

community

The New Apostolic Church around the world

03/2021/EN

What God gives is always enough

Editorial

God cares for us

Divine service

Giving to God:
what counts is the heart

Doctrine

Man and woman in
the image of God (Part 1)

New Apostolic Church
International



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God cares for us

Dear brothers and sisters,

These are unusual times: sometimes we have divine service, sometimes we do not; sometimes we celebrate Holy Communion, sometimes we do not celebrate it. This raises questions, in fact, so many that I cannot even answer them all.

One of these questions is: is Holy Communion no longer as important as it used to be? My answer is clear: Holy Communion is still as important as it used to be! It is a sacrament of Christ's church and thus a divine gift of grace for us human beings.

Let me remind you of the people of Israel. At the time, God led His people into the desert. There was nothing there. If God had not provided manna for them they would have died. They were completely dependent on God in this matter. He gave them manna every day, which they had to eat that same day. Anyone who wanted to put anything aside for the next day discovered that it had spoiled overnight. Only on the sixth day did God provide a double portion. It was the same manna, but they could save it for the seventh day and eat it then.

God wanted to show the people: I will take care of you! When I give you, you ought to take. And what I give you



NAC International

is always enough. It is the same for us. We have trust, however, we must learn to trust God even more: in His love, His care, and His omnipotence.

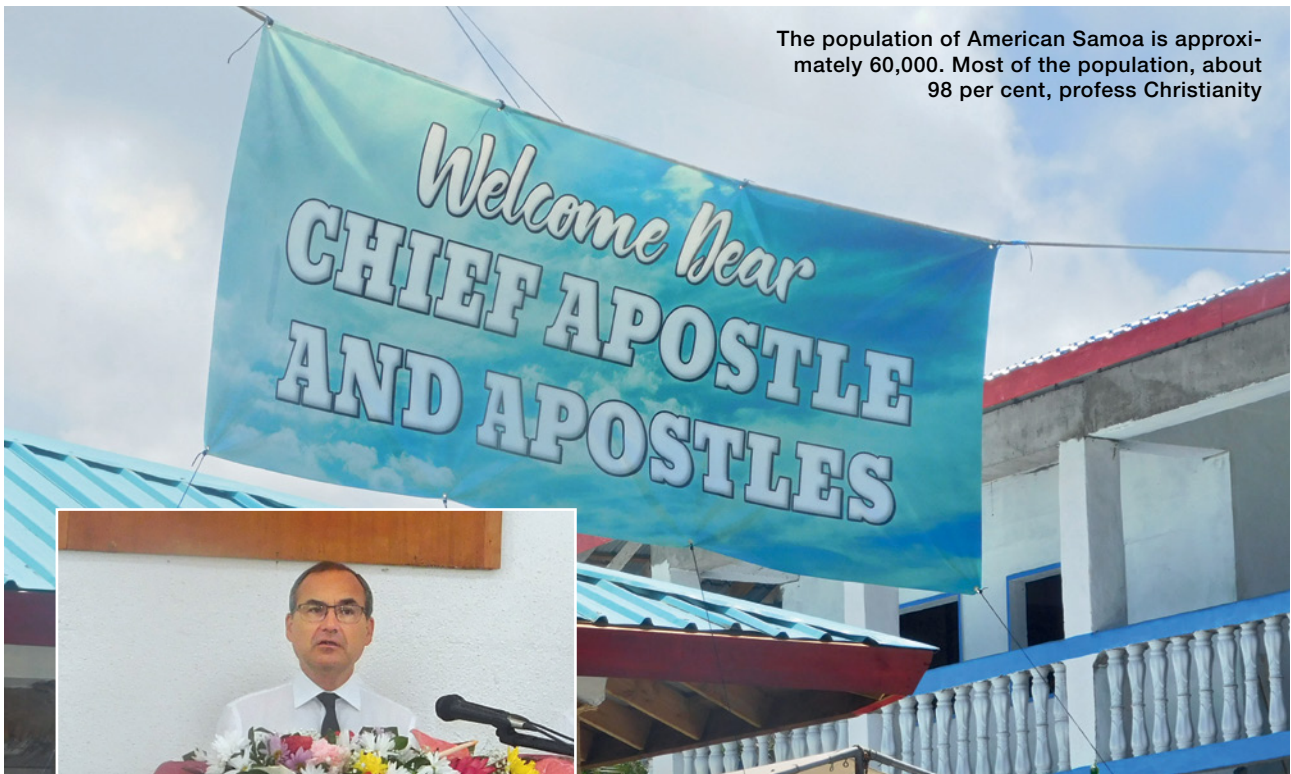
Yes, we need Holy Communion. And we should take it every time God gives it to us. If He allows it that we cannot receive it, however, then He will make sure that the last Communion we received will last until we can receive it again. This is what I believe!

Heartfelt greetings,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'J' and 'S'.

Jean-Luc Schneider

Giving to God: what counts is the heart



The population of American Samoa is approximately 60,000. Most of the population, about 98 per cent, profess Christianity

INAC Western Pacific

Genesis 4: 4

*“Abel also brought of the firstborn
of his flock and of their fat.
And the Lord respected Abel
and his offering.”*

Dear children, my dear brothers and sisters, I am very thankful to our heavenly Father that I can experience this service in your midst and to share in the blessing of our heavenly Father. Our heavenly Father wants to bless and strengthen us. Through the Holy Spirit He wants to prepare us for the return of Christ, and this preparation has two sides: on one side, we listen to the word of God and, on the other side, the Holy Spirit prepares us for the return of Christ. It is up to us to check from time to time if we are going forward in our preparation.

I have a story for the children. When I was a child, each time I came to visit my grandfather he took my hand and led me to a special place in his house, where he wanted me to stand against the wall. And then he came with a pen and made a mark over my head. And the next time I came, he

would do the exact same thing. He was very proud when he could see and could show me: “See, the last time the mark was here and now it’s here; you have grown, you have become a little bit taller!” Okay, sometimes I cheated a little bit and made myself taller; no, no, stand right! Our heavenly Father wants to do the same thing with us. He knows exactly how things are with us and where we stand in terms of our spiritual growth, but He wants *us* to be aware of our spiritual growth. So sometimes He allows it that a prayer is not answered or a wish is not fulfilled. Maybe someone has offended us. Our heavenly Father only wants to check if we still react the same way we did two years ago or whether we have changed in the meantime. Do we still react in the same manner or have we grown and learned something?

Dear brothers and sisters, think about this next time you experience something special. Maybe God just wants to show you that you have matured. Or the other way, maybe He wants us to become aware that there is no difference, that there has been no spiritual growth and we should do something about it. You know, if somebody offends me and

my reaction is the same as it was two years ago, I have to make some adjustments because something is not quite as it should be with me.

Today’s Bible text is taken from the story of Cain and Abel; you know the story. Cain and Abel were the two first sons of Adam and Eve. Cain was a farmer; Abel was a shepherd. And one day, both wanted to make a sacrifice to God. Cain offered some fruit and Abel offered a sheep. God considered the person first and then their offering. And when He saw their attitude of heart He realised, Oh, Cain’s attitude is not a good one. After all, their offerings were a result of their heart’s attitude. Cain brought some fruit from his field, but Abel brought the first born of his flock; the best he had. For Abel the best was just good enough for God. And that is why God accepted his offering and blessed it.

As Christians we have many reasons to offer and sacrifice to God

The subject of offering and sacrifice has a long tradition in the Old Testament and is quite complex. In the Old Testament, the believers brought sacrifices and offerings to God to worship Him. They brought offerings to God to show that He is the giver: “What we have was not given to us

There are two New Apostolic congregations on American Samoa with about 200 members, who are cared for by eleven ministers



by some idol, nor is it just the result of our own work. The Almighty One is the giver; He gives us what we need.”

They worshipped God knowing that He is the Almighty, that everything comes from Him. They brought their offerings to thank the Giver. They wanted to express their gratitude for what God had provided. The Jews thanked God for the earthly gifts but also especially for their deliverance, because the Almighty had delivered them from the hands of the Egyptians. They thanked God because He had elected this small and weak nation to become His people. And that was the great thing about it, the deeper purpose of their thank-offering: God has saved us, God has elected us.

But their sacrifices consisted of more than just adoration and thanksgiving. For certain sacrifices they killed an animal and offered it. Parts of the animal were burned—this was for God—and the rest of the animal was eaten together. That was their part. And that meant: we are in communion with God; we are eating together. Their understanding was: we share the food with God; He gets His part and we get our part and thus we have fellowship with Him and belong together.

That was a nice conception of sacrifice: we belong together, we share a meal, God gets His part and we get our part. Moses told them: “You are sinners; you are not able to obey God.” As a result, they had to bring sacrifices to God to be reconciled with Him. With these gifts they acknowledged: “We are sinners, we need forgiveness. Please forgive us, please be gracious to us.”

And a last point. When the people needed special help from God or wanted a special blessing from Him, they prayed and brought a special offering, hoping that God would answer their prayer and bless and help them.

This then was the meaning of sacrifice in the Old Testament. The people wanted to express devotion to God. They wanted to thank Him, they wanted to have fellowship with Him, they wanted to be reconciled with God despite their sins, and they wanted God to respond to their prayers.



We want to have a strong fellowship with Jesus!

The big change in the New Testament was that Jesus, the Son of God, gave His life as a sacrifice. Through His sacrifice He reconciled man with God, and all those who believe in Him and follow Him will be saved. There is no need for further sacrifices and offerings to be redeemed. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is perfect, and is eternally valid for everybody who believes in Jesus Christ. There is no need for further sacrifices and offerings in order to be redeemed.

However, there are so many other good reasons to offer and sacrifice to God. We offer to God to express our praise and thanksgiving. When we bring our offering, we acknowledge that we are fully dependent on the almighty God. Everything we have comes from God. He is the giver.

We believe in the Creator. We believe that everything comes from Him. We are fully dependent on the grace of God. Our sacrifices and offerings are therefore first of all a profession of our faith. We believe in God our Father. He gives us what we need on earth, and we are grateful for His gifts of grace. Our offerings and sacrifices are an expression of our gratitude toward God.



The divine service was attended by 168 brothers and sisters

So by bringing our offerings we thank Him for His earthly gifts. We know it is a grace; God does not have to give us what we need. There are many people who have much less than we do, and yet they deserve as much as we have. Therefore, let us bring our offerings to the giver.

We thank God for His salvation. We thank Jesus for His great sacrifice. We are grateful to God for electing us to become His children and thank Him by bringing spiritual sacrifices. We do not need to sacrifice a sheep any more.

When we were baptised and sealed, we offered Him our life. When we were sealed, or confirmed, we said, "Now I belong to you. I am yours." Remember, that is a promise we have made to God: "You have saved me; I give You my life." We can express our gratitude by bringing spiritual sacrifices.

A spiritual sacrifice, for example, is to do something good for our neighbour or to help people in need. When we share with others what we have been given, we are bringing a spiritual sacrifice. This pleases God. Let us thank God for His salvation by doing good, by helping others, and by sharing our spiritual treasures. In this way, we thank God for His earthly gifts, for all that He gives us in daily life. We thank Him for the salvation He offers us and we thank God for everything we experience within His church.

It is important, and it means a lot to us, that we can celebrate Holy Communion, that we are part of the congregation, that we are taught, that our children are instructed in the doctrine, that we can come together in a nice church, that we have brothers who have been commissioned to conduct services, that an Apostle comes to visit us from time to time. We are grateful for all of this because it is important to us. And that is why we also want to support this Church by bringing our offerings. After all, we want our Church to function. So this is one way we can express our gratitude: by bringing our offerings and our spiritual sacrifices to thank God for His earthly gifts, His salvation, and for the Church.

Remember, the Jews brought their sacrifices to have communion with God. Our greatest desire is to have perfect fellowship with Jesus Christ. And to have fellowship with Christ, to have communion with Him, we have to renounce everything that does not correspond with Christ: all those things that could pose an obstacle in our fellowship with God. Maybe we have a certain idea about something and are convinced that this is right. But over time we realise that Jesus has a different idea. So we don't agree on this specific point. However, since we want to be one with Jesus we give up our opinion, we surrender it. Maybe we have a wish, but God does not answer our petition. But since we want to be one with God, we give up our wish, because an unanswered wish can pose an obstacle to our fellowship with God. We tell God: "Okay, if it is not Your will, I will make do. What's important to me is that I am one with You." That is a spiritual sacrifice that consolidates and strengthens our fellowship with God. We give up all the things that could be an obstacle to our communion with God.

The Jews had to bring sacrifices to God to atone for their sins. Thanks to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we no longer need to bring a sacrifice or an offering in order to be forgiven. But Jesus wants us to give up certain things. This includes any accusations against our neighbour. He wants us to give up those endless reproaches against our neighbour. He wants us to give up the idea of revenge. He wants us to accept that the sinner will not necessarily be punished by God on this earth. He wants us to accept that the sinner, the guilty, can be forgiven.

It is not always easy to give up our notion of human justice. But Jesus tells us: "If you want Me to forgive you, you have to be willing to forgive your neighbour. Stop reproaching him, stop accusing him, don't seek revenge." This is the kind of spiritual sacrifice that is required of us in order to obtain forgiveness.

And then, brothers and sisters, it happens that we have a special petition. Maybe we have a wish for ourselves or for our neighbour or intercede for the souls in the beyond. I



District Apostle Peter Schulte

know from many brothers and sisters, who then think: "I will pray and will bring a special offering to God." What is behind this notion? One thing is clear, we cannot buy God's help; even if I bring him a billion US dollars I cannot force Him to grant my wish and impose my will upon God. God is not interested in my money. He does not need it. I cannot buy God's blessing. I cannot earn God's help.

So why do the brothers and sisters do this? Why do they bring a special offering when they have a petition? They want to show God how important this prayer is for them, how much the well-being of their neighbour means to them. Our offering complements our prayer. It is to show that this petition really means something to us, that it is important. On the other hand, it is also a sign of trust. Through our offering we want to thank God before He even answers our prayer. We want to show Him: "I trust You. I trust Your love. I trust your benevolence. You will give me



The congregation celebrates Holy Communion for the departed



exactly what I need. You will do what must be done at the right time, and for this I thank you in advance.” In this way we express our trust in God. “I trust You. You will help me, and whatever You do is the best solution for me.”

See, even as New Apostolic Christians we have many reasons to offer and sacrifice to God. We proclaim our faith in the almighty God and great Creator. We thank Him for His help in daily life by bringing our offerings. We thank Him for salvation with our spiritual sacrifices. We struggle to do good, to help those in need, and we want to share our spiritual treasure. We thank God for being part of the Church and we support the Church by bringing our offerings. We want our fellowship with Jesus to be strong, so we need to give up all ideas and things that could be an obstacle to our fellowship. And because we want to have our sins forgiven, we give up the idea of revenge and of punishment. And we give up accusations and reproaches towards our neighbour. And, if we wish, we can accompany our prayers with offerings. Not to buy help, not to force our will on God, but to show Him how important this wish is to us and to express our trust in Him: “Whatever you do we thank You; You will do the right thing.” God looks at the heart first and then at the offerings and sacrifices. If our attitude of heart is pure, He will bless our sacrifices and offerings. The important thing is our heart, not what we give. Jesus made very clear that some people did great

things for Him, but not with the right heart, so He said, “I do not know you.”

On the other hand, if we have the proper attitude of heart, we will not say to God, “Okay, You can have what’s left,” because then God takes first place in our lives. What we cannot do is tell God: “I don’t have any money to spare this month; I am sorry, but I cannot offer you anything. I am so busy, I do not have time to serve you any more.” Remember, Abel had the right attitude. The best was just good enough. Keep in mind, God is faithful. All the sacrifices and offerings we bring with a pure heart will be blessed by God. It is my wish that we may all experience this.

CORE THOUGHTS

By sacrificing and offering to God we worship Him, express our gratitude, seek fellowship with Him, strive for forgiveness, and show our trust in God.

The fivefold yes to Jesus

How Jesus works, what He wants, and where He is leading us is shown by the guide He Himself left us. And it unfolds in the fellowship He Himself established. Here is a divine service on the topic of decisions.



Marcel Felde

On 7 February 2021 the Chief Apostle held a divine service specifically for the members in the Netherlands which was transmitted by video from Saarbrücken in Germany.

According to the Bible text, the Holy Spirit is to enlighten the eyes of our understanding. “What does that mean?” Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider asked and said: “In the Bible, the heart is the seat of man’s decisions.” In a nutshell this means that we are to make our decisions in the light of the Holy Spirit. The Chief Apostle went on to explain this in concrete terms, using five terms from the Bible text.

From hope to preparation

“God wants to lead us into His kingdom, where we can live in fellowship with Him, where we will have been delivered from evil, where we can enjoy perfect fellow-

ship with our fellow humankind.” While this concerns the future, he said, it is more than a vague promise. “This promise is absolutely certain, as certain as the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is the guarantee that this future will come. And it is because we recognise this that we make our decisions. We look to the future and prepare ourselves for it.”

From glory to faithfulness

“The Holy Spirit guides us so that we recognise Jesus Christ. He shows us how great Jesus’ love is for us and explains how holy He is.” And from this, he said, comes our desire to be with Jesus Christ. “Because we have recognised the riches of His glory, we are determined to remain faithful to the end.”



Chief Apostle Schneider was delighted that he was able to be together with the brothers and sisters in the Netherlands virtually

- There are times when things do not look good and there is not the slightest sign of success. But this does not change the fact that Christ continues to be active in His work, and nothing can stop Him. That is why we make our decision: we will continue to serve in His work.
- In the church of Christ we find everything we need to attain salvation. Here too we make a decision: I want to receive the fullness of blessing; not ten per cent, not thirty per cent, I want one hundred per cent.
- The power of Christ, which urges us to unity and puts it into practice, is at work. This power is so great that it can overcome anything that divides. Here too we make a decision: I want to continue to commit myself to the unity in the congregation.

“These are decisions we have to make,” Chief Apostle Schneider said. “And Christ helps us to implement them.”

From power to trust

“This is the effect that God’s omnipotence had on Jesus Christ: He overcame death and was able to go to heaven to be with His Father. And it is with this power that God works on us! Aware of this we again make a decision: we have absolute and unconditional trust; we trust in the power of God.”

From faith to active love

“This power is effective only in those who believe. That is why we decide that we truly want to believe. True faith, which pleases Jesus Christ, is faith that works through love. I want to act out of love so that the omnipotence of God can act on me.”

Effectiveness at work

“The power of Jesus Christ is at work in His church. In the same way that the omnipotence of God was active in Jesus Christ, the power of Christ is active in the congregation.” And this means three things, the Chief Apostle went on to explain.

CORE THOUGHTS

Ephesians 1: 18–20:

“...the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places.”

The Holy Spirit reveals the glory of Christ, His will, and His saving activity to us. Enlightened by the Holy Spirit, we are determined to follow Christ and to serve Him in faith and love until the end.



Chief Apostle Schneider conducted a divine service in the empty church in Strasbourg in France



The great physician at work

Jesus Christ still heals today. Faith is the foundation. But that alone will not do it: this is the diagnosis from a divine service by the Chief Apostle.

Although the sermon took place in an empty church, the divine service on 17 January 2021 counted around 23,000 participants. Because of the pandemic, the divine service for North America was streamed from Strasbourg in France.

Jesus Himself healed the boy who could not hear or see anything during his epileptic seizures and who people thought was possessed by a demon. This is how Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider explained it and asked: What does this miracle mean?

Going to church is not enough

To be able to understand this one must consider the cultural context. For the Jews of that time it was clear: anyone who fell ill had sinned. As a result, sick people were considered unclean and were forced to the margins of society.

Jesus wanted to show that He had been sent by God to bring salvation, the Chief Apostle explained. “Sins are forgiven,

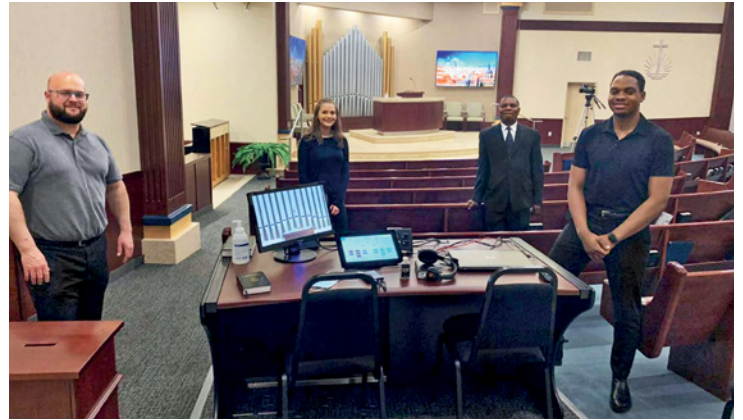
you can have fellowship with God, you can have fellowship with the people of God. That is the meaning of the miracle.”

However, every time Jesus also clearly stated the condition required for this: “Your faith has made you well.” And: “All things are possible to him who believes.” However, this faith needs to be genuine. It is not enough to call oneself a Christian, go to church regularly, and pray. True faith is about doing the will of God every day.

Experiencing the healing power of Jesus today

The healing power of Jesus Christ can also be experienced today, the Chief Apostle emphasised.

- He wants to deliver us, He wants to heal the soul. That is an ongoing process.
- Even in difficult times we can experience His love, His kindness, His nearness. Jesus comforts us.
- He also wants to cast out unclean spirits through His teaching. They can be recognised by the fact that they



Some 8,000 kilometres from Strasbourg, brothers and sisters in the United States and Canada joined the service online either at home or in the church



want to draw us away from Jesus Christ. When it is inspired by the Holy Spirit, the fruit is peace, love, kindness, self-control.

- A danger for many today, especially in difficult times, is that they become deaf and dumb: they are no longer interested in the fate of others. “You are a witness of Jesus Christ. Don’t forget that.”

The Master is still at work

There is something peculiar about the account of the healing of the young epileptic boy. Although the disciples had received power from Jesus Christ to cast out unclean spirits, they were unable to help the boy. Jesus explained to them the importance of prayer and fasting. The Chief Apostle also transferred this into the present. He said that the decline in membership in certain parts of the world certainly does raise questions regarding the authority of the Apostles. This calls for trust: “The Master is still here, and the Master is Jesus Christ. He takes care of His flock. He will fulfil His work of salvation.”

Merely receiving the acts of salvation through the Apostles does not automatically lead to salvation: “We need to pray, to struggle for our salvation: ‘Please God, grant me Your grace.’”

From a spiritual point of view, fasting is about focusing on the essentials, the Chief Apostle said: “For sure, there are a lot of things to do and deal with in our Church.” However: “What is essential is that we remain steadfast in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer.”

CORE THOUGHTS

Matthew 17: 15–16:

“Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him.”

The miracles of Jesus testify to His healing power. Jesus Christ saves those who truly trust Him. He comes to our aid and takes care of our spiritual health. We focus on what is essential for our salvation.

Divine salvation: no pain, no gain

“We are responsible for our own salvation,” the Chief Apostle said in his sermon in Niamey in Niger on 7 February 2020. God puts the necessary means at our disposal so that we can obtain salvation. Our mission is to accept these means.



NAC Western Germany

“Jesus was free when He was on earth because He always did exactly what He wanted to do,” Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider explained. “He had decided to do His Father’s will no matter what. And neither man nor the devil could prevent Him from doing God’s will. Jesus Christ deserves to enter heaven because He fulfilled the will of His Father perfectly.”

Divine salvation

The Chief Apostle explained that human beings can only obtain the salvation offered by God if they fulfil the conditions required by God. To obtain salvation in Christ, we must believe in Jesus Christ: “Whoever believes in Jesus Christ is convinced that Jesus is always right and that His teaching applies to all at all times.” We must be reborn out of water and the Spirit and regularly participate in Holy Communion: “If you want to enter into the kingdom of God, you must have been reborn with water

and the Spirit. If you want to go to heaven you must receive Holy Communion.”

We must grasp salvation when God offers it to us. “I cannot say: ‘God, I don’t feel like it today. I don’t have time. Maybe when I am older, when I am seventy, I will look after my soul.’ Today is the day God offers us salvation. We must utilise it today.” We must also completely surrender to God’s will. We cannot negotiate our salvation. “The Lord has decided: ‘To have salvation we must believe and have obedience of faith. We must apply the gospel, the whole gospel.’ I cannot come and say to God: ‘Now look, I keep almost all the commandments, but there are a few I just can’t keep. However, I will give you a special offering so you can deliver me.’”

Another thing that is important is that we love God sincerely: “Jesus wants us to do everything we do out of love for Him. And how does He measure our love? He tells



In February 2020—prior to travel restrictions imposed because of COVID-19—the Chief Apostle travelled to Africa to visit the brothers and sisters in Niger

us: ‘If you love God you must also love your neighbour. Your love for God cannot be greater than the love for your neighbour.’”

Accepting salvation

“So what must we do then in order to obtain the salvation offered by God?” the Chief Apostle asked further and explained a few of the requirements.

We must make a decision. We really need to make a decision. It is not enough to be baptised with water and the Spirit: we must really make a commitment. We must keep our promises by persevering right to the end. Jesus said: “He who endures to the end shall be saved.” It is not enough to follow Jesus, to obey Him, and to serve Him for a few years. We must be faithful until He returns.

We must give up certain things. Whoever chooses salvation in Jesus Christ must know: by choosing Jesus Christ, you must give up certain things. We have chosen Jesus: that is our priority. And sometimes we need to give something up for Him. And we need to shoulder responsibility: I am responsible for my own salvation. God gives it to me, He gives me everything I need to obtain it. But from the moment I am a child of God, He says to me: “Now you are responsible for your own salvation.”

In addition to all this we need to confront the adversary who wants to rob us of all the good things. “The moment we say yes to Jesus we will be attacked by the spirit from below. We must accept it and defend ourselves,” the Chief Apostle said.

In conclusion, the Chief Apostle said: “Salvation is a grace which God offers to all of mankind. In order to be delivered we must persevere in faith, obedience, and love.”

CORE THOUGHTS

Isaiah 55: 1

“Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”

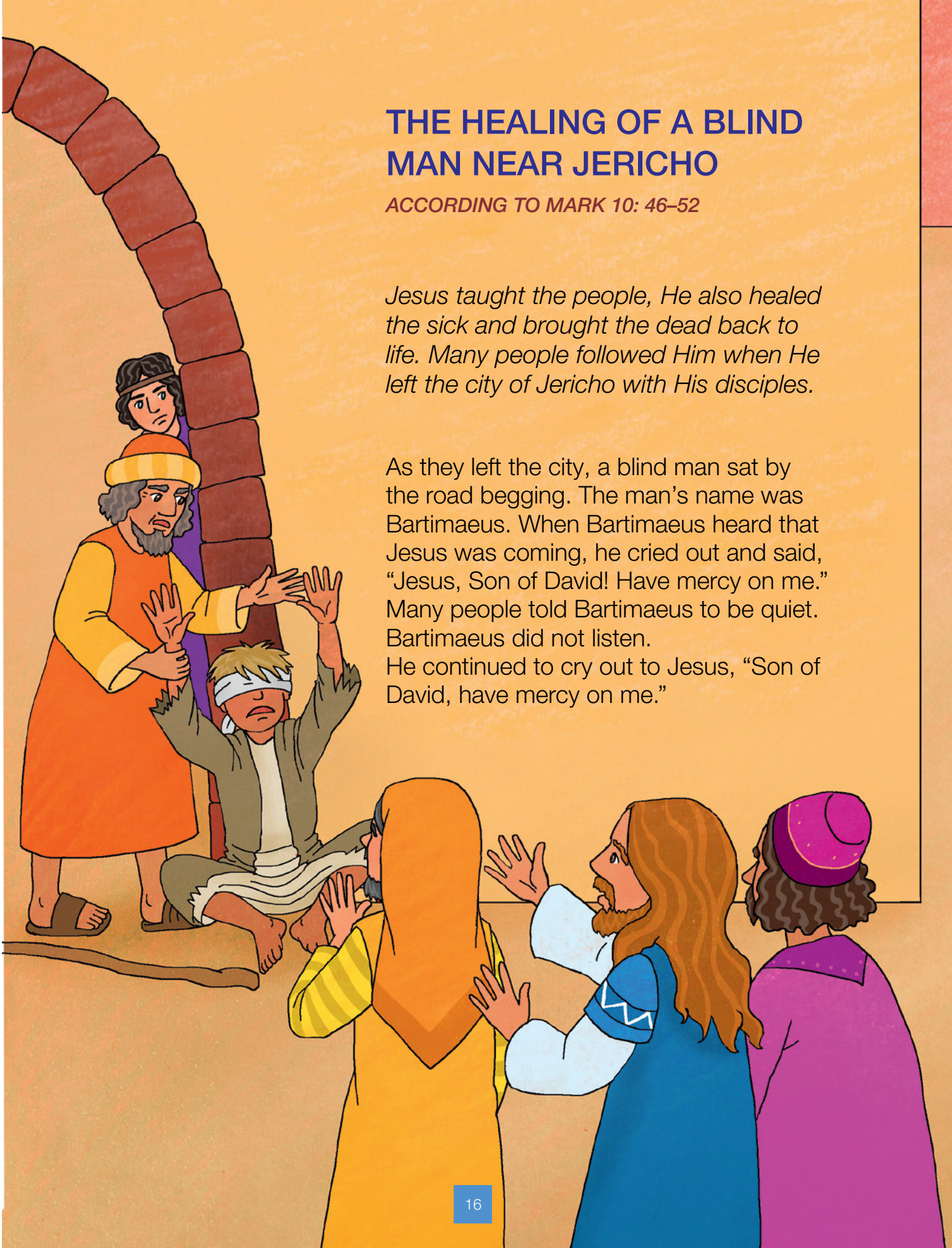
Salvation is a grace that God offers to all of mankind. To be delivered we must persevere in faith, obedience, and love.

THE HEALING OF A BLIND MAN NEAR JERICHO

ACCORDING TO MARK 10: 46-52

Jesus taught the people, He also healed the sick and brought the dead back to life. Many people followed Him when He left the city of Jericho with His disciples.

As they left the city, a blind man sat by the road begging. The man's name was Bartimaeus. When Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was coming, he cried out and said, "Jesus, Son of David! Have mercy on me." Many people told Bartimaeus to be quiet. Bartimaeus did not listen. He continued to cry out to Jesus, "Son of David, have mercy on me."



Jesus stopped and commanded that the blind man come to Him. The crowd called out to the blind man and said, "Be happy and rise. He is calling you."

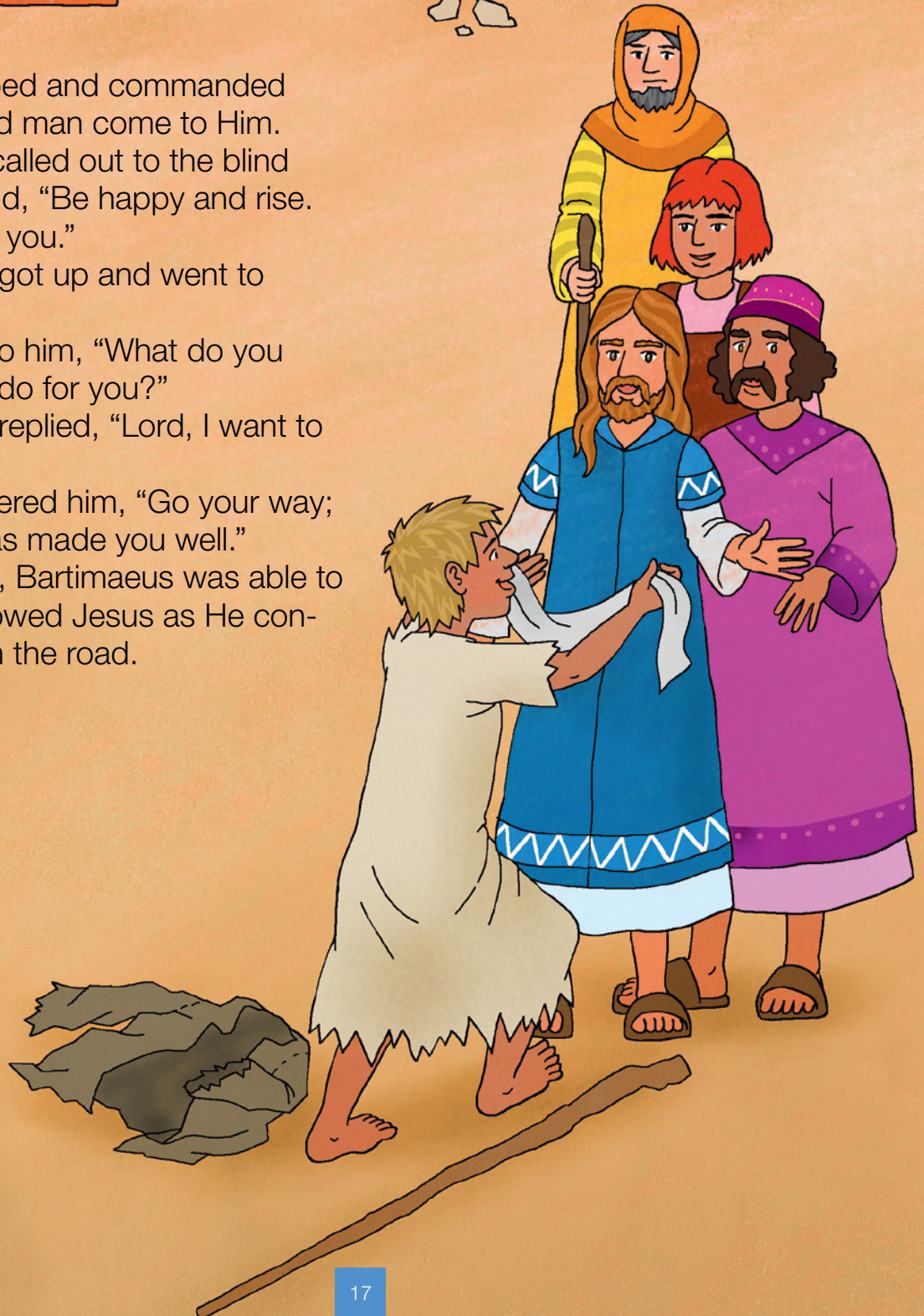
Bartimaeus got up and went to Jesus.

Jesus said to him, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

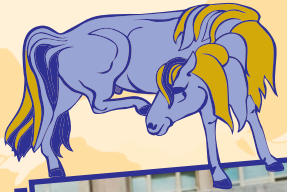
Bartimaeus replied, "Lord, I want to see."

Jesus answered him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well."

Immediately, Bartimaeus was able to see. He followed Jesus as He continued down the road.



AT SARANGOO'S IN ERDENET (MONGOLIA)



Hello, my name is **Sarangoo**. The picture of me on the right was taken when I was very young.

I started school a few years later. The photo on the left with my family and me was taken in front of my **school** on my first day of school.

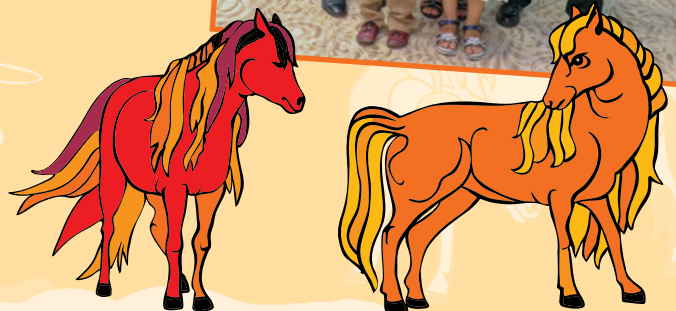
Now I am eight years old and am in grade three. There are 38 children in our class. The photo on the right shows me and my friends performing at a **school festival**.

And this photo of me was taken on **Christmas**.

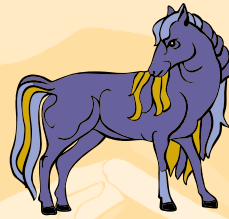
Meet my **parents**. Children in Mongolia are taught early on in the tradition of using polite forms of address. This also applies to the way we speak to our parents. I have four siblings: a younger and an older brother, and a younger and an older sister.

This photo was taken when the **Chief Apostle** was in Ulaanbaatar, the capital of our country, where he conducted a service.

I am the one with the white headband. Standing directly in front of me is my younger brother.



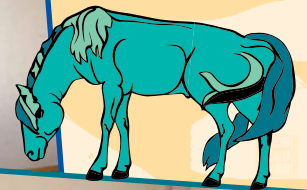
I think that my little **sister** is really cute. During the summer holidays I look after my younger brother and sister.



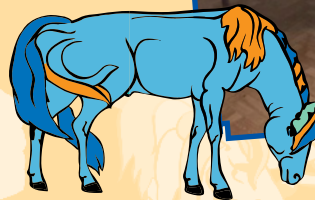
We live in Mongolia. The country is bordered by two neighbouring countries: Russia in the north and China in the south. China and Russia are connected by a highway and the Trans-Mongolian railway, which pass through our country. We live in **Erdenet**. It is the second largest city in Mongolia after the capital Ulaanbaatar. Our city is very clean.



In Erdenet there is a big copper mine and a carpet factory. The New Apostolic **congregation** to which we belong is also here. We all believe in Jesus and love Him.



Sometimes the **children's choir** sings in our congregation.



What else can I tell you? Oh yes, my favourite dish is **beef and vegetable casserole**.

There is something else I like: books. I love to read. It helps me to learn a lot of new things. Have you ever heard of **Genghis Khan**? In the Middle Ages, he succeeded in uniting the Mongol peoples who had previously been at war with each other. He and his successors conquered a vast territory that stretched from China to Europe. The Mongol troops even made it as far as Austria. It is said that the Mongol Empire was the largest in the world at that time.



Man and woman in the image of God (Part 1)

God never intended one sex to be subordinate to the other because He created both man and woman equally in His image. The Catechism only broaches the subject, but an essay discussed at a conference of the District Apostles made it clear what this likeness is all about.

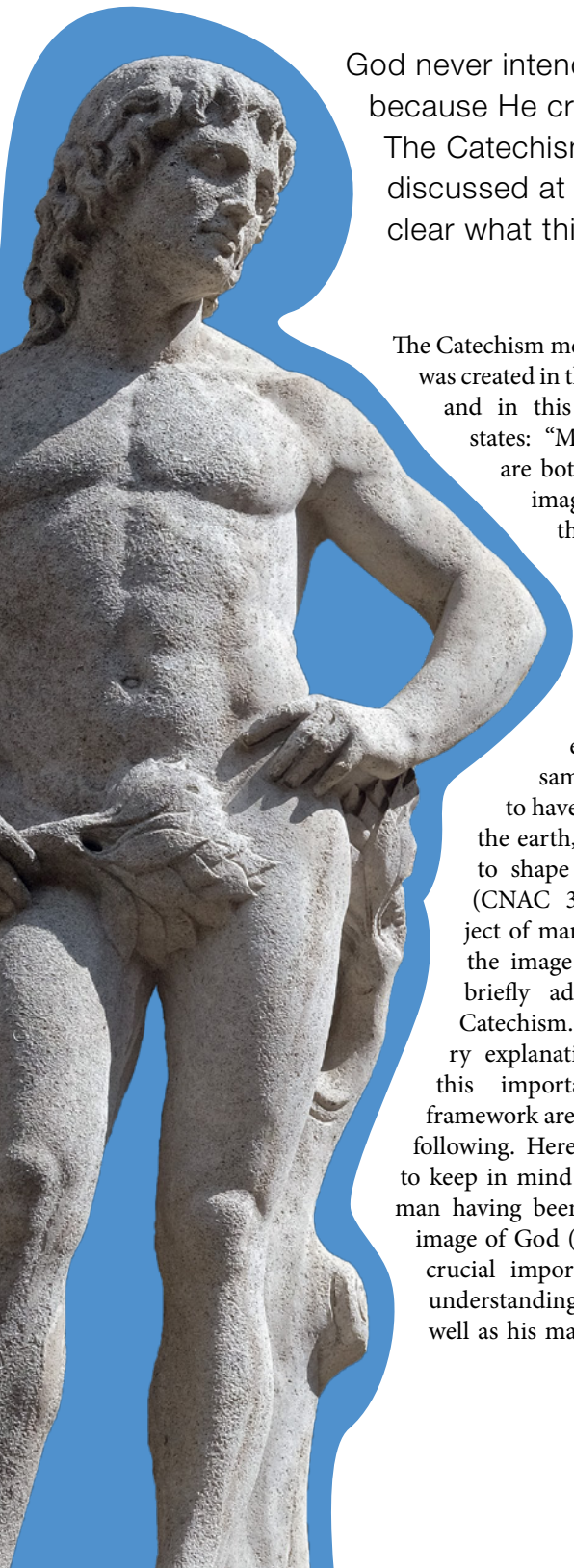
The Catechism mentions that man was created in the image of God, and in this context clearly states: “Man and woman are both created in the image of God and therefore of the same nature. They were not only created with one another but also for one another, and have the same commission to have ‘dominion’ over the earth, in other words, to shape and protect it” (CNAC 3.3.2). The subject of man and woman in the image of God is only briefly addressed in the Catechism. Supplementary explanations concerning this important theological framework are presented in the following. Here it is important to keep in mind that the idea of man having been created in the image of God (*imago Dei*) is of crucial importance for man’s understanding of himself as well as his mandate and func-

tion within the creation. Beyond that, the notion that man has been created in God’s image can be regarded as an important biblical foundation for human dignity—that is, the equivalence and equality of all human beings, irrespective of their gender. The first step in this endeavour will be to take a closer look at those biblical texts that have to do with man in the image of God in general, as well as those concerning the relationship between man and woman, as based upon this understanding. The statements made in the Catechism will then be further explained on the basis of the biblical findings.

The two accounts of the creation found in Genesis 1: 1–2: 3 and Genesis 2: 4: 3 constitute the most important theological foundations for any discussion of man as part of the creation. While the first account of the creation appears rather abstract, the second account has a pronounced narrative character.

The first account of creation

The statement that man is created in the image of God has its foundations in Genesis 1: 26–27. We also read of man in the image of God in Genesis 5: 1–2 and Genesis 9: 6b. The Old Testament scholar Andreas Schüle remarks that the image of God is “perhaps the most influential term in the Old Testament in terms of its impact on history”.¹ The first account of creation portrays God as the one who orders or constitutes all of reality in six days—that is, in six time periods—through His word alone. What is shown here is that everything that exists owes its existence to the word of God. In the concluding phase of the creation event—on the sixth day—the animals living on the ground are the



first to be created (Genesis 1: 24–25). And once the various animals have come into being, God turns His attention to the creation of mankind:

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth’” (Genesis 1: 26–28).

The creation of man is distinct from that of all other things. This is already evident from the fact that God does not utter the rather neutral statement: “Let there be...”, as was the case with the other works of creation, but rather seems to be talking to Himself, as it were: “Let Us make man...” In dogmatic tradition, this sentence is interpreted as a reference to the Trinitarian nature of God: all three divine persons are all equally responsible for the creation. This appeal to Himself to make man is expanded—and even intensified, so to speak—by the fact that God relates Himself directly to man—after all, man is to be created “in Our image”. God thereby places Himself into an enduring relationship with man. By the same token, man is thereby incorporated into just as enduring a relationship with God.

An important implication arising from man’s creation in the image of God is the mandate he is assigned, namely to have dominion over the created world: that is, over the animals and the earth. “One can safely assume that this is to be a kind of dominion that corresponds to the ordering and preserving actions of God, and is thus not intended to legitimate any sort of human tyranny over the world.”¹ Man is to represent God in His creation and, having been created in the image of God, is to allow His nature to be revealed in the world and to all created things. He is “God’s representative on earth” and a “steward of the creation.”¹

Psalms 8: 5–6 attempts to capture the special character of man with the following words: “For You have made him a little lower than the angels*, and You have crowned him with glory and honour. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet.” [Note: this translation is based on the ancient Greek text of the Old Testament. The Luther 2017 version of the Bible, which is cited in the German version of

this elaboration, refers to the Hebrew text: “You have made him to lack little of God.”].

Following this, God fulfils what He has set out to do: He creates man “in His image”—and He makes man “as a plural entity consisting of man and woman”² (Stinglhammer). At first, the word “man” is used as a generic term, and is only given a concrete meaning later on through the biological specification “man and woman”. From the start, human beings created in the image of God thus incorporate both genders in terms of substance. “Man and woman together reflect the glory of God, and together propagate God’s creation... The only one superior to him [the human being] is God. Thus he stands between God and the world.”³ Man or woman—that is, man in general—are both equally created in the image of God. Both stand in an identical—namely a direct and unconditional—relationship of dependency to God. As a result, man and woman—who together comprise man—have received the same task in the creation, namely to “have dominion” over it and to represent God in the creation. Beyond that, this plural entity also indicates that human beings cannot truly exercise their humanity—that is, the fact that they are created in the image of God—in a state of egocentricity or chosen isolation. The plural entity only “becomes concrete once both make the transition to the reciprocal use of the address ‘you’.”² Man and woman, woman and man, therefore belong together because mankind has been created for fellowship from the outset.

Man and woman are blessed by God, addressed by Him, and assigned a mandate: “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.” Man is given the commandment to reproduce in order to thereby fulfil God’s mandate to represent Him in the creation in the course of history. Schüle points out that the terminology in Genesis 1: 28 (“subdue it”), which sounds rather aggressive, is to be read in the context of Genesis 6: 9–12: the mandate of dominion given to man is aimed at “preventing and suppressing the spread of violence.”¹ The terminology of Genesis 1: 27–28 is taken up again in Genesis 5: 1–2, and regarded as a prerequisite for historical development, as it were: “This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created.”

To start with, the passage looks back on the creation of human beings, once again emphasising that they were created in the image of God, and as such, in the form of man and woman. Both man and woman receive this desig-

nation of “Mankind” from God, along with the mandate to multiply. In the following, it is made clear in the form of a genealogical list that man has indeed fulfilled this mandate, having multiplied and shaped the world entrusted to him (Genesis 5: 3–32).

In summary, it can be said that not only the duality of human sexuality, but also the equality of man and woman, are based on God’s creative will. Both genders together comprise the image of God, and both are imbued with equal dignity. According to Genesis 1, any subordination of the woman to the man must be described as contrary to the will of God and the creation: it is not part of the good creation of God.

The second account of creation

While the first account of creation focuses on the world as a whole and divides its development into six distinct stages, the second account of the creation takes the form of a story with characters who act and react to one another. Schüle stresses that although the description of the first account of creation is a closed narrative it seems made “to be continued”. The second account of creation now constitutes this “continuation”, even though it was composed at an earlier point in time and stems from a different line of tradition. The two accounts of creation do not exist in isolation from one another, but are combined to form a new entity. The “Eden narrative regards itself as a commentary on, and even a correction of, the narrative concerning the creation of living creatures in general, and mankind in particular.”¹

These passages relating to the creation of human beings will be more closely examined in the following:

⁷*And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.*

¹⁸*And the Lord God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.”*

¹⁹*Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name.*

²⁰*So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.*

²¹*And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place.*

²²*Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.*

²³*And Adam said: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”*

²⁴*Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*

²⁵*And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.*

Verse 7 relates that man is formed by God from the dust of the earth. Like a potter, God creates a figure out of the dust. The designation Adam “does not yet have a gender connotation at this point, but rather simply denotes the protoplast”.⁴ The word Adam refers to *adamah*, the earth, the ground, from which man was created. It is of note that the idea of being created in the image of God—which is of such fundamental importance for the creation of man in Genesis 1: 27–28—is missing here. However, there is an unmistakable equivalent to this, namely the fact that God breathes into man in order to give him the breath of life. The figure that God has formed of the dust of the earth receives its breath of life directly from Him. God turns to man in a binding—indeed intimate—manner, an action He does not take with any other creature. The breath of life that the moulded clay receives not only results in its physical vitality, as it is inherent in the animals, but also creates the necessary conditions for its personhood. The breath of life is, at the same time, the breath of God, and thus the reason for the uniqueness of man within the creation. So it is that “the Eden narrative likewise associates the creation of man with the notion of being created in the image of God”.¹ The special status of man, his function as the image of God within the creation, is thus also brought to expression in the second account of creation. Man becomes a living being, someone who can and should shape his environment: “Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it” (Genesis 2: 15). Tending and keeping are both constructive actions which are assigned to man. Here we find a clear parallel to the “dominion” assigned to man in Genesis 1: 26 et seq.

Verse 18 brings a fundamental principle to expression, namely that human life is always to unfold in the context of fellowship or community: “It is not good that man should be alone.” The “helper” that is to be created for the man is to correspond to him. In literal translation, verse 18b speaks of “a helper as a counterpart to him”. Schüle points out that this counterpart qualifies the help, so to speak: “Man is to have a...counterpart who is not only with him and near

him, but who also meets him at eye-level, and in whose presence Adam recognises himself.¹

Following this, verse 19 goes on to talk about the creation of the animals, which are formed from the ground, just like the man. The special character of man within the creation is revealed in that God brings the animals to him so that he may give them names. The man provides the animals with names, and thereby creates an ordered system in the created world. Nevertheless, the animals cannot provide the man with the kind of fellowship and help that truly corresponds to him (verse 20).

Verses 22 and 23 discuss the entity that corresponds to the man, the entity that is his counterpart. This counterpart is not created from the dust of the earth, but rather from the flesh of the man. The rib from which the woman is created symbolises that the body of the man and that of his counterpart are of the same kind and of the same substance. The physical unity between the man and his counterpart is emphasised in the verses following: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” Adam, the man—who had until that point existed without any gender specification, and in whom the potential for sexuality had been inherent, so to speak—is now able to describe and recognise himself as “Man” and the other as “Woman” in the counterpart who is like him. There is a physical unity between them. They are made of the same material. The idea of any kind of hierarchy of man and woman based on the creative actions of God has no place in this context. On the contrary, in verse 23, the man gives expression to his joy over the fact that he now has a counterpart who is like him.

While verse 23 explains the unity of man and woman by virtue of their shared physicality, verse 24 (“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh”) maintains that the unity of man and woman comes into being as a result of desire, that is, owing to their mutual attraction and interdependence. This is a reference to the special emotional relationship that can exist between the genders, which is closer than any relationship of kinship.

In summary, it can be stated that the second account of creation does not imply any sort of subordination of the woman to the man. According to Genesis 2, the man initially exists alone and has not yet been sexually differentiated. He is lacking a counterpart similar to himself. For this reason, God creates a counterpart of equal rights and dignity in order to overcome human loneliness. Man and woman are created for one another in order to help one another, and to act in such a way that the other can lead a good and divinely pleasing life.

¹ Schüle, Andreas: *Die Urgeschichte [Prehistory] (Genesis 1–11)*. Zürich 2009

² Stinglhammer, Hermann: *Einführung in die Schöpfungstheologie. [An introduction to creation theology]*. Darmstadt 2011

³ Haag, Herbert: “Schöpfungsbericht”. In *Bibel-Lexikon [Article. The account of the creation. In Bible lexicon]*. Second edition Einsiedeln, Freiburg, Cologne 1968

⁴ Protoplast is understood here to denote the original human, which had not yet been differentiated in terms of gender.



Church construction is a community effort

There are many New Apostolic congregations who still dream of their own church building. With a support programme and some personal initiative, such a dream can indeed come true for many.

For Christians the church building is a place of worship, teaching, and fellowship. The sacred place provides a space for prayers, sermons, sacramental acts, and music. But this space also has to be created and maintained. With approximately 58,500 New Apostolic congregations around the world, this represents a huge undertaking.

While some are concerned about reducing maintenance and operating costs, others dream of finally having their own place of worship for the first time. For decades, church construction has also been a topic that has featured significantly with the District Apostle Meeting. District Apostle Rainer Storck of Western Germany, who tracks the programme's progress on behalf of the European District Apostle Meeting, says: "We are happy when one project after the other can gradually be completed and our local brothers and sisters can move into their new or freshly renovated building and come to love it. That makes all the effort worthwhile." The aim of all these endeavours is to provide churchgoers with a space that is tailored to their

needs, while at the same time reducing future maintenance and operating costs.

Churches big and small

From an international perspective, the differences between the many church buildings and church construction activities could not possibly be any greater: some congregations are located in the heart of large metropolitan areas, where members only have a few hundred metres to walk to church, while others are located in distant rural districts that can only be reached after exhausting day-long hikes or boat trips. Some of our members assemble in enormous church buildings with seating for as many as 4,000 people, while other congregations consist of only a handful of believers who gather to worship under a simple corrugated iron roof in structures without walls, windows, or doors.

And there are also major differences when it comes to construction activities. In some countries, church construction



■ NAC Bolivia



The congregation in Pacharia in South America is situated at an altitude of over 4,000 metres

is the province of specialised companies, where the local building authorities set the standards. In other regions, however, churches can be built by the local members themselves. In some cases this can be difficult, for example, when construction materials need to be dragged through the mountain reaches of Nepal—a process that requires months and involves many long hours on rough and steep paths. Sometimes, on the other hand, things move very quickly, owing to the participation of many members, for example, when a church building in a Congolese mountain village is completed in only four weeks.

Financial support: from a little to a lot

These efforts remain a challenge everywhere. For some it is a fight just to keep their church building from being swept away by floods. And to do so they resorted to dismantling the building brick by brick, carried it away to another location, and built it back up again. Others lack sufficient building materials to support their personal initiative: in some cases, they must first produce and fire the bricks they require.

And then there are always more general questions and difficulties for which solutions must be found. In an interview two years ago, Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider explained, “We have adapted our church construction policies accordingly: in Africa, for example, we are no longer building large churches, whose maintenance costs future generations could barely afford to maintain. In other regions, we are adapting the number of churches and actual locations of congregations to suit our current needs. After all, construction and maintenance are becoming more and more expensive everywhere.”

Ultimately, there is also another factor to consider, namely the financial resources. The European and North American District Churches are the so-called donor churches, as they support most of the other District Churches around the world. In response to the question of how this will develop in the future, the international Church leader remains optimistic: “I hope things will go well. However, in contrast to past endeavours, we want to make the subsidies granted to the local, financially non-self-sustaining District Churches more project-related. The financially stronger donor District Churches are to make their global contribution by financing clearly defined projects.”

A combined effort: whether next door or across continents

As is evident from the published annual reports of many District Apostle Areas, church construction is subsidised in the areas they serve abroad. After all, not every District Church has the resources to independently finance church construction, teaching materials, and other expenditures. It is on such occasions that the responsible District Apostle area steps in.

The Support Programme for Church Construction in Europe has completed or initiated a large number of renovations, refurbishments, and new buildings over the past twelve years in two subsidised programmes. There are countless other church construction projects underway around the world. No matter what the local church looks like, it is and remains a home for Christians. One young sister summed it up nicely in a comment on a nac.today report about the personal commitment of our members in church building: “It just goes to show that any challenge can be overcome when people work together!”



The church building in Kananga (DR Congo) was dismantled and moved: the members carried it brick by brick to the new location

A massive explosion in a chemical plant in Beirut claimed the lives of 130 people and injured another five thousand in August 2020



UN Photo/Pasqual Gorriz and NAC Western Germany

Life in a crisis

The generosity of New Apostolic members from the District Church of Western Germany made it possible to provide much needed relief to people in the Lebanese capital of Beirut following the horrific explosion last year.

“I wish you could have seen the faces of the people who were able to benefit from your valuable donations,” writes Bishop Aramik Fesdjian. He is the lead minister in Lebanon, and is responsible for the distribution of the relief supplies. Five months ago, on 4 August 2020, images of the massive explosion in a chemical plant in the port of Beirut began making their rounds through the media for weeks. The explosion claimed the lives of 130 people, and over 5,000 more were injured. The number of homeless climbed to over 300,000 people from one second to the next. The prevailing mood was one defined by fear and great need.

A country in crisis

Last year’s catastrophe shook Lebanon badly. The country was already struggling with difficult economic conditions, and the effects of the pandemic only made things worse. Beyond that the nation has many political and social uncertainties to contend with. Approximately one third of the country’s inhabitants are refugees. These migrants have come primarily from Syria and Palestine, and there are also numerous elderly people living among them. They had barely managed to flee to Jordan, but life there also posed immense challenges.

And then this explosion on top of everything else! The only bit of good news is that the misfortune unleashed an enormous willingness to help in New Apostolic circles. “I thank you all sincerely for your many prayers, as well as the great moral and financial support,” writes Bishop Aram Fesdjian, who is responsible for Lebanon.

Generous donations

The New Apostolic Church of Western Germany, which coordinates the pastoral and administrative work in Lebanon, received over 80,000 euros in donations in the weeks following the explosion. These funds made it possible to repair eleven damaged living spaces on the ground, along with the local New Apostolic church building, where over 100 members congregate for services. A total of 35 families who lost all of their belongings in the explosion also received financial support to purchase groceries.

Two containers filled with donations of food and clothing, in particular winter clothing and blankets, were sent from Germany to Beirut. Most of these donations came from New Apostolic members in the Wiesbaden church district.

A container filled with non-perishable food items was held up in the port by militias, and only released on Christmas Eve after much negotiation. The second container, which was filled with used winter clothing collected from the

congregations of the Wiesbaden district, has meanwhile arrived in Beirut and was released a few days later.

In total, the New Apostolic Church of Western Germany was able to support the needy in Lebanon with donations in the amount of 86,000 euros.

Help through NAK-karitativ

Following the explosion, an appeal for donations also went out through NAK- karitativ under the tag “Refugee aid for Jordan”. Together with local partner organisations, these funds made it possible to perform emergency repairs, for example, to replace doors and windows and repair sanitary services and power lines. All relief efforts were primarily focused on families with elderly or disabled family members.

Donations to the tune of 86,000 euros as well as food items and clothing were sent to Beirut





NAK-karitativ

Long distances are covered on roads and waterways to reach remote regions



Defeating hunger with fish and sesame

NAK-karitativ is applying a whole bundle of aid measures to help defeat the hunger crisis affecting the people of Burkina Faso. It began by cultivating sesame seeds and establishing farmers' co-operatives, as well as savings and credit groups.

Burkina Faso—which in translation means “land of the upright man”—is a West African nation in the sub-Saharan region that borders on Mali, Niger, Benin, Togo, Ghana, and the Ivory Coast. It was in 1960 that the former French colony then known as Upper Volta achieved its independence. In 1984 it was renamed Burkina Faso. Some twenty million people live in this country. It is one of the poorest countries of the world. Often, the people live on less than one US dollar a day. On one hand, they suffer from recurring periods of famine and on the other hand, they are plagued by frequent floods caused by heavy rains in the rainy season. In addition, the people are burdened by increasing threats posed by the struggle for pastureland.

Taking up the fight against hunger

NAK-karitativ has undertaken several measures to help the people in the rural areas earn an income. It began in 2013, when measures were introduced to counter a large famine

in the south-east of the country by introducing the cultivation of sesame. Farmers were thus able to grow food for themselves in a sustainable fashion. The relief agency then went on to establish farmers' co-operatives, as well as savings and credit associations. Together the members saved up money in order to be able to take out small loans from the group capital for their individual income projects.

The system worked well, and the co-operatives were now in a position to take precautions against recurring food shortages. Pork is also very popular in Burkina Faso—some 20 per cent of its gross national product is generated through the sale of farm animals such as pigs, chickens, and fish. In Burkina Faso, NAK-karitativ put the focus on animal husbandry, and the regional aid organisation known as Poteram Si Volebam has proven to be a good partner in this endeavour. Pig farms, community centres for poultry farming, and inland ponds for the fish industry have now been established in several locations.



It takes several weeks for the young hens to grow into saleable chickens that can be bred and raised

meagre income as welders, teachers, or kiosk-owners. “We must often send our children to bed hungry as a result of our low income,” the project leader was told again and again. In the meantime, statements such as this have become quite rare, as the situation has improved with the support of the aid agency.

After observing the market, the idea came up to build up a poultry farm on a plot of land in the village. The project began with 300 laying hens and 30 roosters. Guinea fowl were also bred. The eggs are hatched in twelve incubators, thus producing a supply of chicks for other customers. The station where the chicks are raised generates its own electricity with a solar power system. The poultry operation is also supplemented by vegetable farming during the dry season.

Most of the time, pigs are farmed according to the traditional method in the villages: the residents raise the animals collectively on a communal area in the village. By taking on the simple work of caring for and herding the pigs, even people with little knowledge have the opportunity to earn some money. The pigs then spend the nights or the hot days in small, dark clay stalls, or tied to a stake. Pig farming around the town of Bobo-Dioulassé is becoming even more professional, as the Korrohogo and Great White species—which respond better to the intense heat and sun radiation—are bred and raised there. They also have a faster growth rate and produce larger litters.

Large stables have been built in the city of Dedougou, and farmers who focus exclusively on pig breeding have been trained and hired. A pig bred there can weigh as much as 80 kilograms. Any surpluses from sales are then passed on to the savings and loan groups. The assets accumulated in this manner are then made available to other farmers in the form of microloans. The system works well, and allows families to make use of these funds to finance their own small animal husbandry projects

Poultry and fish farming

Before NAK-karitativ and its partner organisation started their work, the group known as Wend Naam, based near Kedougou (some 100 kilometres west of Ouagadougou), had only been able to operate its collective poultry farming project on a part-time basis in order to supplement their

It is also worth taking a closer look at fish which, as a staple food in Burkina Faso, should never be missing from the table. Fish provides vital proteins, especially considering the malnutrition that is frequently encountered in the region. Fish production is also significantly cheaper than meat production. It is important to remember that Burkina Faso, as a landlocked country, is dependent on imports for fish. And that is expensive! After fish stocks rapidly declined due to overfishing and the pollution of the local rivers, the farmers’ group known as La Paix initiated a fishing project. The land for construction of the breeding stations has already been found and laid out accordingly.

The current situation

All four forms of food security (sesame, pork, poultry, and fish) require intensive support and encouragement. Project implementation is not always easy, as the difficult infrastructural conditions—such as interrupted supply chains for feed and seeds, falling groundwater levels, animal diseases, or inadequate vaccines—often make it very difficult for smallholders.

Not every project runs smoothly from the start. The knowledge gained from these projects can be applied to other regions in West Africa. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a tense food production situation in the West African countries. NAK-karitativ is preparing targeted aid measures.

It was mostly wealthy women who devoted themselves to charitable tasks in the church



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Women in the early church

Woman and man—created equally in the image of God? There is no shortage of evidence supporting that women were active participants in the early church. The question, however, is what these facts have to say about the role of women in the church.

The position of women in Roman-Hellenistic antiquity was defined by the alleged superiority of men. This was even more strongly pronounced in the Greek culture than in the Roman. From this it follows that the role of women was not a prominent subject of reflection, not even in the writings of Christian authors such as Paul, although he does comment on them. He is a child of his time and consequently defines the relationship between man and woman as a relationship of subordination. The reality in the congregations was much more diverse, however.

Women in the Imperial Roman period

At the time of the early church, women in the Roman Empire enjoyed many more rights than their counterparts in all other cultures. In the imperial era, women became legally competent, and were allowed to manage their own assets. According to Roman law, they could not be forced into marriage, and they also had the option to divorce a man. Women in the upper classes had access to education.

In the first century there was a veritable emancipation of women in this class.

Women in early Christendom

The fact that many were mentioned by name in New Testament Scripture indicates that women played an important role in the early church. Phoebe, Prisca, Nympha, and Chloe led house churches and took on leadership tasks in the church. In the epistle to the Romans, Paul even emphasises the name of Junia as being “of note among the Apostles, who also [was] in Christ before me”.

In his church history, Eusebius of Caesarea makes reference to women leaders of house churches, prophetesses in the tradition of the daughters of Philip, Christian female missionaries, and numerous female martyrs, although women often tend to remain anonymous.

Another defining feature of the early church was that spirituality and the spiritual authority that came with it was not yet linked to ministry. For example, the Roman senator Pliny the Younger did not have the (male) rulers but two women arrested and summoned for interrogation, as they were considered to be the spiritual authorities in the congregation.

The ideal of virginity

The notion of turning away from the earthly world, the ideal of renunciation, the striving for higher, spiritual things, and the expectation of an imminent end to the world not only inspired Christians, but also had a formative impact on many cults and sects. The early Christian esteem for virginity also fits into this picture. Their abdication from the traditional roles of wife and mother allowed numerous women—especially those who were affluent—to devote themselves completely to charitable tasks in the church and to develop their spiritual gifts.

Abstinence was regarded as a special ethical quality and valued as an expression of a life in the Spirit, a life of moral perfection. Owing to the great esteem it enjoyed in the congregation, the ideal of virginity was considered extremely desirable for young women. In the eastern part of the empire, virgins were even counted among the clergy.

Like widows and deaconesses, virgins formed their own class in the church, and they were even able to assume

leading positions in congregations. In some congregations of the early church, virgins ranked higher in the hierarchy than ordained Deacons. With the rise of monasticism, however, these virgin groups began to disappear from church life. The only option remaining to them thereafter was a monastic existence.

The service of the Deaconesses

In addition to providing charitable services in the congregation, Deaconesses were primarily responsible for the religious instruction of baptismal candidates, in some cases even the male candidates. Deaconesses were selected and appointed by the congregation.

In fourth-century Egypt, the question of whether Deaconesses could participate in the dispensation of bread and wine was discussed. Although they were indeed allowed to bring the Lord’s Supper to the sick, their participation in the Eucharist was ruled out.

A number of Franconian Bishops were still ordaining Deaconesses as late as the sixth century. However, this practice was not long condoned by the church, as the Council of Orleans forbade women from exercising any function within the church. There is little reliable information about the reasons for this.

From the records of church ordinances it can be concluded that the development of the liturgy was a contributing factor in the decline of the importance of the diaconate. The emergence of a strong hierarchy of ecclesiastical offices left no room for the more egalitarian ethos of the early Christian congregations.

Conclusions about the early church

In the early church of the first century, women played a more prominent role in the congregations and in the spread of Christianity than they ever did in later history. The fall of the Roman Empire and the turmoil of the Great Migration of Peoples put an end to this progress. Political developments led to the emergence of a strongly hierarchical male clergy, and the role of women was increasingly restricted to charitable services.



Christ, our future

*“I have set the Lord
always before me;
because He is at my
right hand I shall
not be moved.”*

Psalm 16: 8

**New Apostolic Church
International**

