

Jorge Himitian – Nature of apostolic Ministry

INTRODUCTION

The Pentecostal revival, originating at the beginning of the 20th Century, made it clear that the gifts of the Holy Spirit —underscoring principally in Mark 16 and 1 Corinthians 12— are still operative. This understanding was acquired not only by seeing that nowhere in the New Testament are we taught that these gifts would cease at the conclusion of the first Century, but also because thousands and even millions of people since then began to experience such gifts in their life and ministry through a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Today the groups that deny the validity of the gifts of the Spirit in the church are fewer all the time, for God is sovereign to reveal himself when and where he chooses to do so through those gifts.

However, many, even among the Pentecostals, continue to deny the current validity of all the ministries mentioned in Ephesians 4.11 and 1 Corinthians 12.28.

Of the ministries mentioned in those texts, the evangelical church in general has accepted the validity of the ministry of pastor, teacher and evangelist, but not that of apostle or prophet.

Why? The cause is found in our traditions and our fears.

From the decade of the 1960s, with the resurgence of the renewal movement, in many places in the world there is an insistence on the validity of the ministry of apostle and prophet. It is true that in more recent years there has been in some places an exaggerated application of apostolic ministry, but the abuse should not be a motive for disuse but rather for a seeking after God for the correct and balanced use of this important ministerial gift for the body of Christ.

Today in many places there is a growing conviction that apostolic and prophetic ministries are valid. And not only so, for they are seen as the only solution for the advancement of the church in Christ, for its fullness in history, so as to fulfill its integral mission in the earth.

I. THE PRINCIPAL MINISTRIES OF THE CHURCH

There are two basic passages that underscore the principal ministries established by the Lord in the church: 1 Corinthians 12.28 and Ephesians 4.11-16.

1 CORINTHIANS 12.28:

“And in the church God has appointed first of all APOSTLES, second PROPHETS, third TEACHERS, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues”.

EPHESIANS 4.11-16:

“It was he who gave 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. Then we will no longer be infants ... Instead, speaking the truth in love, 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.”

This text clearly indicates to us the following four truths:

- All these ministries are valid until the building up of the body of Christ is complete, until we all reach the unity of the faith, and until we reach the stature of the fullness of Christ.
- The only absolute head of the church is Jesus Christ, and he has never delegated that function to anyone else. He is living and is governing his church. It is he who gives these gifts to those whom he pleases, with which he prepares his servants for specific ministries in the body.
- The church is a body (not many small bodies), an organism (not an organization). All the body should be well coordinated and united by the joints, and mutually helping each other for their edification and growth.
- The church is edified and should function according to the ministry gifts that Christ places within it, and not according to the statutes or offices established by an organization.

Some general considerations concerning the ministries:

- Paul says in the previous verses, Eph 4:7-8, *“But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.”*
- The one who grants these ministries is the Lord, according to his sovereign will. Through grace he chooses certain persons for specific functions; calls them and gives them gifts or charismas to fulfill a specific ministry. That gift is a grace (ability) that a person receives to carry out a specific responsibility in the body of Christ.
- The fullness of all gifts, grace and ministries are in Christ; and he alone gives to each one what he desires, and in the measure that he determines. No one becomes an apostle, prophet, evangelist or pastor/teacher by his own decision. The calling and the charisma for a specific ministry come from God.
- The gifts or ministries can grow, develop and be expanded according to God’s will. Philip was one of the seven deacons in Acts 6; years later he is recognized as an evangelist (Acts 21.8). Barnabas and Saul are mentioned among the prophets and teachers in Antioch (Acts 13.1); later they are called apostles (Acts 14.4, 14). However, we should keep in mind that even these changes occur under the sovereign hand of God. Each one of us should reject the worldly and carnal idea of seeking a “promotion”. Our greatest ambition should be to find ourselves in the center of God’s will. If his will is that I be a deacon or a pastor until the end of my days, I have great joy and peace with that.
- The Bible tells us that “God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable” (Rom 11:29). However, to exercise a ministry it is not enough to have gifts and a calling; it is necessary, according to Paul’s instructions, to have a character that displays Christian virtues, a good testimony and a trajectory. No matter how many gifts a person may have, he can be disqualified for the ministry if he does not have the requisites concerning his quality of life.

The principal ministerial gifts given by Christ to the church:

Through these texts and the teaching of the New Testament in general, we understand that the PRINCIPAL MINISTRY GIFTS that Christ has given to the church are four or five, depending on whether we interpret whether the ministry of pastor and teacher is the same or if there are two different ministries:

- APOSTLES
- PROPHETS
- EVANGELISTS
- PASTOR-TEACHERS

- APOSTLES
- PROPHETS
- EVANGELISTS
- PASTORS
- TEACHERS

APOSTLES

We understand that in the New Testament there are three kinds of apostles:

1. The twelve apostles

These have a unique characteristic because they were personal witnesses of the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Christ. Moreover, they were the direct recipients and transmitters of Jesus' teachings. When one of the twelve, Judas Iscariot, dropped out, his substitute had to be someone that had been with them from the baptism of John until the ascension of Christ (Acts 1:15-26).

2. The other apostles of the first century who, together with the twelve, established the foundation of the church.

The Lord raised up other apostles and prophets apart from the twelve (such as Paul and Barnabas), who together with the twelve received through the Holy Spirit the revelation of the mystery of Christ and his church (Ephesians 3:1-7). They were the channels of the revelation to make us aware of the mystery of Christ, and registered this revelation in the pages of the New Testament. All of them **FUNCTIONED AS PIONEERS**, which was exclusive and unrepeatable, whose purpose was to establish the immutable doctrinal and kerygmatic foundation of the church for all ages (Eph 2:20). This revelation is registered in the sacred Scriptures of the New Testament, and does not admit later additions or modifications after the time of the primitive apostles (Gal 1:8-9).

3. Apostolic ministry of a permanent nature.

According to Eph 4:11-16, Christ continues to give to the church apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers until the edification of the body of Christ is complete, until we all reach the unity of the faith, etc. Having pointed out the unique and exclusive character of the first-century apostles, we need to make clear the nature of apostolic ministry:

- Evangelize. Apostle means "one who is sent". He is sent to the world. He is a man who is near to the heart of God and burns with God's very desire that the gospel might reach all the world and every person (Rom 1:1, 5, 14, 15; 15:18-24).
- Accompany the evangelism with signs and wonders (2 Cor 12:12; Rom 15:19).
- Establish churches (1 Cor 3:10-11). Evangelization in new areas generates the birth of new churches. This task requires teaching the new communities, training the saints, forming new workers, ordaining elders, etc. Paul indicates that since he was the instrument for raising up the church in Corinth, that fact was the seal of his apostleship among them (1 Cor 9:2).
- Supervise the churches with apostolic authority: intercede for them, teach wholesome doctrine, encourage, instruct, correct errors, discipline the impenitent, etc. This supervision and ministry is done through personal visits, letters, and by dispatching apostolic delegates. The purpose of this apostolic covering is to assure that the new churches have a wholesome faith, live in holiness, maintain the unity, serve others in love and evangelize the world.
- To be the principal authority in the ecclesiastical structure. In the lists of ministry gifts, apostles always appear in first place. In 1 Cor 12:28, in the Greek, it says textually: "FIRST, apostles; SECOND, prophets; THIRD, teachers; AFTERWARDS ..." This order is not casual but intentional; it

reveals the order of the ministries. The apostles, under Christ's authority, are the principal authority over the churches and the other ministries. This is God's order for the church and it is what makes unity possible. The overall direction of the work is the responsibility of the apostles, under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

- They are to be men with light and revelation from the Lord. We have already shown that the apostles together with the prophets are channels of revelation (Eph. 3:5). This revelation refers to the "*kerygma*" (the complete revelation of the mystery of Christ and the church) and the "*didache*" (the totality of the commandments that reveal the will of God) that was already given by the first apostles and is registered objectively in the sacred scriptures. But today, as always, we need ministries of revelation in two senses:

- 1) To help the saints to understand "what is already revealed". Through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit God gives to some of his servants light on the ancient truths of the Word, truths that have always been there, were read, but often not understood, because of the overgrowth of erroneous traditions, through cultural and religious conditioning, or due to our natural human limitations. The proper use of this gift has always brought to the church revival and renewal, and its abuse brings heresies.

- 2) Because of the need of a circumstantial and particular orientation. Just as Jesus Christ gave to John a specific message concerning each of the seven churches of Asia, today we face the same need. God is able to reveal to his servants a specific word for a specific church, nation, or individual.

(I take the liberty here to give a brief description of the other ministries)

PROPHETS

There are not many references in the New Testament to this ministry. Among those that exist, we can point out the following:

- In our references to the apostles we already pointed out that the prophets are also channels of revelation. What we have said concerning the grace of the revelation is applicable also to the prophets. For both are mentioned in the N.T. as ministries that receive revelation. (Eph 2:20; 3:5).
- In the order of the ministry gifts, they occupy the second place, both in 1 Cor 12:28 and in Eph 4:11.
- It is evident that the apostle has structural and spiritual authority over the churches that are under his ministry, while the prophet would seem to have mostly spiritual authority.
- Just as with the apostles, their ministry is both local and translocal.
- Two different profiles of the prophet can be seen:
 - 1) Prophets with the characteristics of Agabus, who apparently moved more in "words of knowledge" concerning persons and circumstances. The Lord revealed to him that a famine was coming over the inhabited earth, so that the disciples of Antioch sent economic help to their brothers in Judea (Acts 11:27-30). On another occasion he revealed that Paul would be arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 21:10-11).
 - 2) Prophets with the characteristics of Barnabas, Silas and Judas. Concerning these last two Acts 15:32 tells us: "*Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers*". I believe that this profile differs somewhat from that of Agabus. Evidently, these developed more the ministry of edification, consolation and confirmation in the churches. Something

similar is said of Barnabas in describing his ministry when he arrived in Antioch (Acts 11:23-24). Silas accompanied Paul following his separation from Barnabas, and was for a good time a member of his apostolic team.

EVANGELIST

This term appears three times in the N.T.: Eph 4.11; Acts 21.8 and 2Tim 4.5.

They work with the apostles, members of the apostolic team. Their function is to evangelize and to communicate the apostolic teachings, establish churches, ordain elders, etc. They are always under the authority of the apostles. This is a translocal ministry.

PASTOR-TEACHER / PASTOR or TEACHER

In my perception, pastor and teacher is a single ministry. The text in Ephesians does not say “to some, pastors; and to others, teachers”, but rather “to others, pastors and teachers”.

Pastor - sheep (alegorical terms)

Teacher - disciple (literal terms)

This is a local ministry to shepherd others by teaching, preaching, caring for and governing God's flock. This is the gift required for ordination as a presbyter (or elder) (1 Tim 3.2).

II. THREE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF APOSTOLIC MINISTRY

1) PRINCIPLE OF PLURALITY

- Jesus established twelve apostles.
- The minimum number required for plurality is two. Jesus sent out the twelve in pairs (Mark 6.7). The same with the seventy (Luke 10:1).
- Jesus said: “*If two or you are in agreement...*” (Mt 18:19). “*Wherever two or three...*” (Mt 18:19).
- In Acts we find the pairs of Peter and John / Barnabas and Saul / Paul and Silas, / etc.
- The apostles always established “*presbyters*” (plural) to lead a church. In Phillipi we read of “*bishops and deacons*” (Phil 1:1).
- Paul always functioned with an apostolic team.
- In Jerusalem the apostles and elders gathered (the first council of the church) to deal with the subject of circumcision (Acts 15). In later centuries many issues were decided by councils.

2) PRINCIPLE OF UNITY

Plurality functions in unity. There were twelve apostles but there was only one church in Jerusalem. The twelve formed a single ministry, a single apostolic team: “*The multitude of those that believed were of one heart and soul...*” (Acts 4:32). There was only one church in each city; a plurality of elders, but a single presbytery over a single church in the city. Various apostles may minister in the same city, but they do not form different churches around their ministry (1Cor 1:10-13; 3:3-11). This principle of unity was valid in the church in each city and in the world, and was one of the issues of major concern for the apostles. The unity of the apostles is fundamental for the unity of God's people.

3) PRINCIPLE OF AUTHORITY

This principle makes it possible for the church to be a body. Christ is the only absolute authority in the body, he is the only head; all the rest are members. Concerning forgiveness, salvation, access to God, life, privileges, blessings, all of us are equal; but concerning gifts, charismas, ministries, functions and responsibilities, there are different levels of authority.

There is an order of authority; first the apostles, second the prophets, third, the teachers, etc. The body of Christ functions within a vertical scheme that goes from the head to the last member, uniting the body.

Even among the twelve, all of whom were apostles, that is to say, having the same ministerial level, Peter was the first among equals. Here we see the three elements combined: plurality, unity and authority. We do not believe that Peter was the pope. But he was the “point man” among the twelve and presided, although at times he was subject to them. We can also take note that Peter, James and John can be seen with a greater ascendancy among the twelve in Jerusalem.

In our days, when making a list of names, to avoid offending anyone we generally place them in alphabetical order. But in the biblical text we understand that the order was indicative of a certain ascendancy. In the various lists where the twelve appear, Peter is always first and Judas last. In Acts 13, Barnabas heads the list and Saul concludes it.

At the beginning of the first apostolic trip we read: “Barnabas and Saul”. Later, when the ministry of Paul acquires a greater importance, they are mentioned as “Paul and Barnabas”. This is not accidental but intentional. When there are two or more, generally one has a greater measure of grace and ascendancy, and humility is required to recognize the fact.

The prophets recognized the ascendancy of the apostles. There were no independent evangelists; they were very useful under the apostles. The elders did not constitute the final authority over the churches, but were under the authority of the apostles, and even were subject to those sent by the apostles.

The deacons functioned under the elders, and were of great help in the various areas of service. The same principle could have led the presbytery to the recognition of a principal elder among them.

The apostles, representing the highest level of authority of the church, always saw themselves under the unique and absolute authority of Christ, they were to function in mutual submission to each other. Every apostle should be under the plural authority of a collegial apostolate (or college of apostles).

III. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE APOSTOLIC GIFT

THE APOSTOLIC GIFT INCLUDES:

1. The charisma of **revelation** (Eph 3.3-5)
 - Revelation concerning the mystery of the kingdom of God
 - Revelation concerning the mystery of Christ
 - Revelation concerning the mystery of the body of Christ: the church
 - Clarity concerning the doctrine of Christ and of the apostles (*Didache*).
2. The charisma of **evangelization**. The apostle is a ‘sent one’. Sent where? To the world. When he arrives in a new place, he job is to evangelize (Rom 1.1 y 5).
3. The charismas or the **gifts of the Spirit**. (Rom 15.18-19; 2Cor 12.12)
4. The charisma of **communication**. The apostle is a ‘preacher’ and teacher (1Tim 2.7; 2Tim 1.11).
5. The charisma of **execution**: This is one of the aspects that differentiates the apostolic and prophetic gifts. The apostle has the gift of executing the vision. He has the gift to lay a foundation, plant churches, form lives, form workers, establish elders and edify the church (1Cor 3.10; 9.1-2).

6. The charisma of **government and paternity**: Wisdom, grace and authority to edify, to oversee and supervise, instruct, guide, correct, discipline, cover with full responsibility, patience and perseverance. The content of the epistles clearly indicate this function.

REQUISITES FOR FUNCTIONING IN AN APOSTOLIC MINISTRY

1. Have a call, a personal conviction from the Lord. (1Cor 1.1).
2. Have a recognized ministry in a presbytery in the edification of a local congregation, such as Barnabas and Saul in Antioch (Acts 13.1-3).
3. Recognition by presbyters or churches that accept his ministry and apostolic authority.
4. He is joined to and subject to an apostolic network that confirms and recognizes his ministry.

BURDEN AND PASSION OF AN APOSTLE

1. Have a burden and passion for the extension of God's kingdom. He is a man on the frontier; his burden and passion is to fill every place with the gospel, to reach new places. (Rom 15.18-24)

2. Have a burden and passion to make known to all the mystery that has been revealed. That all might know god, his plan and eternal purpose, the unsearchable riches of Christ ... (Eph 3.8-11).

3. Be zealous for the church to be edified with holy doctrine and according to the revelation of the Word. (Gal 1.6-9; 1Tim 1.3-4; 2Tim 2.2; 4.1-5)

4. Have a burden and passion for the unity of the church. He sees division as horrible, as a grotesque caricature of the new creation. (1Cor 1.12-13; Eph 2.14-16). For an apostle the unity of the church is not an optional accessory of the church; it has to do with its very essence and nature.

5. Have a burden and passion for the quality and holiness of the church. He is zealous that the church be built with gold, silver and precious stones. He preaches, exhorts, and teaches so as to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus (Col 1.28)

6. Have a burden and passion that all the church might reach its fullness in Christ. (Eph 3.19-20; 4.13)

SPIRITUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF AN APOSTLE

1. He is a man of faith. Even though God's objectives are elevated and humanly impossible to reach, he never says it can't be done. His language is always one of faith: Phil 1.6; 4.13; Eph 3.20; 4.13; 5.27.

2. He is diligent and sacrificial. The cost and suffering does not matter to him in order to reach his objectives (2Cor 11.23-28).

3. He is a spiritual man, not carnal. He is not jealous, greedy, with personal ambitions (1Cor 2.16 – 3.3). He does not seek his own, he knows very well that the churches he plants and cares for do not belong to him, but to Christ (2Cor 11.2).

4. He is passionate for Christ. (Phil 3.7-14). Christ is his life, his passion, his love, his goal. Christ is all he wants to gain; he is thirsty to know him and be like him.

¹For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— ²Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. ⁴In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.

Ephesians 3:1–5, NIV

The apostle Paul declares that the mystery hidden for centuries in God was revealed to the apostles and prophets of his generation by the Holy Spirit, and that through them it was made known to the saints (Colossians 1:26). That mystery (or secret) he calls “*the mystery of Christ*” (Ephesians 3:4), “*the mystery of his will*” (1:9), and “*the mystery of Christ and his church*” (5:32).

The letter to the Ephesians is without a doubt the one that reveals the highest level of revelation concerning the church. In it Paul communicates the vision of the church that God conceived in his mind and heart before the creation of the world. It is the church which God purposed in himself, according to his good pleasure.

¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. ¹⁹Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²²And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Ephesians 2:14–22, NIV

⁴In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. ⁶This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 3:4–6, NIV

In accordance with the revelation given to the apostles and prophets, the church is a single people, a unique new man, a single body, a single family, a single nation, a single building, properly coordinated and growing to become a single temple, the dwelling place of God. There are no categories or divisions within the church. Every child of God, without regard for the race or nation from which he comes, belongs to the same family of God and is a member of the same body. This is the church which the Father planned from all eternity. It is the church that Christ brought into being through his death and resurrection. And it is the one church that the apostles labored with God to build.

In the New Testament, the dominant figure referring to the church is the body: many members, but one body. There is a diversity of gifts and ministries, but never a diversity of churches.

As we have already stated, for the apostles this unity must have a practical and visible expression in the church in each city. Paul did not allow the divisions to prevail in Corinth. Nor in Ephesus, nor in any other city. The Christians met largely in private homes. In a single city they might meet in a variety of homes or in a large number of homes, in accordance with their numerical growth, but all of

them as part of the single church of Christ in that city. Toward the end of the first century, after some forty years of having established the church in Asia, Jesus Christ addresses the church in Ephesus, as well as in each of the other seven cities of the region (Revelation, chapters 2 and 3).

Paul, as an apostle of Jesus Christ, was one of those most used by God to spread the gospel and establish churches in many cities and nations of the Roman empire. He possessed exceptional gifts and ministerial virtues; even so, the idea never occurred to him to establish a denomination and call it something like “International Association of Churches of the Apostle Paul.” He could have had the largest denomination of his time. Why did he not do it? The answer is simple.

God had shown him the mystery of his will, which was to bring together all things under one head: Christ, not Paul.

He knew that the foundation of the church is Christ, and not an apostle. Paul built on that foundation alone.

He knew that the church belongs to God. And he knew that he was the servant of the church, not its lord.

He had received the revelation of the mystery of Christ and his church. The church is the body of Christ, and that body should never be divided.

He knew that to take advantage of the churches he founded would be high treason against Jesus Christ. How meaningful are his words to the Corinthians: *“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”* (2Corinthians 11:2). Just as the servant of Abraham did with Rebecca, he was sent afar to find her and, in the long return journey, he took care of her; he honored her and presented her as a pure virgin for Isaac. Paul well knew that the church did not belong to him and it was not for him; it belonged to Christ and was for Christ.

The present danger of apostolic ministries

We praise God for the restoration of apostolic ministries in our days. At the same time, we lament some abuses such as: massive designations of apostles, the use of the term apostle as a status symbol of hierarchy in ministry, etc. Yet, as regards dangers, I want to refer to something more central.

Many observers point out that the church in general has entered a “post-denominational” stage. Denominational identity today is almost irrelevant. To say that someone is Baptist or Catholic or Anglican is hardly enough. There are Baptists who seem to be more Pentecostal than the Pentecostals themselves, and there are Catholics that are more believers than many evangelicals.

But the concern that I want to underline is the fact that many strong and energetic ministries are arising with apostolic characteristics, which are growing more than the denominations to which they belong or belonged at one time. The church in many nations, especially in Latin America, Africa and Asia is growing at an extraordinary rate, and we thank God for that. Yet many of these ministries, perhaps without proposing to do so, are becoming independent and personal in nature. This is accented by the restoration of the apostolic ministry, and is occasionally seen when an apostle acquires a network of churches and sometimes winds up being the only leader, with absolute authority and, for all practical purposes, is the sole owner of the work.

The restoration of the apostolic ministry without a vision of the unity of the church fosters this kind of danger.

The reason for the existence of A.F.I.

What is the future of ministry that is built around one person? What is the mid-range and long-range projection of renewal movements?

I transcribe below a paragraph from the prologue written by my wife for my book, *El Proyecto del Eterno* [The project of the Eternal]:

*The Lord does not have a great variety of plans and purposes for his children. He does not have an infinite number of plans for the world. He does not divide the power of his kingdom into multiple and diverse projects. God has one great project: "to unite all things in Christ" (Ephesians 1.10), that is to say, that all lives and persons, the particular circumstances and historical events, might converge in the fulfillment of his plan: **Christ as the head of a new people, a new family, a new eternal order.***

Seen from this perspective, all that we are and do either moves toward the growth and advance of God's project or works against it. "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters" (Matthew 12.30). Neutrality is impossible. An adjustment of our attitudes, if done in time, will help us to establish a new orientation and face life from another angle. This helps. It allows us to become effective workers...

God's great project is carried out through those who decide to lose their life in God. To lose their own identity within the body. To stop seeking their own way in order to find Christ's way. We cannot follow our personal choices and those of God at the same time. They are contrary to each other. When we lose ourselves within God's plan, surrendering all that we are and our deepest longings for the realization of God's project, we find life, meaning, balance, peace. For we become part of the whole, the great family of God that rejoices in being one.

The church has a unique legitimate future: THE UNITY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST, and every legitimate apostolic ministry has the responsibility to contribute to the formation and growth of the UNIQUE CHURCH OF CHRIST in each city and nation of the world. Amen.

This is the great challenge that all of us have as servants of God; and this is the reason for the existence of this Apostolic Fellowship International (AFI) as an apostolic and prophetic contribution to the church in the world at the outset of the Third Millennium.