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THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN ON THE EARTH:

The church as an instrument of God's voice on issues of morality in the light of the changing times

Rebellion against God the Father: the mother of all battles

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Introduction

I have been asked to share some reflections that might help us understand the interaction and responsibility of all who are present, concerning “*The Church as an instrument of God’s voice in matters of morality, in light of our changing times*”.

Many of the principles and life styles that we as Christians and the society in general sustain are being challenged: heterosexuality, monogamy, marriage for life, parental responsibility, the sanctity of human life in the early stages of development, in their most vulnerable moment and in their conclusion.

This matter is not only a challenge to the principles of Christian faith but a challenge to the very concept of truth. We face a systematic denial of the moral authority of the church, and of its legitimacy to establish and even express its convictions concerning these and other matters. For decades there has been a serious effort, organized and active, on the part of militant radicals.

We could approach the subject from a moral viewpoint, and develop each of these questions which we find on the table for discussion today. Yet that would obviously require a different presentation for each one of the subjects, for which we do not have the time. It would also require a specialized focus on each one of them, for which we would need the input of specialists, and I do not claim to be such.

We could also deal with the proposed question from the viewpoint of theology, ecclesiology, ethics, sociology, psychology, missiology, anthropology, or pastoral responsibility. Each focus would be quite appropriate. However, I prefer to approach the matter in a broader way which, as I understand it, is to get to the root of the question. Therefore my presentation will be from the viewpoint of cosmology.

The cosmos

The apostle John, by using the verb “we know” affirms two convictions of the church: *We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one* (1 John 5.19). Allow me to begin by asking: Does the church today have this dual conviction? Does the church live according to a father/son relationship with God, with all its practical implications? And, does the church today know that the whole world is under the control of the evil one?

I believe that ultimately these moral questions imply a rejection of God’s fatherhood over the life of men and women, and a denial that this is more the result of personal decisions, which respond to a system of domination (*kratos*) by the father of lies.

When we deal with the ethical questions of our times, we often ignore what the New Testament community sustained with clarity, and that has to do with that system of demonic domination, known as *kosmos*. Perhaps the first reason for this ignorance is the dualistic

character of the word *kosmos*, or world. In this context it does not mean universe, nor the land inhabited by humans, nor humanity, nor a specific epoch, but rather basically an order, a system of domination controlled by Satan, which is contrary to God.

If we think of what is generally considered demonic, this is a micro approximation. We think of occultism, witchcraft, sorcery, etc. But this lacks a macro vision. I refer to the *kosmos*, the system of domination that is under the control of the *arjón tou kosmou* (prince of the world), who exercises his dominion through positions of power, which Paul calls rulers (*arjás*), authorities (*exousías*), the powers (*kosmokrátoras*) of this dark world and spiritual forces of evil (*pneumatiká*) (Ephesians 6.12).

These forces are of intelligence incorporated in the cultures, nations and social institutions. These powers are "fallen angels" that abandoned their mission to affirm life, for which God commissioned them for the purpose of promoting his own interests.

The ethical questions are more than the mere result of moral decisions by persons. There is an intricate structure of domination that exercises its spiritual power over the means of communication, educational systems, institutions (including the church), corporations, governments, and exercises its decisive influence over persons. If we do not recognize this fact, our struggle will only be against flesh and blood.

World view

Satan is the one who holds the control over this system of domination. He is the *kosmokrátor* par excellence, the prince of this system known as *kosmos*. He is the source of spiritual, philosophical and moral powers of this world, which the Bible calls the rudiments of this world (*stojéion tou kósmou*, Galatians 4.3, Colossians 2.8, 20). This ordered system of powers and precepts conforms a world view, which is more than a perspective of the universe; rather, it is a comprehension of the whole of life. As a consequence, this view of reality is presented as ethical principles and moral compartments.

Then we also need to understand that Christianity is more than a collection of beliefs and values; it is an integral comprehension of the world, and therefore a world view that competes against other world views. Cultural war not only has to do with abortion, homosexual rights, etc. Those are only minor battlegrounds. The real war is a cosmic battle between world views, between the Christian world view and the diverse secular and spiritual world views.

We are not only dealing with groups of atheistic or homosexual militants, or those who favor abortion, or feminists. Greater forces are in action, invisible powers presented as current ethics, and that pretend to dictate the future. The means of social communication, the entertainment industry and the educational systems are their programs, promoted by national and supranational governments which are the preferred means of establishing the demonic agenda.

Ethical consequences

The system of demonic cosmic domination is expressed in dominating relationships on the human plane. Interpersonal relations of manipulation, control and distortion (domestic violence, sexual perversion and deviation, inequality of opportunities, masculine domination and feminism, abortion, etc.), unjust economic relations (social inequality, unjust distribution of riches between nations and individuals, poverty, indigence, marginalization, etc), oppressive political relations (that promote fissures), violent racial relations (based on hate and discrimination), generational relations marked by division and gaps.

Fallen angels

These powers are not truly angels, but rather persons and their institutions. They also include the spiritual nature in the heart of such institutions and structures.

These powers are in God's creation: *...whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together* (Colossians 1.16-17).

These were created by God to serve his purposes. But now they are fallen angels. These powers have rebelled and fallen. They did not recognize their place, but rather sought for themselves an absolute value, enslaving humanity. All these structures, whether intellectual, moral, social or religious, contain seeds of the good creation. There could be neither society nor history without the existence of structures that are religious, intellectual, moral and social. We cannot live without them. But they have fallen. They are unable to serve us as they should have done. They demand an unconditional loyalty of both individuals and society. Instead of reflecting the truth, they turned into adversaries of the truth. Instead of serving the purposes of humanity lived to the fullest degree, they sought to dominate, coerce, corrupt and enslave, requiring for themselves absolute power. The power they pretend to have is in the origin and consequence of demonic character.

Walter Wink, professor of biblical interpretation, found meaning in the fact that the messages in the book of Revelation are directed to the "angels" of the seven churches, not to the churches themselves. The angels would represent the corporate personalities of the churches, bearers of the vocation assigned by God to those churches.

In the same way, the angel of a culture, system, nation or institution is the bearer of the divine vocation of that culture, nation, system or institution. Governments, communications media, educational systems and institutions are "creatures" whose original purpose was to glorify God and contribute to the general wellbeing. And when they refuse to do so, their spirituality falls, becomes flawed and subservient to the system of demonic domination. Therefore the demonic nature, in this corporate comprehension, is the spirituality produced when the angel of a culture, a government, an institution turns away from God's authority and his divinely assigned vocation.

They no longer serve as mediators of the creative and redemptive purposes of God; we see them now trying to separate us from God's love¹, lording it over those that live far from God's love², with the intention to enslave with their rules³, keeping people subject to their control⁴. These structures, these powers that were created as our servants, have become lords and tutors of human beings.

Demons do not live in a subterranean world, but rather "over" the socio-spiritual structures that make up the only real world. When a specific power becomes idolatrous, that is, when it seeks a vocation different from that which God established and makes its own interests of domination and destruction its highest end, then that power becomes diabolical.

¹ *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Romans 8.38-39).

² *In which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient* (Ephesians 2.2).

³ *Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules...?* (Colossians 2.20).

⁴ *So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world* (Galatians 4.3).

The task of the church is to unmask this idolatry and declare to the powers the creative purposes of our Father God, his manifold wisdom, in order that they might subject themselves to the divine vocation and fulfill their mission in the world (Ephesians 3.10). The church should carry out this task, recognizing first of all its own fall, its idolatries. Evil is not only personal (individual) but also structural and spiritual. It is not simply the result of human actions, but the consequence of enormous systems over which no individual has complete control. Only by confronting the spirituality of a world view, culture, government, institution and its physical manifestations can the full structure be transformed.

Unmasking the powers removes their invisibility and, therefore, their ability to oblige others unwittingly to fulfill their orders. The task of redemption is not limited to individuals that have been transformed, but also to transform their world views, governments, fallen institutions. That redemption will culminate in the salvation, not only of individual persons, but also of nations⁵.

The war

There is a cosmic war that finds expression on the earth. That war, the mother of all battles is a confrontation, in the final analysis, against God's fatherhood. For the rejection of God's fatherhood implies the rejection of his authority, his world view, while provoking a distortion in the identity of his children and in their moral behavior, such as the loss of their inheritance as heirs. Therefore, the redemption that provides us freedom from slavery to that system of domination is the operation of the spirit of adoption that restores the proper father-son relationship⁶.

Psalm 2 clearly expresses this confrontation. We see here mutiny, conspiracy, rebellion, not of a few individuals, but of an entire system: *Why do the nations conspire and the people plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One (2.1-2).*

The conspiracy is against the Lord and his anointed one. In v. 7 we find the matter of fatherhood: *He said to me, you are my Son; today I have become your Father.* It turns out to be absolutely indispensable that the Son should reveal his total subjection to the Father, and that his identity as Messiah is based on that fatherhood.

Founding narrative

Every world vision has a founding narrative that is its reason for existence, an explanation that codifies its beliefs, establishes and affirms certain moral principles and procedures for its fulfillment, gives meaning to our relationship, and explains our creation.

The plot revealed in Psalm 2 has a founding narrative, a way of thinking that repeats itself until it is realized. In the psalm we are told that *the people plot in vain (1)*. The verb *jagá* makes reference to a thought that is declared and presented as an assumed response by everyone. This deceitful narrative that comes from the father of lies is accepted among the people, stating that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has enslaved people, repressed and restricted their individual liberty. Thus the purpose of this mutiny is to get free from the government that the Father exercises through his anointed son: *Let us break their chains, and throw off their fetters (3)*.

⁵ *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28.19); Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed (Revelation 15.4).*

⁶ Romans 8, Galatians 4.

It is the kings of the earth and the princes that come together and establish this deceptive world view⁷. But behind them are the spiritual powers, rulers and authorities that have established a corrupt spirituality in the human powers, corrupting their divine vocation.

Meanwhile, the Father in heaven laughs and scoffs at them and their plans, knowing that his plan, the story of salvation, occurs triumphantly and the demonic powers will be terrified⁸. And his people, his children, those that are in his kingdom and live on the mount of holiness⁹, request and assume their inheritance of authority and government over the nations¹⁰, proclaiming decrees in the spiritual world¹¹ while breaking the demonic powers and shattering them like a potter's vessel; a reference to their system of domination, world view and narrative.¹²

The final battles

The cosmic confrontation is not only engaged in the spiritual sphere, but also in the ideas, for as we saw, it is a confrontation of world views with their correspondent narratives.

In the twentieth century, as well as in others, there were three great battles that defied Christianity and that were nothing but rejections of God's fatherhood and his world view and, consequentially of the lordship of his anointed Son.

The first of those great spiritual-ideological battles was Darwinism. The second was Marxism. And the third great battle was the Freudian mindset. While both Darwin and Marx lived in the nineteenth century, their ideas found expansion in the twentieth century. And the three have world views that directly attack the idea of God as Father, authority, and confront the biblical world view with a naturalist and materialist viewpoint. The three ideologies attacked "the establishment", whose foundation is the concept of authority which is itself based on fatherhood. A deconstruction was proposed for the figure of Father, on the natural plane, the social and the psycho-sexual plane. As Freud would say, to eliminate the illusion of God as proto-father or primitive all powerful father that defends us from dangers. And the three had as their objective to break free from the "bonds" of that Father's authority, including the ethical consequences they produced.

The current battle

The great battle of the twenty-first century is also an attack on God's fatherhood and the search for human emancipation from his authority, in denial of the human identity as a creature made in the image of his creator. This battle against the Father, and therefore against his children, the church, is the generic ideology. Robert Sarah expressed it thus: "In fact, if God is no longer Father, the citizen ceases to be a son. Thus he is no longer a person that receives everything from his father; he becomes an individual, left to himself in the

⁷ *The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One (2).*

⁸ *The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger, and terrifies them in his wrath (4-5).*

⁹ *I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill (6).*

¹⁰ *Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance (8).*

¹¹ *I will proclaim the decree of the Lord; He said to me, You are my Son; today I have become your Father (7).*

¹² *You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery (9).* The apostle Paul expresses it in 2 Corinthians 10.4-5: *The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world, on the contrary, that have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

organization of the world and left to his own destiny. Since he no longer receives his identity (from Him in whose image and likeness he was created), he must construct his own, based on his own reasoning. Currently, with that generic ideology, the person is abandoned, insulted, destroyed, with the destruction of his values, his sexuality, and is little more than an animal. He is abandoned to his own design and, therefore, gradually loses all contact with the Source, the fatherhood of God, that which illumines his conscience”.

As we have seen, every system of domination must have a myth of domination, a founding narrative, a story that explains how these things came to exist, and which is repeated with insistence and is “confirmed” with sufficient frequency in the daily life, until it ceases to be a narrative and is accepted as truth and reality. And when that happens, the people accept the story even if it is destroying their life. The narrative that the spiritual powers have established in our days through the communications media, the entertainment industry, governments, the curriculum content of the educational systems, is the myth of this generic ideology.

It is an ideology (that is, a closed system of thought) that defends the idea that the differences between man and woman, in spite of the obvious biological differences, do not correspond to a defined nature, but are merely cultural and conventional constructions, designed according to the roles and stereotypes that each society assigns to the sexes.

Even though the generic ideology has no scientific base at all¹³, it is imposed through governments through international organisms such as the United Nations Organization and its agencies such as the People’s Foundation, UNICEF, UNESCO and OMS that have put together many documents with the particular categories of this ideology and have become some of their principal channels of defense. The generic ideology proposes total liberation. Some ethical ideas derived from this generic ideology are:

1. Problems of identity and sexual practices. This ideology affirms that sexes do not exist; only roles, mutant sexual orientations, which can be modified in life as long as desired.
2. Acceptance and promotion of abortion. What follows from the death of the father is the death of the mother and later of the child. And by not favoring the true sense of maternity which God designed, in the union of man and woman, the offspring loses its dignity as a gift and becomes an object. In fact, the groups that defend this ideology are mostly radical militants who favor unrestricted abortion. The key to their agenda of total liberation is the freedom of the woman from the slavery of reproduction, through contraception and abortion.
3. Destruction of family relations¹⁴. The persons who deny their own nature reinvent themselves according to their own sentiments and volition, denying that the family is the pre-established reality by creation. Of course, all of this attacks directly the

¹³ For a serious scientific study of the subject, see: Lawrence Mayer, Paul R. McHugh “Sexuality and Gender. Findings from the Biological, Psychological, and Social Sciences”, <https://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/introduction-sexuality-and-gender> Doctor Lawrence S. Mayer is a psychiatrist, epidemiologist and mathematician, and professor of the Department of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University and professor of Statistics in the University of the state of Arizona. He has worked in such prestigious centers as the University of Princeton and the Mayo Clinic. Doctor Paul R. McHugh studied in Harvard and is considered the most important North American psychiatrist of the last half century. For twenty five years he served as Head of Psychiatry in the Johns Hopkins Hospital. The study shows that there is no scientific evidence on which to base the affirmations of the generic ideology.

¹⁴ Pope Francis in *Amoris Laetitia*, published in March, 2016, says that the generic ideology “presents a society without sexual differences, and vacates the anthropological foundation of the family”.

common and traditional idea of the family, a reality based on the union between a man and a woman very clearly defined, from which a son or daughter is conceived. The idea that we have concerning what makes a family, and the meaning of society, is gradually transformed. There are as many new models of the “family” as the new kinds of ideas that exist.

4. Loss of the rights of parents in the formation of their children. The family, the natural society, existed before the State or any other community, and possesses certain rights that are inalienable. But the generic ideology introduces a way of seeing life as obligatory programs in the schools, because parents are already culturally programmed to keep affirming the current roles of masculine and feminine.

Underlying this ideology is the concept that the “liberation” of the individual depends on the “assassination” of the father, since patriarchy is the institutionalization of masculine control over women, children and society, perpetuating the subordination of the woman. Obviously, the understanding is that such patriarchy finds its foundation in religious ideas and in the figure of God as Father. As affirmed in the thesis of the Da Vinci Code, religions are an invention to oppress women. This is the reason for their task of deconstruction of everything religious.

The same old enemy

Some find the origin of the rebellion against God the Father in Darwin, Marx, Freud and in the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche, with his theory of the superman, and his supposed remedy for the desperation provoked by the death of God. Already in the last century Jean-Paul Sartre and his libertarian nihilism, adds another link in the chain. Others go further, affirming that the liberation from the fatherhood of God occurred long ago when the western democracies were formed in a deistic context. The significant thinkers of rationalism (from Voltaire to Diderot including d’Alembert) made room for the famous French Revolution, that is presented by the secular school as the genesis of the liberation of men with regard to the God of the Christians.

In reality, biblically speaking, we find this already in Genesis 3.5. The “liberation” from God is provoked by the enthroning of the ego: Adam and Eve seeking to be themselves the gods of their lives. This focus led and leads to the abandonment of the human being in his condition as a person (in the image and likeness of God) to become simply an individual, separated from his Father and from his purpose. From then on, for the ego everything is possible.

Psalm 2 affirms that the ego seeks to throw off the government of God the Father and of his Son the Messiah. Therefore, ideologies such as those mentioned, find room for maximum development in the midst of a hyper individualistic culture like our own¹⁵.

Individualism in its maximum expression is the denial of all authority beyond the ego, it is the deification of the ego, the base of rebellion against God the Father. And when it comes to finding answers from the church for the ethical problems presented to us by the world, we must not forget that the ultimate enemy in this rebellion, is none other than the ego. Therefore salvation consists in the denial of self, the daily crucifixion of the ego, and obedience in following the Son. The battles will be meaningless if we concentrate only on the

¹⁵ Luc Ferry has called our time the epoch of “ultra individualism”, Pascal Bruckner has baptized it as “super individualism”. Giles Lipovetsky has called this period the “second individualistic revolution” or the step of individualism limited to total individualism.

moral problems and forget the egoistic base that rebels against the Father. At the close of the nineteenth century the famous author Dostoyevski said: “If God does not exist, anything goes”.

The system of domination established in the *kosmos* by Satan occurs because the authority that God gave to the human being was surrendered to Satan because of the egoistic rebellion against the Father.

Responses from the church and their limitations

The church has sought to respond to this system of cosmic domination in different ways¹⁶. We could summarize these in seven propositions:

1. An escapist world view: Furious, ironic and resigned, Francisco I of France wrote to Pope Alexander VI: “The sun rises for me just as it does for others. I would like to see the clause in Adam’s testament that excludes me from the distribution of the world leaving it only to the Spanish and Portuguese”. Adam’s Testament was called the Treaty of Tordesillas that divided between north and south the navigation of the Atlantic and the new American territories between the Spanish and the Portuguese. And the reference of Francisco I is probably to a Syrian apocryphal passage, that refers to the death and testament of Adam in which is traced a dividing line where the earth is the place of sinners, suffering and death, and the new heavens are the place where the sons finally have authority.

For many years the church has sustained an escatology with a “Tordesillas line” and a “Testament of Adam” which proposes the thought that heaven belongs to God, and the earth to the devil. This provoked an escapist missionology, not taking into account earthly problems, since in the end the earth is bound for destruction. In the current dispensation, according to some believers, the world is demonic territory and any involvement of the church to respond to earthly problems would result in a kind of prostitution and surrender before the powers of this world. This posture has effectively turned the earth over to the devil and his system of domination, and has obviously provoked the church into being incapable of transforming the reality, which favors the advance of evil in the earth. One of the great paradoxes of our time is that many non Christians show a greater concern and compassion for those who suffer and for the problems we face, than Christians themselves. The indifference of many Christians would leave anyone perplexed.

2. World view of cultural captivity: In this case the culture of our time with its values and beliefs penetrates the church, and the church becomes captive to the culture. It is what I believe is occurring for the most part with the church today¹⁷. We see a church that is the captive of individualism, through a personalized gospel, privatized and individualistic. Captive to the narcissistic egotism through a gospel of self help. Captive to the entertainment culture, in which the church becomes mere attendants for the religious show that is offered on the platform. Captive to materialism, through a gospel of prosperity that turns the Father’s house into a market. Captive to the consumer culture, through an egocentric gospel of offers

¹⁶ For a larger development of the responses of the church to the social problems, see: *Carlos Mraida, La política y el ministerio apostólico, AFI: Marcianise, Italia, June 8-11, 2010*. In it I present 12 postures which the church has assumed before the social question.

¹⁷ For a more extensive development of this situation, see: *Carlos Mraida, The challenge the church faces in South America. AFI, Consultation: Challenges to the church in today’s world. Rome, May 31, 2017*.

in which the people only expect to receive. The church falls into cultural servitude adopting the world view of the system of domination. Obviously, it cannot transform the reality.

3. Revivalist world view: For many evangelicals the response that the church should give is to pray for a revival that would produce the conversion of a significantly large group of persons and in this way change the culture and the social disaster. And that revival will come through evangelism, so as to change lives that will change the world. “We can change the world one life at a time”. The now deceased and distinguished evangelical leader Bill Bright held meetings for prayer and fasting with this in mind. He sustained: “In my opinion, the only way to change the world is to change individuals. Changes in persons, in sufficiently large numbers, will produce changed communities, changed cities, changed states and nations; yes, in a very real sense, a changed world. Jesus Christ is the only one who can change persons from within. We can help to change the world by leading people to Jesus Christ”¹⁸.

As is obvious, I fully share the call to evangelization and to pray for revival. I believe that evangelism is central in the life of a disciple and a congregation. I also believe that the lives of persons change, their behavior is transformed and this has a marvelous effect on their surroundings and relationships. However, for twenty one centuries the church is changing the hearts of men, but society is getting worse, morally speaking. It is evident that the mission needs to be broader. And the hope for revival, which I also share, through misunderstanding has provoked a kind of paralysis, and we find ourselves awaiting something that doesn't arrive. And while we await the revival, the system of demonic domination gets stronger.

4. World view of moral protest: In some countries evangelicals have come together to object to questions of public morality, mostly in relation to sexual sins (pornography, abortion, prostitution, homosexuality). This has been an important step to get out of the escapist escatology and participate in society. I have marched in many of these manifestations, and recently in one in favor of life and against the depenalization of abortion in my country. However, this perspective leaves the devil and his system of domination to exercise the initiative, and place the church in a position of reaction and “negative” approximation, and in most of these cases the reaction arrives late because the devil has already won the cultural battle through the communications media and the political lobby.

As a collateral effect, its micro ethical focus that reduces the moral question to that which is sexually related, has provoked an image that Christians are people of the conservative right, that are only interested in these matters, that only protest these issues, that never express themselves in those matters that society understands as their most deeply felt needs, such as poverty, the unjust distribution of riches, the violation of women, education, health and other social struggles in which the contemporary church does not participate.

5. World view centered on politics: This perspective affirms that bad laws are the result of bad decisions taken by individuals that are politicians, legislators that give form to politics. Therefore, to change the reality, the active participation of Christians in politics is necessary, and God's people should vote for those who have correct values for public office, so that they might make the right decisions. Tom Minnery affirms: “Christians have the same possibilities

¹⁸ Quoted by James Davison Hunter, *Para cambiar el mundo: La ironía, la tragedia y la posibilidad del cristianismo en el mundo actual*, (Buenos Aires: Peniel, 2015), p.21. I appreciate the valuable contribution of Dr. Hunter, whom I follow in many of his treatises.

to determine good public policies and not just protest against bad political decisions”¹⁹. The belief held by many good North American and Latin American believers is that when their nation has a born again president, everything will change in society. But this illusion does not recognize that this has already occurred and, even so, no cultural changes have occurred, the system of demonic domination in those nations governed by born again presidents, has grown.

I firmly believe that politics is an area of action for those Christians with a vocation for service in that area, which should be exercised, not in spite of their faith, but because of their faith, and that the church should awaken such a vocation in its members. But I also have the conviction that the transformation of the culture which we all desire escapes the possibilities of politics and government. We must demystify politics, freeing it of the illusion of omnipotence, and clearly establishing what politics can do and what it cannot do.

6. World view of moral reformation: Here the perspective is directed toward changing the culture through a renewal of civil society. Different from the perspective just mentioned, this one recognizes that although politics has its place, it is very limited in what it can truly accomplish. Don Eberly states it this way: “The most urgent matters of our time are of social and cultural nature, for which there are no easy solutions by the government”²⁰. The way to accomplish this is through the intermediate organizations, voluntary associations that become means of social correction when other forms of public action, such as legislative change, are not enough. These movements seek to build character dealing with individuals as capable and responsible to exercise self control.

Without a doubt the positive contribution that these movements propose is valuable, but their posture errs by excessive emphasis on voluntary action, and lacks sustainability for the long haul, since it does not modify the course and direction of culture in its totality.

7. World view of cultural materialism: This view sees culture not as a combination of ideas but as a combination of tangible goods. Above all, it is based on material, concrete things²¹. Ideas, values, and beliefs are not floating in the air, but rather expressed through tangible things. And a culture changes when new cultural goods are introduced, concrete products, whether books, cellular phones, buildings, etc. Younger evangelicals have been captured by this world view. In recent decades there has been a massive production of cultural goods like music, books, publications, theology, Christian movies, etc.

These have been a motive of marvelous enrichment for the church, of which all in one way or another have been and are currently participants, but not only has this not significantly affected the reality of society and its system of demonic domination, but has fed the appetite for religious consumerism.

These seven responses, besides their own limitations as world views that are sustained as we have pointed out, also face limitations common to all. The first is that they present a partial focus of the church’s mission, losing sight of its integral nature.

¹⁹ Tom Minnery, *Why You Can’t Stay Silent: The Biblical Mandate to Shape Our Culture*. (Wheaton, Tyndale House, 2001), p. 58.

²⁰ Don Eberly, “*Compassionate Conservatism: Voluntary Associations and the Remoralization of America*” (discourse in Heritage Foundation, 8-11-1999), quoted by Hunter, p. 27.

²¹ Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Rediscovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IVP Books, 2008), p. 10. Quoted by Hunter, p. 46.

In the second place, they ignore the ultimate enemy against which we struggle, which is our ego. And they have in common the fact that they are individualistic responses. From evangelization and revival that pretends to change the world one person at a time, to the institutions of moral reformation that seek to empower the individual by developing character and self control, passing through the moral protest, political participation and cultural production. This individualistic perspective, part of the individualistic gospel that we have received and transmitted, believes that cultures are constituted and transformed through the actions of a large group of individuals. But not only are we unable to respond to the problem with the same problem, but this focus on culture as a large sum of individuals is incorrect. Culture is not the product merely of isolated individuals, but of institutions and the elite that govern them. Individuals have beliefs and values, and as such constitute part of a social order and its institutions. Yet at the same time these institutions and the larger social order of which they are part not only provide the framework of significance and social relationships in which individuals function, but they also “act” upon the individuals, influencing the formation of the structures of their conscience.

In the formation of culture, individuals participate, but the power of the institutions (state, market, education, mass media, science and technology, family) and the elite that govern them is much larger.

This individualism is fed by the Old Testament vision that history is something like the biography of great men. This founding narrative of many models of mission and pastoral work ignores, neither more nor less, the central fact of the history of salvation: the coming of the Messiah, his redemptive sacrifice, his supreme exaltation, the impartation of the Holy Spirit and the establishment of the Body of Christ in the earth, the church as the corporate, community and cultural response of the kingdom of God on earth.

Efforts based on the individualistic response produce good individual results, but do not influence the social scheme that makes such changes sustainable. Thus the extraordinary numerical growth of the church in Latin America has not produced significant changes in the culture. The elite keys of power have not been affected, the formative institutions and of transmission of the culture have not been restructured (education, communication media, entertainment, publicity, sports).

In the third place, to individualism is added voluntarism. But voluntary action, as laudable as it may be, does not recognize that we are not aware of the major issues that shape and direct the life of a culture, and that operates very much below (or above) what most of us are able to consciously perceive. And which constitute precisely that system of domination firmly entrenched in the structures.

Present challenges

For the more conservative evangelical groups the great challenge of our world is secularization and its moral effects on the culture. And therefore the task of mission is the re-sacralization of society, that is to say, go back to including God in all the spheres of society, and with him, the recovery of a lost moral consciousness.

For the more progressive evangelical groups the great challenge of our world is inequality, and the task of mission is to achieve a more just and equitable society.

The problem is that both sectors recognize only part of the puzzle of our world. And therefore they believe that the challenge that they perceive is the preeminent problem. But a

more biblical viewpoint, essential to the reality, shows us the multiplicity of challenges and the tremendous complexity of the causes.

For that reason I celebrate the fact that in this consultation of AFI, we are not choosing between morality and social justice, for we see both problems. It has fallen to me to think about the moral challenges in this presentation, but I want to make clear the integral nature of the problems, and a consideration of Christian ethics from a biblical perspective. Therefore, within the thematic framework that has been requested of me, I want to present two more challenges.

The challenge of the loss of the concept of truth

The rebellion against God the Father as absolute authority brought with it as a consequence the absence of the concept of truth. When there is no more absolute authority, neither is there absolute truth. The result is an emptiness in the discourses and a loss of confidence in the word as a description of reality. Much more so if we are dealing with the Word of God, that is, the Word of him who is no longer recognized as authority. Thus, the weight which that Word might have for the moral posture of the people is quite questioned today.

The more liberal Christians have sought to respond to this challenge by renegotiating the significance of the Word in forms more acceptable to the current secular conceptions. From that position comes the rise of theologies of immanence that seek to provide responses to the social problems. The price has been the loss of fidelity.

More conservative Christians have tried to respond to this challenge of post-truth, by resisting the attack against the authority of the Word of God, while attacking the various currents of the world that undermine that authority. The price has been in many cases isolation, loss of relevance, the definition of identity by reacting to what others say, and in many cases by assuming hostile and aggressive attitudes toward those who think differently, placing in doubt their identity as children of a loving Father.

As is obvious, we need to find an alternative path that connects love for others with faithfulness to the Word. Or to say it in biblical terminology, to have a pertinent mission incarnated in the reality that, just as the Logos that became flesh, might be full of grace and truth. A faithful mission that follows the truth in love²².

The challenge to live in Babylon

The second is the challenge of difference, as Hunter calls it: How do we think of others who are different from us, with different values, beliefs, and behaviors? How do we relate to them and to a world that is not our own? We live in a pluralistic world, that is, with a simultaneous

²² John 1.14: *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.* John 1.17: *For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.* Ephesians 4.15: *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.* 2 Juan 1.3: *Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love.*

presence of multiple cultures and world views. This was not the case in the past, where Christian culture was dominant in the West. Today there is a confrontation of world views in conflict. This pluralism will probably continue being a fundamental characteristic, and for some permanent, in the social order of the world in which we now live and will do so in the future.

This has direct incidence on the life and mission of the church. Just as an example: most Christians have a firm posture concerning homosexuality, which emerges from explicit and clear biblical content. That is to say, homosexuality is sin. Having said this, how do we perceive those who, even knowing our conviction, decide to live that style of life? How do we approach them? How do we reach them with the gospel? Have we developed a compassionate and loving spirit toward them? How do they perceive us? Have our manifestations of moral protest in relation to this subject been accompanied by acts of love equally massive toward these sinners?

Some, the more conservative evangelicals, assume a defensive attitude. The “other person” is a threat to the church. Again, the price for trying to be faithful to the biblical values, in many cases has been isolation and rejection of the others. On the other hand, the more liberal evangelicals have tried to do just the opposite. Minimize any difference of those who are not Christians, and thus avoid conflicts and tensions so as to be more accepted, seeking to erase the image that, according to them, the more conservative ones have given to Christianity, as something reactionary, antiquated, repressive, insensitive and discriminating. As in the former challenge, the price paid to show themselves more relevant and inclusive, for many has been the loss of faithfulness to the values of the kingdom of God.

Finally, the difference is a great challenge, a challenge to live in Babylon. A lot of evangelical Christians and especially those in leadership believe that it is a question of living according to the laws of Israel. That is, firmly impose a life style and the values of the Kingdom in the midst of a society that is not under the King. This, besides being a theological absurdity that renders useless the work of Christ, ignores the pluralistic reality in which we live, whether we like it or not. The values of the Kingdom are not to be imposed. And even though as citizens we should work to promote the best laws, it is not laws that will change our culture. There are no complete and sustainable political solutions for the deterioration of family values, for the lack of decor or the propagation of vulgarity. The role of the State in these matters is less important than we sometimes think. It is true that laws are not neutral but rather reflect values. But laws cannot generate values. I repeat that this does not mean that we should not work and even struggle for the propagation of better laws. But the belief that the State can resolve these problems that go beyond the borders of a nation, that have a universal scale, precisely because they are beyond the reach of the state, is an illusion.

This is why I believe that it is essential that we face the challenge of difference, or of pluralism. If, as I have been saying, we are in the midst of a war, it is fundamental that we understand how to fight that war.

The paradigm of the Conquest

For many Christians today, especially in Latin America, the conquest of the promised land narrated in Joshua and Judges, has become the founding narrative of their mission. In fact, the number of congresses, seminars and gatherings that use in their title the word “Conquest” is overwhelming. Obviously, this is something more than a slogan or theme for a Christian event. The intentional use of the word conquest reveals an underlying world view, and a specific posture in facing the challenge of difference.

The use of triumphalist motivating phrases such as: “reclaim the nations for Christ”, “conquer the areas of influence”, “capture the spheres of power”, etc., far from revealing a sense of victory that is assumed to be contagious, they reflect a language of loss, defeat, deception, anger, frustration, and a desire to conquer.

This is a new edition of the constantinian project of Christianity in which the objective is for Christians to conquer the power and from there to remold the world in the image of the church (or to be more precise, according to the beliefs of the church). This world view leads to the dichotomy of winning or losing²³. The church wins or loses the world, and this dichotomy leads to triumphalist verbalization and pragmatic deception. Even more serious, when the church is able to achieve the power to impose its values, in the midst of the culture war, history shows us that the gospel of love becomes cruelty and hate. The righteousness of God’s kingdom becomes oppression and inequality. Five centuries of conquering Catholic Christianity in Latin America, and of imperial Protestant Christianity in the world should teach us that conquest must not be our motivation nor our mission. Conquest is a category from the Old Testament, but not from the New. The New Testament category is that of redemption, not conquest.

Perhaps the most serious charge, in regards to our subject from the outset, is that the spirit that underlies this world view of conquest is the same that operates in the system of demonic domination. It is the intent to establish Christianity as a dominant culture that obliges conformity upon everyone.

This has been the grave error of the church throughout the ages and of which today we are victims, while in the past we were victimizers. Today there is a direct confrontation of secular radical groups, atheists, homosexuals, feminists, of the generic ideology and others against the church, that is characterized by hate and persecution, not only because they represent values absolutely contrary to that which as Christians we sustain, but because in the past they have felt persecuted, discriminated, oppressed, discarded, and even hated by the Christians, and now is time to even the score.

Those who in the past were victims today are victimizers, and vice versa. Thus conquest should not be our goal, nor motivation, nor perspective. We do not belong to the system of domination. We are in another spiritual kingdom. We should break with the logic of human dominion over others, of imposition, of christianization, of constantinian culture. Jesus said that the powerful ones of this world impose their rule and lord it over the nations, exercising dominion over them. But he said that the church must not repeat that model, but rather His model, that of surrender and service²⁴. The one who needs to submit is not the other person, but the ego, giving ourselves to love and service for others.

John Howard Yoder said that the political novelty that God brings to the world is a community of persons that serve instead of govern, that suffer instead of imposing and inflicting suffering. Imposed dominion is contrary to all that is the kingdom of God. The responsibility of Christians is to transform the culture radically, not imposing values from above, but by a deeper process: live out the vocation of love and service in the daily reality.

²³ That great man of God, James Dobson, expressed it quite intentionally, but incorrectly in my criteria, this way: “The winning side is the one that wins the right to teach what he believes to his children. And if we can do that, writing the study plans, teaching them what to believe and providing them the example of what we want them to understand, in a generation we can change the entire culture”.

²⁴ *Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”* (Matthew 20.25-27).

The immense majority of those that promote the scheme of conquest are extraordinary Christians, faithful and loving God and the people. But I believe that without realizing it their proposal leads us to fall into Satan's trap and his system of imposition. Behind that, even when the motivation is correct there is an unconscious desire for dominion. Without a doubt we are in a cultural war, a war of world views, against the system of domination imposed by the devil and supported by the ego. But we do not battle by the flesh that responds to that system of domination. Our weapons are not carnal²⁵. The prince of this world is the one who rules through imposition, intimidation, domination. But that reign of fear and death was destroyed by the Lord, not with those weapons, but with his loving surrender on the cross²⁶. If the system of demonic domination is basically a rebellion against the Father, the way to counter that system of domination is manifested by the works of the Father, the deeds of love, where the church is an expression in our time of his fatherhood over all, including for those that believe, live and promote different values²⁷.

The cosmological tension

Clearly, these challenges and the responses of the church to them, from this cosmological reading that I have proposed, is the result of the tension presented by Jesus with regard to his disciples who are in the *kosmos* but not of the *kosmos*. That is to say, presence without ownership. Presence in the *kosmos* avoids the escapist and isolationist temptation of the eschatology of the future. The lack of identity with the *kosmos*, avoids the cultural assimilation and captivity, as well as the various missionologies that result from eschatologies of the realized Kingdom.

This cosmological tension proposed by Jesus, finds its eschatological expression in the well-known phrase "already but not yet". The eschatologies of the realized kingdom, completed here and now, incorrectly affirm that the work of redemption has been absolutely completed and therefore the church is not involved in that struggle to which the New Testament refers. What is true is that the kingdom of God has come, but the kingdom of evil has not left. For now, the kingdom of God lives in tension, contradiction and combat. The church lives this eschatological reality. It is a community called to be *now* what the world is ultimately called to be, but *is not yet*.

The church as alternative community

I want to conclude by recapitulating what I have said and to present a proposal that suggests a more integral response, corporative and not individualistic, faithful, loving and relevant to the ethical problems we face in the world, maintaining presence, not ownership, in tension. The work required to face the moral and social problems presented to us by today's world is much more than launching spasmodic crusades to fight for certain causes. The question is much more profound. It is to become as the Lord's church an alternative community to the *kosmos*.

As we have seen, the *kosmos* is under the evil one. That is, it is a system of domination that operates through spiritual powers that rule over cultures, nations, institutions,

²⁵ 2 Corinthians 10.3-4

²⁶ Hebrews 2.14

²⁷ *But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Mathew 5.44-48).*

and that exercise influence over the moral decisions of people. There is a cultural war between distinct world views and Christianity. These powers are fallen angels, creatures of God that rebelled against him and abandoned the vocation to which God called them. This cosmic war is a rebellion against the fatherhood of God, as the source of authority and identity. The battles of the past are part of this same war of rejection of God's paternity. The current battle is the generic ideology under whose umbrella are most of the moral problems we face today. But the basic enemy is the enthroned ego expressed in a hyper-individualistic culture. Facing this the church has responded in a variety of ways, but all of them start from the same individualism they try to combat, with a partial vision, not integral, of the mission, while ignoring the system of demonic domination that lords it over both the cultural structures and the persons. The intent to recover the cultural dominion has installed the paradigm of conquest in the church, which carries implicitly the same spirit of the system of domination. The complexity of the picture reveals the cosmological tension expressed by Jesus who said that we are in the world but we are not of the world, and his eschatological correlation of "already but not yet".

I believe that to lead apostolically in order for the church to become an alternative community to the *kosmos*, requires a response that overcomes the partiality of the options we have considered, overcomes the individualism through a community response, and that exceeds the mere voluntarism through the powerful intervention of the Lord through his Body.

I believe that in the Great Commission of Matthew 28, we can find some tracks for an apostolic agenda that helps to perfect the church as an alternative community.

1. *All power is given to me*: The authority that Jesus had and imparted to the church is what comes from the Father. If the war, the mother of all battles, is rebellion against the Father, the church as alternative community to a *kosmos* that lives ignoring that Father, should recover daily living with the Father. God the Father must cease to be a mere theological or doctrinal affirmation, so as to become an experience of living that affirms God's authority and his identity in the life of believers. Most of the evangelical churches have emphasized principally the figure of the Son. Most of the Pentecostal and charismatic churches have emphasized the person of the Holy Spirit. God the Father does not have significant incidence in the life of the people and the community. However, God has revealed himself in the Bible as Father, Jesus is the way to the Father and the Holy Spirit cries: Abba, Father. That is, God's fatherhood is central in the gospel. Therefore, the devil presents himself as the alternative father, the father of lies. John establishes a double apostolic affirmation that we should affirm in apostolic ministry: *We know that we are the sons of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.*

2. *All power is given to me in heaven and in earth*. The mission of the church as alternative community has a clear frame of reference of authority that the church must establish in the *kosmos* with prophetic voice and action. This spiritual action is directed toward the spiritual powers of evil, not only reproving them, but making them aware of the manifold wisdom of God, so that the structures that are under their dominion experience the redemption of the gospel. That authority should be declared prophetically also to the elite human powers (governments, communication media, shapers of opinion, etc.). This includes political participation, but it exceeds that. It covers all public spheres.

3. *Therefore, go*. The church as alternative community is not absent from the reality, nor does it flee with its mind on the future, But rather it goes to the *kosmos*. It is not of the *kosmos*, but rather is sent to the *kosmos*; it is in the *kosmos*. This speaks to us of the faithful and pertinent presence of the church as regards the reality. As Hunter as well stated, a culture

that is genuinely alternative cannot emerge without a faithful presence in all the areas of life. The reality of increasing corruption and sin in our world is not only the result of the lack of influence of Christianity on the culture in general. It is also the manifestation of its absence in key areas of the culture. We are dealing with “an abandonment of the calling to be a faithful presence... a demonstration of the areas in which the church is not whole. A healthy body exercises in all the spheres of life, not just in a few. The lack of stimulus in the vocation, has given rise to a culture of mediocrity in many vocational areas”²⁸.

4. *Therefore, go, and make disciples.* The church as alternative community is a community of disciples. This has to do with the nature of the church. And it is a pending issue in the church today and an area of privileged labor for apostolic ministry. The church not only proclaims the victory of Christ before the demonic powers and their system of domination, but incarnates that victory by living a new life, a new kind of social relationships. As Hendrik Berkhof stated, with Christ “a new force has made its entry on the scene of the history of salvation: the church... The very existence of the church, in which Gentiles and Jews... live together in fellowship with Christ, is in itself a proclamation, a sign, an example to the powers that their uninterrupted domination has reached its end... All resistance and any attack on the gods of this era will be fruitless, unless the church itself represents resistance and attack; unless it demonstrates through its life and its fellowship the way in which people can live free of those powers”²⁹.

The church does not possess a culture different from the *kosmos*, rather it *is* a different culture. It does not have a social strategy, it *is* a social strategy. It does not have a social ethic, it *is* a social ethic. Its life style judges the *kosmos* and at the same time attracts it. But judgment begins with itself. For the ethical challenges of the New Testament are directed to the church first of all.

The church must be different from the world, truly an alternative community. Change in the reality is not the result primarily of actions, but of being, which is manifested in actions of transformation. The church as alternative community is salt and light in the *kosmos*. The church as alternative community is seen in its life style in accord with the total values of the kingdom of God, and not simply a denunciation of the moral problems of others³⁰. Today we are concerned with the laws that politics can propagate by being salt and light.

5. *Make disciples.* The church as alternative community is a maker of disciples. This includes evangelization, which is essential, but it is much more. It includes learning the Bible and the spiritual disciplines, but it is much more. Discipleship involves the entire life. The problem that believers have today is that they have been previously disciplined by the non

²⁸ Hunter, pp. 144-145.

²⁹ Hendrik Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers* (Scotsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1962, p. 41 s. Quoted by Hunter, p. 232.

³⁰ The Spanish journalist Víctor Lapuente asks: Why do the white evangelicals of the USA vote massively for a prophet of materialism, hedonism and narcissism like Trump? Why do Italian Catholics support Berlusconi? Why do so many religious voices in Eastern Europe celebrate opportunistic despots? It seems a contradiction that the most fundamentalist voters align themselves with the most immoral leaders. And he quotes the historian and Baptist pastor Wayne Flynt who pointed out that there has been a moral shift in the leadership of evangelical Christians. Today they mobilize against those sins that they do not commit, such as homosexuality or abortion. For a heterosexual man it is easier to accept the prescription against homosexuality than the precepts against omnipresent greed in the life of anyone. Instead of questioning our own behavior and trying to control impulses that can be damaging for ourselves and the community, we prefer to judge the conduct of others. And he concludes saying to this temptation to see the straw in someone else's eye called out by Jesus himself now has been added economical and political stimulus. The result is hate your neighbor like you love yourself. Víctor Lapuente, “*La primera tentación de los cristianos*”, *Diario El País*, Madrid, 18-4-2017.

Christian culture, with its world view of life and reality. A leadership is needed that understands the nature of the cosmic confrontation and disciplines the church for a time like that in which we live. The leaders of the church are not prepared for this, and changing that is apostolic work. If this work is not undertaken the result will be a church that, having received all authority, continues to be captive to the culture and its system of domination.

6. *Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.* The church as alternative community disciplines and submerges the nations in the world view of the Father, in order for fatherhood to be restored with all its values. It submerges them under the authority of the Son, so that the nation becomes subject to his lordship, through the work of the Holy Spirit. We must work so that the laws that promote sin will not be sanctioned, because they will bring social and personal suffering. And we must work so that better laws be promulgated that help us to live a more human life. But the transformation of the culture will not come through the laws, but through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit of God.

7. *Teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you.* The church as therapeutic community does not forget the *didaké*. This is essential. People are not empty receptacles when they are converted. In their life they have content, beliefs, values and specific experiences. Not all of it acquires new meaning and/or is filtered by their new faith; rather it may wind up being absorbed by their earlier world view. Assuming that they were christianizing certain beliefs, in reality they were paganizing the gospel. But it is also important to note that the *didaké* comes after the submerging. That the people obey everything that Jesus taught, cannot be imposed; it cannot be forced. The persons and the nation first have to be submerged in a relationship with God, so that they can then learn to live as the Father desires. To try to live in Babylon with the principles of Jerusalem is an absurd utopia. That the church pretends that the nation live according to the principles of the kingdom of God when the people don't belong to the kingdom, is an illusory pretension. The beliefs, values and behaviors of the kingdom are for those who submit their life to the king. Again, this task of conversion and teaching should start with the church itself. Apostolic ministry today should make inseparable the *kerygma* and the *didaké*.

8. *And behold, I am with you all the days, until the end of the world. Amen.* The exalted Christ now becomes present through the church as alternative community that has an incarnational life style.³¹ The presence of the living and exalted Christ is incarnate in the life

³¹ Juan Manuel Montané in his Master's these is theology, entitled: *The contextualization of the apostolic Kerygma*, p. 160, quotes Alan Hirsch who refers to four aspects of an incarnational life style:

- *Presence: If relationships are the key means for transferring the gospel, it means that we are going to have to be present among the people in our circle. Our lives are our message and we cannot absent ourselves from this equation.*
- *Proximity: Jesus met with people from all levels of society. He ate with the Pharisees, tax collectors and prostitutes. If we are to follow his steps, we will have to be directly and actively implicated in the life of the persons we want to reach. That not only implies our presence, but a genuine availability, spontaneous and sustained with the friendships and communities we inhabit.*
- *Lack of power: If we seek to act like Christ, we cannot depend on the normal forms of power to communicate the gospel. We must incorporate the model of Jesus with absolute seriousness (Matthew 23:25-28; Filipenses 2:5). This implies commitment to service and humility in our relationships with the world. Unfortunately, much of the history of the church shows how little we have assimilated this aspect of the incarnation of Christ in our understanding of the church, leadership and missions.*
- *Proclamation: A genuinely incarnational focus will require that we be always ready to share the gospel with the persons in our world. We cannot extract this aspect from the equation and faithfully follow our calling. We are in essence "a tribe with a message" and that means that we must assure that we are being faithful in the transmission of the message that we bear by means of proclamation. (Hirsch 2009:148).*

of the church and the church is incarnate in the reality of the nation, making present God's fatherhood. The incarnation is the unique response to the challenge of the loss of the concept of truth. A church that backs up with deeds what it believes and proclaims. And the incarnation is also the only response to the challenge of the "other one", of pluralism and difference. Love and service for others, even though sinners, was the incarnational model of Jesus. Just as he assures us of his presence, the church as alternative community is made up of disciples that are fully present all for each other, and for those who do not belong to the community. When the love of the Father becomes present through us in the places where we are, and in the tasks that we do, the absence of God in the world gives place to his presence.

Conclusion

We are called to be in the world, without being of the world. It is time to assume an interaction with the non constantinian *kosmos*. A church that does not seek to dominate the world, nor to define its identity or mission through opposition to the domination of the world. We live in a world with a post-christian world view, even in countries whose majorities continue to deny that. Far from assuming the conquest as our founding narrative for our mission in these times, we should know that more than ever before we are a people in exile. As was true of the primitive church in the context of social oppression and absolute immorality of the Roman empire.

In this context many of the differences that have divided the church in the past become irrelevant. In this context the recovery of the central place of the church as the Father's family, becomes essential. Its condition as a community of the Father's love makes it indispensable in the midst of the ultra individualistic vacuum. For that reason, those that affirm anti-institutional tendencies that favor the exodus from congregational life, and encourage the number of those who no longer gather with others, saying that it is a wholesome trend and sign of a new and revolutionary expression of Christianity, are profoundly mistaken, and are being utilized by the system of demonic domination. For such tendencies are the result of a logic of consumerism that converts individualistic choice into the central and uniquely sovereign factor. The idea that today has become established³², that each person assemble the spiritual elements that he needs and that have value to him, constituting in this way millions of experiences of "personalized churches", in fact belong to the consumerist world view of the system of domination, boosted by the therapeutic demands of the individual. More than an expression of revolutionary Christianity, it is an expression of individualism and consumerism characteristic of the system of domination, whose effect seeks to undermine the structures of the church, the only reality capable of constructively resisting the worst of the current culture, which is egotism.

We reject every idea that the hyper-individualistic reality, consumerist, materialistic, narcissistic, hedonistic, and of narcotic entertainment and its moral effects cannot be transformed. That such a reality must be accepted and cannot be challenged. No. Our Lord overcame the princes and powers, made a public display of them, triumphing over them on the cross. We are not bound to them. Jesus Christ the Lord broke their sovereignty, and therefore all change is possible. We will not accomplish it by using the fallen spirituality of domination and conquest. Our task is to take away their invisibility by declaring the victory of Christ over them. Our existence as the church, as the family of the sons and daughters of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, already demonstrated that the rebellion of the powers has been beaten! Our task as alternative community is to live this out and proclaim it.

³² See Hunter, pp. 412, 477-478.