

THE CAPTIVITY OF THE GOSPEL

Shora KUETU

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INTRODUCTION

You've probably noticed that most so-called Christian churches are becoming less and less scriptural. If we compare these assemblies with the Scriptures, we'll see that they're far removed from the model of the early Church. Sound doctrine is no longer preached, men having replaced it with human and demonic teachings. These numerous aberrations have prompted thousands of Christians to leave their assemblies and organize themselves into house churches.

Indeed, the Church is called to enlighten and reveal Christ to men, but for too long it has allowed itself to be polluted by lust and greed, compromise and many other sins. Scandals of all kinds regularly come to light. So it's not uncommon to find leaders who are adulterers, divorced and remarried, greedy, proud and so full of themselves that they think they're stars. However, we must not let ourselves be troubled by all these scandals, for all these events are linked to the apostasy that was foretold by the Lord himself and his apostles.

Let's remember the early Church, which was totally centered on Christ, living in holiness and the glory of God. Those who lived in sin within the assemblies were quickly punished, following the example of Ananias and Sapphira. The apostles were simple: they had neither silver nor gold (Acts 3), yet a great anointing rested on their lives. What a contrast with today's apostles, who have lots of money, lots of gold, but who are spiritually poor because they have abandoned their first love: that of the truth.

These days, truth is unjustly held captive by the very people who

are supposed to defend it. The majority of so-called Christian denominations and theological schools teach philosophical and humanist fables that are based on worldly principles and not on the Word of God. The situation is such that great confusion reigns among God's children. Many are captives of religion, tradition and sin, making true conversion impossible.

But, thanks be to the Lord, a wind of revival is blowing to the four corners of the world, and those destined for salvation are gradually returning to the Father's house. Many of those who have left their backward assemblies are seeking to understand the mechanisms that allowed the enemy to take control of so many churches.

This is the purpose of this book, which I hope, by the grace of God, will be an instrument of deliverance from ignorance and a source of blessing for every reader.

Shora KUETU

CHAPTER 1:

The parable of the lamp and the vase

As you know, the Lord often taught great truths in the form of parables. This happened when he was confronted with two categories of people: the crowd and the disciples.

The word crowd comes from the Greek word "ochlos", meaning a disorderly grouping of men. The crowd included all sorts of people: Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes and Herodians who were looking for a favorable opportunity to put Jesus to death, not forgetting those who followed the Lord purely for their own personal interests (healings, miracles...).

"The disciples came to him and said: Why do you speak to them in parables? Jesus answered them: Because it was given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, and it was not given to them" Matthew 13:10-11.

The Master spoke to the crowd in parables because they refused to hear the truth. Indeed, as he had only three years in which to exercise his ministry, he did not openly reveal these truths to the crowds for fear of being put to death before the time set by the Father.

The second category of people were the disciples to whom Jesus secretly explained the mysteries of the kingdom. Let's take a look at the parable of the lamp and the jar, which contains a prophecy of the captivity of truth by men.

"No one, after lighting a lamp, covers it with a vessel, or puts it under a bed; but he puts it on a candlestick, so that those who enter may see the light" Luke 8:16.

This parable, the foundation of our teaching, simple as it may seem, contains essential truths about the Church at the end of time.

In this passage, we can identify several symbolic objects: the lamp, the vessel, the candlestick and the house.

The lamp

The lamp referred to in this passage represents the Word of God. *"Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path"* Psalm 119:105.

This means sound doctrine, truth, the gospel or Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. Note also that the prophetic Word is compared to a lamp shining in a dark place (2 Peter 1:19).

The vessel

"In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and earth; some are vessels of honor, and others are of vile use. If therefore anyone keeps himself pure, abstaining from these things, he will be a vessel of honor, sanctified, useful to his master, fit for every good work" 2 Timothy 2 : 20-22.

The silver, earthen and wooden vessels symbolize sinners who make vile use of their lives, and the gold vessels represent Christians. These vessels of vile use also evoke religion and its lot of denominations (the "isms": Catholicism, Protestantism, etc.) as

well as traditions, false prophets, etc. These religious systems founded by men are veritable vessels that enclose the truth and keep God's children in captivity and ignorance.

Man is that vessel which God fashioned to be a habitation of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:22).

"O man, you rather, who are you to dispute with God? Will the clay vessel say to the one who formed it: Why have you done this to me? Is not the potter master of the clay, to make with the same lump a vessel of honor and one of vile use?" Romans 9:20-21.

The candlestick

The candlestick is a utensil holding a candle. In the tabernacle, south of the sanctuary, there was one that supported seven lamps (Exodus 25:31-40; 40:24; Leviticus 24:2-4). On its base rested a stem from which sprang six branches of solid, beaten gold. The lamps were filled with pure olive oil and their light shone from evening to morning (Exodus 27:20-21; 30:7-8; 1 Samuel 3:3).

Under the New Covenant, the lampstand is the image of the Church, the light of the world (Matthew 5:14). Just as the candlestick was to light the tabernacle continually, the Church is called to light the world continually.

"Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which are to come after them, the mystery of the seven stars which you have seen in my right hand, and of the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven candlesticks are the seven churches" Revelation 1:19-20.

At the birth of the Church, Christ, the lamp, was in the midst of the candlestick, i.e. the Church (Revelation 1:13). Jesus was the light that illuminated his people, which is why miracles, conversions and deliverances were frequent. The secrets of people's hearts and the works of darkness were revealed, for Christ was that lamp that gave light to his people (Acts 5; 1 Corinthians 14:23-25).

The conclusion of the letters addressed to the seven churches of Revelation is alarming, for Christ finds himself outside the Church, no longer in the midst of the seven candlesticks (the Church) but in front of the door (Revelation 3 : 20). The light of the Gospel is now locked up in the various denominational vessels (Baptism, Lutheranism, Pentecostalism, Methodism, Catholicism, Anglicanism, Orthodoxy...) that men have put in place and in which the truth is held captive. Each of these denominations reads the Bible with its own spectacles, i.e. they interpret it in a particular way, in the light of their heretical, erroneous and paganized conceptions taught in their own theological schools.

The house

The house symbolizes the world, yet the Bible declares in 1 John 5:19 that we are of God and that the whole world is under the power of the evil one. Sadly, many churches and ministries today are also in darkness, having failed in their candlestick mission to give light to men (Matthew 5). In this verse, the word "world", "cosmos" in Greek, means a harmonious and skillful arrangement of order, of government. So all the world's governments are under Satan's authority. Indeed, in Luke 4:5-8, we see that the devil had offered Jesus the governance of the kingdoms of this world in exchange for his worship.

The darkness that covers this world is manifested in the widespread depravity of morality. It's easy to see the exponential increase in evil in our modern societies. More and more people are feeling uncomfortable in their own skin, to the point where some go so far as to undergo major and dangerous operations to change their sex. More and more immoral laws are being passed and enacted to allow same-sex marriage, even granting them the right to adopt children. Worse still, fathers and even mothers sexually abuse their children. In fact, how can we fail to be stunned by all the sordid affairs that the press unfolds before our eyes every day (divorces, racism, murders, suicides, abortions, parricides, pedophilia, rapes, cannibalism, attacks, wars, school shootings, hostage-takings, robberies, etc.)? Is it any wonder that people are so inclined towards perversity and immorality when the media is so saturated with verbal, physical and sexual violence?

In 2008, we learned that Joseph Fritzl, a 73-year-old Austrian, had confined his daughter to a cellar and raped her for 24 years, fathering seven children. More recently, in the UK, Vanessa George, a mother and childminder, has just been arrested for abusing a dozen children, including her own, and posting images of her misdeeds on the Internet. Without a doubt, our generation has seen sin reach an all-time high, far surpassing Sodom and Gomorrah.

According to Luke 11:21, Satan is the strong man who guards his house (the world), which is why it is vital that the Church responds to his call to shine by bringing the truth into the dark place that is the house (2 Peter 1:19).

"Do all things without murmuring or wavering, that you may be blameless and pure, blameless children of God in the midst of a

perverse and corrupt generation, among whom you shine as torches in the world, bearing the word of life; and I may boast in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain nor labored in vain" Philippians 3:14-15.

I) THE FIRST VASE: ROMAN CATHOLICISM

To understand the origins of the paganization of the Church and the establishment of this first vessel, let's take a look back.

Towards the end of the first century, a vacuum was created when the last apostles, Paul and John, died. To fill this void, a clerical caste emerged. Free and open meetings began to die out, and Church assemblies became increasingly liturgical.

By the third century, the clergy-lay distinction was widening at an impressive rate. A hierarchical structure based on a mixture of pagan and Levitical religious models emerged. This favored the emergence of religious specialists, intermediaries between God and the people. Faced with these changes, the authentic, Spirit-filled Christian refused to bow to the heretical, demonic ecclesiastical structure that prevented him from freely exercising his spiritual gifts.

By the fourth century, the Church had become fully institutionalized and its functioning had come to a standstill. At the same time, many pagan orators became "Christians", encouraging the infiltration of pagan philosophical ideas into the Christian community.

Indeed, some of the new converts to the early Christian Church were former pagan philosophers and orators. Unfortunately, many of them became theologians. They are known as the "Fathers of the

Church" and were the authors of several books which, alas, form the basis of many of the doctrines taught in today's churches. Some of these "fathers of the Church" were none other than the false teachers whose coming Paul, Peter and other apostles had announced. Through their writings and various ecumenical councils, they changed the foundation on which the Church was built (Ephesians 2:20).

"When the foundations are overthrown, The righteous, what shall he do?" Psalms 11:3.

1. The writings of the "Fathers of the Church"

In the time of Jesus and the apostles, the sacred writings included the books from Genesis to Malachi. Jesus ordered his disciples to go and spread his teaching:

"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" Matthew 28:19-20.

Christ thus established in advance the authenticity of the New Testament scriptures by making it clear that He had not revealed everything during His earthly ministry:

"I still have things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now" (John 16:12).

That's why he promised the coming of the Holy Spirit to complete biblical revelation:

- In historical terms: *"he will remind you of all that I have said to you"* (John 14:26).

- Doctrinal: "*He will teach you all things and guide you into all truth*" (John 14:26 and John 16:13).
- Prophetically, "*he will tell you of things to come*" (John 16:13).

The Holy Spirit chose the twelve apostles and Paul to reveal to them the entire gospel and complete what the Master did not have time to teach during his earthly ministry (Matthew 28:19-20; John 15:24-27; Acts 1:8 - 9 and Acts 15:17). Indeed, there were prophets in the early Church like Paul, who were chosen by the risen Lord to receive additional revelations, which were recorded in the Scriptures (Ephesians 3:4-5; Romans 16:25-26; 2 Timothy 3:16).

Revelation is the last book to be revealed, so there's no room for other teachings to bring new revelations that would complete the biblical canon. In fact, Jude 1 verse 3 states that the faith (the gospel) was transmitted to the saints once and for all.

Yet many of the "church fathers" ignored Jude's words and wrote several works, supposedly inspired by God, to supplement biblical revelation.

"I marvel that you are so quick to turn away from the one who called you by the grace of Christ, to another gospel. Not that there is another, but there are people who confuse you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But if we ourselves, or any angel from heaven, were to preach a different gospel from the one we have preached to you, let him be anathema! We said it before, and I say it again now: if anyone preaches to you a gospel different from the one you received, let him be anathema!" Galatians 1:6-9.

What certain "church fathers" failed to understand is that we no

longer need new revelations, because the Bible is already the revelation par excellence. What we need are illuminations (from the Greek "photizo": to give light or make evident) as Paul so eloquently told the Ephesians.

*"I never cease to give thanks for you: I make mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation, that you may know him; that he **may enlighten the eyes of your heart**, that you may know what is the hope that attaches to his calling, what is the glorious riches of his inheritance among the saints, and what is the superabundant greatness of his power toward us who believe according to the sovereign working of his might" Ephesians 1:16-19.*

Let's not fall into the trap of those people, mostly Greek and Roman, who had forgotten that salvation comes exclusively from the Jews (John 4:22). The Lord promised to give His authority to His witnesses, all Jews, who would proclaim the gospel by the Spirit (Matthew 10:1-8). This promise was also valid for certain non-Jewish chosen ones called upon to write another part of the revelation, such as Mark and Luke, who were Greek. As the first witnesses to Jesus' ministry began to disappear, the need arose to leave a written record of the Lord's teachings and the apostles' deeds. It was then that the first books of the "New Testament" appeared.

Early Christians accorded the word and life of Christ an authority similar to that of the Jewish Bible, because they believed that both sources proceeded from the Holy Spirit. This collection of the Master's words would later become our Gospels.

Then, towards the end of the first century, equal authority was

conferred on the writings of the apostles. However, a careful selection had to be made to separate the writings of the apostles from those of other uninspired authors.

According to historians, the first trace of a Christian canonical compendium, constituting a true charter of authentic Christianity, dates back to 140 AD. In 150, the collection of Christian writings was divided into two groups: "The Lord" (our Gospels) and "The Apostolic" (the Epistles). The unity and harmony of the biblical writings prove the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures.

This unity does not appear in the writings of certain "church fathers" who contradict the Bible and each other. Their writings are at the root of the paganization of the Church, since they validate pagan rites. For example, Ignatius of Antioch officially affirmed the supremacy of the bishop within the local church. Cyprian of Carthage (200-258 AD). In the 3rd century B.C.), he claimed that leaving the local church was tantamount to losing one's salvation. He also introduced the practice of tithing and spread the idea that the assembly of saints should be led by a single person, whereas early churches were led by a team of elders.

At the end of the 2nd century, the doctrine of theologians such as Irenaeus of Lyons, Tertullian of Carthage and Clement of Alexandria was the authority of the Christian world. The Church of the time had to defend itself against heretical endeavors, and therefore needed a code of doctrine and discipline. Several ecumenical councils were then organized to establish the doctrine of Christianity. Without going into too much detail, here are just a few examples.

2. The councils

Paradoxically, at these councils, the bishops present did not defend the Word of God, but adopted positions that contradicted it.

- *Nicaea*

Council of Nicaea I (325 AD) was the first ecumenical council which was convened by the Roman Emperor Constantine I. He was then considered the Grand Pontiff. Until 872, the bishop of Rome was merely a minister elected by the faithful. The purpose of the Council was to put an end to the controversies that were tearing Christian communities apart. Among the various doctrines of the time, that of Arius, priest of Alexandria (256-336), which denied the divinity of Christ, was rejected, thus confirming the equality of the Father and the Son. However, the Catholic bishops also imposed a number of practices that had no biblical basis.

The ordination of priests thus revived the consecrations of the time of the Law (Exodus 28:1) and those practiced in Greco-Roman temples. In the New Covenant, the elders in charge of the sheep were elected by the faithful in the assemblies (Acts 14:23).

The wearing of priestly vestments, another practice of the Law of Moses (Exodus 28:2), was restored. Now, in the New Testament, the garments of Christians are righteous deeds (Revelation 19:7-8).

The catechism was, and still is, a set of lessons given to the future baptized. Indeed, the bishops of the time had realized that many subjects of the Roman Empire had embraced Christianity to please the Emperor. The catechism was therefore a means of ensuring the sincerity of conversions. The Bible tells us that baptism is the visible sign of our commitment to the Lord (1 Peter 3:21). In the Acts of the Apostles, new converts were baptized on the day of their conversion (Acts 8:27-38).

Sunday was declared the "Lord's Day". Constantine had reclaimed the day of celebration of the pagan god Mithra, the equivalent of the Egyptian sun-god, and imposed it on Christians as a specific day to go to church-buildings to worship God. Yet early Christians gathered every day to celebrate the Lord, and these meetings took place in a variety of places (homes, in the nature according to Acts 2:46 in particular).

December 25 (Christmas) was declared the day of Christ's birth. This is pure invention, for the Bible makes no mention of a precise date for the Lord's birth. It's strange that this event should have taken place in winter, since Luke chapter 2, verses 8 to 13, tells us of shepherds who were "out in the fields keeping watch over their flocks" when they were visited by an angel who announced the birth of the Savior. If Christ had really been born on December 25, how could those shepherds have grazed their sheep in the middle of winter? The reality is that this date corresponds to the winter solstice, a widespread orgiastic celebration in ancient times.

The Lord's Supper was replaced by the institution of the Eucharist materialized by the host whose shape is reminiscent of the Egyptian sun god, of whom Constantine was a faithful worshipper. From a simple communion between brothers and sisters around a table, this meal has become a sacred and mystical ritual administered by the clergy. Today, Protestants and Evangelicals perpetuate this tradition in their assemblies.

The Council of Nicaea officially gave birth to Roman Catholicism, the first vessel containing the truth.

- *Constantinople I*

Council of Constantinople I (381 AD) was in reality a schism which led to a definitive break with Christians who opposed Roman

doctrines, including the bishops. It was at this Council that the Holy Spirit became the third person of the Most Holy Trinity. It should be pointed out that the first person to use the term "trinity" was Tertullian (160-230 AD). J.C.), bishop of the church of Carthage in Tunisia. The Word of God declares in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 that there is only one God, so there is real unity between the three persons of the Godhead. The use of the word "trinity" suggests the existence of three distinct gods. Furthermore, there's no need to establish a hierarchy between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, because it doesn't exist in the Bible. How do you explain an infinite God like ours? He doesn't explain Himself, He reveals Himself. John tells us that when Christ returns, we will see Him as He is (1 John 3:1-3).

It was also at this meeting that the papal primacy was given to Rome, which thus became the center of Christianity, just as Jerusalem was once the center of Judaism at the time of the Law.

- *Ephesus*

Council of Ephesus (431 AD) affirmed the dual nature of Jesus Christ, both divine son of God and man born of a mortal woman. But a huge heresy was introduced by declaring Mary to be the mother of God. Now, Hebrews 7:3 declares that Jesus, as God, is "*without father, without mother, without genealogy*". It was on this occasion that Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, who refuted this idea, was condemned to death.

Borrowed from paganism, the Marian cult is inspired by the worship of the great goddess Artemis, or the goddess Diana of Ephesus, guardian of the city. The Israelites at the time of the prophet Jeremiah also worshipped this divinity in the form of the Queen of Heaven (Jeremiah 7). This new role for Mary was nothing more than a politico-religious maneuver to prevent the Ephesians from

leaving the Roman Church, while at the same time satisfying their idolatrous inclinations. 1 Timothy 2:5 presents us with only one mediator, Jesus Christ, and not Mary, nor the Catholic saints whose sanctification was more than questionable.

- ***Trent***

The Council of Trent (1545-1563 AD). ratified dogmatic decrees on original sin, justification by faith and the sacraments. The nuptial blessing was also instituted, making it obligatory for marriages to be celebrated before a priest assisted by two deacons.

In the Bible, we don't see any pastor or apostle blessing a marriage. It's parents who marry their children, not pastors, as we see in many churches today.

"If anyone considers it dishonorable for his virgin daughter to go beyond marriageable age, and that it should be so, let him do as he pleases, he does not sin; let them marry. But he who stands firm within himself, without constraints and with the exercise of his own will, and who has decided in his heart to keep his daughter a virgin, that one does well. So he who gives his virgin daughter in marriage does well; he who does not, does better" 1 Corinthians 7:36-38.

There are many other passages in the Bible which show that marriage is first and foremost a family celebration with the bride and groom at the center (Genesis 24:21,24; Genesis 29:21-22; Deuteronomy 22:16; Judges 14:1-10; John 2:1-10; 1 Corinthians 7).

Because of this unscriptural decree, we are now witnessing scandalous and dramatic drifts. Pastors who have taken on all the roles interfere in families, going so far as to arrange and impose unions on people based on false prophecies. Of course, these doomed marriages cause enormous suffering.

Originally, these various councils had laudable intentions, since they were intended to iron out differences within the various Christian currents and put them in order. Unfortunately, fearing to lose a large number of "Christians" faithful still attached to certain pagan practices, the initiators of these councils fell into Babylonian compromise, thus giving birth to the apostate Church, the great prostitute.

"One of the seven angels holding the seven bowls came and spoke to me: Come here," he said, "and I'll show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters. The kings of the earth have committed lewdness with her, and the inhabitants of the earth are drunk with the wine of her prostitution. He then transported me in spirit to a desert. I saw a woman sitting on a beast with scarlet fur. This beast was covered with titles offensive to God, it had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with jewels of gold, precious stones and pearls. She held in her hand a golden cup full of abominable things and obscenities due to her prostitution. On her forehead, she bore a mysterious name meaning 'Great Babylon, mother of harlots and abominations of the earth'. I saw that she was drunk with the blood of those who belong to God and those who have testified to Jesus"
Revelation 17:1-6.

"This woman you have seen represents the great city that exercises its power over all the rulers of the world" Revelation 17:18.

This city is none other than the Vatican, the seat of the Roman Catholic Church. This woman is called the great harlot and the mother of the harlots of the earth. A prostitute is an unfaithful, shameless woman. God uses this image to personify the apostate Church, which claims to belong to God while indulging in idolatry.

This prostitution is therefore spiritual because it translates into compromise with sin, idolatry and false doctrines.

"Do you not know that he who unites with the harlot is one body with her? For it is said: the two shall become one flesh" 1 Corinthians 6:16.

The Roman Church (1st vase), here symbolized by this harlot woman, has given birth. Its children represent all the paganized Christian denominations: Protestantism (2nd vase), the Evangelical movement (3rd vase), Pentecostalism and Assemblies of God (4th vase) and revivalist or independent churches (5th vase).

This woman offers the saints meat sacrificed to idols.

*"Write to the angel of the Church of Thyatira: This is what the Son of God says, he whose eyes are like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like bronze: I know your works, your love, your faith, your service, your perseverance and your last works more numerous than the first. **But what I have against you is that you let the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, teach and seduce my servants, so that they engage in misconduct and eat meat sacrificed to idols"** Revelation 2:18-20.*

Roman Catholicism made the same mistake as the Pharisees, who put tradition on the same level as the Holy Scriptures (the Bible). Clergy and faithful alike had to accept the interpretation of the Magisterium (the doctrinal authority) in order to understand the Word. These interpretations had to be in line with conciliar decisions, the writings of the "Church Fathers" and those of tradition.

3. The sacraments of the Catholic Church

In addition to uninspired writings, the Catholic Church has instituted a number of sacraments, most of which have no biblical foundation.

The sacraments of Christian initiation

- Baptism by sprinkling of all men, regardless of age,
- Confirmation, by which the Church attests that the baptized person has personally assumed his or her baptism,
- The Eucharist, which replaces the Lord's Supper with the dogma of transubstantiation (the change of the substance of bread and wine into the substance of the body and blood of Jesus Christ at the moment of the Eucharist).

The sacraments of healing

The priest imposes a "sacred" oil on the sick, containing ashes of human bones, which has been prepared once a year by the bishop. This anointing with oil is also performed on people at the point of death, to prepare them for the afterlife. This is what the Catholic Church calls "extreme anointing".

The sacrament of penance and reconciliation or confession of sins

Only the priest confers absolution, i.e. the remission of sins, after obtaining the faithful's confession. He then imposed a penance consisting of reciting a prayer (the "Our Father" and "Hail Mary's") like mantras.

The sacraments of communion service

- The ordination of priests (Council of Nicaea 325),
- Marriage (Council of Trent 1543).

The doctrine of the sacraments is indisputable, even today, within the Catholic Church, since the Second Vatican Council (Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* on divine revelation) states: "Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture constitute a single sacred deposit of the Word of God entrusted to the Church. It is clear, then, that Holy Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the Magisterium of the Church, by a very wise disposition of God, are so linked and interdependent that none of these realities subsists without the others, and that all of them together, each in its own way, under the action of the Holy Spirit alone, contribute effectively to the salvation of souls".

We emphasize the origins of the Roman Catholic religion because it was first and foremost a state religion designed to unify the nascent Empire of Constantine I, and its nature as a state religion determined its mode of operation, its liturgy and its power.

The emperor conferred on the clergy an authority that gave them the power to set themselves up as judges of believers in place of God. Such a mission was explained by the ecclesiastical hierarchy's need to control the population. It was then essential to distort and transform the Word of God in order to obtain obedience from church members. The dissemination of the Word of God by the "Church Fathers" and the so-called Holy Tradition placed believers under the control of their leaders in both their earthly and spiritual lives. This is why most of the sacraments, even though they are contrary to the Bible, came into being and became indispensable foundations of the Roman Catholic faith. The clergy, which in the apostolic Church did not constitute a body separate from the Christian people, became a privileged order endowed with a power comparable to a "supernatural power".

Under Constantine, the pagan peoples introduced their idolatrous

rites into the Church to satisfy the grievances of the majority.

The biblical truths that men hid in the vase of Catholicism are:

- **The priesthood of all believers** (1 Peter 2:9) has become the exclusive preserve of the bishops. Ignatius of Antioch (35-107), Clement of Rome (died in the 100s), Cyprian of Carthage (200-258), Clement of Alexandria (150-220) were the first to lay the foundations of clericalism and sacerdotalism, thus denying the reality of the priesthood of all believers. Yet under the New Covenant, all believers are priests (Revelation 5:4-5 and 5:8-10) but unfortunately, even among Protestants and Evangelicals, as well as all the other denominations that came out of the Reformation, Christians are regarded as laymen, second-class believers.

- **The Church, which is a living organism** (1 Corinthians 12), became a building.

-**The Lord's Supper, which is a real meal** (1 Corinthians 11:18-34), became a sacred ritual with the host.

- **Christ, the only mediator** (1 Timothy 2:5), was rivalled by other mediators, such as Mary and the "Saints", who merely replaced their former pagan deities.

- **The Bible declares that judgment comes after death** (Hebrews 9:27), yet Catholicism advocates purgatory as an alternative to hell. It provides the opportunity to redeem oneself from unconfessed sins after death, and to undergo a temporary punishment. It should be noted that the time spent in purgatory can be shortened by celebrating Masses for the deceased, in exchange for a sum of money.

- **There is only one God** (Deuteronomy 6), yet Catholicism has

established the dogma of the Trinity, which evokes the existence of three gods.

- **God has neither father nor mother** (Hebrews 7:3), but Catholicism attributed the maternity of Jesus-God to Mary at the Council of Ephesus in 431. This dogma merely replaced the Ephesians' worship of Diana (Acts 19:24-41).

- **Salvation is by faith** (Ephesians 2:8; Romans 1:17), yet Catholicism introduced indulgences, i.e. access to salvation by works, which contradicts 1 Corinthians 13.

- **The worship of images is formally forbidden** (Exodus 20:4-6), but Catholicism encourages the opposite. It was at the Second Council of Nicaea in 787 that the cult of images was authorized and became widespread.

In 385, the Latin version of the New Testament was published under the supervision of "Saint Jerome", while the Jewish Bible (the Old Covenant) was fully translated in 405. This Bible, translated into Latin, became known as the "Vulgate", the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church. But back then, very few people spoke or read Latin, as it was a language reserved for the clergy and the wealthy. Possession of this Bible was forbidden to the people, and anyone holding extracts was persecuted or burned alive by the Catholic ecclesiastical hierarchies. In fact, the Papacy has claimed more Christian lives than all the Roman emperors put together. So, for almost twelve centuries, from 325 until the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, the truth was hidden in the Catholic vessel.

In response, some men of God, though involved in the clergy and Roman Catholic liturgy, revolted. The most famous of these are

Martin Luther and Jean Calvin, founders of Protestantism. The return to the Church's message of the first centuries that they initiated constituted a gigantic upheaval in Western Christianity.

II - THE SECOND VASE:

PROTESTANTISM (XVI century)

1. The precursors of the Protestant movement

God has always raised up people whenever the gospel was threatened in order to snatch his people from apostasy and bring them back to him. This is what He did, choosing courageous men to bring the truth out of the Catholic vessel.

Pierre Valdo (or Valdès), who lived in France around 1200, undertook a reform based on the following principles: Christians should know the Holy Scriptures, lay people should have the same rights as priests, including the right to teach and evangelize. As a result, he considered that the pope, bishops and priests had given themselves illegitimate power. Those who followed Valdo's doctrine became known as the Waldensians. Stemming from a different movement but with a similar inspiration, the "Poor of Lyon", known simply as "the brothers", sowed the Word of God throughout Europe, and were persecuted as a result.

In 1380, in England, John Wyclif established himself as the leader of an anti-clerical and anti-papal movement. His doctrine was based on the separation of Church and State, and a return to the Bible as the "sole source of faith", to which nothing should be added or subtracted. In 1376, Wyclif expounded the doctrine of the authority of all Christians in Christ based on grace. For him, the true Church was invisible, made up of Christians in a state of grace.

Jean Hus intervened in 1400 in Central Europe. He defended Wyclif's ideas, defied excommunications and confronted Prague's politico-religious authorities, to whom he addressed the evangelical message. In 1415, aged 46, he was burned alive, condemned by the Council of Constance.

In the 16th century, one of the most famous reformers was the German monk Martin Luther, who later became a teacher. He set out his doctrine of salvation by faith. This doctrine opposed Catholic teachings based on salvation by works. In 1517, he caused a scandal by putting up posters of his "95 theses" denouncing Catholic dogma on the gates of the castle in Nuremberg, where he taught.

In the 16th century, God raised up Luther, Calvin and Zwingli to bring the truth out of the Catholic vessel.

The reformers of the 16th century seriously challenged the Catholic priesthood. Indeed, they refuted the idea that the priest possessed special powers, notably that of transforming wine into blood. They also denounced the priest's role as mediator between God and the people. They encouraged priests to marry and made the liturgy more flexible to allow greater participation by the congregation. Finally, they abolished the office of bishop and reduced the function of the priest to that of elder. However, the reforms undertaken, while necessary and salutary, have not been carried through to completion.

2. Biblical truths trapped in the Protestant vessel

Unfortunately, the Reformers in turn locked up certain elements of the Word of God in the new vessel of Protestantism. Indeed, they

imported the Catholic clergy-lay distinction into the Protestant movement. They retained the practice of ordination, which is a purely Catholic concept. They abolished the priest's service and replaced it with that of the pastor, whom they clothed in a new outfit including the clerical collar.

The rallying cry of the Reformation was the restoration of the priesthood to all believers. However, this restoration was only partial. Luther (1483-1546), Calvin (1509-1564) and Zwingli (1484-1531) only affirmed the priesthood of the believer in terms of his individual relationship with God. In other words, the Reformers only re-established the priesthood of the believer by making each Christian aware of his or her individual and immediate access to God's presence. Wonderful as it is, they made no mention of the priesthood of all believers in corporate worship and ministry. The reformers therefore proposed an unfinished reform of the Church. Their main contribution concerned a fundamental point: the Bible was no longer confiscated for the benefit of an ecclesiastical hierarchy, but became accessible to all. However, neither the Catholic nor the Protestant rite succeeded in organizing Christians according to the rules laid down in the Holy Scriptures.

These two major Christian denominations (Protestantism and Catholicism) have one thing in common: the people of God are always under the domination of a leader and his crew, who turn the faithful into silent spectators. The Lutheran Reformation abolished the priestly hierarchy and replaced it in part with the office of ecclesiastical government held by theologians. The duo of "layman and consecrated priest" was replaced by that of "layman and regularly ordained theologian" (Rott : Presbyter, E.G., 78, p. 421).

Thus, in the so-called Reformation churches, the theologically

repudiated clerical system was re-established. With Luther, the pastor becomes the head of the local church, the mediator between God and the people.

Calvin originated the doctrine of "**cessationism**" according to which the spiritual gifts and ministries of apostle and prophet ceased after the death of the apostles of the early Church. Calvin had enclosed the apostles, prophets and gifts of the Spirit in his own vessel. Yet the Bible teaches that the gifts and ministries set out in Ephesians 4:11 will continue to exist until the end of time.

The sermon (homiletics) became the centerpiece of Protestant cult, while the Bible encourages the participation of all members in church meetings (1 Corinthians 14:23-26). For the Reformers, Protestant cult could not take place without the sermon, a three-point discourse consisting of an introduction, the subject matter and the conclusion.

III- THE THIRD VASE: PURITANISM (17th-18th centuries)

Puritanism emerged in England in the first half of the 17th century. This was an important movement, as it was at the root of the evangelical church movement. He is best known for his great popular interest in the Bible, and was a Reformation movement within the Church of England. He spoke out against the Protestant formalism of the time, and sought to manifest in every way a life of purity and justice. Persecuted by the ecclesiastical authorities of Protestantism, the Puritans broke away from the official Church and formed a stream of independent "non-conformist" churches, mainly Baptist, Congregationalist and Presbyterian.

In the 17th century, "Pietism", an internal movement within Lutheranism, emerged and modified the Lutheran doctrine of justification. He emphasized sanctification, believing that the presence of Christ in a Christian's life leads to a holy life.

From the 18th century onwards, the evangelical movement, for whom baptism was a major event, made its appearance.

In the 18th century, the Methodist movement was established by John Wesley. Pastor of the Anglican Church, he taught a doctrine based on the works of the Holy Spirit and a holy life. His hierarchy forbade him to preach in churches, so he took to the fields, mines and street corners, attracting huge crowds and many converts.

Unfortunately, this movement has fallen into the same system as Protestantism. Pastors are true professionals of religion, the priesthood of all members is stifled by the omnipresence of the pastor. Buildings became churches, and Sunday was still considered sacred. The gifts of the Spirit are non-existent. Most of the so-called evangelical churches are completely dead; they're real cemeteries full of corpses, just like the Church of Sardis was.

IV- THE FOURTH VASE: PENTECOTISM (20th-century movement)

Pentecotism is an evangelical revival movement characterized by the baptism of the Spirit and its perceptible manifestations for believers. It emerged in 1901 in Topeka, Kansas, on the initiative of a former Methodist pastor. This movement took on an international dimension as early as 1906 on Asuza Street, in Los Angeles, with a black American pastor by the name of William Seymour. Pentecostals insist on the holiness of the Christian life after

conversion, spiritual gifts and, above all, speaking in tongues, which they claim is the indisputable sign of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Pentecotism spread rapidly throughout the world. By 1920, it was well established in Europe and South America. It is currently the fastest-growing Christian religious movement, particularly in the Third World.

Unfortunately, this movement also traps certain biblical truths in its vessel.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit would necessarily be manifested by speaking in tongues, whereas the Bible teaches us that speaking in tongues is only one spiritual gift among others, and that all Christians are baptized in the Holy Spirit at their conversion (1 Corinthians 12:29-31).

Buildings are equated with the Church, whereas according to the Word of God, Christians constitute the spiritual edifice that is the true Church (Ephesians 2:22; 1 Peter 2:5).

This movement gave rise to the Assemblies of God, a very rigid denomination that considers itself to be the one and only true Church, so leaving it is tantamount to leaving the kingdom of God. Unfortunately, the Assemblies of God have become a prison that prevents Christians from living their freedom in Christ to the full.

V - THE FIFTH VASE: REVIVAL OR INDEPENDENT CHURCHES

In the 80s, people who no longer recognized themselves in the Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal movements decided to leave them and set up small prayer groups to experience true revival. God answered their prayers and a veritable outpouring of the Spirit was

poured out on them, accompanied by miraculous manifestations and numerous conversions. These awakened people combined prayer meetings in their homes during the week with Sunday worship in traditional churches. Persecution followed, leading to a definitive break with their original churches. The leaders of this movement were called shepherds, they had no theological training and dressed in no particular way, but they were filled with fire.

However, as the movement grew, many of them became paganized by joining Roman Catholicism, allowing men, often not called by the Lord, to rise up and proclaim themselves apostles and prophets. They then adopted the behavior of those they had denounced in their early days, founding churches over which they began to rule like business leaders.

In short, the vase of the revivalist churches has locked up the essential truths expressed in 1 Peter 2:9. As a result, pastors have become God's sole ministers, with exclusive responsibility for:

- bless marriages,
- teach,
- tithe as under the law,
- present the people's grievances to God,
- present children to the Lord as under the law,
- pray for the sick.

Most of these pastors are inspired by the American "super-pastors" to build great cathedrals to their own glory, just like the pharaohs and their pyramids.

"On the first day of the week, they went to the tomb early in the morning, carrying the spices they had prepared. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the front of the tomb, and when they went in, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. As they didn't know what to make of it, behold, two men appeared to them, in resplendent garments. Seized with fear, they lowered their faces to the ground; but they said to them: Why do you seek the living among the dead? He's not here, but he's risen. Remember how he spoke to you when he was still in Galilee, saying: The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinners, crucified, and on the third day rise again" Luke 24:1-7.

In this passage, Mary Magdalene and other women went to the cemetery with spices to embalm the Lord's body. An angel appeared to them and asked: *"Why do you seek the living among the dead?"*. This question is also asked of Christians trapped in these vessels, which deprive them of their freedom and keep them in spiritual death. How can we expect to find Jesus in these assemblies, where conversions are practically non-existent and genuine miracles have disappeared? Materialism, humanism, tradition, religion, compromise and sin have taken their toll on the good resolutions of their beginnings.

No one has achieved perfection, but we must strive for it. If we are content with the inheritance received from our fathers without really seeking the truth in the Scriptures, like the Jews of Berea (Acts 17:11), we will forever remain slaves to men and their systems.

CHAPTER 2

The captivity of the Church by Babylon and her false prophets

"Brethren, I don't want you to ignore it; our fathers were all under the cloud, they all passed through the sea, they were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, they all ate the same spiritual food, and they all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ. But most of them were not pleasing to God, as they fell dead in the desert. Now these are examples for us, so that we may not have evil desires, as they did. Do not become idolaters, like some of them, as it is written: The people sat down to eat and drink; then they got up to enjoy themselves. Let us not indulge in misconduct, as some of them did, so that 23,000 fell in one day. Let us not tempt the Lord as some of them did, who perished at the hands of serpents. Do not murmur, as some of them murmured, who perished at the hands of the exterminator. This happened to them as an example and was written to warn us, for whom the end of the ages has come" 1 Corinthians 10:1-11.

Church history is similar to Jewish history. We must use the latter to avoid the traps into which the Hebrews fell. The Jews have experienced several captivities, two of the most important being the Egyptian and Babylonian. The first lasted 400 years, and was physically very hard because of the arduous work imposed on them. The second, which lasted 70 years, was more subtle but far more dangerous. Indeed, during the Egyptian captivity, the Hebrews lived in Goshen and didn't mix with the Egyptians, so they were able to remain faithful to their God. On the other hand, during the

Babylonian captivity, the Jews were highly regarded and were seduced, not least because of the preferential treatment they received (Daniel 1). Egypt was persecution, Babylon seduction. Indeed, when God's people are persecuted they cling to God, but when they are seduced by the king's delicacies, they turn away. Sadly, many churches have allowed themselves to be seduced by Babylon, ignoring the apostle Paul's warnings in 2 Corinthians 11:1-4.

I- THE BABYLONIZATION OF CHRISTIANITY

The last fifty years have been marked by an upheaval in the history of the Church. Indeed, we are witnessing a globalization movement, even within Protestant Christianity.

Preliminary meetings in 1925 and 1927 led to the formation of a provisional ecumenical council in 1938.

A world council of churches was then organized in Amsterdam in 1948. In this new affiliation, many denominations and millions of Christians have united in a common effort to form a "super-church". From the outset, the hope was expressed that all branches of Christianity - Protestant, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox - would be brought together in a single ecclesiastical organization. However, in the process, strict adherence to biblical doctrine was sacrificed for organizational unity. Babylon is represented by the woman sitting on the great waters in Revelation 17.

1. Babylon the great

"Then one of the seven angels holding the seven bowls came and spoke to me: Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot,

sitting on many waters. It is with her that the kings of the earth have given themselves over to misbehavior, and the inhabitants of the earth have become drunk with the wine of her misbehavior. He transported me in spirit to a desert. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held in her hand a golden cup, filled with abominations and the impurities of her misconduct. On her forehead was written a name, a mystery: Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and the abominations of the earth. I saw this woman drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of Jesus' witnesses. At the sight of him, I was struck with astonishment. And the angel said to me: Why are you so surprised? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and the beast that bears her, which has seven heads and ten horns. The beast you saw was, and is, no more. It will rise from the abyss and go to perdition. And the inhabitants of the earth, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, will marvel at the sight of the beast, because it was, and is not, and will be again. (We need) here the intelligence that has wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sits. They are also seven kings: five have fallen, one exists, the other has not yet come, and when he does come, he must remain for a short time. The beast, which was and is no more, is itself an eighth king; it is also one of the seven, and it goes to perdition. The ten horns you saw are ten kings, who have not yet received a kingdom, but who receive power as kings for one hour with the beast. They have the same purpose and give their power to the beast. They will fight against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because he is Lord of lords and King of kings. And the called, the chosen and the faithful who are with him (will also overcome them). He said to me: The waters you

*saw, on which the harlot sits, are peoples, crowds, nations and tongues. The ten horns you saw and the beast will hate the harlot, strip her naked, eat her flesh and consume her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose, to carry out the same purpose and give their kingship to the beast, until God's words are fulfilled. And the woman you saw, **is the great city** that has kingship over the kings of the earth" Revelation 17:1-18.*

The woman sitting on the beast and on great waters, drunk with the blood of the saints, is the image of the city that has kingship over the kings of the earth. This city is none other than Rome, and more specifically the Vatican.

The characteristics of this woman are the same as those of the Roman Church. This woman symbolizes the apostate Church, which will fight against the saints. Chapter seventeen of the book of Revelation describes this entity in detail.

She sits on the great waters: the waters represent peoples, crowds, nations and languages. This woman controls nations, as evidenced by the fact that she owns cathedrals and embassies in every one of them, because she represents both a political and a religious system. In Europe and the Americas, it took the form of Roman Catholicism. In Asian countries, it takes the form of Hinduism, Buddhism and many other sects.

There is no nation unaffected by Babylon, for according to Genesis 11, it was in Babel that all languages originated, with the exception of course of speaking in tongues, which comes from God. It should also be noted that the diversity of languages was at the root of the division between the builders of the Tower of Babel, whereas in Acts 2, exactly the opposite occurred. Indeed, the Church was born on the Day of Pentecost with 120 different languages united for the

glory of God (Galatians 3:28).

She sits on the scarlet beast: the apostate, ecumenical Roman Church was, is and will be supported by the beast, the fourth empire, i.e. Europe.

Note that the Greek word for "seated" is "*kathemai*", meaning "to have a fixed abode, to occupy a place". The apostate Church is not seated in Christ in heavenly places, but is earthly, diabolical and materialistic. The fact that this woman, who is religious Babylon, is mounted on this beast shows that she dominates it. Indeed, historically speaking, this religion has influenced many empires, including those of Babylon, Egypt, Rome and others.

Her attire is sumptuous : unlike the Church of Christ, which adorns itself with good works (1 Timothy 2; 1 Peter 3 and Revelation 19:7-8), the apostate Church is clothed in purple, scarlet, adorned with gold, precious stones and pearls. This display of wealth has always been the prerogative of the Roman Church. In fact, it has the same characteristics as the church of Laodicea, which thought it was rich when in fact it was poor in the riches of God (Revelation 3:14-18). The apostate Church is more concerned with material goods and earthly riches, and emphasizes the pomp of its leaders. It spreads a gospel of prosperity, with little concern for the salvation of souls.

She has a name written on her forehead: "*On her forehead was written a name, a mystery: Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth*" Revelation 17:5.

The forehead is the image of thought, which is why God required the Jews to have the mark of His Word on their foreheads (Deuteronomy 6:8). This inscription on the woman's forehead

means that Babylon is above all an ideology, a mentality, a way of thinking (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). Let's remember that the Children of Israel, although they had physically left Egypt, made a golden calf for themselves because their thoughts were still imbued with the Egyptian mentality (Exodus 32).

Babylonian ideology is a veritable fortress that stands against the knowledge of Christ. That's why it's so much easier to bring a pagan to the Lord than a religious person to the simplicity of the Gospel. In fact, the apostle Paul had encountered this problem in Athens when discussing with Greek philosophers, Epicureans and Stoics (Acts 17).

"Take heed that no one makes you his prey through philosophy and vain deceit, relying on the tradition of men, on the rudiments of the world, and not on Christ" Colossians 2:8.

The name on the forehead is also the image of reasoning, which prevents many people from converting. Catholicism has done so much damage to mankind that many overthink when Christ is presented to them, when all they have to do is simply accept Him by faith.

"If we walk in the flesh, we do not fight according to the flesh. For the weapons with which we fight are not carnal; but they are powerful, by the virtue of God, to overthrow strongholds. We overthrow reasonings and every lofty thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and we bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" 2 Corinthians 10:3-5.

2. Babylon, mother of the world's harlots

She is the mother of harlots and the abominations of the earth, and holds a golden cup full of impurities : this harlotry is spiritual,

related to idolatry and image worship. The golden cup that hides impurities is the image of religious people who embellish their outward appearance while inwardly they are filled with defilements. Babylon is a formalistic, legalistic religion (2 Timothy 3).

In this passage, the word "mother" comes from the Greek word "meter" meaning "source". Indeed, Babylon is the source of every form of counterfeit religion, and has always inspired all the false doctrines that have infiltrated the Church.

In Genesis 10:6-12 and 11:1-9, the origin of Babylon is mentioned. From verse 3 to verse 5 of Genesis 11, the Bible tells us about the ambitions of Nimrod, the first king of Babylon, and his people.

*"They said to each other: Come on! Come on! **Let's make bricks, and fire them. And brick became their stone, and bitumen their cement. They said again: Come on! Let's build a city and a tower whose top touches the heavens, and let us make for ourselves a name, so that we will not be scattered over the face of the whole earth"**.*

On the face of it, this project seems quite innocuous. So it may seem odd that he should have aroused God's wrath to such an extent. And yet, behind this human unity lies all man's folly and rebellion against God.

*"**Let us make bricks...**"* While the Church is built with living stones (1 Peter 2:5), Babylon is built with bricks.

Man-made bricks have a uniform, standardized appearance. They are made of clay and bound together with cement. Now, let's remember that the soil (the earth) was cursed by God after Adam's fall (Genesis 3:17). The bricks, once placed in the construction, are

immobilized, inert and motionless. They represent the religious who are formatted by human systems. They are spiritually dead, totally ignorant of the life of the Spirit, and their religion is nothing but idolatry. Despite the failure of this first attempt, this Babylonian vision has survived to the present day. The Roman emperor Constantine, supposedly a convert to Christianity, merely took up Nimrod's vision by having churches built over the bones of dead Christians! This bad mentality still persists in many assemblies. Indeed, many Christians have been accustomed to bricks and mortar, i.e. to routine life in buildings. Conditioned by this pyramidal vision, they put their gifts, their anointing and their calling in the hands of a single leader who directs everything. Melted into the mass, cast in the same conformist mould, they form a uniform, impersonal and moribund group!

Even David, a great king and prophet of the Lord, was influenced by Babylon in his desire to build a sumptuous temple to the glory of God. Like many of today's Christian leaders, he sincerely believed he was honoring God by erecting a building that would attract worshippers from all over the world.

However, the Lord's vision is quite different. "*The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made by the hands of men*" Acts 17:24.

Since very few people have understood God's will in this area, they invest in bricks and neglect the living stones that are souls.

The living stones are the born-again Christians who together form the spiritual edifice that is the Church.

"And you yourselves, as living stones, are being built up into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices,

acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" 1 Peter 2:5.

Unlike bricks, stones are shaped by nature, in particular by water pressure, which gives them a magnificent shine. Carved by the natural elements and honed by each other, each has developed its own qualities and personality along the way. Unique in their kind, full of life and radiance, they assemble freely with one another and move according to the direction of God's Spirit (John 3:8).

Thus, under the Old Covenant, the Lord refused to allow sacrifices to be offered on altars made of stones hewn by man, lest human action profane them. So we understand that the Lord only accepts what comes from him. *"If you make an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for by wielding your tool over the stone you would profane it"* Exodus 20:25.

In Revelation 21:19-20, the apostle John sees the heavenly Jerusalem, whose foundations are made of precious stones. *"The foundations of the city wall were adorned with precious stones of every kind: the first foundation was of jasper, the second of sapphire, the third of chalcedony, the fourth of emerald, the fifth of sardonyx, the sixth of sardius, the seventh of chrysolite, the eighth of beryl, the ninth of topaz, the tenth of chrysoprase, the eleventh of hyacinth, the twelfth of amethyst."*

These precious stones are nothing other than the living stones making up the Lord's spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5), which have reached perfection.

"Let's build a tower whose top touches the heavens...". Note that only the top touches the heavens! This vision of things is at the origin of the pyramidal structure of the Church, which gave rise to sacerdotalism (a leader as mediator between God and the people)

and clericalism (separation of the clergy from the laity).



The image opposite is one of the two seals found on the \$1 bill. The pyramid symbolizes the Tower of Babel.

Note that the top is detached from the rest of the body, touching the heavens exactly as shown in Genesis 11. The eye here represents esoteric knowledge reserved only for the initiated.

At the time, the summit represented Nimrod (Genesis 10:6-12), the perfect type of antichrist, who was the first Emperor in human history and the instigator of this Babylonian vision. At present, the top represents the heads, the leaders at the very top of the pyramid hierarchy (presidents, vice-presidents, secretaries who govern the religious federations). This system is present in the vast majority of churches, where only initiates and luminaries have access to knowledge. They form a separate, closed elite with privileges of their own. This *modus operandi*, inspired by a mixture of Jewish priesthood and Babylonian customs, is at the origin of all mystery religions (Freemasonry, Rosicrucianism, Illuminati...) and all the governments of this world.

According to the Bible, there is no pastoral body, but only one body (Ephesians 4:4; 1 Corinthians 12:13) which has free access to the throne of God. "*For through him we both have access to the Father in the same Spirit*" Ephesians 2:18.

Moreover, God "*wills that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth*" (1 Timothy 2:4).

"Let's make a name for ourselves..." God gave man the privilege of naming the animals (Genesis 2:19-20); this privilege went hand in hand with the authority the Lord had conferred on him. But in wanting to make a name for himself, he expressed a desire to be known for his own glory. Here we have the origins of all the denominations and assembly names to be found within Christianity. Nowadays, almost every church has a name, and there is no shortage of examples: "Bethel", "The Rock", "The Hidden Manna", "Zion", and so on. What a difference from the biblical churches, which were simply identified with the cities in which they were planted!

A perusal of the New Testament reveals that Christians were referred to exclusively as "disciples" or "saints" (from Corinth, Ephesus, Thessalonica...). The term Christian, in itself, is only mentioned three times in the Bible (Acts 11:26; Acts 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16). Today, many people call themselves Christians, while at the same time claiming to be members of Baptism, Pentecotism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Adventism, Methodism... All these "isms", unknown to the Bible, are directly inspired by Babylon and divide God's children more than they bring them together. This perverted system encourages assembly members to chase titles. This has become so widespread that some people are claiming titles never before seen in the Bible: Holy Father, Archbishop, Reverend Pastor, General, International Apostle, Cardinal, Marshall...!

What a contrast with the Word of God! "*Call no one on earth your father, for there is only one Father, He who is in heaven. Do not be called managers, for only one is your manager, Christ*" Matthew 23:9-10.

She drinks the wine of debauchery: *"What am I saying? That meat sacrificed to idols is something? Or that an idol is something? Not at all. But what we sacrifice, we sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I don't want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons"* 1 Corinthians 10:19-21.

Once again, it's a question of spiritual debauchery due to the characteristic mixtures of ecumenism. In fact, even a small amount of sourdough makes the whole dough rise. *"You're wrong to boast. Don't you know that a little **leaven** makes all the dough rise?"* 1 Corinthians 5:6.

She was drunk with the blood of the saints : this intoxication was due to the bloody persecution of Jews and Christians. The massacres perpetrated by ancient Babylon (Babylonian, Persian and Roman emperors) and then by the Catholic Church throughout history, will be repeated with an unprecedented outburst of violence and cruelty. As mentioned above, Roman Catholicism has claimed the lives of over three million genuine Christians, far exceeding the death toll perpetrated by the various Roman emperors.

We are in the end times. The symbolic ancient Babylon is being rebuilt before our very eyes. Europe's rise to power is paving the way for a world government that will give rise to a reconstituted fourth empire.

The apostles warned against the introduction of false teachers into the churches of the end times. Christ came to set us free (Galatians 5:1,13; 2 Corinthians 3:17), but Satan's plan is quite different. From now on, false teachers and their erroneous teachings, which are nothing but doctrines of demons (1 Timothy 4:1-3), proliferate and

reduce many Christians to slavery.

II - THE CAPTIVITY OF THE CHRISTIANS BY FALSE PROPHETS

"There have been false prophets among the people; in the same way there are false teachers among you who will insidiously introduce heresies of perdition and, denying the Master who redeemed them, bring sudden perdition upon themselves. Many will follow them in their misdeeds, and because of them, the way of truth will be slandered. Out of greed they will exploit you with deceitful words, but their condemnation has long been in progress and their perdition is not dormant" 2 Peter 2:1-3.

1. A warning about philosophy and seduction

"You were bought with a high price; do not become slaves of men" 1 Corinthians 7:23.

Paul warned Christians of the danger posed by false prophets and their doctrines, so he constantly encouraged them to stand firm in their love for God.

"Take heed that no one makes you his prey through philosophy and vain deceit according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, and not according to Christ" Colossians 2:8.

The word **philosophy** comes from the Greek "*philosophia*" and means "love of wisdom". In other words, we're talking about theology, which is nothing other than a human science.

*"This wisdom is not that which comes from above; but it is **earthly, carnal, devilish,**"* the Word tells us in James 3:15.

Paul adds, "*And my word and my preaching did not rest on the persuasive speeches of wisdom, but on a demonstration of Spirit and power, so that your faith would be founded, not on the **wisdom** of **men**, but on the power of God*" (1 Corinthians 2:4-5).

The word **deception**, from the Greek "*apate*", means "seduction". Let's be clear: we're not just talking about worldly seduction, i.e. seduction that comes from the outside. Indeed, a much more subtle seduction is exerted within the assemblies by the dissemination of teachings which resemble the Word of God but which in reality are impregnated with humanism, mysticism and demonic doctrines.

The expression **take heed**, "*blepo*" in Greek, means "discernment". There are countless passages in the New Testament where we find this expression. This should give us cause for great concern and caution. Without discernment, the Christian is vulnerable to being swept along by every wind of doctrine and thus causing his downfall (1 Corinthians 7:23; 2 Corinthians 11:20).

The word **prey** comes from the Greek "*sulagogeo*" and means "to take someone captive and enslaved", but also "to lead away from the truth and subject to one's domination". We are currently witnessing the massive revival of false prophets foretold by the Lord and his apostles.

"Many false prophets will arise and deceive many" Matthew 24:11.

"For false christs and false prophets shall arise, and shall work great signs and wonders, so as to deceive even the elect, if possible. I have foretold it to you" Matthew 24:24-25.

The verb "to rise" used in these passages comes from the Greek "*egeiro*" and literally means "to awaken from sleep" or

"resurrection".

In other words, Jesus tells us that at the end of time, there will be an unprecedented awakening of false christs and false prophets who will infiltrate the churches.

It should be noted that the introduction of these gospel swindlers into the assemblies could not take place without the tacit and complacent agreement of certain sheep who, like the Corinthians, like to be stripped provided that they are told pleasant things (2 Corinthians 11:20).

"For the time will come when men will not endure sound doctrine; but, itching to hear pleasant things, they will give themselves a multitude of teachers according to their own desires, will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn to fables" 2 Timothy 4:3-4.

2. Diotrephes, a typical example of a false prophet

"I have written a few words to the Church; but Diotrephes, who likes to be first among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I go to you, I will recall the deeds he commits, speaking evil against us; not content with this, he does not receive the brethren, and those who would do so, he prevents and drives out of the Church" 3 John:9-10.

The Bible gives us the example of Diotrephes, who took an entire church hostage. Rebellious, he drove away all the people sent by the apostles to correct him. By refusing the apostle John's authority, he showed that what mattered to him was having the first place in the assembly. The spirit of Diotrephes is still at work today, with many pastors taking over the churches entrusted to them.

The spirit of Diotrephes can be recognized by these characteristics:

- He likes to be first, he's attached to titles (Matthew 23:6-7),
- It's inhospitable,
- He says bad things about the brothers,
- It prevents people from receiving missionaries,
- He expels from the assembly the faithful who contradict him.

This spirit of domination and control is very similar to the Nicolaitan spirit. It should be noted that "*Nicolaitan*" means "one who dominates the people".

Nicolaitism is a set of pernicious doctrines introduced into the churches of Ephesus and Pergamum.

The Nicolaitans taught Christians the doctrine of Balaam, according to which they could eat meat offered to idols and commit immoral acts like pagans under the pretext of their freedom (Revelation 2: 6, 14, 15).

They were therefore inciting people not to observe the prescriptions of the apostolic assembly which was sitting in Jerusalem in 50 AD.

The Nicolaitan system imposed yokes and total submission to pastors. "Submit to the authorities!" they say.

The Nicolaitans turn the passage from Romans 13 to their advantage to impose their desire for domination over the people.

The Bible teaches us in Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2: 13-15, that as Christians we must submit to the various authorities. However, the Word does not refer to the authority that so-called pastors, apostles,

prophets or priests grant themselves, but rather to the judicial (magistrates, judges...), political, legislative and executive (kings, presidents, ministers, policemen...) authorities of our governments.

Those who crave power are possessed by the Nicolaitan spirit. The Word invites the Church's leaders to lead the sheep to God with wisdom and love. When leaders follow the Bible, they don't manipulate people, they proclaim the truth and encourage everyone to seek the Lord's will. Whatever the state of weakness of the people who confide in them, they help and advise them. The only acceptable hierarchy in the Church is the one established by God. Indeed, Jesus Christ is the head of the Church and its only head (Ephesians 1:22-23).

On this subject, I had a dream in which God told me that many pastors, after winning souls and presenting them to Him, would leave with them as if they belonged to them. As a result, many pastors forbid their followers to attend other seminars or visit other assemblies under the pretext of protecting them from false doctrines!

I would also like to emphasize another verse that is misinterpreted by many pastors. "*Obey your leaders and be submissive to them, for they watch over your souls*" Hebrews 13:17.

The word "obey", in Greek "*peitho*", means "to be persuaded by words". It also means "to persuade someone to do something by reassuring them". Leaders need to understand that Christian submission and obedience has nothing to do with dictatorship and authoritarianism. Rather, they need to reassure and convince them, because anything that is not the product of conviction is sin (Romans 14:23). They must not tyrannize their brothers by forcing them to obey them (1 Peter 5:2-3).

Jesus warned the apostles about the spirit of domination : "*You know that the rulers of the nations tyrannize them, and the great ones abuse their power over them*" (Matthew 20:25).

The word "dominate", in Greek "*katakuriuo*", means "to tyrannize, to bring under one's power, to yoke". Just because shepherds are supposed to look after their sheep doesn't mean they have to rule over them like despots. On the contrary, they have a duty to lead them like true shepherds.

According to the Word of God, the shepherd is the one who lays down his life for his sheep (John 10:10). The shepherd not only reigns over his flock, but also takes care of them, protecting them from ravening wolves. Delegated authority must not exceed the limits set by God. For example, a leader must not interfere in the personal affairs of the faithful to impose a marriage. Nor should he ask the congregation to look after his children or perform domestic chores. He must not solicit, even for the Lord's work, the help of a married woman without the permission of her husband, who is her head (1 Corinthians 11:3).

Note also that submission, according to the Bible, is not unilateral but mutual, for it is written that we are to submit to one another in the fear of Christ (Ephesians 5:21).

What's more, it's obvious that a leader who lives in sin should not continue to lead God's people. You should therefore submit to your leaders only insofar as they themselves are submitted to the Word of God and to each other (Ephesians 5:20-21).

God doesn't impose anything on us, let alone a leader, who has no right to suppress a man's conscience or demand blind obedience. All authority must be examined in the light of the principles given by

God in His Word. Christian leaders who seek authority beyond the standards set by the Lord end up hurting their brethren.

Thus, true Church leadership is a support on which Christians can rest since the Church has Christ as its foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11). What's more, the biblical exercise of authority is always at the service of Christians, not the other way round. Those who use their pastoral or other function to exploit the faithful inexorably become false prophets, pastors, apostles...

There's another verse that is hijacked by many pastors to prevent God's children from escaping their grasp.

"Let us not forsake our assembly, as is the custom of some; but let us exhort one another, and that all the more as you see the day approaching" Hebrews 10:25.

This verse cannot be dissociated from verse 24 of Hebrews 10: *"Let us watch over one another, to excite us to charity and good works"*.

We're talking here about the purpose of church meetings, where brothers and sisters are expected to look out for one another, encourage one another in charity and the practice of good works. If these goals are achieved, there's no reason to leave your local assembly. Conversely, if this were not the case, it's perfectly biblical to leave it, since there's no connection between light and darkness. In fact, there's nothing to stop you from leaving an apostate local assembly while maintaining fellowship with those who walk in the fear of God. To sum up, Hebrews 10:25 tells us not to live our Christian life alone, for we are part of a body.

3. Characteristics of false prophets

Here's what the Bible tells us, in general terms, about false prophets

and false teachers. These are :

- **fountains without water** (2 Peter 2:17). A fountain is a source of living water that springs from the ground, either naturally or artificially, to quench the thirst of people. False prophets are dry and empty and can give water to no one, for they are like fountains or springs without water, that is, without the Word (Ezekiel 36:25). They don't have a message, so they can't water God's people. They have only speeches swollen with pride (2 Peter 2:18).
- **clouds driven away by a whirlwind** (Jude 1:12). A cloud is a large, thick cloud. Its role is twofold: to water and to protect people from the sun's rays. False prophets are clouds without water. They can neither water nor protect souls. They have no basis in fact, and are therefore tossed here and there with the wind.
- **pitfalls** (Jude 1:12). Pitfalls are obstacles, dangers, traps or difficulties that endanger Christians. Indeed, the pitfalls here represent false prophets who are dangers, traps for the salvation of the souls they capture.

"Woe to you, teachers of the law! for you have taken away the key of knowledge; you yourselves have not entered, and you have prevented those who wanted to from entering" Luke 11:52.

- **autumn trees without fruit** (Jude 1:12). Autumn is the season that follows summer and precedes winter, a warm season between hot and cold. False prophets are lukewarm, they have no position, they're just opportunists. God vomits out the lukewarm: *"So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor boiling, I will vomit you out of my mouth"*

Revelation 3:16.

In autumn, tree leaves turn yellow and eventually fall in winter. *"You who call yourself a Jew, who rest on the law, who glory in God, who know his will, who appreciate the difference of things, being instructed by the law; you who flatter yourself to be the guide of the blind, the light of those in darkness, the teacher of fools, the master of the ignorant, because you have in the law the rule of knowledge and truth; you then, who teach others, you do not teach yourself! You who preach not to steal, you steal! You who say not to commit adultery, you commit adultery! You who abhor idols, you commit sacrilege! You who glory in the law, you dishonor God by transgressing the law! For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you, as it is written"* Romans 2:17-24.

- **the furious waves of the sea throwing up the foam of their impurity** (Jude 1:13). The waves wash all the dirt from the sea ashore.

Note that the sea, in the Scriptures, symbolizes the world. False prophets teach Christians the principles and philosophies of the world. Their insides are filled with the things of the earth, which is why the Lord said in Mark 7:20-23: *"What comes out of man is what defiles man. For from within, from the hearts of men, come evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, fraud, derangement, envious looks, slander, pride and folly. All these evil things come out from within, and defile man."*

- **wandering stars** (Jude 1:13). False prophets are shooting stars, unstable. A shooting star is a star that has left its orbit and wandered off into the darkness of the universe. The false prophets have left their orbit around the rising Sun, which is Christ (2 Peter 1:19; Revelation 22:16). They run around

looking for connections, alliances, money. They are completely in the dark and lead men astray.

The stars have the mission to enlighten men during the night but false prophets have no light, they are blind leading the blind: "*Let them alone: they are **blind** leading the **blind**; if **the blind lead the blind**, they will both fall into a pit*" Matthew 15:14.

The mission of false prophets is to set up erroneous doctrines (1 Timothy 4:1-2; 2 Timothy 4:3) in order to seduce and mislead (2 Peter 2; Revelation 13:11-18), to blind, rob (John 10:10), monopolize and dominate Christians.

4. False prophets' means of seduction

We live in a world where people are increasingly sick, anxious, stressed and desperate. To find a solution to their daily worries, they are prepared to make all kinds of sacrifices. False prophets use this reality to their advantage to exploit people. The means they use are:

- **miracles** (Matthew 24:24; 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12; Revelation 13:11-18). Jesus never asked the disciples to organize crusades of miracles. Paul and Peter, for their part, never announced in advance what God was going to do when they preached. They were content to simply present the Gospel while expecting the Lord. Today, many people organize seminars and promise prodigies and miracles in advance, as if they were able to foresee the Spirit's action. And so thousands of Christians chase after miracles, forgetting that these miracles must accompany them all the days of their lives (Mark 16:15-20).

"The appearance of this godless one will be by the power of Satan, with all kinds of miracles, signs and lying wonders, and with all the

enticements of iniquity for those who perish because they have not received the love of the truth in order to be saved" 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10.

Let it be said, those who are too fond of miracles and neglect the Word of God are and always will be easy prey for the godless man.

- **prophecies** (2 Peter 2:1-3): Christians love them! Some even have entire notebooks full of prophecies, often carnal and diabolical, that bind them to false hopes. They sometimes lead to major disappointment, if not irreversible damage.

Strangely enough, these prophets of doom never denounce sin, but rather caress it. Indeed, what interests them is building their fame and enriching themselves by cashing in on their predictions (Jeremiah 23:9-40).

- **activism**: there are assemblies where there's no respite. From Monday to Sunday, programs (seminars, prayer retreats, conventions, etc.) are organized with the deliberate aim of captivating Christians. Constantly busy with various activities within their local assemblies, these Christians trapped in this system have lost their judgment and discernment. This frenetic activism impinges so severely on people's private and family lives that they are severely affected.

So busy, they no longer have time to visit other churches to hear a different sound of the bell.

The main motivations of false prophets are: money, with the collection of tithes, various fund-raising appeals and other invented offerings (2 Peter 2:1-3), sexual lust (2 Peter 2:14), the pleasures of

life (Philippians 3:18-19) and the pursuit of glory through honors, titles and power etc. (Jean 5: 44).

If these false prophets are proliferating exponentially in these end times, it's because they have an audience willing to put themselves under their yoke because of their pronounced taste for fables, prophecies and spectacle (Micah 2:11 and 3:5).

If anyone enslaves you, if anyone devours you, if anyone takes hold of you, if anyone is arrogant, if anyone strikes you in the face, you bear it" 2 Corinthians 11:20.

CHAPTER 3

The Church's captivity to sin, tradition and the Law of Moses

I - CAPTIVITY THROUGH SIN

1. What is sin?

What exactly does God's Word say about sin? "*Whoever practices sin transgresses the law, and sin is the transgression of the law*" 1 John 3:4.

According to the Bible, sin is the transgression or violation of God's law. It manifests itself in thought or deed. Taken in its strict sense, the word "sin" comes from the Hebrew "*hatta't*" (or "*het*", "*hatta'ah*") and the Greek "*hamartia*" which means "to miss the mark" or "to deviate from a target" (Genesis 20:9; Judges 20:16; Romans 3:23). So whoever sins, misses out on the goal for which God created him, i.e. eternal life. Sin, then, is the deliberate violation of God's will or word revealed to man. It's also a state, namely the absence of justice. The devil was the first creature to rebel against God (Isaiah 14; Ezekiel 28:11-19), and it was he who brought sin into the world through Adam (Romans 5:12).

Jesus Christ predicted the increase of sin at the end of time. Today, no one can dispute the fulfillment of this prophecy. Not only has sin increased in the world, but it has also crept into the churches. Many Christians have become slaves to sin and live bound by all kinds of vices.

2. How do we know if we are bound by sin?

The answer can be found in Romans 7:15-23: "*Because what I do, I don't understand. What I want, I don't do, but what I hate, that's what I do. If what I don't want I do, I declare, in agreement with the law, that it is good. Now it's not me who's doing it, but the sin that dwells in me. For I know: what is good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh. For I am able to will, but not to do good. I don't do the good I want, but I practice the evil I don't want. If I do what I don't want to do, it's no longer me who does it, but the sin that dwells in me. So I find this law for me who want to do good: evil is present beside me. For I delight in the law of God in my inward parts, but I see another law in my members, which struggles against the law of my mind and makes me a captive of the law of sin which is in my members.*"

"*Jesus answered them: Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin*" John 8:34.

That's why Paul rightly said: "*Walk according to the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the desires of the flesh. For the flesh has desires contrary to those of the Spirit, and the Spirit has desires contrary to those of the flesh; they are opposed to each other, so that you may not do what you would. If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now, the works of the flesh are evident; they are debauchery, impurity, derangement, idolatry, magic, rivalries, quarrels, jealousies, animosities, disputes, divisions, sects, envy, drunkenness, excesses of table, and the like. I tell you beforehand, as I have already said, that those who commit such things will not inherit the kingdom of God*" (Galatians 5:16-21).

Is it normal to find in the Church covetousness, division, hatred, unforgiveness, murder, abortion, fornication (adultery,

homosexuality, the practice of sodomy and fellatio, the consumption of pornographic films), idolatry, greed, lying, overeating, racism, murmuring, backbiting, slander, selfishness, pride, hypocrisy, seduction, witchcraft, indecent dress...? And yet these things do exist in many assemblies, and unfortunately too few people are concerned about them.

The child of God must master his or her flesh, for the latter always incites him or her to sin. The body was not created for debauchery, but to be the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). That's why Paul made this very apropos reflection: "*Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of a harlot?*" (1 Corinthians 6:15).

But what are we seeing in many churches today?

The mouth, which was created to give glory to God, is subject to lies, criticism, murmuring, hypocritical flattery, insults, fellatio, cunnilingus, overeating, drugs, alcohol, tobacco... (Mark 7:1823).

Eyes, which were created to contemplate the wonders of God, are used to covet and watch insanity on TV and other media in general.

The ear, which was created to listen to the Word of God and receive instruction from the Lord (Proverbs 20:12; Job 36:10), is diverted to listen to slander, gossip, worldly music and unseemly talk. Yet the Lord has never ceased to invite his people to listen to him in order to free them from the evil influences of this world (Deuteronomy 5:1; 6:3 and following; Jeremiah 2:4).

"He who has an ear, let him hear " (Matthew 11:15; Mark 4:9; Luke 14:35; Revelation 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22), an expression so dear to the Lord Jesus, is an invitation to lend an ear to receive revelation.

But many have become hard of hearing because of their hearts hardened by sin. Indeed, their ears are uncircumcised because they refuse to receive instruction from the Lord (Jeremiah 6:10; Acts 7:51). "*An intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge*" the Bible tells us in Proverbs 18:15.

"Faith comes from what we hear, and what we hear comes from the Word of Christ" Romans 10:17. So what we listen influences us for good or ill. Let us beware, then, of allowing ourselves to be tainted by unbelief and sin.

God's kingdom can only be established in the midst of men and women eager to hear his Word and put it into practice. Conversely, those who turn away their ears from God's Word sink inexorably into sin, opening the door to demons (Psalms 119:11).

In Mark chapter 1, verses 21 to 28, Jesus had to deliver a possessed person who had been frequenting the synagogue for years, a place where the Torah was read and where God was supposed to reign. Today, the same sad observation can be made in many contemporary assemblies. Many go to church as if they were going to a show, and the Word of God has become for some a kind of background music that no longer has any effect on them.

"Behold, you are to them like a pleasant singer, possessing a beautiful voice, and skilled in music. They hear your words, but they do not put them into practice" Ezekiel 33:32.

No wonder then that demons have taken up residence in many churches and have free rein to act and inspire all kinds of false doctrines.

II - THE CHURCH'S CAPTIVITY TO TRADITION

In the 5th century BC, the Jewish education system, based on the transmission of traditional knowledge, was one of the most developed in the ancient world. Nevertheless, the rabbis gradually drew a distinction between the written Torah (Pentateuch) and the oral Torah (Talmud), which interpreted, supplemented and sometimes corrected the written law. In the New Testament, this oral tradition is called "the tradition of the elders" (Matthew 15:2; Mark 7:3,5).

The Gospels often allude to the tradition of the Pharisees and scribes. Whereas the Sadducees believed that only the written text was normative, the Pharisees had developed a highly complex oral tradition for interpreting difficult or ambiguous passages. Over time, this oral tradition took on the same importance as the written Torah. All these commentaries and details appended to the Torah (written law) were collected and codified in the Mishna (Tradition). In this way, we better understand our Lord's words when he reproached the Pharisees for nullifying the Word of God in favor of their traditions. Indeed, their tradition had become their religion.

"So you have nullified the word of God in favor of your tradition"
Matthew 15:6.

Christianity today is based more on the traditions of men than on the apostolic foundation spoken of in Ephesians 2:20.

These traditions include:

- Sunday, which became the Lord's Day (Council of Nicaea in 325 under Constantine), whereas the Christians of the early

Church prayed every day (Acts 2:46),

- the host that replaced the Lord's Supper (Council of Nicaea 325),
- the priest's cassock (Council of Nicaea 325), while the apostles dressed like everyone else,
- Christmas Day was declared Christ's birthday (Council of Nicaea 325), even though the Bible does not specify the exact date of the Lord's birth,
- the catechism (Council of Nicaea),
- buildings replaced the spiritual edifice of the Church (Council of Nicaea),
- the praise group (set up in the 6th century by Pope Gregory the Great),
- nuptial blessing and the wearing of wedding rings (Council of Trent, 1555),
- Sunday school, created by Robert Raikes (1736-1811), while according to the Bible, the training of children is the responsibility of parents (Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6).

It's a fact that human beings have a hard time letting go of their traditions. So what Pharisaism was yesterday for Judaism, theology is today for Christianity.

Theology

The word "theology" comes from the Greek "*theologia*" and literally means "to discourse on the divine". It is the rational study of realities relating to the divine. Contrary to what one might think,

theology dates back to antiquity and was not born with the Church. The first to mention about this science is the Greek philosopher Plato in his book "The Republic".

In the early Church, Christians were trained by the ministries of the Word mentioned in Ephesians 4:11. At the time, it was unthinkable to send them to a theological school, as their teacher par excellence was the Holy Spirit. Indeed, theologians, most of whom are researchers and scientists, have never personally met Jesus Christ. Worse still, some deny his miraculous birth, resurrection and imminent return. How then can they properly preach the gospel, which is Christocentric?

"Take heed that no one makes you his prey through philosophy and vain deceit, relying on the tradition of men, on the rudiments of the world, and not on Christ" Colossians 2:8.

There have been four stages of theological education in the history of the Church: episcopal, monastic, scholastic and pastoral.

- **The episcopal stage** began with the Church Fathers (from the 2nd century AD). It was marked by the training of bishops and priests in schools of the same name. There, they received dogmatic instruction on the various rituals and liturgies the Church was to perform.
- The Christian **monastic stage** began between the 3rd and 4th centuries AD. J.C. It was characterized by an ascetic and mystical lifestyle. Monks, having taken a vow of celibacy, poverty and obedience to the monastic clergy, lived reclusively in monasteries. As early as the 3rd century, monastic schools were set up to train missionaries who were then sent to unexplored territories.

- **Scholasticism** owes much to university culture. Around 1200, a number of cathedral schools were transformed into universities. The University of Bologna in Italy was the first, followed by Paris and Oxford. This stage of theological education led to the teaching of theology by university professors.
- **The pastoral stage**, also known as seminary theology, developed from the scholastic theology taught in universities. Dedicated to the training of professional ministers, its aim was to produce qualified religious specialists. Seminary theology, or pastoral school, is still with us today.

III - THE CAPTIVITY OF THE CHURCH THROUGH THE LAW OF MOISE

1. Ignorance kills!

"My people are destroyed, because they lack knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I will reject you, and you will be stripped of my priesthood; Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children" Hosea 4:6.

In this passage, God makes a bitter observation: his people are condemned to destruction because of the ignorance in which they dwell. More specifically, it's ignorance about the identity of God and oneself. Indeed, many Christians do not know their position in Christ. This is still true today in many assemblies. The apostle Paul was already warning his contemporaries about the risks of ignoring the New Covenant and its effects.

"Now, as long as the heir is a child, I say that he differs in nothing

from a slave, although he is the master of everything; but he is under tutors and administrators until the time marked by the father. In the same way, when we were children, we were under the bondage of the rudiments of the world: but when the time was fulfilled, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption" Galatians 4:1-5.

The word "child" in this verse, "*nepios*" in Greek, means "ignorant". Ignorance kills, as we all know. It is therefore essential for Christians to grasp the depth of the Lord's work on the cross. Religion encourages passivity and ignorance, but the Christian who benefits from God's grace is called to break out of this system.

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not put yourselves under the yoke of slavery again. I, Paul, tell you that if you are circumcised, Christ will be of no use to you. And I testify once again to every man who undergoes circumcision: he is bound to keep the whole law. You are separated from Christ, you who seek justification in the law; you have fallen from grace. For us, it is from faith that we expect, through the Spirit, the hope of justice. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any value, but faith working through love" Galatians 5:1-6.

The Galatians had fallen back into the trap of religion. They had returned to observing the Sabbath and the feasts of the Lord and even went so far as to practice circumcision, thus depriving themselves of their freedom in Christ.

"But now, having known God, and especially having been known by God, how do you go back to those weak and poor elementary principles to which you want to enslave yourselves again? You

observe the days, the months, the times and the years! I fear that I have needlessly taken pains for you" Galatians 4:9-11.

"The Lord your God will raise up for you from among you, from among your brothers, a prophet like me: you will listen to him! He will thus answer the request you made to the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said: May I no longer hear the voice of the Lord my God, nor see this great fire, so that I may not die. The Lord said to me: What they said was good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers, and I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them whatever I command him. And if any man will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him" Deuteronomy 18:15-19.

The Messiah raised up by God was to free mankind from sin, demons and the curse of the law through his death. This mission was accomplished by Jesus on the cross. Yet, like the Galatians, many churches are still captives of the Law of Moses. Indeed, they remain fiercely attached to the ordinances of the law such as tithing, thanksgiving offerings, observance of sabbaths and ceremonial feasts, the wearing of priestly vestments, ordination of pastors...

2. The different kinds of laws under the Old Covenant

In addition to the Ten Commandments, which were part of the moral laws, the Hebrews had to abide by other laws, which we'll briefly mention below.

-Ceremonial laws (Hebrews 9:1)

The Bible declares that the Lamb of God was slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8). This sacrifice marked

the beginning of ceremonial laws. After the fall of Adam and Eve, God sacrificed an animal to make them garments of skin to cover their nakedness. This animal was a prefiguration of Christ, who was sacrificed to take away our sins and clothe us with the righteousness of God. Indeed, all the animal sacrifices performed before and after Moses foreshadowed the Lord's atoning death.

In the Old Covenant, these laws related to worship in the tabernacle and then in the temple (Leviticus 16 and Hebrews 9:1-10). These sanctuaries no longer exist, and the Levitical priesthood attached to them is no longer relevant.

In the New Covenant, Christ has made His children a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:22) and a kingdom of kings and priests (Deuteronomy 14:22-29; 26:8-13; Revelation 1: 4-6 ; 5: 8-10; 1 Peter 2: 9).

"Speaking of a new covenant, he declares the first to be old; yet what has become old is near to passing away" Hebrews 8:13.

"For Christ is the end of the law, for the justification of every believer." Romans 10:4.

Those who absolutely want to observe certain elements of the law, must know that in observing one law, they are obliged to observe all laws, otherwise they put themselves under the curse.

"For all who hold to the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written: Cursed is everyone who does not observe everything written in the book of the law, and does not put it into practice" Galatians 3:10.

"For whoever keeps the whole law but sins against one commandment becomes guilty of all" James 2:10.

- Moral laws (Exodus 20:1-17)

Moral laws, which are also the best known, are eternal and unchanging, because they bear witness to God's holy nature. Leviticus 18 gives us a good overview of these laws, which are still relevant today.

For example, in verse 22, homosexuality, which is an abomination before the Lord, is unambiguously condemned. "*You shall not lie with a man, as with a woman; it is an abomination*". 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 confirms this Old Covenant passage: "*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the debauched, nor the idolaters, nor the adulterers, nor the depraved, nor the homosexuals, nor the thieves, nor the covetous, nor the drunkards, nor the revilers, nor the hoarders will inherit the kingdom of God*".

Morality according to God also demands that we do not discover the nakedness of our parents or that of other people, with the exception of spouses of course. It should be noted, however, that future spouses must not see each other naked before the wedding.

It's worth noting that nine of the Ten Commandments are moral laws, and it's clear that they're still in force. This is why they are inscribed in man's consciousness and engraved in his heart.

"Now this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord, I will put my laws in their minds, and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they shall be my people" Hebrews 8:10.

- Social or civil laws (Exodus 21:1-36)

These were civil laws governing Israel's social life, and therefore **exclusively concerned the Israelites**. Among other things, they

dealt with domestic, sanitary and legislative matters... It was a kind of civil code that governed the daily life of the Hebrew people. New Covenant believers are therefore under no obligation to submit to it.

Tithing was part of the social and ceremonial laws, but many people continue to claim it on the pretext that it existed in Abraham's day, long before the law.

3. Tithing, the Christian tax

Tithing is one of the most tenacious laws that persists in our assemblies despite its abolition. Cyprian (200-258) was the first Christian author to call for financial support for the clergy, just as the Jews did for the Levites under the Law. Thus, in the 10th century, tithing became compulsory to support the state church, regardless of how it was used under the Old Covenant. Indeed, the Mosaic law imposed four kinds of tithes.

- The 1st tithe

"And as for the children of Levi, behold, I have given them for an inheritance all the tithes of Israel, in exchange for the service they do, the service of the tabernacle of meeting" Numbers 18:21.

The people had to pay a general tithe for the benefit of the Levites. Indeed, all the tribes of Israel, with the exception of the Levites, inherited land when they arrived in Canaan. As for the Levites, they had been chosen by the Lord to be at His service in the Tent of Meeting, so they received no land in possession.

"And you shall not forsake the Levite who is within your gates, because he has no portion or inheritance with you" Deuteronomy 14:27.

Therefore, in compensation for this service, the other tribes of Israel

had to pay them a tax of 10% of their income. The Levites were the civil servants of the day, acting as health inspectors, police officers, magistrates and teachers.

- **2nd tithe**

"The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: you shall speak to the Levites, and say to them: when you have received from the children of Israel the tithe I gave you over them for your inheritance, you shall take from them the Lord's offering, the tithe of the tithe. And your heave offering will be counted to you as the wheat of the threshing floor and as the abundance of the vat. So you too shall take the Lord's offering out of all your tithes, which you shall receive from the children of Israel; and you shall give the Lord's offering of them to Aaron the priest. You shall take the whole of the Lord's offering, out of all the things that are given to you; out of everything that is best, you shall take the consecrated portion. And you shall say to them: when you have taken the best of the tithe, it shall be reckoned to the Levites as the revenue of the threshing floor and as the revenue of the winepress. And you shall eat it in some place, you and your household, for it is your wages, in return for your service in the tabernacle of meeting" Numbers 18:25-31.

The Levites had to pay the "tithe of the tithe" for the benefit of the priests. All the priests were Levites, but not all the Levites were priests. The latter were descendants of Aaron and had special responsibilities in the service of the tent of meeting and then of the temple. This second tithe provided a financial guarantee for the priests and thus ensured the smooth running of the temple service.

- **The 3rd tithe**

"You shall not fail to tithe all the produce of what you sow, what comes out of your field, every year. And you shall eat before the

Lord your God, in the place which he shall choose to make his name dwell there, the tithe of your wheat, your wine, your oil, and the first-born of your herd and flock, that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always. But if the way is too long for you, so that you cannot carry all these things, because the place which the Lord your God will have chosen to put his name there, will be too far from you, when the Lord your God will have blessed you, then you will convert them into silver, and you will clasp the silver in your hand; you shall go to the place which the Lord your God has chosen, and you shall give the money in exchange for whatever you wish, cattle or flocks, wine or strong drink, and whatever you wish; and you shall eat it there before the Lord your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your family" Deuteronomy 14:22-26.

All Israelites were required to keep a tithe of all their produce in anticipation of their annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem. The people of Israel were to assemble three times a year in Jerusalem, the place chosen by the Lord, for the main feasts. These feasts were meant to be an occasion to rejoice together, and God had foreseen that everyone would have sufficient resources to enable them to enjoy them to the full. To do this, they had to set aside 10% of their annual agricultural production. Interestingly, tithes were never paid in money, but always in kind. This third tithe, intended for consumption during the annual feasts, should not be confused with the specific tithe for the Levites.

- The 4th tithe

"At the end of three years, you shall draw all the tithes of your income for that year, and lay them in your gates. Then the Levite, who has no portion or inheritance with you, and the stranger, the orphan and the widow, who will be within your gates, will come and eat, and be satisfied; so that the Lord your God may bless you in

every work you do with your hand" Deuteronomy 14:28-29.

Every three years, a special tithe also had to be paid, corresponding to a third of an annual tithe, for the benefit of the poor, orphans and widows. Today, in our modern countries, we would call this tithe "Social Security", because it was intended for the most disadvantaged.

These tithes were not voluntary offerings but real taxes, representing over 20% of the Israelites' total annual income.

To justify tithing, many Christian leaders believe they have biblical arguments. The first argument is that Abraham, the father of faith, paid tithes and that we are therefore supposed to do as he did.

"After Abram had returned victorious over Kedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him in the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's valley. Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought bread and wine: he was a priest of the Most High God. He blessed Abram, and said: Blessed be Abram by the Most High God, master of heaven and earth! Blessed be the Most High God, who has delivered your enemies into your hands! And Abram gave him a tithe of everything" Genesis 14:17-20.

But what do we see in the light of Scripture?

- Abraham didn't tithe to be rich, since he already was (Genesis 13:1-3).
- Abraham did not tithe from his personal possessions but from the spoils of war (Hebrews 7: 4).
- Abraham had not given his tithe to a pastor or a church, but to Melchizedek, who was an image of Christ.

- Moreover, as Abraham is the image of the Father, he also symbolizes the shepherds who are supposed to care for the flock. If we refer to Abraham, it's clear that those who must pay the tithe are the shepherds, not their sheep.
- Abraham had given tithes only once.

Do tithing pastors think they're Melchizedek? So if they ask for it, you're only supposed to give it once! And pray that Melchizedek will appear to you, as he did to Abraham, to deliver it to him!

Here's one of the favorite verses of all those who demand the payment of tithes! *"Bring all the tithes to the treasure house, and let there be provision in my house; and prove me in this, said the Lord of hosts: if I will not open unto you the floodgates of heaven, and pour upon you blessing without measure"* Malachi 3:10.

If we study this verse more closely, we'll discover something very interesting. Remember that there were four tithes under the law. So what tithes are we talking about in this passage from Malachi?

*"The priest, Aaron's son, shall be with the Levites when the Levites pay the tithe; and the Levites shall bring the tithe of the tithe to the house of our God, into the chambers of the treasure house..."*Nehemiah 10:38.

The Malachi text refers to the tithes to be paid by the Levites, not those owed by the people! Indeed, Malachi severely rebuked the Levites for not paying tithes of tithes! So the curses foretold by Malachi, threatened by certain "men of God" who insist on maintaining tithing collection today, are not about the faithful but about the leaders themselves.

Some pastors even go so far as to claim that Jesus taught tithing,

based on the following verses in particular.

"But woe to you Pharisees, who tithe mint, rue and all kinds of herbs, while you neglect justice and God's love. These were the things that had to be done, without, however, neglecting the others"
Luke 11:42.

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees hypocrites, for you tithe mint, dill and cumin, and neglect the most important things of the law, justice, mercy and faithfulness. It was necessary to do these things and not to omit those" Matthew 23:23.

Reading these passages, we realize that Jesus was reproaching the Pharisees for neglecting the essentials: justice, God's love, mercy and faithfulness. And yet, Jesus also said that we must not forget to pay our tithes. How do you explain this?

Before his death, Jesus, who was born under the law (Galatians 4:4), referred people to the law. In particular, he advised the rich man to keep the commandments (Luke 18:18-20) and asked the leper he had healed to present an offering for his cleansing in the temple (Matthew 8:1-4). Indeed, the ceremonial laws had to be respected until his resurrection.

Once Jesus said "***all is fulfilled***" (John 19:30), all these laws had no reason to exist, because the Lord had fulfilled them.

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish, but to fulfill" Matthew 5:17.

When Jesus says to the Pharisees in Matthew 23:23: *"...these are the things that were to be practiced, without nevertheless neglecting the others"*, does this mean that Christians should pay tithes? Not at all, for Jesus was addressing the Pharisees, not the Christians. What

was so special about the Pharisees? They considered themselves "consecrated to the law". Jesus was speaking to men who prided themselves on their perfect observance of the law, and so he suggested that they should keep it to the letter without neglecting justice and the love of God. Jesus' words about tithing were not addressed to his disciples, for he had never required them to pay it.

In the Old Covenant, 9/10ths of the tithe went to the Levites and the remaining 1/10th to God. Now, under the New Covenant, 100% of everything we own belongs to God. When we receive our salary, we have to pay our bills and then ask the Lord how to use the money left over, because it belongs to Him in its entirety.

4. The parable of the wine and the wineskins

*"After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector, named Levi, sitting at the tax office. He said to him: Follow me. (Levi) left everything, got up and followed him. Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large crowd of sinners and others at table with them. **The Pharisees and their scribes** murmured and said to his disciples: Why do you eat and drink with **tax collectors and sinners** ? Jesus answered and said to them: It's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. They said to him: John's disciples, like those of the Pharisees, fast frequently and pray, while yours eat and drink. Jesus said to them: Can you get the husband's friends to fast while the husband is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, so they will fast in those days. He also told them a parable: No one tears a piece from a new garment to put on an old one; otherwise, he tears the new garment and the piece he took from it doesn't match the old one. And nobody puts **new wine in old wineskins** otherwise the new wine*

*breaks the skins, spills out, and the skins are lost; but new wine must be put into **new wineskins**. And no one, after drinking **old wine** wants new, for he says: **The old is good**" Luke 5:27-39.*

The Pharisees were scandalized to see Jesus eating at Matthew's house, in the company of tax collectors and sinners. In fact, the tax collectors were Jews who levied taxes on their brethren for the benefit of the Romans, who occupied the country at the time. This activity was frowned upon, as not only did the tax accrue to the occupier, but the tax collectors also earned themselves a substantial commission (Luke 19). The Pharisees and scribes wanted nothing to do with these people, and even refused to approach them, as they were considered traitors. As usual, Jesus answered them in parables.

- **Old wine: the Old Covenant or the Law of Moses**

In the context of this parable, the old wine represents the Law of Moses, or the Sinai covenant given to Israel (Exodus 19:5). This covenant was concluded exclusively with the nation of Israel and included 613 rules.

On Mount Sinai, God gave Moses two stone tablets on which he himself had inscribed the Ten Commandments of the written law. They were later supplemented by 603 other commandments that make up God's law. To facilitate study, it was divided into three parts: moral laws, ceremonial laws and civil or social laws.

- **New wineskins: publicans and sinners**

The new wineskins represent the publicans, thieves and prostitutes whom God delivers into his service. Often uneducated, they have not been polluted by the religious traditions of men and are used in these end times to proclaim the Word and deliver the captives.

"Look, brethren, how you have been called: there are not among

you many wise according to the flesh, nor many mighty, nor many noble. God has chosen what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God has chosen what is weak in the world to shame what is strong; God has chosen what is vile in the world, what is despised, what is not, to reduce to nothing what is, so that no one can be proud before God " 1 Corinthians 1:26-29.

- The old wineskins: the Pharisees

The old wineskins of the day were the Pharisees, scribes and priests. Today, Christian leaders are more attached to theology and titles than to God and the salvation of souls.

- New wine: the New Covenant

The epistle to the Hebrews shows us that the Lord had long ago reserved His New Covenant for pure-hearted believers who had accepted the work of the cross. The author expressly quotes the prophecy given to Jeremiah in 627 BC:

*"For with the expression of rebuke the Lord said to Israel: behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a **new covenant** with the house of Israel and the house of Judah , not like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; for they have not persevered in my covenant, nor have I cared for them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: **I will put my laws in their minds, I will write them in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer will anyone teach his fellow citizen, nor any his brother, saying: know the Lord! For all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest; for I will forgive their iniquities, and remember their sins no more"** Hebrews 8:8-12 (Jeremiah 31:31-34).*

By making a **new covenant**, God implicitly declared the first one old. But **what is old, what has grown old, is close to disappearing** (Hebrews 8:13).

Some theologians consider the so-called "new" covenant to be nothing more than an improvement on the first, and even avoid using the term "New Testament". Yet this passage of the Bible does tell us that God promises to make a **NEW COVENANT** and that He declares the first **ANCIENT**.

The Messiah came to fulfill the Law perfectly, but also to abrogate the imperfections of the old covenant in order to establish a new covenant, not just a renewed or updated one.

Here's what the epistle to the Hebrews says on the subject:

*"If, then, perfection had been possible through the Levitical priesthood, **for it is on this priesthood that the law given to the people rests**, what further need was there for another priest to appear according to the order of Melchizedek, and not according to the order of Aaron? For, **the priesthood being changed, there is necessarily also a change of law**. For he of whom these things are said belongs to another tribe, none of whose members served on the altar: for it is well known that our Lord came out of Judah, a tribe of which Moses said nothing about the priesthood. This becomes even more evident, when there appears another priest in the likeness of Melchizedek, instituted, **not according to the law of a carnal ordinance** but according to the power of an imperishable life; for this testimony is given to him: You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. This means **abolition of a previous ordinance, because of its impotence and uselessness**, for the law brought nothing to perfection, **and the introduction of a better hope** by which we approach God. And since this did not take place*

*without an oath, for while the Levites became priests without an oath, Jesus became one with an oath through the one who said to him: the Lord has sworn, and he will not repent: you are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek, Jesus is by this very fact the **guarantor of a more excellent covenant**" Hebrews 7:11-22.*

This essential passage from the Word of God settles the question of the New Covenant. It is all the more important because it was aimed primarily at Christians of Hebrew origin, who mixed law and grace. This is why the author of the epistle invites these Christians, who were supposed to have been teachers of the Word for a long time, to come out of the camp.

"You, indeed, who long ago should have been teachers, you still need to be taught the elementary principles of God's oracles; you have come to need milk and not solid food" Hebrews 5:12.

"Let us therefore go out to him, outside the camp bearing his reproach" Hebrews 13:13.

The word "camp" in this passage comes from the Greek word "*parambole*", a term referring to the ancient Judaism in which Christians from Judaism had become mired. Today, it rather represents paganized Christianity, essentially based on the Law of Moses, constituting a prison that prevents some of God's children from fully living their freedom in Christ.

What many haven't understood is that the foundations of the Law of Moses **have changed**. The priesthood is no longer "Levitical", a privilege reserved only for the descendants of Levi, but is now "universal" according to the order of Melchizedek. This priesthood is therefore exercised by all Christians without exception.

Unfortunately, after the death of the last apostles, certain "church fathers", notably Ignatius of Antioch, Tertullian, Clement of Rome and Cyprian of Carthage, revived this mode of operation. Under the Old Covenant, the priests were the only interpreters of the law, and, along with the prophets, they acted exclusively as mediators between God and the people. Just as Aaron's descendants handed down the priesthood from father to son, many assemblies are run by families who reproduce the same pattern. Thus, the leadership of the local congregation has passed into the hands of a privileged caste, who like the Levites, collect offerings and tithes from the faithful, present newborn babies to the Lord, wear priestly vestments, receive holy ordination and band together as a pastoral body.

The Old Covenant, also called the "law of a carnal ordinance", is now opposed to the New Covenant, that of grace, which is animated by an imperishable life. The previous ordinance was abolished because of its impotence and uselessness in favor of a better hope introduced by the Messiah. Jesus, the new High Priest, is thus the guarantor of a more excellent covenant. The New Covenant is more remarkable and more complete than all the previous ones. It is based essentially on the sacrifice of Christ and ensures, according to the covenant made with Abraham, the eternal happiness of all the redeemed. It is definitive, irrevocable and absolutely unconditional, since all it requires of man is his faith.

5. The end of the Mosaic Law

"These are only ordinances pertaining to the flesh, concerning food, drink and various ritual baths, and imposed until a time of reformation" Hebrews 9:10.

According to this passage, the Law of Moses was imposed until a

time of reformation, that is, until the coming of the Messiah who was to deliver his life to restore mankind. This law announced the atoning death of Jesus Christ for the redemption of the human race.

Jesus himself proclaimed: "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish, but to fulfill*" (Matthew 5:17). This passage refers to the ceremonial law that announced the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Indeed, all the animal sacrifices under the Law were merely a prefiguration of the death of Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

The verb "to accomplish" in this passage, "*pleroo*" in Greek, also means "to complete". A job accomplished is a job complete. Christ came to complete the ceremonial law that proclaimed his sacrifice. Now that this sacrifice has been made, he doesn't have to do it again, because the work of the cross is perfect. Indeed, Jesus said at the cross "*all is accomplished*" (John 19:30).

"Then he said to them: This is what I told you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" Luke 24:44.

"Having annihilated by his flesh the law of ordinances in its prescriptions; he willed to create in himself with both one new man, establishing peace and reconciling them to God both in one body, through the cross, destroying enmity by it" Ephesians 2:15-16.

"He wiped out the deed (the ceremonial law) whose ordinances (Sabbath observance, tithes, feasts of the Lord...) condemned us and which remained against us and eliminated it by nailing it to the cross" Colossians 2:14.

"Christ is the end of the law for the justification of all who believe"
Romans 10:4.

- Ordinances abolished (tithes, sabbaths, animal sacrifices, feasts...)

"The first covenant therefore had ordinances pertaining to worship, and an earthly sanctuary" Hebrews 9:1.

What are ordinances? According to procedure, the ordinances applied to all the prescriptions concerning the seven feasts of the Lord (Exodus 12; Numbers 9 ; 2 Chronicles 35:13; Nehemiah 8:18; Leviticus 23), Sabbath observance (Ezekiel 20:11-12), temple worship (Ezekiel 43:11,18; 44:5), animal sacrifices (Leviticus 5:10; 9:16; Numbers 15:16, 24; Numbers 2; Ezra 3:4) and tithes.

God was asking the Jews to observe these ordinances that he had given to Moses for all Israel (Malachi 4:4).

"But when the time was fulfilled, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption" Galatians 4:4.

"Having annihilated by his flesh the law of ordinances in its prescriptions; he willed to create in himself with both one new man, establishing peace" Ephesians 2:15.

The word "annihilated", in Greek "*katargeo*", means "to render inoperative or inactive". That's why the apostle Paul wrote: *"He (Jesus) blotted out the deed whose ordinances condemned us and which stood against us, and destroyed it by nailing it to the cross"* Colossians 2:14.

The ordinances, destroyed by Christ on the cross, condemned men since their non-observance brought curse and death. Messiah's

sacrifice satisfied the demands of divine justice, and so the law was fulfilled (Colossians 1:12-14). Having achieved its essential purpose, it has now become unnecessary, since the Lord's sacrifice is perfect. Indeed, Jesus redeemed, forgave, healed and delivered us from the curse of the law by fulfilling the ceremonial laws so that we might practice the moral laws (Ephesians 2:10; Galatians 3:13). So there is no more condemnation for all who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1-2).

"Therefore, let no one judge you about what you eat or drink, for a matter of feast or new moon or Sabbath: all these are but a shadow of what is to come, but the reality is the body of Christ" Colossians 2:16-17.

"For Christ is the end of the law, for the justification of all who believe" Romans 10:4.

So why go back to those old, bygone things when in Christ we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places (Ephesians 1:3)?

- Should ceremonial laws continue to exist?

The law and its ordinances relating to tithes, animal sacrifices, feasts of atonement and Sabbaths, which all revolved around worship in the temple, are no longer relevant. They were therefore provisional until perfect communion was restored through the sacrifice of the Son of God.

*"Jesus cried out again with a loud cry, and gave up the spirit. **And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom**, and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had died were raised"* Matthew 27:50-52.

The veil that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, where the high priest went on the Day of Atonement, was torn when Christ atoned (Exodus 26:31-37). This event marks the break between the old rites and the new ones that have been in place since the Lord's crucifixion. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ has thus opened up a new and living way, enabling all those who accept the work of the cross to enter into a new covenant with the Eternal, and thus gain access to the presence of God, with no other sacrifice than that of the Messiah, and no other priesthood than his own (Hebrews chapters 9 and 10).

However, believers themselves can reintroduce a veil that covers the work of the cross. Of course, we're not talking about installing a new veil in a physical temple, but rather a spiritual veil that blinds and deprives Christians of God's glory. The veil reappears every time a set of religious rules is superimposed on or replaces the Gospel.

Consequently, religious systems that impose rules on believers that exceed and absorb the biblical commandments bring those who practice them back under the law. The establishment of the clergy, of Sunday as a day reserved for the Lord, of prophet's offerings and thanksgivings, of tithes, of buildings as temples and of priestly vestments, certainly have a biblical origin, but are no longer current. What's more, these systems are contrary to the simplicity of the gospel and prevent Christians from entering into true worship.

Thus, the minds of people veiled by religion have become incapable of understanding the mystery of Christ. *"But they've become hard of hearing. For to this day the same veil remains when they read the Old Covenant, and it does not lift, because it is in Christ that it disappears. To this day, when Moses is read, a veil is cast over their*

hearts; but when hearts are converted to the Lord, the veil is removed" 2 Corinthians 3:14-16.

Having received the Spirit of God, our understanding is now uncovered, and we can contemplate, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord whose brilliance never ceases to grow. The glory of the Old Covenant is nothing like that of the New Covenant. For if that which is fleeting has been glorious, how much more glorious will that which endures forever be! So let's be content with sanctifying ourselves and worshipping the Lord, as the Word of God recommends. This implies a consecration of our whole life and a total submission to the Lord, which is far more valuable before God than the sacrifices of the Old Covenant.

- The Law of Moses was a shadow of things to come

"For the law, which possesses a shadow of things to come, and not the exact representation of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which are perpetually offered every year, bring the helpers to perfection" Hebrews 10:1.

We're talking here about the ceremonial law that heralded the advent of the Messiah. In this verse, the word "shadow", "*skia*" in Greek, refers to an image cast by an object and representing the shape of that object. So the whole law was a prefiguration of things to come.

- The Law of Moses was a pedagogue

"Before faith came, we were shut up under the custody of the law, in view of the faith that was to be revealed. So the law was like a tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we might be justified by faith. Faith having come, we are no longer under this preceptor" Galatians 3:23-25.

Among the Greeks, the pedagogue was a trusted slave entrusted with the care of children. He had to accompany them, watch over their lives and conduct, but also protect them, take them to school and bring them home. The pedagogue was responsible for looking after the child until he or she came of age. His work came to an end once the child had matured and was able to take care of his father's business. So the apostle Paul compares ceremonial laws to a pedagogue who led us to Christ, our redeemer. They ended with Christ's death on the cross. From now on, it is the Holy Spirit who takes over and leads us into all truth (John 16).

"Now, as long as the heir is a child, I say that he differs in nothing from a slave, although he is the master of everything; but he is under tutors and administrators until the time marked by the father. We too, in the same way, when we were children, were under the bondage of the elementary principles of the world; but, when the times were fulfilled, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, so that he might redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption. And because you are sons, God has sent into our hearts the Spirit of his Son, who cries out: Abba! Father! So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if you are a son, you are also an heir by the grace of God" Galatians 4:1-7.

Because many Christians have not truly understood the work of the cross, they continue to cling to the law, ignoring their own identity in Christ and the richness of God's call. The law has become a prison for them, preventing them from reaching spiritual maturity and the perfect stature of Christ.

CHAPTER 4

Offerings under law and grace

I - OFFERINGS UNDER THE LAW

In the temple, the priests presented five kinds of sacrifices to God, all of which prefigured Christ and his redemptive work.

- **The holocaust** was the image of the Lord who offered himself without blemish to God to atone for the faults of sinful man. This sacrifice foreshadowed the offering of Christ, the atoning victim for believers who have no natural ability to conform to the Father's will.

-**The offering of flour** symbolized the consecration of the faithful, who were expected to live every day in the example of Jesus. The perfection of the fine flour illustrated the total balance of the Lord's character, which is without flaw or excess. The fire foreshadowed the sufferings Jesus accepted to the point of death. The incense evoked the good-smelling fragrance of his life poured out before God. The oil, mixed with the offering, symbolized his miraculous birth conceived by the virtue of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18-23). The offering sprinkled with oil prefigured Christ, anointed by the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:16-21). Salt was the image of the flavor of truth that is capable of neutralizing the corrupting action of evil. The oven symbolized Christ's invisible sufferings and inner anguish (Hebrews 2:18). The frying pan was the image of the public suffering endured by the Savior.

- **The sacrifice of thanksgiving** was the expression of the believer's communion with God. Note that the choice of victims was left to the Israelite (bull, lamb or simple turtle-doves) and corresponded to the material possibilities of each worshipper. Moreover, the value

of the animals had no influence on the quality of the sacrifice. The details of the sacrifice of thanksgiving highlight the characteristics of the redeemed' s communion with God through Jesus Christ.

The last two types of sacrifice did not include the words "*of a sweet aroma to the Lord*", because they were used to atone for sin. These were **the sacrifice for sin** , which emphasized the sinful nature of the individual, and **the sacrifice of guilt** , which was offered as reparation for sinful acts. The repentant sinner was obliged to present the victim imposed by the law and, in some cases, to confess his fault. Once atonement had been made, forgiveness was granted.

There was also **the peace offering** ("*schelem*" in Hebrew), an integral part of the sacrifice of thanksgiving first mentioned in Exodus 20:24. This offering prefigured the whole work of Christ, bringing peace to the believer. Indeed, God grants peace only through Jesus Christ alone (Colossians 1:20; Ephesians 2:17).

As we have seen, the law provided for specific offerings that were intended to maintain communion and peace between the Lord and his people while awaiting the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ. However, men claiming to serve God, driven by a spirit of unbridled greed, are imposing new offerings on Christians which, once again, have no biblical basis.

II – OFFERINGS INVENTED BY FALSE PROPHETS

Gospel swindlers have a habit of twisting Scripture to their advantage to justify taking these offerings unknown to the Bible. Here are just a few examples.

- The prophet's or teacher's offering

"He answered him: There's a man of God in this very town, and he's a highly regarded man; whatever he says doesn't fail to happen. Let's go, maybe he'll show us the way. Saul said to his servant: But if we go, what will we bring to the man of God? For there is no bread left in our sacks, and we have no gift to offer the man of God. What do we have? The servant spoke again and said to Saul: Behold, I have on me the fourth part of a shekel of silver; I will give it to the man of God, and he will show us our way" 1 Samuel 9: 6-8.

At no point in the rest of the passage do we see Samuel receiving or accepting this money, but on the contrary, he offered Saul and his servant a hearty meal.

"Samuel took Saul and his servant, brought them into the hall and gave them a place at the head of the guests, who were about thirty men. Samuel said to the cook: Serve the portion I have given you, saying to yourself: Put it aside. The cook took the thigh and all that surrounded it and placed it in front of Saul. And Samuel said: This is what has been set aside; set it before you and eat, for it was kept for you, as it were, when I invited the people. So Saul ate with Samuel that day" 1 Samuel 9 : 22-24.

The Bible also tells the story of Naaman. This Syrian general, in search of healing, went to the prophet Elisha with a large offering. The man of God refused the gift, but his servant Gehazi, like many pastors, was quick to claim the offering, claiming that Elisha had changed his mind. The consequence of this greedy and deceitful act was terrible, for God struck him with leprosy (2 Kings 5).

"He who is taught the word, let him share in all his goods who teaches him" Galatians 6:6.

As is often the case, this verse has been deliberately or unconsciously taken out of context to impose the financial and material upkeep of teachers on Christians.

But if we continue reading in verse 10, we see that it also says: *"Therefore, while we have the opportunity, let us practice good toward all, and especially toward our brethren in the faith."*

"Out of brotherly love, be full of affection for one another; out of honor, use mutual thoughtfulness" Romans 12:10.

The word "good" in verse 10 is the same as in verse 6; it comes from the Greek "*agathos*" meaning "privilege" or "honor". The saints are therefore called upon to share their goods with one another. Teachers must never demand a salary from their brothers and sisters, as offerings must be made freely, with love and conviction.

"Let elders who lead well be deemed worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For Scripture says: Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treads out the grain. And the laborer deserves his wages" 1 Timothy 5:17-18.

Here's another perfect example of a verse twisted by the miracle-workers who roam the churches to impoverish Christians.

Many claim they deserve a salary as they preach, pray for people and travel to preach the gospel. They forget that in this passage, the worker is compared to oxen. These animals were slaves, harnessed two by two to a yoke to plough the fields chosen by their master, who decided everything for them.

In the preceding passage, Paul was simply reminding Timothy of the Lord's word in Luke 10:1-12. In verse 4, Jesus asked the missionaries he had sent not to take any purses (the image of a bank

account) with them, because they had to rely exclusively on him. Note that we're talking about workers here, not "entrepreneurs" who had to rely entirely on the Lord for payment. What does the Bible have to say about the remuneration of these workers?

*"In whatever house you enter, first say: Peace be upon this house! And if a child of peace is found there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. **Stay in that house there, eating and drinking what they give you; for the worker deserves his wages. Don't go from house to house.** In whatever town you enter, and wherever you are received, **eat what is set before**, you heal the sick who are there, and say to them: The kingdom of God has come near you" Luke 10:5-9.*

The worker's wage was simply room and board!

- Laodicea and the prosperity gospel

"I know your work: you're neither cold nor hot. If only you were cold or hot! So, because you're lukewarm and neither cold nor boiling, I'm going to vomit you out of my mouth. Because you say: I am rich, I am made rich and I have need of nothing, and because you do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked, I advise you to buy from me gold tried in the fire, so that you may become rich, and white garments, so that you may be clothed and the shame of your nakedness may not appear, and eye salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see" Revelation 3:15-18.

Despite its material wealth, the Lord made it clear to the Laodicean church that it was poor, blind and naked because its heart was not attached to him.

People who hijack the word of God to satisfy their greedy appetites are worthy representatives of the church of Laodicea. They make

people believe that financial difficulties are a curse. With their erroneous teachings, they make Christians with modest incomes feel guilty, pushing them into debt so they can sow unceasingly in their ministry.

"For there are many who walk as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often spoken to you of them, and now I speak of them again with weeping. Their end will be perdition; their god is their belly; they put their glory in what they are ashamed of; they think only of the things of the earth" Philippians 3:18-19.

With their doctrines of demons, these people have become enemies of the cross. They never preach repentance, sanctification, the return of the Messiah, the fear of God, persecution... They have no use for biblical prophecies about the end times, and instead of warning the Church, they water it, fatten it and lull it to sleep with cleverly devised fables. The apostles Paul and Peter (notably in 2 Peter 2) warned us about these ravening wolves that have entered the sheepfold.

Nowadays, the church of Laodicea has grown enormously. For proof of this, just look at the proliferation of American-style "mega-churches", which are seen as absolute benchmarks of spiritual success. Far from being simple workers, the leaders of these assemblies are more like multinational company bosses. They wallow in excessive splendor and deny themselves nothing: haute couture clothes, luxury cars, villas, private jets... They live like kings, light years ahead of the model of Jesus who came to serve and not to be served (Matthew 20:28).

So let's pray that God will raise up authentic prophets who walk in sanctification, like David Wilkerson, Osborn, Séverin Kacou and many others, to denounce the work of these false prophets.

Many pastors require Christians to offer thanksgiving at weddings, the presentation of children, birthdays and graduations. But what does the New Testament say about this offering?

III- OFFERINGS UNDER THE NEW COVENANT

1. Thanksgiving

Unlike tithes and the various ceremonial laws, offerings did not disappear under the New Covenant, but took on a different form and use. In the New Testament, the expression "thanksgiving", "*charis*" in Greek, is translated as "thanks". Since Christ has redeemed us at such a great price, whatever we do, we must do with thanksgiving, as the Word recommends.

- **Food:** *"And if I eat with thanksgiving, why should I be blamed for something I give thanks for. So whether you eat, or drink, or do anything else, do all to the glory of God."* 1 Corinthians 10:30-31.

- **Speaking in tongues :** *"For if I pray in tongues, my spirit is in prayer, but my understanding remains barren. So what to do? I will pray with the spirit, but I will also pray with the understanding; I will sing with the spirit, but I will also sing with the understanding. Otherwise, if you give thanks in the spirit, how will he who sits among the simple hearers answer: Amen ! To your thanksgiving, since he doesn't know what you're saying? It is true that you give excellent thanks, but the other is not edified. I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you".* 1 Corinthians 14:14-18.

Speaking in tongues is a way of thanking God for his blessings.

- **Gifts received from the saints** : *"For the service of this offering, not only provides for the needs of the saints, but makes many thanksgivings abound to God."* 1 Corinthians 9:12.

In this passage, the expression "thanksgiving" comes from the Greek "*eucharistia*", meaning "holy supper", "gratitude", "thanks". The disciples gave glory to God when they received offerings from their brothers and sisters. They didn't thank God by giving him money, but by giving thanks through prayer.

- **Prayer**: *"I exhort, therefore, in the first place, to make requests, prayers, intercessions, thanksgiving, for all men, for kings and for all those who occupy a position that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and dignity"* 1 Timothy 2:1-2.

We must thank God for all men, and pray especially for those who govern us, that God may give them wisdom.

It's interesting to note that not all these offerings were made in money, but in kind. And yet, we find that most churches today, are not content to simply go back under the law but they invent all sorts of pecuniary offerings that have no biblical basis.

2. What should we offer the Lord under the New Covenant?

- The offering of our heart

The first offering God asks for is the believer's heart, not his money. God sent his only Son to die on the cross to save lost hearts. It's important for the saints to know that the Lord's burning desire is to see our hearts transformed.

"Two men went up to the temple to pray; one was a Pharisee, and the other a sinner. The Pharisee stood and prayed to himself: O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of men, who are greedy, unjust, adulterous, or even like this sinner: I fast twice a week, I tithe all my income. The sinner stood at a distance, didn't even dare raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his chest and said: O God, be appeased to me, a sinner. I tell you, this one went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" Luke 18:10-14.

In this story, the Pharisee boasted of his offerings, tithes and good works, whereas the Publican had simply humbled himself before the Lord. God justified the publican because of his repentant heart, not because of his offerings.

That's why the apostle Paul said: *"And though I should distribute all my goods for the food of the poor, though I should even give up my body to be burned, if I have not love, it profits me nothing"* (1 Corinthians 13:3). You can give all your wealth to the poor, but if you don't have love, God will never accept your offering.

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" Matthew 6:21. If God is your treasure, then your heart will be attached to him and not to your perishable material possessions. From then on, you'll understand that everything you own belongs entirely to him, and it will be easy for you to obey him.

"I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which will be reasonable worship on your part" Romans 12:1-2.

The word "sacrifice", "*thusia*" in Greek, also translates as "victim".

Let's remember that the Bible asks us to offer our bodies to God as pleasing sacrifices. Like the burnt offering under the law, our lives must be offered first and entirely to the Lord. Indeed, in the Old Covenant, the burnt offering was a sweet-smelling offering consumed entirely by fire. The priests were not to take anything from it, for it belonged entirely to God.

"Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them: When a man among you makes an offering to the Lord, he shall offer a sacrifice of herd or flock. If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he will offer a male without blemish; he will offer it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting to be accepted before the Lord. He will place his hand on the head of the burnt offering that the Lord has approved, to make atonement for it. He will slaughter the calf before the Lord; and the priests, Aaron's sons, will offer the blood and sprinkle it around the altar at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. He will strip the holocaust and cut it into pieces. Aaron the priest's sons will put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. The priests, Aaron's sons, will arrange the pieces, the head and the fat on the wood set on fire on the altar. He will wash the entrails and the legs with water; and the priest will burn the whole on the altar. It is a burnt offering made by fire of a sweet savor to the Lord" Leviticus 1:1-9.

You can give all kinds of offerings and tithes, but if your heart doesn't belong entirely to God, your offering will be in vain.

The Bible tells us of the Macedonian disciples who first gave themselves to the Lord before giving their offerings. *"We make known to you, brothers, the grace of God that has been manifested in the churches of Macedonia. Even though they have been sorely tried by tribulations, their overflowing joy and deep poverty have abundantly produced rich generosity: according to their*

*possibilities, I attest, and even beyond their possibilities, of their own free will, they have asked us with great insistence for the grace to participate in this service on behalf of the saints. This is more than we had hoped for: **they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us, by the will of God**" 2 Corinthians 8:1-5.*

*"However, in some respects I have written to you with a kind of boldness, as if to awaken your memories, because of the grace God has given me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles; I perform the sacred service of the Gospel of God, **so that the Gentiles may be a pleasing offering to Him, sanctified by the Holy Spirit**" Romans 15:15-16.*

The word "offering" in this verse, "*prosphora*" in Greek, means "a gift, a present" or "a sacrifice".

Remember, you'll never buy peace, healing, deliverance or forgiveness of sins with your money. However, it is possible to make good use of them for the glory of God.

- The offering of our money and material goods

Who benefited from the offerings in the early Church? "*The multitude of those who believed were but one heart and one soul. No one claimed his possessions as his own, but everything was shared between them. With great power, the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace rested upon them all. **For there was not a needy person among them, all who owned fields or houses sold them, brought the price of what they had sold and laid it at the apostles' feet ; and distributed to each according to his need.** Joseph, nicknamed Barnabas by the apostles, meaning son of exhortation, a Levite from Cyprus, sold a field he owned, brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet"* Acts 4:32-37.

The first recipients of these offerings were needy Christians, i.e. widows and the poor. Early Christians did not pay tithes, but gave voluntary offerings according to their means. The money collected was not stored in banks, as is the case in many churches today, but distributed among the congregation according to need.

*"We make known to you, brothers, the grace of God which has been manifested in the Churches of Macedonia. Though much tried by tribulations, their overflowing joy and deep poverty have abundantly produced rich liberalities: according to their possibilities, I testify, and even beyond their possibilities, of their own free will, **they have asked us with great insistence for the grace to participate in this service on behalf of the saints**" 2 Corinthians 8:1-4.*

"For it is a question, not of exposing yourselves to distress for the relief of others, but of following a rule of equality: in the present circumstance, your abundance will provide for their need, so that their abundance may likewise provide for your need; in this way there will be equality, as it is written: He who had much had nothing too much, and he who had little lacked nothing" 2 Corinthians 8:13-15.

***"For the service of this offering not only provides for the needs of the saints, but makes many thanksgivings to God abound. In view of the value of this service, they glorify God concerning your obedience in confessing the gospel of Christ and the liberality of your communion toward them and toward all"** 2 Corinthians 9:12-13.*

"For the collection in favor of the saints, act, you too, as I have commanded the churches of Galatia. On the first day of the week, each of you is asked to set aside what you can, according to your

means, so that we don't have to wait for my arrival to make the collections. And when I have come, I will send with letters those whom you have approved to carry your gifts to Jerusalem; if it is worth my while to go myself, they will make the journey with me" 1 Corinthians 16:1-4.

Today, many churches use offerings to build buildings that house the spiritually moribund instead of supporting the saints as the Bible requires. All the verses that speak of money in the New Testament have to do with assisting the saints in their needs. Church money belongs to the saints. Unfortunately, many pastors use their tithes and offerings to buy villas and big cars, with no concern for their brothers and sisters in dire straits.

What a contrast with Paul, who collected money to help the destitute churches: *"I have stripped other churches, receiving wages from them to serve you. And when I found myself in need among you, I was a burden to no one" 2 Corinthians 11:8.*

Indeed, according to biblical logic, it's up to fathers to raise money for sons, not the other way around.

So where did the funds for the missions come from? The Bible tells us that women supported the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ with their money and material possessions.

*"Then Jesus went from town to town and from village to village, preaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, and some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna, wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, Susanna, and many others **who assisted them with their goods**" Luke 8:1-3.*

The churches did the same for Paul: *"Though much tried by tribulation, their overflowing joy and deep poverty have abundantly produced rich liberalities; according to their possibilities, I testify, and even beyond their possibilities, of their own free will they have asked us with great insistence for the grace to participate in this service on behalf of the saints"* 2 Corinthians 8:2-4.

"For the brothers who came from Macedonia provided what I lacked. In everything I have guarded against being a burden to you, and I will guard against it" 2 Corinthians 11:9.

Paul didn't want to be a burden on any of his brothers, yet the church in Macedonia supported him financially. Like the apostle Paul, missionaries who have been called full-time must expect the Lord to provide for their needs. Indeed, God is able to touch the hearts of the saints to support missionaries in their needs. Furthermore, it is the duty of local churches to train, send out and financially and materially support missionaries who travel the world to proclaim the Word of God.

"Take care to provide for the journey of Zenas, the doctor of the law, and Apollos, so that they lack nothing. Ours also must learn to excel in good works, to provide for urgent necessities, so as not to be unfruitful" Titus 3:13-14.

On the other hand, elders and pastors in local assemblies must work to avoid corruption and dependence on the saints.

3. How to donate?

- With Joy!

"Let every man give as he has purposed in his heart, not with regret, nor under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is

powerful to fill you with all kinds of graces, so that always having everything you need, you abound in all kinds of good works, as it is written: He has poured out, he has given to the poor; his justice abides forever. Now he who provides seed for the sower, and bread for his food, will give you and multiply your seed and increase the fruits of your righteousness; so that you may be enriched in every way, to perform every kind of liberality, which makes us give thanks to God through us. For the administration of this offering not only provides for the needs of the saints, but also abounds in thanksgiving, which many will render to God" 2 Corinthians 9:7-12.

- **According to means**

"When we give from a good heart, God accepts that gift, taking into account what we have, not what we don't have" 2 Corinthians 8:12 (Sower 2000 version).

If you have 100 euros and you owe someone 100 euros, and instead of repaying your debt you give your money to a religious organization, God won't accept your offering. He won't consider it "acceptable". Give only what you really have. Don't let yourself be manipulated by greedy, malicious people, as is the case in many Pentecostal or Charismatic churches, who ask you to "give by faith, believing that God will multiply your gift by a hundred"! The Bible clearly states that the Lord considers such gifts unacceptable!

- **Secretly and humbly**

"Take heed that you do not give your alms before men, that you may be seen of them; otherwise you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you give alms, do not sound the trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly, I tell you,

they receive their reward. But when you give alms, let not your left hand know what your right hand is doing; that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you publicly" Matthew 6:1-4.

So how should we worship under the New Covenant? Well, by simply offering ourselves to Christ as living sacrifices, as the Word of God asks us to do in Romans 12:1:

"Don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, which is in you, and given you of God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a great price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which belong to God" 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

In Matthew 5:17, Jesus declares that he did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. It refers to the ceremonial law, which under the Old Covenant prefigured his atoning death through animal sacrifices (Luke 24:13-27; Luke 24:45-47).

This is why Jesus declared at the cross: "***All is accomplished***" (John 19:30).

So Jesus redeemed us by fulfilling the ceremonial laws so that we could practice the moral laws (Ephesians 2:10).

CONCLUSION

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not put yourselves under the yoke of slavery again"
Galatians 5:1.

Since the fall of Adam, all men have become slaves to sin, demons and other men. Christ came to free us from all these yokes. Through his atoning death on the cross, sin and the kingdom of darkness have been definitively defeated (Colossians 1:13). Freedom is, by definition, the happy condition of the person who is freed from servitude to finally experience a previously unattainable happiness.

"Brethren, you have been called to freedom, only do not use this freedom as an excuse to live according to the flesh; but through love make yourselves servants to one another" Galatians 5:13.

According to the apostle Paul, all Christians have received God's call to freedom. Just as the children of Israel were freed from Pharaoh's power to serve God on Mount Sinai, so too have Christians been delivered to serve the Lord.

Jesus is the instrument of our deliverance that God announced through the mouth of his servant Moses.

"I will raise up for them from among their brethren a prophet like you, and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And if any man will not hear my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him"
Deuteronomy 18:17-19.

In this passage, Moses was announcing the coming of an exodus prophet just like himself. Indeed, this prophet's mission was to

deliver God's people from slavery. This prophet could only be the Messiah:

"Moses said: The Lord your God will raise up for you from among your brethren a prophet like me; you shall listen to him in all that he says to you, and whoever does not listen to this prophet shall be cut off from among the people. All the prophets who have successively spoken, since Samuel, have also announced these days. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham: All the families of the earth will be blessed in your descendants" Acts 3:22-25.

"He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and, as was his custom, entered the synagogue on the Sabbath. He rose to read, and was given the book of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling it, he found the place where it was written: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor; he has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim a year of the Lord's favor" Luke 4:16-19.

*"As Jesus spoke these words, many believed in him. And he said to the Jews who had believed in him: If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples. **you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.** They replied: We are Abraham's descendants, and we were never slaves to anyone; how do you say: Will you become free? Truly, truly, I say to you," Jesus replied, "whoever commits sin is the slave of sin. Now, the slave doesn't always stay in the house; the son always does. If therefore the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" John 8:30-36.*

Christ, ignoring the Zealots' efforts to liberate the Jewish nation from Roman rule by force, began his ministry by announcing a

spiritual liberation. He had come to free men from the slavery of Satan, sin and the law.

- **Satan** : *"So then, since children partake of blood and flesh, he also in like manner partook of it, that by his death he might crush him who held the power of death, that is, the devil"* Hebrews 2:14.

"He stripped off principalities and powers, and made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" Colossians 2:15.

-**Sin**: *"...knowing that our old man was crucified with him, that **the body of sin might be destroyed, so that we should no longer be slaves to sin"*** Romans 6:6.

-**The law**: *"He in his flesh annulled the law with its commandments and their provisions, to create in his person, with both, one new man by making peace"* Ephesians 2:15.

"But when the time was fulfilled, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive adoption" Galatians 4:4-5.

"Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" 2 Corinthians 3:17.

Yet the freedom Christ gained for us at the cross is not fully experienced in many assemblies, because leaders hold the truth captive.

"Woe to you, doctors of the law! Because you took away the key of knowledge; you did not enter in yourselves, and you prevented those who wanted to from entering in" Luke 11:52.

In this passage, the word "key" is "*kleis*" in Greek and means

"power" or "authority". The word "science" comes from the Greek "gnosis" and means "knowledge about God and the Christian life".

The Lord Jesus Christ reproached the Doctors of the Law for having taken away the authority of the Holy Scriptures and thus preventing access to the truth for Jews who wanted to be saved.

Indeed, the teachers of the law had replaced the word of God with their traditions and customs (Matthew 15; Mark 7).

Today, many Christian leaders behave like the Pharisees of Christ's day. They keep knowledge to themselves and refuse to let Christians access the truth in order to be free. The Bible predicts that this situation will get worse and worse until the Lord returns. Apostasy will take root in many assemblies and many false prophets will take Christians hostage. Nevertheless, the truth will be known to the true children of God who are destined for salvation.

No one, neither apostles, nor prophets, nor pastors, nor evangelists, nor teachers, except the truth alone, can deliver men. This truth is accessible only in Jesus Christ, for he himself said: *"I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6).

Times are bad, which is why the Lord is calling this generation to repentance. Those who thirst for the truth are therefore invited to leave Babylon and all the human systems that keep people in captivity.

The Lord is preparing His people for His return, and more and more Elijah ministries will be raised up to announce the imminent rapture of the Bride. These people, coming out of the systems of men, will walk against the current and proclaim the true gospel that will lift

the Church out of its current lethargy.

The midnight cry is sounding in the nations to awaken us from sleep. "***In the middle of the night, someone shouted: Behold the bridegroom, go out to meet him!***" Matthew 25:6.

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