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## THE CHURCH TOWARD IT'S FULLNESS

Fullness - Unity - DEVELOPMENT

### INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the twentieth century the church has been the beneficiary of much blessing, inspiration and spiritual awakening through references to the church of the first century, especially through reading and studying the book of the Acts of the Apostles. So it was that the Pentecostal revival was born at the beginning of the last century. Later, in the second third of the century, movements of divine healing began to emerge. And in the final third of the twentieth century the charismatic renewal movement was born. Each of these movements brought new riches and grace to the body of Christ throughout the world.

Most of those present in this encounter have participated in the third of these three great waves of the past century. Thus we have a common experience and vision and a similar inheritance. The word “restoration” has been a key concept for many of us, and an important one in our vision and comprehension of the eternal principles of the Word of God. It has helped us considerably in the recovery of truths, riches, gifts and experiences, which the church had unfortunately lost through the centuries. However, the concept of “restoration” may have unwittingly produced in us a preconditioning or limitation of the vision of the church that God wants to bring about among us.

**Jesus did not say: “I will restore my church”, but rather “I will build my church”** (Matthew 16:18). We pointed this out in our encounter last year. If by the restoration of the church we mean the recovery of the biblical principles that the church has lost or ignored, that is fine. But if by speaking of the church’s restoration we mean to return to the way the churches were in the first century, we are missing it. Let us recall that many of the churches of New Testament times had significant problems. The Corinthians were carnal. The Galatians turned back to the Law. In Ephesus there was a threat of division. Of the seven churches of Asia Minor, few could be presented as a good example for us. Even the church of Jerusalem did not want to leave Jerusalem, and only preached to the Jews.

In studying Paul’s earlier epistles, we get the impression that at the beginning of his ministry he had the idea that in his generation the building of the church would be completed, and that Christ would soon return. But a study of his later epistles, such as Ephesians, clearly reveals that Paul understood that in the future centuries, and prior to the return of Christ, the church would reach its historical fullness:

*“In order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus ...”* (Ephesians 2:7).

*“Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ ...”* (4:13).

*“And to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” (5:27).*

## GOD’S ETERNAL PROJECT

Our absolute reference for the building of the church is not the church of centuries past, nor even the church of the first century. Our reference is the church before the ages, the church that God purposed to have before the foundation of the world.

### **The church is God’s eternal project.**

She was not born in the mind of God two thousand years ago when he sent his Son into the world. The church was in the mind and heart of God from the eternal ages, since *“before the foundation of the world”*.

The church was not God’s “Plan B” following the fall of man. The church is God’s “Plan A” even before the existence of men or demons. The fall was a detour, an attack against God’s eternal project. Redemption was for the purpose of returning things to the original plan.

The church is the family that God purposed to have for his pleasure, in accordance with his pleasure and will, according to the riches of his grace. Sin revealed the unimaginable immensity of God’s grace.

**This eternal project of God which is the church, has an eternal purpose**, which is repeated three times, like a chorus, in Paul’s extraordinary “magnificat” in Ephesians 1:3-14:

*“... To the praise of his glorious grace” (v.6)*

*“... For the praise of his glory” (v.12)*

*“... To the praise of his glory” (v.14)*

The church exists for one reason alone: to reveal God’s glory in this age and in the one to come.

In order to fully realize the purpose of God’s eternal project, the church should have here on earth three essential characteristics:

### QUALITY - UNITY – QUANTITY

Jesus said: ... *I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it* (Matthew 16:18).

Today Jesus Christ has all the resources necessary to build the glorious church that the Father dreamed of in eternity past. He has all authority and power in heaven and on earth, as well as the determination to fulfill the Father’s plan according to his eternal purpose. Hallelujah!

Christ will do it! He will build his church! Not just any kind of church, but rather the kind that will become **one**. He will terminate all the divisions here on the earth. It will be **holy**. He will terminate mediocrity, carnality, worldliness. We will no longer be children, we will reach the maturity of the fullness of Christ. We will be filled with the fullness of God. Christ’s prayer in John 17 will be fully answered by the Father. We will all be one. We will be holy. And the world will believe that Jesus is truly the Son of God. There will be a great world

revival in all the nations. Thousands of millions will be converted to the Lord. Even Israel will believe that Jesus is the Messiah, for, as Paul said: *“If their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?”* (Romans 11:15).

## HOW TO BRING ABOUT THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH?

The central theme of our encounter is: “TOWARD THE CHURCH’S FULLNESS / Fullness - Unity – Development”.

We must now deal with the sub-theme of DEVELOPMENT. I have been asked to focus specifically on the development toward the unity of the church.

How are we to advance in practical terms toward the UNITY that God predetermined for his church? How are we to realize the church’s unity? That is, how are we to bring about the unity of the church?

### CHRIST’S PROGRAM

In order to carry out God’s project, Christ has a program: to give gifts to men. And, in virtue of those gifts, to establish some *“to be apostles; some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ”* (Ephesians 4:11-13).

#### 1. The need today for apostles and prophets

- Apostles and prophets are men who perceive God’s revelation concerning the mystery of Christ and the church. It is not enough just to have the Bible, read it and preach from it. (Thank God, we have had the Bible for centuries!) The church needs revelation in order to understand and experience the Bible’s message in its fullness. The channels of that revelation are the apostles and prophets (Ephesians 3:4-5). The function of apostles and prophets today is not to receive new revelations or to preach “another” gospel, but rather to perceive, to understand, to communicate to the church and to other ministries the ancient and unique message that was revealed to the first-century apostles and prophets, and which we now have recorded in the New Testament.

- The responsibility of the apostles is to build one church alone, not many churches. Their function is not to build their own particular church or kingdom. That would be treason to the Lord and a misuse of their ministry gift. Their true function is build the Lord’s church according to God’s eternal project. The apostle Paul, although he recognized himself as the spiritual father of the Corinthians, by no means would allow the Corinthians to divide up as followers of the different apostles: Paul, Peter or Apollos.

- The church will depart from its current scheme of division in the measure that apostles and prophets arise according to God’s heart. Men who are emptied of themselves, emptied of all personal ambition, men who seek only Christ’s glory and recognize Jesus Christ the Lord as the only head of the church.

- What characteristic identifies an apostle? An apostle is one sent by God to the world with a specific commission: to raise up the church with the gifts and the grace God has given him,

where there is no church. Apostles and prophets are men of faith, intrepid, with authority and power. Men who are humble and patient, filled with grace and love; but men who at the same time are strong in God, striving to reach a place and to pull up, tear down, plant, lay foundations and build, to change the history of that place. They are pioneers, valiant and ready to suffer. They are often misunderstood, sometimes persecuted. But nothing detains them. They keep moving forward, they have a mission, a commission, and will not stop until it is fulfilled.

Today we need that kind of apostles. Men who understand clearly the current state of the church and the world. And while many say: "Church unity? That is impossible!", apostles have their eyes set on him who said: "I will build my church". And they declare: "Lord, you will do it. You are able to carry out all you have promised". They are men who believe that the church will grow in quality, in unity and that millions and millions will come to Christ and be a part of that unique and glorious church of the Lord!

## **2. The need for revelation today**

*"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better ... that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened ..."* (Ephesians 1:17-18).

We need revelation to see that the current division of the church does not glorify God, that it is completely contrary to his eternal project, that it has no biblical or theological foundation, and that it is a great barrier for the gospel to be believed in the world (John 17:21).

We need revelation to purify us completely of the evangelical paradigms of division and of the human arguments that seek to justify the current division, even using Bible verses.

## **3. One body, one head**

*"Instead ... we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work"* (Ephesians 4:15-16).

The church is only one body. A body is a living organism in which all the members are united to each other. A body is an organic and functional unit. This is the figure most used in the New Testament to represent the church.

Today the evangelical church is divided into thousands of little bodies. We have reached the absurd: we divide what is indivisible. We have cut the body of Christ into pieces.

We are like the valley of dry bones of Ezekiel 37. The sin of the Catholic church is its mariolatry and the worship of images and saints. The sin of the evangelical church is its terrible division. Which is worse? Which of the two is easier to resolve?

God says to us today: Son of man, Will these bones come together? Will my church become one body alone?

– Lord, that is very difficult ... almost impossible ... but you alone know.

- You are right, I know. Therefore, prophesy, say what I say: "...until we all reach unity in the faith ..." *"the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament ..."*

This will start happening at all levels. At the congregational level, at the city level, in the nation and even at the international level. In many countries it has already begun. The

beginnings are usually simple, often imperceptible, but they are very important when initiated by God.

#### 4. **The church in the city**

According to biblical principles, the church is one alone. The practical manner of manifesting that unity in the world is in each city. Today more than ever, the world is gathered in cities. This is the principle that Watchman Nee rediscovered and emphasized: One church alone in each city. In a city there may be thousands of congregations, and even a much larger group of small communities in homes, but one church, under one presbytery.

The Catholic church has held to some biblical principles through the ages, one of which is this: One church in each city, which they call a diocese. There may be many parishes, but for them they together conform the only church in the city. They maintain that unity under the authority of the bishop. (They practice a monarchical episcopate, which I do not affirm as either biblical or correct).

Over the last twenty years, in many churches in Latin America and the world, pastors' councils have risen up. In our country, Argentina, twenty years ago there was a pastors' council in only two cities: Santa Fe and Resistencia. Today there are more than two hundred cities in Argentina where pastors' councils function. Some of them are rather weak and have problems. In others, as in the city of Rosario, the pastors' council is an example for others. In many councils the vision of the church of the city is growing. This is the beginning of the end for all denominational divisions. We must encourage those councils with God's vision. Today's councils will be tomorrow's presbyteries. The day will come when there will be no more Baptist church, Pentecostal church, Renewal church, etc. We will be simply the CHURCH. There will be one church in each city.

Imagine the potential of human, economic and social resources that would mean! Imagine the supernatural potential that will release! When God sees his people as ONE in each city, what would he not do? What prayer would go without an answer? The demons will tremble, the powers in the air will fall, and the kingdom of God will advance as never before in history. *"Father, that all of them may be one"*. We will be one, and the world will believe!

#### POINT OF INFLECTION

- The outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the final third of the last century has gone beyond all denominational barriers. Today the Pentecostal church can hardly be distinguished from the non-Pentecostal. Some non-Pentecostal churches are more Pentecostal than the Pentecostals. Many Catholic meetings are rather "evangelical". What is happening? God is fulfilling his promise to pour out his Spirit upon all flesh. And he will continue until it is complete. We are at a point of inflection in the history of the church. The diverging lines of the last five hundred years have broken down and become converging lines. How many years will this process take until we are "perfect in unity" as Jesus prayed? (John 17:23) We do not know. But we do know that it will happen.

In our experience in Latin America, we have learned that this process should be gradual and progressive, and that it requires much patience, love and faith. The process is not always a single ascending line. There are advances and steps backward. We should persevere, believe,

intercede, pray, struggle and believe again that he who began a good work in us will bring it to completion.

We have learned by experience that there are three progressive steps to grow in fellowship:

1. **Acquaintance.** It is fundamental that we get personally acquainted, that we be friends, that we open our hearts, that we have fellowship, that we cultivate and develop friendship. There are no shortcuts; this requires time, quality time together. Then this will start to take us to the second level:
2. **Confidence.** As we get better acquainted confidence will grow (or perhaps not). If we do not have confidence in each other, we cannot advance to the next level:
3. **Commitment.** It is important to respect this process so that we build firm, lasting and committed relationships between us.

This process has occurred and is occurring among us at the level of the city, at the national level, at the regional or continental level and now with IAF we are growing toward unity and commitment at the international level.

## CONCLUSION

My function has really been to provide an introduction to this subject.

**The response will come from God through each of us:**

IN THE WORKSHOPS LET US WORK AROUND THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

**1 – What are the principal human arguments that we must overcome to advance in a more defined way toward the unity that God wants?**

**2 – What are the principal personal barriers that we must overcome within ourselves to advance toward unity? What conducts or attitudes should we put away on the personal level so as to not hinder the unity that God is bringing about?  
(Time for reflection, repentance and confession).**

**3 – What is your vision and faith for an advance toward unity in your city and country? How can we be factors for unity in our city, country and in the world?**

**4 – How should we communicate this vision of God to the rest of the body of Christ and to the coming generations?**

**5 – How can we progress toward the unity of the faith in this group? How can we grow in our relationship within this circle of international apostolic fellowship in the direction of the unity of the Lord's church at the world level?**