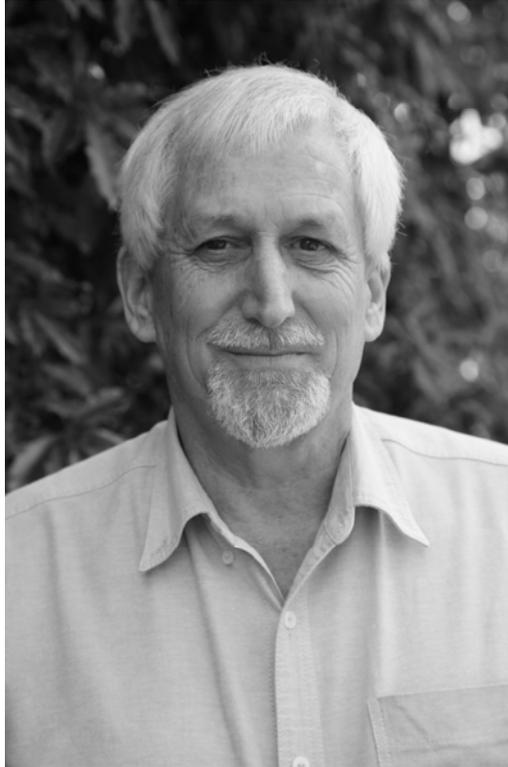


# COME OUT OF HER MY PEOPLE

Dr Michael Jarvis



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PO Box 292, Wellington 7654, South Africa.

Webpage: [www.factandfaith.co.za](http://www.factandfaith.co.za)

Email: [mike@factandfaith.co.za](mailto:mike@factandfaith.co.za)

Telephone: (27) (21) 8641546

Fax: (27) (21) 8641920

## CV

Born in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania in 1942

Schooling in Nairobi, Kenya

PhD (Zoology) 1971, Cape Town University.

1966-68: Research Assistant to Prof. G.J. Broekhuysen.  
Cape Town University.

1969-71: Bird Ringing Officer: Percy Fitzpatrick Institute of  
African Ornithology, University of Cape Town.

1971-75: Professional Research Officer, Cape Dept. Nature  
Conservation.

1975-83: Senior Ecologist, Dept. National Parks & Wildlife  
Management, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe).

1984-94: Specialist Agricultural Researcher, South African  
Dept. Agriculture.

1994-07: Private consultant, based in Cape Town and  
operating internationally.

Author or co-author of 36 research papers in scientific  
journals or books and 58 popular science publications.  
Detailed publication list available on request: Email:  
[mike@factandfaith.co.za](mailto:mike@factandfaith.co.za)

In addition to scientific research, I have  
for most of my life been researching the  
relationship between science and my  
Christian faith **and facing the issues  
that often turn people away from  
embracing the claims of Jesus Christ.**

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# Chapter 1

## Historical Christianity and its scandals

### 1.1 Christianity today

Many people are agnostics or atheists or have turned to other faiths, because of what they see in the most evident structures and actions of the Christian church down through the centuries. **It is essential to face this issue and try to determine how Christianity arrived at this sad position.**

An honest facing of truth can open the way for a return to the dynamic simplicity of the first Christians. Unless you are one of the fortunate people who have met Christians who actually live out their allegiance to Jesus in authentic and practical ways, you may wonder how some of the visible 'churches' of today can have come from the words and teachings of Jesus.

**Some people who are not from Christian backgrounds do not know much about Christian beliefs but they are confused by the externals that are most evident.**

**They see enormous buildings and expensive properties and vast wealth. They see garments and rituals that do not have any obvious practical meaning. They hear about people who seem to have cut themselves off from the real world and live in exclusive communities. They hear of scandals, moneymaking schemes, widespread sexual molestations of minors by leaders in churches and they meet many churchgoers whose lives, during the week, bear no resemblance to their conduct on Sundays.**

**This reinforces the opinion that Christianity has no real beneficial relevance to everyday living and everyday problems, except possibly a negative**

**influence.** Even the language used in some churches dates back to previous centuries.

Other people know a little about the moral teachings of Jesus, such as the need for honesty, sexual fidelity in marriage, doing good to your neighbour and other morality that is widely accepted as essentially constructive for human society. However, **it is the sad experience of many that it is people who call themselves Christian who often cannot be trusted in business, are not loyal in marriage, do not have compassion for others and their overall lifestyle shows little evidence that they are followers of the Jesus Christ we read about in the Bible.** How often we hear people say that they do not go to church because it is full of hypocrites?

Then we encounter the problem that many people from other religions view all westerners as 'Christian', because they are born in 'so-called' Christian countries. These people are often not allowed, by their own religions, to have access to Christian teachings or the Bible but they do see what comes out of these countries. **The world is flooded with self-seeking capitalism, originating in so-called Christian countries.**

I am not saying that capitalism is totally wrong, but its application in a selfish way and when its emphasis is on making profits regardless of ethics, then it is most definitely not Christian.

So we have an international monetary system that has led to the world's richest 20 % spending 86 % of the world's wealth! (Soros, de Soto and Sen 2002). We have a world where the vast majority of people live in extreme poverty, with all its associated evils of ignorance, hunger, disease, crime and despair.

The world's nations find money to meet spectacular disasters, such as the Tsunami devastation of 26 December 2004, but there are far greater on-going disasters crying out for intervention.

It is true that the most powerful capitalistic and democratic nations, most of which were originally founded on essentially Christian ethics, are by far the largest givers to humanitarian crises around the world. However, compared with expenditure on armaments this remains relatively small. The world spends trillions of dollars each year on armaments!

It is also true that human greed and corruption has led to much humanitarian aid landing up in the wrong pockets. Not surprisingly, there is an increasing awareness that aid must be tied to democratic reforms and anti-corruption reforms in recipient countries. Overall, one of the greatest problems facing humanity is human selfishness and greed.

**The world is also corrupted by the ‘moral degeneration industry’ that has formed a significant part of what comes out of Hollywood, but more specifically by those who make the flood of pornography.** These ‘Christian’ countries have high crime rates, jails filled to overflowing, rampant dishonesty in business, religion and politics. They are societies with much drug and alcohol abuse, much marital unfaithfulness and many resultant social problems.

The ‘moral degeneration industry’, combined with the belief of many that there is no God, has added a powerful force behind the moral decline so evident in much of the world. There is no longer the widespread moderating influence of a belief that one day each of us will have to stand before the judgment seat of God and answer for our lives and our actions.

In such a scenario it is understandable that an increasing number of people become addicted to pornography and other sexual addictions and it is not surprising that some of this twisted thinking will show itself in situations such as the widely reported sexual abuse of prisoners by some American soldiers in Iraq. The main culprit is a society where freedom of expression has been taken to ridiculous extremes.

At the same time, those countries who point fingers at America should admit that many of them have even worse atrocities to hide. Much abuse, torture and murder is done within non-democratic regimes, including some of the regimes that point the finger. One redeeming feature of democracies and the American system, is that they provide the mechanisms by which such abuses of human rights can be exposed. They have freedom of speech and the rule of law and this stands in clear contrast to regimes such as existed under Saddam Hussein in Iraq, where many thousands of people were tortured and summarily shot, without any access to a fair trial.

**Many people in so-called Christian nations, such as the USA and much of Europe, are in fact no longer Christian.** They have largely lost their Christian roots and have drifted into agnosticism and humanism. The inhabitants of these countries often do not realise that their freedoms, their democracy, their rule of law, their modern civilisation, their humanitarian institutions and their universities, all came directly out of Christianity.

There are still many sincere and practising Christians in these countries, but there are also many who are only Christian in name. The majority no longer feel that God is important enough to merit mention in the European constitution!

**Before we look at the positive CV of Christianity, we need to honestly face the shames and crimes of past centuries and how the effects of these are still with us today.**

## 1.2 Church history

Those looking at Christianity from the outside encounter the major problem of church history. **Christianity became so corrupted from its original form** that it was soon involved in activities far removed from the teachings of Jesus. The ‘church’ introduced teachings not found in the Bible.

Over the following centuries many thousands of Christians, who tried to return to an early-church lifestyle, were killed on instructions from the ‘Christian’ structures of the day. These early Protestants suffered a series of violent persecutions that involved confiscation of property and mass burning at the stake, including many whole families.

**For centuries the church sanctioned an instrument of torture and large-scale murder of those who opposed the authority of the Pope,** or the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. The Church had its own torture machine called the Inquisition. Amongst the earlier attempt to document these murders, was Cobbin’s: ‘Fox’s book of Martyrs’ (1875). Modern scholarship has confirmed that such things did occur, including many thousands murdered in Spain (Jones 1998).

Documentation of this church history can be found in many authoritative books such as Walker (1959): ‘A history of the Christian Church’. Perhaps the best-known case involving the Inquisition was that of Galileo. His observations of the heavens, through the newly invented telescope, led to his discovery that the earth revolved around the sun. The official church view was that all revolved around the Earth.

In 1633 Galileo was tried for heresy and forced to recant under threat of torture. As prominent as this trial was, it tends to divert the attention of history from the enormous number of other ‘trials’ undertaken by the Inquisition over several centuries, often leading to horrifically cruel death sentences for heresy.

Some people suggest that this brutality was just a reflection of the society at the time. **But why was society so brutal? Europe was supposed to be Christian and the first Christians lived totally different lives.** They loved each other, loved their enemies and lived lives of peace and kindness.

At some stage the church structures became corrupted and adopted doctrines that were not from the Bible. No wonder the Middle Ages in Europe were brutal times. The 'church' had lost its calling and deviated drastically from the teachings of its founder, Jesus.

The killing of 'heretics' was not only done by the Roman Catholic Church. **After the reformation, there were cases where Protestant churches also sanctioned killing of people who differed from their views.** The protestant versus Roman Catholic debate became politicised and all sides were guilty of killing their Christian opponents. How ironic that churches were responsible for the death of so many true Saints!

**Targets for the Medieval Inquisition** included the Cathars, the Waldensians, the Knights Templar, Joan of Arc, John Hus, the Fraticelli, Jews, Moslems, and Protestants.

In 1184, Pope Lucius 111 issued a so-called 'bull' against heretics, which established many of the principles later adopted by the Inquisition. Prior to the institution of the Papal Inquisition in 1227/31, local bishops had the authority to investigate and try heretics in local ecclesiastical courts. Since 1184, the Inquisitors answered only to the pope.

This enabled the Inquisition to act as an independent tribunal and to go where it wanted, when it wanted and to try whom it wanted – with no interference from local secular or ecclesiastical authorities.

**By the 1540's the Roman Catholic Church was reeling from the effects of Protestantism.** Whole countries had been lost to Protestant 'usurpers', including England (Henry V111), Germany (Luther) and

Switzerland (Calvin). France was also starting to look shaky, since a growing community of Calvinists was asserting rights there. Protestantism was even making inroads in Italy!

The Roman Church reacted in two ways. The Council of Trent met from 1545 to 1563 and enacted many badly needed church reforms and restated basic Catholic beliefs. However, **a new militant religious order (the Jesuits) was tasked with open warfare against Protestant strongholds.** This resulted in the 30 Years War in Germany and revitalisation of the Inquisition.

In June 1542 Pope Paul 111 reconstituted the Papal Inquisition and made Cardinal Giovanni Caraffa the Grand Inquisitor. Then in 1555 this Grand Inquisitor became Pope Paul 1V and he increased the power of the Inquisition in Italy and Spain. In 1559 he published the first Index of 'Forbidden Books'. Eventually the works of all the major Reformers would appear on the list. **No Roman Catholic was allowed to read these listed books on threat of ex-communication** and this meant a 'sentence to Hell'.

In 1566 Grand Inquisitor Michele Ghislieri became Pope Pius V and torture again became a common weapon in the Papal Inquisition. On June 23, 1566 Pius V organised the first of what were to be many public *auto-da-fes* ('acts of faith') in Rome. Thereafter, beheadings and burnings became common occurrences and in Italy almost all vestiges of incipient Protestantism were wiped out by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Amongst the most widespread atrocities were in 1209, with Pope Innocent 111's crusade against Cathars in Beziers, where 20,000 men, women and children were massacred. In 1220 Frederick 11, Holy Roman Emperor, made canon law against heresy the law of Europe, including that heretics must be burnt or have their tongues cut out. More than 1,712 Waldensians were massacred.

Some of the most vicious examples were in Spain. During 1391 mobs were encouraged to murder Jews and over 50,000 died. In 1492 the Jews of Spain were given the option of becoming baptized Christians or leaving Spain. Protestants were also frequent targets of the Spanish Inquisition and many were burned at the stake, thus effectively stopping Protestantism gaining a foothold in Spain.

It was only in 1834 that the Inquisition was finally abolished in Spain. In 1869 the principle of religious toleration was at last incorporated into the Spanish constitution. However, the Catholic Church body, that was formerly the Inquisition, still persists in the church today. It is called the **Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith**. As recently as 6 September 2000, they issued a statement re-affirming that there is only one Christian church and that is the Roman Catholic Church (Anon 2000).

There were also **vicious power struggles within the church hierarchy**, even with competing popes. The papacy was attained by some popes whose morals were far worse than most people. There were also money making schemes such as ‘indulgences’. These were pieces of paper that enabled the faithful to buy time off ‘purgatory’, for themselves and even for dead relatives.

### 1.3 Anti-Semitism

Persecution of Jews was seen throughout much of Church history, but only began after the second century. This was in spite of the fact that **anti-Semitism by Christians is totally contrary to the teachings of the New Testament and the early church**. True Christianity has no place for anti-Semitism. In fact nearly all the early Christians were Jews and the whole of Christianity is built up from its roots in the Jewish Bible and Jesus was a Jew.

The apostle Paul was also Jewish and in the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of his letter to the Roman Christians, he points out that non-Jewish Christians are like branches from a wild olive tree that have now been grafted into the Jewish olive tree. In this way we (referred to in the Bible as Gentiles) can be part of the promises and covenants that God gave to Israel.

Paul warns us not to lose our connection with the nourishing sap from the olive tree roots. However, this is precisely what happened in the second and third centuries after Jesus Christ. It became politically undesirable to have links with Jews and Israel.

**The church soon started teaching that Jews were ‘Jesus killers’, resulting in frequent persecution of Jewish communities.** In fact, it was only a minority of Jews who rejected Jesus and sought his death. Furthermore, the Bible makes it clear that Jesus was crucified because of the sinfulness of mankind, not Jews.

Jews who became Christians were told to renounce all ties with their background. No wonder that many have no time for Christianity and remain suspicious of Christian attitudes. It is hard to persuade them that there has been a fundamental repentance on the part of Christian religious ‘structures’.

For instance, during World War 2, Pope Pius XII remained publicly silent about reports showing the murder of Jews in Europe. The Vatican claims that there was silent diplomacy that saved many Jews. However, BBC News of 15 April 2007 states that the Yad Vashem Holocaust museum chairman offered to study Vatican archives for that period, “to possibly learn new and different information than what is known today” (Anon. 2007a) This and previous requests for access to Vatican archives have always been denied. It is logical to ask “why?”

A study of the history of the Vatican can help us understand why the Roman Catholic Church did not speak out against the Holocaust. It was only in 1929

that the church finalised an agreement with the Fascist ruler of Italy, namely Benito Mussolini. This gave the Roman Church the autonomy it had sought, ever since loosing it in 1871. However, in return for recognising the Vatican enclave as a separate and sovereign state, the Vatican agreed, in the Lateran Treaty of Feb 11, 1929 ‘To **perpetual neutrality** in international relations and to **abstention from mediation in a controversy unless specifically requested by all parties**’ (Anon 2008a)

Clearly the desire for independence and political status led to the Holy See agreeing to remain silent on moral issues that had any relationship to ‘political activities’, such as state sponsored anti-Semitism.

Perhaps the Papal negotiators of the Lateran Treaty failed to realise that it would bind them from speaking out against politically motivated anti-Semitism. However, the Fascist regime was openly anti-Semitic and so it is hard to offer this excuse, especially in the light of the historical anti-Semitism within the church (Anon 2008b).

**Anti-Semitism has been a major feature within historical Roman Catholic practice as well as in some protestant churches.** The reformation initiated by Martin Luther moved much of Christian thinking a step back towards rediscovering the truths of early Christianity. However, unfortunately this did not go back far enough. Even Martin Luther wrote an anti-Semitic pamphlet. Hitler later adopted these attitudes and actually praised Martin Luther and used his name to give backing to his plans to eliminate all Jews (Anon 2008c).

Anti-Semitism within Church pronouncements and actions has passed on these attitudes to many secular people in so-called Christian countries. One example was the Evian Conference called in 1938 by President Roosevelt of the United States. Thirty two Nations attended this meeting in Switzerland, solely to discuss ‘How to rescue the Jews from Europe’. Only

three small countries, agreed to take in significant numbers of the Jewish refugees. As a result, Hitler was able to initiate his 'final solution' policy, in the firm belief that nobody would intervene on behalf of the Jews (Shaw, A 2001). The Evian Conference: Hitler's Green Light for Genocide. [www.christianactionforisrael.org/anti-holo/evian](http://www.christianactionforisrael.org/anti-holo/evian).

**It is not at all surprising that the study of church history has turned many away from Christianity.**

## 1.4 Sexual abuse by church leaders

In recent times there have been revelations of **widespread sexual abuse** perpetrated by ordained officials of various churches. This was widely reported in popular magazines like 'Time', with headings such as 'Can the church be saved?' (Time April 2002).

**In fact this is no new phenomenon, but in the past it was more effectively covered over.** Obviously this is a symptom of a major problem and what has been exposed is widely thought to be just the 'tip of the iceberg'.

In March 2004 it was revealed that, during the past 50 years, American Catholic priests reportedly molested more than 10,000 children. (Anon: 2004 Internet news: 28 Feb 2004) Many consider the problem is far worse and more widespread than so far revealed and it is definitely not confined to America .

On 8 March 2006, the BBC reported that more than 100 Catholic priests in the Dublin region of Ireland are suspected of having abused children in the last 66 years (Anon 2006) Similar reports have emerged from other parts of the world.

These revelations throw new light on previous claims that were largely ignored. For instance, Father Chiniquy (1885) in his book '*Fifty years in the church of Rome*' spoke out about the corrupting influence of the 'confessional', as practiced in at least some places.

Cases were given of how ‘innocent’ children were corrupted and scandalised during their first exposure to the confessional. They were asked detailed questions about perversions and activities they had never heard of.

**These sexual abuse cases would not have come to light unless the public had caused an outcry** (Gould 2007). This led to a sort of apology from some in the Vatican, but some critics point out that apologies are meaningless unless they lead to real change and to the ruthless rooting out of the basic causes. The Archbishop who was forced to resign over his cover-up of paedophile sex scandals involving priests in his diocese in Boston, still presided over a mass for the late Pope John Paul 11 in Rome, on the fourth day of the “novendiales” period of formal mourning. (Anon 2005).

Rather than remove the main cause of these abuses, namely the celibacy laws for Roman Catholic priests, the Vatican issued a statement that specifically confirmed these laws (Anon 2007b).

In September 2008 the Pope criticised US bishops for their handling of the child sex scandals. However he laid part of the blame for the crisis, of which he feels “deeply ashamed”, on the breakdown in US values (Anon 2008d). This overlooks the fact that similar scandals have been reported from many other countries.

**In October 2006, the BBC revealed a document called ‘Crimen Sollicitations’, written by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger before he became Pope. This document, marked ‘top secret’, instructs Roman Catholic priests to keep all sexual abuse allegations secret.**

The victims must be told to take an oath of secrecy at the time of making the complaint to Church officials. Bishops are instructed to pursue these cases *‘in the most secretive way... restrained by perpetual silence... and everyone... is to observe the strictest secret which is commonly regarded as a secret of the Holy*

*Office... under the penalty of excommunication'* (Anon 2007c and BBC News webpage: 1 October 2006).

It seems that Roman Catholic Church groups in various other countries are still following this directive. In South Africa (Anon 2002), the 'Rape Action Group' expressed concern over a recent statement made by the local Roman Catholic church, namely that 'The church would not report cases of child abuse to state authorities, but would deal with it through internal rehabilitation programmes'.

In the light of the widespread sexual abuse uncovered in recent years, it would be of interest to determine the origin of orphans cared for in various Church run orphanages. It would also be revealing to know how much money has gone towards 'paying off' children abused by priests in other countries.

**In September of 2003 it was reported that the church had agreed to pay US\$ 85 million to settle more than 500 civil suits accusing priests of sexual abuse** (Anon 2005).

In May 2007, it was reported that the Roman Catholic archbishop of Los Angeles said his archdiocese will sell its main office, to raise money to settle lawsuits for sexual abuse. In December they paid US\$ 60 million to settle 46 lawsuits, but they still face more than 500 claims, with some experts saying it could cost the church as much as \$1 billion to settle all of them (Anon 2007d). This figure of \$ 1 billion has been confirmed by a BBC News article dated 09/19/2008.

**We wonder how much more has been paid out over the years.** This represents money that should have been spent on Christian causes, such as humanitarian aid. It also **represents money given to the church by Christians who presumably assumed their money was going to be used to glorify God!**

Maybe this epidemic of sexual abuse was warned against in the New Testament when we read, *The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the*

*(original) faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons... They **forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods...*** (Bible: 1 Timothy 4: 1-3).

The apostle Paul urged Christians to marry if they cannot constrain themselves sexually, *But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.* (Bible: 1 Corinthians 7:9).

Jesus said, *“And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!”* (Bible: Matthew 18:6).

In these words of Jesus you can sense **the intense anger that he felt towards any who caused children to sin.** It is of course true that at the heart of Jesus’ teaching is forgiveness. He taught that forgiveness by God follows sincere repentance. However, part of sincere repentance is restitution and change.

For a church to admit that many of its leaders have sexually abused children is a welcomed step, but some point out that it was a very reluctant step. However, for this step to be at all meaningful there has to be the realisation and the admission that this disastrous situation is the result of the man-made structures that have been built up in the name of ‘Christianity’. These have deviated very far from the teachings of Jesus and the early church. There needs to be more than cosmetic change. **There has to be revolutionary change!**

## 1.5 Money making abuses

**The immense wealth locked up in church properties and religious organisations** is another

major reason why many reject the Christianity they have been exposed to. Much of this wealth has been obtained by questionable means. Many countries have passed laws called 'forced heirship', to prevent people from giving more than a percentage of their wealth to the church or to other beneficiaries outside the immediate family (Anon 2008f).

One reason for this law was that many people, especially men, were approached at their death beds and reminded of all their sins and failures. A natural response was to ask for a way out. They were then sometimes persuaded that they could earn merit and avoid the worst aspects of their impending fate if they donated all their worldly wealth to the church. Before various countries introduced this 'forced heirship' legislation **many widows and children were being left destitute.**

Another aspect, raising the suspicions of many, is the **apparent discrepancy between some church incomes and the amount of money spent on charitable projects such as orphanages, food handouts etc.** Suspicions of misuse will persist until church structures become transparent and have their books examined by truly independent auditors. It will be interesting to learn how much money goes towards maintaining 'structures' or paying off sex abuse claimants, or supporting lavish lifestyles, rather than to activities that help uplift humanity.

In July 2008 the BBC news reported on a **United States senate investigation into the financial activities of some TV evangelists** (Anon 2008g).

Every year some of the best known of them bring in hundreds of millions of dollars from donors all over the world. In some cases the financial books of these organisations are not open for examination and questions have been raised about multi-million dollar mansions and expensive private jets.

**These serious accusations are against ‘protestant’ churches** and Christian ‘personality cults’. How many of these are actually moneymaking schemes, disguised in fine Christian language? Some of this activity might be described as ‘Theo capitalism’.

We should remember that **Jesus became very angry, made a whip and drove out from the temple all those who were making money out of the peoples desire to find God.** Maybe these are the people Jesus spoke about when he said, *“Many will say to me on that day, Lord Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!”* (Bible: Matthew 7:21).

## 1.6 The process of corruption

History tells us that, once the early Christian church was no longer persecuted and Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, **men began building structures of authority.**

Previously, each local group of Christians managed their own affairs and appointed ‘elders’ to ensure conformity to the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament writings.

**Once authority became centralised, the changes started.** At first it was slow, but it accelerated once teachings were accepted that came from sources other than the Bible.

When, in the second century the Roman Emperor Constantine was converted to Christianity, it became politically acceptable to adopt Christianity as the official state religion. A decision was apparently made to help people coming from other religions by incorporating many of their symbols and beliefs into Christianity.

**Walker (1959), in ‘A history of the Christian Church’, notes that veneration of martyrs and their relics started in the middle of the second century.**

**Also people started praying to the Virgin Mary as an intermediary between man and God, whereas the Bible teaches that Jesus is the ONLY mediator.**

To Mary went out much of that devotion that had found expression in the pagan worship of the mother goddesses of Egypt, Syria, and Asia Minor. For some people she soon took the place of her son as mediator between God and man. The 'Da Vinci Code' book, suggests that the church tried to stifle the voice and role of women. In fact it encouraged a new and dominant role to one woman, namely the Virgin Mary.

**By the fourth century, the reverence of relics was developed to an enormous extent.** Their widespread use for veneration and to raise money, is illustrated by the statute of the Seventh General Council (787) of the Roman Catholic church, *If any bishop from this time forward is found consecrating a temple without holy relics, he shall be deposed as a transgressor of the ecclesiastical traditions.* (Walker 1959).

We also see the appearance within the 'Christian world' of symbols such as obelisks, which are phallic symbols associated with worship of the goddess Asherah. She was consort of the god Baal, a sensuous and lustful creature. The Bible reveals how, throughout the history of Israel the worship of the gods Baal and Asherah were a stumbling block that kept Israel from full devotion to God (Jehovah).

This was more than just worship of other gods, because these religions promoted widespread sexual orgies and had shrine prostitutes as an integral part of their practices. Some sign of obelisks is found in church architecture and **we even have an enormous obelisk in the centre of St Peter's square in the Vatican!**

**Asherah was also referred to as the Queen of heaven.** Many worshippers started praying to Mary as a substitute for their previous belief in the goddess Asherah and similar goddess figures. Finally, the point was reached last century when an 'infallible' 'ex officio'

pronouncement was made by a Roman Catholic Pope, that Mary did not in fact die but ascended to heaven and was made Queen of heaven and earth. This was when the Roman Catholic Church in 1950 made the proclamation of the 'bodily assumption of the Virgin Mary' (Walker 1959).

**What has happened to the scriptures stating that Jesus alone is our intercessor before God?** Other Christians ask, where in the Bible do we find such a view of Mary?

Others pray to dead saints as if they can obtain favours from God via these intermediaries. Some claim that they are not praying 'to' dead saints but 'with' them. Whether or not there is a significant difference between these two views, the fact remains that 'dead saints' are approached by many of the 'faithful', as if they can be communicated with and as if they can impart supernatural blessings. Even the late Pope John Paul 11 claimed that his survival from the assassination attempt on his life was due to the direct intervention of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In places where the worship of ancestral spirits is still a fundamental part of culture, aspects of these beliefs are still practiced by many who claim to be Christians. However, the belief that spirits of ancestors control day to day events, is totally contrary to biblically based Christianity.

**Asherah symbols have also become integrated into other aspects of western 'Christian' culture.** Secret societies, whose members are sworn to secrecy on pain of death, such as Free Masons, use obelisks as symbols and place them on their tombs. **It is noteworthy that leading Free Masons have often held high positions in Christian churches and still do hold high office in some of the most prominent churches.**

This is most surprising since Free Masonry does not come from Christian roots. Also **the teachings of Jesus emphasise that all things must be brought**

**into the light, not hidden in secret or in secret societies**, where only the higher levels know the true nature of its beliefs. For a Christian to swear allegiance to a group, without even knowing its core beliefs, is amazing. Also swearing absolute allegiance and secrecy to an organisation makes it into a god!

Recently, a Cambridge history don investigated the **Kirkwall Scroll that has hung in a Masonic lodge** in the Orkney Islands for almost three centuries. An article by Harding (2000) notes that, *the 18 ft sailcloth hanging is said to contain ancient Freemason and Templar symbols including clues for the trail to the Holy Grail*. Mr Sinclair proposed removing it for safekeeping, but the Freemasons objected and are reported to have said, *“It is priceless to us and we have safeguarded it well for more than two and a half centuries”*. The article includes a colour photograph of the wall hanging. On it you can clearly see two cloven hooved demons with horns, the satanic five pointed star with one point downwards, the satanic ‘all seeing eye’ and other symbols associated with the occult!

## 1.7 Church unity?

Modern times have seen **many attempts to unite different Christian groupings**. Diversity of structure and beliefs are not unique to Christianity. We find these divisions in all world religions and in some it is still causing bloodshed and death, such as between some of the Islamic factions. However, the words of Jesus and the accounts of early Christians, emphasise love and tolerance and unity of spirit. **So what went wrong?**

**Recent attempts at creating greater unity amongst Christian groups have failed because people have added to the Bible their own traditions and in some cases seemingly given as much importance to the traditions of their particular church as they do to the Bible writings.** Since

traditions now vary enormously between different groups, there is clearly no hope of unity unless each group is prepared to go back to basics.

**We need to go back to the early church and the teachings of Jesus and the first apostles of the church.** We do not need unity of structure, but we do need unity of basic beliefs. We need unity within a diversity of cultural differences, such as the music we use, the type of songs we sing and the precise way we worship God. Diversity of cultural expressions is unavoidable and desirable, but conflict on basic issues of belief are the real problem.

Various Christians, down through the centuries, have developed **summarised statements of beliefs that are often called 'creeds'**. The earlier ones did not vary much in essential content, since they merely attempted to summarise Bible teachings. **However, the Roman Catholics added to the basic creeds including, amongst others:**

1. In AD 1854 the Papal Definition of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. This stated that Mary shared in no taint of original sin and this opinion was elevated to a necessary dogma of faith. It further established her elevated position and gave added weight to the practice of praying to Mary rather than directly to Jesus.
- 2 The crowning event of Pope Pius IX's reign was the Vatican Council of December 8, 1869. On 18 July 1870 they adopted the **doctrine of papal infallibility** by a vote of 532 to 2. This states that, when the Pope speaks *ex cathedra*, such pronouncements are infallible and so become a fundamental part of Christian faith and doctrine. This 'Infallibility' clause has never been revoked and remains a fundamental part of Roman Catholic doctrine.

- 3 The Ecumenical Council summoned by Pius XII, proclaimed the dogma of the bodily assumption (raised to heaven without dying) of the Virgin Mary, and this was adopted in 1950. Many Roman Catholics now pray to Mary as Queen of heaven and earth!

**Christians who base their faith and doctrine solely on the Bible, find these decrees unacceptable,** supremely the one relating to Papal infallibility when speaking 'ex officio' (ex cathedra). This enables the Roman Catholics to elevate any teaching they choose so as to obtain as much authority as the Bible itself.

In fact, the whole understanding of the Pope being the God appointed successor of the apostle Peter, is not accepted by Protestant Christians. Furthermore, this doctrine was only formulated in the middle of the fourth century after Jesus Christ. **It was only in AD 445 that the Roman Bishop Leo 1 procured an edict from the Western Emperor Valentinian 111, ordering all to obey the Roman Bishop as having the "primacy of Saint Peter".** (Walker 1959).

Protestant Christians consider that the adoption of this doctrine of papal infallibility is a convenient way of putting a stamp of authority on doctrines and beliefs and traditions that do not have a clear foundation in the New Testament Bible. The papal 'infallibility' pronouncement, relating to the bodily 'assumption' of the Virgin Mary, caused confusion to my late Uncle, Dr John Winteler. He had travelled extensively in Israel and well remembered being taken to the shrine at the tomb of the Virgin Mary. When he visited this site after 1950 he found it closed up and no longer marked as her tomb. **Presumably Christians had been mistaken up to 1950 and only then realised that she had not died but had been taken up to heaven!**

**Fortunately there have been some more recent reversals of past viewpoints.** In the 1960's some modifications were made to the more stringent written laws of the Roman Catholics, such as the abolition of the "sacred Latin" tongue, to allow for the first time for church services to be held in the languages of the people. Also the new authorisation for 'lay' people to read the Bible for themselves in their native tongue.

Some controversial practices were apparently partly reversed after the Reformation initiated by Martin Luther. At that time, one of the practices he spoke out against was the **sale of 'Indulgences'**. People could buy a paper that guaranteed them reduction of suffering in Purgatory after death. They could even buy them for dead relatives. Before the Reformation, the Church of Rome sold indulgences to pilgrims and used the money to pay for some of its grandest buildings and the opulent lifestyles of bishops.

**The existence of Purgatory and the right to 'buy' anything from God were strongly disputed by Luther and the reformers and by all the Protestant Christian groups. Unfortunately, the use of Indulgencies in one form or another is still with us today.**

In 1998, The Papal Bull for the Millennium: *Incarnationis Misterium* (Mystery of the Incarnation), details how Roman Catholics may still gain indulgences for themselves and souls in purgatory (Combe. 1998).

In 2008, the BBC reported that the Vatican made a large financial loss, attributed to the weaker dollar (BBC News 07/11/2008). It is therefore little surprise that we read in BBC news the article 'Pope approves Lourdes indulgences' (Anon 2008e).

**This article points out that Catholics visiting Lourdes within a year 'will be able to receive an indulgence, which can reduce time in purgatory.** The same article quotes the Pope as saying, *believers who prayed at places of worship dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes from 2-11 February next year – or who were*

*unable to make the journey – would also be able to receive indulgences.*

The article fails to point out that all such visits to ‘holy’ shrines or receiving an ‘indulgence paper’ involves the pilgrims in spending large sums of money. **This sounds to me like a good financial decision, in the light of the overall losses to Vatican income.** It reminds Protestant Christians of the days of the Reformation, when Martin Luther spoke out against indulgences that were sold to finance Papal building projects and the opulent lifestyles of the bishops (Walker 1959).

I must acknowledge and emphasise that **we find many really wonderful Christians scattered throughout ALL the great diversity of Christianity’s ‘structure and tradition’, and down the centuries.** Praise God for this fact and for all the good done by many of the faithful.

In many cases these outstanding Christians are ‘lights’ shining in the darkness of human traditions and scandals. I believe the time has come for each Christian to examine the ‘structure’ and beliefs in which they find themselves. **How do they measure up to the words of Jesus and the teachings of the early church, as recorded in the New Testament?**

There is an encouraging new movement of God amongst Christians who have re-discovered that they can communicate directly with Jesus in a personal relationship. However, these Christians are often within religious structures that refuse to reform.

**In cases where church structures are not prepared to critically examine themselves and return to the basic teachings of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to ruthlessly root out evils,** I believe that individual Christians need to hear the biblical call, *Then I heard another voice from heaven say: “Come out of her my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins*

are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes” (Bible: Revelation 18:4-5).

**So, what is the chance of institutionalised Christianity returning to unity?** From the Roman Catholic viewpoint, it seems that unity can only be achieved if everyone else comes back to Rome. For instance, on 6 September 2000, only six weeks before a visit to Italy and the Vatican by Britain’s Queen Elizabeth 11, a declaration was issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith – a Catholic Church body formerly known as the Inquisition. It said that the Christian faithful are, *not permitted to imagine that the Church of Christ is nothing more than a collection – divided, yet in some way one – of churches and ecclesial communities. There exists a single church of Christ, which subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the Successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him. According to the will of God, the bishop of Rome – the Pope – objectively has the doctrine of primacy, which he exercises over the entire Church* (Anon. 2000).

**At the time that these statement were issued, the new Pope Benedict XVI was the head of this ‘Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’.**

The same Roman Catholic view of other Christian churches was again emphasised in 2007 (Willey 2007).

In his inaugural speech as Pope, he assured people that the church wants to continue to build an open and sincere dialogue with other faiths, *for the true good of mankind and of society* (Time 2005: 2 May: 16-20). In the light of previous church pronouncements, presumably such dialogue will be directed at bringing all Christians back into the Roman Catholic Church.

In July 2004, I looked up the **website for the Roman Catholic Church**. Once into this website, you could click on various subjects such as, ‘papal

infallibility’, ‘the necessity of Baptism’, and ‘salvation outside the church’.

In the section on ‘infallibility’, it is admitted that these doctrines are not based totally on the Bible. I quote, *the rejection of papal infallibility by “Bible Christians” stems from their view of the Church. They do not think Christ established a visible Church, which means they do not believe in a hierarchy of bishops headed by the Pope.* ([www.catholic.com/library/Papal-infallibility.asp](http://www.catholic.com/library/Papal-infallibility.asp)).

It is true that Christians, who accept the Bible as their final authority in matters of faith and doctrine, consider the ‘church’ to be composed of all those individuals who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. This is a spiritual reality that does not depend on a human structure or denominational label.

The webpage seems to admit that ‘Bible Christians’ are not the same as Roman Catholic Christians. Furthermore, the arguments presented in this webpage in favour of ‘papal infallibility’ are mainly from sources other than the Bible. The biblical verses quoted are open to other legitimate interpretations.

Regarding, ‘Salvation outside the Church’, we read statements such as, *However, for those who knowingly and deliberately (that is, not out of innocent ignorance) commit the sins of heresy (rejecting divinely revealed doctrine) or schism (separating from the Catholic Church and/or joining a schismatic church), no salvation would be possible until they repented and returned to live in Catholic unity.* **This places people such as myself outside the mercy of God and I have no right to call myself a Christian!**

## 1.8 Simple and relational unity

**So, what were the early Christians like?** There is no doubt that they were very different to much of the visible Christianity that we see around us today. It makes sense to try and analyse how they operated and what they really believed.

**A return to our Christian origins is the cry of many and is the only basis for true Christian unity.**

**Fortunately there are many Christians today, within ALL Christian denominations, who have re-discovered the dynamic life-changing reality of Jesus Christ and his resurrection. They have discovered that the essence of Christianity is a personal relationship with God, through Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit who lives within all true believers.**

To be a Christian is not to follow a list of rules and regulations, or to go through ceremonies. It is a path of learning to be a 'disciple' of Jesus.

Many Christians, scattered through all the sections of visible Christianity, have made this discovery. The majority of these are in countries where they are persecuted and all but the essential realities have been stripped away. They have rediscovered the same dynamic power that motivated the first Christians. They have rediscovered the relevance and reality of the Holy Spirit in very personal and life-changing ways.

My own ancestors were amongst those who suffered under the Inquisition. It was therefore a wonderful experience for me to meet some outstanding Roman Catholic Christians during a period I spent in Belgium. It was only after some time that I discovered that they belonged to the Roman Catholic Church! With my background, as a descendant of Inquisition survivors, this was a very meaningful experience. **It**

**made me realise that Christian unity is possible amongst true disciples of Jesus, irrespective of racial, cultural or church structure background.**

**I believe the urgent call of God today is for committed Christians everywhere and in all ‘denominations’, to go back to the Bible and discard all that is not clearly found in the words of Jesus and the first apostles.** If church structures are not prepared to go through this process of self examination and repentance, then we will increasingly find that many committed Christians will no longer attend the churches they were raised in, but will meet in informal groups in homes. After all, this was the New Testament pattern for church.

**The church structures and institutions that have been responsible for practicing or condoning the evils and scandals documented in this book, no longer have any right to make pronouncements on morality.** Their lack of sincere and fundamental repentance does, in my estimation, merit judgment rather than toleration.

Furthermore, if you are a Christian within such institutions, you need to seriously ask God whether you should remain part of them.



## Chapter 2

### The first Christians

**What was early Christianity like?** We read that, *all the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need* (Bible: Acts 4:32-35).

In other words, **these early Christians were putting into practice the words of Jesus when he said**, *“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you”* (Bible: John 15:9-12).

*“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples* (Bible: John 15:7-8).

Much of what Jesus said was on this theme of loving God and loving your fellow believer and loving all people, even your enemies. **His promise was that, if his followers could fully put this into practice, they would be in close relationship with God and would be attuned to what he was saying. In fact they would know what to ask for and God would answer their prayers.**

The early **Christians met the basic conditions** that are the key to fruitful lives and to answered prayers. They maintained that close relationship with

God and they obeyed the greatest commandment, to love one another. Loving your neighbour as yourself is not a natural ability and needs to be empowered by the Holy Spirit, through meaningful relationships. The early church discovered these vertical and horizontal relationships in a way that transformed lives and societies. **Because the early church met these requirements at the start,** they were enabled to live dynamic lives, where the power and reality of God was present in dramatic ways.

**This dynamic of the early church lasted well into the second century.** Various descriptions from the second century are summarised by Foster (1981). I quote, *In the period directly following the Apostolic Age there was an exuberant caring and sharing on the part of Christians that was unique in antiquity. Julian the apostate, an enemy of Christianity, admitted that “the godless Galileans fed not only their poor but ours also”.*

Tertullian wrote that the **Christians’ deeds of love were so noble, that the pagan world confessed astonishment.** He wrote, *See how they love one another.* By 250 AD, Christians in Rome were caring for some fifteen hundred needy people. He catalogued a long list of groups that were cared for. They supported and buried the poor, supplied the needs of the boys and girls destitute of means, cared for the elderly that were confined to the house, provided for those who had suffered shipwreck and gave to those who had been banished to islands or mines for their fidelity to Christ’s cause.

Another characteristic of early Christians was **their eagerness to learn** from the apostles. The apostles were mainly the followers of Jesus who had been with him from the start of his ministry. The New Testament Bible had not yet been written and so the apostles were the equivalent of the ‘living New Testament’. They reminded the people of the words of

Jesus and the events in his life and interpreted these in the light of the Old Testament (Jewish Bible).

**The early Christians had a hunger for God.**

Before or after work they met together every day to share meals, hear teaching and to pray. We read, *Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved* (Bible: Acts 2: 46-47).

After a relatively short period of calm, persecution broke out against the first Jerusalem Christians, **and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.** *Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison. Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went* (Bible: Acts 8: 1-4).

It is noteworthy that the apostles, who did all the early teaching of Christian converts, remained behind in Jerusalem. The Christians who were scattered had been so well trained and had been so eager to learn, that they now became those who spread the 'Good news' far and wide.

Each Christian man and woman became an evangelist, meaning that each one spoke and witnessed to the faith that was in them, both through words and actions. This was not the function of a special few.

**An analysis of the early church shows a number of key ingredients that** may be summarised as follows:

1. The way to become a Christian

The New Testament gives the clear steps that were recognised by the first Christians, to be the way to become a Christian. These steps were:

\* Repentance from personal sins and ungodly cultural beliefs.

- \* Belief in the Lord Jesus Christ and who he is.
- \* Baptism by immersion under water.
- \* Receiving the Holy Spirit.

The order of these events was not always the same, but the most usual was as listed above. Each of these is explained in greater detail in the next chapter.

## 2. Believers were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Before the Pentecost experience, Christians were aware of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, but remained fearful and ineffective. It was only after they were filled with the Holy Spirit that they were empowered to live triumphant Christian lives and turn the Roman world ‘upside down’.

All the other characteristics of the early church were direct or indirect results of the infilling by the Holy Spirit. We read, *When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them* (Bible: Acts 2: 1-4).

We read of Peter’s first sermon, and how the crowds were amazed, *When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied “Repent and be baptised every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call”* (Bible: Acts 2: 37-39).

## 3. Believers showed real love for one another.

In a modern context, those who had successful businesses were willing to share profits with those needy people whom God placed on their hearts. Christians were called upon to view income as being

given in trust by God and not to be used just as they pleased.

#### 4. There was an emphasis on honesty.

Honesty was required between believers and with God. So we had the example God gave to the early church, *Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it all at the apostles' feet. Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God. When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened* (Bible: Acts 5:1-5).

A bit later his wife came in and was asked the same questions. She also lied and dropped dead. **This event was presumably allowed by God to teach his people the seriousness of honesty, and especially with money.** It is also noteworthy that **Jesus became very angry** when he saw people making money out of other people's desire to draw near to God. That is when he made a whip and drove the moneychangers and merchants out of the temple courtyard.

**Those who do this today, and there are many in this category, may not drop dead like Ananias and Sapphira, but they may face the words of Jesus on Judgment day, "I never knew you, depart from me you evil doers** (Bible: Matthew 7:23).

This does not mean that a full-time preacher or person in full-time Christian work cannot earn a salary. However, it does mean that excessive incomes and extravagant lifestyles cannot be financed from

contributions made by believers towards the work of God in the world.

**Money matters were taken so seriously** that the early church set aside people specially to oversee the task of distribution. They did not choose people on the basis of business experience, but on the basis of spirituality, “*Choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom*” (Bible: Acts 6:3). One of these seven was Stephen who, in addition to supervising money matters, was, *performing great wonders and miraculous signs*. Shortly afterwards Stephen became the first Christian martyr.

5. Money was spent meeting needs of fellow Christians – not on building elaborate churches.

They met in public places and private houses and so had the freedom of not being tied to church structures. In time there sometimes was a need for larger meeting places, but **the emphasis remained on small groups meeting together**, because that is the only way to create bonds of caring and unity.

6. All those who met together were fully committed Christians.

Except for outsiders, who came to hear for themselves the Christian message, early church were people who had ‘burnt their bridges’ behind them. In those days it was a difficult thing to become a Christian and it normally meant instant ridicule or persecution. As a result, few became Christians unless they were totally convinced and totally committed to the cause.

7. Early Christians were totally convinced that Jesus was alive.

The resurrection event was witnessed by many and the risen Jesus had appeared to groups of disciples over a period of weeks. This certainty, combined with the empowerment of the indwelling Holy Spirit, created a dynamic that was contagious and unstoppable.

8. Many of the early Christians were willing to give their lives.

Many thousands were killed in the Coliseum, or dipped in oil and burnt as human torches in the Emperor's gardens. All they had to do, to escape death, was to give homage to Caesar as God. Their conviction that Jesus was God and that he was alive, led many to choose death. That choice was only possible to bear because of the presence of the Holy Spirit within them.

9. Converts were eager to learn and grow as disciples of Jesus.

They met together and remembered the death and resurrection of Jesus on a daily basis. In other words, whenever they broke bread at a meal they gave thanks for the body of Jesus broken for them, and whenever they drank from the normal mealtime wine cup, they gave thanks for his blood shed for them. The frequent meeting together showed that these early Christians were wholehearted followers, keen to learn and keen to put their learning into practice.

10. Converts from many different nations were treated as brothers and sisters

Early Christianity taught that all who had been 'born again' through repentance, faith in Jesus and receiving the Holy Spirit, were brothers and sisters. Paul could write, *Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which bonds them all together in perfect unity* (Bible: Colossians 3: 11-14).



## Chapter 3

### The first church

Our information about the first Christians comes mainly from the pages of the New Testament Bible. However, we also have the commentary of history that shows how a small and persecuted group rapidly increased in numbers and soon was present in the entire Roman world and probably even further than the boundaries of the Roman Empire.

Within a short time, they turned the Roman world's religious beliefs upside down. Writings have been found complaining that the temples of the 'gods' are largely deserted. This was because Christianity had permeated every part of the Roman Empire.

There is much evidence showing how early Christians were persecuted and how many of them were killed, rather than admit that Caesar was God. There are descriptions of the terrible deaths that thousands suffered, rather than deny their allegiance to Jesus Christ. However, their devotion to Jesus, **their outstanding lifestyles and the power of the gospel message, all resulted in a dramatic expansion of Christianity and this expansion was by persuasion not by the sword.**

Linder (1977), in the introduction to 'The lion handbook: The history of Christianity' writes, *the hallmarks of apostolic Christianity were simplicity, community, evangelism and love. It was simple because it had little or no formal organisation, maintained no church buildings or membership rolls, taught easy-to-understand doctrines, and followed a plan of financing activities by personal giving. This simplicity appealed especially to the poor and oppressed classes, which could understand and participate without difficulty in the new faith.*

*In addition, the Christian emphasis on a community of love sealed by baptism, appealed to many*

*people who were otherwise without hope and desperately lonely. Many felt themselves adrift in a world grown too large, and they craved the type of intimate fellowship offered by the Christian congregations. The Christian community made no distinctions based on race, nation, cultural status, slavery, freedom or sex.*

*The Christian church was to be gathered from every nation, all tribes, peoples and language groups. The sense of community was fostered by frequent meetings for worship, study, sharing and the celebration of a love feast called the 'agape'. In short, the community of Christians gave many otherwise outcast people a real sense of identity and belonging.*

**In fact there was nearly no church structure.**

Initially the apostles, who were mainly those disciples who had been intimately involved with Jesus since the start of his teaching ministry, were afforded special status. This was because the early Christians realised they were uniquely able to pass on the teachings of Jesus, at a time before anything had been put to writing.

However, very soon each local congregation of believers obtained the writings found in the New Testament Bible. Modern scholarship suggests that all of these were written within the lifetimes of the apostles. **This meant that it was no longer necessary to have an apostle present to give authority to the gatherings.** The early Christians accepted these New Testament writings as being equally authoritative. The role of apostles remained important but they no longer needed to be present at every gathering of believers.

Initially, the first Christians were still influenced by Jewish traditions. They still sometimes met in the Jewish synagogues and followed similar forms of worship, with regard to prayer, singing psalms, reading scripture and hearing a sermon on the scripture.

However, very soon a new dynamic of spontaneity emerged and was encouraged.

**Early references to Christian meetings strongly indicate a shared eldership making decisions for the local church.** There is no reference in the New Testament to a single elder in a local church, it was always plural. There was no centralised authority to which each local church must bow the knee, except for the authority of the scriptures and the authority of the apostles, for as long as they were alive.

Very soon each local group of believers received instructions on how to meet together and instructions on the fundamental teachings of the Christian way. We read these instructions in the New Testament books. Much of the content relates to the teachings of Jesus and to their interpretation and application to daily life. In other places we have guidelines on how to meet together for fellowship and teaching.

When all the first apostles had died then the scattered groups of Christians still met in small groups in homes or public places. They still operated under the guidance of elders and they still had participation gatherings where inputs were encouraged from those present.

**It soon became recognised that God gave to each person individual gifts and abilities that could be shared with his or her fellow believers.** These were referred to as 'gifts of the spirit' and were not just natural abilities. They were supernaturally enhanced, as these believers became empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

It was emphasised that all Christians, in any one geographical locality, were meant to operate as a unit. **The illustration given by Paul was that of a human body.** Each part of the body has a function and each part must perform its function, in order for the whole body to be healthy. This is covered extensively in his

letter to the Corinthian believers. For instance, *now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues* (Bible: 1Corinthians 12: 27-28).

In Romans 12, Paul adds other gifts to the list, such as prophesying, serving, encouraging, contributing to the needs of others, leadership, and showing mercy.

This divergence of gifting was clearly put into practice by early Christians. **When they met together they would share whatever they believed God had prompted them to share.** Sometimes this got a little disorderly, and so Paul was moved to write, *What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. **All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.** If anyone speaks in a tongue, two - or at the most three - should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God.*

*Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged* (Bible: 1 Corinthians 14: 26-31).

**Clearly, early church gatherings were participation gatherings.** No carefully organised format, with every aspect timed to perfection and only a pre-determined preacher to give a message. In fact, the greatest characteristic was participation and sharing, ministering to each other insights into God's word and ministering to each other's spiritual and practical needs.

A recurring theme in the New Testament is that the Holy Spirit of God treats every believer in a local group as having a vital function to perform, for the good of the whole body. **These meetings were led by the Holy Spirit.** I have been to present day gatherings of Christians where the format was the same as described by Paul.

These informal gatherings can lead to amazingly co-ordinated times, provided those present learn to live their day-by-day lives in relationship with God. We find that the Holy Spirit reveals a truth to one person during the week and something else to each of the others who are willing to listen. When they all gather together to praise, worship and learn, we find that the whole time flows naturally and clear themes develop.

**God is truly a God of order, but his type of order is not man-made.** It is an order whereby the combined inputs and insights of the members of the group complement each other and flow together. They complement each other because it is the same Holy Spirit who has organised it.

Naturally, we do all sometimes make mistakes. However, the nature of a caring body is that mistakes are allowed. Where something is said or done that it not in harmony with the clear teachings of Jesus and the New Testament, then it is the function of more experienced Christians and elders to gently correct and instruct.

These informal early Christian church meetings gave God the freedom to run the proceedings. By contrast, our modern church meetings are often so organised that God may find himself 'put on hold'. I am not saying that organisation is wrong, but **any organisation that is rigid is in danger of missing out on the unpredictability of God.** After all, Jesus said that the Holy Spirit is 'like the wind', meaning that he often moves in unpredicted and unexpected ways.

**Is this early church format a recipe for chaos?**  
No; in fact it is a recipe for life and spiritual growth.

Each time they gathered together it was in exciting anticipation, because no two gatherings were alike. One day God may lead them into a prolonged time of praise and worship. On another occasion he may lead them to an emphasis on prayer and intercession for needs that have arisen. At other times there may be a balance between these, or an emphasis on teaching.

**When the Holy Spirit is allowed to be in control then spiritual life and transformed lives follow and the development of true unity and love.**

**In the first church, small home groups were the core focus. One of the great strengths of the early church was this emphasis on community, sharing and love.** The small gatherings in homes and in the open air, were essential for the cementing of these close relationships. Each larger group was founded on gatherings of smaller groups.

The early Christians had a clear understanding that each and every believer was called by God to perform 'priestly' tasks. This has been referred to as the '**priesthood of all believers**'. Peter referred to all Christians as being; *A Royal priesthood* (Bible: 1 Peter 2:9).

All Christians are priests, in the sense that they all have direct access to God through Jesus and can all bring others to God as they pray for them and they all can speak the promises of God into other people's lives, as they go out into the world.

**It is not necessary to approach God via a human intermediary.** We all approach the presence of an awesome God, not through human merit, or the merit of some 'super saint', but only through the merit of Jesus Christ and what he achieved for us at the cross. In the early church all Christians were referred to as 'saints'.

## Chapter 4

### Come out of her my people

We are faced today with Christianity that has become split and divided by differing theological beliefs and different traditions and often on racial lines. Of even greater concern is the evil that has become part of many Christian structures and denominations. Here I speak of the widespread historical and current sexual abuse of children by church leaders and the widespread historical and current abuse of money.

Even where sexual molestation of minors and money making systems are not an evident problem, churches have sometimes become monolithic structures that encourage or even demand allegiance. **In many cases people find their 'security' and their 'significance' through membership of a Christian structure, rather than in a personal relationship with Jesus.**

We are faced with **'strongholds of tradition'**. In some cases Christians with essentially the same understanding of theology are nevertheless divided by traditions, such as the order of worship services, the type of songs used and other externals that become causes of division. In some cases traditions seem to hold as much importance as the Bible! Sometimes these traditions are more important than the Bible!

Many Christians are bound by **'denominational mindsets'**. They will not attend Christian functions unless organized by their own 'denomination'. Affiliation to such traditions can become more important than co-operation in evangelistic outreaches or in social upliftment projects, such as the care of orphans or the destitute!

Other Christians are bound by **'legalism'**. This not only refers to church rules and ways of doing things, but also involves relationship with God.

Legalistic believers feel the need to ‘earn’ favor with God through the things they do for God, the church or for others. In some traditions the faithful are urged to do hard or painful actions or to visit ‘holy places’ in order to earn merit. This is sometimes linked with money making since ‘pilgrims’ may be expected to pay for admission to certain ‘holy sites’.

Legalism can lead to self-righteous attitudes which Jesus strongly condemned. He gave examples such as, “*Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee (Outwardly religious person) and the other a tax collector (often corrupt agent of the Roman government). The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’*

*But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’*

*I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted”*

Legalism stands in contrast to an emphasis on our relationship with God as his sons and daughters. Relationship orientated Christians know that they cannot earn anything from God. It is by grace they have been saved. The good things they do are out of gratitude and love, not in order to gain any merit.

Another major problem within contemporary Christianity is **dogmatic literalism**. This is shown by rigid adherence to specific interpretations of scripture. This was understandable in pre-scientific ages. Now, with the dramatic increase in knowledge, we need to take note of discoveries in science, archaeology and other research disciplines.

There is now a need for a more analytical approach to scriptures. For instance, the study of early manuscripts of the New Testament reveals that some

passages, such as Mark 16, verses 9 to 20 were absent from the earliest manuscripts. Therefore, to develop a theology based on this passage, is unacceptable.

There are many Bible passages where the original Hebrew or Greek script allows for a considerable variability in translation. A dogmatic insistence on only one out of several legitimate translations often leads to intolerance of those who favor alternative interpretations.

As an example, some Christians hold to one rigid interpretation of Genesis chapters 1 and 2, relating to the creation. Anyone who adopts an interpretation that is more in harmony with scientific discoveries is sometimes branded as a heretic.

**Many Christians feel threatened and vulnerable when faced with a simple relationship orientated Christianity, where there are no set patterns of worship and where grace is allowed towards those who hold differing viewpoints on non-essentials of the Christian faith.** We can easily get accustomed to a format where our church services are planned and organized. If we are put into a New Testament type church, based on sharing and participation, we feel insecure.

**Many Christians have remained within church structures that refuse to reform.** Historically, we have seen great moves of God that have not been accepted by most of the traditional church structures. Rarely are existing churches and denominations reformed from within.

We certainly have a responsibility to examine the churches in which we find ourselves. We should try to influence reforms where they are needed. This can be through praying for leaders, but also through speaking out and sharing concerns.

However, if there is a reluctance to confront known evil or if there is a rigid adherence to spiritually dead formats, then individual Christians should seriously consider moving to places where they can be

at peace with their own consciences and where they can grow spiritually. Our allegiance should first and foremost be to Jesus Christ and not to church denominations and traditions.

**In cases where evil has been exposed and where there is no genuine repentance leading to fundamental changes,** I am convinced that the call of God to all true servants of Jesus Christ is,

*Then I heard another voice from heaven say:*

*Come out of her, my people,  
so that you will not share in her sins,  
so that you will not receive any of her plagues;  
For her sins are piled up to heaven,  
and God has remembered her crimes.*

(Bible: Revelation 18:4-6)

Theologians debate exactly what is being described in this passage from the Bible. Some say it refers to the corrupt world system. It can equally be talking of a corrupt religious system. Christians are called to come out of both.

When applied to some visible church structures, **we have abundant examples of ‘her sins’ and ‘her crimes’, not only in the past but very much with us today.**

**The time has come for God to purify Christianity and to expose the evils found within visible theological edifices. It is these corruptions of Christianity that keep millions away from seriously examining the claims of Jesus Christ.**

World events point so clearly to fulfillment of Bible prophecies, including the words of Jesus, all indicating that we are very close to the very end of this age in world history. There is no longer any place in God’s agenda for slow reformation. I believe he is urgently calling for a clear distinction between his true children and the distortions of Christianity seen in many religious structures.

Jesus described world events that would lead up to his return to this earth at the end of this age in world history. He describes wars, famines and earthquakes in various places. He then describes these as, *The beginning of birth pains*' (Bible: Matthew 24:8). This suggests that there will be an increasing frequency of such events as the 'birth' approaches, just as happens with birth pains prior to the birth of a child.

Scientific studies of earthquakes and hurricanes reveal a dramatic increase in these over the past 100 years and especially since 1996. The Red Cross keeps a record of all natural disasters and human casualties caused by these. The figures show that, prior to 1996 these disasters averaged 200 per year. Since this time the incidence steadily increased. By the year 2000 it reached 392. In 2002 these disasters killed 25,600 people. In 2003 this was trebled to 76,806 deaths and in 2004 it trebled again to 250,000 deaths. This trend continues to escalate.

The Red Cross reported in December 2007 that disasters caused by global warming were up by nearly 20 percent from the previous year. In 2006 there was a rise of 70 percent since 2004. Over the last 10 years the number of natural disasters rose by 40 percent over the previous decade. The report for 2008, issued in October, records that *more people died from natural disasters in the first six months of 2008 than in the Asian tsunami of 2004*. (See Red Cross webpage).

In addition, we see a dramatic increase in terrorism, wars, pestilences, starvation and other frightening things caused by mankind. There is no evidence that mankind are heading towards a man-made utopia or millennium of world peace. Events point very strongly towards biblical predictions.

We read, *There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of*

*good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – **having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them*** (Bible: 2 Timothy 3:1-4).

**Why must believers seriously consider coming out of corrupt structures?** It is because God is going to judge these most severely.

**God keeps a record of the history of crimes.** These include the murder of so-called heretics, the mass slaughter of Muslims and Jews in the crusades of the middle ages, the widespread persecution of Jews throughout much of church history, the depriving of livelihood to widows and orphans by persuading men on their death beds to give all their money to the church, the money making 'Theo Capitalism' in our days, the widespread sexual molestation of children by trusted leaders in churches, the channeling of believers money into massive buildings rather than into projects of compassion and many other negations of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as originally given.

Crimes can also include the introduction of new teachings that have strayed far from the Gospel message delivered to this world by Jesus Christ. **False teachings have led to millions believing they have a ticket to heaven, irrespective of life-style.** In large measure their 'blood' is crying out against the doctrines that have lulled them into a sense of false security.

**All of these things cry out for vengeance and justice.** The Bible says, "*Her sins are piled up to heaven and God has remembered her crimes* (Bible: Revelation 18:6). God says, *It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord*" (Bible: Romans 12:19).

**God is exposing the current widespread evils** of sexual abuse that permeates the innermost fabric of some of organized Christianity and the making of money for excessive personal gain by playing on the emotions of genuine God seekers.

**When did Jesus become very angry?**

When he entered the Temple of his day and found 'religious traders' making excessive money out of the peoples desire to worship God.

**When did Jesus become very angry?**

When people cause harm to little children. He said, *"And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!"* (Bible: Matthew 18:6).

**When did Jesus become very angry?**

When he encountered religious hypocrites who pretended to live good lives, but inside they were full of deceit, lies and evil. Jesus said, *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean"* (Bible: Matthew 23:29).

**When did Jesus become very angry?**

When the religious leaders were guiding people into harmful teachings. Jesus said, *Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.* (Bible: Matthew 23:15). This and other passages contain many harsh words against those proclaiming false teachings that lead people away from a personal relationship with God.

Consider again the words of Jesus, ***"Many will say to me on that day, Lord Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!"*** (Bible: Matthew 7:21).

**The serious and urgent call to sincere Christians today includes at least three main actions:**

- 1. We are being called upon to expose evil within church structures. Jesus faced evil head on and was particularly scathing of evil tolerated within religious organizations and individuals.**
- 2. We are being called upon to come out of these institutions that have wandered far from the true purposes of God and which refuse to repent from the heart, shown through changed structures and actions.**
- 3. We are being called to go back to the beliefs, actions and simple relationship based life styles spoken about in the New Testament.**

Once we have left these church structures, that are destined to be severely judged by God, the next challenge is to search the scriptures. Join with other serious seekers after truth. Jesus has promised, *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened”* (Bible: Matthew 7:7-8)

The meaning of the original words, from which our English New Testament is translated, is to ‘keep on seeking’, ‘keep on knocking’. **This is speaking of a heart attitude that seeks truth above all else and seeks it passionately.**

The ultimate truth to be discovered is a personal relationship with God, through what Jesus achieved when he died for you and me on the cross. Jesus said, *I am the way, the **truth** and the life* (Bible: John 14:6)

**The time has come for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?** (Bible: 1 Peter 5:17)

## Chapter 5

### A Missionary faith

I am not going to give a detailed analysis of how I personally understand New Testament theology. This is extensively discussed in my book '**Big Bang Christianity**'. However, I do believe it is important to emphasize that the first church was very much missionary orientated.

Some Christians ask: Why should I tell others about my faith in Jesus? There are several important reasons, namely:

The overall reason should be a desire to share with others what you have discovered about God and his love. It is a practical outworking of the greatest commandment given by God to mankind: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength **and love your neighbour as yourself*** (Bible: Mark 12:30).

There are countless millions of people who are burdened with **heavy loads of guilt**. The message of Jesus brings them a way of forgiveness and peace of mind.

There are millions of people who live **without any real meaning to life**. The Christian message can liberate them from hopelessness and give them a worthwhile reason to live.

There are many who live with the **fear of death**. The message of Jesus and his resurrection can free them from this fear, as they discover for

themselves the reality of the resurrection and the promise of Eternal Life and as they experience the assurance that comes from the working of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

There are millions who are **held captive to habits and sins** from which they cannot break loose. God, through his Holy Spirit and through the support of fellow Christians, can set the captives free.

There are many who have deliberately turned away from the truth that God has revealed to them. **Such people are in the worst condition of all men.** However, the Christian message, delivered in the power of the Holy Spirit, can convict such people of the error of their ways and save them from the eternal danger they are in.

The Christian message of new life through Jesus has **the power to transform society.** A transformed society means less crime, less abuse of women and children, less pain and suffering. In short, a truly Christian society means a better life for all, even right here on earth.

Telling the Good News about Jesus, is a **direct command that he gave to all his followers.** If he is Lord of our lives then it follows that we need to, *“go into all the world and teach all men and women to be my disciples”.*

There are many millions of humanity still living under shocking conditions. This is due to the greed and selfishness of man, his wars and his spending of vast amounts of money on armaments. **A right relationship of people with their Creator is the first and vital step in transforming societies.**

Jesus said, ***“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour”*** (Bible: Luke 4:18-19).

We, as followers of Jesus, are also called to be empowered by the Holy Spirit and to take this same message of forgiveness, spiritual freedom, spiritual insight, release from bondages and habits, assurance of Eternal Life, and to announce this ‘good news’ to the ends of the earth.

It is a highly significant fact of history that the very small band of ‘Christians’, who have really put into practice the words of Jesus, have literally transformed society. **Most of the great humanitarian movements have been initiated by committed Christians, or by people strongly impacted by the Christian message.**

Western democracy, the rule of law and the fundamental rights of individuals, all derive from our Christian roots. Great movements such as modern hospitals, orphanages, abolition of slavery, abolition of infanticide and widow burning in India, the International Red Cross movement - all these and others came out of our Christian background. Other cultures and faiths have since copied some of these, such as the Red Crescent movement in Moslem lands.

If the early Christians had not taken the words of Jesus seriously, Christianity would never have spread to such a wide portion of the earth. There are still areas where people live in ignorance of the Gospel message. Countries with a Christian heritage lead the world in tolerance of other faiths. Unfortunately many Moslem

countries do not show this same tolerance, even though they benefit from it in western democracies.

The challenge and calling to all Christians, who take the words of Jesus seriously, is still the same missionary message. **If released from the man-made 'straight jacket' that characterises so much of modern 'Christianity', the message of Jesus still has the power to turn societies upside down, not by force of arms or bombs, but through the power of God's love to change lives.**

May our great and awesome God bless you and keep you and make his face to shine upon you and give you his joy and his peace. And may he empower you and motivate you to share the Good News with those you rub shoulders with at work. You do not have to be a great theologian or a trained evangelist. All you have to do is share your own life experience, point people towards Jesus and show the love of Jesus in practical acts of kindness.

However, it will make you a much more effective witness if you seriously study your faith and learn how to express it to those who have never clearly heard about the God who, *so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him, should not perish, but should have Everlasting Life* (Bible: John 3:16).

## Chapter 6.

### **A life worth living**

The most satisfying discovery is that your life really does have a meaning and that it is truly worth living. Once we realise that God does exist, that he is knowable in personal experience and that our relationship with him lasts into eternity, then we view everything positively. This life really is just the 'curtain raiser' for far greater things.

This is not just an intellectual knowledge. Life lived 'on the edge', in relationship to the God of creation, can be the most exciting, challenging and rewarding of all experiences. This is really life with a capital 'L'.

This life will still have its share of hardships but through them all we can experience the reality of God. Since our destination is the Timeless Dimension, the most important thing is to prepare ourselves for our destiny. In the final analysis, God is not so much interested in our comfort as our character. It is our character and our relationship to God that will survive into eternity.

Although this life is the 'curtain raiser' to far greater things after physical death, the Christian life is certainly not meant to emphasise some sort of 'pie in the sky when we die'. God has made it very clear that we are all placed here on earth to fulfil specific callings and specific roles. We are meant to be the hands, feet, eyes and actions of God in a world filled with sadness, largely caused by humanity's rebellion against God and his best plans for our lives. *'Love your neighbour as yourself'* is the calling to all followers of Jesus.

Hardships and challenges often increase once we have given our lives to Jesus. This is understandable in the light of the cosmic battle that is in progress between good and evil, between God and Satan. Peter, who was

one of the original twelve close disciples of Jesus, wrote, *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.*

*In this you greatly rejoice, **though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.** These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – that faith, may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed (Bible: 1 Peter 1:3-7).*

**In the midst of many challenges and hardships, the Christian who is prepared to ‘live on the edge’ for God, is destined to have exhilarating experiences of the reality of God.**

As one example I share my experiences whilst climbing Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. The name Kilimanjaro means ‘Mountain of God’ in the Massai language.

### My Kilimanjaro experience

Since my childhood it had been an ambition to someday climb this magnificent mountain. It is the highest point in Africa and is the largest ‘free-standing’ mountain in the world. In July 1999 I joined up with a climb organised by Tribe Safari Adventure Company. We were 35 climbers, including my son-in-law Robin Gibbs and his wife Tomene.

**What started out as the fulfilment of a longstanding dream, turned out to be another experience of the reality of God.** The first hurdle seemed to be the expense. However, about five weeks before the climb I received the finance from an unexpected source. I now embarked on a crash ‘get fit’

programme because, although I regularly jog, I was totally unfit for Kilimanjaro.

Shortly before leaving Cape Town, my wife Anna remarked what a great experience it will be to pray from the top of the mountain. As she said this, that 'flow of thoughts' that has been the way that God often speaks into my life, said to me, *That is actually the main reason why you must climb Kilimanjaro.* This came as a bit of a surprise, but the more I thought about it the more I became convinced that I must do this.

One day, as I sat at my desk and thought about this 'praying from the mountain', the 'flow of thoughts' said to me, *Look up Isaiah 42.* I discovered that this passage from the Bible spoke about how God was about to do 'a new thing'. It also spoke very strongly about false gods and how these would all be brought to utter shame. The same day Anna came to me and said that, as she was meditating, she had been led to Psalm 97. This was also speaking strongly about false gods and how the God of the Bible was above all other gods.

I wrote these two Bible passages on a sheet of paper, together with a prayer and resolved to leave these in a bottle somewhere on the top of Kilimanjaro. Writing the prayer was to me an amazing experience. I started writing, without knowing what to write, and then experienced what I believe many of the Bible writers must have experienced.

As I completed each line, the next line immediately came to mind. The whole 36 lines just flowed without any corrections or pauses. It seemed to me as if my mind was just 'taken over' for that short time that I was writing. There was nothing pre-arranged, it just flowed from my pen. I was aware that the Holy Spirit was at work in this situation.

As we flew from Johannesburg to Arusha in Tanzania, I sat next to a young man who was later greatly blessed through his own mountain experiences. Out of the 35 climbers I found myself, without any prior arrangement, constantly interacting with five of them,

in addition to Rob and Tomene. One was of Jewish origin, one I called an ‘intellectual sceptic’, one was the young man I sat next to in the aeroplane and the others were a husband and wife team from the Orange Free State in South Africa.

**On the third day of the climb, I overheard one of the climbers telling another how his wife was a very spiritual lady and that she had given him some ‘crystals’ to bury at the top of the mountain, ‘in order to improve the spirituality of the world’.** To the Christian such ‘crystals’ are equivalent to false gods.

A bit later on the climb my ‘sceptic friend’ remarked on the splendour of the view. I then told him a story I had heard about a debate on the BBC. This was between an atheist and a Christian pastor. At one point the atheist said to the debate chairman “What I can’t accept about people like this pastor, is that he expects me to believe that some theoretical god made everything out of nothing”.

The pastor replied “I admit that it takes a step of faith to believe that God made everything out of apparently nothing. However, my atheist friend wants me to believe that ‘nothing’ made ‘everything’ out of ‘nothing’. To my mind that takes even greater faith!” My sceptic friend was silent for a moment and then said “I like that. In fact I like it a lot”.

The last camp before the summit is called Barafu, which means ‘cold’ in the local language. At this stage we were all extremely tired and most climbers were suffering from some degree of mountain sickness. I had been saved from any hint of mountain sickness because a friend had told me to frequently eat a little salt and drink water with it. This appeared to work because I seemed to be the only climber without some degree of mountain sickness.

I had thought that maybe Rob and Tomene could join me in praying at the top of the mountain, but I now wondered if we would all make it up the last

stretch. For the first time I shared with Robin the contents of the paper scroll that I intended leaving on the mountain. He said he would take a spare copy I gave him and show it to Tomene in their tent.

Robin told me later that, **when he entered the tent, Tomene was busy reading her Bible and was reading the same Isaiah 42 passage that I had written down for leaving on the mountain.** Once again we see the directing 'finger of God' at work.

At 11 pm that night we started on the final climb, so as to reach the crater rim by sunrise. In fact that climb was the hardest physical feat I have personally ever encountered. I was really not very fit, had suffered flue just before leaving South Africa and my age was not on my side. Twice I came to a complete standstill and everything within me cried out 'thus far and no further'.

I felt I just could not take another single step. However, on both occasions a young mountain guide gently pushed me from behind and enabled me to start moving again. On my return to Cape Town, three Christian friends told me how they had woken up during that night with the intense feeling that they must pray for me!

**After reaching the summit I found a quiet place overlooking the crater, read out the written prayer, and found a crevice in which to place the scroll in its plastic bottle.** We then started the long descent to a camp halfway down the mountain.

As we headed down on the last day, I found myself formulating a thank you speech for the porters and guides who had been with us. I remembered some Ki-Swahili language from my childhood in Kenya. When we reached the base camp, the climb leader said he thought it would be great if I could thank the porters.

**My speech in Ki-Swahili went something like,** *On behalf of all the climbers I would like to thank you all for helping us so much on the mountain. I was also very interested to hear how many of you had been singing Christian songs while we were climbing. It seems to me*

*as if you all love Jesus very much. (To this I noted a number of definite nods). Well I think that is great because I also love Jesus a lot. I am sorry that my Ki-Swahili is not very good but I learnt it long ago as a child in Kenya. My father was a doctor in Tanzania and later in Kenya and I went to school in Nairobi. All the climbers want to thank you once again and give you all our best wishes.*

As soon as I finished my brief speech a couple of the climbers said, *'Now we want an English translation'*. **As I gave the translation I realised that everyone would now know that I have taken a stand for Jesus, and I wondered what the outcome would be.**

I was the first to reach the hotel in Moshi, because I was offered a lift in the lead vehicle. As they checked me into the hotel they asked if I minded sharing with three others. I quickly had the first shower in six days and, as I finished my shower my first roommate arrived. He was the Jewish friend who, from various remarks he made during the climb I had concluded was an atheist. His first words were, *"Are you in this room?"* When I replied affirmatively he said, *"Then I suppose no swearing or dirty jokes!"* I did not know how to reply and so just encouraged him to have a shower.

The next roommate was my 'Intellectual sceptic' friend, followed by the young man I had sat next to in the aeroplane. Out of all the 35 climbers I again found my path crossing with the same people. Obviously this was not a co-incidence. The young man then shared with me what happened to him on the last night of the climb. He reached a point where he sat down and just could not get up again. Suddenly, he unexpectedly got a burst of energy. Then he remembered how his father, who is a Bishop, had promised to pray for him when on the mountain. When he looked at his watch he saw it was 4 am and he remembered that his father normally got up at this time each morning to pray. He said, *"then I knew where that burst of energy came from"*. As I

listened to this testimony I realised that I would not have heard it if I had not previously given that brief speech to the porters.

Shortly afterwards, the husband of the couple who had often been interacting with me during the climb, came over. He just wanted to thank me for speaking out so boldly to the porters and fellow climbers. He told me how, shortly before leaving South Africa he had gone forward in church to re-commit his life to Jesus. However, he found it difficult to confess his faith to others and what I had done gave him greater courage to speak out.

That evening all the climbers got together at a Chinese restaurant, to share highlights of the climb. We were all asked to share something that had been particularly meaningful. **When it came to the man who had been asked to bury the ‘sacred crystals’, he told us more or less as follows,** *“When I got to the top of the mountain I completely forgot to bury the crystals. I only remembered this when I was in my tent half way down the mountain. I thought to myself, well we are still on the mountain so I can still bury them here. I then got out of the tent before daybreak and climbed to a slight rise near the camp. I dug a hole and buried them.*

*It was now close to sunrise so I decided to watch the sunrise. As it became light I realised what I had done. The place I had chosen to bury the crystals was where the porters came to the toilet!”*

**I thought to myself, the prayers I left on the mountaintop were all to do with bringing down of false gods. Was it possible that the Creator God was telling me that this was exactly what he intends to do in Africa?** He will find a way to shake the confidence that many people in Africa have in false gods, such as the widespread belief that spirits of ancestors cause most of the good and bad events in our lives.

What did God think of false ‘gods’ like ‘magic crystals’? Not only did he prevent them being placed on

top of the mountain, but he also told us in vivid drama what he thought of them. **They should be buried in the toilet!** I also marvelled that this dear man shared this experience with us.

The next day we flew back to Johannesburg from Arusha. I was one of the last to enter the aircraft and it was free seating, first come first serve. As I looked down the seats, it seemed at first that all were occupied. However, one lady waved to me to sit next to her by the window. On the other side of her was our Jewish friend and behind us sat the young man whose father is a Bishop, and close by was my 'intellectual sceptic'!

The lady turned the conversation to Christian topics almost throughout the flight. When we arrived at Johannesburg and were waiting for the doors to open, my Jewish friend stood up in the aisle and suddenly said in quite a loud voice, "*Well, I suppose there may be a God after all!*"

**To me, these types of events are not coincidences at all.** They make life truly exciting. Clearly God manipulates events, to help people think seriously about spiritual realities. It is invigorating and most satisfying to be on the 'Winning team'. This gives us an inward excitement and an inward peace and an inward joy. This type of inward peace and joy can be experienced, even in the midst of severe problems. It is the joy and peace that comes from knowing that God is actually in full control.

The author of the Bible book of Philippians wrote, *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. **And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding,** will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.* (Bible: Philippians 4:4-9).

## Chapter 7

### My personal journey

In 1960 my parents moved from Nairobi in Kenya to Cape Town, and I enrolled at the University of Cape Town, with Zoology and Botany being major subjects. I became increasingly fascinated with Zoology and in particular with the origins of life and with evolution. At the same time, I experienced severe mental agonies, because my Christian upbringing had led me to understand that evolutionary processes could not be reconcilable with the Bible.

At first, much of my time was spent trying to find fault in what I was being taught about origins and evolution. However, by my second year I was fully convinced that some sort of evolutionary processes were involved in the development of our planet and the Universe. At the same time, I was greatly privileged to meet some people who described real-life situations where events strongly suggested intervention in human affairs by a 'supernatural' being.

Thus, I was torn between my sincere desire to follow truth in my Zoological studies, and my real desire to retain a higher meaning to life. At this stage I wrote a few poems that perhaps show my mental conflicts. For instance:

I trace the misty centuries all past,  
and see the actors now for ever gone.  
as then I learn how man emerged from dust,  
of how our fathers lived in savagery scarce lost.  
These facts must bring my mind to certain doubt,  
and make me feel I am just naught but dust.  
For can there be a nature in each man,  
that differs from the common lot of life around?

Or again:

This mortal dust that vainly dwells,  
that passes on as mist does pass at dawn.  
Time marches by, and gone is mortal man,  
from dust he came and thus he must return.  
How can such folly reach on high,  
how touch and feel the infinite or real?  
Can Spirit with frail dust unite in one,  
or mortal reach to the immortal light?

During my time at University I was still very involved in student Christian activities. I largely kept my doubts and questions to myself. I remember on one occasion going out alone under a starry sky with a full moon overhead. Here I spoke out loud, "God, if you are really out there, and if you really know that I am honestly searching for truth, please send me an angel to speak to me, then I will really know that you are there". However, nothing unusual happened right then.

After graduating with a PhD. in Zoology, and getting married, I was employed in various wildlife research projects in South Africa. However, in 1975 we immigrated to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). Here I was employed as Ornithologist with the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management. However, the country was being torn apart by a bush war that intensified each year and I had to carry a rifle wherever my research projects took me.

Within six months of arrival in Rhodesia I was enrolled into the military. In my unit we had to do military service for periods of about three weeks at a time and then return to our civilian duties. The periods of military duty steadily increased and by 1978 I was spending about half of the year on military duty. **These periods of duty turned out to be my first real personal experience of the supernatural.**

I was in a unit called PR 4 connected to the police reserve. It was thought that our exposure to real battle situations would be unlikely, because we were not part

of the combat army. However, **a series of events took place that really changed my whole outlook on how God works in human situations.** I will describe these in some detail, hopefully to help you enter into the situation more realistically. There were many other times when I felt that events were somewhat unusual, and where apparent co-incidences were rather frequent. However, the most memorable were as follows.

**28 May 1977** I was deployed to a fortified base called Beveke, north of the town of Mount Darwin. Jerry Ziebell and I were responsible for a group of newly recruited soldiers (actually armed Department of Home Affairs personnel) who had received very little training. Our main responsibility was to supply four other fortified bases with supplies, and to do this we had to drive a considerable distance into Mount Darwin, collect supplies, and then drive along these dusty two-wheeler tracks through the bush.

On 9<sup>th</sup> June we received a radio call from one of the bases in our area called Muteravendi. The corporal in charge said he had a sick soldier who needed to be uplifted to Mount Darwin. Jerry and I decided to leave early the next morning, as it was already late afternoon and no travel was done at night because it was too dangerous. However, early in the morning we received a call from Mount Darwin that we must first go there to collect supplies needed urgently by another base. I tried to protest that we needed to first go and collect the sick soldier. However, I was overruled by senior rank.

By the time we returned from Mount Darwin it was already early afternoon. We organised two mine-proofed vehicles and planned to head towards the Muteravendi base and sleep there overnight. I had two soldiers with me and we drove in front, because I had travelled this road several times, whereas Jerry had only just arrived at the base. These roads had no signposts and you had to know your way by experience.

Jerry followed in a mine proofed Landover, together with two soldiers.

I drove confidently down the dusty road until I came to the first fork. Here, without any conscious doubt as to my choice, I took the left fork. I only realised I had made a mistake when I saw a small dam on my right side and I immediately remembered that this should normally be on my left side. I was about to swallow my pride, and tell Jerry that I had taken the wrong turn, when I noticed that there was a vehicle track going along the dam wall and this would take me back to the correct road. So, not wanting to admit my mistake, I simply drove onto the dam wall. However, unknown to me there was a soft patch in the road and the right hand rear wheel sank in deeply. In fact the heavy armoured vehicle was in danger of rolling down into the dam.

We carefully climbed out and I apologised to Jerry for my mistake. He was very understanding and suggested that we should leave the soldiers to guard the stuck vehicle while he and I would drive back the few kilometres to our base. At base we had a Bedford truck that we could use to pull the stuck vehicle back out of the sand.

I jumped into the mine-proofed land rover next to Jerry and he then attempted to put the vehicle into first gear. It was one of those Land rovers with a ball at the base of the gear stick on the floor. As he tried to put it into gear the lever simply broke off flush with the ball.

When we got over our amazement, we tried to get the vehicle into gear with a screwdriver. However, there were no other tools and it turned out that both of us were totally ignorant of mechanics. No way could we get that vehicle into gear, so we now had two stuck vehicles.

I remember at this point saying to Jerry, "It looks like we are not meant to go to Muteravendi" We then decided that Jerry and two soldiers would walk back to base while the rest of us guarded the vehicles.

After some time Jerry appeared with the Bedford truck. It was now approaching evening and we decided it was not a good idea to try to tow the vehicles back until the morning, because a night-time curfew was in operation. As we drove back into camp I heard an excited voice on the radio calling us and saying, "We are under attack". It was the corporal at the base that we had intended visiting.

It was now that I 'heard' a voice in my head saying very clearly to me "Your times are in my hands". I was quite shocked, because it seemed to me that this was probably a phrase out of the Bible. The full significance of this did not immediately strike me because I had to attend to the radio.

At first I was very disappointed, because I knew that all the troops on that base were new recruits and had very poor training. A couple of weeks earlier another base had come under fire and the troops just fired in all directions until they ran out of ammunition. The only reason they were not overrun was because the opposition forces apparently did not realise that they had no more ammunition. My real fear was a repeat of this situation. After some persuasion and shouting over the radio I managed to get the corporal to stop his men from firing and to just hold their position. Fortunately the opposition did not press home another attack that night.

In the morning we started down towards Muteravendi, to see what damage had been done. Another group of army came with us. About two kilometres from the Muteravendi base we found that a land mine had been placed in the left wheel track (I actually took a photograph). In the bushes to the right we found flattened grass where an ambush had been in wait. Apparently the ambush was expecting us to come to pick up the sick soldier. It was common for such information to filter out of camp to the opposition. When we did not appear the previous evening and it became so late that the ambush must have known that

we would not be coming that day, they then decided to let off their frustration by firing at the base camp.

The ambush site was very well planned. The two-wheeled track ensured that the lead vehicle would hit the landmine. Both Jerry and I realised that we would have been in a very precarious position because of the mine, but also because the four troops with us were still very poorly trained and inexperienced and unpredictable. We had discovered this a few days earlier when we had them all out on a firing range. Some of the rifles did not fire because of poor maintenance and the safest place to be on that range appeared to be in front of the targets!

**Jerry and I now put together the events of the past two days.**

Clearly the opposition had known we intended to visit Muteravendi on the 10<sup>th</sup> June.

Our intention was delayed because of the urgent command to collect supplies from Mount Darwin.

We still tried to get to Muteravendi to collect the sick soldier.

Things went further wrong when I somehow got confused and took the left fork instead of the right. I got the one vehicle stuck on the dam wall.

We still tried to salvage our plan by driving back in the second vehicle.

This was further frustrated when the gear lever broke off in a most amazing way.

We still hoped to salvage the situation, but by now it was again too late to travel to Muteravendi. All these events added up to us missing possible death in the ambush.

As we were analysing all this, **we both came to the conclusion that there certainly seemed to be 'someone up there on our side'**. We did not analyse how this 'someone' had organised events. However, it seemed to involve influencing thoughts and decisions of

several people, and also using soft patches on roads and broken vehicles. Overall, there had to be careful timing of events to ensure that we missed that ambush. **The ‘someone’ seemed to be aware of the intricate details of our situation.**

That night, I looked through a Bible that I had with me and managed to find where those words in my mind had come. It was in Psalm 31, “*My times are in your hands*”. As I thought about this I was suddenly reminded of that prayer I prayed years before while a student, “God, if you are really out there, and if you really know that I am honestly searching for truth, please send me an angel, then I will really know that you are there”.

In an instant it was like that ‘voice’ in my head said, “You asked for a vision of angels. You have just received it”. Well, I thought, I never saw an angel but it certainly seemed as if there was one organising events for us. I then got quite excited and my next prayer was something along these lines, “God, yes, it really does seem that you were behind all this. Thanks a lot and I am really grateful. But God, I hope you do not mind my asking but I would be really pleased if you could do this sort of thing again”.

So it happened that, after another couple of years, I remember my section Commander Alistair Kito saying to me one day, “how come, whenever our section gets into an ambush or dangerous situation you seem to be there?” I actually believe it was because God took my prayer seriously. He showed me again and again that he really does intervene in real life situations and even in individual lives. Here is another case:

**28 February 1978.** I was in charge of a group of five men, tasked with escorting commercial vehicles from Fort Victoria to Renco gold mine. This was a particularly dangerous task because nearly every convoy to the mine during the preceding few months had been ambushed. On one occasion five elite Selous

Scouts were killed. The insurgent group operating in the area was led by a self-styled General Nylon, who was trained in the best of Rhodesia's army but had defected to the other side. It was with some trepidation that we faced our task. We were a Police Reserve unit and normally we did not have automatic weapons, only semi-automatic FN rifles. We expected to be ambushed with machine guns and anti-tank rockets.

We were meant to escort the convoy with one mine proofed Land Rover and a Bedford truck, covered with sand bags against land mines. However, the truck had engine trouble and no replacement was available. We waited three days for the vehicle to be fixed, but in the end I pestered the mechanic so much that he gave us another truck which he said was his best vehicle. At last we headed for Ungundu halt and intended continuing to Renco mine the same day.

Before leaving Fort Victoria I was approached with a request to take two MAG machine guns to a Selous Scout group at Renco mine. None of us had been given training with these weapons but we had no problem taking them with us.

We were hardly 50 km along our route when the so-called 'best truck' started jerking and showing signs of serious problems. We finally reached Ungundu halt but realised the vehicle was in no state to make the rest of the trip to Renco mine. We were now stuck at the army base until an alternative vehicle became available.

Since we were immobilised, I asked the army lieutenant at Ungundu halt base if one of his chaps could instruct two of us in the use of MAG machine guns. This was duly done and I was one of the pupils. The other chaps with me were Wesley Chambers, Derrick Robinson, Daniel Rossouw and John Urie. If I remember correctly John Urie was the other pupil.

On 5<sup>th</sup> March, the Lieutenant took pity on us and volunteered to send one of his army trucks together with 6 troops, to escort us to the border of the tribal area. The instructions were that this truck would turn

back at the border and we would continue on the back of one of the commercial vehicles. However, when we reached the tribal border there were definite signs of trouble waiting. There was not one person in sight and we knew this was the usual sign that an ambush was ahead. The leader of the army group tried to radio through for permission to continue with us to Rencome mine, but there were no radio comms. He then took his own decision and decided to go with us.

As we approached a wooded area, that 'voice' spoke clearly in my head, "Fear not, I am with you even to the end of the age". It was amazing the peace these words gave me. We then rounded a corner and started going up a hill. The land rover was in front and two commercial trucks followed us. I was on the back of one truck with the MAG machine gun ready to fire. Suddenly the ambush opened up from close range and I just saw blue smoke as everyone on both sides of the truck opened fire. We did not know which side the firing was coming from.

However, the ambush was probably taken by surprise when our two machine guns, and the two with the army group, returned fire. Probably because of this, the ambush did not direct fire as accurately as usual. The land rover was hit with rifle fire and a bullet passed inches behind the driver's seat, but no one was injured. When we got past the firing we found that our truck was not even hit once.

So, why tell this real-life story? It is because **these events again illustrate a pattern that I saw repeated over and over. Events occurred that frustrated us, yet they all worked together to ensure that we came out of the situation alive.** For instance;

1. Our wait at Fort Victoria for three days, because of vehicle problems, resulted in our getting two machine guns in addition to our normal rifles.

2. Our further delay at Ungundu halt meant that we were given instruction in their use. The further failure to obtain a replacement vehicle led to the army Lieutenant taking pity on us and sending us on our way with an escort.
3. When we reached the tribal area we should have lost the army escort, but a lack of radio communications led to their decision to go ahead with us. This meant far more fire power than the ambush was expecting.
4. The 'someone' had a detailed awareness of our personal situation.

All these delays and developments led to a failure of the ambush, because of the unexpected intensity of our return fire. Are all these circumstances pure chance? If it happens once we are tempted to say so. However, this was now the second time that **all the chaps with me said, "There was someone up there organising events"**.

**29 January 1979:** We were based at Umtali in eastern Rhodesia and our task was to escort convoys of heavy commercial vehicles between Umtali and Chipinga. The escort consisted of two Mazda pick-up one-ton trucks with a Browning machine gun mounted on the back. These machine guns were the same as used in the Second World War Spitfire fighter planes. The guns were mounted on a rotating turret and the gunner was partly shielded by armour plating. Each vehicle had a gunner on the back, a driver, and one person in the passenger seat. One escort vehicle led the convoy and one brought up the rear.

On the way south I was manning the machine gun on the lead vehicle. The driver and companion both had their FN rifles out of the windows ready to fire. As we reached the turnoff to Cashel, I noticed a circular mark on the tarred road in front of us. This looked like a typical situation where a circle of tarred road is

removed by rotating a cut metal drum that had been heated in a fire. A landmine is then placed in the hole and the circle of tar replaced.

This dangerous looking circle passed right under our vehicle between the wheels. I then signalled to the commercial truck behind us to swerve around this mark. We had strict instructions not to stop. I was gratified to see that each truck behind us followed the same detour.

On arrival at Chipinga I discussed this episode with Dick Salt and Geoff Sanderson who were in my vehicle and with the other escort vehicle. Dick mentioned that he also saw a circular patch, but at a point about 250 m from where I saw mine. We decided that on the return trip our vehicle would bring up the rear and when we got to this suspicious spot we would stop and investigate while the convoy continued without stopping.

On this return trip I was driving, Dick Salt was next to me and Geoff was manning the machine gun. When we got to the spot where Dick had seen the mark we stopped briefly, but amazingly could not find the mark he had previously seen. It seemed to have totally disappeared. We then checked out the mark I had seen but again it was no longer visible. Meanwhile the long line of very slow commercial vehicles moved slowly ahead up a steep slope, at 5 to 10 km per hour.

I decided it was time to catch up with the convoy that now disappeared over the top of the rise. Because of this I was travelling much faster than would normally have been the case. When half way up the slope we suddenly were under heavy fire from the left side embankment. I started firing out of my window while driving in case there were also enemies on the right. However, my rifle suddenly jammed and instinctively I took my hand off the steering wheel to cock the rifle action. As I did this, the vehicle swerved violently to the right. At that very instant there was a loud 'whoosh' and flash immediately to our left.

This flash was in fact a rifle grenade and I am sure it missed us only because I had swerved at that instant. Meanwhile all of us continued firing as we accelerated up the slope. None of us were hit and the only casualty was a soldier to whom we had given a lift. He had apparently been told by a Sangoma (Tribal medium) that he would die today. When the firing started he threw himself on the floor with such violence that he cut his hand. Needless to say the Sangoma was wrong in his prediction of death.

We were given radio instructions to continue with the convoy and another reaction group would follow up on the ambush. This follow-up found 35 firing positions on an embankment, hundreds of spent bullet cases and remains of one M60 rifle grenade that had been fired at us. So, why were we not hit? Again our analysis of these events showed **very precise timing that all added up to our amazing escape from any injury.**

1. The mark on the road. Was there really a mark or did I 'see' something that was not actually there?
2. The decision to investigate on the return trip. This meant that we caught up with the convoy at far greater speed than normal and so were much harder targets.
3. My rifle jamming, leading to me swerving at the precise moment that the grenade was fired at us.
4. The 'someone' had a detailed awareness of our personal situation.

We assume that the leader of the ambush had decided to attack the tail vehicle, because there would be less chance of the lead vehicle offering assistance. **Another amazing event came to light when we got back to camp.** Don Mclean and Peter Haddon, from the lead vehicle crew, told us that, as the convoy was going slowly up the steep slope, the escort vehicle driver saw in his rear mirror that one commercial truck was

overtaking another. This was against convoy rules. The escort vehicle doubled back on the right-hand side of the road and pulled the driver to a standstill to tell him off.

Without realising it, they had stopped immediately opposite the ambush position that was on the left side of the road. However, the heavy commercial vehicle was between them and the ambush. Presumably the ambush did not open fire because the escort vehicle was shielded by the truck, and because they knew our follow up escort vehicle was still to arrive.

Once again, all the chaps discussed the events over a beer and all agreed, “someone out there was on our side today”. But no one had a good reason as to why. However, it seemed that the ‘someone’ had again influenced human thought processes, leading to split second timing of events.

**17 September 1979:** One of my duties, when not on military call-up, was to help protect cereal crops from literally millions of small finch-like birds called Quelea. The official policy was to wait until these birds collected in large groups and actually threatened agricultural crops. A million Quelea can eat and waste more than a ton of wheat in a day.

The procedure was to identify the bushes or reeds where these birds congregate in a dense mass to sleep at night. We then called in a specially trained pilot with a crop spraying aircraft, such as a Thrush Commando. We would fly over the area earlier in the day to help the pilot pinpoint the site and then direct him in by radio just before dark. He then released a fine spray of Fenthion poison over the roosting birds. A survey the next morning would sometimes reveal several million dead Quelea. It was rather an unpleasant task, but at the time this was the only approved way of protecting crops from potentially disastrous damage.

On this occasion I flew to the Mid-Sabi irrigation scheme with Mike La Grange and the pilot of a small

one engine plane. That afternoon four of us went on horseback down the Sabi River looking for the reed bed where the Quelea were roosting. You could tell this from the carpet of white droppings on the reeds and sandbanks. We failed to locate the exact site that afternoon. However, from watching the direction of flight taken by vast 'clouds' of Quelea towards dusk, we were able to approximately pinpoint the roost.

Towards dusk we passed through a village of huts used by workers on the irrigation scheme. We asked them if they knew where the Quelea roosted but nobody was able to answer accurately. The next morning one of the workers came and told us that a group of opposition troops entered the village that night and asked the workers what we were doing in the area.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> September we managed to identify the roost from the air. We arranged to conduct the spray that evening and we also asked a local group of police for protection of the operation. We arranged to meet with the police group at 17h00 at one of the farmhouses. However, there were delays due to having to fill the aircraft with fuel. On arrival at the rendezvous at 17h30 there was no sign of the police group and we thought they had forgotten to meet us.

Mike La Grange and I now drove to the riverbank and walked down the dry riverbed between two parallel rows of tall reeds. We intended to pinpoint the Quelea roost more accurately since we still had about half an hour before the aircraft was due to start the operation. After a while we heard the aircraft starting up in the distance. We were not yet quite up to the Quelea roost. If we had arrived at the river ten minutes earlier we could have reached the roost before the aircraft started up.

Mike said we must run back to the land rover, because this had our only radio to communicate with the pilot. I was at this point furthest from the land rover and about to follow Mike, when firing opened up just ahead of us at the Quelea roost we had been heading

for. We could see tracer bullets bouncing off the riverbank.

Mike came up to where I was standing. Our first instinct was to return fire, because we believed it must come from the opposition forces. We presumed they could not see us due to the reeds, but probably thought they knew where we were. Mike La Grange said, "Let's rather dash back to the land rover and warn the aircraft to abort the Quelea spray".

We ran back under cover of the reeds, called off the operation and returned to camp. Here we discovered that the firing had in fact come from the police group. They had gone on their own to the river bank without thinking of informing us and had thought they saw people moving through the bush on the opposite bank of the river. They believed these were opposition forces because there was a curfew in the area. The bullets we saw hitting the bank close to us were in fact 'friendly fire'. If we had returned the fire it would have resulted in a very nasty battle between us and our police protection unit.

**On reconstructing the events of the day, Mike and I realised how close we had come to a very nasty firefight with our own side.** We would have been very vulnerable, because we were in the bottom of a flat riverbed. We realised that we had been delayed, by refuelling the aircraft and then by waiting ten minutes at the planned rendezvous with the police. If we had arrived at the river ten minutes earlier we would have reached the Quelea roost at the time that the police group opened fire on the people moving on the opposite bank. The police would not have realised our presence because we were shielded by tall reeds. We would therefore have been in direct line of fire and would certainly have returned fire.

**Once again, we saw how pinpoint timing of events led to us escaping a very nasty situation and almost certain loss of life.** Clearly, the 'someone' who

was in overall control of the events, was aware of the minute details of my life and circumstance.

**Other Rhodesia adventures:** I have outlined some of the more dramatic Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) events that convinced me that God was, for some strange reason, not willing that I should die at that time. His intervention revealed itself through the precise timing of events, the breakdown of vehicles, and through influencing the decisions made by people. There were many other Rhodesian situations where I felt we had been supernaturally protected.

**God at work in Belgium:** In 1988 I faced some dramatic events that necessitated my going to Brussels as part of a legal action. At the time I was employed by the South African Department of Agriculture. My goal in Belgium was to locate missing family members. This was a private goal financed by my family and there is no need to go into details. However, I needed to know if some people lived at a particular address in Brussels, and to determine this without myself being seen at that address.

When my sister heard I needed accommodation in Brussels, she contacted a friend who had been at school with her in Kenya, but now lived in Belgium. This friend said she was about to spend time with her mother in Germany and I was welcome to use her flat in Brussels. On arrival at the flat I discovered that it was situated in the very same street as the house I needed to watch. Furthermore, I could watch that house from the balcony of this flat! **For those of you who know the size of Brussels you will appreciate the odds against such an event being chance!**

During this time in Brussels I found I had to stay longer than planned. I was introduced to a small group of English speaking Christians who met informally in a school hall. I was asked by some of them why I was in Belgium and I told them it was in connection with a

pending court case. However, I did not tell anyone of my real financial situation.

One family, the Ridings, put me up at a very low rent. However, I still realised that I would run out of money before my tasks were completed. After a few days, I asked the landlord what he did for a living. He bought old houses, renovated them and then resold them at a profit. I offered to help with renovations when not otherwise occupied. After a couple of days he told me that, if I could help him in this way, I could stay in the accommodation free of charge.

In spite of this generosity, my finances were again soon nearly used up and I was worried that I would have to cut short my stay before all the work was finished. One Sunday, as I sat in the school hall where the Christians met, a young German man came up and asked me how I was getting on. I said all was fine, I just had to wait for events to happen. He then handed me an envelope and said God 'told' him to give this to me. I regret I cannot recall this man's name. If he reads this please do contact me. I would love to show my gratitude in some way.

When I got to my accommodation, I opened the letter and it contained 20,000 Belgian Francs. At that time this was a considerable amount of money. I used it sparingly on various essentials. For instance, I had to hire a vehicle for a few days to check out something in a small village outside Brussels. By the time I finally headed back to South Africa, on a previously purchased return air ticket, I still had a little of the Belgian money left over.

On arrival at Johannesburg on a Sunday, I realised I did not have a ticket to Cape Town. I went to the ticket desk and intended paying by cheque, since a salary had been deposited into my South African account in my absence. However, in those days banking was still not well automated and the ticket office told me that they could not accept a cheque for payment, and I did not have a credit card at that time. The man

suggested I go to a bank that was open in the airport terminal. Here I encountered the same story. They could only cash a cheque up to R100, which was far too little for the ticket.

I was looking for a solution to this problem when the teller asked if perhaps I had some foreign currency on me. I remembered the Belgian francs and when he changed these into Rands, together with the R100 cheque, it was just enough money to purchase my one-way ticket to Cape Town!

**I hope my reader can begin to see why I now believe in a God who does intervene in human affairs, especially when the human is in desperate situations and when that human exerts a measure of faith and trust in this God.** I am quite sure that He is actively involved in this world at all times, but we only become particularly aware of this at certain times.

**God at work in South Africa:** If you live life ‘on the edge’, and step out of your comfort zones, you are far more likely to experience the supernatural at work. It is not every day that I experience spectacular interventions by the supernatural. However, I personally believe that such events happen almost on a daily basis, even though I am often unaware of them. I often remark how I seem to be at just the right place at the right time. Some might pass these situations off as coincidence. I have learnt to thank God for his blessings.

**The suicide case:** Sometimes, being in the right place at the right time is really dramatic. For instance, we lived in a small town called Wellington, about one hour drive from Cape Town. One morning I and my wife Anna needed to visit Cape Town. We neared the city at a point where the highway broadens into four lanes in each direction. This is a very busy highway and at mid-morning the traffic is only slightly less intense.

On this morning, as we rounded a bend and started climbing the hill near Tygerberg hospital, we

saw a young man standing in the middle lane. I instantly saw that he was most distressed and traffic was rushing past him on both sides. Almost instinctively I found myself stopping immediately in front of him. I put the hazard lights flashing and got out to talk to him.

Amazingly, vehicles continued to rush past on both sides. The young man was suicidal and my initial attempts to get him into the car were resisted. It must have been five or more minutes of quiet talking, with Anna praying hard in the car, before he reluctantly got into the back seat in a very stressed state.

As we drove on down the highway we slowly got him to tell us where he lived. When we arrived there he told us he had no key. However, it happened that his mother arrived on foot at exactly that moment. She was most relieved to see her son. After things calmed down she explained the events that had preceded our finding her son.

Apparently, they were being driven in a car along the highway and were having an argument. At one point when the vehicle slowed down, her son jumped out of the car and disappeared through the traffic. His mother decided she could do nothing so she prayed, "God, please send someone to help him".

When her son had calmed down, and realised how close he had been to death, he kept saying that we were angels sent to help him. We thought to ourselves, how true it was that God had indeed intervened. He answered the desperate prayer of a mother by sending us along that road at precisely the right time. Apparently no one else was interested in stopping, since the cars kept rushing past on both sides of us. I believe that God also intervened by preventing a major pile-up of cars and by enabling me to calm the man down enough to get him into the car.

**A near miss with gangsters:** In 2002 I received a phone call from a man who said he was from Nigeria. He said he wanted to meet me to talk about ostrich farming and asked if I we could meet in Cape Town. This would have meant a drive of 60 km and I told him I was busy, but maybe we could meet the next day. He suggested meeting at a petrol station on the main highway at 10 am the next day.

A few hours after this conversation I received another telephone call from a policeman. He asked for my name. He then mentioned the Nigerian's name and asked whether I had met him. I told the policeman that I had not yet met him and explained my telephone call. The policeman then told me that I was 'a very lucky man'. The police had just arrested this Nigerian, together with four others in his gang. He assured me that these men were very dangerous criminals. So, once again I was protected by very precise timing of events. Again I repeated the Bible passage "*My times are in your hands*".

**This sort of event has been my experience on a number of other occasions.** I am therefore totally convinced that there is a God who does intervene in individual human lives. I believe he intervenes most when he finds faith and a willingness to obey his 'still small voice', and a willingness to step out of our comfort zones. The more we develop that relationship of trust and obedience, the more we experience the reality of his presence.

Learning to recognise his 'voice' is obviously important. For myself, it is not an audible voice. It is more a 'flow of thoughts' that somehow stand out as important. I have learnt that, when such a 'flow of thoughts' is followed by another thought that seems to say 'take note', then, as I act on those thoughts, the following events show that they were in fact God inspired.

**Why me?** I often asked myself why I was seeing these amazing events and why it seemed that I was being supernaturally protected. I like to think that it was partly because **I really did have a great desire to discover God in my own experience.** Even in those student days, with all my intellectual doubts, I really wanted to believe in and discover God.

I am also convinced that we see the hand of God at work in human lives mostly when certain factors are present. It seems there has to be a desire to discover God. He also seems to work most dramatically in situations that are totally outside our control. In this way we are forced to acknowledge his hand and give him due credit. In addition, each time these events occur, if we show our gratitude and acknowledge God it is much more likely that similar events will occur again.

**My personal experiences, such as are detailed above, help me to understand how God has acted throughout cosmic history,** and throughout the evolution of this vast Universe. I conclude, from my personal experiences of God, that it is reasonable to describe this God as the one who is in all things and aware of all things, even the minute details and who acts within his creation.

**I am convinced that this cosmic super-mind, that we call God, is in fact intimately aware of every minute event in this entire Universe and he interacts with these events. After all, my personal life experiences are just one tiny part of reality, a tiny speck in an immensely large Cosmos.**

**This points to a God who is aware of minute details.** This awareness of minute details is possible because he operates in the Timeless Dimension and this dimension permeates all of reality.

**Some people accept the reality of God, but cannot accept the relevance of the Bible in a scientific age.** It used to be a widely held assumption

that these writings were inspired by God. By this we mean that the human writers were motivated and inspired by God in what they wrote.

The dawn of the scientific age and especially the Theory of Evolution and evidence for the great age of the world, threw serious doubt on the relevance of these writings. The debate was further confused by extreme viewpoints aired by charismatic proponents of atheism on the one side, and extreme proponents of fundamentalist religious literalism on the other side.

**For the past 40 years I have been investigating how to relate our Bible to the major discoveries of our scientific age.** This has culminated in my book with the deliberately provocative title **‘God by Evolution’**.

The initial reaction of many Christians to scientific revelations, relating to the great age of our Universe and Earth, was to fight these discoveries. This was because many Christians felt that this conflicted with the scriptures.

**This attitude of confrontation** placed many theologians into a similar situation to that faced by the church in the 1630’s. The newly invented telescope enabled Galileo to discover that the Earth and other planets all orbited around the sun. However, theologians at that time believed that certain scriptures said that the sun orbited around the Earth. As a result Galileo was branded a heretic and was fortunate not to have been killed by the Inquisition.

However, as science continued to provide proof that Galileo was correct, the theologians finally came round to look again at the scriptures they had used in their defence of the sun orbiting the Earth. They then discovered that these scriptures, such as Psalm 19, were actually poetic and were meant to be proclaiming the greatness of God, but within the scientific ignorance of that time.

**Christians today should guard against falling into the same trap of fighting science.** There is no need to fight it since all of scripture can be fully reconciled with the great discoveries of science.

All that is needed, for this reconciliation, is for Christians to be willing to seriously reconsider traditional interpretations of a few key Bible passages. When this is done with an open mind it can be discovered that there is actually no conflict. In fact the discoveries of science, if correctly understood, enable Christians to greatly expand their understanding of the greatness of God.

Scientific discoveries within the sub-atomic quantum physics reality, enable us to understand how God, who operates within the Timeless Dimension, can in fact be aware of every minute event in the Universe, both simultaneously and instantaneously.

A full explanation of this relationship between biblical revelation and scientific discovery, is covered in my book **'God by Evolution'**

The theological implications that logically result from this understanding of the Bible and scientific discovery, are further expanded and explained in my book **'Big Bang Christianity'**.

Science is advancing at such a breathtaking speed that Christians understandably find themselves struggling to catch up. However, the need to catch up is extremely urgent, in order to enable us to present the Gospel message in ways that are really meaningful to millions of people raised in this scientific and technological age.

**My contribution, towards reaching a full reconciliation, is not likely to be the final word nor is it a dogmatic statement of Christian theology. However, considering the importance of these questions I do hope and pray that my personal quest for truth can serve as a starting point.**

**Perhaps other Christians can use my approach as a ‘working document’ or as a step towards presenting our Christian faith in new ways that do not cause ‘stumbling blocks’ in the paths of many sincere searchers after meaning in life.**

In addition to the issues relating to science and faith, there are theological interpretations that have led to different viewpoints.

Two of the most divisive theological issues within Christianity are:

1. The role of baptism and sacraments.
2. The communion or ‘breaking of bread’ memorial.

Because these two issues are so divisive, I challenge Christians to look again at the scriptures and see whether or not you need to change your interpretations.

**In the next two chapters I present my personal understanding of baptism, sacraments and communion and suggest that this presentation can serve as a ‘working document’ or starting point for your own study.**

As part of your further study may I suggest that you read my book **‘Big Bang Christianity’**

## Chapter 8

### Baptism and sacraments

**The significance of baptism** has become one of the major causes of disagreement among various groups of Christians. I personally believe that it is good and desirable for Christian parents to bring their babies before God in a ceremony of 'dedication' and to voice their determination to raise them in a Godly manner. At the same time, to ask God to bless the child and to ask the Christian community to take up their responsibility, to help the parents in their parental tasks of raising the child in the knowledge of God.

**This act of faith, on the part of believing parents, will bring a blessing from God.** Jesus invited parents of his day to bring their children to him and he blessed them. However, for each and every child a time must come when they personally have to decide to give their allegiance to Jesus Christ. If they do not come to this decision themselves then the blessing performed over them as babies is not some 'magic' insurance of Eternal Life. **It is an act of faith by the parents or guardian, and an act that God blesses, but once the child is of age salvation comes from a personal decision,** not the decision of parent or guardian or church denomination.

In some Christian denominations this 'confirmation' by a young adult, when they endorse the act of faith performed by their parents when they were babies, is a very meaningful occasion. In other cases it is a mere formality, where participants fail to realise their own personal necessity to respond to the claims of God on their lives.

In many cases children go through a confirmation 'ceremony' and then may never again enter a house of Christian worship. Clearly, such cases show that these children have not been 'born again' into the kingdom of

God. They still have to come to a situation where they face the claims of Jesus on their lives. They have to make a 'personal decision' to give their lives to him, as their personal saviour and as their personal Lord.

Those who give baptism the status of 'sacrament' and believe that the act itself gives Eternal Life, are often horrified when such a person decides that he or she needs to be baptised as an adult. I can fully understand the desire of many to be baptised by immersion in water when they reach the point in life where they make a personal decision to follow Jesus. This can be a very meaningful act of obedience and a sign to the world that they have decided to follow Jesus.

After all, this was exactly what the first converts to Christianity did. **In my view it is inexcusable that such people are sometimes accused of serious error.** God alone is our judge and we are told that he judges the intentions and motivations of the heart.

**The whole question of 'Sacraments' needs to be looked at in the light of Bible teaching.** The concept of an act or ceremony, by itself gaining us mercy and favour from God, is hard to justify from the Bible. Over and over we read that God judges the motives and intentions of the human heart and mind.

Grace, which means the free and unmerited mercy and favour of God, is given to us in response to our personal response to God. Firstly, it is by Faith in what God has done for us on Calvary's cross. The obedience that leads to baptism is preceded by a heart response of repentance towards God. The act of baptism is an outward expression of an inward reality that has already come to pass.

Baptism was originally initiated as an outward and visible sign of repentance. This was performed on adults who professed repentance and the intention was that they had a heart attitude to match. For instance, John the Baptist baptised by immersion under the water, all who came to him at the Jordan River, but he spoke harshly to some Pharisees (religious leaders) who

came to be baptised but did not show a heart attitude of repentance. We read, *but when he (John) saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptising, he said to them “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance”* (Bible: Matthew 3:7).

The disciples of Jesus also baptised while Jesus was still with them, but after his resurrection he specifically instructed them to, *go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you* (Bible: Matthew 28:19).

When Peter preached his first sermon, it was clear that he understood baptism to be an outward sign of repentance. When the people heard Peter’s sermon we read, *they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied, “Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call”* (Bible: Acts 2:37-39).

**New Testament conversion** (being born again) involved repentance towards God, faith in Jesus and what he has done at Calvary, baptism under water as a sign of being washed clean by God, and as a sign of being buried to our old life as we are immersed and raised to new life in Christ as we are raised out of the water.

Baptism does not save us from hell. It is a sign of obedience to our new Lord and it is a symbol of cleansing and resurrection to new life. But, it is our repentance and faith that leads to God forgiving our sins, not the act of baptism.

The new converts have passed from spiritual death to spiritual life and have had their sins forgiven, but they have not necessarily been ‘filled with’ the Holy

Spirit. They receive the Holy Spirit at the point of repentance and faith. However, in the New Testament church there was another dimension to 'receiving the Holy Spirit'. This was often a separate event that is sometimes called a 'filling' or 'baptism' in the Holy Spirit. It was considered to be vital if the new believer was to receive the needed power and strength to become an effective disciple of Jesus.

There are no clear biblical references to small children being baptised with water. The emphasis was for baptism to follow conversion. Some like to suggest that Christian baptism took the place of Jewish circumcision. That ceremony was performed on infants on the eighth day after birth.

However, the circumcision ceremony was only performed on boys and it was also intended to be an outward sign of a spiritual reality. This is shown from scriptures where the Israelites are criticised for being circumcised only in the externals, but not in the heart. It was meant to be a sign that the nation was 'set aside' for God. So we read, *circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. **No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code*** (Bible: Romans 2:25-29).

Passages such as these emphasise that God is not interested in ceremonies and sacraments. He looks at the attitude and intent of the human heart. In like manner, the emphasis on baptism is as an outward and visible sign of a heart attitude. It is intended for adults, not small infants. Later in Christian history the baptism of infants became standard practice, 'as a means of ensuring their salvation from hell'. In other words it became a 'sacrament', an act that of itself was thought to impart salvation.

**This doctrine of ‘salvation through baptism’ has, in my view, diverted Christianity from the truth of the Gospel,** as originally given by Jesus and as practiced by the early Christians. How many millions of people have gone through life believing that they are headed for heaven, regardless of their real spiritual condition, regardless of their lifestyle and without a personal relationship with God?

**This attitude towards baptism arose out of the formulation by Augustine, in the early fifth century AD, of the doctrine of ‘original sin’.** He argued that infants are born guilty of sin and therefore subject to the wrath of God. Therefore, it was vital to baptise them immediately after birth, so that they could be saved from Hell. Even unborn dead foetuses are baptised, to ensure that they will receive ‘eternal life’! Augustine was also the first of the church ‘fathers’ to formulate a ‘doctrine of sacraments’. **He argued that the sacraments of baptism and communion were necessary for salvation** (Walker 1959).

It should be clear from this book that I do not hold this view of baptism. It is not a ‘sacrament’ that of itself saves us from Hell. It is meant to be an outward sign of an inward reality. It is meant to follow repentance and faith.

For a further study of Augustine’s doctrine of ‘original sin’ see my book ‘Big Bang Christianity’. Here I discuss the scriptures relating to sin, its origin and definition. Sin is defined as breaking a God given law. A baby is not born guilty of sin. However, every human is born with a tendency to sin and the inevitability of sinning. In other words, every human is born with a ‘sinful nature’ but a baby has not yet sinned.



# Chapter 10

## Communion

Unfortunately there have been other changes to early beliefs of Christianity. For instance, the radical changes made to our understanding of the ‘communion’ memorial that Jesus initiated just before he was crucified. **This amazing ‘communion’ celebration was given by Jesus to His followers.**

The breaking of bread and drinking of wine was to be a reminder of his death for us on the cross and as a reminder that he is going to return to this Earth in visible form. He chose ordinary bread and ordinary grape juice or wine. This was the daily food of the people of his day. They were items that every household could afford and obtain easily, no matter how poor.

Breaking the loaf of bread was a memorial of how his body was broken by the cruel whipping and the crucifixion. The grape juice, with its red colour, was a memorial of how his blood was shed.

It is of profound spiritual significance only in so far as it reminds us of the amazing love of God, revealed to mankind by the events of Calvary. It becomes spiritually significant as a result of the heart response of the individual participant. It is the heart response that turns the ceremony into a ‘sacrament’, namely something that does have spiritual meaning and spiritual blessing.

Similarly, it is the heart response that can turn communion into a negative influence in our lives. We read that people who celebrate communion, without being in a right relationship to God, cause themselves harm. This is because they are being hypocritical, partaking of a memorial while negating its significance, through hanging onto unrepented sins. Paul wrote, *A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognising the body of the Lord, eats and drinks*

*judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment* (Bible: 1 Corinthians 11:28-31).

**The early Christians celebrated this memorial as part of a normal meal.** Each time they sat down to eat their daily bread they were reminded of the death of Jesus. However, by the time of the Christian writer Justin in 153 AD, the celebration of the ‘Lord’s supper’ (communion) with the common meal had ceased (Walker 1959: A history of the Christian Church).

Maybe this was why Christians started to just give a prayer of thanks at the start of each meal. Initially this was to give thanks for ‘the death and resurrection of Jesus’. Over time this became changed to simply giving thanks for the food.

There are several accounts of how Jesus initiated this memorial. For a complete understanding we need to compare the various accounts in the gospels and in Paul’s writings. Those who look upon the ‘Lord’s supper’ as a ‘sacrament’ sometimes claim that the bread and wine are supernaturally changed to the actual body and blood of Jesus. Such a view comes from one possible interpretation of passages in the Bible. However, to my mind, it is an unacceptable view, due to the following main considerations:

1. Jesus ate the last meal before his crucifixion, together with his close followers. He instructed them to eat the bread and drink the cup as a memorial to his death, and to remind the disciples that he would not leave them forever. If the bread and wine had actually been changed into flesh and blood, then Jesus would have been eating his own flesh and his own blood!
2. Jesus specifically equates this new memorial with the Jewish Feast of Passover. This Passover feast was a commemorative meal to remember God’s

deliverance of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. In like manner, Jesus initiates this eating of bread and drinking of wine as a memorial to his death and the initiation of a new 'covenant', or a new Agreement between God and man.

3. In the Matthew account, Jesus talks 'figuratively' about the bread and wine representing his body and blood. However, as if to clarify any misunderstanding he adds, *I tell you, **I will not drink of this fruit of the vine** from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom* (Matthew 26:29).
4. In like manner the Mark account adds the same words, *I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the **fruit of the vine** until the day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God* (Mark 14:25).
5. The Luke account is possibly the clearest, *When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, **I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you** before I suffer. For I tell you, **I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God.** After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you **I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine** until the kingdom of God comes".  
*And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; **do this in remembrance of me**".*  
*In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you* (Luke 22: 14-20).*
6. Some refer to the words of Jesus in John 6:53-63, where he tells his hearers that, *"whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I*

*will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him”.*

This is clearly not referring to the ‘Last supper’ memorial. The whole context of the passage is that the words of Jesus are the source of real life. If we accept these words as God’s words, then this is the ‘spiritual food’ that leads to spiritual life. In fact, in verse 63 we read, “*The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life*”.

7. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul reminds Christians not to take part in pagan ceremonies dedicated to demons. He says that the Christian memorial ‘communion’ ceremony is partaken of by those who have accepted the significance of the sacrificial death of Jesus. Such people cannot then participate in pagan ceremonies dedicated to the worship of demons. So he writes, *Is not the **cup** of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the **bread** that we break a participation in the body of Christ?* It is clear from the context that Paul is not suggesting that the wine and bread become the actual body and blood of Jesus.

The Apostle Paul further comments on this memorial, *for I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body, which is for you: **do this in remembrance of me**”* In the same way, after supper he took the cup saying, “*This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me*” **For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he come** (Bible: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

**Clearly, the understanding of the first Christians was that this memorial was celebrated around ordinary daily bread and ordinary daily wine.** It was only meaningful to the celebrants if they used this simple act as a genuine remembrance and thanksgiving for what Jesus had achieved for them on the cross. However, some people changed this emphasis.

**In time, 'church' structures formulated this simple memorial into a 'sacrament' that could itself impart supernatural grace from God, and later on it became essential for salvation. This was later further 'mystified' by claiming that the bread actually changes into the body of Jesus and the wine changes to his blood.**

Then, instead of each and every Christian being encouraged by Jesus to celebrate this memorial with everyday objects that all could afford, it now became a 'sacrament' that only specially 'ordained' people could administer. Furthermore, it became changed in ways that ensured that mankind has to commit intellectual suicide in order to accept it.

**Once again, the simple truths of the early Christians became complicated, distorted, mystified and formulated into 'sacraments' and ceremonies.** Furthermore, many great Christians were burnt alive in past centuries, simply because they would not agree that the communion bread actually became the body of Jesus Christ. How amazing that these great saints were killed by the 'official' church!

## **Conclusion**

I believe God is urgently calling Christians into the same sort of simple and relational Christianity that existed in the first two centuries after Jesus died. This means individual believers should leave religious structures guilty of widespread evils and it means breaking free from strongholds of tradition, denominational mindsets, legalism and unbiblical theology.

It means re-discovering the foundational truths passed onto the first Christians by Jesus himself. It means entering into life-changing personal relationships with Father God through the merit of Jesus Christ and the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

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