

THE PATH OF THE CHURCH TOWARD FULNESS

Jorge Himitian

It is my responsibility to introduce the principal theme that has been proposed for this encounter. My plan is to present the subject, suggest some questions and motivate all of us to reflect upon it. Among the participants in this assembly there is a rich deposit of God's light and grace. All who are here can testify that in our years of ministry, in spite of our weakness and mistakes, we have seen God, we have heard his voice and received his revelation. And what we have received from God is not only for our group or sector, nor even limited to the church in our respective countries; rather it is for the entire body of Christ in the world. Today we have the privilege of being together here by God's sovereign grace, and we greatly need him.

We need to consider together, in the light of the Scriptures and with prophetic discernment, what is the pathway by which the Lord is conducting his church in the world so that it might reach its fullness in history, in order to cooperate more efficiently with the Lord's working and, at the same time, be able to communicate with clarity, anointing and faith God's vision to the generations to come.

I – THE RECOVERY OF HOPE:

In my appreciation, one of the most important elements that God has restored to the church with the moving of his Spirit in the last third of the twentieth century is **hope**.

In the past, many of us had a defeatist expectation and a certain pessimism concerning the church. Our perspective was that the church would finish in defeat, conformed to the world, divided, full of stains, wrinkles and the like; a debilitated church, small in number and poor in quality, a church without glory, with more love for the world than for the Lord.

Today we see the situation differently. The church is recovering the hope that it is to become a victorious and glorious church here in the earth. Hope is faith that looks toward the future. It is the certainty of what is hoped for, the conviction of what is not seen. Today there is a growing certainty within God's people that he will fulfill all that he has promised in the church and through the church in the world prior to the second coming of Christ.

Today in many countries the church is experiencing a phenomenal numerical growth. We believe that in the same way there will be growth in quality and in unity.

That is what God has determined since before the foundation of the world and he will accomplish it.

What are the most important factors that have produced in the church this paradigm shift, this change in its vision?

II - GOD'S PROMISES FOR THE WORLD:

Many biblical passages have been accentuated in the heart of God's people in the last three or four decades. Here are a few:

- The outpouring of the Spirit prophesied by Joel (2.28-32).
- World evangelization prior to the end, as announced by Christ (Matthew 24.14).
- Habakkuk's vision: the earth full of the knowledge of the glory of God (2.14).
- The glory of the latter house greater than that of the former house (Haggai 2.9).
- Reconciliation between fathers and sons prior to the day of the Lord (Malachi 4.5-6).
- God's people will give themselves willingly in the day of his power (Psalm 110.3).
- The nations will come to the mount of the Lord to learn (Micah 4.1-5 / Isaiah 2.1-4).
- Will the third day in which the resurrection of God's people occur in the third millennium? (Hosea 5.15 – 6.3).
- Upon completion of the fullness of the gentiles, the conversion of Israel will occur and this, according to Paul, will be life out of death! (Romans 11).
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What is the relation between the church's faith and what happens among the nations?

What are the limits of our faith?

III - GOD'S PROMISES FOR HIS CHURCH, ACCORDING TO EPHESIANS

- Ch. 1.17-22

... that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. [I pray that] the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. [These are] in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly [places], far above all rule and authority and power and dominion ... (NASB)

- Ch. 1.23

The church... the fulness of Him who fills all in all.

- Ch. 2.6-10

... and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly [places], in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (vs.6,7 y 10)

- Ch. 3.10-11

... in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly [places.] [This was] in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord

- Ch. 3.14-21

... may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God. (Vs.18-19)

- Ch. 4.11-16

... until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all [aspects] into Him, who is the head, [even] Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

- Ch. 5.25-27

... Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless.

1. **Did the church of the first century, or in any century since then, reach the level of holiness, unity, maturity and fullness that is indicated in this epistle?**
2. **Could it be that Paul at this stage of his life might be perceiving that the church would reach such fullness in the future prior to the return of Christ?**
3. **What is the relation between this revelation in Ephesians and Jesus' prayer in John 17?**
4. **Can history conclude without God having been able to fulfill in the church his eternal plan which he proposed in his sovereign will before the foundation of the world?**

IV - RESTORATION OF THE CHURCH OR EDIFICATION OF THE CHURCH?

In these times of renewal which the church has experienced and continues to experience, an expression has been very common among us, especially during the decade of the 1970s. I refer to the word "restoration". When Arthur Wallis visited us in Buenos Aires in the year 1969, he encouraged us greatly when he spoke on several occasions about restoration, based on the book of Nehemiah. That vision helped us to understand the direction of God's work and established an adequate frame of reference for all that was to follow.

The years 1968-1970 were years of considerable revelation. God gave us light concerning ancient truths in his word and restored among us several principles of the apostolic foundation. That helped us to understand that what was happening among us was not simply spiritual renewal but rather restoration. It seemed to us more appropriate to think of ourselves as a restoration movement and not simply a renewal movement.

However, in relation to this we began to speak of the "restoration of the church", which presents an inadequate aspect that needs to be clarified. If by restoration of the church we mean the recovery of biblical principles which, as the church, we had lost or ignored, that is fine. But if in speaking of the restoration of the church we mean to return to be like the first century church, that is not good. Jesus did not say: "I will restore my church", but rather "I will build my church". Many of the churches of New Testament times were quite problematical. The Corinthians were carnal. The Galatians returned to the Law. In Ephesus there was a threat of division. Of the seven church of Asia Minor, few represent a good example for us. In some of his expressions in his Epistle to the Ephesians Paul seems to be anticipating a future time when the church will be united, grown up, glorious and holy.

"...until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children..."

“... the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies ...”
“... to the building up of the body of Christ”.
“... that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless”.

The church is a work under construction. The Lord Jesus has committed himself to build it; that is, to complete it here on the earth. He promised to make it so strong and firm that the gates of hell would not be able to resist its glorious advance.

There are many riches and much blessing in the church's history. If we consider that so as to learn and receive inspiration and example, excellent. We should also consider the negative elements from the past so as to avoid repeating the same errors.

But let us never consider the past of the church with a view that limits our faith and vision. Our doctrinal reference and foundation are in the past. We should not move one bit from all the revelation given by the Holy Spirit to the first century apostles and prophets. *“No man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ”.* But our reference point with regards to the church that we are to become is not in the first century church, but in the church that God has planned to build since before the foundation of the world.

Our reference point is the church of the future, the one that Jesus promised to build. *“He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus”.*

There is no limit to what God can do. The only limit is that which he himself has proposed to do since before the foundation of the world.

God is waiting for a generation to rise up which will, like Abraham, believe that he is able to do all that he has promised. And that generation is going to rise up! Will it be our generation?

What are some of the characteristics of the church that God wants to build?

How do you visualize the church of the future?

From our position today, how can we better advance toward the church that God wants?

What impact will the church of the future make among the nations?

What are the most problematical paradigms that are hindering the church from advancing to become the church that God wants?