

"Then I shall Return"

Interview with Gerrit Sepers

"Christ im Dialog" has visited the brethren Willy and Gerrit Sepers two and one-half years after [Gerrit's] resignation from his office as an apostle in the Netherlands. We talked with him about his assessment of the situation in which the New Apostolic Church is today.

CiD: It has been two years now since you have given your last interview with naktuell.de. At this time your decision not to be an apostle any more was very fresh yet. In the meantime two years have passed. Which are your feelings now after some time has passed?

Gerrit Sepers: I think that we have put an increasingly longer distance between ourselves and the NAK. This is definitely the case.

CiD: Are you still a member of the NAK?

Gerrit Sepers: Yes, officially we are still members but we hardly visit this church any more. Only when there is a celebration, when relatives celebrate a Baptism or a sealing and we are invited, then we attend. The last time was at the begin of April in gent where a cousin was sealed. When my wife visits her mother in the north of the country she goes with her to the service. But otherwise we actually don't go any more. Usually we go to the Dominicus congregation in Amsterdam which is an (ecumenical, the editor) basis congregation. We usually go there every Sunday. We have seen several congregations from the inside in the meantime but we have found the best place for ourselves in the Dominicus congregation.



As far as the New Apostolic Church is concerned: I visit several NAK web pages and am following the discussions; I cannot always agree with the content (verbatim: follow their content). I understand very well that it is sometimes necessary to criticize and needs a place to vent feelings and thoughts but many things ... I have to say that I experience CiD as the most constructive web site.

CiD: Thank you!

We have taken a close look behind the scenes

Gerrit Sepers: We do not want to get too deep into this church any more because it has become obvious that the church leadership often talks about changes but - except for cosmetic changes - does not do anything. This system cannot be changed so easily because it is intentional that those within the system keep each other captive. In my personal opinion it is impossible without help from the outside. We have basically detached ourselves from it in our thoughts.

CiD: How can you arrange yourself with your active time in the NAK? After all, both of you have devoted much time to the church. When we hear you it sounds as if one can simply make a cut?

Gerrit Sepers: At the bottom of things it is simply that we have taken a deep look behind the



scenes. It has been a long process which started in the mid 80s when I began to discover what is actually going on here.

We both come from old new apostolic families; our parents and grandparents have also been very active in their congregations. My wife's family was already not as fanatic as other families. My father was also very liberal and has always said: "Jesus is in the center. It is He whom you have to follow till the end."

CiD: So you have been raised Christ-centered from early on?

Gerrit Sepers: Yes, exactly. Jesus is and remains the center. No chief apostle can bring you to the goal ...

It was the same with my wife's parents. When I then discovered - I was a young district elder at the time when the waves were going high over the legal fight between apostle Rockenfelder jun. and the church leadership - I have for the first time noticed the whole scope of this split thinking and the mingling of enterprises with the church. There was for instance a former district elder in whose enterprise many brethren from the NAK worked. I had to hear from several who were affected that this elder gave brothers their walking papers either in his office or he threw them out in the sacristy. I have experienced how people have been spiritually murdered. And what did the church leadership do against it? Much too little! These people have just been left lying at the side of the road. And that has troubled me very, very deeply, I must say.

And then at one time I had to think: if we wanted to keep our place in this church, then we have to make liberation and redemption more our goal again. One has to also establish ties outside the church, assume social responsibility, and sit down [and talk] with other denominations. To this end it is paramount to firstly talk to the other apostolic denominations, in the first place to clarify our own history. (Chief apostle Fehr has later agreed to that. There have been very nice talks over the years).

We have done this in our district. This was still in the time of chief apostle Urwyler. We have taken the responsibility ourselves. I was at that time working in Malta and established a friendship with a family there. There I experienced how Roman-Catholic Christians live in a typical medieval situation. Then the thought occurred to us that we could go to Libya (laughs). Let us learn Turkish and Arabian because there are so many Turks in Holland. Around the middle of the 80s we got into contact with an Imam; we noticed that there were many young Muslims who had a hard time with the western culture. He sought the exchange with believing Christians in the New Apostolic Church and perceived it as a chance to encourage the Muslims again in their efforts for integration. This was unfortunately not continued after I assumed other responsibilities. But we wanted to start something social outside the church. The basis did not really support it but there have been many deliberations and some sisters and brothers who had a broader scope of thinking welcomed it very much. There were for instance some volunteers who asked: Can we also help those who are not new apostolic? Oh my dear, what a question! Of course! It is even our obligation! At that time I underwent some profound changes.

CiD: Was this the time when you began to work in the project groups?

Gerrit Sepers: Yes; when I worked with many brothers in these work groups also outside the Netherlands, I discovered things where I thought "My Heavens! This cannot be true!" I have talked about it with others, for instance with Armin Brinkmann, whom I personally know very well. We have worked together in the project group "Children and Youth". We had unending quarrels (laughs) but always fair. He was also always outspoken. We remained friends and call each other off and on. But he has always been ark-conservative. In the meantime he realizes more and more that some things have to change. And now he is in a position where it is not so easy to accomplish it.

And so it went on and on. I have read almost all books by Eugen Drewermann and Bonhoeffer, have developed further. But I have always felt that I cannot say all that what I think. I was able to talk about certain things with district apostle Pos. He was somewhat accessible in that respect and knew how I thought. A year ago I had the longing to speak with, to speak with him very openly.

Also about the past so that we would not just pass each other when we meet and that we can speak with each other in an open and fair way. This was important for me and it was somewhat successful.

CiD: So you met him?

Gerrit Sepers: Yes. On neutral ground (laughs). And of course he mentioned 1998 ...

CiD: ... the year when district apostle de Brujin became his successor ...

Gerrit Sepers: ... I have been asked years before that if it would be possible that I take up my profession as an M.D. again, but things only became clearer from 1998 on.

CiD: Was this connected to your interview with the youth magazine "Het Jeugdmagazine"?

Gerrit Sepers: Yes, I think that the interview was one reason why district apostle Pos was concerned whether I would remain a faithful follower of the the chief apostle.

I myself did not see it that way, I did not want to separate myself or start my own thing. This has not at all been my concern but for him the point had come where he said: "Now it is no longer possible". And then he also suggested that I check into the possibility to work as an M.D. again.

Well, as things were, I was willing to work as an apostle for a transition period and at the same time work on my return to my profession. Chief apostle Fehr made one more attempt after the change in 1998 and said to me: "I would rather that you stay, Gerrit, and that we find a solution". But I did not want that any more. No.

CiD: What do you think, how could this change of thinking have come about?

Gerrit Sepers: Well, I think of course that the reason was on one hand that I would still be available for the church and on the other hand to remedy past mistakes. And finally, so that the church could say 'we have wanted the best for Gerrit Sepers, maybe to tie me in and gag me. It was no question for me that I would stay: "No, I shall no longer do this. It is over now". And in early 1999 he accepted it.

I went to Antwerpen and became a student again. It is very difficult in Holland, also because of the European laws, to work again as a general practitioner. One has to work for three years with the university. This is what I did.

CiD: Does this mean that you also left your home?

Gerrit Sepers: Yes, I lived two and one-half years in Antwerpen and was only at home on the weekends.

CiD: Did you still have a ministry during that time?

Gerrit Sepers: Yes, during the week I studied, on Sunday I served at the altar. It has not been an easy time for me or my family. But when I returned I quickly found a practice because we have a lack of doctors.

Our personal development continued during this time and at one time the point came where we wanted to get things settled. We attended service in a neighbor congregation across the border which has a very loving rector. I had read a sentence in the Word of Life which I had known from the past but had never read it again until this very moment. It read there: "He who leaves the ship is lost". I thought, of course this ship is the NAK. But that a rector could say this without blinking an eye, that was for me ... And when I looked around in the congregation and did not see one who showed a reaction, I had to say: "This is it!"

Exclusivity is a very big problem

Then I wrote a letter, about twenty pages, in which I expressed very clearly that exclusivity in the church is for me a very big problem.

You know, we had talked for years already with other apostolic congregations. I found out that the

Holy Sealing happens already during Baptism in these congregations: in the apostolic congregation of Kuhlen (the greatest schism from the NAK, chief apostle helper Kuhlen had been excommunicated by chief apostle Bischoff, the editor) and also in the congregation of Schwartz which still exists in the Netherlands (Hersteld Apostolische Zending Kerk, Tribe Juda, Schwartz was one of the co-founders of the NAK, the editor).

And then I read a lot together with a historian friend and discovered that this has always been the belief of the Catholic-Apostolic Congregations (all apostolic denominations can be traced to the Catholic-Apostolic Congregations, the editor). The NAK has changed this later to the effect that only an apostle can seal and that the Holy Spirit is only conveyed at the Holy Sealing.

CiD: Apostle Schwartz calls it a "confirmative sealing" instead of a sealing.

Gerrit Sepers: Yes. This is also what the doctrine of the "reestablished" sending church (can also be traced to apostle Schwartz, the editor) says, that the sealing is only confirmation for the elected that they will partake in the commission in the Thousand years of Peace. But the Holy Spirit is already conveyed at the time of Baptism. Period.

This has always been my approach and I call my conversation partners in the apostolic congregations my brothers and apostles. And the same applies to other churches.

How come someone can have the boldness or the right to say that other churches do not have the Holy Spirit? We are allowed to have our truth, can hold it for true that apostles perform it like that, but we cannot deny it God that the Holy Spirit has also other ways to come to men and to resurrect them or whatever one wants to call it. I have also written this in my letter.

My walk to the mailbox was a symbolic action for me. I thought: O.K., now it is over. And it was indeed like that.

CiD: Have you been able to express your position about exclusivity in the work groups in which you participated? Was an apostle allowed to publicly say that this was his opinion?

Gerrit Sepers: I have stated this in the project group "Children and Youth" and in the group "Current Issues".

CiD: Does this mean one could state it although it is not to be seen in the results?

Gerrit Sepers: Of course they say "I want to know how you think". I could say it in these groups. Richard Fehr has also known my standpoint.

CiD: Is there a real discussion in these groups or is the outcome already determined?

Gerrit Sepers: It was possible in both work groups to really discuss things. This was an enrichment. What the outcome eventually was is another problem (laughs). There are some papers which have disappeared deep in some drawer because the coordination group, the KG, came to another conclusion (a control panel which supervises the work of all work groups and project groups on the NAKI level, the editor). In such cases the proposals have to be adjusted. One time, when I was still responsible for the children and youth work, they did not accept what we had produced. This went too far.

CiD: A couple of months before chief apostle Fehr retired, various project groups very quickly presented their results which have also been enacted. One could somehow have the feeling that the results had been knitted with hot needles in this last phase. Was it becoming clear before that time when you were still active in several project groups that the bottom line would be that the results will be bent into the desired shape, that one would run against walls, or something similar?

Gerrit Sepers: Yes. As a member of the group "Youth" in which also Michael Ehrich was, I said "Not with me". This group produced only a skeleton. The content can be classified as narrowed new apostolic thinking.

CiD: Then more talks took place ...

Gerrit Sepers: Yes, several talks with district apostles Studer and Wend and a last one on October 12, 2004.

CiD: Would you say that the intention was to keep you, or was it only pro forma?

Gerrit Sepers: No, because this would have not been so easy. My opinions differed widely from district apostle de Brujin's which was a difficult subject for my conversation partners. Nevertheless I wanted that we work together well and jointly address other problems. I had already said earlier: "I will gladly work together with you but then all have to help along, all four, the district apostle, the two bishops, and I". The two district apostles Studer and Wend have initially worked in this direction. But in the end my own district apostle did not want it.

And so the last talk took place on October 12, 2004. And then there was of course this letter about exclusivity and the two district apostles asked: "We do not accept this. Do you stay by your position?" I remained firm and they saw only three solutions: "Either you retire, or we remove you from your office, or you leave voluntarily."

CiD: These are the same solutions every time.

Gerrit Sepers: Well, I did not want to retire yet because I was too young. To be removed from the ministry in such a situation was also out of the question. When there are conflicts, it is necessary to first try and solve them. Before such an attempt was made I did not want to resign. After the failure it was a matter of honor to return my ministry.

I have then received an invitation yet to speak with Richard Fehr and Armin Studer who is my friend since the work group "Children and Youth". I had the wish that he should relieve me from my ministry because I was afraid that it would be a catastrophe if this would be handled in Holland alone. Both agreed. We drafted a letter together and this was when the wording was chosen that Gerrit Sepers resigned because of personal reasons.

CiD: This is how we could read it later in the Unsere Familie.

Gerrit Sepers: But the letter which was read when I was retired eventually expressed my thoughts more or less. This has certainly not been easy for the church leadership. I had written that one is a prisoner of the system if one cannot write the truth. And I understand that there are situations where one can hardly act differently. But at some time the story had to come to a good end. This was on Nov. 30. I was retired on December 1st 2004. For the first time since WW II our church has really tried to find a mutually acceptable solution. Yes, this is how it is. I am very thankful to Richard Fehr and the two district apostles for that.

Nobody dares to change anything

CiD: Let's assume you had become the district apostle in the Netherlands and this thing had not happened: would you have seen a possibility to work for a change of course in the NAKI? Would NAKI stand there differently today?

Gerrit Sepers: Yes. But I also believe that when I take everything in consideration it is infinitely difficult. And I doubt that NAKI would stand there differently today.

CiD: You would probably stand pretty alone today ...

Gerrit Sepers: Yes.

CiD: Also among the district apostles?

Gerrit Sepers: Yes. Yes, that is true. It is infinitely difficult for these men to express this publicly what they only say secretly, say at home.

CiD: Does the church exert financial pressure in such situations? The time while someone serves as an apostle is also relevant for his retirement pay. Can apostles be under pressure because of that?

Gerrit Sepers: The chief apostle has seen this very well. When he started it was not common to even organize a pension. This was also the reason why district apostles have been active for so long in the past. The church would have had to pay them a pension for a much longer time.

But anyhow, when you make people dependent on a system you can also use them like a puppet-on-a-string. However, some apostles are not dependent on the church and they think like the others.

CiD: Does this mean there is a scissor in the heads?

Gerrit Sepers: Yes.

CiD: But that means also that even when brethren who would think more ecumenical, who think in more general Christian terms formed the majority of the members or would reach a critical mass - even then the leadership would not change? Even if we had not only one but many Blankenese, the leadership situation would remain unchanged?

Gerrit Sepers: Yes, I think so. Of course there not many congregations like Blankenese. Blankenese is not the average congregation. It is not Klein-Kleckersdorf-Ost (the proverbial small congregation) as district apostle Brinkmann always likes to say.

CiD: Is it Leber's 'secret mission' to consolidate, meaning to finish the open construction sites or to close them, and in any case not to open any new ones?

Gerrit Sepers: This is also a part of his character.

CiD: How would you describe him? On the surface he makes a somewhat undecided or ambivalent impression.

Gerrit Sepers: Yes, you could say ambivalent.

CiD: The 'Botschaft' also shows the chief apostle's ambivalence. One time he says in an interview (idea spektrum No. 25/2006, the editor) that it is no longer a dogma, and later he maintains about the same subject: It is a Godly message. What do you think how it is in the heads of the church leadership, is there still the conviction: This was a Godly message? Or is it a far too hot subject to touch it?

Gerrit Sepers: Yes, one is bound so firmly by what the patriarchs have told us in the past. Nobody dares to change anything here. They admit other things at the fringes like plagiarism etc. But I think if they question the Botschaft it would also have financial consequences. In my opinion - if at all - it will only happen in 150 years when we are all dead. There are several voices who say that this story was a major mistake. But I think that has to sink in at a higher level. Because this belongs to the thinking of the system.

People are simply being split and their consciences influenced. An one is obedient to the religious system out of fear what the future of one's soul will be.

What happens after death? This is it and it works fabulously. It is terrible if this is being stressed too much. It became very clear under Rockenfelder and Friedrich Bischoff. This is why the Botschaft had such an effect in Europe and predominantly in Germany. They lived with the trauma of a lost war there. The Botschaft was really a change for them!

CiD: One could also surmise that it would be easier for the chief apostle if he as the son-in-law of Friedrich Bischoff would say: The Botschaft has never been true! This would have a higher credibility because he comes from this family?

Gerrit Sepers: Yes. Yes.

CiD: But he is no Luther, he is not going to do that?

Gerrit Sepers: No.

CiD: Let us assume that it would not happen in 100 years but the church would address the Botschaft subject now. Would this cause an outcry in the church? Would the conservative wing resist?

Gerrit Sepers: I think the older ones would be pretty disappointed. But this has also to do with ambivalence. In the end it would be: we will do what the chief apostle says.

CiD: So he has this much authority?

Gerrit Sepers: I believe so. And it does not play a big role for the younger generation any more. They don't know it or they don't believe it. In their eyes the chief apostle would greatly gain in reputation if he had the courage to openly tell the truth.

CiD: But then there are also these statements: Leber has said this or that but it does not hold anyway. For instance this thing with Uster, his "I do not know".

Gerrit Sepers: Yes, this is how he worded it but the official position is different.

CiD: He does not know which group of people belongs to the bride of Christ, this is left to God's sovereignty.

Gerrit Sepers: But people are far from noticing that. Not in the least. There are only a few who recognize this as a problem. Most think this does not interest me in the least.

One example: in "Questions and Answers" no. 179 we read: "What shows us that the chief apostle ministry is established based on Godly order?" The answer is: "It is Jesus' will that His church is guided by a chief apostle to whom all apostles and believers look up (Matth. 16,18). From the Bible citations in questions 177 and 178 we deduct that apostle Peter had an elevated position among the apostles. From this the chief apostle ministry in the new apostolic church assumes its special position." My Heavens! This is a mere assumption!

CiD: Yes, the old discussion about Peter as a chief apostle. Is this a new apostolic invention?

Gerrit Sepers: One cannot assert this if they want more publicity or more cooperation with other Christians. This cannot really be true. These people can take a lot of liberties.

There are some who have a lot of influence

CiD: You have said the naktuell interview something to the effect that your impression is that Richard Fehr wanted [the church] to become more open.

Gerrit Sepers: Yes, this is true.

CiD: And then there must have at one time come the moment when the church leadership or the coordination group decided: we will not proceed on this way to an open church. We damage too much in the process, too much is starting to move, we do not have it under control any more. We will stake out the claim now and make it narrower again.

Gerrit Sepers: Yes, but not only the coordination group. There are some pulling the strings who have a lot of influence.

CiD: Should Leber try as a chief apostle to bring them all together? In the sense that he does not totally offend the ecumenical brethren and also keeps the conservative forces in line? Does he have to try to perform this split?

Gerrit Sepers: It was like that with every chief apostle. It was the same with Richard Fehr. And Fehr is actually a very dear person. And he has also rather soft-spoken and not so consequent in what he did. The reason were the financially strong district churches which determine what happens.

CiD: So the chief apostle had to do what the well-to-do district churches wanted with respect to this opening of the church?

Gerrit Sepers: Yes, indeed. One was afraid of a schism between the Big Ocean, between America and Europe.

CiD: There have also been a couple of district apostles where one had the impression that

they did not support one hundred per cent the course which Richard Fehr wanted.

Gerrit Sepers: Yes. Some did not at all support his course.

CiD: But at the same time the impression was given that there was this wonderful apostle unity?

Gerrit Sepers (laughs): I have experienced this personally at one time. (Turns to his wife Willy) I can tell that, or? (Willy smiles and nods) When you see the pictures from the apostle meetings in the Unsere Familie then you see a microphone on the table in front of each apostle. Everyone who sees the pictures thinks an apostles meeting follows democratic rules. But this is not the case. Truly not.



CiD: There is no discussion?

Gerrit Sepers: No, not at all. In a meeting with 300 people. No. It is not even allowed to say something. The microphones are only there for P.R. reasons.

CiD: Are they being told, or is this common knowledge?

Gerrit Sepers: You know that.

That one time in Johannesburg there were five or six subjects to vote for. One vote for six different subjects. One vote was about the election of the chief apostle, another a change in the statutes, according to which only the district apostles should be eligible to cast their votes who were supposed to first ask their apostles about their opinion. Of course, only that what the district apostle would represent in the vote would get considered. And I did not agree to that. Apostles would then be only puppets-on-a-string.

Every one had to stand up to cast their vote and brothers scurried through the aisles to see if every one was standing. There were 341 apostles present and only one said "No". It was I. The bewilderment was great.

They had deep compassion with my district apostle. They told me: "You have voted against the chief apostle." "No, I did not" I responded. "But when one has the right to vote, one must have the option to say "No", otherwise we don't even have to go to the ballot." I had to answer whether I wanted to vote against the chief apostle. My answer was: "No, this is not what I do. But I must have the liberty to say 'no' to one of the other subjects."

CiD: Did the chief apostle ask you this question?

Gerrit Sepers: I don't remember. I was a little bit shaken then.

CiD: Can you tell us a little bit about the balance of powers or the blocks in the district apostles meeting?

Gerrit Sepers: Yes, of course things have changed somewhat. The important blocks of power are USA and Canada; one hes to say, I guess, that it has become somewhat less.

CiD: Canada does not have that many members. North America has [only, GG001] about 50,000 members but is a rich [district] church?

Gerrit Sepers: Yes, they are extremely rich. South Germany is another important block of power, it is very important. It was more clearly visible under district apostle Saur than it is now with Ehrich. But Saur is still present in the background (laughs). Yes, it is like that. France is not important, Holland neither, Switzerland is no longer as important as it used to be, NRW (North-Rhine Westfalia) was very rich at one time but not that much any more. The travel expenses for missionary work could be paid from the interest of the capital alone. This is a huge amount.

CiD: Do we have to picture that when Saur said: We don't concur, then it did not happen?

Gerrit Sepers: This did not happen under the eye of the public, the most important decisions did not happen in the meetings but in the background.

CiD: So, whatever the other district apostles thought, the decision was already made?

Gerrit Sepers: Yes, of course! After all, the church is set up as an international organization and well organized.

CiD: Then it is Fehr's merit that he has installed another structure?

Gerrit Sepers: Yes, true. But Urwyler wanted to go much further. Urwyler was much more aware of the fact that the vertical transcendence has to decrease and the horizontal transcendence has to become more active.

CiD: Can you explain what this means?

Gerrit Sepers: It means that not everything has to come from above through the hierarchical structures to the brethren but that instead the involvement of the basis is very important, the horizontal transcendence of spirituality.

Therefore he wanted to separate the spiritual functions and the management. He wanted that men with a commission should foster their gifts (qualities). At one time he found a brother without a ministry for the church administration in Zuerich who was now the leading manager. And the district apostles were supposed to also find [capable] men in their districts who would take care of financial and economic matters, and they should keep out of these matters. But the whole thing was of course stuck, it was actually impossible, because a district apostle does not let himself be told by priest X what he should do in his district.

And why does this not work? Because the unity of the church is purely formal, each district church is a separate legal entity. Because they are not financially dependent on Zuerich each district apostle can do what he wants. And it has also to do with the statutes. And therefore I think that real discussions at this level are practically impossible.

CiD: How do we have to picture this when a theological subject is discussed in the district apostles meeting? Are those district apostles who have a smaller district already inclined from the beginning not to join into the discussion?

Gerrit Sepers: Yes, also because it is above their head. There are some district apostles who do not understand a thing when it comes to certain theological subjects. I am very sure about that. I could name a few but I'd rather not do this now. In the past when we still had district apostle Pos there were lively discussions I must say. The same with Engelauf. I have often sat together with them. These two men were, notwithstanding other qualities, charismatic. Pos and Engelauf went to an altar when they saw it and talked and could not stop (laughs). They also could tell nice stories; not everybody can do that.

When a congregation does not obey any more, it has to be sacrificed

CiD: Why can the NAK not afford to have a pilot congregation like Blankenese?

Gerrit Sepers: Because the vertical transcendence is missing. Spirituality from above to the lower levels, where the communication with the basis is poorly handled, where the true inner spirituality cannot grow, because church laws and the system are considered holy and cannot be discussed. It is a church where the highest leaders have all the power, whose management is well organized, but which has too little theological and psychological substance. When a system perceives itself as necessary for salvation then it cannot accept any basis in which horizontal transcendence has a larger influence. And in which spirituality can grow inward. Or which gives room to Christian mystic. Where man and woman are equal. Where children help to hand out Holy Communion, etc.

The calls from Fehr and Urwyler for more self-responsibility and more depth of faith did not have an effect on the every day practice of the NAK. Because if someone wants to have more depth then he has to open himself to new opinions and cannot simply hold on to the old tradition and the theological viewpoint in the Questions and Answers. This is very small and thin. If it turns out that the brethren at the basis know many things better than the leadership and a congregations develops independently and flourishes, then unendingly much envy develops. And the leadership cannot accept that a congregation which is legally dependent becomes too independent. If they do

not follow the apostle ministry any more in blind obedience then they have to be sacrificed. As an example for the other congregations nearby and also in all of Germany because they are absolutely aware that this would spread otherwise.

CiD: According to Mao's motto: punish one and educate hundreds.

Gerrit Sepers: Yes, I think so.

CiD: Does it not matter to the church when brethren simply leave?

Gerrit Sepers: The system comes first. In positions one through ten. That is why people are sacrificed. I know examples. Terrible examples. Experienced myself and watched from close by. Thanks be to God that there have always been others who cared for these souls and have helped them in the background.

CiD: Can you give us an example?

Gerrit Sepers: The British apostle Erry who went to India is a good example. But there are more.

CiD: Was the church afraid of similar developments in these cases, have they been dangerous for the system?

Gerrit Sepers: Yes, Kuhlén was a similar example. There is also a retired rector who writes in the web, he is also ostracized.

CiD: Some new apostolics come now and say, also to the church leadership: You are no longer strong. You are no longer a monolithic block. You are afraid and you cause fear. You indiscriminately beat everything in sight. Is this only an assumption or could this be true? Is the church leadership weak, the basis strong?

Gerrit Sepers: I am not sure whether the basis is so strong, I have not been across the border for many years. There are educated people here and there who are becoming more active but the basis in general is only strong because of their sense of community. Because of their social contacts but not theologically or religiously.

Whether the leadership is weak? I think that the leadership is not as robust as they used to be but instead they are more intelligent and support their power with better words. This is my opinion, yes.

CiD: Would you say that the capability for dialogue and conflicts has increased, decreased or remained the same under chief apostle Leber?

Gerrit Sepers: I cannot judge this so well. But it was not so well established under chief apostle Fehr. Chief apostle Urwyler was much better in solving conflicts. He was a great man. It is too bad that he fell ill so early.

They want the ACK membership as a pacifier for the church public

CiD: There are many rectors who do not know how to assess the subject "Uster". Was it a closure or an opening? One can interpret it both ways.

Gerrit Sepers: It is not an opening for me. I have also been invited but I would have only been able to come to Amersfoort (NL). But I did not get the permission to go there. I do not experience what I have read so far as an opening. No ...

If the NAK had fully and without reservations recognised the Baptism with water in other denominations then it would have had far-reaching consequences. According to the common understanding the Holy Spirit is already given into a soul or awakened through the act of Baptism. Holy Baptism involves the Holy Spirit for other Christian denominations! The anointment with oil serves that purpose.

Conclusion: one does not need the Holy Sealing from an apostle. This is my point of view.

CiD: Would it not have been a more consequent step to re-interpret the sealing as a confirmation of the immanent Holy Spirit?

Gerrit Sepers: It was on Curacao where we met a man who was originally from Holland. He had been living there since 1950, belonged to an apostolic congregation, to a schism, and he told us that he had been sealed, that he had a letter to prove it and that he would not let himself be sealed again. I have supported that. This means that I have to answer "yes" to your question.

CiD: When you read in the paper or hear from a district apostle "We want to be a member in the ACK" - what are your feelings?

Gerrit Sepers: Wend and Brinkmann want that, alright. I can believe that Wend wants to open the church some more, with Brinkmann still somewhat. Volker Kuehnle has also been in contact with the ACK, he would also agree.

CiD: Why do they desire that?

Gerrit Sepers: I think they want to send a message to the church members (people) "Look here, we participate in ecumenism!"

CiD: Is it because they want to placate the other members in Christianity?

Gerrit Sepers: Yes, this is it.

CiD: When you see it that way and then think of all the brethren who are still in their church and carry many hopes, who say: I do not really want to leave my church! You can only advise them: Begin to look for something new ...

Gerrit Sepers: Is it allowed - ethically, morally - to do that? Yes, can we say that? Is there a great desire to establish something new? Why do I ask this? There are quite a few Christian congregations. The plurality has already been there in the begin. For instance there is the question why has Paul never been in Alexandria? Why not? Because there was a gnostic Christian congregation. A visit there would have been dangerous for him. What was Paul's role anyhow? And did Jesus want to establish a church? No. He was a full-blooded Jew, he did not at all want that. These facts are all there. Do we have to wish for something new? Don't we as human beings have to say when I leave this church I am going back to the church of my ancestors? Or will I look for something which suits me, maybe solo-religious in this time? Or maybe at the basis where there is more of this horizontal transcendence, with me and together with the others. Do I have a right to say one should leave this church? That is difficult to say.

CiD: Picture the following: members under a real pressure, with a spiritual hunger, speak with their district apostle in their need. And he answers: Listen, I cannot watch you suffer, you are falling to pieces if you go on like this. Why don't you go to the Apostolische Gemeinschaft (VAG, GG001) instead? In your current situation they are a much better fit for you than our church. How does this recommendation impress you?

Gerrit Sepers: Has this actually happened?

CiD: Let me explain this some more. The actual wording was "One who cannot agree to the understanding of the Holy Communion in the New Apostolic Church should rather go to the AG."

Gerrit Sepers: I cannot believe this.

CiD: Here are two people who have heard it with their own ears. How does this impress you?

Gerrit Sepers: It is well-intentioned, yes, that's it.

CiD: Yes. But even if it is well-intentioned, can this be a model for a church into which one has been born? Is it a model for a Christian who says I have no place here any more, I have no room any more, you do not have a niche for me any more, it is best that I really leave. Or is it better to say: I am fighting within this community for more Christendom? What would be the approach?

Gerrit Sepers: We have experienced it ourselves. Very clearly. Yes. Yes - there was no room for us any more.

The NAK will be a small fundamentalistic movement in 2020

CiD: You have once said, it has been a while ago, that the members will step by step leave this church and that it will rather happen silently. Do you still see it that way today?

Gerrit Sepers: Yes, and it will happen. (Sheepish silence) At least here in Holland, definitely.

Willy Sepers: Yes, certainly, there are only very few in my parent's congregation, and especially not many youth.

CiD: Where do you see the NAK then in 2020?

As a minor fundamentalistic movement.

CiD: The church has about 60 congregations in the Hamburg area. Would this mean that there would be maybe 15 left?

Gerrit Sepers: Yes, possibly. When people are getting damaged psychically, when they cannot develop any further but want to then there is no holding them back today - maybe still within the system - but actually our society does not have such rigid ties any more. The pillars are gone, one can simply leave. And those who consider this for themselves will just do that. They will silently leave.

And one more thing. Five years ago we had 100 confirmands in Holland. Now we had 48. I don't know if the pace is as fast in Germany.

CiD: The demographic development is one reason. There are not as many children born as brethren pass away. It is a rare event when guests are adopted, after all, the work in the vineyard has ceased. When you come into a large congregation like Hamburg-Eppendorf on a Wednesday evening then there are 40 brethren in a humongous church.

Gerrit Sepers (surprised): 40?! When I was there, the church was full.

CiD: They are more on Sunday mornings but in extreme cases there may be only 40 on a Wednesday evening ...

Gerrit Sepers (still totally surprised) 40 ...!

CiD: And of these are two thirds the ministers with their wives. A very small choir in this huge church.

Gerrit Sepers: Yes but there are still differences. Hamburg is a completely different district than Bremen. Naturally, from the education, etc. And that is also different in NRW and southern Germany. Also in France and Switzerland. The major number of members is in the Third World and the NAKI in Europe will become smaller and smaller if it continues like that. This is not the same everywhere in this world. Not in Australia and not in Canada / USA. Although they also have their problems from what I hear and read.

CiD: But this means that the financial foundation of the church is crumbling? Those who offer sit in Europe.

Gerrit Sepers: Yes, it is very difficult.

They must have the courage to organise themselves

CiD: What should those brethren in the church do who are striving for reformation?

Gerrit Sepers: I think, after all, if they want reforms, they must strengthen themselves and begin the confrontation in a positive way.

CiD: Are you now talking about an organisation at the basis?

Gerrit Sepers: Yes, they have to organise themselves. Yes, they must have the courage to organise themselves. But I cannot demand that.

CiD: Would the church leadership go along with that? Could they accept such a "counter-power"?

Gerrit Sepers: Well, I think that the church leadership will not so easily accept it, not at all. (Willy Sepers laughs). I believe that when such a reform movement develops, the church will more and more go into the fundamentalistic corner.

CiD: This means the two are mutually dependent. The poles (two positions) are hardening.

Gerrit Sepers: Yes. - Yes.

CiD: But when those reform-oriented brethren would just leave, would the same effect be observed?

Gerrit Sepers: Everything would remain as it is.

CiD: What could one do?

I have asked myself, what would be if there a reform movement would form in the NAK. I have thought: then I would return. Yes, I would participate. Not as a leader, but I would help along. Write, offer my thoughts.

CiD: Last question: Imagine Jesus would come on a Wednesday evening into a run-of-the-mill NAK congregation. What would He say?

Gerrit Sepers: I think He would be very surprised and terrified. Maybe He would say: I have told you something in my Sermon in the Mount. What do I find here from this sermon?

CiD: Christ im Dialog says 'Thank you' that you have been available to answer our questions.

The interviewers were Esther Vietz, Thomas Andrich and Frank Vietz.

Interview with Gerrit Sepers on

http://www.christ-im-dialog.de/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=209&Itemid=30

Published 2007-05-08. Translation by GerGuest001 with permission and on request from CiD.