

CHALLENGES FACING THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD



Apostolic Fellowship International

- To develop peer level fellowship
- To enrich and inspire one another
- To hear God together and for one another
- To encourage cooperation to accelerate unity in the Body of Christ
- To support and protect one another
- To provoke the Church to accomplish its whole mission in the World



AFTI Frascati - Roma
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International Apostolic Conference and Consultation

Dear reader,

We have gathered here the Proceedings of the AFI Consultation held in the days immediately preceding Pentecost, from May 29 to June 1, 2017, at the Giovanni XXIII Center in Frascati - Rome. Another precious occasion of prayer, communion and reflection on the future of our “community of destiny” in the context of the challenges confronting the church in the modern world.

It was particularly fruitful to approach the topic from a perspective closer to the different cultural and geographical contexts from which we came and in which we continue to work with our ministries.

We have been enriched by sharing our experiences and the dialogue between our different, often complementary points of view. We have once again been confirmed and encouraged to move forward in the “purpose” for which we believe that the Lord has called us to “walk together”.

Giovanni Traettino

Permanent co-ordinator of AFI

Caserta, 25 April 2018

THE CHALLENGE OF THE CHURCH IN SOUTHAMERICA

Carlos Mraida

We are being called on this occasion to think about our future as AFI, and its mission facing the church in each continent. It has been my turn to reflect on what the future of the church in our Latin American continent is and the challenge for us today.

When you pack your bag, do you think about the climate of the place where you live or the climate of the city where you are going? If you go to New York in the winter, even if I do not know where you are going, if I look at your suitcase I know you are going somewhere cold.

What is in our suitcase, in the church in South America, in the leadership of the church in South America? If someone comes today and opens the suitcase, what clothes does he find, the clothes we need to wear where we are or the clothes we need for the place where we are going? Where does God want us to go as a church?

Obviously answering this question far exceeds what I can say. I believe that God has to give us in meetings like these a prophetic perspective. So that noone misunderstands me, I understand the prophetic as an approximation that tries to reach a systemic understanding of the future, based on:

1. What the Word of God says, anticipates, prophesies.
2. Knowledge of the past. The past prophesies.
3. The recognition and understanding of the present, in such a way that helps us to draw tendencies and to project possible scenarios.
4. The revelation. What the Holy Spirit is speaking to the church more specifically in this time and in this context, announcing the newness that God is doing and will do. The Christian perspective does not accept determinism. We also believe in the new intervention of God in every moment of history. Amos 3.7: *Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.*

And what is this prophetic exercise for? The prophetic is not to know the future just to anticipate, to adjust ourselves the best we can. It is not even primarily to plan better. The intention of the prophetic is the transformation of reality according to what the Word and Spirit are telling us.

The future does not appear, the future is created by us today. If there is representative leadership here, it is us who will determine much of the future of the church. We make this present creation of the future from what we believe, that is, from the theological perspective that we have, and from what we do, the missiological perspective. Both perspectives determine what we are today and what we will be.

Actually, I think we should talk about the futures of the church, rather than the future. We have to think about the 3 P's of the future. First, the possible future. Second, the probable future. And third, the preferable future.

I. The possible future

In every moment of history and everywhere there are only two possible models of church. Jesus said: *Stop turning my Father's house into a market!* (John 2:16).

The church as a market house is a church captive of the culture of its time, and therefore unable to transform its culture. Church is the corporate expression of a culture. Either we are an expression of the culture of the Kingdom, which is the Culture of the Father, or we are an expression of the culture of the market. In the discipleship of the new generations we will have to choose one of these two models. We are in the world, but we are not of the world.

When we confuse inculturation with cultural adaptation, we fall into cultural captivity, unable to transform reality.

II. The probable future

Trends tell us that today the church in South America is shaping up more like a market house than as the Father's house. Some characteristics that I described more extensively in my presentation of a few years ago titled: *Kingdom, Church and Society*.

- The culture of the market is the narcissistic culture. This vision of reality has also affected believers with a self-centered religiosity, a Christianity without conversion, with a Christianity of self-help. Before we spoke of the converts, but today we speak of believers. Because people do not seek to change, but seek to feel good. That is why today we have 50% of the evangelicals all over the continent that do not congregate. And one of the causes is the disappointment that people suffer at the trials of life. Jesus anticipated it in the parable of the four lands. But it is the result of having been vaccinated from a self-centered gospel, and when God does not respond to my expectations, then I walk away.
- Market culture is the culture of hyperindividualism. Luc Ferry has called our time the age of "ultraindividualism", Pascal Bruckner has called it "superindividualism". Lipovetsky has described this period as the "second individualist revolution" or the passage of limited individualism to total individualism. And this individualistic perspective of faith leads to churches where people become attendees who come to have a private, intimate worship: "God and I." Hundreds of individuals worship in isolation without being aware of the other, without discerning the Body of Christ, and they come to seek individual blessings by making the Father's house, a market house. But in the Father's house the worshipers worship the Father, as a family of the Father, well aware, that you can not love God, if you do not love your brother. The laws of the market emphasize the self, but God is us. The great problem of the church as a marketplace that affirms individualism is that the feeling of orphanhood deepens. Because we do not know the Father, and we do not live the experience of being the Father's family.
- The culture of the market is entertainment. Industry number one. Everything has to be fun. Preachers are no longer presented as men of God, but as dynamic communicators.

People change church according to the platform show. When we turn the Church into the market house, we are only attendees.

- Today there is a great mobility of believers from church to church, according to the show they are given. We say: “I really liked worship, I did not like the pastor. Yes, it was good”. Liked. It was good. These are the same phrases you use when you go to the movies or the theatre. This happens because the church is captive of the culture of the show. The culture of the show that the pastors promote to the people, focusing everything on the magical square meters, called platform. We show as lucky rockstars, who promote events, where singers are more important than those who bring the word and form people, where people define the church by what happens on the stage, and what 15 people do, and not for the life of community and the impact that that provokes in the city.
- The culture of the market is that of materialism. And that penetrated into the church. Preachers who on TV preach the gospel of prosperity, and that in order to reach it they manipulate people to give. When Jesus had to condemn idolatry, he did not speak of Baal, nor of Astarte, but of Mammon. And he said that you can not serve two masters. Because Mammon requires devotion, submission, religious obedience, change of message.
Because Mammon takes advantage of my lack of emotional healing, and involves me in pharaonic projects, so that I feel that I am doing something great, that makes me feel what I am not feeling, important. And what follows is that the pharaonic project ends up consuming the ministry, and you have to stop being faithful to the message, because you have to talk about something else, to see if you raise the money for the project. It is not that they raise it for themselves. In most cases it is well-intentioned people who seek to fill their void, their lack of identity, their damaged self-esteem with achievements to which God did not call them.
- The culture of the market is that of consumerism. And consumerism is just a way of trying to fill gaps. Young ecstasy addicts tell us that their parents were consuming things that never filled the void, so they decided to consume ecstasy to see if that filled them. And consumerism also came to the market house church. People come and seek to receive. “Bless me, give me, fill me, deliver me, give me the program I need, the cult that I like.” This is called spiritual consumerism.
- But the church is not a dispenser that feeds consumerism, and it continues to leave people empty. As we were told last year by Eddy Leo: Dracula Christians, vampires, come to suck, and to demand more and more because they are never satisfied. And that's why they go from church to church. The House of the Market does not generate members of the body, but clients. The customer never has a pure commitment. The mentality of the customers is to go where they give the best quality at the lowest price. When that happens you have the customers, but when another one gives them a better service or a lower price, they change. But Jesus taught that you will never be satisfied until you give.

III. The preferable future

It is the one that we must create today, with our decisions so that the church can be an expression of the culture of the Kingdom, and a House of the Father, not a house of the Market. And this is where all of us have a key role. Because if we do not disciple new

generations according to that preferable future, we will only have the probable one. The one that unfortunately the trends are marking us, and more and more we will be house of Market.

1 Corinthians 12: 4-6: Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

The end of the 60s brought the recovery of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The 1990s brought the recovery of the five ministries of Christ from Ephesians 4. We have to be the generation that recovers the operations of the Father.

We are called to incarnate in our generation the fatherhood of God, doing the operations of the Father, that is, the works of the Father.

John 14:10-13: Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves. "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

The passage tells us several things:

- The works of Jesus were those of the Father.
- The works of the Father made by Jesus demonstrated his perfect unity.
- Jesus left the Father, therefore He can not continue doing the works of the Father on earth. The work of the Father today is incarnated through the church, called to do the works of the Father.
- When the church manifests the Fatherhood of God, it does greater works than Jesus, because it completes his ministry, because the church is the fullness of Christ, his completeness.

The church is the fullness of Christ: (Ephesians 1:22-23).

And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Christmas is the incarnation of Christ. Pentecost is the incarnation of the Holy Spirit. We need now, the incarnation of the Father.

The Holy Spirit was poured out in the last times for the church to incarnate the Fatherhood of God in the world, being the Father's House, and in this way to be able to perform the greater works, which are the operations of the Father. I believe that all of us have been entrusted with the greatest works, the incarnation of the Fatherhood of God.

It does not have to do with gifts, or with ministries, but with attitude. I have to show the Father's heart, with my gifts, with my ministry. We have to express the greater works. Why are they greater?

Because the greatest commandment is to love God and my neighbor. Because the most excellent way is the one of love, if I lack that, my wonderful gifts and my recognized

ministry are like cymbals that only make noise. Because the greatest in the Kingdom is the one who becomes a child to relate to God as Father, so that he can express that fatherhood.

The works of the Father are the greatest, because the only thing the church can give the people that the world can not give is love, genuine interest in the other, listening, hugging.

Just some of the innumerable challenges for the church of our continent:

1. The challenge of ending in South America with the feeling of orphanhood in the life of the pastors once and for all. We all need ministerial paternity. We need to generate a pastoral network of all the pastors in each city. May we all have a pastor to turn to when we need it.
2. The challenge for the pastors of South America to be the people's parents again. No CEOs of religious multinationals, not showmen, but close parents of people who love and teach to live. Expressions of the Fatherhood of God.
3. The challenge of making our congregations Father's houses and not market houses. And that 50% of the believers who do not congregate today (in Argentina it is 66%) will return when the house is filled with the love of the Father.
4. The challenge of being ministering parents of young pastors, who feel like Solomon that his father David provides everything he has in his personal treasure to raise his son as king so that he can fulfill the mission by surpassing his father.
5. The challenge of Latin America being under the authority of the Heavenly Father, and not of protectors or mothers.
6. The challenge of raising a new generation of paternal leadership for Latin America, not paternalistic or populist, that teaches people the culture of effort, of work, as Luther did 500 years ago.
7. The challenge of strengthening the local congregation, so that it becomes an alternative community, the family of the Father. In South America, thanks to God, we have grown a lot in the consciousness of the Kingdom of God, and in countries like Argentina, there has been a lot of growth in the concept that there is only one church in every city. But the local congregation has been greatly hurt, especially among the younger generations. Enough of prophets of protest against the church, welcome prophets of proposals.
8. The challenge to a Latin America in need of transformation, which numbs people with entertainment making them spectators and not protagonists of changes, so that it does not reveal itself to unjust realities, to pastor the new generations in a constant discernment that helps us be an inculturated but not domesticated church. Enough of modern prophets and welcome transforming prophets. They should integrate technology, art, communications, as important elements to generate contact with the world today, but they should not use them for a show that makes christians attendees but protagonists of a collective change, establishing the counterculture of the Kingdom and who make the church the house of the Father.
9. The challenge to a continent of absent parents and millions of orphans, to pastor the new generations in the Paternity of God, and the Church family of God, body of Christ, facing the individualistic, privatized and intimate, North Americanized and macdonalized non-biblical gospel. The whole Bible is written for a people, not for individuals. And we individuals can appropriate the promises that are there as long as we are part of that people. The church is the house of the Father, the family of God who heals the people of his orphanhood by connecting it with the Father and his family.

10. The challenge to a system that increasingly turns to the survival of the strongest and the “save who can”, pastoring the new generations in a gospel not of self-help but of helping others. In Argentina, for example, to mentor more than 1,100,000 young people who today neither work, nor study, to eradicate the structural poverty of our nations, entrenched corruption in our society. The meaning of life is not in feeling good, but in fulfilling the transformational purpose of God.

May ours be the generation that recovers the operations of the Father, the greater works, ministries that embody the fatherhood of God and a church that will be the house of the Father to enthrone our God as Father in Latin America.

The essence of the gospel is the Fatherhood of God. God reveals Himself as Father. Jesus is the way to the Father. The Holy Spirit intercedes saying Abba Father. And the devil comes to us as the father of lies. Because paternity is the key to life. The root of all spiritual, emotional, material problems.

The greater works, the great revival that comes, the last revival, is promised to us when the heart of the parents turns to the children and the hearts of the children towards the parents.

If now we open the bag of the church today, we will not see the clothing of where we are going, but we will see that most of us are wearing the clothes we need where we are today. That is why today God wants to fill our bags with his paternity, because we are going to do the greatest works, the works of the Father.

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THE CHALLENGES FACING THE CHURCH IN ASIA

Bishop Sudarshan Jyoti Komanapalli

Definition of Asia

“The largest of the continents, bordering on the Arctic Ocean, the Pacific Ocean, the Indian Ocean, and the Mediterranean and Red Seas in the west. It included the large peninsulas of Asia Minor, India, Arabia, and Indochina and the island groups of Japan, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Ceylon (Sri Lanka); contains the mountain ranges of the Hindu Kush, Himalayas, Pamirs, Tian Shan, Urals, and Caucasus, the great plateaus of India, Iran and Tibet, vast plains and deserts, and the valleys of many large rivers including the Mekong, Irrawaddy, Indus, Ganges, Tigris and Euphrates. (Collis English Dictionary-Complete & Unabridged 2012 digital edition, Dictionary.com)

“Asia has 48 countries, three of them (Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkey) having part of their land in Europe. Asia has extremely diverse climates and geographic features. Climates range from arctic and subarctic in Siberia to tropical in southern India and Southeast Asia” (Asia-Wikipedia)

Myriad of Culture, Ethnicity and Language

“Out of Ethnologue’s 6,909 for instance, only 230 are spoken in Europe, while 2, 197 are spoken in Asia” (How many languages are in the world? Linguistic Society of America)

Challenge of Exclusivity of Christ in realm of polytheism

- Thinking pervasive in Asian thinking of oneness of God. He is manifest in different forms and religious identities. (Church in Asia Today, Saphir Athyal)
- How do we reconcile Acts 4:12 “There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be save.” NLT

Geo Politics and Economics

- First, second and third world economies
- Where is our identification? Do we identify with the poor and marginalized?

Religious identification

According to a Pew poll in 2016 Asia is most religiously diverse in world.

Major religions of world born and practiced in Asia: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Jainism, Sikhism, Judaism and Zoroastrianism which have also seen various sects and subsects come forth. (Religion in Asia, Wikipedia)

- Culture: diversity ranging from European, Arab, South Asian and South East Asian.
- Nation: Myriad of nations and affiliations based on religious, ethnic and economic affinity.

Emerging leadership from mission dependency

- Legacy of historical and mission churches

Cult of Personality

- A legacy of leadership or only a memory of a leader

Local empires vs. Kingdom of God

- Building for faith and family or for Kingdom of God

Persecution

- Internal
 - Catholic vs. Protestant
 - Intra Protestant (established or mainline, charismatic, independent)
- External
 - Anti-Christian (religious based, culturally based, historically bias)
- Out of the 50 countries on World watch list by Open Doors 33 are in Asia. Based on Pressure and Violence. North Korea 1, India 15, China 39
- They will overcome (“by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony” Rev.12; 11 NKJV)

Church in Asia - Future is bright

- Jesus is drawing people unto Himself (“that any should perish but all come to repentance.” 2 Pet 3:9 NKJV)
- Jesus is shaping and molding His Church (“not having spot or wrinkle” Eph 5:27 NKJV)

Jesus is building His Church (“I will build My church” Matt 16:18 NKJV)

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THE CHALLENGES FACING THE CHURCH IN EUROPE TODAY

Giovanni Traettino

First of all, I would like to thank Pastor Jorge Himitian for suggesting that, in the context of our discussions on “the future of AFI”, we should hold a “consultation” on the challenges facing the church in the world today. “Thinking together” continues to be one of the most stimulating and fruitful experiences of our journey together. And we need to ask ourselves questions about the future role of our “shared calling” in the context of the challenges facing the church in the world we find ourselves in.

Furthermore, I believe it is useful to approach the question from a perspective that is closer to the various geographical and cultural contexts in which we find ourselves working. There are differences and peculiarities characterising and differentiating our various societies. At the conclusion of this process, we should have a clearer understanding.

In the last two AFI meetings, I have already suggested some thoughts about Europe and the future of AFI. This time I shall add some further considerations, in the hope that they may help us to concentrate our attention increasingly on what, in the final analysis, I believe is most important for our future progress.

Come, Holy Spirit!

On the subject of Europe, last year I made the striking discovery of what seems to me a most interesting “discussion workshop”, which has been set up at the Theological Faculty of the University of Fribourg in Switzerland. The course is entitled “*Re-imagining the Church of the 21st Century*”. Taking as its starting point the invocation of the Holy Spirit (“*Come, Holy Spirit!*”), serious attention is paid to the “new things” that have burst upon the scene of church life during the last century, significantly altering its appearance, giving rise to new hope in many believers, encouraging expectations of renewal and making it possible to imagine a new future for the church. The context of these deliberations – spiritual and highly qualified – is fundamentally that of the historic churches – Catholic, Anglican, Reformed, Orthodox – with a contribution from major representatives of spiritual movements closer to the evangelical, ecumenical and charismatic streams. We have taken note of the involvement of men and movements such as Holy Trinity Brompton and the Alpha Course, Taizé, Enzo Bianchi and Bose, the Archbishop of Westminster, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Father Raniero Cantalamessa and the Focolarini. The participants also include, as welcome guests and interlocutors, Pentecostal pastors. This is a pioneering experiment, in a fruitful and creative climate, which is truly on the frontier. Together with Pastor Ernest Bretscher we were able to take part in last year’s session, and have been invited to make a contribution to this year’s too.

Signs of something new

You are all aware by now of the other “novelty”, which has accompanied us for three years now. As a consequence of the relationships formed between Pastors Himitian, Mraida and Saracco and Cardinal Bergoglio at Buenos Aires, on 28 July 2014, after the latter was elected Bishop of Rome, Pope Francis came to visit our fellowship, to ask forgiveness for the part played by Catholics in the persecution of Italian Pentecostals and to start a new chapter in the climate of relationships between the Church of Rome and the Pentecostal world. How often has my mind gone back with gratitude to the prophetic friendship last century between David Du Plessis and Pope John!

In a few days we shall witness another “novelty”. Together with numerous other evangelical and Pentecostal pastors from various parts of the world, we shall commemorate the first, historic Pentecost vigil with Pope Francis, to celebrate our shared origins, our DNA, our shared “Pentecostal” heritage, at the Circus Maximus. We shall also remember our common roots in the blood of the martyrs, both those of ancient times and those whose lives are taken day by day in various parts of the world, just because they are Christians.

I would also like to recall – to remain within my own limited experience – the meeting that took place at Athens in June 2015 with Archbishop Ieronymos II, the head of the Greek Orthodox Church in Greece, and some of his assistants. We were invited to meet him in his office in Athens – the first time in history that a head of the Orthodox Church of Greece had welcomed an evangelical pastor. We prayed together and our meeting was much blessed. We have kept in touch in order to allow the Lord to make our relationship fruitful. Their meeting (between Francis and Jeronimos) at Lesbos was to some degree helped by this contact.

Spiritual streams

I would add that during the last century, alongside episodes such as those just cited, what can only be called “streams of life and spirituality” have watered the soil of Europe and refreshed the church – the church without any adjective, the “great” church. I am thinking of the *biblical and evangelical movement*, with its recovery of the primacy and centrality of the Word of God, the rediscovery of the power and simplicity of the Gospel; that of the initial proclamation (the *kerygma*) and the apostolic teaching (the *didache*). I think of the *fellowship movements (koinonia)* inspired by the prayer of John 17 (“*That they may all be one*”). I think of all those who, in their desire to go back to the spirit and the freshness of the early church, have rediscovered the first chapters of Acts, the church of Jerusalem. Today I meet so many believers who have been made fruitful by these spiritual movements, who pray and work for friendly encounters, for brotherly dialogue and for unity among Christians. I think of the *servicing movements (diakonia)* that, inspired by the spirit of Christ, have dedicated their lives to the weakest and the outcasts. And I think of the great and variegated *Pentecostal and charismatic movement* that has brought Christ to millions of people throughout the world and revived and renewed the lives of millions of nominal Christians. Here is a range of movements and spiritual streams that are increasingly tending to converge, to influence one another and to intertwine. They are giving rise to a rich spiritual chemistry which, once launched, cannot fail to bear fruit in the new season that is beginning, cannot fail to make both the church and the future fruitful.

The virtue of hope

So something is going on! There is new hope! There are clear signs of openness and new developments for the future of the church, in Europe too. Underground, like subterranean rivers, there are pressures for renewal, reformation and unity which must surely bear fruit in due season. God's preferred style is hiddenness, like the seed that falls into the ground or the leaven, the salt... The *processes*, even in our own difficult country of Italy, are under way. In the last century the preparation of the ground and the sowing of the seed began... As we have already seen, various spiritual movements, often across church boundaries, have emerged unexpectedly, have been raised up. The old paradigms are being challenged! I am still thinking of the hopes raised by the birth of the ecumenical movement, the surprise of Vatican II, the powerful waves caused by the birth and tumultuous development of the Pentecostal movement. And again, of the appearance on the world scene of outstanding men and women: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John XXIII, Paul VI, Chiara Lubich, Basilea Schlink, Roger Schultz, Martin Luther King, Teresa of Calcutta, Carlo Maria Martini.

Is this to be a new era?

We must however observe that, alongside the positive signs, there are others that are questionable or undeniably negative. But then, has not the course of history always been like that? Undoubtedly, the challenges facing Christians here in Europe today are far from negligible. They are the same ones facing every European citizen. They include the political and economic spheres, bureaucracy and the administration of justice, in a regrettable context of creeping corruption which is eroding the moral fabric of society, particularly in some of the countries of Southern Europe. The price paid is enormous, and falls especially on the weaker sections of society. Poverty, even here in Europe, is increasing at a rate we thought belonged in the past. And beside these problems, which are essentially "material", we have to remember – as someone has observed – the numerous powerful altars erected by modernity.

And yet – hoping as it were against hope – I somehow believe that what has taken place in the last century is preparing a 'new era', a *kairos* (a particular time) of new acceleration in the process of people returning to God, of rapprochement between Christians and of a new openness, a new ability to listen to the world, including Europe, in view of the realisation of that 'fulness' which is God's dream from all eternity.

I personally believe that *political* commitment and action are important. Somebody has called this the highest form of charity. And I think that every Christian and every Christian fellowship should take to heart "the common good", the wellbeing of the "city". But I am still more deeply convinced that, in order to change our cities, the most important and strategic level lies in the dimension that comes before politics, in both the "*pre-political*" and the "personal" spheres. I mean the building up of individuals and of communities. These are the "containers" that take priority in God's eyes, they are God's gifts to mankind. These are the "agencies" in which right from the start He chose to invest, and through which He still wants to manifest himself for the healing of the land and the redemption of mankind.

Basic principles and essentials

So then, there is hope! Years ago, the Cardinal Archbishop of Florence Silvano Piovaneli gave a good answer to someone who asked about his expectations for this millennium. He replied that it will be *an epoch in which there will be a return to the basic principles of Christianity*. Father Raniero Cantalamessa, too, likes to repeat that God has given evangelicals *the gift of going back to basics*. “Foundational principles” and “basics”. These are two sorts of values with which we evangelicals should find ourselves very much at home. I believe that they are the ingredients of the “prophecy” entrusted to our “side” to stimulate and bring new life to the historic churches, especially the Church of Rome. We need to go back to first principles and re-emphasise the essentials, even among ourselves, paying particular attention to the *individual* and the *community*.

The individual and the community

With regard to the first of these – *the individual* – we know that, on the positive side, this was and still is the greatest contribution made by the Protestant and Evangelical tradition. Today however we must once again raise the standard of revival with its call to holiness.¹ In the context of various “backslidings”, we need a new stimulus towards holiness. Regarding the second element, *community*, we need to enrich our “heritage”: in my opinion, within our tradition we still need to think afresh and recover this dimension.

There is an interesting new book by the American Orthodox writer Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, subtitled “A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian World”.² It is a stimulus and at the same time a challenge to recover in this world the value of the local church, the *experience* of community. Christ for the individual, and the Trinity first of all for community. Afterwards come all the fundamental truths. It is all well preserved in the excellent summing-up of the basic Creeds: the Apostolic Creed and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. *The indwelt person; the indwelt community*. It might seem a small thing, as we face the challenges of a highly complex and enormously expanded world, a globalised civilisation. But I believe these are the instruments – the humble yet fundamental instruments – that, made alive by Christ and the Trinity, can once more in human history take on and defeat the great challenges which today’s reality is facing us.

¹ This year marks the 300th anniversary of the beginning of the Revival in Europe (Geneva, 1817). “We find ourselves at Geneva in 1817. The theology students at the *Academie*, still Calvinist by tradition but not in doctrine, are in a long-standing crisis: their professors’ teaching, resulting from a rationalistic mentality, is out of tune with the feelings of their generation, born out of Romanticism: to be a Christian does not just mean living a virtuous life, but also experiencing spiritual renewal...” - Giorgio Tourn, “1517, 1817, 2017, fra Riforma e Risveglio”, *Riforma*, March 2017.

² “Rod Dreher argues that the way forward is actually the way back – all the way to St. Benedict of Nursia. This sixth-century monk, horrified by the moral chaos following Rome’s fall, retreated to the forest and created a new way of life for Christians. He built on principles of order, hospitality, stability, and prayer. His spiritual centers of hope were strongholds of light throughout the Dark Ages, and saved not just Christianity but Western civilization” – Rod Stiger, *The Benedict Option*, Sentinel, New York, 2017. *From the Preface*.

The mission of AFI

A final consideration, concerning – in this context – the nature and calling of AFI. AFI is an *International Apostolic Fellowship*. A fundamental part of its ethos is its relational approach, in the conviction that this is the root nature of God, the DNA of His fellowship. Relationships, relationships, relationships! This is why its ministers, and especially apostolic ministers, are themselves called to be men on the frontier, bridge-builders, ministers of reconciliation. And AFI is called to operate over the moats and in the cracks that have formed primarily – but not exclusively – between the various evangelical and Pentecostal families; and then to take possession of new territory for Christ, continually drawing together and creating relationships, in every sphere, with other ministers who have the same heart and the same passion for unity; first incarnating, and then promoting ever more clearly in people the life and ways of Christ, building and increasing Fellowship.

In this process we need to get free, to the extent that we become aware of them, of all that is left in us of vanity, pride and independence, and to practise and promote everywhere a spirit of listening, service and unity, investing our time and resources first and foremost in relationships with other apostolic ministries. And together with them – men called by God – to influence and orient, by both attraction and imitation, new generations of disciples and new and old fellowships, bringing them into relationships of brotherly love and fruitful mutual acceptance. In the spiritual desert of our time, we must always keep as our first priority the building of safe-haven fellowships and holy people.

“So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future – all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God” 1Cor3:21-23.

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ENEMIES OF THE EUROPEAN CHURCH TODAY

Angel Manuel Hernandez Gutierrez

THE ENEMIES ARE THE EMERGENCE OF HERECIES THAT ARE ALREADY DEFEATED.

Catholicism lowering - Protestantism the only alternative for Christianity in Europe.

The Jewish professor, Joseph H. H. Weiler, in his book *A Christian Europe*, gives 8 reasons for anti-Catholicism which has become a Christ-phobia in Europe:

1. After the theatrical play of Hochhuth, *The Deputy* (1963), which leaves the Vatican not looking good, a great disillusion started to arise among Christians because of the behavior of the protestant and catholic clergy at the Holocaust.
2. The lack of tolerance towards others, especially among the governments that denominated themselves as Christian.
3. The failure of communism that began as a hope for Europe, which failed at its peak because of the strong pope implication.
4. The bond that began in the 50's between the Christian faith and many political parties also influenced the Christ-phobia. People saw Christianity and a political action more than what is it should be, an eternal hope.
5. The fight between the right and left political parties. A right that declares itself Christian and a left that declares itself secular.
6. The lack of wisdom from the church when dealing with such sensible and present subjects such as abortion, homosexuality, a women's role, etc. all have contributed to Christ-phobia.
7. Changes that the church has provoked on subjects like the modernity, which in the past has been much condemned, also create Christ-phobia.
8. The emptiness in the churches and the lack of integration of Christians in society create Christ-phobia.

External Enemies

1. Islam

A Christian heresy.

Nestorius (386-451) Fifth Century.

Muhammad was raised by his uncle Abu Talib from his father's side, a Nestorius monk.

His uncle died in 619 ac, 9 years after Mahammad received the revelation and started to found islam.

The Nestorians are Muhammad's source of the beliefs.

Islam is born from Muhammad in 610 ac.

To connect islam to Abraham is Muhammad's great sermon to convert Arabs to Muslims. To repeat this prediction is a great mistake that many misinformed Christian make.

2. Atheism

According to my friend Josue Ferrer, professor of the University of Valencia, who wrote the book "why are stopped being an atheist", says that atheism is not a thought but an organized movement. That is why he can talk about the militant atheism, because he was once part of it.

The objective of atheism is to take society to corruption.

The pre-flood generation took two steps toward world corruption.

1. The first step was to do things in secret. They tried to do things without God seeing them because they had awareness of the existence of God. That is why the text says "Gn. 6:12a And God looked upon the earth..."
2. Secondly, after they have lost all awareness of God they began doing things openly and that is why it says "Gn. 6:12b for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth."

When all awareness of God is lost, social crimes are committed openly. It is then that the whole earth is corrupted. That is why it says: "Gn. 6:13... for the earth is filled with violence...". This indicates that there was no longer any place on earth that had not committed a crime. "Violence", in Hebrew "Hamas", which means, "theft in small quantities". If you stole less than the value of a "perutá" (smallest coin value), you were not punished. So everyone would commit "Hamas". Noah was chosen for not having committed "Hamas", even though this was permitted. Noah's integrity captured God's attention and this is why he was chosen (Gn 6:8).

According to Jewish scholars, Moses was also chosen for not have practiced theft since he took his sheep to graze further, to the fields no one owned, as far as Horeb (Ex 3:1), so that they would not eat from someone else's grass. On one of these journeys he found God's Mount where God called him for his integrity.

The objective of atheism

Is to take society to the last step to total corruption, to take God out of society and of the awareness of the people. When society no longer has awareness that there is an eye that sees all, an ear that hears everything, a book where all is written, humans become totally corrupt and corrupt everything that is around them.

There is a source of Christ-phobia in all of Europe that is being orchestrated by atheism. The historians René Remond and L.J. Rogier go even further saying that it is difficult to explain this anti Christianity and brutal rejection without talking about hate. For example, the German magazine "Der Spiegel", dedicated the front page to the atheists entitled : "Crusade of the atheists, God has the blame for everything".

Internal Enemies

3. The sound-doctrinists.

“2 Timothy 4:3 (RSV) For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings,”

“Titus 2:1(RSV) But as for you, teach what befits sound doctrine”.

What is sound doctrine?

Sound doctrine cannot only attend to knowledge because knowledge for knowledge faints. (1Cor. 8:1).

We must acquire knowledge to put it in practice not to know something but to live and experience something. That is what it says in James 1:23-25 *“23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.”*

Example: Papias a Christian writer from the II century said that he learned more by living the word of God and preserving in it than from any book.

The word is the mind of Christ, his way of thinking and feeling. When we study it to live it we start becoming what Christ is.

Christianity unlike other religions and even Judaism, started as an “ethos”, A way of life and behavior that effected all daily life and the whole world. Its crisis started when it stopped being an “ethos”.

A (healthy) sound doctrine is a doctrine that heals.

A sound doctrine has to heal and take you out of destruction because that is the effect the word has. As it says in *“Psalm 107:20 He sent His word and healed them, And delivered them from their destructions”.*

The doctrine that heals is the one that teaches, reproves, corrects and instructs you to justice. *But to do good works* (2Tim. 3:16-1), *to do good, to bless and not to curse* (Rom 12:14). Not to convert us as apologetics against our own churches. *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”* (Ef 2:10 10).

Signs should follow a sound doctrine, like we see in Mr 16:17-18 *“And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; 18 they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover”.*

The evil effects of the sound-doctrinists

In the council of Trent (S. XVI) it was asked to recover “the sound doctrine” in front of the faith of the new protestants. In the catechesis of the catholic churches they would lash out against Protestantism until the year 2002-2005 in the Spanish Episcopal conference (IE

28), where they realized that for having dedicated themselves to this they have committed the mistake of interrupting the transmission of the Christian faith which brought Europe to secularism.

Some protestants are doing the same by abandoning the same flag of “sound doctrine” and going against all Christian movement, especially charismatic and Pentecostal movements that grow. They have abandoned their true mission, the evangelization of the world, instead have dedicated themselves to persecuting the only ones that are reaching the world for Christ.

While some dedicate themselves to criticize and judge, others dedicate ourselves to evangelize and disciple.

Let's not listen to them, because if we dedicate ourselves to defend our faith to other Christians we shall fall into deception of the enemy.

If we dedicate ourselves to defend our faith to other Christians, God's work will cease like it says in, Nehemia 6:3 3 *“So I sent messengers to them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?”*

Let's not dedicate ourselves to that, instead lets train new converts in defending:

- Pentecostalism versus the most rancid Calvinism,
- Generosity of tithing versus Antinomianism,
- The commandment of talking in tongues versus cessationism,
- Because the kingdom needs these tools to be able to advance.

4. The cessationsists

1Corinthians 14:39 *“Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues”.*

Cessationism comes from the word “to cease”

These are the ones that affirm that the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit (like tongues, prophecy and healing) ceased from being practiced at some time after the first century. Cessationism has its origins in the heresy of the II century called Montano. Among other heresies he said that in his home town, Pepuza, was the place where the new Jerusalem would come. The montanists affirm that their group exclusively has the prophetic gift and especially to Maximila, Montano and Prisca, who were the founders of this movement. Maximilla prophesied that after her they would be no prophets. From this, Cessationism was born.

Even so, tongues and prophecies have continued throughout the history of the church.

In the second and third century according to *Ireneo, Bishop of Lyons* talking in tongues has continued. As it says in his book “Against Heresies (Volume 6): *“In the same way, we heard the brothers in the church that had the gifts of prophecy, who through the Holy Spirit talk in different tongues and bring light to the benefit of all, the hidden things*

of men and declare the mysteries of God. To those the apostles also call «spiritual», being these spiritual because they participate in one same spirit....”.

Justino Mártir another defender of the faith in the first centuries (100-165 b.C.), said: *“If you want proof that the Spirit of God that was in your town has left it, come with us. Enter into our assemblies and there you will see Him expelling demons and healing the sick. You will hear him talking in tongues and prophesying”.*

In the centuries IV and V. It was also declared similar things Pacomio, Crisóstomo, Agustín from Hipona.

En los Siglos IV y V. Pacomio, Crisóstomo, Agustín de Hipona also declared similar things.

*** XII al XV Century.*** The Britanica Encyclopedia, vol. 27, pp. 9-10, 11ava ed., points out that talking in tongues was also present among the mendicant friars of the thirteenth century. In The History of the Christian Church written by Philip Schaff we read from **Vicente Ferrer who died in 1419:** *“Spondamus and many others say that he was honored with the gift of tongues.*

***In the Reform (XVI to the XIX century)*.** In the History of the Christian Church, from the Dr. T. Souer (1859), vol. 3, p. 406, it declares as following: *“The Dr. Martin Luther was a prophet, and evangelist who talked in tongues and interpreted, a person equipped with all the gifts of the Holy Spirit.”*

What destroyed Christianity in Europe is the coldness of the intellectual Christianity.

We need to live in Pentecost so that we can gain our land for the Lord.

“2Timoteo 1:6 6 Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.”.

It is only the Holy Spirit and His power that can change people.

Acts 1:8 (NKJV) *“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me[a] in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

Acts 1:15 *“And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty”.*

Only 120 believers were gathered on Pentecost. (Acts 1:15), but before that day was finished there were three thousand more. (Acts 2:41). Before long there were five thousand believers (Acts 4:4). In time, the Jewish directors accused the disciples to have “filled Jerusalem” with the message (Acts 5:28).

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