

# Church of God, The Eternal

P. O. Box 775  
Eugene, Oregon 97440

Switzerland  
Case Postale 2 701  
CH 1002 Lausanne

Canada  
P. O. Box 76946, Station "S"  
Vancouver, B.C. V5R 5T3

October, 1985

Greetings Brethren:

Since my turn has come to write you a few lines, I would like to assure you of our affection and respect for all who endure and struggle to be the true servants of Jesus Christ.

As time goes by, we are witnessing more and more catastrophes and tragic circumstances which are happening in this world. We can be extremely thankful to our God, who protects us from many adversities. This should encourage us to better fulfill our spiritual responsibilities, to be more and more united as a group by the mind of Christ, and to love one another with a respectful and sincere love.

Whatever continent or country in which God allowed us to be born, whatever our language, our race, our status, our education, in Christ we are all brethren. Paul made the following statement, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Therefore, we must not allow anything in our lives to prevent us from achieving this fraternity and oneness, whether it is our education or our lifestyle, providing these aim at order, cleanliness, and discipline. Each country, each continent has different lifestyles, customs, and traditions; but, providing these things are not contrary to God's Way and do not alter His Way of Life, we must be extremely tolerant toward others and even be willing to go out of our way a little in order to bring joy and strengthen the bonds of friendship between brethren. Paul wrote to Philemon, "For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother" (Ph'm. 7). This is what everyone must come to do. To be able to give great joy and consolation to a brother rather than avoid him because -- in our sight and according to our own thoughts -- we consider his personal life less worthy than ours.

In this world, social status creates barriers and divisions between human beings and countries. People speak of the man in the street, the common man, or of great personages. And yet the Bible shows us that all were created in the image of God. Then human evaluations create these differences and divisions. Therefore we

cannot allow ourselves to be influenced by our own emotions and to use a double standard in showing the respect we owe to others. Christ said, ". . . Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me" (Matt. 25:45). Christ was fully aware that this problem would exist among God's people as it exists quite naturally in the world. But with the thoughts of Christ in us, such a frame of mind must be destroyed. James explained it quite well, saying, "Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low . . ." (Jas. 1:9-10). Christ speaks of the least; not on the spiritual plane (God alone is Judge on that plane), but what man considers as the least.

To illustrate this point, let me again tell you the story of the propped-up cherry tree whose trunk was beautifully slender and whose branches were loaded with blossoms. Very proud of its fresh finery, it said to its prop one day: "Friend, you are a rather wretched sight. What are you but nothing more than a stake, without flowers, fruit, and foliage? What did you learn in the woods for you to be so dumb at your age?" The prop answered: "In the silence of the thick woods, the forest, my teacher, taught me nothing, you see, except to have a noble spirit of sacrifice. I am no longer anything, I have had to give myself up to be only a strong support -- the support of your extreme weakness."

Yes indeed, if our habits, our education, our thoughts are not shored up by the true love of God, which consists in sacrificing the self to come to truly love one's brother and fellow man, then what seems so beautiful, so righteous to us -- our lifestyle, the origin of the family from which we are descended, our material circumstance -- is in reality extreme weakness.

Brethren, as the called of God, we must learn to see like God, think like God, and recognize the true values, those that neither moth nor rust corrupts. And nothing in the physical domain should alter the love and respect which we owe to any human being in whom Christ makes His abode. Jesus Christ said, ". . . all ye are brethren" (Matt. 23:8).

Once again, God in His great mercy enables us to gather together to celebrate a great Feast -- the Feast of Tabernacles. I say "great Feast" because it is the only Feast at which God's people have the opportunity to live together for several days. It is the Feast at which every person called has the opportunity to bring joy, consolation, and honor to his brothers and sisters for several days in a row. We read: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (I John 3:16). To avoid a brother in order to avoid listening to him, talking with him, helping him, encouraging him,

comforting him, sharing with him -- because we want to live in our shell, with our habits, with what we believe to be our superiority -- is a concept of extreme weakness which will lead the one who persists in such an attitude to spiritual suicide.

Paul had to write, "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations ["but not for disputes over opinions" -- RSV]" (Rom. 14:1). The Bible exhorts us to welcome others but not to judge them on the basis of our own opinions. "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand" (verse 4). "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living. But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (verses 7-10). Brethren, we see that our responsibility is not to demand from others what we would like to receive from them, but to set the example and fulfill acts of kindness, love, and honor in our relationship with them. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also" (I John 4:20-21). There is the basis on which we can evaluate and see where we stand concerning the affection which we show to God and His Son Jesus Christ. The Bible shows us that as we forgive, so shall we be forgiven, and that we cannot claim to love God if we do not love our brother. It is by growing in the development of these spiritual attributes that we shall achieve a perfect oneness.

In every facet of our life, Christ must be our example. He said: ". . . love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12). And He adds, "These things I command you, that ye love one another" (verse 17). These are words that every called man and woman knows by heart -- but just knowing is far from sufficient. Even the letter application is insufficient. It must come from the heart; it must be without hypocrisy, and peace must rule in our hearts and minds.

The one who deliberately avoids meeting a brother or a sister during this Feast misses the very purpose of what this Feast represents. Again, being present is far from being sufficient. We must also show God our thankfulness by living what we know. Brethren, we have all that we need to be successful. It is up to every one of us to live it and make this Feast a treasure which none will be able to take away from us. No one can point his finger at somebody else

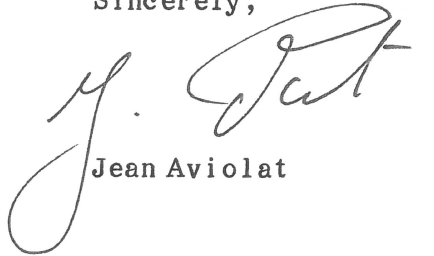
because the other person has not been able to overcome, crush the self, and live what he knows.

To live a foretaste of God's Kingdom is good, but to be able to enter into it someday is even better. Such an assurance is given to us if we achieve this oneness. Christ said the following prayer for us, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (John 17:21-23). It is up to us, brethren, to show by our actions, attitude, and behavior to those who observe us, that God loves us and is making us into the greatest benefactors of humanity. We shall prove it to them by loving one another as Christ has loved us.

Those of you who are isolated or ill, maintain your courage and confidence. Be filled with the hope of the promises which are given to you. God keeps His word. For the rest of you, the success of this Feast, the blessings which stem therefrom, and your satisfaction will all depend on the application of what you know.

To all you brethren, our most affectionate and respectful feelings.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'J. Aviolat', written in dark ink. The signature is fluid and somewhat stylized, with a large initial 'J' and a long, sweeping underline.

Jean Aviolat