

# WHAT HOLDS BACK THE GREAT REVIVAL?

Jorge Himitian

*For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.*

Romans 8.19–22, NLT

*... the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

Colossians 1.26–27, NIV

**T**he world is suffering. There is pain everywhere. All of humanity is groaning with birth pangs. There is unimaginable suffering. In spite of abundant international news received every day through the mass media, it is impossible for us to fully understand the pain and suffering in the world.

Yet God sees it all. He understands the pain of every creature in every corner of the planet, and he shares the pain of each one. God weeps. He suffers with those who suffer...

All of creation —that is, all humanity— lives in slavery. It is all corrupted and the slave of its own corruption. Corruption rules at all levels and spheres of society, and subjects the people to pain and suffering with injustice of all kinds.

But this text, which so dramatically describes the state of society in general, points at the same time to a hope. The undisclosed and subconscious hope that, in the midst of so much pain, is still in the heart of men: *the eager waiting of creation for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are.*

We are those who are being awaited, for they are anxiously awaiting the revelation of God's children. Someone needs to interpret those muffled groans. Someone needs to translate into their own language the groans of

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He has authored several books, of which the best known are *Jesucristo el Señor*, *Sanos por la Palabra*, *Que sean Uno*, and *El Proyecto del Eterno*.

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the little girls who have been raped by their stepfathers; of the exploited immigrants; of the women who sell their bodies in order to feed their children; of those who are so hungry they don't even have the strength to cry; of those who suffer domestic violence; of the mothers who watch their children die of drug overdose; of the youth who have no opportunity to study, no work and no future; of populations that have been bombarded, massacred, plundered by the powerful; of the cry of those who are tortured, kidnapped, abused, abandoned; of those who are innocent yet condemned by corrupt judges; of those who are alone in the world; of those who suffer from unjust salaries; of the homeless without a roof, bread, family, health, or friends...

The list of those who groan is interminable. All of them, as if speaking in a language that even they cannot understand, are saying to us (allow me to interpret their unutterable groans):

“Hey, you, children of God, what are you waiting for! Aren't you the church? Aren't you the light of the world? Hasn't the love of God been shed abroad in your hearts? Are you not those who have the truth that can set us free? Are you not the ones who have the solution to our problems? We, the slaves of corruption, are eagerly waiting for you to free us from the slavery of our corruption and lead us to the glorious liberty of the children of God. Why are you waiting? Why can't you get together? Why do you continue to compete among yourselves? Why don't you leave aside the small talk and your religious entertainment and fully launch the mission to which you were called to help suffering humanity?”

The sacred text tells us that *“all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay.”*

The present picture we see of humanity is not the final one. All creation was subjected to the curse in the hope that it would be freed from the slavery of corruption and experience the glorious liberty of God's children.

This is urgent! The world is in bad shape. They do not have the solution; they don't have the medicine to heal the international cancer of their own corruption, egotism, greed, injustice, and lying. The only solution is God's reign.

With a simple question I want to show you that the only solution for this world is Jesus Christ: What would this country, or the whole world, be like if all its inhabitants lived according to God's will? How would things be if each person loved his neighbor as himself?

And isn't that what Jesus Christ came to show us? Didn't he teach us to pray every day: *“Let your kingdom come, your will be done here on earth as it is in heaven?”*

The only hope for the nations is Christ in us. He is the hope of glory.

## **THE REVIVAL THAT WE ALL DESIRE**

The world desperately needs the manifestation of God's children, in a world revival as yet unknown in human history. The God of love, who so loved and continues to love this world, is ready and desires to fulfill all his promises for the end times, But is the church ready? Are we ready?

Or must we confess the same that King Hezekiah said to the prophet Isaiah, when faced with the attack of Sennacherib: *“When children come to the point of birth... there is no strength to deliver them”* (Isaiah 37.3).

We all long to see the great signs and wonders that Jesus promised that we would do in his name; and even greater ones than those he performed. We would all like to see the dead rise again; the blind receiving their sight; paralytics that leap; bread and fish multiplied; great awakenings. And I have no doubt that miracles and healings are occurring, but great signs and wonders are still scarce.

We would like to see nations where the gospel is transforming the structural injustice in society. Corrupt politicians and government officials who, when converted, just as with Zacchaeus, return what they have stolen, and share their bounty with the poor. Business men freed from greed who use their possessions and abilities to create work opportunities with proper salaries.

We want to see nations that, in obedience to Jesus' teaching, transform their "swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks." That they cease to invest in weapons and instead invest in education, health and the development of poorer countries.

Where are the cities whose bars and brothels close down because of the conversion of the great majority of the population? Where are the nations whose laws are changed as a result of great revival as in the days of John Wesley?

Where are the churches of which it can be said that there is no needy person among them, as we read in the early chapters of the book of Acts?

I have no doubt that in some measure this is happening in some parts of the world, and I thank God for that. Yet we long to see the great revival that God promised for the end times where millions are converted to the Lord and the church again becomes the salt of the earth, the light of the world and the principal factor in social transformation through millions of disciples that in each nation consecrate themselves to serve with love those in need.

We long to see the church and the congregations of the different cities of the world ceasing to spend millions of dollars on the construction of sumptuous temples and instead dedicate that money to build homes for the homeless or for those who live crowded in squalor in slums due to the injustice of the social system.

We long to see the complete fulfillment of Joel's prophecy:

*"And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke.*

*The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls."*

Joel 2.28–32

We long to see the fulfillment of Habakkuk's vision:

*"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."*

Habakkuk 2.14

Or the days of world evangelization which Jesus himself foretold:

*"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."*

Matthew 24.14

We long to see the times prophesied by Isaiah:

*"Arise, shine, for your light has come,  
and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.  
See, darkness covers the earth  
and thick darkness is over the peoples,  
but the Lord rises upon you  
and his glory appears over you.  
Nations will come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your dawn."*

Isaiah 60.1–3

## WHAT HOLDS BACK THE GREAT REVIVAL?

With all my heart I believe that the answer to this question is found in Jesus' prayer to his Father shortly before his redeeming sacrifice, and registered in chapter 17 of the Gospel of John.

### We need to understand Jesus' cry and identify with his prayer.

<sup>1</sup>*Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you...<sup>6</sup>I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word...<sup>9</sup>I pray for them...<sup>11</sup>I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one...*

<sup>15</sup>*My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one...*

<sup>17</sup>*Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth...*

<sup>20</sup>*My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,<sup>21</sup> that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.<sup>22</sup>I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:<sup>23</sup>I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

### Exactly what is it that Jesus asked of the Father?

- That the leaders of the church might be one, just as he is one with the Father (v. 11).
- That they be sanctified in the truth which is his word (v. 17).
- That all of us who have believed in Jesus through the word of the apostles might be one so that the world might believe in the Son of God (vs. 20–21).
- That Jesus has given us the glory that the Father gave to him so that we might be one, just as the Father and the Son are one (v. 22).
- That the Son, indwelt by the Father, is in us so that we might be perfect in unity in order that the world might know the Son of God.

Summarizing, and focusing on the subject with which we are dealing, Jesus prays to the Father:

That we might be one so that the world might believe in the Son of God.

That we might be perfect in unity so that the world might know the Son of God.

If my understanding is correct, that which is holding back the great worldwide revival is the division in the church of Christ on the earth. When we are one, the world will believe.

### Arguments and excuses that do not help us toward unity:

1. *Unity is spiritual; we are already one in Christ.*  
Jesus prayed for a visible unity that the world could see.
2. *In heaven we will be one.*  
Jesus prayed that we might be one on earth so that the world might believe.
3. *Unity is not so important; what is important is the salvation of souls.*  
Because of our divisions the world does not believe, and many millions are lost.
4. *Unity has already been achieved; there are associations, confraternities, alliances, etc.*  
Thank God for the advances achieved in our generation but our unity is still far from perfect; we are not a single body.
5. *Unity here on the earth is impossible.*  
With God nothing is impossible. He is able to fulfill all that he has promised. Is it possible that Jesus' prayer to the Father would not be answered?

## FOUR GREAT OBSTACLES THAT HINDER UNITY

1. Lack of conviction.  
This is due to the lack of understanding John chapter 17 and the mystery of the body of Christ.
2. Doctrinal differences  
These are legitimate difficulties that should be seriously considered. God has an answer which I will seek to present later.
3. Lack of spiritual stature  
Personal ambitions hinder. Ambition for power, fame, glory, money, greatness (Who will be the greatest?). Also jealousy, envy, egotism, feeling wise in our own opinion.  
God has a unique solution for carnal behavior. We will speak of that later.
4. The new apostolic ministries  
The resurgence of apostolic ministry in our days without a clear revelation of the church as the body of Christ is replacing the older paradigm of division in the church in some denominations with a new antibiblical paradigm: the division of the church behind new leaders.

## REVELATION CONCERNING THE CHURCH IN THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

In the New Testament, the Epistle to the Ephesians is the book that contains the most elevated level of revelation concerning the church. This revelation will help us to remove the first obstacle we mentioned.

Chapter one presents the church as the eternal project that God purposed in himself before the foundation of the world (vs. 4–5). There we are shown that the mystery of his will is to reunite all that sin broke up and divided under one head: Christ (v.10). The chapter concludes by presenting Christ as the head of his body which is the church, which he fills with his fulness.

The second part of chapter two reveals the church as a single people, a single new man, a single body reconciled to God and men through the death of Christ, a single family, a single spiritual building as God's habitation, built upon a single foundation which is Christ.

Chapter three presents the mystery of Christ which is the church and its unity. A mystery that was hidden for centuries in God, but revealed to the apostles and prophets of the first century: *that the Gentiles are coheirs and members of the same body in Christ Jesus through the gospel*. There is not a Messianic church and a Gentile church. There is only one church which is the body of Christ. The intermediate wall of separation was definitively torn down by the cross, making a single people of the two (2.14).

The Bible never speaks of the Pauline church or of the Petrine church or of the church of John. Much less of the Evangelical church or the Catholic or Orthodox church. I have never seen mentioned in the New Testament anything about the Baptist church, or the Assemblies of God, or the Presbyterian church, or Foursquare, or Charismatic. There are no denominational names in the Bible. There is only one name and it is that of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ from whom is named every family on heaven and earth (3.14–15).

Thus we reach chapter 4 of Ephesians, where the apostle Paul declares:

*... one body, and one Spirit, as you were also called in one hope of your vocation; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all* (vs.4-6).

In this chapter Paul speaks of three progressive levels of unity and shows us the paths on which to advance toward the perfect unity that God desires.

### The three levels of unity

- Unity of the Spirit. *"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit..."* (vs. 2–3). In order to live on this first level of unity we need humility, meekness, patience and love, in the bond of peace (vs. 2–3).

- Unity in the faith. *“Until we all reach unity in the faith...”* (v. 13). This expression indicates two things: 1) that it is a process, and 2) that one day all of us will reach this level of unity.
- Unity of the body. *“The whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament...”* (v. 16). God is working to unite his church. The day will come when all of God’s children will conform a single body in each city, in each nation and in the world, under the single head of the church: Christ.

Our first responsibility is to believe that God wants to do that, and that he is able to do it. But faith is more than that. It is *“being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see”* (Heb 11:1). Faith is declaring: God will do it! God moves mountains when we release the word of faith. He does things that are humanly impossible when we act in faith.

However, though faith is the first indispensable step it is not everything. It is not sufficient to believe in the unity, nor even to desire it with all your heart. Faith without works is dead. True faith is expressed in deeds. Here we must apply the rule of Saint Benedict: *Ora et labora*. We need to pray intensely, with perseverance, Jesus’ prayer in John 17, and also work to build that unity.

We understand that to achieve unity is such a great miracle that only God can make it happen. But we can either cooperate with God or work against him. In any case, the Lord will finally achieve what he has proposed, whether with us or in spite of us. The church will achieve unity through obedience or through persecution.

Will we be the generation that because of unbelief will die in the desert? Or the generation that by faith will enter and possess the promised land, or at least leave the legacy of unity to the next generations?

## HOW TO ACHIEVE UNITY IN THE FAITH

I indicated earlier that one of the great obstacles for unity is evident in the doctrinal differences that we have as Christians, whether Catholic or Evangelical.

The essential step to achieve the perfect unity that God desires is that we achieve UNITY IN THE FAITH.

As we face so many different doctrines and teachings today, will it be possible for all of us to achieve unity of the faith; so that we all believe, teach and preach the same things? The Bible text affirms that such a process will advance *“until we all reach unity in the faith”* (Eph 4.13). It is written. It is the Word of God. It will be fulfilled.

The great question is HOW?

In the month of June, 2006 we received the visit of a pastor from Recife, Brazil, Luciano Figueiredo (a close friend), who preached in our congregation in Buenos Aires on the theme *How to achieve unity in the faith*. When he concluded, I said to those present that I regretted that there were not in that meeting 10.000 pastors and an equal number of priests from Argentina to hear his message.

I will seek to transmit the essence of his message:

He began with 1 Corinthians 1.10: *“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.”*

The solution is quite simple: We should return to Jesus’ example, who is our perfect model. How did Jesus speak?

In John 7:16–17, Jesus says: *“My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.”*

If there was one person who walked this earth and could have spoken on his own account, it was Jesus Christ. However, Jesus, demonstrating absolute humility and faithfulness, denying himself completely, states: *“My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me”*.

In the following verse he declares: *“He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him.”*

John 8:26: *"I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world."*

John 8:28: *"When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me."*

John 12:49–50: *"For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say."*

Luciano continued:

I was quite impressed when I reached John 16:12–14. There Jesus says: *"I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you."*

So the Holy Spirit does not speak on his own account!

Neither Jesus nor the Holy Spirit speak for themselves. Neither one of them seeks to be original, but faithful. Why is there perfect unity in the Trinity? Because there is only one source: the Father. And both Jesus and the Holy Spirit strictly respect him.

What do we speak? What do we teach? Why do we have so many varied doctrines?

In Matthew 28:19–20. Jesus said to the apostles: *"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them... and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you..."* If we should all do that, instead of teaching our particular doctrines, in a short time we would achieve unity in the faith.

1 Peter 4:11. *"If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ."*

In Galatians 1:8, Paul writes: *"But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!"*

We need to return to the apostles' teaching, to the *kerygma* (preaching) of the apostles. We should leave aside many of our lovely and eloquent sermons and return to the simplicity of the gospel. Preach the Word, and nothing more than the Word.

## HOW TO GROW IN SPIRITUAL STATURE

When Paul wrote his first letter to the church in Corinth, faced with the division that was advancing there, his diagnostic was simple and direct:

*"Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ... For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?"*

1 Corinthians 3.1–3

Today this is the greatest need of the church in the world. There are many leaders who act like children. Many are pastors, apostles, prophets, evangelists, ensconced leaders, gifted men, with tremendous ministries, yet they act like children, carnal. How do we know that? It's quite simple: We see jealousy, contention, division, personal ambition, ambition for fame, power, money, ambition to occupy the first place, pride, feeling wise in their own opinion.

The solution is to grow. But how can we grow spiritually? How can we cease to be children and advance toward maturity?

It is relatively easy to combat moral sins in ourselves. But what about the inner sins that have to do with our attitudes, intentions and motivations?

David affirms in Psalm 19:12–13:

*“Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression.”*

What Jesus proposed is quite simple: THE CROSS.

*“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”* (Matthew 16.24).

*“Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple... any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple”* (Luke 14.27, 33).

*“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave”* (Matthew 20.26–27).

Without the cross in our life we reach a ceiling and are unable to grow more.

The cross takes precedence over all carnal ambition. Over all carnality, pride, a feeling of self-importance, a superiority complex, being wise in our own opinion, believing ourselves to be first, the desire to be recognized, honored, mentioned.

The struggles between the disciples occurred before the cross, they were pre-Pentecost conflicts. The Holy Spirit activated the operation of the cross in the life of the apostles of the church.

The principal evidence that they had been filled with the Spirit was not that they spoke in tongues, but that they became spiritual men; they stopped being carnal. They grew in spiritual stature.

And this is what we need today as leaders of the church.

## **THE RESPONSIBILITY OF APOSTOLIC MINISTRY TODAY**

I thank God for the men he is raising up today in his church around the world with apostolic ministries. But it is fundamental that we give much attention to what is revealed in sacred Scripture in order to understand the distinctive characteristics of apostolic ministry and the responsibility this implies.

Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ, one of the men most used by God to extend the gospel and establish churches in many cities and nations of the Roman Empire. He had exceptional ministerial gifts and virtues. Yet it never occurred to him to establish a denomination and call it something like “International Ministry of Churches of the Apostle Paul.” He could have had the largest denomination of his time. Why didn’t he do it? The answer is quite simple:

- God had revealed to him the mystery of his will: to reunite everything under one unique head, Jesus Christ, not Paul.
- He understood that the foundation of the church is Christ and not some apostle.
- He was aware that the church belongs to God. Paul saw himself as a servant of the church and not its lord.
- He received the revelation of the mystery of Christ and of his church. The church is the body of Christ, and that body should never be divided.
- He understood that to appropriate for himself the churches he founded would be high treason to Christ. How significant are his words to the Corinthians! He said to them:

*“I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him”* (2 Corinthians 11.2).

Just as the servant of Abraham did with Rebecca: He was sent away to seek her, and on the long return journey he cared for her and honored her, and when he arrived, he presented her as a pure virgin to Isaac. Paul clearly understood that the church was not his; it belongs to Christ alone.

## The present danger of apostolic ministries

We praise God for the restoration of apostolic ministries in our days. At the same time, we lament such abuses as massive designation of apostles, the use of the term *apostle* as a new status symbol of ministerial hierarchy. Yet as I speak of the danger, I want to refer to something more important and basic.

The aspect that I want to underscore is the fact that many strong and imposing ministries are emerging with apostolic characteristics, that are growing faster than the denominations to which they belong or belonged at some point. The church in many nations, especially in Latin America, Africa and Asia is experiencing extraordinary growth—thank God for that—yet many of these ministries, sometimes without even proposing it, are becoming more independent and personal. This has been accentuated by the restoration of apostolic ministry. An apostle with his network of churches, often becoming their only recognized leader, the maximum authority and almost the owner of the work.

The restoration of apostolic ministry without a vision of the unity of the church runs this risk. What is the future of a one-man ministry? We need to seriously reflect on this contemporary reality and on the unity of the church, so as to clarify the foundation for a cristological and Christ-centered ecclesiology, and not one centered on apostles.

The great challenge of all the apostolic ministries today is the edification of the body of Christ. A single body “*joined and held together by every supporting ligament [that] grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work*” (Ephesians 4:16).

This is not an easy task. Who said the apostle’s task was easy? It has a cost. It will cost us everything. Besides, we have hell against us, principalities and powers, and Satan himself. But we have God on our side, and *if God is for us, who can be against us?* It is the only path we can follow to become again the church, the church the Father dreamed of, and which the world and the angels want to see.

## The need for a national and international apostolic agenda

We need to have a work agenda for the next 10, 20, 30, 50 and 100 years.

We need to turn around the history of the church, in order to turn around the history of the world. God is by our side. The earth does not belong to the devil, but to God. Psalm 24 proclaims: “*The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.*”

The vision will be fulfilled: The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. Amen.

