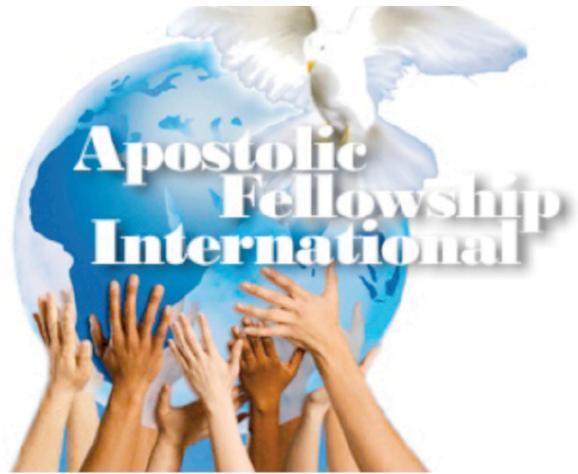


AFI



Apostolic consultation

What's the future of the church?

Caserta - Maggio 2012

Carlos Mraida - a God of relationship

I have been asked to give a presentation entitled: *A God of Relationships*. And all framed within the overall theme of: *What is the future of the church?*, which is also the general theme of this *European Consultation of AFI*, that is to say, an apostolic fraternity. So please allow me to connect these three frameworks: apostolic ministry, the future of the church, and the God of relationships, by using the word: *mystery*.

I start with the word *mystery* for two reasons. The first is that prior to any theological formulation concerning God, comes the experience of an encounter with the divine *mystery* that leads to surrender, love, worship, mission. And then the experience/encounter with the *mystery* is rationally understood in terms of doctrines, creeds, theology. Also involved in the formulation that today we will share: a God of relationships. So that first we meet the *mystery*, then the formulation.

The second reason that I want to begin with the concept of *mystery* is that Saint Paul described the apostolic task that is the basis for this consultation by saying: *Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God*¹.

The Greek word is *μυστήριον* (*mustérion*). It appears 28 times in the New Testament. And while it is true that 23 of those appear in the singular, when Paul refers to the apostolic task as a stewardship of God's servants, the use is plural. Therefore I will also use it in the plural.

I. The "first" *mystery*: A God that is ontologically relational:

When we think of God's being, the distinctive doctrine of Christianity has been and is the Trinity. Tertullian formulated it in the Second Century, and it was formalized in the theology of the church in the Fourth Century. Essentially, it consists of three affirmations: that there is only one God, that each of the three persons—Father, Son and Spirit—is God, and that the Father, as well as the Son and the Spirit, are clearly differentiated persons.

This "first" *mystery*, or eternal *mystery*, that has to do with God himself, has been partially made known to us, since our mind is unable to fully understand the double affirmation that God is One and also Triune.

It is more than evident that this description of God's being emerges first as a spontaneous expression of the Christian experience. The early Christians found themselves reconciled to God the Father, and understood that such reconciliation was assured by the atoning work of the Son, and that it was communicated to them as an experience with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, for them the Trinity was a reality before it became a doctrine.

Irenaeus and Origen share with Tertullian the responsibility for the formulation that continues to be, in the basics, that of the Catholic Church. Under the leadership of Athanasius this doctrine was proclaimed as a creed of the church in the council of Nicea², and in the hands of Augustine, a century later, it received a formulation included in the so-called creed of Athanasius which is accepted by trinitarian churches until our days. After being clarified by John Calvin³, it was acknowledged by churches of the reformed faith⁴.

Having been formulated in this way it is manifest as the Tri-Unity of God. Thus it is exceedingly clear that God is a God who in himself is a God of relationships.

¹ 1 Corinthians 4.1 (NKJV).

² Year 325 A.D.

³ See B. B. Warfield, Calvin and Augustine, Presbyterian & Reformed Pub Co, 1956, pp. 189–284

⁴ Nuevo Diccionario Bíblico Certeza.

Three persons, one nature. His triune nature speaks to us of the indispensable diversity for which there are relationships. His “unity” communicates to us the quality of those relationships. Each person is self-conscious and self-directed, but never acts independently or in opposition to the others. When we say that God is a unity we mean that while it is true that God is in himself a tripartite center of life, his life is not divided into three parts. He is one in essence, in personality and in volition (will).

Theology has defined that the divine persons are «subsistent relationships». This means that the divine persons do not HAVE relationships; rather, they ARE relationships. And because God is love since eternity past, not only since creation, he is love in himself. The Father has a Son, the Logos, whom he loves with infinite love, which is the Holy Spirit. In all love there are always three realities or subjects: one that loves, one that is loved and the love that unites them.⁵

In Hebrew monotheism we are faced with the solitary “aloneness” of one, who has no one at his side. He is eternally alone. All other beings are subject to him. All possible communication would be unequal. On the other hand, in polytheism, with a plurality of gods, divine unity evaporates⁶.

But this “first” *mystery* shows us that in his own being, ontologically, God is a relational God. The believer, in the experience of the *mystery*, experiences the diversity of the three persons, and at the same time the unity, in the relationship, in the fellowship.

If God were only one, there would be a solitary concentration in unity and uniqueness. If God were two, a duality (Father and Son alone), there would be separation (each is distinct from the other) and exclusion (one is not the other). But God is three, a Trinity.

As Leonardo Boff has said, the three avoid aloneness, overcome separation and exceed exclusion. The Trinity impedes a relationship between Father and Son in a “narcissistic” contemplation. The third person, the “other Jesus”⁷, implies communion. The one and the multiple, the uniqueness and the diversity, are found in the Trinity as circumscribed and reunited. Here the three does not involve only the number, but the affirmation that under the name of God differences are verified that are not excluded, but rather included; that are not opposed, but rather are in fellowship; the distinction is for the purpose of union.

Where is the union of the three? It is in the communion (fellowship) among the three. Communion is common union. The three persons are one because they are open to each other, they exist with each other and are for each other. To express this union, theologians, beginning in the Sixth Century, coined the Greek expression *perijóresis*⁸: each person contains the other two, each penetrates the others and is penetrated by them, each lives in the others, and viceversa⁹. Its significance is always that of interpenetration, that of being a reciprocal of each of the persons in the other two of the Trinity, living one in the other in a unique substance, as a circulation of love without mixture or confusion of persons. The divine *hipostasis* are one in the other without confusion, living and residing always together, without the possibility of being conceived separately. Thus in the Holy Trinity there are three *hipostasis* united by one *perijóresis*, that express the maximum grade of interpenetration and communion of love in the maximum grade of diversity.

The first person of the Trinity is made known with an essentially relational name: Father. Christ always attributed to himself a unique relationship with God as Father, and the Jews who heard him apparently had no doubts about what he meant by that. In fact they tried to kill him because he said that God was his own Father, making himself equal to God.¹⁰ And the Holy Spirit is made known as the person who knows uniquely the depths of God’s nature: *For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God... no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God*¹¹. This is like saying that the Spirit is “God himself in the deepest essence of his being”¹².

Due to the *perijóresis*, each person acts in union with the others. The Father creates by the Son with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Son becomes flesh, sent by the Father in virtue of the life-giving Spirit. The

⁵ See Rainiero Cantalamessa, *La Trinidad escuela de relación*, 18-05-2008.

⁶ See the theological development of Leonardo Boff on the Trinity, in *La trinidad, la sociedad y la liberación*, Madrid: Ediciones Paulinas, 1987.

⁷ John 14.16: “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you” (NLT).

⁸ From the Greek: Rotation, revolve around.

⁹ Boff, pp. 9-10.

¹⁰ John 5.18.

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 2.10-11.

¹² Certeza,

Spirit descends upon the believers sent by the Father at the request of the Son. Tradition has manifested this in different ways: The Father engenders the Son in the womb of the Holy Spirit, or the Father gives breath to the Holy Spirit together with the Son, or the Holy Spirit reveals the Father through the Son, or the Son loves the Father in the Holy Spirit, or the Son and the Holy Spirit are recognized in the Father, and so on. All are declarations that show that it is all relationship, all participation, all circulation, all is given reciprocally, all are united by communion.

Thus, though only partially understood by our logical limitation, the “first” *mystery*, that of God’s being, One and Triune, we see essentially that our God is a God of relationships.

II. The “second” *mystery*: A God who is incarnationally relational:

The “first” or eternal *mystery*, that of the Tri-Unity of God, remains partially hidden, since our mind cannot comprehend it and therefore cannot explain it. Our words, concerning the Trinity, hide more than they reveal and we are able to express more analogies than exact definitions. But in the incarnation God revealed himself to us.

The word *mystery* proceeds from the verbal root *myéb*, meaning etymologically “to close.” From the same etymology are derived our adjectives ‘dumb’, from the verb *myaó*, and ‘miope’, from *myops*. In the incarnation, the *mystery* that was “dumb” became the *Logos*, the incarnate Word. And the *mystery* that was “hidden” was revealed by the Son: *No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known*¹³.

And then the “first” and eternal *mystery*, hidden and “dumb,” was revealed to us: *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us*¹⁴.

And when the apostle John tells us the reason for the revelation, he says that the purpose is the relationship with each other and with God: *We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ*¹⁵.

Thus the “first” *mystery*, even when it remains hidden, shows us a relational God. And the “second” *mystery*, the revelation in the incarnation, shows us God’s desire to extend to us his relational character, allowing us to see what is hidden of his glory, in the only begotten Son; that is to say, in God’s paternal/filial relationship: *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth*¹⁶.

And as the Father sent the Son who was in his bosom, the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God¹⁷, the Spirit of the Son¹⁸. And the *mystery* that was “dumb” became tongues of fire. And the hidden *mystery* became visible signs and wonders for everyone.

Thus the incarnation is the relational axis of God. The first person is manifested as the Father of all, in the incarnate Son, that “broadens” the incarnation, inhabiting the life of men through the Holy Spirit. In the incarnation the transcendence of the Father become immanent in the Son, and transparent in the Holy Spirit, uniting transcendence with immanence, transforming the human creature by divine power. And the God of relationships *ad intra*, now is fully manifested as a God of relationships *ad extra*, incorporating all of us who are in the Son, through the Holy Spirit in his own bosom.

III. The “third” *mystery*: A God apostolically relational:

And the One and Triune God becomes incarnate “again” in the life of the believers, through the Holy Spirit, requested of the Father by the Son, causing the church to become his Body, in the incarnation of the God of relationships. And the God who said that he would inhabit the darkness, makes his temple in the life of all who receive the Father, through the Son, by means of the work of the Holy Spirit. And the veil rent in two, unveiled the hidden *mystery* making it the incarnate *mystery*.

In the common comprehension, the Trinity is reduced to a *mystery* of logic instead of a *mystery* of our salvation. It is more a curiosity than a reality that affects our existence as the church. This is what Immanuel Kant understood when he affirmed: “From the doctrine of the Trinity nothing of importance definitively results

¹³ John 1.18 (NIV).

¹⁴ 1 John 1.1-2 (NIV).

¹⁵ 1 John 1.3 (NIV).

¹⁶ John 1.14 (NIV).

¹⁷ Romans 8.9, 14, 15.19, 1Corinthians 2, 3.16, 6.11, 7.40, 12.3, 2Corinthians 3.3, Ephesians 4.30, 1Peter 4.14, 1John 4.1,2.

¹⁸ Galatians 4.6, Philipians 1.19, 1Peter 1.11.

in practice, even when the pretension is made of understanding it; even much less when someone is convinced that it exceeds absolutely all our concepts. It is not hard for the student to accept that in the divinity we worship three or ten persons. For him it is all the same, since he has no idea about a God in several persons (*hipostasis*). Moreover, nothing of distinction is derived that absolutely affects his conduct".¹⁹

Nothing could be further from the truth. The Trinity is vital for the definition of our existence and activity as the church. For as Boff would say, "it clarifies our own existence and puts us in communication with the ultimate structure of the universe and of human life: communion and participation"²⁰. Therein we find practices and guidelines for social and personal behavior.

This is where faith in the Trinity, in the *mystery* of the *perijóresis*, acquires resonance, since the Trinity is presented as a model for humanity, through the example of the church. Christians are the first fruits of a society that can be the image and likeness of the Trinity. For this purpose the church of Jesus Christ is sent, that is to say, it expresses apostolically the relational God. This has vital missiological implications, that have to do with the theme of our Consultation, the church of the future, and with our apostolic ministry.

Allow me to share some things, simply as areas of concern, rather than as answers, about some issues upon which I believe it would be pertinent for us to reflect.

1. *The church of the future reflects the relational God, making visible in the city its unity in diversity.*

The first implication I wish to underscore concerning the Trinity has to do with the unity of the church. This unity is not only spiritual, but must be expressed in a visible way in the locus of its mission which is the city. Let us not tire of reminding ourselves in all possible forums, that every time the New Testament speaks of the church in a city, it is always singular.

The most urgent apostolic task today is precisely to show the *mystery* of unity. Jesus affirmed the unity of the church making it parallel to the unity of the Godhead: *My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 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.*²¹

On the visibility of the unity of the church in each city will depend the effectiveness of the mission: "so that the world may believe that you have sent me." The church of the future has no other option. Either it will make visible the *mystery* of its unity, or its message will not be pertinent. In a world of multiple messages and of a concept of truth that is completely relative, in a world of conflicts, divisions and confrontations, the message of Christian love will remain a hidden *mystery*, *myops*, unless people can observe through a church that in each city makes visible the *mystery* of the Triune God who is One. Historically, there have been several attempts to bring the Christians together. I say to bring together, rather than to unite, because the results were not unity, for in one sense they made the division more profound. In reality, they were attempts at uniformity, not unity. But unity requires diversity, and diversity, far from being a problem, is an expression of the richness of the unity. Thus unity that necessarily requires diversity, expresses the God of relationships that are One and Triune.

Uniformity impoverishes, but unity in diversity enriches. We have attempted to come together uniformly under the criteria of orthodoxy. The word *orthodoxy* comes from two Greek words: *ortho* which means correct, straight; and *doxa* from which we derive our word doctrine. That is to say, orthodoxy means correct doctrine. So the criteria of orthodoxy is to come together with those who have correct doctrine. And what is the correct doctrine? Your own.

So that all who believe the same come together under a structure or organization. And these are separate from the heterodox, that is *hetero*, other, *doxa*, doctrine. They separate from those who have a different doctrine. Of course, the denominations have followed this criteria. The denominations are the result of illuminism. That is to say, a way of seeing reality that has characterized our occidental culture in recent centuries. Illuminism, rationalism, or modernity—however you want to call it—has enthroned reason and therefore the concept, and has provoked a world of confrontations and a divided church. The church of the past failed to make a reality of Jesus' desire that we be one, through its attempts to bring us together through doctrine. Beyond that, the church of the future will also be unable to achieve it, both for what has been said, but also because we no longer live in the culture of modernity but rather in post-modernity, and the axis has been displaced so that it is no longer reason and concept.

¹⁹ Immanuel Kant, *El conflicto de las facultades*, Madrid: Trotta, 1999, pp. 38-39.

²⁰ Boff, p. 29.

²¹ John 17.20-21.

There have also been efforts to bring Christians together uniformly based on their experiences and practices, that is to say, following the criteria of *orthopraxis*. As we say *ortho* means correct, and *praxis* means practice. That is, the correct practice or experience. And what is the correct practice or experience? Obviously, your own. Thus, all those who have a similar praxis or experience come together. And they separate from those with a *heteropraxis*, that is, from those who have a different practice or experience.

Thus to the divisions of orthodoxy we have added the divisions of orthopraxis. That is to say, our experiences and the practices resulting from them divided us again. God wants to restore his church in unity so that the world might believe. Orthodoxy has its place. Orthopraxis has its importance. But for God what is more important is *orthokardia*. What interests God more than anything else is that we have a correct heart. What is a correct heart? Could it be the heart of the pastors of the Assemblies of God? Or would the heart of the pastors of the Full Gospel be more correct, or perhaps that of the pastors of Holiness? Or maybe mine, which is Baptist?

The only one who has a correct heart is God. And he is interested in our following the criteria of *orthokardia*. That is, a heart in harmony with that of a God of relationships, a heart that makes visible the One and Triune God. We are not exhorted to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of truth, nor in the bond of praxis, nor in the bond of experience. We are told to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. The bond is peace. For that reason God prefers *orthokardia*. A heart that loves, and that loves with *ágape* love, love in spite of... in spite of our differences of tradition, of doctrine, of experience, or practice.

The opposite of *orthokardia* is *esclerokardia*. This is an malady that Jesus often diagnosed in the life of his disciples: he told them they were *hard of heart*.

And the manifestation of the heart of the God of relationships is expressed principally through mission. For the heart of God beats for people. And the effective mission of the church depends on its showing its unity so that the world might believe. The axis of unity is the mission in each city.

And if there is one church in each city, there is one presbytery in each city. A pastoral body over the city, made up of all the pastors of the city. Each one must renounce his job as pastor of his congregation to become pastor of his city. It is time that together with the rest of the pastors of your city you assume responsibility for the condition of your city. God placed you in that city, to reach it with the gospel and transform it. But alone you cannot do it. You must pastor the city joined with your fellow servants. For God is not that interested in our doctrines or experiences, but rather in the people that are dying without Christ in our cities, and in the condition of our cities. And for the transformation of the lives and structures of your city, it is indispensable that the church of the future work in a united mission in the city.

2. The church of the future reflects the relational God weaving trinitarian networks in each congregation.

We must make every congregation an expression of a community that lives a different life. The Trinity is not merely a speculative *mystery* destined for theological reflection, for it has to do, not only with the divine nature, but with the nature of the church and its mission. In the conception of a One and Triune God we find our origin, our model and our objective as the people of God. The church is the family of the Trinity, that lives out the Unity in love and surrender, and that realizes its mission to the world with the purpose that every person may know the love and the surrender of that One and Triune God, and that each one of the spheres of human reality might be modeled according to that kind of love. Humanity was created in the image and likeness of God. Sin distorted that image and likeness, but in Christ they are restored to us, and the church, first fruits of the new creation, should reflect that image and likeness of the One and Triune God.

I believe that we should begin to model a pattern of trinitarian networks in the church of the present and the future. The evangelization of the world in which we live and especially of the world to come, will not be principally a question of discourses or programs, nor the ministry of a specialist, but the presentation to the world of a community that reflects in its life the living reality of the One and Triune God.

A world of orphans, of lost health, of egocentric hyperindividualism needs the corporate expression of the church as the first fruits of the new creation.

In an orphaned world the church should be an expression of the paternity of God, through networks of integral and continual mentoring of the life of its members, so that all fulfill the visions of God for their lives, grow, prosper, advance.

In a lost and wounded world, the church should be an expression of the redemption of the Son, through networks of integral and continual healing of the life of its members, as a result of the lordship of Christ.

In a hyperindividualistic world, the church should be an expression of the communion of the Holy Spirit, through networks of vital relationships that enrich and sustain integrally and continually the life of its

members. And this in such a way that all might have the possibility of being healthy, of growing in every facet of their life, and of experiencing the richness of significant relationships of love and surrender.

In the world that is coming and is already among us, the church will be meaningful for its members in the measure that each one enjoys the opportunity of knowing spiritual paternity, that promotes growth in every sphere of life, while helping others to develop their potential; experience permanent health in life and relationships, while being an instrument for the restoration of the life of others; enjoy interpersonal relationships that cause people to become givers and receivers of the love of God.

In the world that is coming and is already among us, the church will have meaning for non believers in the measure that its mission be an expression of its life, the activity of its being. Then that world that is orphaned, sick and egotistical can see an alternative of life incarnate in the church.

2. The church of the future reflects the relational God making audible and visible the mystery of the Triune God in mission.

The central task of the church of the future will continue to be to make known the *mystery* of the gospel: *that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel.*²² The *mystery* of the gospel must be revealed to those who do not yet know Christ. The dumb and hidden *mystery* must be proclaimed and visibly manifested. The nucleus of the *mystery* of the gospel is the incarnation, and therefore the kingdom becomes word and body, which are visible.

The church of the future cannot lose any of its two dimensions. It must boldly make known the *mystery* of the gospel through proclamation, and it must boldly make known the *mystery* of the gospel through its visible manifestation. This is what the apostles of the primitive church received and it is what they made known. The members of the City Council questioned Peter and John: *By what power or what name did you do this? ... Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."*²³

The apostles of the early church had received, seen and heard the *mystery* of the gospel, and this is the way they made it known. Therefore the city authorities questioned them about the power, and ordered them to stop speaking. The apostles of the church today, as well as of the future, must make audible and visible the *mystery* of the gospel. Therefore they must administer the *mystery* of the Trinity, proclaiming and making visible the love and righteousness of the Father. Proclaiming and making visible the salvation, healing and deliverance of Jesus Christ. Proclaiming and making visible the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the post modern world, where truth is absolutely relative and the truth of the gospel is only "our truth", we must preach boldly the gospel and expect the backing for "our truth" with signs and wonders and with the life of a people that lives an alternative life before our society. We must expect that God will back up the word with signs and wonders, in such a way that God's intervention in history is manifested.

The primitive church raised a prayer: *Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus*²⁴. We pray for what we don't have. Sometimes we idealize the church of the book of Acts, but they requested boldness in proclamation and signs, because at that moment they felt that they did not have either the boldness or the signs. If the European church feels that they do not have boldness in the proclamation and if signs are lacking, they need to request them. The result will be the same: When they had prayer, the place where they were meeting trembled; and all were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness. The church of the future will be a church with boldness and with signs.

4. The church of the future reflects the relational God through a trinitarian and multi-generational leadership.

Unlike Kant, who was unable to foresee the practical consequences of the *mystery* of the Trinity, of the God of relationships, Yves Congar and others have pointed out the dangers of a unitarian concept of God, in the formation of leadership. One can justify ideologically the concentration of power in a single person. Jürgen

²² Ephesians 6.19.

²³ Acts 4.7, 18-20.

²⁴ Acts 4.29-30.

Moltmann mentions the example of Genghis Khan: "In heaven there is one God alone; in the earth, one lord alone, Genghis Khan, the son of God"²⁵. The similarity can be repeated in ecclesiastical leadership.

I see at least four negative implications for leadership:

i. "Unitarian" leadership can provoke divisions in the church of the city.

A-trinitarian monotheism can also open the way to a concept of leadership that impedes the unity of the church. Just as in heaven there is one head (God), in the city also there must be a single head as representative: "the man of God for the city", the "anointed of the Lord" and other Old Testament models, that do not adequately reveal the *mystery* of the Trinity, nor the *mystery* of the church.

A return to the God of relationships, whose unity is not unitarianism, but the unity of three persons, One and Triune, overcomes any ideological justification for leadership concentrated in power, in grace, in revivals.

ii. "Unitarian" leadership can provoke the continual loss of leaders in the congregation.

In light of the *mystery* of communion between the divine persons a model can be projected for raising up new leaders and for work teams in each community. The church of the future that wants to multiply itself in the development of its mission and its scope, will need to experience a multiplication of its leadership and a deliverance from itself.

The church today is suffering a constant loss of leaders. There is a pastoral vision of the function of leadership that has strongly incarnated itself, because it has been strongly emphasized for many years. And it is the Aarón-Hur model, that sustains the arms of Moses, to keep him from tiring and to obtain victory over Amalec. This is a necessary part of our leadership, having people that sustain and help us, and it is necessary in the formation of leaders that learn to sustain their leader. But when the raising up of leaders is limited to assigning tasks to help us sustain our ministry, things get complicated. And maladies in leadership are produced.

The first is *sterility*. The function of all of us is not only to carry out our ministry but to raise up new pastors. There are impressive ministries that have not been multiplied in other pastors. Success without a successor is failure. Ministerial sterility is a serious problem. Something is wrong with us if we are unable to multiply ourselves in others of the same kind.

A second problem is that the almost unique emphasis on numerical growth has caused us to concentrate everything in the congregation and then all the leaders that we raise up are to work in the program centralized in my own congregation. It is the problem of *concentration*. To find a church today that has the vision of Antioch to release two of its principal leaders to extend the gospel is like finding a needle in a haystack. When concentration becomes a style of pastoral leadership, we face strong contradictions to the essence of the gospel itself, which is to give, liberate, release, send. Moreover, it begins to produce other problems within the congregation and the leadership. Those leaders that are not released, and that stay by our side, in time begin to have problems. This is the reason that some pastors live through repetitive cycles of complete renewal of their leadership. Some, every couple years, others, every five years, etc. but inevitably they lose the people that are at their side that have cost them a great deal to win and to raise up. Some interpret these processes as ingratitude of the people. Others blame Satan. Others preach more about subjection and the danger of Absalom than about the cross of Christ. But the fact is that in most cases this happens to us because we do not adequately understand what is Christian leadership, why we should raise up leaders, and what to do with those leaders.

Things get ever more complicated when the ecclesiastical and pastoral model almost, *almost* promotes the deification of the principal leader or pastor. For when that happens, and subliminally a message is projected that the highest aspiration that a person could reach in life is that of becoming the senior pastor, and people buy into that vision, then the people begin to grow in their leadership, and they want to grow more and more, until they hit the ceiling. What is that ceiling? The senior pastor himself. And the emerging leader wants to continue growing, due to a legitimate calling, or because he bought into the vision that realization in life is to scale the pastoral pyramid, and discovers that he has hit the ceiling.

Then things divide into various subgroups. There are "little pig" leaders, those that bang against the ceiling that we represent, and want to continue growing, and they keep banging, and when they discover that they can't, they turn into little pigs. Their leadership is slowly debilitated, nothing terrible happens, but within a few years, we can hardly count on them anymore.

Then there are "goat" leaders, those that bang against the ceiling that I represent and because they want to continue growing, they try again, but since I don't give them more space because I am the ceiling, they begin

²⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *La unidad convocante del Dios uno y trino*, en *Concilium* 197 (1985).

to butt the ceiling with their horns, and they start to create problems. Then they rebel and if they are leading a group, they wind up dividing the church, or leaving with a group of people and forming another congregation. Things get worse if the system in which he was formed is like we said before where the one who grows, prospers only if he can become the pastor, because those who are coming up want that desperately, and since their only hope of realization is in the church, they feel they have to form their own congregation to see if they can grow and become number one.

There are also the "lost sheep" kind of leaders; things go well for they are submissive sheep, workers, they give us their wool, but then they reach a level where they cannot grow, because they have hit the ceiling, which I represent as the senior pastor, gradually they start dropping out. And then one day we realize they are no longer there.

Also when we are the ceiling, we produce leaders that are like "elephants". They don't make big problems for us, they don't turn away, they are there, but in the bottom of our heart, we know they have an enormous potential that is contained, they are not becoming all they should be according to the gifts that God gave them. They are like elephants, they are strong, they have the potential to be king of the forest, but they are not.

The only way to resolve the problem is for us to stop being a ceiling for others. Antioch is the model of leadership without a ceiling. I see three characteristics in this kind of leadership. First, it is shared. Second, it is centrifugal. Third, it is growing. How is the problem of the ceiling resolved? I understand that there are at least three ways that are joined to these three characteristics of Christian leadership.

The first is to knock down the wall, build another room, so that other ceilings are needed. That is to say, sharing within our own congregation the leadership. But that also means sharing authority. We find it difficult to share leadership, to lead cooperatively. But until we resolve this problem, we will have conflicts with leaders. And the exercise of leadership in our own congregation is excellent training for doing the same later in the city.

The second way is to open the door. Christian leadership is extension. Some of those leaders we need to release, send out, so that the work can grow. This is centrifugal movement, not centripetal.

I want to underscore one other way, setting it apart.

iii. "Unitarian" leadership can provoke the annulment of apostolic ministries.

The third way of ceasing to be a ceiling for emerging leaders is for those of us who are the ceiling to raise our own ceiling and grow. We leave our own space to occupy new spaces. In our formation this is decodified as loss, but I believe it is growth. The caricature of apostolic ministries that we see every day show us the need and urgency in the work today for true apostolic ministries. Not people that have to be the boss. Rather recognized pastors, with authority, with a history, with wisdom from God and a calling for this, to serve the pastors. Not a mockery of apostolic ministry that pretends to be the top of the pyramid in the hierarchy of authority, but those that follow the biblical model, that tell us that instead of being at the peak, they are at the base, below, in the foundations, not to command, but to serve the pastors, to shepherd them, move them forward. This is the number one need of the work. Pastors tell us in all the surveys that we do, that they feel like orphans, they need to be helped in the vision, get them involved with others in unity in the city. There are too many pseudo apostles, because the need among pastors is enormous.

And today there are pastoral ministries that God has blessed in many ways, who need to lift the ceiling. One day four stretcher bearers broke up the roof to enter a home and get a paralytic healed. Today we need healthy ministries to break up the ceiling from within the house, the church, to heal the paralysis of many pastoral ministries that have great potential, but find no models, no stimulus. We need ministries to break up the roofs over the temples, and to look upon the city. To install good pastors for the congregational program, so that they can elaborate a strategy for the city and the nation.

At one point men say to David, please don't go out with us to fight the battles on the battlefield, so as not to put out the light of Israel. With genuine love, I want to say to you who are an older pastor, proven, blessed of God, that if you are a ceiling for your leaders, that you have become your own ceiling. Don't put out the light that God gave you. What you have done until now, your people learned, and they will continue to do, and they will do it even better than you. But it is time to raise your ceiling, and bring new light for the kingdom in your city, in your nation. Don't turn off the light.

Let's don't kill more leaders, let's don't repeat those fatal cycles of death for leaders. Let's reproduce ourselves in them. Don't let your leaf fall. The well planted tree gives fruit in its season. You know how to bear fruit in your season; that is to say, there was a time in your ministry that your fruit was of one kind, but now you

must bear another kind of fruit. The trees that you are not allowing to grow are your own fruit. Supervise them, minister to them, inspire them, but give them space. Continue to produce through their branches, through your descendants. Those who come from your own fruit will honor you if you let them grow.

You are a light for your city. They said to David, don't go out to do what you have done all these years. Sit down to plan the strategy, and we will go to the battlefield. We need you to counsel us, to shepherd us when we face the daily battle, we need your wise counsel to win the city. We need your inspiration when we are filled with fear. We need for you to minister to the authorities in the nation. That is not to lose the platform. It is to move to a larger scene. For if you do not do it, it will happen anyway. For when the years pass, sooner or later the lights are going to focus on another. The real question is whether during this time you have left something transcendent in the kingdom of God, you left a legacy, succession, a mark on the city, or whether you decided to stay on a 2X2 platform in your temple.

iv. "Unitarian" leadership provokes a lack of reproduction and impoverishes the congregation. It is time for us to raise up new pastors, of a variety of characteristics and of all ages. But especially we need to raise up young pastors. Those who understand our world. I believe they should be persons, not for the church that we know, but for the one that is coming. And this implies that, besides the basic and irreplaceable fundamentals of a strong sense of call, a spiritual family and ethical life in accord with God's will, and the gifts of the Spirit necessary for the pastoral task, this generation of pastors needs to have some characteristics that God is showing me. Most of them will be young persons.

We need a current of renewal of ideas, of world view, of perception of the reality and of the possibilities of mission, a new wave of enthusiasm, of renewed emotion, of refreshed commitment, of new skills, of wholesome professionalism, of greater efficiency that leads to growth and development and that lifts today's church out of the stationary mode in its mission. The measure of maturity and experience we will continue to provide. But we need this generational renewal.

They will also need if possible a university diploma and some work experience that has provided them some apprenticeship, as well as the desire to continue learning. The church that is coming will require pastors with a better formation, that have the ability to think like a person from the university, for a good part of the members of the congregations will be from that sector.

We are not thinking about moving the current pastors off to the side, but rather to move them forward. We, the older pastors, can dedicate ourselves to the efficacy of the mission, but we will leave the matter of efficiency in the hands of the younger ones. That is to say, we who are older will focus on God's priorities, and in what can make a difference in the kingdom, assured that the efficiency, that is to say, the ability to handle the local ministerial tasks in the right way will be passed on to the newer generation of pastors.

The God of relationships is a multi generational God. And that should be reflected in the leadership of the church of the future. God is the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob. In the church of the future, in both the level of the presbytery of the church of the city, as well as the level of each congregation, this multi generational character should be expressed in the leadership. I believe that we must enter into a raising up of young pastors with whom we share the ministry, and that it be a normal and continuing process, as part of the cycle of life of a healthy congregation. Not the raising up of a new pastor out of need or urgency or a vacancy, but as a multi generational process, natural and continuing.

It is the time of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The "Abraham" pastors are those of more than fifty years of age, those that take care of the "what" and the "why", that is, caring for the integrity of the gospel and for the vision of the kingdom of God, and that everything be only for God's glory.

The "Isaac" pastors, around forty years of age, will attend to the "where" and the "who". The "where", that is, those that are like "Isaac" are those who must implement the united mission in the city. They are the ones to raise up the "who", the new generation of the "Jacobs", young pastors of 25 to 30 years of age that should attend the "how" and the "when". The "how" should be implemented by younger pastors, for they are the ones who understand how to carry out the mission in these times. We were formed with a different world vision and do not understand today's reality. If we wait until they are 40 to raise them up as pastors, they will not understand the reality. So we should leave the "how" to the younger ones. For they are the ones responsible for the "when", that is to say, carrying out the mission today.

And working together as a team, subject to each other in all the responsibilities. The Isaacs and the Jacobs, subject to the Abrahams for the what and the why. The Abrahams and the Jacobs subject to the Isaacs

concerning the where and to whom. The Abrahams and the Isaacs subject to the Jacobs, concerning the how and when.

Conclusion:

In writing to the Corinthians Saint Paul says: *Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards (oikonomos) of the mysteries of God*²⁶. In an apostolic consultation like this, that visualizes the church of the future in light of the God of relationships, each one should evaluate his apostolic task as a steward. Simply as a way of concluding I would like to present three parameters that help us to establish our priorities.

I. Apostolic stewards of the mystery of the church carrying forward a united mission in the city:

It will be indispensable for the church of the future to have a united mission in the city. And for that apostles are required that understand this as one of their priority tasks as steward of the *mysteries* of God. To do this it will be essential to administer the grace of God in its various forms as it is manifested in the church of the city with the variety of gifts that have been shared among the pastors, causing each one to function in his grace, just as God designed the ministries of Ephesians 4 in reality: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers.

In some cities there has already been an experience of unity at the first level, that of the Spirit²⁷. The second level of unity, unity of the faith, requires the perfecting of the saints and the building up of the body, for which it becomes indispensable to recognize and activate the different graces that God has poured out and which until now were grouped only under the figure of "pastor". As administrators, the apostles need to lead this process of recognition of each other, and the activation of each one in the united mission in the city, which will enable them to move into the third level of unity.

ii. Apostolic stewards of the trinitarian mystery incarnate in the church.

The apostolic help to the ministry of the pastors in each congregation so that these trinitarian networks can be woven bringing significance to the life of the church community, not limited to worship services, or activities that demand time, money and effort, but that do not add much value to the life of the people, in the reality of today's world.

The principal way of doing this is the exercise of spiritual paternity over the pastors, healing their lives and establishing close and significant relationships with them. The pastors that experience in their own life the trinitarian action by the ministry of the apostles, will replicate it in their congregations.

iii. Apostolic stewards of the mystery of the gospel.

Apostolic teaching and apostolic signs are the two columns for the unity of the pastors in a city. Apostolic teaching levels out and apostolic signs convoke and unite the leadership in a city: *And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch*²⁸.

Apostolic teaching and signs go together. Nicodemus was able to recognize the authenticity of Jesus' teaching by the signs that he did: *Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him*²⁹.

We should rebel against the dichotomy between teaching ministries and ministries of power. The church of the future must be a church with boldness in the proclamation and signs that back it up. For this the apostles must administer the *mysteries* of God, convoking in prayer and ministering the fullness of the Holy Spirit to the pastors, so that they in turn do the same with the believers, so that all become witnesses.

iv. Apostolic stewards of the multi generational mystery.

Apostles must lead this process of multiple leadership for a multiplication in the work. Raising up new pastors, and raising up new apostles. For the apostles also reproduce themselves in apostles.

²⁶ 1 Corinthians 4.1.

²⁷ Jorge Himitián has indicated in the light of Ephesians 4, three levels of unity: unity of the Spirit, of the faith and of the body.

²⁸ Acts 5.12.

²⁹ John 3.2.

It is the time of *oikonómos*. How are we handling our stewardship? We are living in a time of great challenges, great changes, great uncertainties, but at the same time of great opportunities. We are the *oikonómos* of the last days. Let us occupy our place, let us raise our ceilings, let us release the new workers of the final hour, missionaries in unity.

The great and sovereign *Oikonómos* of all times has *made known to us the mystery of His will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness [oikonomía] of the times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in him* (Eph 1:9-10).

Soon we will see him! Then the stewards, the *oikonómos* will no longer be needed, since by the work of the Holy Spirit every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is the *Kyrios*, for the glory of God the Father.