

*Easter Series*

# THE LIVING GOD

By

Rev. CLIFFORD GREEN, B.A., B.D.

FOUR STUDIES FOR EASTER

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For Young People's Camps and Conferences  
With Group Work and Questions for Discussion

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STUDY I.—GOOD FRIDAY: GOD WAS IN CHRIST.

STUDY II.—EASTER EVE: THE GOSPEL SACRAMENTS.

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COMMUNITY.

## PREFACE

It has been a great pleasure for me to write these studies for the Easter camps of the Crusader movement. For in camps at Otford, St. Ives, and Yarramundi I first began to grow into a living faith, and commenced upon the way which has led me into the ministry of the church.

It will be obvious to all who read this booklet that the limits of space prevent a complete treatment of the great themes of our faith which are involved in these studies. My aim has been to stress a number of aspects which are frequently neglected, and to present the material in a way which is provocative. The purpose of a study book, as I see it, is not an attempt to state all the answers, but rather to open up the questions—to stimulate thought, discussion, research, and further study.

It was an instinctive wisdom that led the Crusader movement to adopt as its theme song the traditional hymn "Felowship". For in each camp, with all its activities of worship, study, recreation, pranks, quiet time, and above all, its communion service, there is a brief but genuine flowering of christian community. This, I believe, makes a deeper impact on the members of the camp than any single activity by itself; and the responsibility for this community, humanly speaking, rests to a large degree with all who are called to be leaders.

The General Conference has set a special emphasis for this year on "men for the ministry". Only a brief glance at the last study will show that a call to any service, whether as layman or minister, is most likely to come as the christian community seeks out and lays hold of the gifts which Christ

gives to His church. It was to the church at Antioch that the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Paul and Barnabas . . ."

Christ calls no-one to be part-time servants. Both minister and layman are called to complete obedience; the one primarily to serve the gospel of Christ to the church, the other to serve the gospel of Christ to the world. If this study book aids in the commitment of life, the growth of faith, and the acceptance of Christ's vocation, whether as minister or layman, I will be more than amply rewarded.

To Audrey, once a camp pianiste, now my wife; and to Monica, who refrained from drawing too many "toot-toots" on my papers, I express my thanks.

CLIFFORD GREEN,

Gosford Circuit, 1961.

STUDY I

# GOOD FRIDAY: GOD WAS IN CHRIST

Scripture References:

KEY PASSAGES.—2 Corinthians 5:17-21.  
1 Corinthians 1:18:25.

The meeting place of man's sin and the grace of God is the cross of Christ. This is literally the "crucial" point. For here sin reaches its highest and its blindest point; so its exceeding sinfulness is exposed. And here, of all places, God pours His merciful love upon His enemies that they might be saved.

Kierkegaard, the great Danish christian thinker of the nineteenth century, has said, "Take away the alarmed conscience and you may close the churches and turn them into dancing halls." In a similar way, if we want to understand the cross of Christ, we must also understand the sin of man.

## The Great Revolt

Paul and Silas were called by the Jews to Thessalonica, "the men who had turned the world upside down". Little did those Jews realise that it is the great revolt of man's sin which turns the world upside down, and that it is Christ who puts it back on its proper axis. In the blindness of sin they could not see the truth.

In the Genesis accounts of creation (ch. 3:1-13), the ancient writer tells us the story which is the symbol of all sin—the creature revolts against his Creator. Adam and Eve rebel against the limit set on them by their Lord, and thus they deny His right to set a limit. In fact, they show by this rebellion that they do not want God to be their Lord at all—they will rule their own lives, they will decide for themselves what is good and evil, they will be their own gods. The story does not try to show where this evil

too late  
to  
turn  
back  
to  
God

ultimately comes from, but the disastrous results are known to us all. Man no longer rejoices in the presence of God, but when his Lord calls he is guilty and afraid, and he hides himself. At the same time the fellowship between man and man is broken; when Adam is questioned he blames Eve, no longer caring about their fellowship, but only seeking to save himself. He even goes further, hinting that God Himself is to blame because He gave him the woman in the first place!

## Who Is Adam?

Now this is not a fancy story of something that happened long ago and far away. This is the story of Everyman. It is no accident that the name Adam is simply the Hebrew word for "mankind". The name of every man born into this world is Adam, and he remains in his sinful revolt against God until he is made a new man in Christ, receiving a *christian* name when he is baptized into the Church.

WE are Adam. We all try to be as "gods". We exalt ourselves, trying to sit on the throne that belongs to the Lord God alone. (Pride, you remember, is number one on the old list of the Seven Deadly Sins.) We push ourselves into the centre of life, trying to make life revolve around ourselves. Instead of being God-centred we are self-centred. And in the sinful attempt of man to be free from God, we end up not free, but slaves of our sinful selves.

## Sin and Sins

Sin, then, is a fundamental twist of our whole being. As our Lord said, it is "of the heart of man", in the very centre of our life. (See Mark 7:1-23, especially 14-23.) Martin Luther described sin as "the heart turned in upon itself". Now, if the very centre of our life is corrupt, then the thoughts, attitudes, and actions which flow from this are inevitably diseased also. Sin expresses itself in sins. (See verses 21, 22.) Likewise, St. Paul shows how sin comes out in sins, when he writes to the Galatians of the

complete contrast between the works, or deeds, of a man who lives by the Holy Spirit, and a man who is ruled by the flesh. (See ch. 5:16-24; it should be stressed that St. Paul is here using the word "flesh" in a technical sense—it does not mean the physical body, which clearly is not to be blamed for idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit and the like. "Flesh" means the whole natural man in his sinful condition.)

Sin is very commonly thought of as weakness, but this is far from the truth. If sin is a basic corruption in the *centre* of our life, it will come out more clearly and more dangerously *at* the centre of our life—at the point of power and strength and ability. It is not necessary to snoop around in the corner of a man's life to spy out his moral weakness; it will stare you in the face from the centre and strength of his life. The Pharisees may not have had any moral failings, but Christ saw their sin in that which was the glory of their lives, their very religion itself. To take another example, was Hitler's sin seen chiefly in the fact that he was not married to Eva Braun? Is Australia's sin as a nation seen most in widespread heavy gambling, or in something else? It is very interesting to see that when people asked John the Baptist what their repentance meant for their future lives, he confronted them at the very centre of their existence. (See Luke 3:10-14.) Turn the centre hub, and you change the direction of the whole wheel.

### Who Will Save Us?

From what we have seen of the nature of sin, it is clear that man cannot save himself from sin by a little character improvement, or exercises in mental health, or education, or social reform. He needs to be turned right around; more, his old sinful life must die, he must be created again and given a new life. Indeed, man simply *cannot* save himself! He has cut himself off from God; he is tortured by his guilt and insecurity and futility, vainly trying to forget his hopeless predicament by pathetic escapisms. By rebelling against God man has fixed a

great gulf between his Lord and himself, which he cannot bridge; he is in desperate need of forgiveness, but he cannot forgive himself; he needs a new life, but he is not his own creator. Only God can bridge that gap, only the One who has been offended can offer the grace of forgiveness, only the Creator can re-create His broken creature.

### The Living God

"If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself." (2 Timothy 2:13.)

A cynic once said, "God sits in heaven and does nothing." Perhaps he was a worshipper of Baal, whose priests Elijah mocked so delightfully (1 Kings 18:27); he certainly did not know the "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". For He is the Living God, the Lord who exercises His rule over His creation, and whose mighty saving acts are the theme song of His people.

Even man in sin cannot escape from God. (Psalm 139:1-12.) It is true that sin separates us from God, but this does not mean that He is not present. Separation does not mean that God is absent; it means that He is present in opposition! His Holy Love is set in absolute resistance to the sin which would destroy His creatures and ruin His Creation. This infinite pressure of God in resistance to sin produces the sinner's guilt. Truly He is the Living God, even to those who resist and deny Him.

But the Holy Love of the Living God not only resists sin. It is most clearly seen in the infinite passion of the Father in heaven to save His lost people, to forgive the rebels, to free the slaves, to restore the dead to life, to replace the chaos of revolution with His kingdom of peace.

In the Old Testament we can see God's continual working to heal and renew His people. But the Old Testament is like John the Baptist, preparing the way of the Lord. Its peak is God's promise through the prophets which points forward to His mightiest act—the coming of the world's true King and only Deliverer, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

## When The Time Was Fully Come . . .

. . . God sent forth His Son, born into our sinful situation, that He might liberate us. (Galatians 4:4-5.) The writer of the letter to the Hebrews (ch. 1:1-2) stresses that with the coming of Christ a new age has dawned. God no longer speaks to men indirectly through the prophets, but He speaks to them in person, He is present in the Son, right in their midst. It is no longer the time "before Christ", but it is "anno domini", the year of our Lord, the year of grace.

St. John says exactly the same thing in the magnificent introduction to his gospel (ch. 1:1-18). The Word, Jesus Christ, who is Himself God, who was with the Father in the beginning, has become flesh. He dwells among men, full of grace and truth, radiating the glory of the Father. Thus Christ is called *Immanuel*, which means "God with us".

But the fact that God is *with us* also means that He is *for us*. In Christ, the wonder of God's saving love for mankind is revealed, for the Son has not come into the world to condemn the world, but to save it. Is not this an amazing thing? For surely the Holy Lord would be perfectly justified to leave this rebellious world to its own sinful devices, until at last it came to a miserable doom. Or if He did trouble Himself about man's fate at all, surely He would be perfectly just to visit this world in wrath, dealing out well-deserved condemnation and punishment. But this is the very opposite of what He does. In an overwhelming love He comes in great humility and at infinite cost, not sparing Himself, offering to His people a free gift which is completely undeserved—not only forgiveness for sin, but freedom from sin, a new life in the kingdom of His beloved Son. St. John summarises this in chapter 3:16-17. How much is contained in the one word "so". (See also 1 John 4:9-11; "so" features in the same way in verse 11.)

## Costly Grace

A dying man, on being asked by a friend whether he was worried about his sins, replied, "God will forgive; that's His business." This glib blasphemy conjures up a picture of God like a shopkeeper in the midst of a clearance sale, handing out forgiveness on the easiest of easy terms—no deposit, no interest, no weekly terms. It was this sort of attitude that Bonhoeffer, the great modern German churchman, attacked as "cheap grace". Now, undoubtedly, grace is free, but it is certainly not cheap. As St. Paul reminds the church at Corinth, "You are not your own, you were bought with a price." Nothing less than the precious blood of Christ had brought them this grace. This "costly grace" streams in a great flood upon the greatest of sinners who comes to the repentance of faith; but the flood gates are locked to the self-confident and blasé man who presumes to himself the grace of the Holy God.

## The Love of God

St. Paul shows us how absolutely amazing is this love of God in his letter to the church at Philippi, ch. 2:5-11. For while man's movement in sin is thrusting himself up against his Lord, God's movement in Christ is one of humbling Himself, coming to men as a servant, even to the point of pouring out His life upon the cross. Here is a redeeming love which we cannot compare with any human love. (See Romans 5:6-8.) Before this cross we can only bow in penitence and adoration, for here is the love of *God*.

## Two Lords

There is no greater contrast than that of Pilate and Christ. Pilate is a lord, in the manner of the sinful world. He embodies the glory and the power of man. He, a guilty sinner, confronts the innocent and holy One, the true Lord, the Prince of heaven. The Holy One, with His common dress and humble bearing, appears weak to sinful man. "Are *you* the King of the Jews?" asks Pilate in-

credulously. Then Pilate judges that Christ must be crucified; but in passing this judgment he is in fact judging himself, for he exposes his own sin. To preserve his own reputation and position he will sacrifice this One whom he has admitted to be blameless. But Christ despises the shame, and does not seek to preserve His life; freely He will lay it down, the Innocent will die for the guilty, the Holy One for sinners.

So He ascends the only throne this world ever offered Him. And as He was mocked before by the Roman soldiers who dressed Him in royal purple, but crowned Him with thorns, so now He is mocked by His own people. (Matthew 27:39-44.) They jeer at His weakness, taunting Him with the reminder of how He had saved others. The blindness of sin is seen above all in the challenge, "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." For Christ had offered Himself upon the cross precisely because He *is* the Son of God. Only *God* so loves the world that He gives His grace through the cross. Pilate was not the Christ, and so he saved himself. Jesus *proves* that He is the Christ by ascending His cross.

Here is the wisdom of God's grace to sinners which the unbelieving sinner sees as foolishness; here in the utter helplessness of Christ stretched out upon the cross is the mighty power of God for salvation.

"For the foolishness of God is wiser than men,  
And the weakness of God is stronger than men.  
The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing,  
But to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

#### SUGGESTED GROUP WORK

1. Read the Passion story in one of the gospels. Read Isaiah 53.
2. Read Bonhoeffer's poem "Christians and Unbelievers", in his book, "Letters and Papers from Prison, page 167.
3. Read these hymns:  
177 Ah, Holy Jesu.  
144 My song is love unknown.  
159 One who is all unfit.
4. Try to depict in gestures, poses, or mime, attitudes which are symbolic of sin, and of repentance. Express by poster or some other art medium, Philippians 2:5-8.
5. Do some research on these words: grace, love, faith, justification, redemption, salvation. Can you express these ideas in modern words and concepts? What does St. Paul mean in Ephesians 2:8-9? Try to frame this in your own words.

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- (a) Are we right in calling today "Good Friday"?
- (b) What did Kierkegaard mean when he said, "The gospel does not say that men are sinners because they commit sins, but that they commit sins because they are sinners."?
- (c) Where would you look for a person's "sins of strength"? Does a nation have sins of strength, as well as national weaknesses?
- (d) What are the sins of the church today?
- (e) Which are more dangerous, sins of the body, or sins of the spirit. How are they related to each other?
- (f) If Christ died many centuries ago, how does He redeem us today?
- (g) "Jesus was not crucified in a Cathedral between two candles, but on a Cross between two thieves." What did George Macleod mean by this statement in his book, "Only One Way Left", page 38?
- (h) Isaiah said, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord." How does this apply to the ministry and cross of Christ?

## EASTER EVE: THE GOSPEL SACRAMENTS

This study naturally anticipates much of the following two. We must assume that the study book has previously been read in full; however, reference to the other studies will be found helpful.

### **Baptism**

“If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature;  
the old has passed away.”

2 Corinthians 5:17.

Off the west coast of Scotland lies the island of Iona, on which stands the ancient abbey, recently rebuilt by the members of the Iona Community. Immediately you enter the church you are confronted by the baptismal font, standing in the centre of the aisle. At the other end of the aisle stands the altar. But before you can enter to join with the congregation in the worship of God and gather around the altar of Christ, you must pass the font. This is the ideal position, for it symbolises the crucial importance of baptism for the life of the church. None may enter without passing through its waters. It is not the door of the church, but the baptismal font, which is the dividing point between the world and the church, between sin and salvation. Baptism is the missionary sacrament.

It was John the Baptist who prepared the way for the earthly ministry of our Lord. He preached that the Messiah was coming, and called on Israel to prepare itself by penitence, baptising (in the waters of Jordan) all who repented. Baptism, of course, had been practised by the Jews long before John. All Gentiles who were converted to Judaism not only had to be circumcised like every other Jew, but also had to be baptised, as a mark of cleansing from sin. The remarkable thing about John was that he called on the *Jews* to be baptised, forcing them to confess they they, as well as the Gentiles, were in need of God's salvation, the first requirement of which was repentance.

## The Missionary Sacrament

When the Resurrection of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit had turned the disciples into apostles, the mission and preaching of the church begins. The Risen Lord commissions the apostles to preach, teach, and baptise. (Matthew (28:18-20.) At Pentecost, those who are moved by the first christian sermon, preached by St. Peter, are urged to repent and be baptised. (Acts 2:22-24, 36-42.) The New Testament, and particularly the Acts of the Apostles, is full of passages showing the importance of baptism in the early church. (Acts 8:1-13, 25-38; 9:10-19; 16:11-15, 16-34.)

## Dying We Live

But the baptism of the church is a more profound thing than the baptism of John. It is still the rite of entry into the people of God; it is still a mark of repentance. But christian repentance is much more than feeling sorry and making resolutions to do better. This baptism is "in the name of Jesus", the Crucified Lord, and just as He died for our sin, so we too must die to it. We saw in the first study that sin is a revolution in which man tries to put himself on God's throne. By the cross of Christ we are brought to the point where we loathe our sin and wish to die to it, so that Christ may renew us. Baptism is the time when we do this.

This what St. Paul means in Romans 6:1-11, especially verses 3-4, 6-7. See also Colossians 2:12. (Note the same principle in the story of Nicodemus, John 3:1-7. Verse 5 refers to baptism.) Paul asks how it is possible to continue in sin if we die to it in baptism. He regards baptism as the crucifixion (verse 6) and burial (verse 4) of our old sinful self. At baptism sin is executed and interred, and when we are baptised we confess that this is what it deserves. Outside the church of a very ancient monastery in Greece is the place of baptism. It is a cavity hewn out of the living rock, cut in the shape of a cross. As the candidate goes down to be baptised into what represents both a cross and a grave, he would have a very

realistic experience of exactly what St. Paul meant when he wrote of baptism as "dying to sin". But the cross he enters is also the sign of God's infinite grace, mercy, and love, and so he is baptised not in fear but in joy.

When a slide of Christ upon the cross was shown in a village in India, an Indian leapt up, shouting, "Come down, you Son of God; That is my place!" But the God of grace does not require that we should die *for* our sin; He requires that we should die *to* it; He requires that in penitence and faith we be baptised. Baptism is His way of destroying sin and saving the sinner.

## The New Community

One of the slogans of sin is, "Every man for himself". But the command of Christ is "Love one another!" Baptism is the exit from the self-centred individual life of sin, into the Christ-centred community of the church, into a new common and shared life as a "member" of "the Body". This is strongly emphasised by the form of baptism followed by many churches in India, where baptism frequently takes place in a river. The congregation stands on one bank of the stream, the minister and candidates on the other. They enter the water, and are baptised, coming out on the other side to join with the congregation. For a person such as a high-caste Brahmin whose christian faith would mean absolute expulsion from his family and friends, the experience of such a baptism would be very real, for from the moment he stepped into the water he would literally have no family or community but the church.

## The Community of the Spirit

When preaching of Christ, John had said, "I have baptised you with water; but He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit." From the earliest days of the church, the receiving of the gift of the Holy Spirit was associated with baptism (See Acts 2:37-39.) That is why, when St. Paul found some men at Ephesus who confessed that they had never even heard of the Holy Spirit, he immediately inquired about their baptism. (Acts 19:1-7.) For while

he well knew that the Holy Spirit of God was completely free to work in His own way, at the same time St. Paul expected that all who had been baptised into the church would have received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Now there is nothing at all magical about this. Baptism is the door of entry into the church which is the temple of the Holy Spirit; it is being grafted into the Body of Christ whose very breath and life is the Holy Spirit. Nothing could be more normal than the fact that all who die to their old sinful life in the waters of baptism, receive, as a free gift from the hand of God, a new life, the life of the Holy Spirit in the fellowship of the Church. *Note:* The limits of space prevent a discussion of the fellowship of baptism from the time of the early church to the present; however, plenty of material is readily available on this subject. It should be stressed that baptism is a very lively concern in numerous discussions throughout the world church, and often quite radical views are stated in most unexpected quarters. The whole question deserves our most careful attention.

### Holy Communion

The celebration of Holy Communion is the normal and central service of christian worship. This is recognised not only in the practice of the great traditional churches—the Anglican, Lutheran, Orthodox, and Roman, but also in the weekly communion services of churches such as the Church of Christ, the Brethren, and others. The practice of infrequent communion is comparatively modern. Calvin's desire was for weekly communion services in the Reformed, or Presbyterian Church; it would seem that the custom of quarterly communion services, justified on the principle that "familiarity breeds contempt", arose because the civil authorities in Geneva would not comply with Calvin's wishes, and so a virtue was made out of a necessity. John Wesley urged the early Methodists to "Go to the Lord's table once a week." Indeed, the great importance given to Holy Communion among the early Methodists, compared with the lax practice of the Church of England at

the time, was one of the contributing factors to the withdrawal of the Methodists from the mother church to become a separate denomination.

### The Living Bread

The Lord's Supper is frequently misunderstood as being merely a memorial service; where this is the case, it is little wonder that people do not wish to observe it frequently. While the element of remembrance is certainly present, nevertheless, this is not a memorial to a dead Christ; it is, as its name implies, a *communion* with the *Living Christ*, the Risen Lord. That is why we worship on the first day of the week, the day of Resurrection, and not on the Jewish sabbath. As the church gathers around the table of her Lord, all bound together by the Holy Spirit in the love of Christ, the Lord is present in the midst of us. He who poured out His life in the sacrifice of the cross is now the Risen Christ, the Head of the Body which is His Church. We who have been marked with the sign of His cross in baptism are now fed by Him who is the Bread of Life, that we might grow up in faith, love and obedience. He is the Vine, we are the branches.

St. Luke tells the story of the two disciples who travelled to Emmaus on the first Easter Day (Luke 24:13-35). Although Jesus himself walked and spoke with them, it was "in the breaking of the bread" that their eyes were opened and they recognised Him.

It is the presence of Christ among His people gathered in fellowship around His table of which Charles Wesley sings in hymn 761:

Jesus, we thus obey  
Thy last and kindest word;  
Here in Thine own appointed way  
We come to meet Thee, Lord.

Thy presence makes the feast;  
Now let our spirits feel  
The glory not to be expressed,  
Thy joy unspeakable.

It has been said that when protestants consciously strive to be distinctive they only end up being eccentric. On this question of the presence of Christ there perhaps may not have been a conscious desire to be different from Rome. But while we do not agree with the Roman Church's doctrines of The Mass, or its interpretation of the presence of Christ, yet we must treasure as central our faith in the real presence of Christ among His faithful people. The service we call Holy Communion, which began to be formed in the earliest days of the church, was never intended to be merely a memorial service, nor a repetition of the last supper. It was designed to provide the whole diet of christian worship, a form of service by which the church could unite in the fellowship of faith and commune with the Living Lord. And in spite of many corruptions in the use and understanding of this service, our gracious Lord has faithfully used it as a channel of His grace to all who come to meet Him in His "own appointed way".

### Fellowship and Communion

"One loving cuppe to syppe,  
And to dyppe  
In one dysse faithfullich,  
As lambkins of one folde,  
Either for other to suffer all thing,  
Lo, here is Felawschipe."

One of the many scandals in the church at Corinth which distressed St. Paul was the selfish and fellowship-destroying behaviour of people at the Lord's Supper. (1 Corinthians 11:20-34.) Each was concerned only for himself, one eating his fill while another went hungry. (21-22.) Such self-centred behaviour was quite out of place in the community of which Christ is the only centre, and who had commanded them to love one another. Here was sin raising itself up in the very shadow of Christ's cross. Therefore Paul said that if anyone eats and drinks without considering the Body (that is, the fellowship) he eats and drinks judgment upon himself. Now this not only applies to the actual service of communion, but to

the whole life of the church. Unless the church lives in love and peace and unity, we cannot commune with our Lord. This is a sacrament of unity (see 1 Corinthians 10:16-17), and if the peace and harmony of the church is broken by sin, then we build a barrier which shuts us out from communion with Christ. (See Matthew 5:21-24, with this thought in mind.)

### The Pattern of Worship

*Note:* It will be necessary for the group to have copies of the service to study.

Here we must briefly study the pattern of the Communion Service. The order found in our Methodist "Book of Offices" left Wesley's hand with very few changes from the order of the Church of England, and thus it stands in the main stream of the universal church.

The service falls into two main parts—the service of the Word of God, and the service of the Sacrament. After the Lord's Prayer, which is intended for the personal preparation of the minister, and the prayer known as the Collect for Purity of Heart, the service of the Word begins. The emphasis is first on God, who graciously comes to His people. The Word consists of commandment, scripture, and sermon, and to each of these the congregation makes response. The response to the commandments is one of prayer for God's mercy and aid. The scripture, preceded by the Collect for the Day (a short prayer appropriate to the season of the church year and varying week by week) consists of a lesson from the Epistles and another from the Gospels. The response of the church to the mighty acts of God recorded in epistle and gospel is the response of faith, which is made by the congregation through the Nicene Creed. Then follows the sermon (although it has been omitted in our Book of Offices)—the setting forth of God's Word by direct address, and related to the present life of the church and the world.

The response to the sermon is the offertory. Now this is not here because it is the only place a collection

could be fitted in, as a necessary evil! It is *the* response, par excellence, to all that has gone before. Our response to God's grace in offering Himself to us sinners in Jesus Christ is the offering of our whole lives to Him in trust and obedience. It is only in comparatively recent times that the offering was designated for the poor. Originally the gifts offered were actual loaves of bread and flasks of wine which were brought up by the people and laid upon the altar. These were both the products of the work of the people, and their staple diet, and so were effective symbols of their whole lives offered to Christ in thanksgiving and penitence, that He might receive them and renew them for His service.

Having offered our whole lives to Christ, we then offer the great prayer of intercession for the church as it serves Him in the world. As we approach the point of communion, an exhortation directs us to approach with true repentance and lively faith. This leads into the prayer of confession for our sin, followed by a prayer for God's forgiveness, and the reading of the Comfortable Words, to reassure us that even as sinners we are accepted by the gracious Lord through our faith in His beloved Son.

Then we draw near with faith, praising God in the words of the *Sursum Corda*, and yet approaching with great humility, expressed in the Prayer of Humble Access. The great prayer of consecration is then offered, and as we gather around His table and receive the symbols of His body and blood given for us, we are united in communion with our Risen, Living, and Present Lord.

But our Lord feeds us that we may be His servants and apostles in this world for which He died; so after the Lord's Prayer, a prayer of thanksgiving, and the final offering of praise in the *Gloria in Excelsis*, we come swiftly to the point where we are dismissed with the words of the benediction, to be scattered throughout the world as the salt of the earth.

"Go ye out into all the world!  
I am with you always."

## SUGGESTED GROUP WORK

### A. Baptism

1. Read and compare the two services of baptism in our Book of Offices. How well do they express the ideas of baptism in the New Testament?
2. Should we baptise all who ask it for their children, or should the church set conditions? If so, what should these be?

Discuss the suggestion that the parents should be church members as a condition for the baptism of their children.

3. What is required of the parents of baptised children to keep the vows they have made? How should the congregation fulfil its promises? Is this done?

### B. Holy Communion

Read and study John 6:1-59.

1. Study the order of service in the office book. Do you think any changes need to be made to improve the order? to make some of the wording more easily understood? to give the congregation a fuller part in the service?

Write out such a service with your modifications, and compare your work with other groups.

2. What would you say to the person who will not come to communion because he says, "I am not good enough"? See the exhortation beginning "Dearly beloved brethren . . ."
3. "I did enjoy your service!" said the lady to the minister at the church door. What would you say to her? Whose service is it? Does her remark point to some serious fault in our worship?

STUDY III

## EASTER: THE LIVING CHRIST

Christ the Lord is risen today!  
Hallelujah!

Because He *is* the Son of God, Jesus stayed upon the cross; because He *is* the Son of God, He rose up from the grave. Our God is not the God of the dead, but of the living; our Christ is not a glorious yet tragic martyr, but our Risen Lord, whose name is still Immanuel—God with us. He is the *living* Head of His Body, the Lord of both church and world, exercising His kingly rule until His kingdom is established.

### Christ the Victor

A modern philosopher once pronounced with solemn finality, "God is dead." Perhaps he too was a Baal worshipper. But, in spite of all that we said about God's work in Christ in our first study, if the cross is the end of the story, then it is the story of a noble and tragic failure. Without the Resurrection it would be true to say that God is dead. (See I Corinthians 15:17-19.) In His struggle with sin God would have exhausted Himself, and the body of Christ would be laid in the tomb with sin victorious.

But praise be to God! Christ is *risen!* Christ is the Victor over sin and death. Christ *is* the Lord, without question or dispute. The King has confronted head-on the revolution of sin, and now He reigns triumphant, even though the guerilla warfare of the defeated enemy continues. All the force of human sin has hurled itself against Christ; in the cross the climax of the battle is reached, "It is finished", He says. In the Resurrection His victory is proclaimed, and now the crown of thorns becomes the crown of glory.

## Witnesses to the Resurrection

Without the resurrection the whole of the christian faith crumbles to pieces. Indeed, at the time of Christ's passion and cross, this is exactly what happened to His disciples. Peter, the chief disciple, who was the first to confess Him as the Christ, who had declared that he would never fall away but would even die with him, publicly renounced his Lord. James and John, the other two of the "inner three", who had also declared that they would share the cup of Christ's suffering, were among the rest who "all forsook Him and fled". And when two of them were walking to Emmaus, not knowing with Whom they were speaking, they spoke for them all when they confessed their disillusionment, "We had hoped that He was the one to redeem Israel," they said. The disciples were a group of broken men, their great hopes shattered, their Lord dead; so they hid themselves away, for fear of the Jews.

But soon a mighty change came over the disciples; indeed, they were new men. From their hiding place they came forth, bold and fearless. For Christ was *not* dead, but risen! God was not defeated, but triumphant! Their Lord was in their midst, and they, like Him, had passed from death to life. Small wonder, then, that the chief work of the apostles was to be witnesses to His resurrection. (Acts 1:21-22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:27-42.) Peter, who had so shamefully denied Him, is the first to proclaim the mighty victory of His resurrection. (Acts 2:22-24, 36.) And in the power of the Risen Lord they all worked and preached, the Lord working with them. (Mark 16:20; Acts 2:47; 3:1-16; 7:54-60; 9:1-22.)

## The Meeting Place

The event of the cross had been a public spectacle, initiated by the chief priests, permitted by Pilate the Roman governor, and witnessed by all the people. None could deny it. But when the apostles later began to preach that the crucified one was none other than the Son of God, who had left His heavenly glory to minister to sinful men, who had offered Himself upon the cross that sinners might

be forgiven, freed, and created anew, the Greeks replied, "Nonsense!" and the Jews cried, "Weakness!" The event of the cross and the faith of the cross were two separate things. Only the church professed the faith; but even unbelievers acknowledged the event.

When we come to the resurrection, unbelievers will not acknowledge the event, and even the disciples had some hesitation for a time. Without the experience of the personal presence of the Risen Lord, the whole story is fantastic and incredible. Only those who live the life of faith in the presence of the Living Christ who is in the midst of His church, and who know His living power among them, will profess the faith in His resurrection.

When St. Paul was in Athens, some who heard his preaching of Jesus and the resurrection, took him to the Areopagus where the philosophers spent their time swapping novelties. (Acts 17:16-34.) They listened with interest until he began to speak of the resurrection, and then their reaction was mockery and scepticism. One would not expect to find doubt among the apostles, yet Thomas is proverbially known as the Doubter of the resurrection; and Luke tells us that when the women told the apostles that Christ was risen, "these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them." (24:11.) It was only when Christ was present in their midst that doubt was dispelled and they knew Him as the Risen Lord.

St. Paul, who, as Saul, had been a fanatical persecutor of the first christians, and who undoubtedly had heard the preaching of the resurrection, did not believe it until he was personally arrested by the Living Christ. From that time forward he was a new man, continually living in the presence of his Lord, so that he could say, "I live, and yet not I, Christ lives in me."

Many who are seriously seeking to receive faith are often hindered by doubts about the resurrection. At this point a fatal mistake can be made, by seeking in the wrong place. Indeed, many books purporting to "prove" the resurrection only confuse the issue. For you can

examine the scripture records, discuss their value as historical evidence, and try to explain the differences in the various accounts; you can scientifically examine the possibility of a dead body being revived to life; you can discuss the power of God in relation to the normal laws of nature; and when you come to the end of your investigation you may feel that you have "proved" the resurrection; it is just as possible, however, that you may feel that you have disproved it. But this whole approach leads to a dead-end. Indeed, to a person firm in faith and spiritually sensitive, the whole proposal verges on blasphemy, and I only mention it because many misunderstand this fundamental issue. There is nothing more relevant to this discussion than the question of the angels to the women at the tomb, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"

The only proper question about the resurrection is not, "How can we prove it?" but, "Where can we meet the Risen Christ?" For Christ cannot be "proved" as you can prove a formula in maths or a theorem in geometry. God is not an object you can study impartially, as if man is the great investigator putting the Almighty God under a microscope! God is Person, and even human persons cannot be known by this method. The Risen Christ can only be known by personal meeting, by the commitment of faith. A small boy once voiced a common misunderstanding of faith when he said, "Faith is believing what you know is not true." Christ does not call us to crucify our God-given minds, but to free them from the darkness of sin. He challenges self-centred man to cease his sinful revolt against God, to leave his individual independence; He calls him to humble repentance, and to find his life and freedom and fulfilment in true community under the rule of the gracious Father and Living God.

Thus the meeting place with the Risen Christ is not in His tomb, where no one ever found Him. It is in His church, in the midst of the community of His faithful people. For in this fellowship of faith and love, of worship and prayer, of obedience and service, here is Christ. Now it is quite possible for sin in the church to obscure Christ

from the world. But where the redeemed community lives under the rule of its Head, where the life of His Spirit unites and sanctifies all the members of the Body, there is the Living Christ; there is the Light of the world, the King whose city being set on a hill draws all men through its gates into the walls of salvation.

On one occasion the Sadducees, a Jewish party who did not believe in the idea of resurrection, came to our Lord with a frivolous question, trying to justify their belief. (Matthew 22:23-33.) In reply Christ said that they were ignorant of both the scriptures and the power of God. "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living." While the Living God, the Lord of heaven and earth, is by no means confined to the church, and certainly not controlled by it, here is found the evidence of His mighty power—men made new by His renewing power, sinful division and strife healed by His peace. Here, in His church, the Living Christ carries on His redeeming work in the power by which He rose from the dead. "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."

### Lord of this World

It is this real world in which we live that God so loved that He gave His only-begotten Son. Here is the judgment of God upon all those, who, calling themselves christian, look down upon this sinful world in self-righteous condemnation, and who, trying to keep themselves "pure" by isolation from the world, wish to be purer than God himself.

It is for the real sin of the real world that Christ died, for the "newspaper sins"; the sins of the home, of husband and wife, of parents and children; the sins of factory and office, of employer and employee; the sins of society, of business men and politicians, of citizens and soldiers, of criminals and spies; the sins of class and race and nation; the sins of *this* world. (See George Macleod "Only One Way Left", p. 38.)

But "God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified". (Acts 2:36.) The New Testament writers are at pains to stress that it is the same Jesus who was crucified who rose in victory. Thomas was not convinced by an unscarred Christ, but by the Risen Christ who yet bore the marks of nail and spear. (John 20:24-29; Luke 24:36-40.) This same Christ who died and rose he worshipped, "My Lord and my God!"

### Victory and Promise

The resurrection is the proof that our God *is* Lord of this world. Living in this world, the responsible christian acts with great seriousness on the great issues of our time—racism, war, communism, secularism, the life of an industrial society, the food and population problem, rapid social change, the welfare of under-developed nations, and the search for world community. But the christian never lives in anxious fear, for come what may, even the threat of massive tragedy and darkest evil, the final issue is not in doubt, the victory of Christ is won. Christ *is* Lord. The christian hope is not wishful thinking; it is confidence in the power of God.

The resurrection is God's promise of salvation for this world. Already in the church we live in the new creation—the power of the Living Christ is re-creating us, healing us from our sin, uniting in His Body those who had lived in the division and strife of men. "All power is given unto Me", said our victorious Lord. He who rose is now seated at the right hand of the Father. As day by day we pray, "Thy Kingdom come", the Living God works out His purpose for the world, "to unite all things in Christ".

"In the world you have suffering;  
But be of good courage!  
I have overcome the world."

### SUGGESTED GROUP WORK

1. St. Paul's account of the resurrection in I Corinthians 15 is earlier than any of the gospel accounts. Study this chapter, especially verses 1-11, and compare it with the gospels.
2. "You have died . . . you have been raised with Christ . . ." Study Colossians 3:1-17.
3. Why do we call the celebration of our Lord's resurrection "Easter"? And why easter eggs? Why is the resurrection of Christ different from the new life seen at springtime and birth?
4. In the Apostles' Creed we confess our faith in "The communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." What does "the resurrection of the body" mean?
5. In I Thessalonians 4:15, St. Paul writes, "We who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep." What is the thought uppermost in his mind here?
6. What does the New Testament mean when it speaks of the Return or "Second Coming" of Christ? How is this related to the victory of His resurrection?
7. Christ has won the victory over the world; by faith we know that sin is defeated, yet sin seems as powerful as ever in the world. What pictures can we use to help us understand this situation?
8. The common popular belief is that men are by nature immortal. What is the christian approach to this question?

What is the difference between "everlasting life" and "eternal life"? (Note: by "eternal life" the New Testament means "the life of the age to come.")

## EASTER MONDAY: THE MISSIONARY COMMUNITY

"The bible knows nothing of solitary religion!" declared John Wesley. "A man does not find grace by sitting alone in a corner," insisted Martin Luther. The christian faith and the christian church are inseparable. The common attitude of many today that you can be a christian apart from the church, while it may in some cases be related to valid criticisms of the present life of the church, nevertheless reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of the gospel. For the christian life is not the achievement of a private individual; it is a common life, life in community. The classic formula, "outside the church there is no salvation", should not be interpreted as a restriction on God's freedom to save; it is an insistence on the fact that the christian life is literally a corporate life, life in "the Body" of Christ. To the first christians, the suggestion that you could be a christian without at the same time and as the same thing being a member of the church, would have been preposterous.

### **The New Creation**

We have seen in the first study that sin destroys the community, or fellowship, which is the Creator's purpose for His people. In the second study we saw that baptism is the act in which we both die to sin through the grace of God, and enter into the christian community; and also that communion with the Risen Christ and the fellowship of the church are inseparable from one another. The church is the beginning of God's new creation: in the community of those who have been reconciled to Him by His grace in Christ, He alone is worshipped and served, loved and trusted; and so human fellowship is re-created, the sinful divisions of men are healed, and we are united in Christ. (Galatians 3:27-29; Colossians 3:9-11; Romans 10:12.) Here the great commands of Christ are fulfilled. (Mark 12:29-31.)

Here, however imperfectly, is shown forth to the world that true community for which all men are searching today; here is the colony of heaven upon earth, the sample and pattern of the Kingdom of God.

### **You Are The Body**

It is no wonder, then, that the New Testament uses pictures to describe the church which stress that the christian life is a common life, life in community. It is the New Israel, the new people of God, who are not divided by human nationalism, but are a holy nation of all men, ruled by Christ the King; as soon as Christ proclaims the nearness of God's Kingdom, He calls twelve men to be the nucleus of the new Israel. (Mark 1:14-20; I Peter 2:9-10; Galatians 6:15-16.) It is the vine of which Christ is the trunk, feeding all the branches with His common life. (John 15:1-11.) It is the flock of which Christ is the Good Shepherd, who has given His life for His sheep. It is a building, a spiritual house—not just a heap of individual stones, but a building of living stones all held in place by Christ, the original Living Stone, who is the chief corner stone, the key stone. (I Peter 2:4-6; Ephesians 2:19-22.) It is not comprised of solitary hermits, scattered in desert or cave, but it is the household of faith, of which Christ is Lord. (Galatians 6:10.) And, in the picture which is best known of all, it is the body of Christ. (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12:1-21, 26-31. It should be stressed that in Romans 12:9-21 and I Corinthians 13, St. Paul is speaking primarily of the common life in the Body of Christ.)

It is clear, then, that the church is not something we go to once a week; the church is what we *are!* "You are the body of Christ," said St. Paul. A limb or organ is nothing apart from the whole body; a branch is nothing apart from the vine; a brick is nothing apart from the building. The fellowship in Christ is not something we go to, nor is it made of bricks and mortar or even stained glass windows; it is what we *are*. No doubt the fact that the first christians had no special church buildings enabled them to realise more clearly than we do that the church is nothing but the community of Christ's people, living under their

Head and in His Spirit. Our gain in bricks has been our loss as the household of God. When we regain the awareness of *being* the church, we will understand that you cannot be the church on Sunday, and not be it for the rest of the week! Our being christians and our being the church are the same thing, and all the time.

### **Either for Other**

So great was the awareness among the early christians that the christian life is a common life, that for a time in Jerusalem they completely renounced any private ownership of goods and property. The possessions of one were for the welfare of all; the needs of one were the responsibility of all. (Acts 2:44-46; 4:32-35; see also I John 3:16-18.)

When the gospel spread throughout the Mediterranean area and new christian communities grew up, the sense of unity and common life in Christ did not diminish. A famine which distressed the church at Jerusalem was felt as the concern of all, and on his missionary travels St. Paul collected the first "inter church aid" for the relief of the saints at Jerusalem.

In the christian faith there is no division between spiritual and material—the Incarnation of Christ has put an end to all that. This material responsibility which the first christians showed as part of their common life was one aspect of their total concern for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. This total concern had another most important aspect which we may call their *pastoral responsibility* for each other. This was not avoided by trying to pass it all over to those whom we would call the ordained ministry—it was simply accepted by the whole church as another expression of "either for other".

The reason why the whole church took this pastoral responsibility for each other was because they realised the truth of St. Paul's statement, "We are members one of another." In our physical bodies, the health or illness of one organ or limb affects the whole body—if there is great pain in the leg, the brain cannot function clearly; if the eyes are blind, or the ears deaf, the whole body is gravely

restricted. So it is with the church. So closely is our christian life bound up with our common spiritual health or sickness, that the welfare of one is the concern of all, and the sickness of one infects the life of the whole Body.

Thus we find many passages, especially in the epistles, which stress our common pastoral concern for one another. When one sins, he is to be confronted with the fact, not in order that he should be condemned, but with forgiveness. (Matthew 18:15-20; Luke 17:1-4.) The purpose of the approach is that he may be restored (Galatians 5:25-6:2) and this happens when we bear one another's burdens, as we confess our sins to one another and pray for one another. (James 5:13-16; I John 5:13-17.) Disputes must not lead to vindictive litigation in secular law courts, but are to be settled by the wisdom and love of the church. (I Corinthians 6:1-8.) All actions which threaten to cause strife and division in the Body are forbidden; it is in truth and love that we keep the peace of Christ. (Ephesians 4:25-32.) By mutual concern we must strengthen and encourage one another. (Hebrews 10:23-25.) No better summary of this common life could be found than that in Ephesians 4:1-16, and Colossians 3:12-17.

### **One Lord, One Faith, One Body**

Unless the church is one, it can neither be holy, catholic, or apostolic. In the end, all the pastoral concerns mentioned above are to protect and foster the new life Christ has given us, a common life given by the one Spirit of the one Lord. We can state the whole situation briefly by saying, "Sin divides; Christ unites." So the unity of the church is not just a practical matter of organisation—better spacing of church buildings and placing of ministers, the removal of duplicate organisations, more economical use of money, and so on. The unity of the church belongs to the very heart of the gospel. That is why our Lord prayed, "that they all may be one." (John 17:11, 20-23.) That is why St. Paul writes with great distress to the church at Corinth when he hears of serious division amongst them. (I Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:1-9.) For disunity is the denial of Christ's power to heal

us from the division of sin and unite us in the peace of His salvation. How can we proclaim that Christ is the Prince of Peace if the only peace we have is the uneasy truce of denominationalism? This world which so desperately yearns for peace, from the domestic to the international level, will not be impressed by such a second rate imitation of the real thing. Even the sinful world seems to know that the Living God has more to offer than that.

Thus disunity not only cuts at the very heart of the gospel; in doing so it inevitably drains the power out of the church's mission, it blunts the sharp edge of the gospel. Unity and mission cannot be separated. Christ prayed "that they all may be one . . . so that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me."

### **The "Sent" Community**

We have come naturally to the point where we can see the centrality of mission to the life of the church. "The church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning," said Emil Brunner. Christ not only calls His church together; He calls it together in order that He may send it out. (Mark 3:13-14.)

Whatever virtues a church may have, it can never be truly apostolic unless it is missionary. It has been said that "God is a missionary God", that is, He is not a God who sits in heaven and does nothing, but a God who has come amongst us in Jesus Christ to bring us into the community of His salvation. We can only be His people as we share in the mission of Christ to the world. In His earthly ministry our Lord worked through a human body; now the Risen and Living Christ works through the Body which is His Church. Thus, the church does not *hold* missions from time to time, nor does it *have* missions in down town areas—the church *is* a mission, it is the sent community of Christ. (Matthew 28:18-20; John 20:19-23; I Peter 2:9; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.)

As the church *is* a mission, then we are wrong if we think that mission is something we pay specialists to do—e.g., overseas missionaries, home mission departments, visit-

ing evangelists such as Billy Graham, or the local minister. It is the *whole* church which is the mission, even though various special agents may carry out special aspects of that mission. But this means that lay people, ordinary church members (who are after all the vast majority of the church!) are the main agents of the mission of the church. Now when we consider the life of the lay people of the church, we see that it is not even necessary to urge them to go out into the world—that is where they are already! As the church we *live* in the world—in home and neighbourhood, in factory and office, in clubs and societies, in earning and in spending, in paying taxes and in voting, we are living right in the midst of the world. But for Christ's sake let us realise that we don't just *happen* to be there, like mushrooms in a field! We are *sent* there by Christ our Lord, who Himself is with us in the world, the Living Christ. We are not there just to *be* there, but to *be there as christians, as the church, as the mission of Christ.*

### The Living Body

The life of the Church of the Living Christ is naturally a life of movement; as Bishop Newbigin put it, "You can't have a right picture of the church unless it is a motion picture." Like the tide, it is constantly coming in and going out; like salt it is continually being gathered and scattered. In its great service of Sunday worship, the community is gathered; but it also gathers in smaller groups to pray, to wait for the living Word of God through the study of Scripture, to grow in faith and love, and to seek to understand the world in which the obedience of discipleship is lived out. Then it scatters in the world, there to be the modern apostles of Christ, the salt of the earth.

In this gathering and scattering movement of the church is seen the partnership of the ordained ministry and the great multitude of lay people. The minister is not an agent who the congregation pays to do its work of mission. Indeed, by virtue of his proper work he is in a particularly bad position to do this. For the minister through word and sacrament is the server of the gospel of Christ to the church; he is the

pastor, the shepherd to Christ's flock. Therefore his movements are largely among the church; the majority of his time is not spent "in the world", but in the church. The lay people, however, *live* in the world, set day by day right in the field of mission. Here the great issue is faced, "What does it mean to be a christian, to be the church in the world?" Only in the partnership of minister and lay people can an answer be found: the laymen know intimately their situations in the world; the minister must feed the church by Word and Sacrament to equip them to be the mission of Christ in that situation.

Here we also see that the minister depends upon the lay people to be himself a faithful servant of Christ. "We are members one of another." For only when the church is taking in deadly earnest Christ's command to be His mission in the world will it expect and cry out for the food of the gospel which is the minister's proper calling to give. Otherwise it will allow, or even expect him to become an irrelevant jack-of-all-trades—organiser, administrator, builder, financier, entertainer—everything except a true server of the gospel.

Here again we see the truth of Brunner's statement, "The church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning." Unless the church takes its "scattering" seriously, then its "gathering" will be largely irrelevant. Mission and fellowship are inseparable—unless it is a fellowship in mission it is not christian fellowship at all, but merely a secular club smeared over with religiosity. But when the church scatters to be the apostles of Christ, then its gathering is full of depth and relevance. For when the church is seeking to be the church *in the world*, then there will be an urgent need to gather together for prayer and to grow in the understanding of the faith and of the world, through the study of scripture, discussion, and the sharing of experience. This is what Wesley had in mind when he devised the Methodist "class meetings".

In the mission situation the fellowship of worship also comes alive: for when the church is aware of its repeated betrayal of Christ day by day, then the prayer of confession in Sunday worship is not a hollow formality, but a genuine cry to God for mercy; the assurance of God's forgiveness is not taken for granted, but is something you desperately need to hear; the reading and preaching of the Word of God is no longer boring and irrelevant, but the living Word given to a living church; the prayers of intercession are an expression both of the fellowship of the church in mission, and of its genuine concern for the world; the offering is an expression of a commitment not only of mind and feeling, but of the whole life; the creed is a confession of a living faith in which we live day by day; the hymns and prayers of praise and thanksgiving will be offered to the Living God in whose power the church daily lives and witnesses; and when we gather around the table of our Lord in the fellowship of mission, knowing that He is in our midst, we "feed on Him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving." Thus He equips us to be His apostles; and in the benediction, the "good saying", we receive once again the command of our Lord, "Go ye out into the world and make disciples of all nations", and the blessing of His promise, "I am with you always."

"Now to Him who by His power within us is able to do far more than ever we dare ask or imagine, to Him be glory in the church through Jesus Christ for ever and ever."

"Therefore my beloved brethren,  
                   be steadfast,  
                   immovable,  
 always abounding in the work of the Lord,  
                   knowing that in the Lord  
 your labour is not in vain."

AMEN.

## SUGGESTED GROUP WORK

1. Make a list of the characteristics of the church as pictured in Acts 2:41-47, and Acts 4:32-35. How does your local church compare with this?
2. Many groups in the church have been searching for forms of christian community life for the 20th century. See what you can discover about the Iona Community in Scotland, the Community of Taize in France, and the "house church" approach in Halton, England.
3. What new forms of community life can we find for our local churches? Compare Wesley's "class meetings" and the "house church" approach. How are they similar, and how are they different?
4. "Unless the church is one, it can neither be holy, catholic, or apostolic." Do you agree?
5. Do some research in the camp library on the "ecumenical movement". What is it?  
 What is the World Council of Churches? What are its activities?  
 What do you know of the Third General Assembly of the W.C.C. in New Delhi next November/December?
6. Discuss ways of local inter-church co-operation. How can we really get to know and understand the beliefs and practices of our fellow christians in other denominations?
7. What do you know of the work that has been done towards the union of the Congregational, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches? What can we do to help this movement?
8. Read the remarks of Bishop Newbigin, and Hans ReudiWeber's description of the "service of the lamps", in the report of the National Conference of Australian Churches, "We were Brought Together", pages 59-60, 88-90.
9. Do you find the rhythm of "gathering and scattering" a helpful picture in describing the life of the church?
10. Discuss in terms of your job or your studies, your place in the mission of the church.

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