of Christ except through her Head. First, if you will, the Head must breathe in this Spirit and from there it will automatically be poured from the Head through the lungs and arteries into the Body.

This, then, constitutes the outpouring on Pentecost: Through His Ascension Jesus has been appointed Head of His Church. Herewith the moment arrived at which that Church could be delivered from Israel's womb. Now that this has occurred, two things happen. First, the Head absorbs in Himself and receives the Spirit from the Father. Secondly, He who Himself has breathed in that Spirit and absorbed it, now pours it out into all His members and thus makes it flow throughout His Body. Thus, on Pentecost, there was not in the least anything external that Jesus sent down. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit was simply out of the Head, through the lungs and arteries, into the Body of the Spirit that He Himself had received from the Father.

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With all this the difference between the Pentecost event and the present working style of the Holy Spirit in us through the ages has become abundantly clear. As the oxygen we breathe in has no effect on the members of the body unless it flows through the body, so also comes the Holy Spirit to us, the members of the Body, only through the Body of the Church. Repeated outpouring of the Holy Spirit is absurd. It is possible that a fetus keeps living without breathing independently, but that is impossible for one already born. After Pentecost, it is wholly impossible for there to be even one moment during which the Holy Spirit would be absent from the Church. That would deprive her of breath and she would be dead. Sometimes the living Spirit may appear to be absent, but in fact never is. Even during times of revival, the Holy Spirit never comes from outside the Church, for He always revives from within

the Body.

When your foot grows numb, is perhaps frozen, the warmth of life can only return to that foot from within the body. You can rub it, brush or prick it, but revived life must always come from within the body. And that Spirit comes only from within the Body, out of the Head.

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Thus all difficulties literally disappear; everything becomes clear and transparent. If after this you ask finally for what purpose that Body of Christ stays on earth, well, here's the ready answer. "Behind the work of the Holy Spirit you will always find the work of the Son, while behind the work of the Son always lays the work of the Father."

The gathering of the chosen into a Church is thus not as if you find some disparate pieces of cloth which you then sew into a garment. Rather, it is like assembling shards of a piece of ceramics of which you know that, once assembled, they will constitute a beautiful vase. Since it was conceived already prior to Paradise, the image of the whole Church lies in the plan and foreordination of the Father. Each chosen member is not only called into her, but is also naturally inclined to fulfill precisely that spiritual life function in the Body of Christ that is indispensable for the growth of the whole.

Oh, the depth of wisdom and knowledge! Lord, how unsearchable are Your ways! What overflowing comfort for your poor Church! Comfort also for our souls!

Meditation 15*

This Is What Was Spoken by the Prophet Joel

This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

I will pour out My Spirit on all people."

Acts 2:16-17

We stammer and can hardly speak of that majestic happening, when on the tenth day after Jesus' Ascension into the highest Heaven, the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles and the crowd of believers out of that same Heaven. Already at the Bethlehem manger, where the Son first meets us, do we cover our face with the veil of shortsightedness and we worship but do not comprehend how that awesome miracle of the incarnation of the Word was possible. And this was a coming in the flesh, an act in visible form that the eyes could see, the ears hear and the hands touch the Word of Life.

How much less could we expect to understand now that not the Son but the Holy Spirit descends, that Holy Spirit who does not become flesh, but remains hidden in the spiritual, remains invisible and untouchable as He establishes His indwelling in the bosom of the Church and His temple in the hearts of the faithful.

The Apostles, moved by His descent and outpouring, spoke in strange languages according to how the Spirit enabled them. How can we possibly analyze and find the words to describe what amounts to shadows of heavenly things, when the Apostle Paul later confessed that these were "inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell" (II Corinthians 12:4). Ponder, but do not analyze too much. There is something glorious here for your heart. Try to understand that. There is a river here through which flow the waters of eternal life. Try to

bathe, immerse yourself in that. A fountain of eternal comfort is opening here. Try to quench your thirst from this for the comfort of your shriveling soul.

There was an Old Testament promise from the Prophet Joel (Acts 2:16-17). True, Joel's was not the only one, for there were other seers and prophets before him, but Joel's version was the clearest of them all. Of this promise, Joel gave a disclaimer: It is not mine, but it is the promise from the living God to the spiritless and discouraged, to the Church of God on earth that is so bereft of comfort. It was a word of compassion and mercy from Him who knows the oppression His people suffer even better than those who have entered deep into the Way. It was from that merciful God who had even more love for His old Church in the dispensation of shadows than for us. That is why He supported and upheld especially that church with promises rich with comfort.

That old Church missed so much. She did enjoy some great privileges that we do not have: immediate miraculous revelations and divine messages through the words of the prophets. But she did not know the manger; she did not look upon the cross and had not yet become a temple of the Holy Spirit. She could not boast of what John spoke:

"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" (1 John 1:1).

However, they did not lack anything regarding their salvation. The Lord God also gifted His chosen among His ancient covenant people with faith, the faith that focused on the Messiah and that brought inner revival to joyful souls. But still it all fell under the shadows. She did not have the clarity, the transparency, that full overflowing measure in which we rejoice.

We pilgrims still on our journey are behind the chosen ones already

called up, those who now already have a taste of the glory before the throne. We have to be satisfied with the promise without tasting that glory. Likewise, Israel was behind us, who know Bethlehem, Golgotha and Pentecost of which they had the promise but not the realization of it all.

That made them apprehensive and filled their souls with worry. It drove them on as in a storm. The Lord our God, who is merciful and who shares in the oppression His people were suffering, was aware of their feelings. Therefore, He sent His seers, including Joel, and through him opened for His people the Word of promise, that glorious vista of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. It did not happen in their day, but they saw it from afar. It was their Nebo! (Deuteronomy 32 and 34). As the Lord refreshed Moses' soul by showing him the rich and fertile land of Canaan from the pinnacle of distant Mount Nebo, so the God of all mercies heard His covenant people and helped them set their eyes on the promise through prophecy, on these glorious things of the Spirit, from far off.

That under which Israel suffered and succumbed was that its God was far off and not near by, not directly approachable. As the deer pants after water, so Israel pined after the refreshing and animating Body of the living God. That was what all those who feared Jehovah called for and for which they implored Him; not all the people, of course, but the faithful among them. They missed their God and could not do without Him. Their souls were parched during this long wait. In the midst of this distress and near spiritual death, Jehovah came to comfort, first by promising, "I am coming in the Messiah," and then by pronouncing, "I am coming in the Holy Spirit!"

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Strugglers among God's people are familiar with this distress and this

near spiritual death even today. It is a strange mystery that the spiritual suffering of Israel is the image of what God's chosen suffer throughout the ages. This is not because history retrogresses or the New Covenant slips again behind the Old, but because every chosen person individually repeats in himself the history of suffering and comfort of the entire people of God. The people of God in the Church first live through the phase of missing God, and from there move on to the phase of glorious possession. That is the process taking place in the soul of each person whom God claims. Bethlehem, Golgotha, Mount of Olives, Pentecost--it was all there and they knew about them, but they could not penetrate or enter as yet; they were still left out and did not yet taste the sweetness of the deep kernel of holiness.

So, they sing along with the angels' Christmas song in the fields of Ephratha (Luke 2:13-14), but in their souls they cry out in anguish, "Where is my God?" A stirring lamentation wells up from their hearts as they gaze on that terrible struggle in Gethsemane and on Golgotha. They still ask, "Who delivers me from my sin?" On Easter morning, they jubilate with the crowd but still call out, "Who is my righteousness?" On the Mount of Olives they watch their Saviour ascend, but sigh, "Who opens the portals of Heaven for me?" Similarly, on Pentecost they testify to the wind, fire and foreign languages, but in their souls they continue to groan after fellowship with the living God. That's the kind of enigmas we ourselves are. We are like children who play with pearls and rubies, but who go hungry for lack of bread.

And that is why this prophecy is also for us. Paul says it so convincingly, "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope" (Romans 15:4). With the same promises and prophecies with which the Lord God used to

refresh His ancient covenant people, does He still refresh the comfortless souls today. That is to say, all those souls who genuinely and truly pine after the living God but do not enjoy the glorious fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Until, until.... finally the working of the Holy Spirit penetrates so deeply in such a soul, that the channel is finally fully dug and the waters of life can flow through it. That's when the full joy of salvation comes upon him. That's when the foolish child first becomes aware what a treasure it has possessed for years in his pearls and rubies. Then it happens: The mystery of the manger suddenly opens up along with that of Golgotha; the mystery of the Spirit discloses itself; and the newly comforted give thanks for this loving radiance from God's comforting face, exclaiming with joyful recognition, "Abba Father!"

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There are some individuals who, not having a clear understanding of the "things of God," think that they have experienced an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, a kind of repetition of a mini Pentecost wonder. Some even use a special term for it: "Baptism of the Holy Spirit."

That is not possible. That would amount to negating the great Pentecost of the Church. Similarly, there have been people in past ages that consider the birth of Christ in their heart their Bethlehem with such strong emphasis that they lose the original Bethlehem and, eventually, even deny it. Keep an eye on that exaggerated form of over-spiritualization. No, God's way is not a matter of soul and soul; it is first of all of God with His Church. From there He moves to each individual member of His chosen flock. He is victorious over sin by means of returning and bestowing the human race with His glorious and sweet fellowship. His first step is to come to His Church with

prophecy, then to His Church in the Son and, finally in the most intimate and innermost mode He comes to His Church in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

In the natural creation, God the Lord does not grant each city and village a separate river, but He opens the sluices of Heaven over His mountains for everybody, so that the mighty streams of water cascade from the mountain tops down into the rivers, from where they flow forth until they irrigate all lands and states. So in the kingdom of grace is His work not piecemeal, dealing with every individual entity, but flows down from the mountain of His holiness in one single mighty stream till all chosen peoples and every chosen soul will be refreshed and washed according to individual circumstances of time and place.

Thus, Pentecost does not repeat itself. It is a single event that does not come and go, but that one single unique descent has its effect from then till the present day. Anyone who wants to partake even now in that Spirit can only do so by partaking in what was poured out only once, descended only once, but that now dwells in us and in His Church.

This is what was prophesied by the Prophet Joel to the soul that called upon the Spirit, who still had to come down from above, "Take note, God the Lord is now in his Holy Spirit with and in you. Your Church is no longer alone. The Lord is in her and is her God!" [1]

Oh, indeed there is a breaking through of the Holy Spirit into the soul that earlier resisted Him. What used to be a lifeless and frozen soul has now become more fluid. What at one time appeared spiritless, motionless and lifeless, is now animated and lively. Yes to all of this, but a repetition of the descent of the Holy Spirit as on Pentecost, that will not happen.

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What then is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and wherein does it

differ from the separate working out of Heaven in each chosen one, head for head? We do not deny that God the Lord could work on each soul. Why not? He is almighty. Even the decisions made in the council of God that govern all things, are sovereign and bound by nothing. The thing is, the Lord did not choose to do things that way; He chose another way that is clearly demarcated in His council. Kicking against it makes no difference; it will change nothing. Things go according to His will.

The way He has chosen has been staked out in such a way that the souls of His chosen ones cannot be comforted except in the communion of saints; that is to say, in the organic operation of the Body of Christ, which is His Church.

Now, as in a body not all parts breathe--the hand doesn't; the foot doesn't; the eye doesn't--but they all keep their life and shine through the single breath cycle of the entire body. So it also goes in the Body of the Church. On Pentecost, God blew the breath of life into the Body of the Church by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Consequently, the Holy Spirit now lives as the heavenly breath cycle both in the Head and in the members of the Body. It is through the breath of the Holy Spirit that every member of the Body lives.

Just how does all that work? If you can explain to me how, in the mystery of natural life, the breath out of your lungs makes your eye sparkle, then I will explain the mystery of spiritual life, which is that the Spirit of grace comforts the soul of each member. We cannot penetrate that secret. You can only worship, admire and rejoice in this mystery.

Worship--that is to say, kneel down in deep reverence and thank your God and Father, who now for twenty centuries has been blowing the breath of life into the Body of the Church by giving her the Holy Spirit. Admire and pay attention to the manifold wisdom of God, who,

since the descent of the Spirit, has spread His Church abroad throughout the whole world and has turned the face of the world around. But also rejoice for yourself, as member of the Body of Christ, and cherish along with fellow saints the warmth of that life that has been flowing throughout the Body of Christ out of the breath of the Spirit for twenty centuries.

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And what is all this? This comforting, that breathing, that glorious rejoicing? You must know that these things have nothing in common with the excitement of ecstasy or with arousing cheer and song. Pompous tones and high sounding songs are not inviting to the Spirit but ban it far away. No, this comfort is for the quiet kind of suffering and is imbibed in holy calm. The joy comes when you become aware of the sin of your deeply miserable heart.

It is possible that you have long thirsted after righteousness and pined for having the will to do good works, but you are constantly disappointed, for your heart deceives you. You just could not carry through, so that at the end, now suffering the most fearful tension, you cried out in despair, "I want to be holy, but I can't." If this is how you suffer and are oppressed, bent over in misery till you feel, "God must have His way with my soul," but it does not happen--that is the sad thirst in you after God, who will work a permanent conversion in you. It is during that fearful doubt that God the Holy Spirit comes quietly knocking on the door of your heart and calls you with this imagined invitation: "Oh, you without comfort, weep no more. Your prayers and sighings have ascended before the face of God. You have been heard. Your oppression shall come to an end and the fear in your soul shall fade away. For now I know that you have groaned to your God in uprightness of heart for delivery from sin and the ability to become

holy. Here I am, I, your God, who will make His indwelling also in your heart. What you are incapable of doing, that I, God, shall do for and in you. I will bend your will towards the good. I shall cleanse your inclinations, purify your imagination and enlighten your eyes. No matter how much unrighteousness from the pool of perdition still bubbles up in your unclean heart, I will see to it that you will walk in my ordinances!"

After the Holy Spirit no longer just says this but actually does it and the soul sees that the Spirit is establishing this in her, then she is no longer powerless. Instead, she is now capable of moving what seemed like mountains. That's when the sound of jubilation will be heard, and the glorious experience of restoration in her innermost being will be felt. She will know what it means that, in the words of the Heidelberg Catechism, "Christ, by his Holy Spirit, makes me whole-heartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him."

Meditation 16*

Tongues of Fire

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

Acts 2:3

Rulers wear crowns; heroes are given laurels and wreaths. Even if we do not come from a ruler clan or are not heroes, every human being on earth struggles for honour, glitter and glory; everyone reaches for a crown. Our hearts beat faster when we are wreathed with honour.

Is that a sinful inclination? Is that allowed? Or must a child of God surrender such ambitions? Paul the Apostle answers, "No, absolutely not! It does not have to be surrendered." He brazenly affirms this attitude. Even he himself, after he entered into the service of Jesus, was aiming for a crown and struggled to attain one. In fact, he was animated by the hope of one day receiving his crown (1 Corinthians 9:25; Philippians 4:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:19; 2 Timothy 4:8).

But--and here's the difference--he did not expect one until the end of this dispensation. His crown will not be placed on his head by the hands of friends, but by those of the righteous Judge. That crown will not bring him some pseudo-splendour but will truly make him king: "And (He) has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father" (Revelations 1:6).

You see, there are two kinds of light, two kinds of splendour, two kinds of honour. The first one comes from below, is generated in the fire of ambition, fanned by imaginative honour and recognized in the glitter of metal or jewel. This is the glamour of artificial light that

will soon lose its brilliance and be extinguished. It is a pseudo glitter that flares up one moment and is quenched in the next. But there is another splendour that does not originate from below but from above, with the Father of all lights, from the chambers of eternal splendour. It radiates our way from the depth of the holy Unseen and outshines the sun by far, while it is not consumed throughout eternity. He whose eye is captivated from below, is blind to that higher splendour. For him it does not exist and since he does not notice it, it cannot captivate him either. But take a godless person who comes to Christ and now is desirous of that nobler splendour. For him, that bright earthly glamour pales and wanes immediately. He turns away from it. For him, it no longer has glamour. What once seemed pleasing glitter, has become dull and lost its glamour for him.

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Do realize that all this is more than speaking in metaphors; we are talking reality. You cannot think of Christ in His glory with a dull and worried face. When you consider Him, you cannot but imagine Him radiating a wreath of soft and holy light, glittering in a glow greater than diamonds, not by means of fantasy, no, but radiating from within His innermost Being. It is like His holy Person stepping outside of Himself with the fragrance of anointing surrounding Him. Even the mediator of the Old Covenant, Moses, according to the Holy Scriptures, when he descended from the mountain, such bright light shone on and around his face, so that the people could not tolerate seeing his face. He had to cover his face in order to address the people face to face (Exodus 34: 29-35).

For this reason, the Church of Christ has accustomed us from ancient times on to depict the holy Patriarchs and the Martyrs, the holy Apostles and Prophets with halos around their heads. The point was that

those people were the pure of heart who had climbed up the mountain of God's holiness and had caught a reflection of the light of the glory of the Eternal One on their faces. Tender, pious, God-fearing men and women who were appointed as beacons of light in the midst of the Church, have sometimes left the impression of having something higher radiating from their eyes and of having an expression of holiness on their faces. They may be compared to angels, those heralds from Heaven who are seldom seen on earth, but who have a higher glory surrounding them that even emanates from their robes.

Whenever it pleases God to take someone home and the deceased enters into the rest of the Lord, sometimes we witness a kind of radiance around him during or even after his going, so that greeters are jealous and rapt.

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When the Holy Spirit descended on Pentecost and divided tongues fire settled on each believer, the latter had an experience similar to that of the disciples at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36; II Peter 1:16-18).

At the Transfiguration, the Lord received His crown and radiated heavenly glory, while on Pentecost the believers, who constituted the kernel of the Church, were baptized with glory like princes and rulers, and received the heavenly diadem of light on their foreheads, so that no crown or wreath from below would ever be coveted by those purchased by Jesus.

The Church of Christ declines in spiritual power when worldly wreaths are disseminated in her midst by human hands, but she increases in spiritual power as earthly glitter fades from her midst and tongues of fire and the luster of the spiritual diadem of light once again appear among believers. The cross of Jesus is powerless and the blood of

reconciliation without effect when people kneel at the cross who seek honour with the finest of worldly ornaments and who are decorated with wreath and crown by their fellow sinners. But that cross blesses and the effect of the divine blood penetrates deeply, when those who kneel at the cross first take off all those ornaments, wreaths and crowns and throw them at the foot of the cross.

And you, my brother, my sister, what shines and glitters on you? By what glory do you see yourself surrounded? Is yours still earthly glitter? Oh, tremble for your soul! For then you are still craving earthly honour; then you cannot believe and will perish. Then everything about you is still shell, still useless wild splendour, and the dew of the eternal morning does not yet adorn your face.

And now, did you receive a Pentecost blessing? If so, then allow these fiery tongues to be seen on you and the image of heavenly glory envelop your face. That light is not harshly blinding, but soft; it does not flare, but feels congenial. To see those tongues of fire on each of us would constitute the most glorious witness to God's tender mercy. It would also represent a glorious precursor of dying in the glow of His glorious light, something like a transfiguration on your deathbed before you pass through the dark portal of death into the heavenly Jerusalem.

Meditation 17*

Too Much Wine

Some... made fun of them and said,

"They have had too much wine."

Acts 2:13

The deep fissure that entered human life already in Paradise can unfortunately not be healed as long as the Maranatha has not been fulfilled. Then, yes, when the Lord, who presently has His palace in Heaven and rules the world from there, returns on the clouds as the glorious King, and shows us His last act of grace by leaving Heaven and descend to this earth for the second time, then shall this terrible fissure come to its end, but not before that.

Then Paradise returns, and more than Paradise! Then the angels will not only sing "Peace on earth" to us as a prayer and as the beginning of fulfillment, but then there will be eternal peace on earth, never again a disrupted peace. This will be an endless rule of tender love under the sovereignty of the Prince of Peace, the heavenly Solomon! All the earth one city of peace, one immeasurable Jerusalem!

But we're not there yet. The time is not yet ripe. When people try to establish such a regime of peace at this point, then that fissure is not really healed so much as merely covered up. When people are fooled into imagining that this eternal peace on earth has already been found, then the Lord God metes out terrible punishment for pushing aside His ordinances. Such efforts are nothing but attempts to take the work of establishing peace out of the hands of the King of Glory and implies a declaration that the return of the Lord is not necessary. In the words of the Prophet Isaiah, "Lord, you establish peace for us; all that we

have accomplished you have done for us" (Isaiah 26:12). This statement constitutes the prophetic song of praise with which the Church needs to await her Bridegroom. Woe unto us if we imagine that the establishment of this eternal peace requires anything less than His return on the clouds. That peace will not come before that!

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"Full of wine!" Do you hear in that burst of guffaw and mockery not a further tearing at that same fissure, but now on Pentecost?

The languishing human heart thirsts for a new life dynamic. Everything in you seeks a stimulus that will deliver you from the tepid and tired feeling of depression. You feel tingling in your blood, but in reality there is nothing but arid inertia. That's why the human heart calls with a variety of voices for holier and higher zeal.

But you see, in His grace, the Compassionate One has already supplied you with such stimulus and enthusiasm. Long ago, a liberated people already sang the song of the redeemed on the shores of the Red Sea jubilantly! Waves of praise escaped from emotions of overwhelming gratitude (Exodus 15). That song of praise at the Red Sea was the resounding praise that accompanied Israel on all its pathways. God's protection served as walls and ramparts to provide safety. The desert blossomed and roses spread their fragrance throughout the wilderness. However, after the Red Sea, the highest, the most important event still tarried. It also tarried after the Bethlehem manger. After all, the glory of the angel choir in the fields of Ephrata faded at Gethsemane and comparatively disappeared at Golgotha.

But now with Pentecost it comes. Finally, finally the Spirit of the Father and of the Son Himself descends. Rich, mild and in an overwhelming cascade He flows out over the entire flock of the Lord. And now, there we have it, that most blessed stimulus. The most

glorious dynamic has sprung into action in a language that spatters with fire and radiates a sparkling glow. There stand those Galilean fishermen, ready to proclaim the manifold praise of God in the Jerusalem temple! And what is the impression that most people in the city gain from this? Only that these Galileans had drunk too much strong wine! They are talking like drunks!

This was sin against the Holy Spirit!

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Appalling! And yet so natural! Think of it, that crowd in Jerusalem needed stimulus, animation and refreshment to overcome their tiredness just as much as you and, in fact, most people. That is the result of sin and thus holds true for everyone. But what is about the only thing that stimulates the people, whether in Jerusalem or in our own country? The answer is something that has always been there, is now and shall remain till the Lord's return, namely wine and strong drink.

Wine has indeed the power of lifting up one's spirit. God created the grapevine. The purpose and effect of wine is indeed to strengthen depressed powers and to animate tired spirits. And so, it should not surprise us that this crowd in Jerusalem, that itself had never known any other kind of stimulation and had never seen people's mood elevated except through the effect of wine, would assume the same to be the case with the Apostles. Thus they called out, "You're drunk!"

It is exactly this kind of reaction that reveals our deep sin and the depth to which we have sunk. Left to ourselves without higher light, we attribute the highest operation of the Spirit of grace to the operation of the spirit of satan! Only grace, divine mercy, protects us from such behavior.

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That's the situation here. Wine can indeed strengthen and is a

stimulant given by God (Proverbs 31:6) for the sad of heart, so that in his anguish he does not become prey to hopelessness. Nevertheless, there is also a devilish power that hides in wine. Wine has its boundaries. If you allow it to prickle you just enough for a moment, it will strengthen and animate you. But you go beyond that boundary just a bit and it won't take long before it de-animates instead of animating you, and will release the demon residing deep in your blood and spirit that was under restraint only by your self-consciousness. That is why all drinks that stimulate are extremely dangerous. These drinks, as long as you use them to warm and get yourself a lift, are a precious fire, but they can also singe and scald you and burn you with terrible wounds. They can destroy you as soon as you go just a little beyond the boundary.

Drunkenness is from the devil; it is satan's satyr [1] that sneaks into the human soul and life. A person who is not animated, elevated and resounding with praise to the Lord, is poisoned in his innermost, made senseless and has become a slave to evil passion. That crowd in Jerusalem now equates that satanic, that terrible demonic that causes an explosion of evil within us, with the work of the Holy Spirit! Oh, what a sour and bitter fruit of evil!

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Marvelous! The human race is offered two stimulants. God created the grapevine to ease exhaustion of the body and, out of pure grace, gave us the Holy Spirit to relieve spiritual exhaustion and spiritual death. Our evil heart says, "The prickle of the wine is enough!" and lets it stimulate our soul through the blood. Thus both soul and body are poisoned. But the Spirit wants it the other way around. He offers you stimulation of the soul, lifts you up out of your spiritual exhaustion and enervates you spiritually, while He simultaneously enervates your

weakened physical prowess and provides support for your whole being. But now these two work against each other. On the one side there is the unregenerate (not born again) world that seeks its excitement in the visible and can therefore not understand the Spirit. On the other side, there is the flock of the Lord that, saturated with the streams of the Spirit, despises those unholy stimulants. Thus, from both sides there arises tension between them, stronger stimulation, more powerful pushes, but both from completely opposite sources. That small flock animated by the Holy Spirit; that large crowd, by a torrent of indulgence and fun. They must collide. The only impression the world can leave with God's children is that everything in it is all about its state of drunken stupor. The same with God's child; as soon as he meets the world he can only leave them with the impression of being drunk. Hence their scornful, "You are full of wine!"

Provided the child of God has an intimate relationship with Him, the above situation produces in the believer a terribly fearful feeling of tenderness and compassion, while the child of the world, when he meets a Christian, can only react with scornful laughter of mockery and contempt. You need to be able to bear that scorn and laughter. You may not try to avoid it by following a different route. You even need to desire that laughter for Jesus' sake. You must counter that scorn and laughter by calling out and announcing ever louder the great deeds of God.

[1] A sylvan character in Greek mythology having certain characteristics of a horse and goat, noted for riotousness and lasciviousness.

Meditation 18*

The Comforter [1]

I will ask the Father,
and He will give you another
advocate/comforter
to help you and be with you forever.

John 14:16

And so our Pentecost came, the holy feast of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Oh, whose soul is not lifted up from all the baseness and lack of holiness of our earthly existence at the hearing of those glorious sounds that there is a Holy Spirit that overcomes the unclean spirits?

That Holy Spirit is not far from us, does not still have to be sent, but is Someone who has already been given to us. Now the Fountain of blessed comfort, brought to us by that Holy Spirit, flows generously.

The broad population knows nothing about all this; the masses do not comprehend this rejoicing of the soul. Apart from His Name perhaps, they do not know the Holy Spirit. He is a stranger to them about whom they may have heard rumours as of a mysterious apparition. They may have heard many stories about Him but He has never penetrated their hearts. They may have heard of tongues of fire and of talking in different languages, but how can those who do not know Him be spellbound by these events and of whom these signs were witnesses?

Therefore, the travelers along the broad road also celebrate Pentecost but without the Holy Spirit. It is more a celebration of spring and a matter of enjoying nature, a family day on which people visit relatives and friends or enjoy bonding with their children. [2] They are not particularly intent on desecrating the feast of the Holy Spirit; they

simply ignore it.

Oh, the Lord Jesus had so strongly warned about this Holy Spirit, "The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him" (John 14:17). That Holy Spirit and the spirit of the world will remain at odds with each other till the end.

But not everyone keeps following the ways of this world. Throughout the ages and even today there are those who have divorced this world, not with a haughty "Leave me, for I am holier than you," but because they have come to fear the world, fearful of her deadly influence, fearful of her terrible power of temptation. Such people have cast off the snares of this world as one shakes a poisonous viper from his hand. These are men and women who follow the path where once the holy Apostles trod and to whom Jesus had said, "But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you" (John 14:17). While they follow that narrow path, they are troubled that they may have escaped the world, but that they still carry it with them in their own heart. They are afraid and dispirited, because Jesus has said, "You will have the Holy Spirit in your heart," but when they pulled their hands away from their bosom, they were leprous (Exodus 4:6-7) and the smell of the death of the world clung to them. For, yes, that is the actual situation. There is not one broad way for godless sinners and then one narrow path taken by saints.

No, no, whoever puts it that way is dreaming. For this is the fact of the matter, that thousands go in through the wide door, whose gracious adornments of the soul may sometimes make you jealous. On the other hand, there are also hundreds who go in through the narrow gate and who walk the right path, but who still carry the leaven of the world within themselves. This is what causes the oscillations, the fluctuations and the struggles in the life of the soul, for what will these men and

women hold on to? If there is no benefit, why not return to the broad way? As his wife advised the suffering Job of ancient times, "Bless God and die!" (Job 2:9). [1]

No, by all that is holy and as truly as God's Covenant is firmly established, they cannot do that, but they pursue another and better way. For hear! In the midst of their misery they jubilate in the presence of the Holy Spirit. Where all hopes appeared gone, they praise the divine Comforter.

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What does it mean that the Holy Spirit is a Comforter? Could it mean that the Holy Spirit heals the wounds of our souls or lifts us up in our sadness, refreshes us in our mourning or upholds us during the bitter beatings of life? Certainly that is all included.

There is nothing, absolutely nothing that can grieve our heart for which the Holy Spirit does not have sufficient rich treasure of comfort, so that whoever comes to Him will never be sent away with empty hands. And surely, when death enters our life and robs us of a loved one, then it is not the spirit of the world but definitely the Holy Spirit from above who will fill our disquieted heart with courage and hope. The Holy Spirit will lift us up into that higher life so that we who remain behind do not envy the glory of the friend taken up. The Spirit helps us live in the heavenly awareness that, even after our separation, the bond of fellowship remains and He sets our self-centred hearts straight by making it clear to us that even those most dear to us do not live for us, but that we together exist only for God.

We must never entertain the slightest doubt that only by the Holy Spirit is the real divine balm of healing comfort prepared for the wounded heart. Whatever else we seek or recommend is a mere placebo that only serves to make us forget our suffering without healing it. If

you do not want to follow that route but, instead, want to experience and accept whatever God lays on you, you want to empty the cup that God has prepared for you, sip by sip, and you submerge your head in the waves of misery till you have been through it all, by then you cannot manage without the Holy Spirit and you will be the first to be comforted by Him.

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And yet, that is not the real Pentecost and that is not real Pentecost praise! If that were the essential meaning of it all, then only those suffering deprivation would be the happiest of all and only mourners would be saved. This would amount to a Pentecost for defeated souls only.

That is definitely not our Pentecost. It is for all God's children; for everyone who knows the Holy Spirit; for every generation. It is for those who first came to know the Father; thereafter, the Son; and only after that entered into the glorious knowledge of God the Holy Spirit. For--and this is a mystery of the Comforter--to be submerged by mourning because of hard knocks of misfortune or bitter mourning for the loss of a loved one, is not the worst.

There is a wound that digs in much deeper and a suffering that is much more cancerous, for it devours our soul and brings on all God's onslaughts and the waves of the Almighty over us. That kind of suffering can come upon us even if all our children surround us with loving support and Heaven above is glorious and cloudless. Oh, the battle of the soul, the inner struggle of the spirit, that hovering between life and death, God and satan, heaven and hell! If that's truly where we find ourselves, so terribly exhausted and worn out, it casts the soul into a deep pit of defeat.

If that's our situation, then deep within our soul there will be an

invitation from God, the living God, to approach Him directly. But we cannot do so without the intervention of a miracle, the miracle of grace, mercy and of saving omnipotence. Think about how disheartening it would be, for you to suddenly stand before the portal of death in clear awareness of all the terror of your sins and your godlessness cast itself upon you, and just at that moment when you need Him the most, the Lord your God were banned from your soul because of your self-accusations. How you would helplessly and desperately shout, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13).

That is seldom what happens at the death of a Christian. First of all, in the hour of death your strength has diminished too much and your spirit is too faded to equip you for such a struggle. Secondly, it appears that the Lord God in His mercy prefers to spare us such deadly angst on our deathbeds.

Even though such angst seldom attacks us while we are dying, it can attack us before dying. It can overtake us when the Lord God engages us in struggle and confronts us with judgement; when He makes us aware of the deep needs of our souls or shows us the image of His Son so that--oh, how cruel!--our own hearts must answer, "I have hardly reflected that image at all."

Sometimes that struggle comes furiously, horribly, and overpoweringly; it is sometimes compressed into a single night or week. During such an intense time our entire life may fly past us in review, how God has gone with us through fire, storm and thunder and we finally implore Him like Jonah from out of the belly of the whale (Jonah 2).

However, this is by no means always the case. Often the struggle is spread out over the entire life of God's children. There will be momentary breathers, but then they will again be submersed and their heads tossed about by seaweed and bulrushes.

Of course, all this is about a spiritual existence that, you might say, cannot really be considered a life. Everything holy about God presents itself to the soul clearly and lucidly. There is no doubt about the way to follow: there, there I need to go. Neither is there any desire to wander away from God, but, rather, a strong urge to cleave to the living God. However, our goodness is not up to His standard and thus does not reach Him, while the heart, that should belong to Him and cast its hope on holiness, that poor weak heart is constantly struggling against evil intrusions, tormented by sinful thoughts, experiencing an abyss between God and praying lips. Then, when the soul asks itself, "What do I have that distinguishes me as a child of God?" it recognizes there is not even one grain of salt, not a single beam of light, not a stone of either a city or a mountain, except an occasional despairing call, "That millstone, Lord, is for me. Cast me with it into the depth of the ocean, for I have caused your little ones to stumble" (Luke 17:2)!

We hear much about suicide. It is said that many deep souls become insane. Well, yes, if there were no Pentecost and a child of God were being tossed to and fro for days or even years, then insanity may seem a natural result so that the victim hardly be held responsible. Without the Holy Spirit, a worm will enter to destroy the spirit; you will not find any happy child of God.

But see, it is exactly at this point that the glory of the Comforter rises within us! We have the kind of wounds that need that Comforter and for which He has prepared the necessary balm. This is for the children of God who are torn in their innermost, for the upright of heart who leave no stone unturned in their struggle against unrighteousness, for the men and women for whom God and His righteousness are a central concern and have a sense of, "Oh, God, I am

sinking!"

With such people the work of this divine Comforter is glorious beyond words. He is the Holy Spirit, God almighty, God Himself. That unholy world lies within and around us, but the Spirit does not say, "I have no truck with that world or with that awful unholy heart." No, the Holy Spirit speaks to you from out of the depth of that unholy world and from the noisy pit of this unclean heart. He does not keep His distance but descended to this earth and there chose for Himself a circle of people and moved into their hearts as His Temple. Now He lives in that circle and is there, near to them, not far. He has been commissioned, poured out never to return to Heaven. Since Pentecost, never but never has the Church of Christ been without that Holy Spirit even for one moment.

Oh, the Holy Spirit with us! That is all the comfort we need. That penetrating divine Spirit that uncovers all secrets, came to us and has never left us again. He stayed with us and when everything seemed to go wrong, that Spirit was right there at our side, never retreating but continually reassuring, "Do not despair; My hand holds you!"

Is that not indescribably glorious? When you're on your sickbed, writhing in pain with the contagion of cancer consuming you, but that holy Angel, no, much more, that Holy Spirit stands by your bedside constantly, God Himself watching over you as your life fades away, moistening your dry lips as you were about to succumb in your sorrow. Just the knowledge that, in the midst of all this filth and impurity in my heart, the Holy Spirit never leaves me for a moment is a glorious experience! Just to know that, when everything around me is frozen and I myself am numb and petrified, the Spirit is constantly there with His glorious, warm and cherishing embrace, with His eye sparkling with the glow of love and His breath stirring life in my tightly squeezed

breast!

Don't you feel this consolation? Can you think of any richer, more glorious comfort? Is He not like your guide who walks along with you in the dark forest so full of murderous caves? As soon as you perceive His presence, doesn't your soul automatically revive and reach out for the holiness that is Him?

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Even that is still not His comfort at its fullest. It isn't only that the Holy Spirit is near and around you, never leaves God's children, and feels anxious with you in all your anxieties and oppressed in all your oppressions. He does more: He not only comes near you, but in you and comforts you by making that wonderful faith flow in you. And what does it mean that the Holy Spirit dwells in you? This, that the Spirit shares your suffering and misery. He, the uber-rich par excellence, dwells in you, the pauper, and shares His wealth with you. Is that not real consolation?

Imagine, if you will, a family in deep misery, without bread in the house, all clothing worn out and resentment, malice and iniquity given free reign. Now imagine that a millionaire stranger moves into their hovel with them. He has his chests and suitcases brought in and shares his wealth with the family. With much laughter, he spreads peace and happiness around. What do you think: would such a family not be comforted? Could you think of anything that would make the family in that hovel happier?

Well, that is exactly what the Holy Spirit does for God's children. He knows you are desperately poor and does not pretend otherwise. He does not pretend you are well dressed, but acknowledges you in your nakedness. He does not consider you sparkingly clean but recognizes the festering boils in your heart. That uber-rich Holy Spirit, to whom

all the treasures of Heaven belong, comes to dwell in you and becomes your fellow victim in misery. When the debt collector comes and you don't have the wherewithal to pay, He will pay. When it is time to eat but there is no bread, He will provide it. When you find yourself naked and ashamed, He will quietly come up behind you and cover you with His cloth, so that no one will ever see you in such shame again, even though you did not contribute a single stitch. Don't you think that a song of joy and praise would be sung in the house of God's Israel on that Pentecost? Would not a psalm of praise be raised to God for such exceptional goodness?

Pentecost remains forever young and alert. We keep falling into slumber and forget in our sinful dreams that the Holy Spirit has come to live in us. But every time the bell tolls and our Pentecost is once again rung in, the dormant soul of God's child awakes and again feels the glorious touch of the Holy Spirit, who once again lays His hand on us with blessed benevolence and whispers to us in his heavenly voice, "Be comforted, you who are driven by the storm! See, I, the divine Comforter, am with you and dwell in you with all My divine treasures!"

[1] Many English translations use the word "Comforter" where the NIV, the translation from which we quote, has "advocate." Since Kuyper bases his meditation on the former, we use that as well.

[2] Kuyper describes the way the Pentecost holiday was celebrated by most people of his time and culture.

[1] The NIV here has "Curse God and die!"

Meditation 19*

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.

Hebrew 6:19

Jesus ascended into Heaven, into that Heaven that, like the earth here below, was created and thus was not from eternity. It is, to be sure, a totally different creation sphere, but that nevertheless offers a realm of life and activity, of enjoyment and beauty, but in a much richer sense. It is not a vague entity, purely spiritual, but a rich and glorious reality. It is a world much more real than our world in which we currently live. It is a created place that has a foundation; our actual fatherland. It is that magnificent creation where all of God's good angels have their abode as well as those saved by the Lamb, the crowd that no one can count. This is the very goal of the existence of believers, their real home.

The ascension of Jesus to Heaven does not imply that He withdrew from earth as God and suddenly jumped back to the throne of glory. That is not possible, because as God He is omnipresent. Such a God can withdraw His revelation or His countenance, but He cannot move from place to place.

Hence it was not God as God who acted, but the Son of God, who as Mediator personally united with the man Christ Jesus. That's how the Ascension became possible. The man Jesus Christ, like all humans, is restricted and limited to one place. Thus, as a human being Jesus was

not in Heaven when He was on earth. In fact, He had never been in Heaven prior to His life on earth. As human being He could not be on earth and in Heaven simultaneously; it was either one or the other. His Ascension story clearly tells us that the Mediator between God and people, the human person Jesus Christ, started His journey of suffering, the Via Dolorosa, in Jerusalem, and from there He moved on to the Mount of Olives. It was there at the top that He ascended through the atmosphere surrounding our globe, going higher and higher until He, constantly on the move from one place to another, finally arrived in that totally different part of creation called "Heaven."

We do not know how one enters Heaven or where it begins. We do not know the measurable limits of the universe. It could be that the heavenly creation, with its totally different contents and proportions, intrudes or penetrates our creation sphere in similar fashion that Jesus in His state of glorification penetrated walls and locked doors. Nor do we have any clue as to the time it took the Lord Jesus to ascend to Heaven. However, people should avoid the notion that there was no time involved. The ten days between Ascension and Pentecost suggest the contrary. Moving from one place to another always takes time. In the world of space, astronomers tell us that one flash of lightning may take years to complete its journey out there. With that in mind, I repeat that no one knows whether or not the sphere of Heaven penetrates into the lower creation sphere. Secondly, the Scriptures repeatedly make mention of sudden movements much faster than we experience. Think of the movement of angels, of the fast travel of the Prophet Elijah when he ran ahead of King Ahab (I Kings 18:46; II Kings 2:11) or ran to Mount Horeb (I Kings 19:7-8) and of the Prophet Elisha when he was as it were carried to Samaria (2 Kings 6:20). The story of Jesus' sudden disappearance from the sight of the two disciples in Emmaus (Luke

24:31) gives a similar impression as does that of Philip and the eunuch (Acts 8:39-40).

With respect to all those events we have to keep ourselves to a minimum of details and explanations to avoid all spiritualization. We can only know the following for sure: that the restricted man Christ Jesus moved from place to place in normal restricted human fashion.

We know that, during the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-3; Mark 9:2-9; Luke 9:28-36), He had one moment and then a series of moments during his transfer to Heaven and finally a glorious moment during which He reached the actual Heaven, passed through its portals and now arrived in that Heaven where the man Christ Jesus had never been. There, in that totally different, richer, more glorious world He accepted that high position of governing that the Father had laid on Him.

As to the circumstances in that Heaven, how the angels relate to the saved saints and the latter among each other or how they all connect with the man Christ Jesus, none of that is revealed to us. We do know certain things: Christ does not float or hover about in Heaven like a spirit, but He moves about as a human being with our flesh and blood and is never at more than one specific place at any given time. We also know that, if we were in Heaven now, we would indeed see Him there in a glorified state, but with a specific silhouette so that we would recognize the contours of His body.

God's presence in Heaven is very different than it is on earth. The highest and most glorious Being is omnipresent. Thus He is at each point totally God. However, much of His creation acts like a veil that covers His countenance. His countenance is not revealed here but only in Heaven, for there that veil does not hide Him; there He reveals His presence in majestic details. This is the reason that, when we call upon God, we look up to Heaven. The Scriptures teach that we must not

look for the throne of glory on earth but in Heaven. Seeing that the glory of the Highest Being is not revealed here but in Heaven, that the man Christ Jesus entered Heaven and received His power there, and that human Person has as substratum the eternal Son of God, the Scripture teaches that the man Jesus Christ is raised to the right hand of God and now lives with the Father in order to pray for us.

In this new state of glory and majesty, the man Christ Jesus has been assigned sovereignty over His Church by God. Since that Church is unthinkable without the world and that world unthinkable without all of nature, Christ's sovereignty includes absolute power over all the rulers over the earth, over all peoples and nations as well as over all elements of nature.

After the Ascension of Jesus Christ, God remains God. However, from that moment on a totally new circumstance was introduced, namely that God no longer rules everything directly, but through the mediation of the man Christ Jesus.

This would not have been possible if the man Christ Jesus were not also Himself God. However large the terms in which we think of the power and speed of movement of the Human who lives in Heaven, that power never reaches omnipotence or that speed, omnipresence. And since the Church, the world and nature cannot be governed except with omnipotence and omnipresence, government over all these by the man Jesus Christ is unthinkable, unless the "divinity, majesty, grace and Spirit"

(Heidelberg Catechism, question 48) can work through Him in a style that is marked by omnipotence and omnipresence.

During His state of humiliation, the Mediator supported His humanity with His divinity, so that He was not defeated and lost. Similarly, the same Mediator, now ascended to and living in Heaven, again supports His humanity with His divinity, in order to carry out the highest regiment

of government over the Church, and indirectly also over the world and nature, doing so in the Name of God and under His orders. That is what He said: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18).

If you now understand clearly the significance of Jesus' Ascension to and entering Heaven, then you will also realize that with these new circumstances, the Church on earth had also to enter into a different situation from what she had experienced so far. The Church has been there ever since the beginning of the world, with Adam representing her in Paradise, then Adam, Eve and Abel and on down the generations. Throughout the ages during which God Almighty supported His people on earth by the Word of His power, He had His chosen ones. These chosen ones were not simply loose pearls strung together on a cord, but they belonged together by virtue of their mutual organic relationship in the Body of Christ. But, and this must be added immediately, that Church of the Old Covenant or Testament did not yet have the Mediator, the man Christ Jesus, who, later having entered into the innermost holy place of the Heavens, ruled her.

The Ascension was an actual event. Before His Ascension, there was no human Christ Jesus up there in Heaven. The Old Covenant Church could never say what God's people confess now, namely that the human Christ Jesus lives in our flesh and blood in order to pray for and to govern us.

We in no way deny here that the Son of God had a relationship with His Church since the beginning. If dates were recorded from eternity, we might say that that relationship can be traced back to the eternal council of God. In addition, we know that the Son of God, already during the Old Covenant, watched over His Church in a special way as an Angel of His Presence.

But regardless of how highly we may rate that Old Covenant work of Christ, it was all provisional, preparatory, leading the way and intended to move up to empirical reality only in the fullness of time.

That was the time after the Word had become flesh, the Golgotha phase had passed, the reconciling Mediator had ascended, and the man Christ Jesus sat at the right hand of the power of God in the Heavens.

It was then, with the Ascension of Jesus, that the household of the Church suddenly was transformed. Now that the real "thing" had come, the shadow faded and disappeared. In the temple, the altar fires were extinguished, the lamp of the eternal light was blown out, the curtain was torn in two (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38) [1] and already the Roman legions were approaching to destroy city and temple according to God's plan. The Church no longer needs her earthly fulcrum, the visible Jerusalem, now that she has her firm and glorious foundation directly in Heaven in the person of her King and Mediator, the human Christ Jesus.

While the small ship of the Church was anchored at the holy sanctuary of Zion during the past ages, that anchor has been lifted. She is now moored to a completely different anchor, that is to say, to the human Christ Jesus, who as the new anchor has been securely moored in the Heavens. This implies that the Church, that till then was pressed down in her earthly form with its national character, felt that oppressive form slide off her shoulders after Jesus' Ascension, whereupon she dropped her national character and became the Church of the world. In the past, the Church was on earth, merely looking out at Heaven from the outside, but now that her principal Person, her One and All, has entered Heaven, she herself has after a fashion also been carried there. Take the example of the royal court where the king resides, even though most of his hangers-on, while at the court, are still some

distance from the king. So it is with the Church; Jesus is there, but most of His beloved are still on earth.

The government of the Church has been transferred. It is no longer the earthly David who reigns (2 Samuel 2:4; 2 Samuel 5:3-5), but the heavenly "David." The Church has been morphed from an earthly to a heavenly Church, since its government has been transferred from the city near the Mount of Olives to the city in Heaven. From this it flows necessarily and directly that the working of the Holy Spirit in the Church is very different before and after Jesus' Ascension.

When the Church did not yet have the human Jesus Christ as its Head and King in Heaven, the working of the Spirit was ad hoc, passing, temporary and without identifiable central focus. True, the Kabod, that is, the glory of the Lord, revealed itself above the atonement cover of the Ark (Leviticus 16:14). However, this shadowy splendor pointed to and derived its meaning from a better and more glorious future when the atonement cover would reside in the very heart of the real High Priest, Jesus Christ, while the Holy Spirit would find in Him, the centre and head of the Church, His most glorious Temple.

The Jerusalem temple was nothing but an example or image of that better Temple. Thus, when that better Temple arose, the image imploded into ruins. From now on, the human Jesus Christ was the true, essential and always intended Temple that had finally come and opened up. Till Gethsemane and Golgotha that temple had hidden its beautiful treasures and ornaments in the pitch-dark of night, but now, through and by the Ascension of Jesus, the eternal light was lit in that Temple and all those treasures began to sparkle and glitter so bright, that all the angels were surprised and aghast.

Christ is the Church. Now that Christ, the human Jesus Christ, had the Holy Spirit dwelling in Him and radiating out of Him, He could not at

this stage of His glory arrive in Heaven and establish the intended relationship with His Church without at once having the Holy Spirit radiate and emanate from Him, never to separate from her again. Now that is what took place on Pentecost.

This is what happened, when on the morning of Pentecost, sound and light broke into that upper room in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-4). Having arrived in Heaven (Luke 24:50-51) and having the glory of the Holy Spirit ignited in Him as the Temple of God, the human Jesus Christ now entered into the normal relationship with His Church that had always been intended and was prophesied of old. He now elevated her out of her national, earthly and preparatory position into her heavenly place. He severed her from her earthly anchor and moored her to Himself as the heavenly anchor. From now on He would no longer approach her from the outside, but as a cascading stream working from within, He poured the Holy Spirit into the Church which then became the Spirit of life they shared, with Him as Head and they His members.

[1] During the lifetime of Jesus, the holy temple in Jerusalem was the center of Jewish religious life. The temple was the place where animal sacrifices were carried out and worship according to the Law of Moses was followed faithfully. Hebrews 9:1-9 tells us that in the temple a veil separated the Holy of Holies--the earthly dwelling place of God's presence--from the rest of the temple where men dwelt. This signified that man was separated from God by sin (Isaiah 59:1-2). Only the high priest was permitted to pass beyond this veil once each year (Exodus 30:10; Hebrews 9:7) to enter into God's presence for all of Israel and make atonement for their sins (Leviticus 16). Read more: <http://www.gotquestions.org/temple-veil-torn.html#ixzz2vzXAUNOm>.

Meditation 20*

Clothed with Power from on High

I am going to send you
what My Father has promised;
but stay in the city until
you have been clothed
with power from on high.

Luke 24:49

Jesus ascended into Heaven to inherit a Kingdom. The time that has elapsed since has not been one of rest but of struggle and war and victory. He has ascended the throne. The scepter of the Kingdom has been placed in His hand and He has magnificently ruled amid His enemies throughout these ages.

He did not rule dressed in robes fashioned after earthly rule. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, My servants would fight to prevent My arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now My kingdom is from another place" (John 18:36). No, the Kingdom of Jesus Christ does not come with the ostentation, the external glitter or facade of an earthly kingdom. His conquests are within you; the character of His triumph, spiritual. He does not operate by force of sword or fire or stake, but by bending one's consciousness and by transforming the heart.

Oh, yes, the Kingdom of Jesus also has an external face, of course. But that external form is derived from that other part of creation that we know as Heaven, not from the lower part called earth or "the world." If only you could be transferred from here to the above and possessed organs capable of admiring the beauty and the radiance of what blazes

in that unseen light. How amazed you would be at the heart-gripping impression of that heavenly external face of Jesus' Kingdom. You would kneel in worshipful ecstasy.

The mightiest rulers on earth all have magnificent courts, where everything flaunts its splendour and displays its wealth of the most exquisite stonework.. However, all this magnificence and splendour is pale and lacklustre in contrast to the glory of Jesus sitting on His heavenly throne.

The Apostle John saw something of all this on the island of Patmos and promptly fell as if dead at Jesus' feet because of this overwhelming light (Revelation 1:17). The Prophet Isaiah peeked at it when he witnessed the splendour of the Seraphs on the throne (Isaiah 6:1-5).

The Apostle Paul caught a glimpse of it when he was breathing murderous threats on his Damascus Road (Acts 9:1-2). What kind of person, even if he felt only a shadow of such glory coming over him, would not be overcome by consternation and lose control over himself?

Don't make a mistake. Up there in Heaven you will no longer find that Child "wrapped in cloths" (Luke 2:7, 12), or the Son of Man who has no place to lay His head (Matthew 8:20; Luke 9:58), or the Man of Sorrows resembling a bruised reed (Isaiah 42:3; Matthew 12:20). To the contrary, there above He is the laurelled Conqueror, the King of glory, who has a crown of finest gold pressed on His head, the mighty Ruler who fills all the Heavens with His glory. And not only that. Outwardly, externally, that glory of Jesus' Kingdom is not only up there above, but it also descends down to this earth and one day, at the appropriate moment, the illustrious day will dawn when all rulers on earth will experience the power and force of this King of glory in a visible external way on earth. Leave them to their mockery; let them laughingly declare that they refuse to worry about the Lord and His Anointed. He,

who sits on the throne, knows that the Lord has anointed His King over Zion and that one day all those Pagans will become His inheritance. Those who over-spiritualize things will see the truth. Their fanatic spiritualization will bring them in open conflict with the Holy Scriptures and lead them to deceive the people that things in heaven are already very different and that one day things on earth will also reveal themselves very differently. In this spiritual mysticism the external hardly counts so that everything withdraws itself into the internal. They forget that if everything were purely spiritual, there would be no need for anything physical: the physical incarnation, physical death, physical resurrection or even a visible sacrament. This puts us on the road to the antichrist, for, says the Apostle John, he is the antichrist who denies that Jesus came in the flesh (I John 2:22; 4:3; II John 1:7).

May the Church of God therefore free itself from this sinful one-sided imbalance and confess, as the Heidelberg Catechism does so gloriously, that there is but one comfort, one solace, one balm for soul and body, in death as well as in life. Let us also in Christ constantly have an appreciation for the full, rich and versatile glory; glory in the spirit, but also in the visible; your innermost, but also with your external face. All of this holds with the provision that this "external face" is for now only in Heaven, but destined to be revealed later here below in the resplendent regimen of the Anointed of the Lord.

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The life of God's children is not to be one monotonous continuum, plodding and struggling from one day to the next, one generation dying off as the next emerges, as if we can expect nothing but to meaninglessly spin out the thread of our lives and, at the end, to be taken up into some spiritual vacuum. By no means. Our motto, our

struggle, our enthusiasm must have a goal, a prospect or vista, a solid hope and a firm expectation.

Of course, we have to accept that the struggle may last long, even centuries perhaps, while in the meantime there must be much suffering of the saints before that great and illustrious day arrives. But no matter how excellent this suffering of the saints may be, it becomes unholy if it is separated from the glorious anticipation of Jesus' Kingdom. It would also become unholy if we were to think that we are presently, after all these centuries, on a sort of stagnant plateau, and that perhaps many centuries later our King, the Anointed of the Lord, will arise from His slumber in order to establish His Kingdom on earth.

Israel's Watchman never slumbers nor sleeps (Psalm 121:4)!

Now as well as throughout all these ages, it is one mighty work, one holy dynamic activity, one majestic continuous struggle, one restless pursuit towards that glorious goal. Put in other terms, it is a never ceasing victory, a steady triumph, a sure approach with certain steps day after day towards the intended goal. Not for one moment should we entertain the thought that the struggle of King Jesus for the further development of His Kingdom is ever suspended for even a minute. Our King never negotiates a truce with his enemy. Never does He pull back from the battlefield.

Restlessly He pits His power against that of His adversaries. That's how it was when you were a child; so it is still today now that you are a mature adult; and so it will remain till your senior years. When you pass on to better regions, that struggle will continue over your grave. It will not end until He comes for whom all graves will unlock themselves. Thus all God's children are steadily involved in a battle and, while battling, they are constantly on the way to an abiding

triumph and lasting victory. All their struggle is merely one mighty preparation for that one great future day, when the clouds shall break and the Kingdom of our King descend to earth.

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Thus a child of God here on earth may never think that the Kingdom of God has actually already arrived and that all we have above in Heaven is a shelter and protection of this earthly kingdom. To the contrary, he must live and struggle in the steadfast and living realization that he is not in his own country but in the Kingdom of God. At best, he has been sent to a distant dependency in order to fight and struggle for the honour of his King, constantly remembering that the triumph does not belong to that far island or that lonely and forsaken dependency, but that it will be celebrated in the true realm of the King--in the Heavens above.

This should easily be understood, especially in countries with far-flung dependencies or colonies. Their citizens live in their own land along with their ruler, whether king, prime-minister or president. But far off somewhere, there are those dependencies, colonies or overseas possessions. Citizens of the metropolis go live and work in those distant places, not for themselves nor for that dependency; they go there to fulfill their national calling. Their orders and directions come from the metropolis; they send their tributes and profits back home. They live far away, but it is a life from and for the metropolis. Should the colony obtain its independence, the metropolis citizens will immediately return home. That is their country and that's where they belong.

That's how it is with the children of God on earth with respect to their King, who is in Heaven. The Kingdom is with Him. From Him come the orders. They do not live for themselves nor for this earth.

Everything comes from above and returns there. The land, the Kingdom for which they strive and struggle, is not for them on earth but above in the Heavens. Jesus does not exist for the world, but all the world exists for Him. That's why Pentecost follows on the heels of the Lord's Ascension.

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He ascended to inherit a Kingdom, but He had hardly ascended the throne when an amazing miracle occurred through which He made His reign on earth invincible with one stroke and prepared for His assured triumph on that great and illustrious day. If He is the substantive and real King on the throne up there above and (1) His Church on earth must battle for Him and (2) He must be revealed there as the victorious King on earth, then there has to be community and commonality between this King and His redeemed here below. The battle for His Kingdom on earth and the triumph of that Kingdom in the Heavens cannot be a mere figment of the imagination. It cannot exist only in theory or amount to mere pondering or dreamed-up invention. It must be real; it must actually exist in power.

Now, that's what it finally became through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. That outpouring is not a mere enlargement or permutation in the world of spirits. No, it is a sudden invasive invasion into the human heart by the power from on high, of such a power that outrivals all other powers with irresistible force. Our King Himself said to His disciples before He ascended to His throne that they would be clothed "with power from on high" (Luke 24:49).

Every battle is a struggle between opposing powers. Therefore, over against His honour and glory, the world combines all of her forces in order, if at all possible, to resist the victory of our King. Of course, our King has to counter that extremely great power of the world

with an even stronger force.

As the world derives her power from her kingdom, so must our King derive His power and make it effective from His kingdom. For the world it is a matter of having her supporters and faithful empowered out of the depth, but for our King, those He redeemed and purchased are empowered from on high. His power thus came and comes from on high. From that realm "on high" emerged a real and effective power, a power that neither fights with a sword nor uses physical violence to restrain the spirits, but one that penetrates into the deepest pores of the human soul. From there it influences the innermost of his consciousness, from that consciousness his life, his muscles, and everything he accomplishes.

This is not a power from the outside to the inside, but the reverse, from the inside to the outside! It is for that reason that it is an irresistible and all-victorious power. After all, it is the power of the Holy Spirit, the One which the entire Church worships and Who, together with the Father and the Son, comprises the only and majestic God, Who is worthy to be praised throughout eternity!

Pentecost is thus the flowing of the power of the Lord of Lords into the world of human hearts in order to gain the victory and to rule first those hearts and, through the hearts, gradually the world. This is not a temporary sensation of higher power. No, the rule of King Jesus in that world of human hearts continues restlessly without ever ceasing. Ever since that great Pentecost day, that power of the Holy Spirit has never ever been lacking in either our human lives or in that of the Church of Christ.

That which was once poured out, stayed and shall stay; it is inseparably tied to the Lord's Church. Even in times when the glow of the gold seemed obscured and people were under the delusion that the

entire Church was destroyed, on hindsight it was clear that it never ceased its work, perhaps not above ground, but certainly at least underground. This is a forever advancing triumph of our King in the hearts of the children of mankind.

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Do remember: All this does not depend on massive crowds of people. The power and glory of our King would not diminish one bit, even if He had in this entire world rescued only one single human heart from death, turned him towards Him and won him for eternity as the gem of choice in His crown. The multiplication of restored hearts is, of course, glorious, but it remains multiplication. Jesus' real glory lies in the essence of His victory and reign, not in the continuous increase of His subjects.

All human power on earth combined has constantly proved itself powerless to affect root change in the heart of even one single person that resisted it. All tyrannic and despotic violence, even in its most cruel format, proved completely helpless over against the tough resistance of even one single human will. It is only that unique "power from on high" dating from Pentecost, with which our King has succeeded for many centuries. That continues and will continue to turn even the most fanatic opponent into His bosom friend, turn the Sauls into Pauls (Acts 12:9), thistles into a myrtle trees (Isaiah 41:19, 55:13), eventually to establish for Himself a permanent and imperishable sign and established monument in human hearts.

The dynamic of "being clothed with power from on high" continues to operate till this day. The decisive question for our lives is one of two things. Whether the main direction of the labour of our souls and our struggles is in sync with that power and in line with the channel it follows or whether we fortify ourselves against God with power from

the depth of our own hearts, obstructing the progress of the flow of the Spirit whether consciously or subconsciously. For whoever follows the flow of that river there is a Pentecost in that life. That life becomes one continuous pilgrimage from his Pentecost to his eternal Paradise. Whoever is not carried along by this flowing river or does not bow before our King, goes upstream against that power and will one day, as sure as the irresistibility of that power, be sucked under by this river.

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Ah, "being clothed with power from on high" has such deep meaning. Negatively, the mark and sign that the King up there above has pointed His scepter to you and shown you His favour is not merely being "clothed from on high" or a purely emotional experience. To be sure, our feelings must not be allowed to petrify or be blunted. Neither may we despise the blessedness of an emotional life in the love of God. Nevertheless, though such an experience is indeed the effect of being so "clothed," it is not that operation itself.

More positively, "being clothed with power" constitutes an escape from your spineless, tepid, mindless dullness. It does away with limp hands and languid knees, but puts power into those hands and energizes those knees. It once again animates the blood and creates a blessed glow in the arteries of our souls. Yes, clothed "with power!" There is no more the fearful shaking reed every time satan lurks around the corner or sin tempts you even before you are actually assailed. It is to be clothed with power to ward off, to resist, to battle and to overcome in the Name of your God.

If there is need to render help to someone, being clothed with power will prevent you from shirking your responsibility and thinking that others will jump into the fray, since your strength will accomplish

nothing and you are helpless in your languor. No! You have been "clothed with power from on high" in order to step in and to generously give assistance, to lovingly offer support and to compassionately apply a dedicated heart.

"Clothed with power from on high" has as its goal for you to reach out beyond yourself in the Name of God in any number of situations. Where you used to keep quiet, now you can speak up. Where previously there was no prayer, now you lead in prayer. In short, "clothed with power from on high" means that the crippled now jump like deer and the dumb sing of the mercies of the God of Jacob. All of that is the operation of the Holy Spirit, who therefore is our soul-refreshing Comforter, for He comes into our hearts as a messenger from the King and pours our hearts full with fresh vigour and oil till they overflow.

In all of this the wonderful mystery is that He does two seemingly opposite things simultaneously. He girds the weak with glorious power, while at the same time turning this new powerful hero into a small child before his Lord and King.

Abba, our Father who is in Heaven!

Meditation 21*

Receive the Holy Spirit

He may strengthen you

with power through His Spirit

in your inner being.

Ephesians 3:16

Pentecost draws and compels every soul that loves God, to bring praise, honour and worship to the Holy Spirit; to Him who teaches, leads and comforts us; to Him who prays in, with and for us with unutterable sighs; who with the Father and the Son is eternal and veritable God to be praised in all eternity. This is the One through whom He reveals the gifts of life and of reconciliation to us, who regenerates ("re-births") us and glorifies the Son in us. He is our Re-Creator because He is our Saviour, who quickens our despondent spirit. He is the Power of the power of all believers, our inner Light that dispels our internal darkness. As Immanuel is "God with us," so the Holy Spirit is "God in us." We are His temple and He makes our hearts His dwelling place!

What benefit does the sun bring you, when the moon inserts itself in between, intercepts the light and prevents it from reaching you?

Similarly, how would your Christ, the Sun of your righteousness, benefit and refresh you, if the light of the Sun, which in this context is the Holy Spirit, could not penetrate you?

Therefore, no, we do not separate the Father from the Son nor the Son from the Holy Spirit. But does that not allow us to declare or confess that it is first the Spirit through whom all the love of the Father and the reconciliation of the Son becomes a personal soul experience for

us? Or, should we ever taste the most blessed fellowship with the Eternal Being, would it not be God the Holy Spirit who would induce that joy into our bosom and make that blessed experience real?

This arrangement neither places the Father behind the Son nor in the shadow of His glory, for the Holy Spirit proceeds from both Father and Son. Furthermore, that Spirit, proceeding from both, never points to Himself but always glorifies both Father and Son. That is the reason the Holy Spirit is not so dominant in your spiritual life. He is the light that illuminates everything and without which everything would lose its beauty, but that Himself remains unseen and imperceptible. The Spirit never comes out in the open, never displays Himself, is never pretentious, but is the constantly serving and supporting personal divine love beneath all the movements in the soul. Wherever He is, there is light shed on the indescribable compassion of the Father as well as on the unsearchable riches of salvation and redemption that lie hidden in the Son. The Holy Spirit in you rejoices when the light displays that compassion and those riches, or when He focuses your eye on that and keeps it there. He rejoices when He can create in your soul awareness, feeling and passion for all that, and when your soul opens up to drink the dew of heaven along with the radiance of His eternal love.

Because of all of this, it cannot be otherwise but that it takes a long time before love for the Holy Spirit begins to burn in your soul, for all His works go unnoticed. He tends to timidly withdraw Himself so that you really have to actively pay attention in order to detect Him. And then, it sometimes joyfully happens through that unnoticed work that you experience your bonds to the Father and the Son. Ah, then that tender compassion of the Father and that total self-sacrificial love of the Son easily fill you with such a strong tension that you neglect to

ask who it is that prepared this inner joy in you, or who made it possible and who bestowed it.

The child of the Kingdom arrives at a later stage and along a different route.

My brother and sister, allow me to tell you of that route of the Pentecost of the Lord. You see, that quiet, hidden operation of the Holy Spirit serves not only to show you the glory of the Father and the beauty of His dear Son, but He also has another function, a sad and almost ignominious one. The Holy Spirit must also lead you to self-discovery by letting its clear and irresistible light fall on what lies in your heart, on what your soul hides, on what contaminates your journey among men and what it is in the course of your soul that dishonours you in the eyes of God.

Sometimes the Spirit will be cruel towards you, precisely to lead you to the mercies of the Father. He spares you nothing. He brings out of your hiding places everything, everything that you have ever been, thought or did and what you had so eagerly hidden, burrowed and made invisible. He puts it all in the light of the divine countenance. Yes, the Holy Spirit dares to be cruel in order for you to open your heart to the soft tenderness of the Son. For example, when you lived in deep pretence before your child and were satisfied you had covered yourself with a beautiful varnish; that is when the Holy Spirit exposed your most horrible iniquity in all its depth to your child.

At first, this turns you off. Ah, we think, the Father in Heaven is sweet and loving to the heart. In order to love us with His unutterable love, there is His eternal Son.... But, why in addition that Holy Spirit, who is so near us but spares us nothing? Why does He always dig deeper and deeper into our souls and, like a highway robber, rob us of our false peace to leave us with such inner disquiet? That's when we

have moments when we wish the Holy Spirit away; if only He were not there! This is a terrible thought that is almost never expressed but nearly always experienced in the spiritual struggles of the righteous. Experienced, yes, but also resisted, banned and regretted with hot tears of repentance and the terrible failure to recognize the most tender form of divine love that expresses itself precisely in that act of cruelty on the part of the Holy Spirit.

Do not forget: the Father and the Son also love the Holy Spirit and want nothing to do with your worship and praise as long as you fail to recognize the Spirit and ignore Him. And so it happens that this higher and holier love makes you tender and renders you truly conscious that all this harshness, all these penetrating and apparent cruelties of the Holy Spirit are at their core nothing but precious demonstrations of deep divine mercy.

But this is no more than a beginning, for the struggle of the Holy Spirit with your spirit has not yet reached its end: This is actually where the true spiritual struggle begins, even though on a wholly other terrain, involving much more anxiety, in a much more fearful relationship and in a manner directly opposite to its first beginning.

The first was an inner pressure and squeeze exerted by the Holy Spirit to convince you of your sin and lead you to reconciliation, God the Holy Spirit Himself pleading with you, "Be reconciled to God!"

But now things become very different. Praise the Spirit, you have now been convicted of sin and have drunk from the fountain of salvation that has opened the House of David in the struggle against sin and unrighteousness. You drank and you gained power! Oh, how gloriously did your soul revive under the lilies of eternal love. At this stage, you naturally expected that the Holy Spirit would praise and encourage you and withdraw from that sharp unsparing spiritual criticism.

How disappointed you were. The same Holy Spirit continued with that same apparent cruelty and lack of compassion to disparage all your good works and to dismiss with strong disapproval the beautiful robe you have been given with a contemptuous, "Nothing but a castaway!" You did not understand this; you could not bear it; it was too much for you. You felt entitled to some benefit. After all, you had forsaken the world and confessed your sins. You strove with holy zeal and excelled in bearing fruit and doing good works for your Lord. Then to find out that all of this is still besmirched by sin and violence from an unclean fountain! Now you understood Israel's lament, "Let us return to Egypt!" You nearly gave up on your pilgrimage to the holy land of Canaan (Numbers 14:1-4).

Truth be told, you would already have given up and either returned to or died in the wilderness where Israel wandered for forty years (Exodus 16:35; Numbers 32:13; Deuteronomy 8:2), were it not that that faithful, loving Holy Spirit, who never gives up on you during such dark nights of the soul. He went before you like a pillar of fire (Exodus 13:21).

And then what happened? Then you said to the Holy Spirit, "Then I can do nothing, not love, not work, not pray, not even sigh! If all of that is contaminated with sin, then there is no hope for me in eternity!"

Then you expected that the Holy Spirit would comfort you by assuring you, "It's not that bad with you. You can do some things." That was not the answer. Instead, "Yes, that's how it is with you, child of the Father and redeemed of the Son, you are wholly incapable; nothing good comes from you. But listen well and experience now that deep divine mystery, that mystery of godliness that you can finally experience only now. For this purpose have I, your God the Holy Spirit, been sent in order to make all of this effective in you eternally and completely; so to work that you will drink in all the blessedness as if it were your

work, even though it was I who did this in and through you, to deprive you eternally from all self-congratulations, which has been the bane of your soul!"

This is where it all begins with that intimate exchange of the soul with the Holy Spirit, so that the child of God gives praise to the Spirit saying, "You, the Spirit of God, did and does it all in me." The Spirit responds by withdrawing Himself quietly and impressing on the soul a consciousness of a blessed awareness of a glorious spiritual power and display of spiritual dynamics. At that point, we ourselves no longer pray, but the Holy Spirit prays in us and we follow Him, so that there is an echo on our lips of what the Spirit has pleaded in us. Now we can no longer practice self-love, but the Spirit pours out His love into our hearts, so that we grow tenderly warm internally and can no longer be indifferent or cold. We are now consumed with affection for all the people of the Lord. By now we know nothing of Jesus on our own, but the Holy Spirit within us praises the love of our Saviour so gloriously that affection for the Lord and King burns within us. And then the Holy Spirit becomes so indescribably gentle, compassionate and attentive that our soul says to itself, "How can it be that I could regard the Spirit for so long as unloving and even unmerciful? There is no mercy more tender than His!"

By now you will have no more sorrow, for the Spirit has already anticipated it long before and unnoticeably prepared and administered the medicine that would comfort that sorrow in you. You will never face a temptation or the Spirit has already anticipated that long since, knowing that your faith had to go through the crucible, but that you would not resist it so that you would be terribly distressed. Like a mother cares for her slumbering child, so the Spirit will strengthen your spirit with powers and command His angels to ensure no stone would

bump against you (Luke 4:10-11).

Ach, where should we begin or where end if we were to mention all the ways in which the Spirit displays His tenderness? Only those who have experienced it know that love. Only the wedding guests glow from the radiance of that soft, tender, beneficent light. That is the reason they love the Holy Spirit; therefore they yearn for the fellowship and the operation of the Spirit; and therefore is their Pentecost blessed. Blessed not because finally a church was established, for that had been there since the beginning of the world. Nor because the Apostles had been converted at this time.... No, but they are blessed, because on Pentecost the Spirit once again brings home into their hearts His glorious, tender, self-denying and wakeful love, calls them and assures them that it is not a matter of His still being on the way, but that He is already there. He is in the Church of the living God and both can and shall bless you with inner solace within the bonds of the Covenant of Grace.

Do not lose yourself in ambitions and ideologies, but open your eyes to reality. What do you see and find there? This, that even God's most favourite children, even the greatest saints in this life, again and again wander away from the Holy Spirit and thus sadly fall apart without comfort or consolation. Then, in their foolishness, they think, "The Holy Spirit has departed from me." They complain in their faithlessness, "Who will lead me to a safe city?" In their exhaustion they conclude that it has all been nothing but a dream!

That is why our Pentecost is a message of quiet and blessed consolation, because at that time God's Holy Word comes to their souls with power to testify, "No, the Holy Spirit has not departed. He has been poured out. He lives in the Church of the Lord!"

This is the truth, that you, having saddened the Holy Spirit, feared

within yourself, "Now the Spirit will no longer bestow His love on me"
and that, punishing you for thinking His love, compassion and mercy to
be so limited, He meets you with even greater divine compassion,
saying,

I was not surprised at the sadness you caused Me. I know you. I know
what kind of creature you are; I will never ever give up on you. See,
here I am, your God and the Restorer of your soul. Drink in the light;
drink in the power; drink in the hope from my consoling Face!

Meditation 22*

Love in Our Hearts Poured out by the Holy Spirit

And hope does not put us to shame,
because God's love has been poured out
into our hearts through the Holy Spirit,
who has been given to us.

Romans 5:5

Together with the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is the true and eternal God. Actual God. Not a third part of the divine Being or a part that belongs to that Being. No, that one highest Being is simultaneously Father, simultaneously Son and simultaneously Holy Spirit. Each of the three Persons has the same Being and together they are of one substance. God the Holy Spirit is therefore also the omnipresent God. He is not a God from afar, but near by, close to each one of us. It can never be said that the Holy Spirit is here but not there; He is everywhere and everywhere in His totality. God the Holy Spirit is even in hell, where He is as a consuming fire, a terror in the conscience of the damned.

Even if the Spirit is always everywhere, He by no means uncovers Himself, reveals or displays Himself in every place or at all times. He can be and is there in such a way that we do not always hear his footsteps, that His face is veiled for us, that we do not listen to His voice. In effect, where this is the case, it is as if He were not there. But, after you have sinned, the pressure of an Accuser, who does not allow you rest, suddenly surprises you in your inner being. That does not mean that Accuser was not there before. No, He was there all the time but hidden to you. That Accuser was the Holy Spirit. The Holy

Spirit uncovers His formidable face here for a moment and then once again goes into hiding, according to the character of the person for whom He uncovers Himself, judging at one time, comforting the next. He is always the same God the Holy Spirit, who with the Father and the Son is one unique, eternal and true God, but sometimes He hides Himself behind a thick veil, sometimes behind a more transparent one. At other times He uncovers His entire face, His glorious and comforting face. For that reason the Scripture teaches and the Church of Christ knows from experience that there are souls who have never noticed anything of the Holy Spirit and those to whom the Spirit has revealed Himself. Even blessed believers have times and moments during which they miss the Spirit and other times and moments when they possess the Spirit in ecstatic blessedness.

When the Holy Spirit uncovers Himself to an unbeliever, he will see a "consuming fire," avoids it and slouches away. That is the Holy Spirit without the Mediator!

Should it please God to cause someone to be born again through faith, then that person will also get to see the Holy Spirit, but as the Comforter, gentle, loving, teaching and anointing the soul. That is the Spirit poured out by the Mediator, reconciling, and indescribably refreshing and bountiful. The heavy fog is swept away by mercies. Thus the eye of the soul now sees the same Holy Spirit whom it did not see previously. While previously alone, that soul now has God in the innermost room of the heart.

Sometimes the Holy Spirit uncovers Himself to the unconverted without the latter being born again. We don't question why that should be, but the Bible so teaches in Hebrew 6. Not a few people have memories dating from before their real conversion about experiences of seeing lights of phantom conversions. However, such an experience is wholly different

from the operation of the Holy Spirit in genuine second births. Only a tip of the veil is lifted for just a moment, only to fall back into its normal position.

However, with genuine second births, the veil totally falls away so that the view of the Spirit hits and falls upon us. This amounts to His being poured out in us; His indwelling in His temple; His coming into us, living, praying, comforting and motivating. Even among those born again, the eye of the soul can at times close again either partly or fully so that it can no longer see the Spirit (clearly), but in such cases the consoling face retains His presence; the Holy Spirit does not withdraw.

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What is then the full blessing in that consoling and comforting presence? It is this, brother or sister, that in, with and through the Holy Spirit the love of God is poured out into your hearts. The holy Apostle Paul testifies to this, and to that witness the Church of Christ responds with an "Amen," that also is echoed in your soul. Understand well that this is not that lukewarm, tepid, diluted explanation that reduces the Spirit to a mere heightened awareness so that its beneficiaries now instinctively practice love as God is love. It's nothing like that. This love of God is the tender, divine, merciful love of the Highest Being towards us that, like a river revives the shriveled pasture and refreshes the thirsty garden of our souls through the streaming in of a cavalcade of the Holy Spirit. You do not have love in you; your heart is devoid of it. Whatever may look like love within you is one of three forms. It could be that instinctive love of a mother hen towards her chicks, but that has no value with God. It could be a display of love that suddenly shrivels up when it becomes a threat to your ego. It could also be the only true

form of love that has been created in your loveless heart by a Higher Force, a nurturing that penetrated your cold spirit from the outside, a holy spark in your heart, a splash from the blaze of eternal tenderness. By nature your heart does not believe in God's love. Measuring Him by your own yardstick, you think of the Eternal as cold and without passion. Oh, yes, you say, "God is love. He, the Father of all forgives all." But that is mere idle talk, superficial chitchat without root or fiber. Meet up with distress--you're hungry without food; your favourite person has been cut off from your heart; your honour is under attack--and you will see what remains of God's love. That contemptuous fencing with beautiful sounds about God is deeply offensive. What has anyone who speaks in this manner of forgiveness, ever, ever experienced of that horrendous guilt for which he himself personally needed to receive forgiveness? All this is empty, meaningless gibberish. Being cold yourself, you thought of your God as equally cold, carefully measuring and reasoning things out as you do in your own cumbrous, matted soul.

But, then, suddenly a fire shot into your bones and your marrow writhed within you. God struck you down as you felt your unrighteousness cascading over your head. Then, yes, then you suddenly discovered your God, as your illusions fell away and the real God appeared before you, a totally consuming Fire! That's when finally, finally the Holy Spirit forced Himself into your heart and came to dwell in its inner chamber. From there He addressed you with words of unspeakable blessedness, while you suddenly came to understand all that inexpressible tenderness of the consoling face of your God. That's when love came, the love of God, that warm, glorious glow of living love of the loving life. It was all food and drink at the same time, complete nourishment for your soul. That love of God was inexpressible; it was something

indescribably glorious, like an inflow of a stream of many waters, in which each individual drop expanded into a full ocean of riches and blessings.

Oh, the Holy Spirit is God Himself. He does not blend Himself with you, but all that you feel and realize in your innermost being, is what He makes you, as it were, co-feel and co-realize concurrently with Him. Along with that come the divine joys and blessings He Himself relishes and experiences, now that that holy peace has descended into your terrorized heart and God Eternal has flooded you with His divine mercies. That, that is what the holy Apostle of the Lord experienced when he wrote, "God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit," to which he added, "who has been given to us" (Romans 5:5). Everything is freely given us. The Holy Spirit is given us out of pure grace, with the result being a mandatory and eternal gratitude laid upon all of God's chosen.

Meditation 23*

The Spirit Gives Life

The Spirit gives life;
the flesh counts for nothing.

John 6:5

A tree with its marrow dried up is dead. The trunk may still stand, the dry branches still hanging and the pale leaves still clinging, but the tree is dead. It is no longer a tree, but only wood, wood that is most likely of no use for the planer anymore but only for the furnace.

Without its marrow, the tree is gone.

Do you understand this parable of the dead tree? The living marrow is God's Holy Spirit. Wherever the Holy Spirit withdraws from the leaves or twigs, from the branches or stems, from the trunk or roots, there remains nothing but barrenness, mould and death.

In the spiritual sense of the word, this world in and by itself is nothing but dead. Everything is dead with nothing excluded. It is only insofar as the Spirit invades that death and inspires new life, that life emerges and remains. It isn't that there is life but it has shriveled and that the Holy Spirit irrigates it and thus enables it to refresh itself and raise its head again. No, at first there is no life; there is nothing but absence of, lack of and want of life. There are only some indications that there should actually be life, but in its place we find mere lifeless, soulless and powerless death. In the midst of this, the Prophet testifies, "Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live" (Ezekiel 37:9).

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And see, it happens according to the prophecy. The Spirit blows, the

Spirit comes, the Spirit works. Where He comes, there is life; where He has not yet come, death remains. Also death returns, when the Spirit came but was grieved and withdrew again. My brother, my sister, imprint it deeply inside of you: It is the Spirit, only the Spirit, and no one or nothing else than the Spirit that creates life.

A church from which the Spirit has withdrawn is dead; it is nothing but a dried up tree trunk and will be cast into the fire. A generation, a clan, a family from which the Spirit has withdrawn sinks into spiritual death and breaks up. As with a dried up tree, so also does the brittle wood of a dead generation crumble at the first touch. Similarly--and pay special attention here--, when the Spirit withdraws from any circle of pious worshippers, including each pious member thereof, then that circle dies and turns into bait for the devils. It will not take long for such a heart to reveal that it did for a time know a degree of external grace, but that in its essence it really is still dry and without the life-giving sap. It still does not live, but remains dead and is headed for the fire--unless it revives and comes to life. All life is from the Holy Spirit.

Think of it. If the Holy Spirit had not been at work and there had been no law, word or prophecy in Israel; if no wrestler had ever fought, no zealot ever striven, no martyr would ever have had the courage to sacrifice his life. Without the Holy Spirit not a single soul would ever have come to life, no church ever founded, no preaching of the Word ever heard, no power resisting evil ever risen, no lie ever unmasked, no innocence ever established, no proud heart ever softened and not one single blessed and refreshing prayer, cry or sigh ever ascended to the throne!

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When God Almighty looks down out of Heaven upon this earth, He mostly

sees a world caught up in death and curse. But His holy eye will also discover many positives that are loving and commendable, praiseworthy virtues, expressions of compassion, long-suffering or mercy. Yes, but realize that in whatever form or shape these appear, whether sighs of relief arising from this world, or scenes of love that rise to the throne on high, it is only the Holy Spirit who has established these. It is the Spirit that got them going, kept them going, kept animating them and, finally, the Spirit who brought their expression before God. The Church of Christ as well as our own hearts is indebted to the Holy Spirit for everything, everything that is in the world.

To the extent that the Holy Spirit withdraws even for a brief moment from us, spiritual winter sets in over us, the cold slides over our hearts and then covers our souls as with ice, while the stream of life is blocked and death lurks just around the corner.

However, when the Spirit returns and once again sends us His beams of light, it becomes summer again in the soul: The icy bottom of our human emotions melts, the heart is once again nurtured, the sounds of the pitter-patter of life revive, and the precious blossoming fruit in the field refreshes the eye of the soul.

Ah, if only the world understood its real condition, it would do only one thing: Without ceasing, it would call upon and plead for the Spirit to enter its bosom.

Ah, if only the churches of Christ on earth had any insight into their real import, banning all other considerations, how they would call upon and plead for the Spirit to protect the arteries of the organism without ceasing.

Ah, if only our generations and families would realize what it is that keeps them together, how they would call upon and unceasingly plead, "Do not cast me from Your presence or take Your Holy Spirit from me"

(Psalm 51:11).

Ah, yes, if only your own soul realized and apprehended on what her salvation, her adornment and her glory depended, how she would without ceasing call upon and plead for the experience of the holy presence of the Spirit. If the riches of the Holy Spirit were known and understood, how love for the Spirit would explode, set souls aglow and bring about an awakening of the dead.

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As it is, we tend to conduct most of our affairs without the Holy Spirit. We have a Father, who cares for our necessities, who is the healer of our diseases and upon whom we call upon in times of danger. We have a Jesus who died for our sins and through whom we have redemption through His blood.

And now, what of our sanctification and preparation for the road to life ahead? Oh, that! We half pretend we can manage that mostly on our own, possibly needing a bit of extra power provided by some entity outside of us that we label "Holy Spirit." Such an attitude grieves the Spirit; He takes it as a reproach. It may not prevent Him from doing His work, but it does hold it up. Till people go through their deep valleys to arrive at life and some appear again who love the Holy Spirit, entrust their souls to Him and gain understanding that all blessings flow out of Him, then there is life again, life in the heart, life in the Church, and life among the nations!

That is a life that arouses opposition, evokes hate; a life that provokes the active hostility of death, sin and the devil, but that knows no distress. The life sap moves about. There is faith once again, a faith that is lived and brings blessing to the soul. The angels of God who see it, burst into praise in holy joy. And everything that receives breath from the Spirit sings, "Veni, Creator Spiritus! Come

Spirit, the Creator of life!"

That Spirit takes pleasure in His own work, the pleasure being salvation, the salvation that is available already here on earth for all God's children.

Meditation 24*

The Lion Has Roared

The lion has roared--

who will not fear?

The Sovereign Lord has spoken--

who can but prophesy?

Amos 3:8

Most readers of these meditations have never heard the roar of a lion with his full strength in the wild. We may have heard the sound with which a lion makes the bars of his zoo cage shimmer. Even then does it make us shiver, as when it snorts out of his nostrils, snores out of his throat or roars with his wide opened maw. But what is this snore of the basically tame lion in his cage compared to the thundering roar with which the wild lion terrifies the desert or spreads shivering fear throughout the forest?

God created that roar. The lion did not just find it, but the Creator of this royal animal created and instilled that roar in the king of the wild. That roar began as a thought in the Lord of Lords and from there this divine thought entered this majestic animal.

This gigantic, overpowering wild animal is a dreadful illustration to us humans, an illustration of brute strength that far supersedes human power, of an enigmatic power that lurks in secret places and then suddenly wakes up and frightens any nearby human soul. That's the reason the roar of a lion can serve at the same time as an image of the wrath of God as well as of the stealthy crawl of satan. The immense wrath of God and that snorting of satan are both superhuman powers that create images within us and symbolically speak to us through that

unsettling animal. Such animals also have their purpose, which, among others, is this higher role of reminding us humans of the reality of immense super-human powers.

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The Scripture frequently points us to the roar of God's wrath and compares it to the roar of a lion in the forest. In Hosea we read, "They will follow the Lord; He will roar like a lion. When He roars, His children will come trembling from the west" (Hosea 11:10). Or take Isaiah: "As a lion growls, a great lion over its prey--and though a whole band of shepherds is called together against it, it is not frightened by their shouts or disturbed by their clamor--so the Lord Almighty will come down to do battle on Mount Zion and on its heights" (Isaiah 31:4). And John wrote on 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 carefree along the trail in the forest and are oblivious to any danger, let alone a lion, that does not mean there is no lion. She may be hiding with her cubs in the thick of the underbrush, awaiting her hour and ready to pounce upon her prey. When she sees her victim from afar, she opens her maw wide, lets her manes rise up and allows the warmth of her blood spurt out of her throat and nose as vapour and then comes the terrifying roar that thunders through the woods and makes the entire forest floor shake.

It is here that the Holy Spirit makes you hear an echo of the bulldozer of God's wrath among the nations and in the hearts of individuals. Neither the nations nor individuals ever consider that there is an immense God in the wild forests of their lives. They live without a care, oblivious of any evil or suspicion of a power that will judge them. This goes on and on from day to day and from year to year, till,

suddenly, the Lord lets go a mighty roar in the life of such nations or individuals. When we then hear that roar of His holy wrath, puny beings that we are in our impotence, we tremble with our entire beings and are terrified to the very core of our lives before the face of the Lord of Lords.

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Our conscience is the ear with which we hear the roaring Lion. Conscience, that wonderful interpreter of our inner thoughts, immediately interprets for us in a pithy and touching way what the wrath of God crashing into our lives means for us. That conscience is a wonderful memory created within us that reminds us in a split second and in vivid shades and colours of our forgotten past with its sinful history. It is that which relentlessly prostrates us, never gives us a way out, but judges us constantly and irrevocably. Our conscience within us understands that roar of the Lion and makes us shudder, because we have provoked the Lion of Judah. That is what grooves into our soul that endless, deep, cutting mortal agony.

The Lord God is on the way! Hear the roar of that Lion. I, I have infuriated this almighty God with His immense majesty!

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And then, suddenly, you lighten up. You no longer consider resisting, while fleeing will not help. In your fear, even before you feel all torn up inside of you, you feel yourself already succumb. And that is what saves you. Once that roar of the Lion overpowers you and makes you shudder, then suddenly the tickling, the excitement and that sinful search for your own ego falls away along with your egomania and your proud self-confidence. You suddenly find yourself reduced, dwindled and, as you collapse, your evil heart breaks and the proud spirit within you is squashed.

And then, then everything is glorious! Now the roaring of the Lion has suddenly achieved within you that which all the pressure to love, all words of warning or all holy intentions were not able to accomplish. Now it vibrates again in your soul that you are responsible to God and are to keep Him in mind, Him, the Eternal One, the almighty and all-authoritative God. Your soul lifts itself above the insignificant and lets go of all trivial spirituality.

The game is over; things are serious now. Dragging and slow feet are replaced by a steady and firm step. Even though the roar of the Lion may cease, you will never again forget the voice of the Lord of Lords, but you will walk in the awareness of His fellowship.

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And so that roar of the Lion will soon cease, but the nations have been startled and many hearts have become despondent in fearful terror. Ah, if only the children of God were attuned to their conscience and catch the vibration of God's majestic wrath. So many are slumbering that need to be woken up again, not tomorrow, but right now. See, the Lord beckons and all His children need to follow His cue.

And then there are so many children of God who still walk around unconverted but who will sooner or later be adopted as children, even though their ear is still plugged and their capacity to believe is still dulled. While they are still on their carefree path, they, too, need to perceive the roar of the Lion. They are the Lord's and need therefore to join His people.

The majesty of the Lord of Lords is so indescribably horrific. Does your heart sense nothing at all? If you experienced that roar, how can your heart withstand it?

Meditation 25*

You Are the Branches [1]

I am the vine; you are the branches.

If you remain in Me and I in you,

you will bear much fruit;

apart from Me you can do nothing.

John 15:5

A branch of a grapevine is nothing but a channel or a tube through which the root pumps the sap of the vine up to the trusses of grapes. Without the vine itself, the branch is nothing, insignificant and has nothing to offer, for the life is in the vine, while the fruit ripens in the grape trusses. The branch is between trunk and truss; its function is to suck up the sap, pump it up and let it through; also to carry the trusses till the grapes are ripe to be harvested. The significant parts are the vine plant itself and the grape trusses, but the branches are incidental.

Even as wood, branches of a grapevine have no value, for there is no wood that has less purpose or use. The grapevine has value and people offer money for grapes, but no one offers anything for just the branches. A branch, Jesus Himself said, has no use of its own beyond that of an ordinary weed that gets thrown away or burnt in the fire and the flames destroy it. The Lord thus deeply humiliated His people when He told them, "You are the branches," branches, the most useless and disposable item that a grower can imagine.

You proud people with all your pretensions, you pious with all your imaginations, you chosen members with all your holy sham, even if you claim Peter as your apostle or, like John, consider yourself "the

beloved of the Lord," you are mere branches! That is your title of honour. Therein lies all your hollowness and emptiness.

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All this, yes, except, and now the page turns completely, except you are properly and organically connected to the vine with real living fiber that does not only show leaf but also carries hefty trusses of swollen grapes. There is a difference of day and night between a branch that is cut off and one that is still in place. The branch that is cut off is not even worth throwing away; you do the winery operator a service if you take it away, but those functioning branches still connected, don't touch them. Those connecting branches are worth their weight in gold. The owner cares for them, supports them, ties them, prunes them and turns them towards the sun. Those branches will produce grapes.

When the owner notices a branch that is functioning properly and underneath its leaf notices budding trusses of grapes, then that otherwise useless branch has more value to him than the best of wood. He will almost defend this branch with his life should someone tear that branch or otherwise ruin it.

So spiritually the page turns as well. You, the people of the Lord, who are nothing but branches, once you are grafted into Immanuel and show budding grapes, then you who are otherwise less than useless, suddenly become indispensable to the vine. Without the branches, the vine cannot display its glory; without branches, our Father, our heavenly Husbandman, has no fruit to pluck from the Vine.

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Oh, would that the Lord's people would set their entire hearts on being grafted into Immanuel and quit playing around, but, instead, stand next to Immanuel or kneel before Him or look up to Him with pleading eyes.

All your external worldly involvement counts for nothing here. Even if you lay the branch on the vine and string it with rushes around the vine, it will still wither and the grower will rip it off and dump it.

Each child of God must be grafted, grown, annexed and plaited with its own fiber into this marvelous Vine. She has to be truly one plant with Him. By itself empty and hollow, offering only to serve as a passageway for the sap of life, but so grafted into and attached to the Vine that it does not exist on its own for even a moment, but lives from and grows as part of the Vine.

Even more, it is not enough that you are grafted into your Mediator by means of invisible fiber, but, being grafted in Him, you must also want to be nothing but His organ. It is not as if you as a branch produce the sap and then add it to the vine. Totally sapless and empty yourself, you must derive all your power and strength, all praise and love, all tenderness and devotion only from Him, your Jesus. Everything that goes on within you must first have happened in your Jesus before it arises in your heart. It must all be gained, imbibed and, as it were, sucked up through Him. The only function of the branch is to be a channel of the works of grace, of light, love and life.

You must allow the sap to pass on to the ends of the trusses to make them bud. You may not keep that life sap for yourself in order to cause you as empty branch to swell and increase till you reach the size of the branches of other trees. The branch uses very little of that sap for its own functioning; it pumps it all upward to the trusses. She knows that soon the heavenly Husbandman will come to seek the fruits of His Son. That's why it is the honour of the branch to offer the richly swollen grape trusses not as products of the branch, but as the fruit of the Vine, that is, as the fruit of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross to the Father, who is in Heaven.

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"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" (John 15:8). Pay attention: You carry the fruit but do not produce it. You carry it as a chandelier carries the light, but the fruit does not originate with you anymore than the light with the chandelier. You carry it for Christ. What you carry are His fruits, the products of His work, of His suffering, of the labour of His soul. You yourself have not participated in the least in the production of the fruit.

Yes, it is true that the grapes ripen and mature on your branch, something that is an inexpressible honour for you and for which you will never be able to praise and thank your Saviour sufficiently. But still, yours it is to carry, not for yourself but for Him who will soon harvest them. They hang on you, but they are for the Father and come from the Son. All your work is to accept them from the Son and, in the name of the Son, hand them over to the Father.

You even may and must make the leaf also grow and mature, but that leaf may also not lead you to ostentatiously parade around in your green outfit, except to cover the trusses of grapes and to foster their ripening. It is the Father, not you, who must be gloried in both leaf and fruit. All the glory must be attributed to the Father; yes, through you but out of the Son.

So it goes with anyone wanting to be a branch. A branch is the least and most unworthy on its own, but the most lovely when she pumps up the sap and thus carries the treasured fruit.

And now, you people are the branches! How does your soul participate? Are your branches attached to the Vine or do you simply lay next to the Vine?

[1] Translator's note: I fail to understand the reason this meditation

is included here, since it does not refer to the Holy Spirit even once, either directly or indirectly. For fuller understanding of this meditation, you are advised to read John 15:1-8.

Meditation 26*

Love through the Holy Spirit

And hope does not put us to shame,
because God's love has been poured out
into our hearts through the Holy Spirit,
who has been given to us.

Romans 5:5

Pentecost is a glorious celebration, but the contents of our thought and the holy stimulant of our joy on Pentecost lay hidden deep in our spirit. This Holy Spirit, who descended on Pentecost, is the eternal and veritable God; of one substance and co-eternal with the Father and the Son; proceeding from both Father and Son.

"You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout...; say to the towns of Judah, Here is your God!" (Isaiah 40:9). This text is a fitting song of jubilation as the Spirit is descending, even though it is different from the birth of the Son. There is no manger, no cloths in which to bind Him, no singing of the angel choir. When the Spirit descends, there is nothing your eye sees, your ear hears or your hand touches of the Spirit of life. To be sure, there were sounds and flaring flames, but of only momentary duration without repetition. Just for once; more symbol than reality. It was a sign rather than the event itself that, being wholly spiritual, hid in spiritual mystery.

But still, even here it is a matter of your God Himself coming! Not in a weaker sense or more external, but in a more intimate and deeper sense than in Paradise, on Sinai or at the manger in Bethlehem, for here your God does not come to you but in you. Not in order to live

among you but in you; not as happened in Paradise from where He withdrew, but to be with you eternally, to stay with you permanently. This is a mystery of inexpressible majesty, which is precisely the reason that it astonishes us more than speaks to us, it surprises us more than that it rationally convinces us.

Zion, that is, the Church of God, hardly dares to accept that her God Himself came to her when the Holy Spirit was poured out. She lacks the courage of faith to actually imagine this immense and most glorious fact that God chose her as His temple. That is why she modifies this joyful fact, debases and minimizes the Lord's deeds. In her minimal faith and unbelief she pretends that a portion of God's holy power came to Zion on Pentecost, but not God Himself. Isn't that astounding?

Think of it. Anyone daring to assert of the Bethlehem manger that it was not God Himself who came to us there, but merely a power of God, flies in the face of all God's people. Such a claim will be rejected as blasphemy. But when someone claims on Pentecost that it was not God the Son but the Holy Spirit who came to His temple, then people often feel free to downgrade this second miracle of divine compassion by spinning their own fabrication, while the Church of the living God hardly notices it.

Therefore this sin in the Church about Pentecost must be resisted at all cost. In so far as Zion is so unspiritual as to be incapable of absorbing that deep mystery of salvation, she is piling up guilt upon guilt for herself. She earns for herself triple guilt over the Lord's inheritance when He comes and Zion does not notice and she denigrates the coming of her God by rambling on about a coming of His power! No, if it were only for the sake of holier import or holier power or even a holier spirit, Pentecost would not have been necessary. The Psalmist sang of it and the prophet of Jehovah gave thanks for it. No, neither a

holier spirit nor a sanctifying spirit, but the Holy Spirit came into His temple on Pentecost.

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The salvation of a soul lies in being known by God and, as a consequence, to know God; first partially, but, one day, as we are known. Every impulse, all straining and striving in the soul of a child of God must strain towards establishing abiding fellowship with the Eternal God in its closest and most intimate form. This must not just be pious language, desire or wish, but take the form of a straining and pressing of the soul; that soul is incapable of resting before it reaches this goal. Just as hunger arouses and allows no respite, so also must that homesickness of the soul arouse you. Or, to say it with the Psalmist, as a deer that has been hunted to exhaustion by dogs and can no longer run, thirsts and pants after fresh streams of water (Psalm 42:1), so every soul in Zion must pant and thirst after fresh streams of life that flow out of the living God.

Alas, the soul of all mankind has sunk so deep that they in themselves no longer seek God, but flee from Him; not chase after Him, but avoid Him; not love, but hate Him. In spite of this, God the Lord in His divine compassion comes and pours the thirst for life into that deteriorated and degenerated soul, even when that soul often does not acknowledge that thirst and chooses death instead. Then, when the time comes for the soul to meet God, it does not burst out in holy ecstasy but continues in its false imagination, "It is not He Himself, but His power!" As in the case of Simon the Sorcerer in Acts 8:10, so it is said of the Holy Spirit when He came on Pentecost, "The Great Power of God!"

But this takes its toll. For Zion, callous and unfeeling as she veers from her God, grieves the Holy Spirit, does Him reproach and thus

necessarily deprives herself of His input and consolation.

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The cause of this sin is clear: our pride. Have you ever given deep thought to the difference between these two statements, "In the Holy Spirit on Pentecost God Himself came to me!" and "On Pentecost I became aware of divine power from on high?" Or don't you sense either that, when the Lord God moves into His Zion, Zion must be still, bow down and blot itself out in order that God do it all, God work it all out, God fulfill it all so that at the end He receive all the glory?

But if Zion proclaims, "I received divine power on Pentecost," then God is the giver of power, but Zion the possessor of power. This implies that it is Zion herself that now is going to operate with this holy power, pushes through with it and establishes it. And when everything comes to an end, then Zion, that is, the child or Church of God, will boast she has achieved it herself. Yes, with power from God, true, but still herself.

Many industrial machines were driven with power derived from steaming, boiling water. Rolling out the hard iron, plying it, boring it, shaving it, bending it--what human strength could do any of it? We used this new strength to bend that hard iron as if it were mere tissue paper. But listen carefully, for as a ship, made with this kind of machinery and driven by steam power, slides from the wharf into the water, what engineer will then praise God who provided the steam power? Rather, he will praise himself, "I have built that beautiful ship!"

That is the sin we are talking about. When power enters into us in our weakness, a power that enhances and strengthens us a hundred fold, and with that power we conquer a sin or we bring our body under our control, than we often pretend that we, the child of God, are the main actor who won the victory and all praise is reserved for us. Even if we

respond with our lips, "Thanks be to God!" or "Praise God!", this amounts to piling up one sin onto another, layer upon layer. Such comments are merely superficial, while in the depth of our hearts the sentiment remains, "It wasn't God who did this, but we--or I."

Oh, yes, this makes all the difference. Let me give you an example. You are the CEO of a powerful corporation, but things have run stuck and, due to your mistakes, the onus is on you. You have created a situation best described as plunder and confusion so that you have to go into bankruptcy proceedings. However, you try to rescue the situation by enlisting a power. That is to say, you hire a specialist to search out the problem, to create new capital so as to enable you to recover. In due time, all anxiety and all fear for the demise of your corporation has vanished. You emerge, of course, as the acknowledged hero. You pay your powerful specialist his due and all obligations are taken care of. Now take it a step in another direction. You cannot find any help with the power to rescue your corporation, but someone else turns up and makes you an offer, "I will rescue you, but I have to receive the credit. You just sit there and I will do it all for you, but make sure I am the acknowledged saviour." The plan works; your corporation is back in business, but you have kept yourself in the background, while your saviour receives all the credit and honour.

This first example says it precisely. Anyone who says, "I received power from the Holy Spirit," rescues himself with the help of the power he received. He may express his thanks with some kind of offering and consider all dues paid, but he receives the credit. On the other hand, in the second example, the Spirit pushes aside the ego in your heart, takes over and replaces you. He proceeds with the rescue and restores your soul. Everybody sees what is happening and who is doing what. They all step back in the acknowledgement that the Holy Spirit has rescued

you.

There you have it. Either the Holy Spirit is regarded as a power made available to you for you to do your magic as the engineer with steam and electric power does his, or it is the Spirit as your Saviour, who makes you recognize your lost condition and then receives the credit and walks off with all the honour. This is where the immeasurable distance lies between the sin of Pentecost and the Pentecostal Soli Deo Gloria! for your God.

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All of this depends on love.

Whom do you love on Pentecost? Yourself or your God? And please do not say, "My God, of course!" Even if you're not serious, you could say that, for in your sinful nature there resides a consciousness that tells you, "That's how it must be." The fact that it isn't that way embarrasses you. It is even possible that you imagine yourself to be in a genuinely holy state. But if you dig deep down to the root of your spirit and test your soul right down in the innermost region of your heart, you would not be a child of God unless you would truthfully recognize and confess with inner pain in your heart, "No, no, the love for myself still overpowers me."

It isn't that you would not bring any offering or that you would not renounce anything or even refuse to go out of the way for your God. However, all of this would not touch the deeper mainspring of your heart.

The desire to be saved is in itself a form of self-love. The desire to be a child of God is also to love yourself. To be counted among the pious and holy is something that can be flattering. The real touchstone of love is only whether you are jealous for the honour, praise and glory of your God.

Salvation is to realize between you and God that He is right and you are wrong, that He is righteous and you unrighteous and, thus, guilty. It includes your acknowledgement of your own unrighteousness and guilt without minimizing it in any way, not because you could not carry the load and were convinced, but because you could not bear the thought that there might be even a smattering of wrong with God or even some minimum of guilt with the Most High.

Love for God is to love Him more than the pupil of your eye. It is to prefer the honour of your Lord above your own. It is to be consumed inwardly by worship and adoration of the graciousness of the Eternal One so that you cannot keep your eyes off Him and are passionate about the beauty of your God who appears in full glory in Zion.

It is not a matter of calculating, "God did this for me, thus I need to do something for Him!" No deliberation: "He is my God and thus I must prostrate myself before Him in adoration!" But as a child, upon seeing a beautiful fire display, cannot keep it within herself but shouts it out in excitement, so you must shout out in amazement and wonderment about the splendour of His majesty and the glory of His graciousness. You are to proclaim the graciousness of Him who has called you into His marvelous light! All this not because, after checking it all out, you have rationally come to the conclusion that it is all beautiful and true, but because it has enraptured you, carried you away, and overwhelmed, consumed you inwardly in adoration.

Love is to be incapable of anything other than to love. It is the love in the depth of your soul for the Eternal One. It is a pleading, "Come, Lord, and speak to my soul!" It is pining to be near Him; not being able to live outside of Him. It is to see nothing else but Him when He comes, to think of nothing but His glory, and to be blessed in losing yourself in the Lord your God.

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And what is the nature of this love? Is it a case of this love being there first, after which the Lord comes and this waiting love now gets focused on Him? Quite the contrary. The sun cannot be seen unless it first shines its rays by which you see her. Similarly, Zion calls out to her God, "Lord, we see light only in Your light!" No, this love does not originate with you in order to direct itself towards Him. He Himself inspires and evokes it within you; He Himself pours it into you. That sole Object of your most holy love Himself ignites the spark in you that will light the fire of love in your soul for Him.

Yes, even when He occasionally hides to test your love and to see whether, not seeing Him, you still love Him, even then it is His dimmed radiance that causes this love to continue in you. It is not your heart that has enough love in itself to love Him, but it is your precious God, who is able to penetrate the soul of His child and nurture the gift of love in you. It is not your eye that finds the light, but the light attracts your eye and has itself trained your eye to see it.

For example, a new-born infant is shy of bright light so that you need to shield its half opened eyes with your hand. Even you yourself shut your eyes momentarily, when you suddenly enter a lighted place out of the darkness. And so it is with this divine Light. Left to itself, the eye of your soul would avoid it and shut, but it is from this Light itself that the eye of your soul learns to gaze upon Him.

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That is the reason the holy Apostle raves of a love that has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. It is not that this love has any material substance like water of its own that lives in our soul as an ingredient in its own right, but more like the light that pours its rays into the valley and into the deepest clefts of the

mountains. That is how the Holy Spirit pours His light into the crevices and cracks of your heart. Wherever that light penetrates, there the moldy place turns green and blooms; the germ raises its head; a new dynamic develops and life begins to flourish. Ah, then the flower opens up to the rays of the sun and turns to the light. It is this kind of love that pulls the souls of God's children to Him.

When the sun shines on quiet waters, it transforms drops of water into vapour. This warmed up steam then rises above the waters towards the sun and forms clouds. That is the way the rays of the Eternal Love work on an abandoned soul. At first it floats as a drop of water in the cold waters. But then come those rays of light over the water of the soul that it catches and it in turn then warms the soul. Next, the warmth makes the soul more pliable so that it loses its stiffness, whereupon she at last ascends upward to the Fountain of her light.

And that is precisely the glory of Pentecost. It is not God Himself just coming over you in Paradise with a local wind that happened to be blowing at the time.... No, it is God penetrating into your own spirit and being to live in the innermost chambers of your soul.

And so the great Pentecost question to you is whether you are willing to be absorbed through this divine penetration into the depth of your being? Whether you are willing, using the example used above, to be transformed from flowing water to ascending vapour, no longer searching, removing all your own weight, and now ascend in tender love to Him who draws you?

Of course, all this takes place away from the multitude. For them this is the equivalence of being full of sweet wine. The world regards this as fanaticism and the semi-righteous as overdone. But that's how it must be.

These blessings emerge from the mystery of salvation, which is revealed

only to the children of God and only according to His covenant of peace.

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