



**Mission Statement:**

*To develop peer level fellowship  
 To enrich and inspire each other  
 To support and protect one another  
 To hear God together and for one another  
 To encourage cooperation to accelerate  
 unity in the Body of Christ  
 To stimulate the Church to accomplish  
 its whole mission in the world*

# ***Apostolic Consultation and Pastors' Conference***

***Bogotá, COLOMBIA***

***August 22-27, 2011***

***Theme:***

***LET US LOOK TOWARD THE FUTURE***

***The church of the third millennium***

## ***Contents***

APOSTOLIC MINISTRY AND THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH .....	3
Giovanni Traettino	
THE CHURCH'S ADVANCE TOWARD FULNESS.....	11
Jorge Himitian	
THE GOSPEL OF DESIRE.....	23
Giovanni Traettino	
WHAT HOLDS BACK THE GREAT REVIVAL?.....	33
Jorge Himitian	
THE WORLD IS GROANING .....	43
Ernest Komanapalli	
THE WONDERFUL GRACE OF GOD.....	47
Orville Swindoll	
FROM CHAOS TO THE KINGDOM .....	55
Hector Pardo	
THE PASTORS THAT YOUR NATION NEEDS .....	63
Carlos Mraida	
HOLINESS.....	73
Dele Olowu	

General presentation, by Giovanni Traettino

# APOSTOLIC MINISTRY AND THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

Giovanni Traettino

*<sup>4</sup>As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. <sup>2</sup>Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. <sup>3</sup>Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all...*

*<sup>11</sup>So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup>until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

*<sup>14</sup>Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup>Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup>From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”*

Ephesians 4:1–6, 11–16

## PREMISE:<sup>1</sup> THE FRAMEWORK FOR OUR MEDITATION

**The unity of God:** *“I believe in one God, the Father almighty...”<sup>2</sup> The Church as an icon of the Trinity.*

### God’s Purpose

*“...he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, <sup>10</sup>to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment – to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.”*

Ephesians 1:9–10



GIOVANNI TRAETTINO

Caserta, ITALY [g.traettino@reiconciliazione.org](mailto:g.traettino@reiconciliazione.org)

Giovanni Traettino is the permanent coordinator of the Apostolic Fellowship International (AFI). Senior pastor of the Christian Fellowship of Caserta, he presides over the Evangelical Church of Reconciliation in Italy and has an apostolic ministry to a network of churches in Italy, the Central African Republic and Chad. With a passion for unity and quality in the Body of Christ, he is a pioneer of the dialogue between Evangelicals and Catholic Charismatics.

Married to Franca, they have four children and three grandchildren.

## God's dream

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

John 17:10, 20–23

## Paul's method

Unity of the spirit – Unity of the faith – Unity of the Body

### 1. The main virtues that promote unity

*“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.<sup>2</sup>Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.<sup>3</sup>Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”*

Ephesians 4:1–3

### 2. The three levels of unity

*“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace...<sup>13</sup>until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ...<sup>16</sup>From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”*

Ephesians 4:3, 13, 16

### 3. Seven revealed principles by which the unity of the church is established and confirmed

Seven basic concepts to understand and build the unity of the church

*“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called;<sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism;<sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”*

Ephesians 4:4-6

### 4. The function of the ministries

*“<sup>11</sup>So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,<sup>12</sup>to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up<sup>13</sup>until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.<sup>14</sup>Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.<sup>15</sup>Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.<sup>16</sup>From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”*

Ephesians 4:11-16

## THE APOSTLE'S MISSION

The commission given to an apostle is essentially defined by his being sent (Greek *apostello*; cf. the Heb. *sjaliach*).

His sending or commissioning has to do with:

- The revelation of God's mystery<sup>4</sup> – Knowledge – The plan.

- The proclamation of God's mystery<sup>4</sup> – Preaching.
- The realization of God's mystery<sup>5</sup> – The task of co-ordination.

In other words, obedient understanding (his thinking illuminated by an intimate, personal dialogue with God, by investigation and reflection in prayer); faithful transmission (the word of the 'apostolic witness', especially in preaching and teaching); and building God's mystery on the ground (through recovery and restoration, from which derives the continuation of 'apostolic service').

This commission, received "*not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father*" (Gal. 1:1; see also Eph 4:11: "*It was he who gave some... others...others*"), is the subject of his revelation, his burden and responsibility. The content and heart of this commission constitute the foundation which, before and above anything else, he is called to lay in the lives of people and churches.

## THE APOSTLE AND UNITY

But what is the specific contribution of the apostolic ministry to and for building the unity of the church?

It is great in every way, because it has to do with the revelation, proclamation and realization of 'God's mystery' and with the responsibility, which belongs primarily to apostles, of "laying a foundation" (1Cor 3:10-11).<sup>6</sup>

The apostolic ministry is the ministry of unity par excellence.

This is because unity has to do with:

- the foundation of the life (identity) and the very nature (the inner nature and structure) of God (2 Tim 2:19: "God's solid foundation stands firm"), revealed and manifested in Christ ("the image of the invisible God", Col 1:15). Father, Son and Holy Spirit > One.

"Christianity is an imitation of the divine nature" – St Gregory of Nyssa.

- the foundation of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. In it the Son of God became one with the man Jesus of Nazareth: the divine nature and human nature in a single Person!
- the foundation of the union between Christ and the church, that is, the foundation of the action and manifestation of God in history by means of the church (an "extension" of the Incarnation!? > 1Cor 12:12: "*outōs ò Christòs*"; Eph 1:22-23: "*the church ...the fulness of him who fills everything in every way*"). Christ and the church > One.

"The Church is an image of the Holy Trinity" – Vladimir Lossky;

"The Trinity is the Church before the Church" – St Gregory of Nazianzus.

It is illuminating to consider the Church's progress as "moving from the Trinity towards the Trinity" ("*... the Father, from whom the whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name*", Eph 3:14-15). In this sense, it is because...

- Unity is at the heart of the nature and the revelation of God (Father/Son/Holy Spirit)

("I and the Father are one", "*...we will come to him and make our home with him... so that they may be one as we are one*"; the dogma of the Trinity: "*One God in three persons who are equal yet distinct...*"). The unity of God!

The Trinity is revealed as a unity of persons in a relationship which is differentiated (structured > *episcopè*) and unbreakable (*Alleanza! Berith-Diathèke!*) of love (*koinonia*) and service (*diakonia*). This unity has to do with God's own identity. This unity precedes and is the basis of the unity of and for the church, which proceeds from it and is nourished by it. Therefore, unity is not and cannot be optional. Certainly it is a pluralistic unity, but still unity. Relationship-based unity, certainly, but still unity. Unity cannot be optional because it is about God's own nature, and therefore the nature of the church. (In this sense, too, "the Trinity is the church before the church").

- Unity is at the heart of the nature and the revelation of the church, which is the reflection and image of the trinitarian life of God (“The church is an image of the Holy Trinity” – Vladimir Lossky). The unity of the church.

The Body of Christ, the Church as a covenant of relationships, as a fellowship (cf. the Trinity) in which unity and plurality are inseparably bound together.

- Unity is at the heart of the objective of a universal “*bringing together*” which is God’s ultimate goal in history.

“...he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment (Grk: *eis oikonomian tou pleròmatos tòn kairòn*) – to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.”

Eph 1:9-10

“For from him and through him and for him are all things.”

Rom 11:36, the ultimate unity of the universe

Therefore, precisely because unity is so radical and central to the foundation of God and of the church (“the pillar and foundation of the truth,” (1 Tim 3:15) and of the final “summing up” of all things in God, it necessarily follows that the apostolic ministry (both individual and collective), as a foundational ministry, must be, and cannot fail to be, a ministry of unity. Indeed, the ministry of fellowship and unity *par excellence*. As the catalyst and co-ordinator of the other Ephesians 4:11 ministries, as the central and ultimate reference point of *koinonia*, *diakonia* and the *episkopè* of the churches and of the church, as the continuer of apostolic service in the church (historical continuity), as the one ultimately responsible for faithfulness to the truth of the ‘original apostolic testimony’ (*i.e.*: Old and New Testaments). The apostle as guarantor, continuer and builder of the unity of the church.

## BUILDING UNITY

The authority (*exousia*) conferred on the apostle (remember the Hebrew *sjaliach* and the rabbinical principle by which he who is sent is equivalent to the sender!) is closely related to the commission he has to carry out and for which – as a ‘commissioned representative’ and ‘plenipotentiary’ – he is responsible before God.

However, this authority is authenticated and established not only by his faithfulness to the Word, but also by his fellowship with and submission to the council of the apostles. See for example the so-called “Council of Jerusalem” (Acts 15); but also the apostle Paul’s attitude when, three years after Damascus, he goes to stay with Peter for fifteen days (Gal 1:18), and after fourteen years of intensive ministry, goes back to the most highly respected apostles —James, Cephas and John— to share with them the content of his preaching and receive their affirmation and approval (an interesting precedent for the development of the practice of ‘recognition’!), and they reassure him that he has not “*run his race in vain*” (Gal 2:2). Or again, the humility shown by Peter in accepting correction and reproof when necessary (Gal 2:11–16). Paul’s boldness (to tell the truth, sometimes rather rough-edged) is often praised; less often Peter’s humility, “gained” from his experience of great weakness.

### Personal *episkopè*

The building process is carried forward (the theme of continuity = fellowship and truth) with the two elements which make up the apostle’s work:

- *episkopè* (Acts 1:20) and
- *diakonia* (Acts 1:25).

That is, the two essential functions of:

- *government* (through guidance, oversight, discernment, connection), and
- *service*

which in practice are delegated to the *offices* (not to be confused with *ministries*) —apostolically appointed (the ‘12’/the New Testament), in continuity with and in the footsteps of the Old Testament— of:

- *elders* and
- *deacons*

who are, so to speak, ‘the right arm’ and ‘the left arm’ of apostolic action in the government of the local churches.

### **Collegial *episkopè***

While there is a personal and, so to speak, individual dimension, both in the calling and in the commissioning of the apostle, it is undoubtedly true that the apostolic commission is not exhausted by its personal dimension, but also, by its nature and because of the purposes of its action, requires for its correct functioning a “collegial” dimension. There is an *episkopè* and a *diakonia* belonging to the individual apostle (with geographical boundaries and limits in time). But there is also an *episkopè* and a *diakonia* belonging collectively (*‘in solido’*) to all the apostles in mutual relationship and fellowship (Acts 15:28: *“It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us”*). In the New Testament there is a clear indication and, in any case, a clear understanding of the collegial nature of the apostolic ministry, of apostolicity as a service for the unity and ‘catholicity’ of the Church (*in time* > unity, historical continuity; *in space* > the geographical dimension – universality, and *in truth* > faith, doctrine, the Word, restoration...).

### **The *koinonia* of the apostles**

Thus the *koinonia* of the apostles is necessary to the connection, co-ordination and organic (and increasingly and in future also organizational = *visible!*) unity of the local (in their trans-local dimension), national and continental fellowships (that is, the international, universal, ‘catholic’ dimension) over which they preside (*episkopè*).

This allows recognition of a space for the exercise of individual ministry, but always in the bonds of unity and truth with the collective *episkopè*, the sphere and responsibility of collegial apostolic government. The apostolic nature of the church is ultimately the responsibility of the apostles in a mutual fellowship of love and truth.

*Koinonia* and unity among the apostles are necessary as an authoritative service (*diakonia*) to the universal church, so that it can grow in love and truth (from the truth in love to the truth in unity) in our individual churches, and in the whole church, with a view to the ‘fulness’ already expressed in Christ, and which remains God’s necessary goal for the entire church.

### **Experience – My/our experience along the road toward unity and reconciliation**

Why do you (still) believe in the unity of the church? This calls into question my experience!

The level/time of faith: Ephesians 4 – John 17 – Revelation 21 > *“There is one body”* – *“that all of them may be one”* – *“God’s dwelling place among the people”*

- The level/time of history: Our experience – *“History has short legs”*

In between: the space/time for reconciliation – The tension between what we are and what we should be:

- The process of reconciliation is a faith process (*“We welcome them from a distance”*)
- Once again, it has to do with *“Your kingdom come on earth...”*. As it is in heaven, so it shall be on earth! Where are the Catholics? Where are the Evangelicals? The real question is: Where are the Christians?
- The need for a spirituality of reconciliation

Today’s Word is an expression of the time of faith

Our experience of embarrassing divisions: the time of history

In between: the space, the pain and suffering of reconciliation

This space is where our progressive experience of fellowship and reconciliation (even before it becomes an experience of co-operation) is situated: our witness to the will of God and of faith! This is where we are inspired and motivated; where we experience the joy of fellowship and the impact and the wounds of history.

### **A word of hope – A special *kairos*: the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

The century that recently ended was a century of great tragedies, but also of great testimonies of reconciliation: men and movements on the frontiers of the future! Jorge Himitian has spoken of “an important turning-point”.<sup>7</sup>

#### **Some movements**

The biblical movement, the movement for Christian unity, the movement leading to Vatican II, missionary movements, movements to rediscover the foundations of Christian life on both the Catholic (Cursillos, Neo-catechumenate, Focolarini) and evangelical sides. In this context, a special role belongs to the pentecostal and charismatic movement; on both the evangelical and Catholic sides!

#### **The original vocation and destiny of the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement**

- The Pentecostal/Charismatic movement is rooted in a number of different traditions: Afro-American oral culture, the *Holiness* church movement, *Roman Catholicism*, *evangelicalism*, the *radical/critical* tradition and the *ecumenical* movement (Walter Hollenweger).
- The Pentecostal/Charismatic movement demonstrates an extraordinary ability to influence and bless all Christian denominations. One might say that it is the heart-cry of a church that has become impoverished on the one hand and dried-up on the other; a church that has lost its first love. A cry expressing hunger and thirst for the Presence, hunger and thirst for God: a church crying out, like Moses, “*If your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here*” (Exod 33:15). It is the heart-cry of an impoverished church, joining with the cry that goes up from the destitute of the earth.
- God’s broken heart meets the broken-heartedness of the church (God’s groanings in us), and a river of Presence comes forth from the heart of God. A river of Presence bursts forth from our wounded hearts now indwelt and filled, overflowing with the Holy Spirit. At the root of this cry and of these groanings is the same Holy Spirit who is “*set on life and peace*”. Not just life! Peace too! Life and peace for mankind, life and peace for the church, life and peace for the universe.
- Therefore I believe that the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement, as well as a movement for the revival and renewal of lives, is also a movement for unity and reconciliation within the church. This is because it is united in its causes and its inspiration, and united in its objectives and its hope. Therefore it is qualified to step forward as an instrument of life and reconciliation for the church, because it is the very invocation of life and peace! It is the same river flowing from the heart of God that touches all the coasts of the Christian archipelago.

## **THE APOSTOLIC FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL**

Who we are: A group of apostles in relationship with common values and vision for reconciliation and edification of the Body of Christ

### **The nature of apostleship**

1. **Revelation** - Revelation of the mystery of Christ and of the body of Christ..
2. **Authority** - First translocal ministry with authority to a network of churches/ministries
3. **Recognition** - Recognition from other apostles.

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

- To develop peer level fellowship
- To enrich and inspire 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

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> I owe this premise to Jorge Himitian, *El Proyecto del Eterno* [The project of the Eternal], Buenos Aires 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Nicene Creed.

<sup>3</sup> "...he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, <sup>10</sup> to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment" (Eph 1:9-10). "For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles... <sup>3</sup>...the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. <sup>4</sup>In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup>which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets"(Eph3:1-5). - As Jorge Himitian has written: "The apostle Paul states that the mystery hidden for centuries in God was revealed to the apostles and prophets of his generation by the Holy Spirit; and that through them it was made known to the saints (Col 1:26). He calls this mystery (or secret) "*the mystery of Christ*" (Eph 3:4); "*the mystery of his will*" (1:9); the mystery of Christ and his church (5:32). The Epistle to the Ephesians is without question the one containing the highest level of revelation concerning the church. In it, Paul communicates the vision of the church as God conceived it in own mind and heart before the creation of the world; the church that God intended within himself, according to the pure desire of his will" (in *El Ministerio Apostolico y la Unidad de la Iglesia*", AFI 2002).

<sup>4</sup> "...to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things" (Eph 3:9); "that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel" (6:19); "pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains" (Col 4:3).

<sup>5</sup> "By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care" (1Cor 3:10)

<sup>6</sup> "For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building. <sup>10</sup> By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. <sup>11</sup> For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, <sup>13</sup> their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light" (1Cor 3:9-13)

<sup>7</sup> "In our generation an important turning-point has been reached. The numerous divisions which have taken place from the Reformation onwards as diverging lines have begun to weaken and bend to become converging ones. Today there is a very precious rapprochement between the various sectors of the church. The aggressive, bellicose attitudes of the past are being laid aside. There is dialogue, openness, reflectiveness, fellowship, interchange, reconciliation... At the same time there are dangers, some of them serious. For example: a unity without holiness, without truth, without the purity of the faith. This produces a human ecumenism, in which what one believes or how one lives is not important. Obviously this is not the unity that God is seeking" – Jorge Himitian, *art. cit.*



# THE CHURCH'S ADVANCE TOWARD FULNESS

Jorge Himitian

<sup>1</sup>*Come, let us return to the LORD.  
He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us;  
he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds.*  
<sup>2</sup>*After two days he will revive us;  
on the third day he will restore us,  
that we may live in his presence.*  
<sup>3</sup>*Let us acknowledge the LORD;  
let us press on to acknowledge him.  
As surely as the sun rises, he will appear;  
he will come to us like the winter rains,  
like the spring rains that water the earth.”*

Hosea 6.1-3, NIV

*But do not forget this one thing, dear friends:  
With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.*

2 Peter 3.8, NIV

## INTRODUCTION

*Men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do—200 chiefs, with all their relatives under their command.*

1 Chronicles 12.32

This may be one of the verses that most clearly defines one of the most important characteristics of the ministry of apostles and prophets. Today, more than ever, the church needs to hear from those who understand the times. It seems quite probable that this Apostolic Fellowship International has been raised up by God so that



**JORGE HIMITIAN**

**Buenos Aires, ARGENTINA [jorgehimitian@gmail.com](mailto:jorgehimitian@gmail.com)**

Pastor of the Comunidad Cristiana de Buenos Aires, Jorge is a leader that God raised up in the spiritual renewal initiated in Argentina in the 1960s. His ministry, with prophetic clarity, is providing for the church in many parts of Latin America and Europe a fresh vision of the kingdom of God, the lordship of Christ, Christian discipleship, church unity and other ancient truths from the Scriptures. His apostolic ministry is recognized in various countries of South America. Currently, he is one of the five coordinators of the Pastors Council in the city of Buenos Aires, and member of the executive committee of the Apostolic Fellowship International.

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

Himitian, of Armenian descent, was born in Palestine (today Israel) in the year 1941. He lives in Argentina since he was seven years of age. He is married to Silvia Palacio, with whom he has five children and eleven grandchildren.

there might be in this vital period of the church's history in the world two hundred people who understand the times, who know what the church should do in this century and this millennium.

The overall theme of this apostolic consultation is:

### **“LET US LOOK TOWARD THE FUTURE, the church of the third millennium”**

In the second millennium the worldwide church reached the lowest and darkest point in its history. In addition to the loss of its spirituality, in the year 1054, a great division occurred between the churches of the East and the West, with reciprocal excommunication between Catholics and Orthodox.\* The nominal church sank into sensualism, ambition, lust for power, material riches and opulence. Holiness shined by its absence, although God has always had a faithful remnant. The intent of the reformers to renew the church gave place to the excommunication of Luther and others. This set off one division after another until the church reached the current complex scene of fragmentation in an endless number of churches, not only separated from Rome but also separated among themselves in thousands of denominations. In their search to return to the truth, the reformers —perhaps without proposing it— violated another absolute and non-negotiable truth established by the apostles in the New Testament: **THE INDIVISIBLE UNITY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST**.

We thank God for all the biblical principles and spiritual riches which the reformers recovered and left to us; without them we would not be where we are today, but at the same time we must confess that until this day it is hard to erase our Protestant DNA genes of division.

The twentieth century, the last of the second millennium, has been a tremendous time. Two world wars rapidly destroyed the illusion of an almost perfect world pre-announced in earlier centuries by modernists. During that time, three great waves of the Holy Spirit have come upon the church in the world. Each wave exceeded the earlier one while including it. (In my vision and faith, the twentieth century has been the prelude and preparation for what God will do in the third millennium.) Those three waves are:

- The Pentecostal revival with the outpouring of the Spirit (at the beginning of the century).
- The renewal movement which embraced almost all the Protestant and Catholic denominations throughout the world (beginning in the 1960s).
- The emergence of the apostolic and prophetic movement so that the church might recover the revelation of the mystery of Christ and of the church, in order that she, according to God's eternal purpose, might reach her fullness in history and fulfill her integral mission in the world.

Most of us have been involved in the second and third wave, and we have indirectly experienced the first wave.

A large part of the inspiration of the first two waves has come about because of the desire to recover the spirituality of the first-century church, especially as narrated so magnificently by Luke in the early chapters of the book of Acts. How inspiring has been the reading of those glorious chapters! How many principles we have learned! How many paradigms and traditions we have been able to overcome! At all times the church has found in those pages a great source of inspiration and awakening.

With the second wave, some dared to go a little further. When the Holy Spirit visited us in the 1970s, the Bible became a new book to us. The word became light. We began to rediscover that the gospel preached by Jesus and the apostles, was the gospel of the kingdom. The word kingdom was always there, but we had never really taken notice of it. We discovered that the requisite to be saved was to confess Jesus as Lord, and not only as Savior. That the Great Commission was not limited to preaching the gospel to every creature, but also included making disciples of all nations. That discipleship was the proper way to build up the saints. That God's purpose was not simply to save souls but to be the Father of a great family of many children, all like Jesus. That

---

\* In 1965, at the conclusion of the Vatican Council II, the mutual excommunication was lifted.

the church that Christ promised to build is not the Evangelical Church or the Catholic Church, but simply the church. That apostolic and prophetic ministries are valid today and not only evangelists, pastors and teachers...

In those days the word 'restoration' was a key term among us, since it helped us to see that the church needed to recover important truths that the church had lost with the passing of time. However, the concept of 'restoration' also had the effect of conditioning or limiting us, almost without realizing it. We began to talk of 'the restoration of the church'. Years later we understood that Jesus never said: "I will restore my church", but rather: "I will build my church" (Matthew 16.18).

If by 'restoration' we mean the recovery of biblical principles, which as a church we had lost or ignored in earlier years, that is correct. But if, by speaking of restoration, we mean to become again like the churches of the first century, the focus is incorrect. Stated in another way, we can speak of the restoration or recovery of biblical truths, but it is not correct to speak of "the restoration of the church." The Bible prefers to use the term edification [building up] of the church.

Let us also remember that many of the churches in the days of the New Testament were rather problematical. The Corinthians were carnal and divided. The Galatians had returned to the Law of Moses. In Ephesus there was a threat of division. Of the seven churches of Asia, few were a good example for us. Even the church in Jerusalem, in spite of its initial glory, did not want to move out of Jerusalem and, when they did leave, thanks to persecution, they only wanted to preach the gospel to the Jews.

In conclusion, our absolute reference for the edification of the church in our times and in the third millennium is not the church of the first century, but rather, first of all, the church that was and is in the mind and heart of God from before the foundation of the world. And, in addition, the church that is prophesied to be realized at the end of time before the second coming of Christ. Both of these, the church of the remote past and the church of the future coincide fully. For the realization of God's project for the endtimes will be exactly what he proposed and projected before the beginning of time.

Both God's eternal project and the promises that his project will be realized in its fullness are registered in Sacred Scripture, especially in Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians.

## **OUR FIRST ABSOLUTE REFERENCE FOR THE EDIFICATION OF THE CHURCH IS GOD'S ETERNAL PROJECT**

Hebrews 11.10 refers to: "*the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God*".

Every architect, before initiating a building or a city, starts with a project. Before defining the project he must be very clear concerning the purpose of that building or city. Then, according to that purpose, he designs the project.

The project specifies all the aspects of the work that he will build: its foundations, the columns, the walls, the doors and windows... absolutely everything, even the smallest details. There we find all the dimensions, measurements, forms, materials, and the quality of the materials. In a great project, the reams of plans with their specifications are enormous. Much more so when we are thinking of the building of a city.

## **GOD'S ETERNAL PROJECT**

To describe this, I could not find better words than those which my wife wrote in the prologue of my book entitled: *El Proyecto del Eterno* [Project of the Eternal]. The following is a transcription of several paragraphs:

Since the beginning of time God has had a project. We have often spoken about it: God intends to have a family of many children who are like his son Jesus Christ. But, generally speaking, we have no real idea of its dimensions, or of its scope and implications.

We refer here to God's great project, the unique plan of the ages in which he brings together all his intentions, purposes and power. Within that project flows the very history of humanity, even with its multiple detours and efforts to detain it, initiated by people under the influence of the forces of evil. Nothing remains outside

this project of God. And each one of us is included in his plan; each one has a place and a responsibility for the fulfillment of what God has proposed to accomplish through the ages.

There are not many plans. There are not many proposals. It is the great project that God determined to realize from eternity past, before anything existed. And it continues until our day.

We have the option to commit ourselves to his plan, understand it, embrace it, make it our own. Or we can stand on the margin, continuing with our personal projects, or working according to certain “ministerial perceptions”, which, in reality, do not lead us to what God has purposed. This is the reason why there are so many Christians who are active and frustrated. They never achieve what they think they should accomplish...

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

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

God’s great project is carried out through those who decide to lose their life in God. To lose their own identity within the body. To stop seeking their own way in order to find Christ’s way. We cannot follow our personal choices and those of God at the same time. They are contrary to each other. When we lose ourselves within God’s plan, surrendering all that we are and our deepest longings for the realization of God’s project, we find life, meaning, balance, peace. For we become part of the whole, the great family of God that rejoices in being one. We do not seek something difference, but rather a common identity. We do not strain to achieve the choice place at the front, but rather the rear guard in order to offer support and strength to our brothers from that site. And if we advance to the first rank, it is to become the point of the lance and a shield of protection for those behind us. Our goal is the body, not our individuality. Our achievements are evaluated from that perspective. The best place of all is to lose ourselves for the benefit of the common good...

God did not propose the realization of a temporary project, with a date after which it is no longer effective, for his project is eternal, transcendent, forever. It starts from eternity past and moves through history toward eternity future, and in the fulfillment of time it unites everything in Christ. Not as the end, for in God there are no final points, but rather as the realization of the ultimate fullness that, once achieved, will continue forever. And in that fullness we also have a part.

## **GOD’S ETERNAL PROJECT CAN BE SUMMED UP WITH A SINGLE WORD: C H U R C H**

What is the church?

It is not a physical building, but a community formed of redeemed persons.

It is not a human institution or a legal entity; it is God’s family.

It is not a denomination or association; it is the bride of the Lamb.

It is not the property of a person or group of persons. The church belongs to one person alone: God. It is God’s people, the body of Christ, the temple of the Spirit.

It has no proper name; it is simply ‘church’, nothing added, no adjectives.

In the Bible it is known as the church of such and such a city.

It is not a congregation. The church comes together, and rightfully so, but it continues to be the church, all the hours of the day and all the days of the week. We don’t attend church; we are the church.

The church was not born in God’s mind two thousand years ago when he sent his Son to the world. The church was in God’s mind and heart from eternity, since “before the foundation of the world.”

The church was not God's Plan B following the fall of man. The church is God's Plan A, even before men or demons existed. Man's fall was a detour, an attack against God's eternal project. Redemption was required to bring things back to the original plan.

The church is the family that God determined to have, according to his pleasure, according to the design of his choice, according to his pure and great love, according to the abundant riches of his grace. Sin revealed the unimagined immensity of his grace.

The creation of man and woman, the institution of marriage, procreation, the incarnate Word, the redemptive sacrifice of Christ, his resurrection and exaltation, the coming of the Holy Spirit, his gifts and ministries, the Word of God; all these elements together point to the same objective: the realization of God's eternal project which is the church.

## **THIS ETERNAL PROJECT — THE CHURCH — HAS AN ETERNAL PURPOSE**

That purpose is mentioned three times in Ephesians 1.3-14, as the chorus that is repeated in this extraordinary *magnificat* of Paul.

Summarizing that passage we could express it as follows: Blessed be the Father who in Christ blessed us... chose us... predestined us... redeemed us... revealed his will to us... and sealed us with the Holy Spirit, for a unique purpose:

*to the praise of his glorious grace* (v.6)

*in order that we... might be for the praise of his glory* (v.12)

*to the praise of his glory* (v.14)

This is the church's reason for being through all the ages of time.

Paul concludes his prayer in chapter 3 of Ephesians in this way:

*to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

## **THE THREE ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHURCH according to god's project**

In order to achieve God's eternal purpose, that is, that God be glorified in the church in Christ Jesus, she must bear in the world three essential characteristics:

- QUALITY (HOLINESS)
- UNITY
- QUANTITY

### **QUALITY = HOLINESS**

This is the first specification that we see in God's project, and it is in Ephesians 1.4:

*For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.*

God's purpose is not only to make us his children, but to make us holy and blameless, that is to say, like Jesus.

Paul expresses this clearly in Romans 8.29:

*For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

God's plan is not merely to save us from hell and take us to heaven, but to make us like Christ. Obtaining forgiveness for our sins and becoming a child of God is only the first step toward the fulfillment of God's project, not the end. God's objective is to conform us to the image of his Son. This is quality.

Holiness in life is one of the main points of Paul's focus in Ephesians, especially in the second half of the book (chap. 4, 5 and 6). In 5.25-27, he declares that Christ, by his sacrifice and through the Word of God,

determined *to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*

## UNITY

*He made known to us the mystery of his will... to bring all things... together under one head, even Christ (3:10).*

The key word that reveals the mystery of his will is the verb translated here as *bring together*. God purposed in himself to bring together (unite anew) all things in Christ. This verb in Greek is *anakefalaiosastai*. It is made up of three words:

*Ana* (anew) + *kefalé* (head) + *iosastai* (unite).

It means to bring together again everything under one head.

This Greek expression was used in ancient times when an army that had been defeated, broken and scattered, was again brought together, and organized anew under the authority of a new commander in chief.

This word *anakefalaiosastai* presupposes at least three things:

- That originally, in the universe everything was united and ordered harmoniously under God's authority.
- That something happened in the world that compromised that unity.
- That God, knowing beforehand that this would occur with humanity, through grace determined to unite everything again under Christ's authority as head.

Let's consider this more closely:

### 1. What was God's original plan?

The unity of everything and everyone. A united world, beautiful and harmonious, in which man would live in fellowship with God, loving, worshipping and obeying him. A place in which man would experience unity with his neighbor, harmony between humans and nature (creation). Unity in marriage, in the family, and in all humanity. God's eternal project was and is a united society, with common interests, without selfishness nor rivalry; humanity that lives in peace and love; where each one, filled with God's love, would love his neighbor as himself.

### 2. What happened?

Unfortunately, man rebelled against the Lord and, accepting the proposal of God's enemy, sinned. Thus sin entered the world and, through sin, death. Death means separation, division. The unity between God and man was broken, the unity among humans and with their neighbors. Jealousy arose, envy, conflicts, homicide, fratricide, wars, injustice, divorce, greed, the unjust distribution of riches, social conflicts, racial discrimination. Human history became a history of wars, blood, hate, violence, crime and death. Very different from the model of society projected by God! Nature itself was affected by the sin of humans, administrators of the planet Earth. Men and women became God's enemies, and enemies of their neighbors.

### 3. What is the mystery of his will?

To bring together everything under Christ as head of a new humanity. The new humanity that has Christ as its head is the church. The church is the realization of God's dream for the earth. It is his eternal project for humanity. That dream was potentially consummated on the cross.

*"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility."*

Ephesians 2.14–16

The unity of the church is essential to God's eternal project

In a world that is divided, at enmity, overrun by individualism, injustice, egotism, competition and wars, the church is that part of humanity which, in Christ, has returned to God to be one with him; it is reconciled humanity. The church, in its essential nature, is forgiveness, reconciliation, peace, love, service. The church is community, family, unity. It is the holy kiss, the fraternal embrace, shared bread, shared goods, sincere affection. It is the end of loneliness, and of individualism. It is the end of all division. It is God's *Shalom* installed among men to bring peace to the earth and to illustrate to the world the greatest of all miracles: unity.

### **The current division of the church**

God has revealed to us the mystery of his will: To bring men together under the authority of Christ. Any division in the church is inadmissible and contrary to God's will, for it is opposed to his eternal project. The current division of the church has no biblical or theological foundation. It can only be explained as something that happened in our history.

God has not desisted from his eternal project. According to his revealed project, God will bring everything together under the unique head of the church, which is Christ. We firmly believe that the present division of the church will be overcome until we all conform here on the earth the unique body of Christ. Christ's prayer in John 17 will be fully answered by the Father: *"...that all of them may be one, Father... that the world may believe that you have sent me"*. We will be one, and the world will believe!

## **QUANTITY**

It is vital that we now ask ourselves the following question:

### **WHO DID GOD INCLUDE IN HIS ETERNAL PROJECT?**

I will respond to this delicate matter with five questions:

- 1) Who did the Lord create for himself?
  - \* According to Colossians 1.16: All humans were created by Christ and for Christ.
  - \* According to Romans 11.36: Everything was made from him, through him, and for him.
  - \* According to Romans 3.23: All have sinned and fall short of God's glory, which implies that all were created for God's glory.
  - \* According to Matthew 25.41: Hell was not created for man, but for the devil and his angels. Yet finally, all the unrepentant will be cast there.
- 2) What was God's plan for all humanity when he created the first man and the first woman? (Genesis 1.26--28).
  - \* According to Genesis 12.1--3: God's purpose was to bless all the families of the earth through the seed of Abraham, who is Jesus Christ.
  - \* In Genesis 15.1--6, God promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars of the heavens (**QUANTITY!**).
- 3) Who did Jesus redeem on the cross?
  - \* According to John 1.29, Christ is the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world.
  - \* According to 2 Corinthians 5.19, God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.
- 4) To whom must we preach the gospel?
  - \* According to Matthew 28.18--20, Jesus' command is to make disciples of all persons in all the world.
  - \* According to Mark 16.15--16, Jesus commands us to preach the gospel to everyone in the world.
- 5) What is God's will for all people?
  - \* According to 1 Timothy 2.3--4, God's will is that all men be saved and come to the full knowledge of the truth.
  - \* According to 2 Peter 3.9, God does not want anyone to perish.

## **What is the meaning of predestination? Whom did the Father predestine for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ?**

God has only one “natural” Son, his own: the Only begotten. A son has the same nature as his father. The son of a man is a man. The offspring of a horse is a horse. The offspring of a dove is a dove, and the Son of God is God. To affirm that Christ is the Son of God is to affirm that he is God (John 5.17–18).

None of us are children of God by nature, but rather creatures of God. Yet God, long before creating us, in love predestined us to be adopted as his children through his Son Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1.5); and to grant us the same relationship, the same honor as his only begotten Son. In this way the only begotten became the Firstborn among many brothers and sisters (Rom. 8.29). For that reason we declare that God’s eternal project is to have a family of many children like his Son, so that he might be the Firstborn among many brothers.

We believe in predestination rather than in destiny. We are Christians and not Muslims. Muslims believe in destiny. The phrase: “No one dies in the evening” is not a phrase from the Bible, it is a Muslim phrase. They believe in a closed destiny, predetermined, fixed.

The Bible speaks of predestination. To predestine means to assign a destiny beforehand. God’s project includes all those he created. But God does not impose his project, his plan, his will on anyone. God’s plan is that all persons be his children. The gospel is a proposal, not an imposition that God places upon people.

For that reason we have good news for all people: With complete certainty and truth we can say to any person: *“God loves you. God has a wonderful plan for your life. You were born for God, to be a child of God; you were born to be holy, to be like Jesus, to be part of God’s family.”*

Unfortunately, not all will respond positively to the Lord’s call. However, he loves all and included all in his wonderful project.

## **OUR SECOND ABSOLUTE REFERENCE FOR THE EDIFICATION OF THE CHURCH is what God declared would happen with his church prior to Christ’s return.**

When studying the epistles that the apostle Paul wrote in the early years of his ministry, one gets the impression that he then had the idea that in his generation the edification of the church would be completed, and that Christ would soon return. But as we study the later epistles, such as Ephesians, it is quite evident that Paul understood that in future centuries, and before Christ’s return, the church would reach its fullness in the course of human history.

God revealed to Paul the wonderful heights that the church would reach here on the earth in the future, prior to Christ’s return. He proclaims in the Epistle to the Ephesians that what God purposed in himself, before the foundation of the world, he would clearly achieve in the fullness of times.

## **NINE CHARACTERISTICS PROMISED BY GOD FOR THE CHURCH, in the Epistle to the Ephesians**

- The church will manifest before the world God’s greatness and goodness through the church’s good deeds...  
*“...in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus...”* (Eph 2.7).  
*“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do”* (Eph 2.10).
- The church will make known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms the manifold wisdom of God, according to his eternal purpose in Christ Jesus.

*“His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph 3.10–11).*

- The church, in fellowship and unity with all the saints, will experience the four dimensions of God’s love, and will be filled with all God’s fullness.  
*“...may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” (Eph 3.18–19).*
- Christ will provide the church with apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, that will train the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edification of the unique body of Christ.  
*“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Eph 4.11–12).*
- The church will achieve unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God.  
*“until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature” (Eph 4.13).*
- The church will reach the measure of the fullness of Christ.  
*“...until we all reach unity... and become mature... Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ” (Eph 4.13–15).*
- The church will reach complete unity as a single body joined and held together by the ligaments of the body. All divisions will disappear.  
*“From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Eph 4.16).*
- The church will be united, glorious and holy.  
*“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” (Eph 5.25–27).*
- Paul concludes his prayer for the church with this glorious proclamation:  
*“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amén.” (Eph 3.20–21).*

## TEN PROPHECIES FOR THE FINAL CENTURIES OF HISTORY

- The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all people.  
*<sup>28</sup>And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. <sup>29</sup>Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. <sup>30</sup>I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. <sup>31</sup>The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. <sup>32</sup>And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.”*
- Joel 2.28-32
- World evangelization, as prophesied by Jesus.  
*“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”*

Matthew 24.14

- All nations will know the glory of God.  
*"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."*  
 Habakkuk 2.14
- Troubles among the nations and greater glory in the church.  
*"This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty. 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the LORD Almighty. 'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the LORD Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the LORD Almighty"*  
 Haggai 2.6-9
- Generational reconciliation between parents and children.  
*"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."*  
 Malachi 4.5-6
- The nations will come to the church to ask her to teach them the ways of the Lord.  
*"In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.'" The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore."*  
 Isaiah 2.2-4
- The conversion of Israel and worldwide revival!  
*"But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!... For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?... Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved"*  
 Romans 11.12, 15, 25-26
- Jesus' prayer will be perfectly fulfilled.  
*"...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me."*  
 John 17.21-23
- WE WILL BE UNITED AND THE WORLD WILL BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS THE LORD!
- Jesus will completely fulfill what he promised: he will complete the edification of his church and the gates of Hades will not be able to resist the glorious advance of the church.  
*"I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."*  
 Matthew 16.18

## CONCLUSION: THE GENERATION THAT BELIEVES GOD

We need to believe God. The Lord gave to Abraham “*the promise that he would be heir of the world*” (Rom 4.13). And Abraham believed God.

In the same chapter 4 of Romans, verses 17 to 21 tell us:

*As it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.” He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.*

*Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.*

Will we be the generation that believes God? Can we believe that God has the power to do what he promised?

A generation that did not believe died in the desert without reaching the promised land, except for Joshua and Caleb who led a new generation.

God asked Ezekiel:

*Son of man, Can these bones live?*

*—O Sovereign Lord, you alone know.*

*—You are right, I know.*

*—Then... prophesy to these bones and say to them: “Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life...”*

Prophesy means to say what God tells us to say.

*So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I was prophesying, there was a noise... and the bones came together, bone to bone... (Ezekiel 37.1–10).*

Faced with the present scene of a divided church, with many stains and wrinkles, with carnal leadership and competition to have the largest church, the greatest fame, the most power...

Faced with the scene of a worldly and materialistic church... the Lord asks us today:

Son of man, Will the church achieve unity in the faith? Will it become again a united body in each city, in each nation and in the world? Will it become glorious and holy, without stain or wrinkle? Will it be the salt of the earth and the light of the world? Will it become again a factor for social transformation among the nations?

Do you believe that I have the power to do what is prophesied and written in my word?

If you believe, prophesy and proclaim with your mouth what I say in my Word...

If you believe in your heart, declare that it will come to pass, and what you believe and say, I will do.



# THE GOSPEL OF DESIRE

## Desire, Kingdom, Incarnation, Transformation

Giovanni Traettino

*“The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost”* (Luke 19:10).

*“You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride; you have stolen my heart with one glance of your eyes”*  
(Song of Songs 4:9).

*“We love because he first loved us”* (1John 4:19).

### A word of thanks and greeting

Dear brothers, after twelve years of our walk together as AFI we meet for the first time in Colombia, South America; to be precise, in Bogotá. We come in response to a warm invitation from our dear friend, Pastor Hector Pardo, expecting great things and fully trusting that this is the right time, an appointment God has prepared for us.

### Premise

Before launching into the subject I have been asked to cover, I would like to share what I feel to be some of the most significant points of our thinking. This should help those of you who are with us for the first time to understand more clearly our beginnings:<sup>1</sup>

“Over the last ten or twelve years, after an initial phase in which we emphasized the theme of *relationships* (*koinonia*, fellowship) as foundational to the nature of God and of the body of Christ, and therefore also to apostolic relationships, we examined and came to agreement about the strategic nature and role of apostolic ministry, both individually (*personal, episkopē*) and in relationship with others (*collegial, episkopē*), for the leadership, upbuilding and unity of the church.”<sup>2</sup>



GIOVANNI TRAETTINO

Caserta, ITALY [g.traettino@reiconciliazione.org](mailto:g.traettino@reiconciliazione.org)

Giovanni Traettino is the permanent coordinator of the Apostolic Fellowship International (AFI). Senior pastor of the Christian Fellowship of Caserta, he presides over the Evangelical Church of Reconciliation in Italy and has an apostolic ministry to a network of churches in Italy, the Central African Republic and Chad. With a passion for unity and quality in the Body of Christ, he is a pioneer of the dialogue between Evangelicals and Catholic Charismatics.

Married to Franca, they have four children and three grandchildren.

We then dealt more closely, as was natural, with the subject of the church. The subject of our discussions from 2004 to 2007 was “*The Church’s progress towards fullness*”. We explored the most important aspects of this fullness: 1) Unity; 2) Quality; 3) Quantity.

## Kingdom of God, Church and Society

In Chile in 2008 we began to examine the subject of “*Kingdom of God, Church and Society*”, and we continued with the same subject in 2009 in Nigeria.<sup>3</sup>

“It seemed clear to us —as emerged with particular clarity from the three main papers given at Santiago 2008— that the two subjects are *interconnected* and *closely joined together*.”

“The theme of the Kingdom is basic to the church and intersects its path *towards fullness*; because the path towards fullness coincides with the *process* of growth and the increase of the Kingdom; and because *the fullness* is in fact the fullness of the life of the kingdom, the kingdom of God fully realized. This is true at the personal level (the *person* being the habitation of God by the Spirit), at the interpersonal level (the *community* as the habitation of God by the Spirit), and at the ecological and universal level (the *earth* and the *universe* full of his glory!). By then God will have healed, inhabited and filled with himself all relationships and the whole creation! A new creature! A new community! A new creation!”<sup>4</sup>

In the course of these deliberations we happened on the theme of *Transformation*. The subject of Fullness and that of the kingdom raise the question, in God’s economy, of transformation: transformation of the individual Christian and the Christian community, and —to the degree that they are transformed, however partially (but truly!)— that of *society* and of the nations in which we live.

All this began from God’s insatiable, invincible and irreversible desire to live in and possess the heart of man. It is what I like to call —more even than the Gospel of the kingdom— the *Gospel of desire*! We must start from the Gospel of desire in order to understand the *Gospel of the kingdom*. We must start from the heart of God to understand the heart of the kingdom. The Gospel of the kingdom is nothing but the gospel of the desire which God has always had and continues to have, to *enter and possess the heart of man*!

The bridge, the connection between the Gospel of desire and the Gospel of the kingdom, is the *Gospel of the incarnation*.<sup>5</sup> God’s purpose was to inhabit and experience man —the new tabernacle (!)— *from within*. A tabernacle no longer made of walls of cloth, wood or stone, but walls of flesh. It was inaugurated by God in Christ (“*Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me*”)<sup>6</sup>, and is continued in Christians through the breaking in and indwelling of the Holy Spirit (“*Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you*”)<sup>7</sup>. But all this would be incomplete if we did not comprehend that the ultimate purpose of the Gospel of desire, of the kingdom and of the incarnation is the Gospel of transformation! God’s desire has always been the complete recovery of man in order to transform him, from within, in his personal life and his relationships, into His own image and likeness!”<sup>8</sup>

## Two instruments of transformation

The papers presented in Lagos emphasized that from a Christian viewpoint there are basically two possible agencies (and also witnesses and guardians!) of the kingdom to transform the world: the individual and the fellowship (the natural family and the spiritual family)<sup>9</sup>, transformed in their character and behavior by the “Gospel of the kingdom” (*kerygma* and *didache*); the conversion of the individual and the reformation of the fellowship (*Ecclesia semper reformanda!*). As Pitsanunart has written, “*The key is the man and the man is the key*”. To which he adds, “*The key is the church and the church is the key to the kingdom of God*”. From this we can understand the strategic importance of both the individual disciple and the church taking responsibility (Jorge Himitian) for living out (incarnation) and proclaiming (preaching) the kingdom of God!

Therefore, the secret is “seed men” and “seed churches”, which hold within them the seed of the life of the kingdom, the ingredients (the DNA!) needed to “fertilize” society and “make it fruitful”, from within! This is why the strategy becomes “planting churches, planting the Kingdom.”

The “gap” between personal experience and the social impact of the Gospel of the kingdom is explained by the delay in the lives of many Christians in making room for God’s government. Unfortunately, walking in the flesh is more common than walking in the Spirit! The Church’s commitment to the gospel, lived out in holiness and proclaimed in the power of the Holy Spirit, cannot but bring transformation and joy to the community (Adeboye), including the secular world. There are many examples in both biblical (Abraham, the prophets of restoration) and secular history (the historical transformation of Europe, the experience of Africa).

The models are the *person of Christ* (incarnate and glorified) and the *fellowships* described by Luke (the church of Jerusalem in Acts) and John (the New Jerusalem of Revelation).

## The Gospel of desire

This is the background to the additional considerations that I would like to put forward here. These particularly concern a phrase that for me has become especially dear and “revelatory” of God’s heart, and which I like to call “*The Gospel of desire*.” This is none other than the good news of the desire cherished by God throughout eternity to dwell (“*I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God*”)<sup>10</sup>, inhabit (“*I will put my dwelling place among you*”)<sup>11</sup>, be present (“*My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest... [This] will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth*”)<sup>12</sup>; that is, to adopt the powerful term used by the same John, to “tabernacle”<sup>13</sup> in the heart of man<sup>14</sup> and in the relationships experienced in the “fellowship.” God wants to establish from within a personal, intimate and loving relationship with his creatures, full of grace and truth. The whole of Scripture bears witness to this “insatiable and unconquerable desire in the heart of God”: to enter the heart of mankind, to enter the heart of man! *A God who wants to experience man!* As someone has said: “God cannot compel someone to love Him, but he will not give up his desire to walk beside him.” This is why, “*at many times and in various ways*”,<sup>15</sup> he has taken the initiative to reveal himself; why there are so many visitations and, above all, it is the reason for the Son’s “dive” into history in the incarnation, and likewise for the Holy Spirit’s “dive” into the hearts of believers at Pentecost!

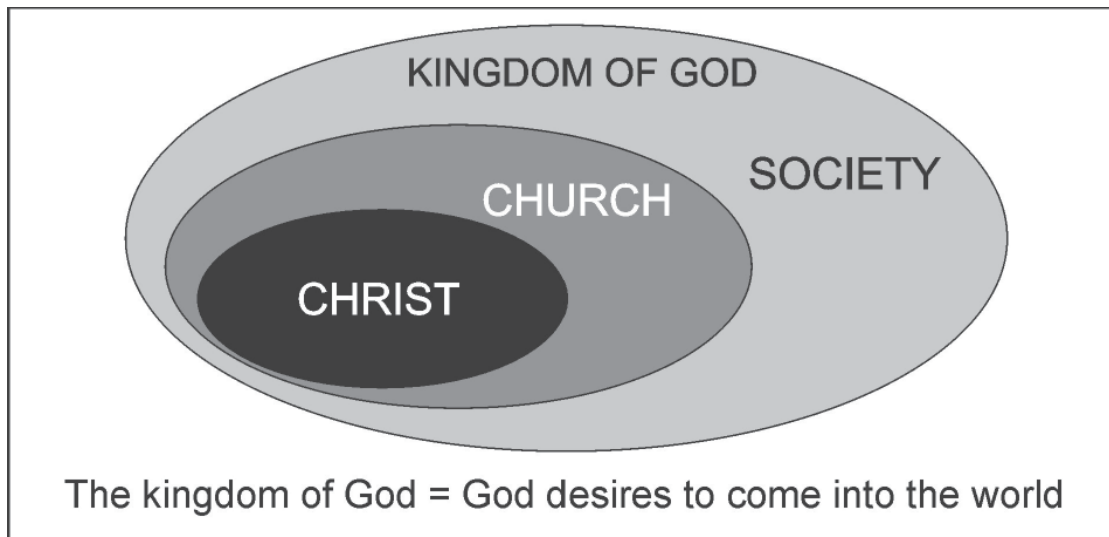
For the sake of clarity and simplicity, I would like to propose three illustrations:

1. A diagram with three ellipses;
2. An hourglass;
3. A prism.

All three have to do with this desire!

## Three ellipses: God’s eternal purpose (“God desires to come into the world”)

The first diagram represents the entry into the world of the kingdom of God (with Christ, the stone of Daniel chapter 2)<sup>16</sup>, its progress and growth (in the individual<sup>17</sup> and by means of the church)<sup>18</sup> and its ultimate goal (“all things”, the earth, the whole creation, the ends of the earth and of history: “*The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever*”);<sup>19</sup> “*...the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment – to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ*”.<sup>20</sup>



Until the final fulfilment of God's desire! This is the vision of the end given us by John in the last book of the Bible:

*"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup>I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup>He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' <sup>5</sup>He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' <sup>6</sup>He said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life.'"*<sup>21</sup>

God's desire was to come into the world! God longed to "invade" the world, to reign in the world! he already reigned "in heaven", but he also wanted to reign on earth<sup>22</sup> —in the heart of that creature who was the summit, the intelligent, relational masterpiece of his creation, starting from the "earth" out of which we are made and our *inner man*!<sup>23</sup> In relationships between men; in the cities of mankind...! An overwhelming, passionate love: "God so loved the world..."<sup>24</sup> "God is love..."<sup>25</sup> This is why, as Rabbi Hanokh of Alexander observes in *The Way of Man*: "The other nations too believe that there are two worlds ... The difference is this: They think that the two are separate and severed, but Israel professes that the two worlds are essentially one and shall in fact become one."<sup>26</sup>

The strategic turning-point ("when the set time had fully come")<sup>27</sup> for the fulfilment of this desire comes when, in Christ, the Kingdom of God definitively bursts on to the scene. It bears the name of Jesus Christ! The Kingdom of God has drawn near to us in Christ, has been inaugurated by Christ, and enters into us and grows in us as we receive Christ: "To all who did receive him... he gave the right to become children of God".<sup>28</sup>

The preparation for that event flows from the desire conceived and cherished by God from all eternity. God loves mankind; He is in love with man. "He first loved us"<sup>29</sup> Man seeks after God only because God first seeks him.

The opening chapters of the Letter to the Ephesians "make known to us the mystery of his will", revealing that, "in love", the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ "chose us before the creation of the world" and "predestined us... for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ". In Him He has blessed us, redeemed us, made us heirs and given us the seal of the Holy Spirit as "a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption..."<sup>30</sup> And all this is by grace! Because, as Paul adds: "Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us

*alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.* <sup>6</sup> *And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,* <sup>7</sup> *in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.* <sup>8</sup> *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.*<sup>31</sup>

As Job says, *“But he stands alone, and who can oppose him? He does whatever he pleases.”*<sup>32</sup> God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, desired man; to dwell in man; to experience humanity. So we understand that at the core of the divine search is God’s eternal desire for man. There is a desire for man on God’s part! Hence grace... Hence the incarnation... Hence the gift of the Holy Spirit... Hence the gifts... Hence the ministries... It is all Love. It is all Grace. It all begins with God’s desire, an intense circular movement of love joining the Father to the Son through the Holy Spirit,<sup>33</sup> the river of love that flows from one to the other and is poured into the hearts of men,<sup>34</sup> as He ardently desires to *fill*<sup>35</sup> all those who are prepared to receive him.<sup>36</sup> It all begins with desire! God’s inner life is determined by that desire! God’s outward activity is determined by that desire. Man’s inner life is determined by that desire! The Holy Spirit of God, who inhabits *“the deep things of God”*,<sup>37</sup> is the bearer of this desire of God. And He longs to inhabit *“the deep things in the heart of man”* to spark within him the fire of desire for God.<sup>38</sup> Because, when we are loved, we are able to return that love...

The God of Christian revelation is a God of relationships. He is not the god of the Stoics, nor of Greek philosophy: remote, apathetic and perfect in his self-sufficiency. His nature is Love! *“God is love”*!<sup>39</sup> Desire; a passionate searching for his creature; love! Love *ad intra*, within: between *Father, Son* and *Holy Spirit*. Love *ad extra*, turning outwards: a passionate and insatiable desire for fellowship with His special creature, *man*. Otherwise, why should Scripture state that *“[God] jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us”*?<sup>40</sup>

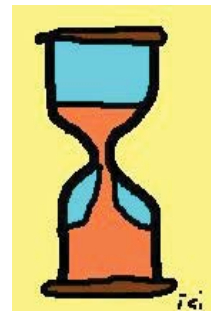
### The hour-glass: God’s method: the incarnation and Pentecost

This “urge” for relationship was so intense that it suggested the method of incarnation through the Holy Spirit of God in Christ: *the incarnation!* And of Christ in us: *Pentecost!* This picture of an hour-glass illustrates the method God chose to enter this world! The upper vessel represents the Kingdom of Heaven; the lower one, the earth. They are connected by a narrow neck (brokenness, Mary’s yes, the humiliation of God in Christ, the seed falling into the ground and dying...), a wound (*“When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’”*<sup>41</sup>), essential for putting heaven in touch with earth, the upper vessel with the lower. God desired to touch and experience man from within! He wanted a dwelling place with walls of flesh. It was necessary to open a channel to enable the fulfilment of God’s desire: to reconcile heaven with earth, to pour what was above into what was down below, to make the two worlds one.

*“How will this be?”* Mary asked.

*“The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you”*. The relationship between the Word and the flesh is made possible by the Spirit. *“May your word to me be fulfilled”*, was Mary’s response.<sup>42</sup> The incarnation of Jesus is the greatest work accomplished by the Holy Spirit! And a human body became the hour-glass chosen by God to connect Heaven and earth. Within Mary’s body, the miracle of the connection was achieved. The body of Christ became the physical location of this union!

Thus we can better understand why it is written: *“Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: ‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, ‘Here I am... I have come to do your will, my God’”*.<sup>43</sup> The physical body of Jesus of Nazareth became the point of touchdown of God’s desire, the entry point, the channel, the meeting-point, the path of communication between heaven and earth. The flesh of Mary’s son became the physical location of the entrance of God and his kingdom into the world, for the kingdom of heaven to come to earth. In him heaven and earth were united in a real, permanent way, and, by means of the resurrection, irreversibly and eternally.



The kingdom of God came with Jesus and is inseparable from his person! What was new in Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God "is he himself, simply his person" (J. Schniewind).<sup>44</sup> The kingdom of God is in Christ! "*In Christ all the fulness of the Deity lives in bodily form*".<sup>45</sup> "God was pleased to have all his fulness [that is, the fulness of the kingdom] dwell in him";<sup>46</sup> "...so that in everything he might have the supremacy".<sup>47</sup> Jesus Christ is God's dwelling-place in the flesh, the dwelling-place of the flesh in God! To receive Jesus as Lord means to make room for God's desire, to welcome his rule, to receive his kingdom! The kingdom of God is in Christ. The kingdom of God is the Holy Spirit in man. The kingdom of God is the life of Christ.

### The prism: God's way: transformation

Now —as Athanasius of Alexandria observes— the Word of God, Jesus Christ, became flesh so that human beings could receive the Holy Spirit and become "bearers of the Spirit".

Through the incarnation, indeed, he has made possible, through the Spirit, "the grace of union" of the human and divine natures in the same person;<sup>48</sup> in the body of the Son of God he has initiated and given physical shape, through the Spirit, to the new, eternal covenant;<sup>49</sup>

he has made possible, through the reception of the Holy Spirit, the miracle of man's becoming a partaker of the divine nature.<sup>50</sup> From the beginning of time this was God's desire: to enter the heart of man, to dwell by means of the Holy Spirit in his innermost being and so make him a partaker of his own nature. He would thus be able to activate and make possible the process of transformation needed to restore and reflect the image of Jesus, "*the firstborn among many brothers and sisters*".<sup>51</sup> This was impossible without the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, impossible without drawing on the very life of God himself. Therefore it required the fulfilment of Ezekiel's prophecy:

*"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws"*.<sup>52</sup>

In fact, after pronouncing the Beatitudes, the manifesto of the new life in Christ, and in the context of a considerable raising of the moral standard required of his disciples, Jesus warned: "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them*".<sup>53</sup> So there could never be a suggestion, to use Bonhoeffer's expression, of *cheap grace*. A little earlier he had declared: "*You are the light of the world*"<sup>54</sup>, thus aligning expectations of their character, behaviour and lifestyle in relation to his own, since he also said the same thing of himself: "*I am the light of the world*"<sup>55</sup>!

No, Jesus did not wish to abolish the commandments! But he certainly knew —even better than that scrupulously observant Jew, Paul ("*The evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing*"<sup>56</sup>)— that it was impossible for the flesh to obey the law. No-one knew better than he that the God of Sinai was the same as the God of the Sermon on the Mount! No, Jesus had no wish to abolish the commandments! It was necessary to open up another way! He knew that people can be induced to act either by coercion or by attraction, and decided to transform outward imposition into inner desire... It was necessary to implant God's desire "inside", the Spirit whose desires are life and peace. It was necessary to establish a control room "inside", through a direct relationship; to create a deep inner relationship between the inner man and the person of the Spirit of God. Hence the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Hence "*your bodies... temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you*"<sup>57</sup>. Hence the new "*law of [that is] the Spirit of [that gives] life in Christ Jesus*"<sup>58</sup> which frees me from the law of sin and death. Life from life, in short! Light from light! Only the life of Christ, life in Christ, abiding in Christ, could make possible the imitation of Christ! Only a deep inner fellowship with "*the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus*" could make possible a genuine process of transformation.

In this way the Light of Christ was to become our light, by a phenomenon similar to that produced by a prism. Light refracted by a prism separates into seven colours, the colours of the rainbow. Natural light is the





sum of these seven colours. So too the light of the inner nature of Christ, described in the Beatitudes. It is interesting that there are seven of the latter, plus one —the last— which may be seen as underlining the intensity and spirit of sacrifice with which to live out the others, which deal with attitudes and behaviour.

*“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ”.*<sup>59</sup>

*“God’s grace consists precisely in this, that He wants to let Himself be won by man, that He places Himself, so to speak, into man’s hands. God wants to come to His world, but He wants to come to it through man. This is the mystery of our existence, the superhuman chance of mankind... This is the ultimate purpose: to let God in... Then we are establishing, in this our place, a dwelling for the Divine Presence”.*<sup>60</sup>

*“May I die for love of Your love, as You deigned to die for love of my love!”  
“God! Never enough! I can never have enough!” – St. Francis of Assisi*

*“I myself will see him with my own eyes – I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!!” – Job 19:27*

*“The tension between God’s power and His love is the supreme suffering of God. And the reconciliation of this power with this love is the highest joy, and this pain and this joy are one and the same thing” – Edith Stein*

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Giovanni Traettino, *“Ten years together”*, AFI Napoli 2010, see [www.afint.org](http://www.afint.org).

<sup>2</sup> IAF documents, Italy 2000

<sup>3</sup> For some of these materials in written form, see the web site [www.afint.org](http://www.afint.org).

<sup>4</sup> Giovanni Traettino, *Kingdom of God, Church and Society*, AFI Santiago, 2008

<sup>5</sup> As someone has observed, “The incarnation is the spiritual and theological foundation of commitment to ‘action.’”

<sup>6</sup> Heb 10:5

<sup>7</sup> 1Cor 6:19

<sup>8</sup> From my “Welcome” at the *AFI Apostolic Consultation* in Lagos 2009.

<sup>9</sup> In other words, Christ and the Body of Christ!

<sup>10</sup> *“I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God”* (Ex 29:45).

<sup>11</sup> *“I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you. <sup>12</sup> I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people”* (Lev 26:11-12); *“Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing”* (Jn 15:4-5).

<sup>12</sup> Ex 33:14,16

<sup>13</sup> *“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling (eskénōsen = “tabernacled”) among us...”* (Jn 1:14)

<sup>14</sup> *“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever – <sup>17</sup> the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you”* (Jn 14:16-17).

<sup>15</sup> *“In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways”* (Heb 1:1)

<sup>16</sup> *“Your Majesty looked, and there before you stood a large statue – an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. <sup>32</sup> The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, <sup>33</sup> its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly*

of baked clay.<sup>34</sup> While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them.<sup>35</sup> Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were all broken to pieces and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth” (Dan 2:31-35)

<sup>17</sup> “...to all who did receive him...” (Jn 1:12)

<sup>18</sup> “...a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (Eph 2:22) and “the fullness of him who fills everything in every way” (Eph 1:22)

<sup>19</sup> Rev 11:15

<sup>20</sup> Eph 1:9-10

<sup>21</sup> Rev 21:1-6

<sup>22</sup> “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10)

<sup>23</sup> “...that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being...” (Eph 3:16)

<sup>24</sup> Jn 3:16

<sup>25</sup> 1Jn 4:8

<sup>26</sup> Martin Buber, *Der Weg des Menschen: nach der chassidischen Lehre*, 1948, Eng. transl. *The Way of Man: According to the Teachings of Hasidism*, London, Routledge 1950, p. 44.

<sup>27</sup> Gal 4:4

<sup>28</sup> Jn 1:12

<sup>29</sup> 1Jn 4:19

<sup>30</sup> “...the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.<sup>4</sup> For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love<sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will –<sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.<sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace<sup>8</sup> that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding,<sup>9</sup> he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,<sup>10</sup> to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.<sup>11</sup> In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,<sup>12</sup> in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.<sup>13</sup> And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,<sup>14</sup> who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession – to the praise of his glory” (Eph 1:3-14).

<sup>31</sup> Eph 2:4-8

<sup>32</sup> Job 23:13

<sup>33</sup> On this internal dynamic of the love of God it has been stated that “the eternal blessedness of God consists in a circular movement of divine love in which the giving of self grows with the receiving of the other” (Miroslav Volf).

<sup>34</sup> “...because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us” (Rom 5:5)

<sup>35</sup> “When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all” (1Cor 15:28)

<sup>36</sup> Jn 1:12

<sup>37</sup> “However, as it is written: ‘What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived’ – the things God has prepared for those who love him –<sup>10</sup> these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.<sup>11</sup> For who knows a person’s thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.<sup>12</sup> What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us.<sup>13</sup> This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words” (1Cor 2:9-13).

<sup>38</sup> “...because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us” (Rom 5:5)

<sup>39</sup> 1Jn 4:8

<sup>40</sup> “Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?<sup>6</sup> But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: ‘God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble.’<sup>7</sup> Submit yourselves, then, to God... Come near to God... purify your hearts<sup>9</sup> Grieve, mourn and wail...<sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up” (Jas 4:5-10)

<sup>41</sup> Acts 2:37

<sup>42</sup> Lk 1:34-38

<sup>43</sup> Heb 10:5-7

<sup>44</sup> B. Klapper s.v. “Regno”, in *Dizionario dei concetti del Nuovo Testamento*, Dehoniana, Bologna, p.1535

<sup>45</sup> Col 2:9

<sup>46</sup> “[God] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, <sup>14</sup>in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. <sup>15</sup>The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup>For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup>He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup>And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. <sup>19</sup>For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup>and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Col 1:13-20)

<sup>47</sup> Col 1:18

<sup>48</sup> “The Son of God became man. He did not merely come down into a man to dwell in him, but he was made man: truly *made man*, and – to make it impossible to say, for example, that he despised the lowliness of a body and was joined only to the inwardness of a holy soul or the loftiness of an elect spirit, John insists: *And the Word was made flesh*. History and destiny are not brought about in a pure spirit, but only in a body...” (Romano Guardini)

<sup>49</sup> In the words of Athanasius: “When the Word came upon the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit entered her together with the Word; in the Spirit, the Word formed a body and fitted it to himself, desiring through himself to unite and bring to the Father the whole of creation”

<sup>50</sup> “His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. <sup>4</sup> Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2Pet 1:3-4).

<sup>51</sup> “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters” (Rom 8:29)

<sup>52</sup> Ez 36:26-27

<sup>53</sup> Mt 5:17

<sup>54</sup> Mt 5:14

<sup>55</sup> Jn 8:12

<sup>56</sup> Rom 7:18-19

<sup>57</sup> 1Cor 6:19

<sup>58</sup> Rom 8:2

<sup>59</sup> 2Cor 4:6

<sup>60</sup> Martin Buber, *op. cit.*, p. 46



# WHAT HOLDS BACK THE GREAT REVIVAL?

Jorge Himitian

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

Romans 8.19–22, NLT

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

Colossians 1.26–27, NIV

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

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

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

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

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

**JORGE HIMITIAN**

**Buenos Aires, ARGENTINA [jorgehimitian@gmail.com](mailto:jorgehimitian@gmail.com)**

Pastor of the Comunidad Cristiana de Buenos Aires, Jorge is a leader that God raised up in the spiritual renewal initiated in Argentina in the 1960s. His ministry, with prophetic clarity, is providing for the church in many parts of Latin America and Europe a fresh vision of the kingdom of God, the lordship of Christ, Christian discipleship, church unity and other ancient truths from the Scriptures. His apostolic ministry is recognized in various countries of South America. Currently, he is one of the five coordinators of the Pastors Council in the city of Buenos Aires, and member of the executive committee of the Apostolic Fellowship International.

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

Himitian, of Armenian descent, was born in Palestine (today Israel) in the year 1941. He lives in Argentina since he was seven years of age. He is married to Silvia Palacio, with whom he has five children and eleven grandchildren.



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Joel 2.28–32

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

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

Habakkuk 2.14

Or the days of world evangelization which Jesus himself foretold:

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

Matthew 24.14

We long to see the times prophesied by Isaiah:

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

Isaiah 60.1–3

## WHAT HOLDS BACK THE GREAT REVIVAL?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## FOUR GREAT OBSTACLES THAT HINDER UNITY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### The three levels of unity

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

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

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

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

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

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

## HOW TO ACHIEVE UNITY IN THE FAITH

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

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

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

The great question is HOW?

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

I will seek to transmit the essence of his message:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Luciano continued:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## HOW TO GROW IN SPIRITUAL STATURE

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

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

1 Corinthians 3.1–3

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

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

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

David affirms in Psalm 19:12–13:

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

What Jesus proposed is quite simple: THE CROSS.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The present danger of apostolic ministries

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

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

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

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

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

## The need for a national and international apostolic agenda

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

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

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



# THE WORLD IS GROANING

Bishop Ernest Paul Komanapalli

**W**e live in a time when the elements of hell seem to be pouring into our nations, societies, communities, neighborhoods and families. The forces of Satan seem to be attacking on all fronts of humanity. We even see this with the increase in natural calamities from earthquakes, tornados and tsunamis.

It is a time where we truly hear the groaning of the earth and its inhabitants. They cry out for a solution, an answer and deliverance. They look to the physical and spiritual. They look for an answer in knowledge, riches and power. They look to technology. They look to the Church. Do we have an answer for their problem or are we also part of the problem?

## HOW DID WE GET HERE?

God's original plan

Genesis 1—2: God created a perfect habitation for man (the Garden of Eden).

Their needs were met. They had intimate fellowship with God, daily walking with Him. God gave them dominion over all he had created.

Romans 5:12: One man's sin entered the world, and death through sin.

Romans 8:22: The whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Man's dominion was corrupted; he failed to properly care for the earth and fellow humans. Human corruption caused war and the destruction of creation and man.

## CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

- Poverty
- Greed
- Selfishness
- Grief



**ERNEST KOMANAPALLI**

Hyderabad, INDIA [bishop1ek@msn.com](mailto:bishop1ek@msn.com)

Bishop Ernest Paul Komanapalli lives in Hyderabad, India and has an extensive ministry with apostolic oversight over many churches...

- Pain
- Jealousy

## Poverty

In spite of world progress, the world is afflicted with abject poverty as the following analysis shows us.

At a poverty line of \$1.25 a day, the revised estimates indicate:

- 1.4 billion people live at this poverty line or below.
- This is more than the previous estimate of 984 million with the older measure of a \$1 a day in 2004.
- In 1981, the estimated number of poor was also revised upward, from 1.5 billion to 1.9 billion.

The World Bank notes that “the incidence of poverty in the world is higher than the past estimates have suggested. The main reason is that (previous data) had implicitly underestimated the cost of living in most developing countries.”

The data also does not reflect the recent global food crisis and rising cost of energy, which is feared will bring another 100 million into poverty.

## Prostitution

One of the offshoots of poverty is prostitution. Poverty has driven many women and children into this horrendous flesh trade. It is estimated that 4 million women and girls worldwide are bought and sold each year, either into marriage, prostitution or slavery. Approximately 1 million children enter the sex trade every year. Although most are girls, boys are also involved.

According to UNICEF, 10,000 girls annually enter Thailand from neighboring countries and end up as sex workers. And between 5,000 and 7,000 Nepali girls are transported across the border to India each year and end up in commercial sex work in Mumbai, Bombay or New Delhi.

Although the greatest number of children working as prostitutes is in Asia, Eastern European children from Eastern European countries, such as Russia, Poland, Romania, Hungary and the Czech Republic, are increasingly vulnerable.

There are also special social and cultural reasons for children entering into the sex trade in different regions of the world. In many cases, children from industrialized countries enter the sex trade because they are fleeing abusive homes. In countries of Eastern and Southern Africa, children who become orphans as a result of AIDS frequently lack the protection of caregivers and are therefore more vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation. In South Asia, traditional practices that perpetuate the low status of women and girls in society are at the base of this problem. Children exploited sexually are prone to sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. In addition, because of the conditions in which they live, children can become malnourished, and develop feelings of guilt, inadequacy and depression.

## Natural calamities

In this year alone we had many major natural disasters, which have displaced many people and many have died.

- 1) Japan — earthquake (8.9) and tsunami: March 11, 2011  
16,477 dead, 4,787 missing, 5,888 injured
- 2) New Zealand, Christchurch — earthquake: Feb 22, 2011  
160 dead
- 3) China — hailstorm: April 18, 2011  
17 dead, 118 injured
- 4) Australia — flood: Jan 10, 2011  
22 dead
- 5) Brazil — Mudslide: Jan 17, 2011

- 500 dead, 13,500 homeless
- 6) Joplin, Missouri — tornadoes: May, 2011  
153 dead; destruction of houses, businesses and farms over area 14 miles long

## THE WORLD IS GROANING

Thoughts on Romans 8:20–28

Romans 8:22: We know that all creation groans and travails together in pain until now.

Romans 8:20–21: The condition of the Christian was one of bondage and servitude, an imperfect and humiliating state with pain, sorrow and death. When Christians receive new life in Christ, old things pass away and all things become new but the entire physical earth and those not renewed in Christ continue to groan, not only because of the fallen state in the world and their lives but because God has put eternity in the heart of man (Ecclesiastes 3:1), yet they cannot understand it and therefore groan.

Groan: In this passage the Greek is groan together in condition of sorrow in which the whole world is united until now.

Travail in pain together: Intense agony/ extreme suffering of misery and death, every age experiencing the same thing.

The Greek word here for travail is only used in the NT. It also appears in Galatians 4:19, 27; Revelation 12:2. The kindred noun (birth pang) in Matthew, Mark, 1 Thessalonians 5:3. Also see Mark 13:9, Acts 2:24.

Together they refer to a common longing of all the elements of creation, not to the longing in common with God's children. Nature resembles a bride, fully attired for marriage, which saw the bridegroom die. She still stands with her fresh crown and bridal dress but her eyes are filled with tears.

Travail: The whole world is groaning for deliverance. Many do not understand its trouble or even what it wants, but knows it is fallen, frustrated, and longs for deliverance (new heaven and earth wherein dwells righteousness, 2 Peter 3:13).

## THE ANSWER IS GOD WORKING THROUGH THE CHURCH!

1. When God saw the darkness he brought light!

*<sup>1</sup>In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup>The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. <sup>3</sup>Then God said, "Let there be light", and there was light. <sup>4</sup>And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness (NKJV).*

Genesis 1:1-4.

2. God is moved by the groans of his people

*For the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them (NKJV).*

Judges 2:18

*<sup>24</sup>So God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. <sup>25</sup>And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them (NKJV).*

Exodus 2:24–25

*<sup>7</sup>And the Lord said: "I have surely seen the oppression of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. <sup>8</sup>So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites" (NKJV).*

Exodus 3:7–8

## 3. When they needed a savior he sent his Son Jesus

*And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins (NKJV).*

Matthew 1:21

## 4. He groans within himself to bring life in death

*Then Jesus, again groaning in himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it (NKJV).*

John 11:38–39

## 5. He brought power to the powerless

*But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (NKJV).*

Acts 1:8

*Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body (NKJV).*

Romans 8:23

## 6. Now he sends us, his church

*Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world (NKJV).*

James 1:27

*<sup>15</sup>And he said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. <sup>16</sup>He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. <sup>17</sup>And these signs will follow those who believe: In my name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; <sup>18</sup>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” (NKJV).*

Mark 16:15–18

*And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward (NKJV).*

Matthew 10:42

*And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh (NKJV).*

Jude 22–23

Since the inception of the church it has taken care of the poor and the needy. If the same principle is followed by today's church, we can eliminate the groaning physically and spiritually.

Today it may look like an impossible task.

When an American preacher visited Mother Teresa, he asked her a question: “Mother, there is so much need. Where can we start?” She answered: “Young man, you start with one child and change his destiny and you have one less problem.”

If you think of the whole world at once, you might give up. If everyone thinks about one, we can surely make a change.

We can make a change. We can make a difference, because with God all things are possible!

# THE WONDERFUL GRACE OF GOD

Orville E. Swindoll

I want to call your attention to the account of a gracious intervention of Jesus in a synagogue of Galilee, where He healed a man with a paralyzed hand, which meant, of course, that the man suffered a great disadvantage since he was unable to work and earn a living. Jesus' great compassion led him to reveal God's love and power in this man's life.

In the unfolding of Jesus' ministry, it will help to realize that prior to this occasion Jesus had already affirmed that he had authority to forgive sins (Luke 5:20–26), and that the Sabbath existed for the good of human beings (Luke 6:1–5), and not as an end in itself. Which means that Jesus was in open conflict with the more strict interpretation of the law affirmed by the Pharisees.

Following is the text that relates Jesus' action in the synagogue.

## Mark 3:1–6

<sup>1</sup>Another time he went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. <sup>2</sup>Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. <sup>3</sup>Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone."

<sup>4</sup>Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent.

<sup>5</sup>He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. <sup>6</sup>Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

The way this incident is presented indicates that Jesus is questioning the traditional Jewish interpretation regarding rest which the law required on the Sabbath. Among the Pharisees, there were two prominent schools of interpretation of the law. The one known by the name of Rabbi Shammai was the more rigorous and that of Hillel more liberal. Shammai dictated that even a fractured bone should not be set until after the Sabbath, while Hillel understood that if life were endangered, an intervention was allowed. From the critical viewpoint of the Pharisees, the important matter here is that this man's life was not in danger. Therefore, even from the more



ORVILLE SWINDOLL

Miami, Florida, USA [swindoll@att.net](mailto:swindoll@att.net)

Married to Erma Jean Hensley (1952); four children, nineteen grandchildren

Studied at Rice University, Houston, Texas and Wayland Baptist University, Plainview, Texas; later awarded Doctor of Divinity degree, 2005, Logos Graduate School, Jacksonville, Florida. Missionary in Mexico (1957) and Argentina (1959-1991).

Author of *Designed to Express His Life* (1965, Sure Foundation), *Times of Restoration* (1983, Destiny Image), *I Hit Bottom, Now What Do I Do?* (2000, Ed. Vida); numerous books and pamphlets in Spanish. Director of *Visión Celestial* (1964-1967) and *Encuentro en Cristo* (1986-1989).

Website: [www.orvilleswindoll.com](http://www.orvilleswindoll.com)

liberal position, Jesus was guilty of challenging the religious tradition that determined that he should wait until after the Sabbath to heal the man.

However, Jesus understood that God's purpose transcends the simple rules of conduct for the observance of the obligatory Sabbath rest. Jesus insists that God is interested in man's welfare. God contemplates the human being as an object of his love, his care, his compassion and mercy. Many of the Jews, and especially the Pharisees, had lost sight of this focus, and emphasized more than anything else the norms that had to be kept. A transgression of the norms merited censure, which the Pharisees wanted to see applied with rigor. This is the reason they were so displeased with Jesus.

The account we read indicates that what caught Jesus' attention when he entered the synagogue was the man with the withered hand. Obviously, some among those present fixed their attention on something else: they wanted to see whether Jesus would behave like any other respectful Jew, or whether he would continue with his scandalous custom of breaking the religious tradition. For Mark tells us: *"Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath."* They already had reason to believe that Jesus would again disdain Moses' law. Matthew points out the plot of the Pharisees' attempt to trap Jesus, by asking a question: *"Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"* Evidently, they had already suspected his intention to intervene in the case of the man with the withered hand, and wanted to provoke him to act.

As we read these accounts, we should try to understand as well as we can, what it is that motivates the protagonists. Why do they do what they do? What is behind their words and their actions? God's purpose in sending Jesus to the world is in question here, and we must not lose sight of the different elements, or of the persons whose intervention will determine the unfolding of the story. This is much more than the story of a poor disabled man that Jesus heals so that he can live a normal life.

If a physician had treated the man who was then healed, it would not have so captured the attention of the people. But in this situation Jesus is questioning the traditional way of interpreting the norms that God his Father had given to his people for their welfare, in order to assure them a life full of happiness and health. A tradition that, sadly, had twisted the law until it became an instrument to burden down the people, increasing their difficulties. How sad this reality that distorts something good so that it winds up being heavy and hard to bear! This situation weighed heavily on Jesus' heart. He understood that the Sabbath was for the purpose of rejoicing in God's presence, appreciating God's many favors toward his people. How much better to lift the heavy burden from a man, which for long years only served to weigh down his life and his family! In effect, Jesus wanted to say with this action: God is good! He is generous and kind. God is powerful and loves us intensely.

The "wet blankets" could not support that audacity. While censuring Jesus for his act of kindness on the Sabbath, they were making plans to trap and kill him. What a contradiction! What blindness! They censure Jesus, while planning to kill him, contrary to all that God's law teaches.

Even in this tense situation, Jesus moves forward. He called to the front the man with the shriveled hand. Then he said to all who were present in the synagogue (Matthew 12:11–13):

*"If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."*

*Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other."*

The way Jesus presents the case is instructive. He does not say: *Is it forbidden to heal on the Sabbath?*, but rather, *Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good?*

From this wonderful story I want to underscore three lessons, the first two as questions and the third as a challenge.

## LESSONS FROM THIS ACCOUNT

### Why does God's law exist?

- 1) Because our disorder is endemic, habitual, and needs to be corrected.
- 2) Because order brings well being, happiness, contentment, a feeling of realization.
- 3) Because God's favor toward us is shown in his government, his rule over us.

### Why does God reveal to us his grace?

- 1) Because by our own merit we will never get anywhere.
- 2) Because God wants to offer us a new beginning, a new birth, a new opportunity.
- 3) Because it is the only way that we can experience his love, his kindness and his purpose.

### Let us exalt the power of love and compassion

- 1) John 3:16: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*
- 2) Many theologians affirm that love is God's basic attribute, from which emanate the remaining attributes: *"God is love"* (1 John 4:8).
- 3) The apostle Paul tells us that without love, everything else loses its value (1 Corinthians 13). Love is the essential ingredient of Christ's life.

Some time ago and in another country, I was invited to the monthly meeting of the pastors of the city. As usual I arrived a little early. I found a small group of pastors conversing before the meeting began, so I approached the group.

One of them was telling about the recent conversion of a customs inspector that over the years had come to occupy a significant position in the national administration. He told us that he was known for his dishonesty through which, over the years, he had enriched himself, so that he lived in a nice home in one of the better neighborhoods of the city.

But he had come to feel rather unhappy with himself. His wife was also bothered by the situation. A Christian neighbor spoke to him about Jesus Christ and in time the man opened his heart and acknowledged Christ as his Savior and Lord; his wife did the same. He then decided to have a banquet in his home to celebrate turning his life over to Christ. He invited a number of his friends, many of them employees of the customs house like himself. At the conclusion of the dinner he told those he had invited his motive for the banquet: that he had embraced the gospel and decided to follow Christ. Beyond that, he had also made the decision to leave his profession, for he wanted to serve the Lord and dedicate to him the rest of his life.

When the pastor concluded his story, another at his side told us of another case. For business reasons he had come to know a woman in a nearby town who had gained some notoriety for her loose morals. She had been married and divorced several times, and later became unhappy with her current companion. She had a strange mix of religious ideas, but seemed to be seriously searching for something genuine. The woman told him that she had recently found Christ and had given him her heart. Not only that, for she had also begun to share her new life in Christ with some of her neighbors, who were amazed at the change in her life and in her countenance, and several of them had also come to Christ. The pastor told us that she would soon be baptized.

At that, another pastor told of the conversion of another customs inspector who was evidently moved by the change he had observed in the first one mentioned. He had also turned to Christ, and because his conscience was burdened down due to his indiscrete actions, he had promised the Lord that he would settle his outstanding accounts and was in the process of returning to a significant number of people the money he had accepted for his favors.

As I listened to these stories, I thought of the great challenge for the church to integrate these people into the community and transform them into productive Christians.

Many of you will recognize these three cases as fictitious adaptations of the conversion of Levi, the Samaritan woman and Zacchaeus, all from the New Testament.

A true story comes to mind that I heard a number of years ago directly from a man who had come to Christ when Billy Graham held his first evangelistic campaign in Los Angeles, California, in 1948. This man told us that his father was a pastor but that he had completely abandoned the pathway that his father had taught him. He was an expert in electronic equipment and worked for the police, teaching them how to plant hidden microphones among the Mafia in the area. But, over time, the Mafia had persuaded him to work with them, so that he became a kind of double spy, employed by both the police and the Mafia. In that way he had amassed a small fortune and lived comfortably with his family in a suburb of Los Angeles.

In the midst of that double life, he had become miserable and decided to attend the Billy Graham campaign. To shorten the story, he turned to Christ and understood that he had to clarify his past, so he began to return things he had stolen and decided to confess to the police his double life. Later he went to talk with Mickey Cohen, who at the time was head of the Mafia in Los Angeles. He told him of his conversion to Christ and, therefore, could not continue living a false life. He then told us that he did not understand how he was able to leave Cohen's office just as he had entered.

But a few days later, a black car arrived in front of his house, out of which exited four men dressed in black, who called at his door. He said that his first impulse was to run out the back of the house and try to escape. Just at that moment, the text of Proverbs 16:7 came to mind:

*When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD,  
he makes even his enemies live at peace with him.*

So, instead of trying to escape, he decided to open the door and let them in.

He didn't tell us what happened then in his living room, but he did say that an hour later they left just as they had entered, and it was the last time he ever saw them. When he finished his testimony, I think there was not a single dry eye among all of us who heard him in a hotel in Houston, Texas. I'm referring to Jim Vaus, whose testimony was later published in the book, *Why I Quit Syndicated Crime*.

Why does God go after those with such a rotten life, who have hurt so many others? Only God knows the answer to that question.

The reason I mention these cases is to underscore the GRACE OF GOD, so marvelous, so amazing, so extraordinary, that it has even reached us.

*<sup>16</sup>“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup>For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. <sup>18</sup>Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. <sup>19</sup>This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup>Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. <sup>21</sup>But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.” (John 3:16–21, NIV)*

This passage from the Gospel of John affirms that anyone who comes to Christ with faith will receive his forgiveness and eternal life, that is, God's life, the presence of Christ in his life. Then it tells us that God has no interest in condemning the world; rather he wants to save it. With such willingness on God's part to open the way into his presence, why don't more people respond? In the rest of the passage we are told why. Because they prefer darkness to light, “for fear that [their] deeds will be exposed.”

John makes it clear that their condemnation is NOT for the bad things they have done, but because they have “not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.” They have not opened their heart to him who calls everyone to repent and trust in Christ. We have all done evil things, perverse things. That is why Jesus died in

our place, to pay our debt to God's justice. He wants to free us from the darkness. Let us come to the light, and practice the truth, just as this passage tells us.

I remember the conversion of a man to whom I presented the gospel during my first pastorate in Galveston, Texas, another true story. He was visiting his sister, a member of our congregation. I had visited him once before and gave him the gospel, but he was not interested. On our second visit the Holy Spirit came upon him with such conviction that he fell to his knees and began to cry bitterly. He told me that he had done every kind of evil, that the tales of his wickedness would fill a book the size of a telephone directory of a large city. He said that there were only two things he had not done: die, and become a Christian. He told me that he had even sold human bodies (in truth, I don't know what he meant by that, nor did I question him).

In the midst of his weeping, he called to his sister to help him. She responded that only Christ could help him. After weeping and repenting for a good while, he calmed down, raised his head and said that a great peace had come into his heart and that an enormous burden had been lifted. He later gave a public testimony in a meeting of our church.

At times we feel discouraged instead of speaking of Christ to those who have gone so far astray. But we cannot know how many are bothered and tired of their own life style. The only one who can set them free is Jesus Christ, who carried in his own body on Calvary the burden for all our sins and rebellion, our life without God.

Let's be encouraged, brothers and sisters, to share the gospel of God's amazing grace.

**I** have a pastor friend who lives nearby in Miami, with whom for over fifteen years we have been meeting on Monday mornings to chat and pray together. A couple years ago, when I entered his office I asked him a question:

Is the church a place for saints or for sinners?

Put another way, is it a home for those who love God, or a refuge for those who need God?

Why do so many object that there are too many hypocrites in the church? Where should the hypocrites be?

If a hypocrite is a person who pretends to be good when he has flaws, who qualifies as a good person? If you were a hypocrite, wouldn't you prefer to be with good people?

Some people see me as a good person, but my wife knows all my flaws. My children are also aware of my flaws. Many of my friends know my flaws. Where should I be if I recognize my flaws and the need to be better, to be a person of integrity?

Dare we classify people on the basis of their flaws? If we did that, where would we wind up?

Probably the best known and most beloved Christian hymn in the English language is John Newton's *Amazing Grace*. It is often played or sung on public occasions, whether or not they are distinctly Christian.

Years ago a very respected friend recommended to me a book by one of my favorite authors, Philip Yancey: *What's so Amazing about Grace?* It was one of the most challenging books I ever read. I had the privilege of doing the layout for the book in Spanish, later published by Editorial Vida. I suggested the title in Spanish could be *The scandal of grace*, but the publishers preferred a title that was less scandalous.

Why is the subject of God's grace always a challenge to us? How do you understand God's grace? In what way can you affirm that you have experienced his grace? Have you ever been surprised by the marvelous grace of God?

## **JESUS' ATTITUDE**

Have you ever felt scandalized by some of the characters with whom Jesus hung out? I have. Would you feel comfortable with those people?

How about Zacchaeus and Levi, both of them hated tax collectors?

How about the Samaritan woman of John 4, who had gone through five husbands, and was currently living with a man to whom she was not married?

How about Mary Magdalene, out of whom Jesus cast several demons?

How about loud-mouthed Peter, who had trouble keeping his foot out of his mouth, and his sword in its scabbard?

Many years ago I heard a simple definition of grace and mercy that I have never forgotten: God's *grace* means that he gives us what we DO NOT deserve, and his *mercy* means that he does not give us what we DO deserve.

Most of us readily recognize that we are not all we should be or could be, but we are deeply grateful for God's grace and loving kindness that somehow reaches us and covers our need. That wonderful fact has changed our life. No longer do we think of God as a distant and threatening judge, but rather as one who loved the world so much that he gave his son Jesus Christ to die for our sins and redeem us from a rebellious and estranged way of life, wasted and without meaning. These facts we know, my brothers and sisters, simply by the revelation of God's grace.

Most books of theological orientation inform us that the simplest definition of grace is "God's unmerited favor, revealed to us in Jesus Christ." And the same texts also suggest that God's grace is revealed in two specific categories: one is known as *common grace* and the other as *special grace*.

Common or universal grace implies that his grace is revealed to all, simply because we have all been created by God. God loves his creation and takes care of it. On the other hand, special grace is that which we come to know through the work of Christ, specifically in his death and resurrection on our behalf. Let's look a little closer at each of these manifestations of God's grace.

## COMMON GRACE

Common grace is also known as *divine providence*, and refers to the care and attention that God as creator provides for all his creation.

In Hebrews 1:3, the Bible tells us that Christ, the Son of God, is the one who "*sustains all things by his powerful word*". In Matthew 5:45, Jesus said that God "*causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*" Apart from this divine providence —this common grace— we could not live.

Moreover, apart from his gracious provision for us all and the fact that he sustains all things, God also *keeps a restraining hand on his creation* so that it will not destroy itself. This is also due to the providence of his common grace. Without such grace, our society would fall apart or become impossible to govern. Yet by his grace, we are able to live relatively well in a society that is more or less ordered and at peace, even though the ones who govern do not always recognize these benefits as coming from God's hand. This is obviously the reason that Paul states that civil government is essentially God's way of keeping things in line.

There is another way in which common grace implies a great benefit for us. I refer to what we call our *conscience*, the sense of responsibility that human beings have toward each other as well as toward God. This is a provision of common grace and evidence that we were created in God's image as moral and responsible beings. For if we did not have a conscience that tells us from within what is good and what is evil, what is acceptable and what is not, we would live little better than brute beasts that are unable to anticipate the future nor the consequence of an act that is damaging or hurtful to another.

Our experience of these benefits does not depend on faith nor on the recognition of God as creator, even though without him none of these things would exist. Divine providence, the restraint of evil in society and human conscience are consequences of God's common grace granted freely to us.

## SPECIAL GRACE

On the other hand, special grace is only known by those who recognize in Jesus Christ God's immense favor shown us in redeeming and sanctifying us and promising us a glorious future. For example, Paul proclaimed this divine grace in 2 Corinthians 5:17–18:

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.*

Here is another text in which Paul exalts God's grace, 1 Corinthians 15:10:

*By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.*

What the apostle underscores in this text is that none of the benefits that he knows as a result of being saved by Jesus Christ is due to any human effort. It is all the result of God's grace, pure and simple.

God's grace is, at the same time, marvelous, grand and mysterious. We shall never be able to plumb the depths of this great mystery in the heart of God. We will never understand how it is that God could have loved us so much in our rebellious and sinful state as to give his own son, Jesus Christ, to redeem us. Even though we cannot understand it, we know that it is true.

It seems that the best we can do is express with joy and gratitude the same thing that Paul said in Romans 11:33,36:

*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!...  
For from him and through him and to him are all things.  
To him be the glory forever!  
Amen.*

I close with the words of a hymn by Haldor Lillenas that aptly expresses our gratitude for God's wonderful grace:

*Wonderful grace of Jesus, greater than all my sin.  
How shall my tongue describe it? Where shall its praise begin?  
Taking away my burden, setting my spirit free;  
For the wonderful grace of Jesus reaches me.*

*Wonderful grace of Jesus, reaching to all the lost.  
By it I have been pardoned, saved to the uttermost.  
Chains have been torn asunder, giving me liberty;  
For the wonderful grace of Jesus reaches me.*

*Wonderful grace of Jesus, reaching the most defiled.  
By its transforming power making him God's dear child.  
Purchasing peace and heaven for all eternity;  
For the wonderful grace of Jesus reaches me.*

Chorus:

*Wonderful the matchless grace of Jesus;  
Deeper than the mighty rolling sea,  
Higher than the mountain, sparkling like a fountain,  
All sufficient grace for even me.  
Broader than the scope of my transgressions;  
Greater far than all my sin and shame.  
O magnify the precious name of Jesus;  
Praise His name!\**



# FROM CHAOS TO THE KINGDOM

Hector J. Pardo V.

I want to express my appreciation for the presence of our brothers and sisters from other countries and the effort they have made to come from far away places to share with us what God is doing through their lives in different places in the world.

My gratitude is also to my fellow servants in Colombia, for their desire to see our nation transformed through the advance of God's kingdom in our nation. As Nehemiah expressed:

*"The work is extensive and spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!"*

Nehemiah 4:19-20

This reality means that times like these are most important in the execution of the task that God has assigned us.

## CHALLENGES FOR TRANSFORMATION

The expectations created by the advance of science and technology which promised that humanity by the third millennium would live in a land filled with peace and tranquility that would be like Paradise have ended in frustration. Chaos and desperation have spread tremendously and make us feel like we are living in the times of the Apocalypse. In the midst of such desperation, the human race is in search of an answer and in the innermost being of each person on the earth there is a feeling that there must be an answer and that it is possible to find it.

What is sad is that when they approach the church, the only hope offered is after death, causing greater uncertainty, for in the place where hope should burn brightly, the light has become blurred, leaving the world in darkness.

All of which means that the answer we have given to the desperation is not very different from the materialistic and atheistic world view that has invaded our culture. This leads us to review the message that we have been proclaiming.



HÉCTOR PARDO  
Married to

Santa Fe de Bogotá, COLOMBIA [hectorjpardo@mitabernaculo.org](mailto:hectorjpardo@mitabernaculo.org)

Isaiah the prophet said:

<sup>2</sup>*In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it.*

<sup>3</sup>*Many peoples will come and say,*

*"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths."*

*The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*

<sup>4</sup>*He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples.*

*They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.*

*Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.*

<sup>5</sup>*Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD.*

Isaiah 2:2–5

The gospel of desire, as our brother Giovanni has called it, the gospel of the kingdom of God, does offer the hope that the human race desires.

In the days following my conversion, I was taught that Jesus had brought the message of God's kingdom, but that since the Jewish people rejected it, it was postponed until the second coming, and that a new dispensation had been initiated, of God's grace. With the passing of time, the Lord has gradually brought us clarity, giving us a coherent vision and making us to understand that he never had a plan B in his eternal project, that history is lineal, not cyclical, and that history reveals the plan that is taking place, so that we might live in harmony with God's purposes. In my understanding, that is an unavoidable task of apostolic and prophetic ministry.

There are foundations in the revelation of God's eternal purpose that should be the basis of our action: His kingdom is unmoveable, the king of this kingdom (Jesus) is unchangeable, his truth (the Bible) cannot be modified, his people (the church) is invincible —*las puertas del infierno no prevalecerán contra ella*— and God has committed to us a mission of transformation, with a message of hope and redemption; *"...until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets"* (Acts 3:21).

The forces of hell have done everything they could to frustrate God's plan, and at times it has seemed that the enemy's action has been so effective that we thought that the only hope for the human race, beginning with the church, is a rescue operation: the "check out". We should affirm that the second coming of Jesus Christ is a reality, and we should live in the light of that blessed hope. However, there are several things we should understand:

- The day and the hour of that glorious event are reserved as the Father's secret.
- We must work until Christ comes.
- His kingdom must be made known in every corner of the earth.
- There is not a single aspect of human activity that is not to experience the transforming effects of the gospel of the kingdom, and
- When Jesus returns he will conclude the work that the church has carried out with diligence, faithfulness, unity, holiness and loyalty.

The earth awaits a new day, just as the apostle Paul affirmed:

<sup>19</sup>*The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.* <sup>20</sup>*For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope* <sup>21</sup>*that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.*

Romans 8:19–21

## THE REALITY

The soteriology —the doctrine of salvation— that has been our guide for more than a hundred years has been centered in “the salvation of the soul” and the “check out”, which is part of the gospel, but we have forgotten that the gospel that we are to proclaim is the gospel of God’s kingdom, the lordship of Christ, that leads us to experience and proclaim God’s eternal purpose.

Eschatology has led us to believe that this world is “like a ship that is sinking in the midst of an immense ocean”, and that there is no more hope; that God’s plans revealed in the “cultural mandate” (Genesis 1:26–28) have failed; that Satan’s deceits have won the day and that God had to initiate an alternate plan, for which he sent his Son to die on the cross. Such an incomparable work of redemption only serves to save the soul. It is the reduction of the greatness of the gospel.

Ecclesiology has led us to accept the capitalistic model of competing with each other, and to fall under the influence of the evolutionist declaration of the survival of the fittest. Church and ministries are built with the aspiration of being a family patrimony; without recognizing that Christian ministry is a call from the Lord (Ephesians 4:11) and not an inheritance transmitted through the family. Moreover, when we speak of the local church, we confuse it with a group that meets in a particular location.

We urgently need to examine these doctrines —soteriology, eschatology and ecclesiology— for they are of vital and transcendental importance in the advance of God’s kingdom.

With reference to the gospel that is preached in the Christian world today, Darrow L. Miller writes:

Since secularism began to dominate the academy, seminaries had to face the infiltration of theological liberalism. Unfortunately, with few exceptions, the fundamentalist and evangelical leaders opted to remain outside the debate. Thus they abandoned reason and called the church to “only believe”. Faith to participate in the public arena was discarded and became a private matter. Instead of defending our world view or Judeo-Christian perspective, the church ignored all that was considered secular, while taking refuge in a reduced space known as “sacred” (from *Discipling the Nations*).

The past century saw two world wars, the invasion by humanist thought of our universities and its impact on the culture, the Darwinist vision, with its evolutionist position and other philosophies that have molded the life of the human race. It was not interpreted as an opportunity to present the transforming message of the gospel, but as a sign to prepare for the “check out”. Without realizing it, many fell into the ancient Greek dichotomy that divides the universe between the spiritual field, considered sacred, and the physical field, seen as profane. Faith, theology, ethics, missions, devotional life and evangelism were placed on the spiritual plane and considered as of primary importance. Reason, science, business, politics, the arts, music and the satisfaction of people’s physical needs occupied the lower plane, the material. When expressing a desire to serve in missions or the pastorate, Christians frequently betray their dichotomized thought in declaring they want to enter “full-time Christian service”, implying that all other Christians involved in secular activities are part-time Christians.

This evangelical schizophrenia has led us to a new gospel, known as “evangelical gnosticism”, which interprets the Great Commission as a task concerned only with saving souls, planting churches and preparing people to leave the earth. It is more concerned for what happens within than for what occurs in the world, forgetting that Jesus said to the Father: “*My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one*” (John 17:15). Secular work, business, science, economics, politics, education, family and other tasks of daily life must be permeated by the principles and values of the kingdom of God. More than a century ago, the Christian leader Abraham Kuyper said: “There is no place on the earth or in the task that we are to do, where Jesus should not be proclaimed and recognized as Lord”.

The apostle Paul teaches us the nature of the reality of the gospel that we should preach:

<sup>16</sup>For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. <sup>17</sup>He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup>And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. <sup>19</sup>For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup>and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Colossians 1:16–20

The gnostic gospel has also led us to think that work is the result of punishment for the fall (Genesis 3). A song that has been considered as patrimony of the Latin culture, and which affects the Christian world, is *El negrito del batey*\*, with the following lines:

(batey = the grounds occupied by a sugar mill)

A mí me llaman el negrito del batey	[They call me the black boy of the sugar mill]
orque el trabajo para mí es un enemigo.	[for I see work as my enemy.]
El trabajar yo se lo dejo todo al buey,	[I let the ox do all the work,]
porque el trabajo lo hizo Dios como castigo.	[for God gave work as punishment.]
A mí me gusta el merengue apambichao,	[I like to dance merengue apambichao]
con una negra retrechera y buena moza.	[with a charming and good-looking black girl.]
A mí me gusta bailar de medio lao,	[I like to dance a bit sideways,]
bailar medio apretado	[dance while snuggling tight]
con una negra bien sabrosa...	[to a delicious black girl...]
Porque eso de trabajar	[But that business of working]
a mí me causa dolor.	[just makes me sick.]

That's not the way it is. Work is not punishment, it is part of our vocation, and in it we should reflect the beauty of God's kingdom. The reformers called it a place to live *coram Deo*, "in God's presence".

Another characteristic of the influence of this dualism is the perception of society in individualistic terms rather than in terms of community. When we are affected by this current, we interpret Jesus' mandate to "go and make disciples" as an individual mandate, spiritual rather than secular, and assume that our task applies only to those who are converted and not to society or to the nations. "Evangelical gnosticism" should not exist. That which is spiritual and that which is secular both belong to the gospel, and are included in the implications of proclaiming God's kingdom and Christ's lordship.

Martín Luther said:

The work of monks and priests, no matter how saintly and arduous, in God's eyes are no different than the rough work of the field hand or the work of a housewife when she carries out her labors in the home; because all work is done before God as an expression of faith... Surely, the insignificant work of a servant is frequently more acceptable to God than all the fasting and other works of the monk or priest, because the monk or priest is lacking faith.

## THE GREAT COMMISSION

Following his resurrection, the Lord Jesus Christ was with his disciples for forty days, speaking to them of the kingdom of God. Before departing he gave them the task that they should carry out to fulfill the Father's desire, the Father's eternal dream.

*He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation (Mark 16:15).*

*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).*

As we can see, the Great Commission has two significant components: evangelize and make disciples. And two means are essential: preach and teach. —*kerigma* and *didaque*. What we find in Mark is easy to understand. But there is some confusion concerning what Matthew tells us. Some versions translate the verse: Make disciples IN all nations. Others, OF all nations. And others, TO all nations. As far as I have been able to determine, the prepositions IN, OF and TO do not exist in the original Greek, and for that reason each translator follows his criteria. Thus the text can also be translated: “Go and disciple all nations”.

To understand better, let’s consider what the Lord has revealed in the Scriptures, as well as history from the divine perspective:

- When God called Abram, —later Abraham— he told him: *“I will make you into a great nation... all peoples (families) on earth will be blessed through you.”* When referring to this episode, the apostle Paul wrote: *“The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: All nations will be blessed through you”* (Galatians 3:8).
- When we ask ourselves what was the main purpose for which God called Moses to get the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob out of the land of Egypt, we read in Deuteronomy:
 

*“See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. <sup>6</sup>Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. <sup>7</sup>What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? <sup>8</sup>And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?”*

Deuteronomy 4:5–8

God’s purpose was to lift a people that had been poor, without education, with no economic system, with no principles of government, no military forces, no industry, who had only learned to be slaves and numbered some three million, and make them a nation that would be an example and model for other nations. He gave them principles of government, economy, education, health, arts, family, faith, etc. The great tragedy was that instead of becoming a model nation, over time they wanted to be like the other nations of the earth (see 1 Samuel 8). The history of Israel’s exodus was not written as an allegory to teach the benefits of salvation; it is real history, and as such we should read and understand it.

- *“I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the NATIONS your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession”* (Psalm 2:7–8). Bible students agree that this is a promise that God the Father made to his son Jesus.
- Mystery novels lead the reader to ask many questions as they read the developing plot, which is resolved at the end, in the final episode. Then the reader says to himself: “Of course! Why couldn’t I see it before? It’s logical.” Let’s see how this story ends:
- *“The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever”* (Revelation 11:15).
- *“Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you”* (Revelation 15:3–4).
- *“The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it... The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it”* (Revelation 21:24, 26).
- *“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life,*

*bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations” (Revelation 22:1–2).*

An outstanding aspect of this history is that at the end there will be nations that are saved and healed. The only thing that brings salvation and healing is the redemptive work of Jesus.

The well-known Christian thinker, Vishal Mangalwadi, of India, in reference to Isaiah 53, which tells us that “by his stripes we were healed”, says:

American individualism has become so entrenched in the church that many Christians automatically assume that “we” means ‘her, you and I as individuals’. That is, a collection of individuals that constitute “we”. But when we look at the book of Isaiah, we find a very different description.

Who is sick and needs healing? Isaiah responds to the question, beginning with verse 4 of his first chapter:

*“Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him. <sup>5</sup>Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. <sup>6</sup>From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness— only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil. <sup>7</sup>Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire (Isa 1:4–7).*

Who is sick and needs healing? Isaiah could be describing the American financial institutions responsible for the current economic crisis as he continues to say in verses 21–23:

*“See how the faithful city has become a harlot! She once was full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her— but now murderers! Your silver has become dross, your choice wine is diluted with water. Your rulers are rebels, companions of thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow’s case does not come before them.”*

Israel as a nation is sick and the prophet proclaims the good news that there is healing for the nation in Messiah’s stripes. In chapter 6 Isaiah again uses the word heal. Isaiah saw the Lord and heard his call:

*“Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?... Go and tell this people: ‘Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’ Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”*

If you notice the word heal and healing in the book of Isaiah, you will see that the prophet is not speaking of persons. He uses such words frequently to refer to the nations. God called Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to bless all the nations through their descendants.

The idea that Messiah’s wounds are for the healing of the nations brings up a theological problem for Christian individualism.”

(Truth and Transformation)

In closing, allow me to express the Great Commission in the following way:

Mark 16:15...

Go \_preach\_ individuals\_ mono generational \_ urgent

Matthew 28:19...

Go \_make disciples\_ nations \_ multi generational \_ strategic

This is the climax in our understanding of the “mystery” of the Great Commission:



Individuals and nations have a special place in God's heart. In the Psalms we find the following:

*"All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations" (Psalm 22:27–28).*

*"Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD..." (Psalm 33:12).*

*"May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun. All nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed" (Psalm 72:17).*

*"Rise up, O God, judge the earth, for all the nations are your inheritance" (Psalm 82:8).*

*"All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name" (Psalm 86:9).*

And in Proverbs we read:

*"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people" (14:34).*

## **SUGGESTED STRATEGY**

In the work that we are projecting in Colombia, we use the following scheme:

Person \_ surroundings \_ covenant networks — community \_ nation  
*Anthropos \_ Oikos \_ Koinonos \_ Polis \_ Etnos*

We have learned how to evangelize with the principles of the gospel of the kingdom, but we have not yet learned how to disciple the nations.

Either we will learn to disciple the nations, or they will disciple the church.



# THE PASTORS THAT YOUR NATION NEEDS

Carlos Mraida

**L**eonardo de Pisa, known by the nickname of Fibonacci, wrote a book on mathematics in the year 1202, which promoted in Europe the use of the decimal system and Arabic numerals. Until that time all mathematical operations were done with Roman numerals. Thus he changed the way we all count.

I think we need to change the way we count. I have been a pastor for 26 years in the city of Buenos Aires, and 90 % of the congregations in the city have grown, some of them quite significantly. But the overall condition of my city is significantly worse than it was 26 years ago. Morally, spiritually, economically, socially. Which means: there has been church growth, but the kingdom of God has not been established.

God's reign is much more than the numerical growth of the church. We feel happy when the number of members increases in our congregations, but we need to change the way we count. And we need to understand that what Jesus came to establish is God's reign. For at times, when we watch Christian television —and we thank God that we have that media today— we see that some of the most successful ministries belong to some of the poorest countries, which are also the most corrupt, with the greatest amount of crime. We need to establish God's kingdom through the personal conversion of individuals, but also through the transformation of all the spheres of the life of our nations.

If we want to see a revival that includes the transformation of our cities and nations, we must change the way we count. We all want our congregations to grow, but the fact is that it should be as a consequence of the establishment and growth of God's reign. Also applicable here is the norm that if we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, then the growth of the church will come as a result. That is God's order... and not the reverse.

God does not need to be convinced of the need for revival, as some people seem to suppose. God is not going to change because of our fasting and prayers. God does not change. So let's not expect him to change, nor try to twist his arm. God is already convinced of the need for revival, because revival is nothing else than people coming to know him as Lord, along with the change in their sinful social structures. Both things are God's eternal will. We need to pray and fast to change ourselves. Because revival with transformation, which is always God's will, does not come because we make it happen.



**CARLOS MRAIDA**

Buenos Aires, ARGENTINA [cmraida@gmail.com](mailto:cmraida@gmail.com)

With his wife Silvana they have three children: Gabriel, Florencia and Ezequiel. Carlos Mraida has been for 26 years the senior pastor of the Iglesia del Centro [Church of the Center] in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina. They have over 50 congregations throughout the country.

He is one of the Coordinators of the Council of Pastors of the city of Buenos Aires. Together with several other colleagues they serve in a movement of unity and national transformation known as: "Argentina Oramos por Vos" [Argentina, we pray for you].

He is also a leader of CRECES, *Comunión Renovada de Evangélicos y Católicos en el Espíritu Santo* [Renewed fellowship of Evangelicals and Catholics in the Holy Spirit]. Carlos is author of fourteen books.

Several weeks ago, in the National Pastors Retreat in Argentina, I was asked to present the subject: The pastors that Argentina needs. The first question that occurred to me that I should propose for reflection and support is: Does Argentina need its pastors? Today I ask you the same question: Does your nation, your city, need its pastors to transform its situation?

If we were to ask the people this question, what answer would we get from the majority? What image do we have among the people who are not Evangelicals? If we asked those who govern, how would they respond? Besides seeking our votes, or to pray in a public gathering, do they seek our counsel concerning the central problems of life in our cities? In the universities, do they invite us to model the thinking of the younger generations?

When people dream of a better nation, do they think of us as those who could at least offer part of the solution in the processes of transformation that our nations need? Does today's culture legitimize us as principal actors in the process of transformation, or only as those who are to be tolerated in the religious sphere and within our temples?

And we, as pastors, what do we think? Does your nation need you; does it need me? Our answer is yes... how could I not be needed if I am a servant of God? But when I look at our ministries, the impression I have is that we show no evidence of believing that the nation needs us for an integral process of transformation.

It seems to me that we have identified with the message of Shemaiah, who told Nehemiah to run into the temple and close the doors behind him. Nehemiah believed that Jerusalem needed him, and he responded: "Should a man like me run away? Or should one like me go into the temple to save his life?"

I say this because when I consider our average ministries, they seem to be more on the model of Shemaiah, than on the model of Nehemiah, when I look at the evidence that we give about believing that the nation and the city need us for their integral transformation. I am thinking: What else is needed besides the vision and inspiration such as that we are receiving in this retreat, in order to lead a process of transformation?

## **PLAN, TEAMWORK AND EXAMPLES**

Just imagine that an individual or a group from the social field comes to me, or from the political field, or economic field, and says to me: we have decided to lead a process of transformation of our city, and we want you to work with us.

I would ask them, essentially, three things: first of all: Do you have a plan?

Do the pastors in your city have a concrete plan for transforming the various spheres of the reality of your city? For if we believe that our nation or our city needs the pastors, we must have a plan. If we do not have one, the evidence that we are giving is that we are not needed.

The second thing, besides a plan, is the awareness that a process of transformation of a city or a nation requires teamwork. I would respond to that person: Do you know how to work in a team?

We are weary with Messianic personalities who see themselves as unique saviors. Do the pastors in your city know how to work as a team? If we are not willing to work as a team, we are showing that we do not believe that the nation needs us for a process of transformation of all the different spheres of society.

The third thing that I would ask of them is the need to be examples.

Do we have that quality? That is, can we show on a small scale what we want to do on a large scale. Can we present the church of our city as a valid alternative for the country? Can we take to the microphones of the national chain of radio and television and say to all: We want the nation to be like the church in our city? We want the nation to see in our love and unity a model to terminate the divisions, the sectorial interests, the social conflicts and violent confrontations. We want the nation to see in the Christian families the model that we present for the families, we want them to see the economy of the believers as the model for our nation.

That is the least we could ask of anyone. That is the least that we could offer. Do we believe that our city and our nation need us? Or do we close ourselves within our temples, worried about our congregations and growth of the church, fleeing from the processes of change that our society needs?

For that reason, to the question Does your nation need its pastors? my response is an emphatic Yes. The nation needs its pastors; it needs you and it needs me.

## WHO ARE WE?

Your city needs you, my city needs me. But beyond believing that and giving evidence of it, if we want the people, those who govern, the media, to give evidence that they need us, we must understand who we are. Thus there is a second pertinent question regarding the integral transformation of our nation and our city: Who are we?

We are the spiritual authority of a city. We must assume that position, that role, of being the spiritual authority of a city. In the days of the prophet Jeremiah, Israel was going through a terrible crisis. And God tells them in chapter 3 that the crisis in the nation is the result of a dual problem of authority. First, they have forgotten me (says God) as their final authority. They have closed me in and circumscribed my activity to the religious sphere, shutting me into the ark of the covenant, and in whoever possesses it. But in everyday life in your cities, you do whatever you please.

The second problem of authority is the leadership over your nation. Starting with spiritual leadership. So God uses the prophet to tell them that they have a dual problem of authority, and if they really want a national transformation, they must return “to me”, and make a triple change of paradigms.

## PARADIGM CHANGES

Allow me to simply mention the first two paradigm changes, because I want to focus especially on the third, in accordance with the subject that has been assigned me. The three paradigm changes are intimately related and are part of the process of restoration of spiritual authority of God’s people over a city.

First, he tells them, change the paradigm of the ark, and use instead the paradigm of unity in the city.

*16“In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land,” declares the LORD, “men will no longer say, ‘The ark of the covenant of the LORD.’ It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made. 17At that time they will call Jerusalem The Throne of the LORD, and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honor the name of the LORD... 18In those days the house of Judah will join the house of Israel, and together they will come from a northern land to the land I gave your forefathers as an inheritance.*

The **first paradigm change**: the manifestation of God’s presence and the visible expression of his authority is not enclosed in a chest, nor in the person who has it. From now on the manifestation of my authority and presence changes to the sphere of the city and is evidenced in the unity of my people.

He says this paradigm change has to be made when the people are multiplied. The generation of pioneers of our work was not able to be a factor for national transformation. They had to lay the foundation of the work, and God used each denomination to initiate the work in each city, so as to fill the cities with the testimony. And the believers of that generation had to work within the temples because they were persecuted, discriminated. But now we have grown as God’s people; a new generation faces a paradigm change from the temple/religious enclosure where each was on his own, to the active mission to the city in unity.

The **second paradigm change**: the establishment of a national leadership that emerges in each city: *I will choose you —one from a town and two from a clan— and bring you to Zion (3:14).*

This is not my subject today, but the unity of God’s people in each city depends on the recognition in each city of leaders who unite with those of other cities and provinces to establish a spiritual government over the nation. If you are uncomfortable with the name “apostolic ministry”, use a name that doesn’t make as much

noise, but your nation needs a spiritual government at the national level established by leaders that emerge from each city, from each province (or state) and seek God for a strategy, a plan for the nation's transformation. These leaders do not promote themselves, for they are the result of the unity experienced in their city, and they are chosen by their own peers.

This is not my subject... it's not my subject... it's not my subject. I am not here to talk about this. But just as there are false pastors, even though we all continue to call them pastors, because Ephesians 4 says so, there are also false apostles: those that want to manage the pastors instead of serving them, those that have an inferiority complex and appoint themselves, those that seek prestige instead of being servants, those that want to be at the top of the pyramid, whereas the Bible says that the apostles are at the foundation. Let's not let the caricatures of apostolic ministry cause us to lose this ministry which is also in Ephesians 4, and is constituted by God for the perfecting, the realization of what God wants to do through his people in this nation.

But that is not my subject! We are marching toward these two paradigm changes: the unity in each city of his church to manifest the authority and presence of God in each city through a united mission, and the raising up of a national spiritual leadership in each city.

## NEW SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

The **third paradigm change** that God indicates for the nation's transformation is a new spiritual leadership: I will give you different shepherds. The verse on which I want to focus is: *Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding (3:15).*

The Lord tells us: The nation does need pastors. For the awakening with the transformation that I want to accomplish, your nation needs pastors "after my own heart" who will lead you "with knowledge and understanding." The reference in the context is to new leadership in all spheres, principally spiritual. Yes, your nation needs the pastors. Your nation needs new leadership, and from us, who become the spiritual authority in our cities. Allow me to share with you some implications and characteristics of that authority.

### 1. The exercise of spiritual authority

Our authority comes from the Lord. But that authority is manifested and confirmed in the realization of our vocation. God says: Colombia, Chile, Italy, Ecuador, United States, Argentina, *I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you.* The authority that the Lord has delegated to us is to lead, to shepherd. We have authority to care for the sheep, to shepherd them.

Our authority is validated in practice, when we lead people to eat in green pastures. Our ministries must be schools for life. We must teach the people how to live, to be fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, administrators. People don't know how to live.

But the sad part is that many believers who are members of our churches suffer the same lack, for we have not taught them how to live. There is little solid teaching, practical and biblical. That is the reason our people don't look like a viable alternative to the unconverted. Unbelievers do not grab our members by the lapel and say to them: "Please, give me what you have; I want my home to be like yours; I want to prosper like you, I want to lead in society, like you."

People are not able to clearly understand how the gospel changes a person's life, how participation in a church enables them to grow and mature. This is one of the reasons why 50% of those who call themselves evangelicals do not attend any church. And in the larger cities of the continent, it is more than 50 %.

But we are the spiritual authority of the city, and we must teach them how to live. When we do so the people will recognize the spiritual authority and will request our guidance for all the spheres of life. And on the larger scale as well, we will guide our cities along paths of righteousness concerning what God says about economics, politics, science, art, sports. All this is in the Word of God.

God says: Your nation needs the pastors to shepherd the people. God says that your nation needs you if you shepherd the people. The authority he gave you over the city is validated when you shepherd the people.

## 2. The jurisdiction of spiritual authority

All authority has a specific jurisdiction. That jurisdiction determines the area where that authority is valid, as well as the limits and competence of that authority. Those limits are determined basically by two elements. The first is the proper sphere. In the sphere of justice, there are federal judges, provincial judges, justices of the peace, judges of the lower courts, etc. A judge in one city cannot exercise his authority in another, nor can a justice of the peace exercise authority in federal matters.

The second limit is the designation. A judge is designated by the maximum authority which is the president, with the Senate's accord. Thus I cannot designate my own authority, for that spiritual authority over the city is established by the highest authority which is God and it is revealed in his Word.

Thus God says: I will give you shepherds. It is God who establishes that spiritual authority. And in order to avoid our trying to manipulate God with our own reasoning, he already made clear the jurisdiction of our spiritual authority. I learned this from Satirio Dos Santos. He said to me: Carlos, it is very important for you to understand the principal of spiritual jurisdiction. Don't try to do anything over an area that God has not given you, and don't cross the limits that he established.

The shepherds that your nation needs are pastors who understand the jurisdiction of spiritual authority. First, our sphere of authority is our city. I can initiate a work in Bogota, in Quito, in New York. For God sends me from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. But that does not imply spiritual authority over those cities. God has given the spiritual government over the city to the church of that city.

And that leads us to the second jurisdictional limitation. God has not given that authority to a pastor, nor to a congregation, but to the entire church in a city, led by the elders or pastors of that church. That is the reason why the New Testament speaks of the church in a city. It is always singular, never plural. And therefore when reference is made to the expression of Christ's authority, the whole church is mentioned. In ancient Israel this was quite clear, when the elders were those who sat in the gates of the city to exercise authority over the city.

For that reason, when Paul sends Titus, he tells him to establish elders, presbyters is the Greek term, pastors, not in a congregation, for he said to him: *The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you* (Titus 1.5). And he refers to the honor and payment that should be given those elders, he says: *The elders who govern well...*

The elders govern and they do it in a city. So we need to move from the present pastoral councils, that bring the pastors together for fellowship and to organize special activities, to the presbytery of the city, elders who in unity govern as the spiritual authority of a city.

And just as Jeremiah says, from each city leaders will be raised up that at the national level will exercise that spiritual authority, serving as pastors and spiritual oversight for the nation, making known God's plans and strategies. Your nation needs shepherds who in unity exercise spiritual government over your cities.

## 3. The knowledge of spiritual authority

Our text says: *I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge*. The Hebrew word for knowledge is *deyah*, and means just that. God says: I place you in the city with spiritual authority, to care for my sheep with knowledge. In order to care for the sheep with knowledge, I think we should do three things.

The first is to **raise up a new generation of young pastors**. God wants us to advance his reign in our cities. To advance is to raise, or to walk ahead. When you walk ahead, you leave empty spaces, that were occupied before you moved forward. And here is an obvious truth; you cannot move forward without leaving where you were. And when we are talking about God's kingdom, when we move forward, in order to avoid leaving empty spaces we must position others there.

I believe that we should raise up pastors, not for the church as we know it, but for what is to come. This implies that, in addition to an irreplaceable foundation of a strong call from God, as well as a spiritual and family life, ethics and the necessary gifts of the Spirit to shepherd others, these pastors will need to have some characteristics that God has been showing me.

Most of them will be younger men. I think it is time to raise up a new generation of pastors from 25 to 30 years of age, to begin the process of preparation alongside the present pastors, in order to lead in the management of the Lord's work. We need a torrent of renewal of ideas, of world views, of perception of the reality we are living and of the possibilities of mission, that will necessarily come from the hand of the younger generation.

The measure of maturity and experience we should continue to provide. But we need this generational renewal. They should also have, wherever possible, a university degree and a minimum of work experience that has been like an apprenticeship, as well as the desire to continue their training. The church ahead of us will require shepherds with better preparation, with the ability to think as they learned to do in the university, since a good proportion of the members will be university graduates.

Prophetically, I dream of and visualize pastors with Masters and Doctorates in Management, in Marketing, in Social Development, in Human Resources, in Counseling, in Public Policy, etc., to lead our work, so as to produce an *upgrade*, a raising of the level of wholesome professionalism in the ministry, that can shake us loose from the limitations of our pastoral generation, from the management deficit evident today in all the work, that can lead a process of transformation of our national reality, that so far our generation has only been able to dream of and declare prophetically. What I envision for the future is not shepherding congregations, but the city.

The work suffers from a great crisis in management. God is giving us a vision of transformation of our reality, but we are unprepared to manage that process. Those of us who are leading today have been unable to manage the reality of our times, for we were prepared in a vision and training to lead congregations. But we soon become aware that this is more than a simple ecclesiastical matter; for the mission field is the reality of our cities. And we were not trained for that. In addition, as if that difficulty were not enough, our world has now changed. So that if we were unable to manage the reality of our times, much less can we manage the reality that is ahead.

But we can spiritually lead that process. The necessary level of maturity and experience we should continue to give. We should continue to bear the spiritual leadership. There are positions related to the vision, to spiritual leadership, that require maturity and experience. But we need this generational renewal.

We are not talking about the retirement of the present pastors, to leave the conduction to others. It's more like the situation of Acts 6, where the apostles realize that there is murmuring, and that the growth is running the risk of bottoming out, for there is a serious management deficit. And if they want to see the work move ahead, they need to take a step forward, leaving the management of the tables in the hands of others more capable for that, and they should dedicate themselves to the spiritual leadership of the work. The result was: *So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith (6:7).*

This is not a question of the current pastors moving aside, but of taking a step forward. The apostles concentrated on efficacy and left in the hands of others the efficiency. Efficacy is the ability to make the right decisions. Efficiency is the ability to carry out the task in the best way. The older shepherds should concentrate on efficacy, that is to say, on the vision, leaving in the hands of the newer shepherds, with professional training, the efficiency of the tasks to be done. That is management.

This is not raising up the youth, while we continue to do the same as always. Rather the younger element should bring in renewal and professionalism of management. It is time to shepherd the city, taking a step forward so that the level of management might be occupied by a younger generation professionally trained and who understand the world in which we are living, and have been trained with a mentality oriented toward objectives and goals, so that the work might move forward, improve, advance.

More than ever we should take seriously Paul's charge to Timothy and to the elders of his day: *Let no one despise your youth*. If we try to raise up pastors when they are 40 years of age, they will minister in a world they do not understand. I am not saying that pastors who are 40 or older cannot serve, nor that those who do not have a university degree cannot serve. To the contrary. We will continue to raise them up as we are now doing, all those whom God calls, no matter their age or the training they have had.

We face a serious management ceiling. We have tried to do well, but our reality is the church of yesteryear. Now we face another reality. The same thing is happening to us as was the case with the first apostles. The passage to which we referred starts by explaining the context of the crisis: *In those days when the number of disciples was increasing...* (6:1).

The work has grown, the demands are not simply to open a meeting place and have weekly meetings, an evangelistic campaign and preaching on Sundays. If we really want to see the church at the head of the life of each city, and lead a process of transformation, we need to raise up a new generation of young shepherds and train them to manage our new reality. It's a different way of thinking, a different way to focus on our reality. It is what we call world view, people of this world (*cosmos*), not of the past. People to lead processes of transformation of the city, with our backing and oversight. I plan to raise up in the next three years, five new pastors with these characteristics, not just for our congregation, but for the city. And I am not planning to retire, nor cease to be a pastor. They will need me, but the city needs them. I encourage you to do the same.

The second thing we need to shepherd, to lead the city with knowledge, is to **have a plan**. We cannot afford to have no plans at the national level and at the city level for the growth of the work. There are no five year plans, and certainly no long-range plans. What kind of work do we expect to have in the year 2016? How many churches will we have? How many missionaries around the world? How many legislators? How many well-known artists? We suffer from spasms of transformation, of conquest, in every crisis. And then, nothing but foam; everything gets diluted.

We believe that God will do something wonderful among us. We believe that an awakening is coming that will transform the whole social structure. But that work requires preparation. In his Word God tells us that the manifestation of his glory requires our preparation. Before Isaiah 40:5 says that God will manifest his glory, we are told: *Prepare the way for the LORD* (40:3).

The third thing we need to lead the city with knowledge is to **establish strategic alliances**. When we assume authority over the city, the frontiers change between what is inside and what is outside. And we begin to understand the mission not simply as a category of the church, but of the kingdom. And when we assume that role of leading a process of transformation, then we take advantage of the resources that are beyond the church. I refer to persons and organizations that, although not evangelical, with their work they are helping in the processes of transformation with values that are those of God's kingdom.

Certain aspects of that transformation are the exclusive mission of the church, such as the conversion of the unsaved through the preaching of the gospel and discipleship. In this matter there is nothing to share with those who do not believe as we do. But there are other areas in which other organizations already have the knowledge and the experience and are fulfilling an important role in society, in the transformation of their spheres, and installing, even without realizing it, realities that belong to God's reign. We should take advantage of those resources, associate with them, support them, promote them, and we should also develop strategic alliances. Not with just anyone, but rather with those who over the years have demonstrated integrity, a disposition to serve others, the ability to transform, and have a good reputation among the people. The kingdom of God is broader than the church. And there are people and organizations such as Cyrus who, although he did not know the Lord, was anointed by God. Such persons are establishing aspects of the kingdom that the church has not established.

We should not be afraid nor should we use the worn-out argument to be careful because the people might become confused. People are already confused through listening to the message of a church that talks about transformation but doesn't transform anything. Yet we need not worry when dealing with prestigious organizations. On the contrary, people will associate us with their good actions. Of course we need to be careful, with all the pertinent precautions, for our nations need pastors who care for the sheep with knowledge and understanding.

#### 4. Understanding spiritual authority

Our text says: *I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding.* The Hebrew word for understanding is *sakal*, and it means intelligence, such as being wise and expert. We are told: I place you in your city with spiritual authority, in order to lead with wisdom and expertise. That wisdom begins by **knowing ourselves**. What has God given you that is unique, which he did not give to any other pastor in your city?

When we begin to understand the mystery of the church, the concepts of the church and the presbytery of the city, then we no longer need to be doing all the same thing; we can release our ministerial DNA that is unique and singular. We are no longer subject to the limitation of imitating others. We don't need to seek the formula that is established and stereotyped for ministerial success by imitating one or another, for we can be legitimate, not imitated copies, legitimate persons, for this releases the wonderful and unique values that God placed in each one.

Ministerial success is not comparing yourself with me so that you are able to do better than I and become the most important pastor in the city, nor in copying stereotypes of successful pastors. We don't all need to do TV programs, or the same activities as others. Your ministerial success is to do that for which you were made. So that the day that you die you leave your unique and different digital fingerprint on the reality of God's kingdom. What is the unique and significant participation that you will leave as a mark on the reality of God's reign in your city?

Paul speaks of that mystery hidden for centuries that is the church, and he tells us that the church reveals the manifold wisdom of God. God wants to care for your city with his wisdom that is expressed in manifold ways through the unique church and through its leadership represented by the different pastors of the city.

The city of Buenos Aires does not need 300 men like pastor Carníval; one is more than enough. It does not need 300 like pastor Saracco. Each one of us were made in a unique way, for a singular and unique purpose. And what my city needs is that each one of us release the multiple grace that God placed in the leadership of his church, so that we do what each is supposed to do with the manifold grace that God placed in all the church. That we care for the sheep, not just those who on Sunday sit in the congregation, but the whole city; that is where we need to manifest God's riches. And for that purpose we need to be wise in at least two matters: I need to **know myself** in order to release my unique potential, and I need to **know others** in order to recognize the unique potential that God has placed in them.

Know ourselves and recognize others. In our pastoral councils, besides sharing the platform in the next campaign, do we know the manifold grace that God has given to the leadership of the church in the city? That is to say, do we recognize each other? Your nation needs wise pastors who know themselves and recognize others.

#### 5. The heart of spiritual authority

God says to the nation: *I will give you shepherds after my own heart.* The heart of spiritual authority is that we be shepherds after God's heart. And the key to being shepherds after God's own heart is in your heart. What God most needs is people that know their heart, whose heart beats like God's heart, people of his presence.

How is your heart? Perhaps your heart feels pain and discouragement, because things have not turned out well for you. “I don’t even know how to manage my own congregation, and you are talking to me about caring for a city.”

Jesus gave to a disillusioned Peter the order to care for his sheep. Peter experienced a call to the ministry on two occasions. Both were preceded by a miraculous catch of fish. The first is found in Luke 5, and the second is in John 21. In the first he is called to follow Jesus by becoming a “fisher of men”. In the second he is called to care for sheep.

In the second miraculous catch of fish, Peter is disillusioned, because Jesus’ project to establish his kingdom had apparently failed. And he is personally embittered because he denied him three times. At the time Peter is with six other disciples. In his frustration he says to them: I’m going fishing. The others respond: we’ll go with you. But they catch nothing. Jesus appears and tells them to cast their net. And the result was another miraculous catch of fish.

But there is a difference; in the first miraculous catch of fish we are told that the quantity of fish broke the net, but with the second, we are told they caught 153 fish and, in spite of that quantity, the net didn’t break.

How many of you are tired of seeing your nets broken? Just when you feel that this time you are going to gather in what God promised you, just at the point when you are about to see that promise fulfilled, your net breaks.

Jesus called you to be a fisher of men and the net has already broken many times. But I am here to tell you that your net will not break this time. This is not a dream that cannot be fulfilled. This is not an illusion, this time the vision will be fulfilled. Your net will not break.

Your nets have broken so many times that you are afraid to believe that God will do something different this time. But the devil is a liar; I assure you that your net will not break this time. I am speaking to you about the real vision, a dream that will be realized. The blessing will not disappear at the last moment. God is not playing with you. God swore that he would bless you and that is correct. Your net will not break.

## **CALLED TO BE A SHEPHERD**

Because this time Jesus is not calling you to fish, but to shepherd. He repeats the question and the commission to shepherd three times, since Peter is disillusioned for having denied him three times. The first question that Jesus asks Peter before assigning him three times the commission to care for the sheep, is: “Peter, do you love me more than these?” It is a question with an intention. He wants to determine something in Peter’s heart. It is a question for Peter’s heart; that’s why he speaks of love. But it is a question with a specific intention, so he uses a comparison: “more than these”.

Before his triple denial, Peter had assured him that even if the rest abandoned him, he would never do that. He compared himself with others and felt that he was the only faithful one, the best. But now he is quite aware of his failure. And Jesus tries his heart: Peter, do you love me more than these? Now Peter does not compare himself with others; rather he says: Lord, you know that I love you.

This time your net will not break. It’s not a question of how many members you have in the congregation. It doesn’t matter whether your ministry has grown or not. God makes no promises about that. You were hoping for something that God does not promise. God doesn’t ask how many fish you have caught, in the loneliness of ministry, trying to be more than others.

God is speaking to you about shepherding your city along with the rest. Concerning this there are promises of God that the nations will walk in your light. If you are affirmed in that which he promised, you can be sure that your net will not break this time.

But what happens if I accept the vision of shepherding my city in unity, what about the other pastors? Peter says this to Jesus: What about this one? What about John? And Jesus answers him: What does that matter to

you? You have your own pathway, you will extend your hands and another will gird you, and take you where you do not want to go. What I want is for you to shepherd the sheep. Therefore, let me today remove from your heart all bitterness, discouragement. What is ahead for you and your ministry is wonderful. You are going to leave your digital fingerprint on the reality of God's kingdom in your city. You will not be just one more in the bunch. God says to your nation that he has shepherds after his own heart, and you are one of them.

Peter went fishing because he was frustrated. He returned to what he knew, where he felt sure of himself, to that which he believed he could control: fishing. But he didn't catch anything. Returning to the boat was his way of sticking with what he could control. But Jesus tells him: this is your last day on the boat. From now on I call you to shepherd.

Don't be afraid, fellow servant, today is your last day on the boat. Don't try to stick with it, don't try to control it, get out of your comfort zone, and be part of what God wants to do. This time your net will not break. For your nation needs pastors after God's own heart. And you are one of them.

# HOLINESS

Dele Olowu

*And when Abram was ninety nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said to him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me and be perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.*

Genesis 17: 1–2, NKJV

*But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written: Be holy, for I am holy.*

1 Peter 1.15

*Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity, therefore, God thy God hath anointed thee with oil of gladness above thy fellows.*

Hebrews 1.9

I do not know why the organizers of this year's AFI Consultation and pastoral conference assigned me the topic of holiness. I presume it is because they know that holiness is an important element of our mission and ministry and perhaps also they know that my General Overseer (who is unavoidably absent) likes to speak on such a subject.

The more I thought about the subject the more I discovered that this is actually the key issue in Christianity today. There are diverse interpretations of holiness. On the one hand, there are those who argue that the God we serve is a God of love and we should have outlived by now ancient notions of prudishness and righteousness, and especially concepts such as hell and its fire, because there is no way a loving God can throw his beloved children into a burning eternal fire. There are also other segments of the global church that subscribe to the notion of eternal security whereby once a person is saved, he or she is saved from past, present and all future sins. At the other extreme, there are others who hold that the world is so sinful that the best thing is to live outside the main stream society, secluded from its sins and maladies. There have been different versions of these diverse groups throughout the history of the church to date.



DELE OLOWU

NETHERLANDS [dolowu2@yahoo.com](mailto:dolowu2@yahoo.com)

Native of Nigeria, Dele is based in the Netherlands, serving various countries in Europe in apostolic ministry.

Dele and his wife Bukky have \_\_\_ children.

As I further studied the subject in the Bible, I was baffled by the fact that holiness is one issue that is core to the survival and global prosperity of the church. Holiness is also God's guarantee that the gates of hell would not be able to overcome his church, no matter what the minions from hell seek to achieve. This was the essence of God's covenant with Abram, to wit, that he would be exceedingly fruitful, his children who would be many (Ishmael, already born in Genesis 16, was not regarded as one of these) would possess the gates of their enemies. All he needed to do was to walk before God and be *perfect*. This brings us to the need to revisit the meaning of holiness.

## WHAT IS HOLINESS?

Conventionally, we think of holiness as *obedience to God's word*. In both Old and New Testaments, God constantly reminds his people that they **MUST OBEY HIM**. Obedience is God's way of knowing that we truly believe in him as our loving Father, who has our best interest at heart. In both the Old and New Testaments there is a great emphasis on obedience as the key to pleasing God with specific benefits for diligent obedience. (Deuteronomy 28; John 13:17).

Holiness is also interpreted to mean *integrity*—that we live up to our word. It also implies that we ensure that there is no difference between our words and lifestyle, between what we promised and what we actually do... or between our private and public lives. The absence of integrity has brought shame to God and it is the reason why the Lord condemned and cursed the Pharisees who were the religious leaders in his day. It is also the reason he instructed his disciples to let our light shine before the world so they can glorify our Father in heaven (Matthew 5.16). For many people outside the church, as the word reminds us, we are their Bibles. *We are truly the epistle that is written in hearts and read by all men* (2 Corinthians 3.2). They would not read the Word but they pay close attention to how we live, whether we live by hatred and warfare when we preach love as the essence of our Lord's gospel (see James 1.23–25).

The problem with these meanings of holiness is that they contain important but partial elements of what holiness is. God says the reason we must be holy is that he is holy. Clearly, God cannot be disobedient to himself. His word is also yea and amen, settled in heaven (Psalm 119.89). The Bible also makes reference to a range of creatures and things that are holy: e.g., animals, houses, pots used in the temple worship. Tithes are holy, according to Leviticus 27.30.

Holiness is rooted in the Hebrew word *qodes*, that is, what belongs to the sphere of sacred as distinct from common or profane. Holiness is thus 'sacredness', separation or dedication to an uncommon, sacred function. The opposite of holiness is not necessarily sinfulness but 'commonness', as Watchman Nee points out in the chapter on the sanctification of those who exercise delegated spiritual authority in his classic, *Spiritual Authority* (1972, pp.179-185). God calls his people to live a different kind of uncommon, supernatural life: life that is above nature and uncommon existence, a life of perfection in devotion to God or complete consecration. It is also the sense in which things and animals can be abominable (unholy) or clean (holy).

This is the essence of God's covenant with Abraham: to live a life of perfection, devoted and consecrated to God. Even the word 'consecrate' in the English language is rooted in this understanding. Hence, in Leviticus 20 the Lord spells out for Israel what holiness is and concludes: *And ye shall be holy unto me, for I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people that ye should be mine* (v. 26). From this view then, as the Lord tells us what he told Jeremiah, he has set us apart from the time we were in our mother's womb (Jeremiah 1.4–5). We are set apart for his eternal purposes. In other words, God has a plan or destiny for our lives. *Holiness is the key to the realization of destiny or purpose*. Lack of holiness probably explains the failure of Abrahams' father, Terah, to realize his destiny (Genesis 11.31–32). Destiny or purpose is clearly an important matter to most people in our universe, one reason why Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose Driven Life, What on Earth Am I Here for?* (2002) became an instant global best-seller.

## WHY HOLINESS IS IMPORTANT

God's nature is holy and he commands us to be holy. *Be ye holy as I am holy. Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect* are both injunctions from the Old and New Testaments (Leviticus 20.26; Matthew 5.48).

1. Holiness opens all of heaven's resources to God's people because it shows we truly love God. God's resources are for his faithful and obedient children (1 Corinthians 2.9–10).
2. Pervasive iniquity is the true mark of the last days and the only force to counteract it is the life of Christians which shine out of darkness. Light also always overcomes darkness! (John 1.5).
3. Holiness leads to prosperity as the Lord told Abraham and the Hebrew people later (Genesis 17.1–10; Deuteronomy 28.1–2, 12–13).
4. Holiness ensures healing and divine health (Exodus 15.26, James 5.16).
5. Holiness renews our spirit man from glory to glory even as our physical body ages (2 Corinthians 4.16).
6. Holiness is essential to eternal life with Christ. More importantly, as I show below, it is essential for all leaders, but especially those who lead in God's church, if they are to help their followers to find God in this world and the one to come (Hebrews 12.14).

## WHY HOLINESS IS A CHALLENGE FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

If there are so many advantages to living holy, one wonders why every child of God would not like to live holy. The problem is that there are enemies within and outside each of us that define true enjoyment as sin and complicate any resolve we may have to be holy.

This is why the Bible distinguishes between different types of sins among Christians.

- Besetting sins: These are sins that, no matter how hard we try, the flesh insists on having its way in our lives (Hebrews 12.1). These are sins that we too have come to accept as a part of our nature and it is one of the issues raging today in the church with some people claiming that homosexuality is their nature and not a sin as is condemned in the Bible. But the same argument can be used by kleptomaniacs and those who abuse tobacco, alcohol and drugs, etc.
- Weights or presumptuous sins: These are sins of ignorance, or those that we do not equate with sin, even though God does (e.g. Leviticus 4:1–35; Luke 16.19–24). For many people today, social drinking, alcohol, womanizing, pornography, lying, etc, are no longer in their vocabulary of sins. Hence, they no longer make any effort to leave these sins behind. For many Christians in business, white lies are acceptable. These are lies that are thought to be socially and business-wise acceptable, as compared to the other kinds of "black" lies. However, this distinction is not in the word of God (Revelation 21.8). Even the international community which once tolerated bribery abroad for business purposes has risen up against such actions and sanctioned them. Other examples of presumptuous sins are:
  - Faithlessness: God regards this as sin. Many people have lost their faith today because they lost faith in God and live without faith. This also is sin. Whatever is not of faith is sin (Romans 14.23).
  - Lovelessness: Many Christians today spend most of their time gossiping about other Christians, pretending in their presence to be their friends. He that does not love his brother whom he can see but claims to love God is described by the Word as a liar (1John 4.20). These and other examples are what the writer of Hebrews 12.1 refers to as 'weights'.

God's solution to all of the above shortcomings is not hell fire as is commonly taught in some circles but the gift of his Holy Spirit, who is given to us to ensure that we live a consecrated life (Ephesians 4.30). The more we obey him and do that which pleases him, the more he possesses us and lives out his life through us which is the essence of our calling, as Pastor Enoch Adeboye explains in his classic, *Becoming a Special Carrier of the Holy Spirit* (2009). The manifestation of the Spirit in our lives enables ordinary Christians to excel in all they do in life and ministry (Hebrews 1.9). This is what enables a person to do the seemingly impossible, far above one's peers, as we see in the lives of several men and women in the Bible: Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Nehemiah, David,

Solomon, Daniel, Esther, Paul, Peter, Priscilla and Aquila, etc. and also in several contemporary examples today. Leadership, holiness and the ministry of the Holy Spirit go together.

We highlight a few Bible examples below.

### CASE STUDIES ON HOLINESS AND THE FULFILMENT OF DESTINY FOR LEADERS

In this section, we do a study of some Bible characters and the role that holiness played in the realization or non-realization of their destiny. We select these although the lessons apply to all leaders in Bible times and in contemporary times. The selected ones are: Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samson, David, Daniel and his three Hebrew colleagues, Peter, Mary Magdalene, and the madman of Gadara.

<b>HOLINESS AND REALIZATION OF DESTINY: Study of Bible characters / leaders</b>			
<b>NAME</b>	<b>DESTINY / PURPOSE</b>	<b>SUCCESS OR FAILURE</b>	<b>EXPLANATION / LESSON</b>
<b>Joseph</b>	Rule in a foreign land and take Israel to Egypt	Successful	Keep the vision of destiny and holiness ensuring God's favor in that land, as a slave and prisoner
<b>Moses</b>	Take Israel out of Egypt to the promised land	Partial success	Anger by God's meekest man
<b>Joshua</b>	Possess the promised land and allot it to the Israelites	Successful	Full of Holy Spirit; understood importance of absolute consecration
<b>Samson</b>	Deliver Israel from the Philistines	Failure	Could not live a consecrated life
<b>David</b>	Conquer Philistines and rule over God's people	Successful	Consecrated with grace covering sins. Cultivated Holy Spirit from childhood
<b>Daniel &amp; three Hebrew men</b>	Spokesperson for God on behalf of Israel in captivity	Successful	Excellent spirit, led to promotion after overcoming impossible odds and threats
<b>Peter</b>	Lead the church after Christ, both Jews and Gentiles	Partial success	God had to raise up another (Paul) for the Gentile ministry
<b>Mary Magdalene</b>	Care of Christ during his earthly ministry	Successful	Consecrated life following deliverance from demons
<b>Gadarene madman</b>	Evangelist in the region	Successful	After deliverance from evil spirits, consecrated himself to reach ten cities

These examples represent practically all possible human conditions today. Passion for righteousness and hatred of iniquity lifted these men and women of like passions as ourselves to a new level of uncommon attainment that is being celebrated many years after these people departed. Their experiences also underscore the point that holiness for leaders is even more essential for the church and especially in these last days, for several reasons. First, these leaders are the standard bearers and setters in the church. Second, they are more visible than others compared to the rest of the church; they are epistles being read. Thirdly, they are the ones most in need of the Holy Spirit and when he leaves them, the spiritual life of the whole church may be jeopardized. No wonder the New Testament provides a comprehensive list of attributes for those who would be leaders in the New Testament church. They constitute a check-list that every apostle, senior leader and pastor should use periodically to undertake a personal spiritual check-up. They include the following 20-point check-list. According to Titus 1.5, a bishop must:

- Be blameless
- Maintain marital fidelity: husband of one wife (life-long association)
- Have faithful children
- Not riotous
- Not insubordinate, unruly or disorderly
- Not arrogant or self-willed
- Not quick tempered
- Not given to drink (wine or alcohol)
- Not violent or pugnacious
- Not greedy for money
- Hospitable
- Lover of good
- Sober-minded
- Just
- Holy
- Self-controlled
- Faithful to the Word
- Able to teach
- Able to exhort
- Convincing

No wonder the Lord sanctified himself for his disciples and expects us to do the same!

## CONCLUSION AND PRAYER

We can summarize the main points presented in this paper.

- First, holiness is consecration to the service of God, or commitment to perfection.
- Second, anyone who hungers for holiness attracts an anointing to excel from God. This causes a man or woman to become a blessing to God and to man. It also ensures a glorious legacy for the next generation.
- Thirdly, holiness enables one to become a carrier of the Holy Spirit and therefore a partner of the Holy Spirit in shaping one's own life and that of others towards excellence. It is also enables us to keep our essential spiritual garment cover (2 Corinthians 5.3).

These three reasons make holiness a *sine qua non* for all leaders of God's people, as holiness attracts an anointing for excellence. Witness the manner in which Saul who had become backslidden lost the Holy Spirit and hid in the presence of Goliath. Compare this with young, untested David, brimming with the anointing of the Holy Spirit and the manner in which he took down Israel's terrorist (1 Samuel 16:13–14; 17:11, 42–54).

Many people wonder how can one commit to a holy life-style.. Possible helps include:

- Love for God's presence. This was David's secret and is the secret of all those who would live for God (Exodus 24.12–18; Luke 9:28–32; Acts 6.4).
- Hunger for God's kind of holiness or perfection.
- Hunger for the gifts and fruit of the Holy Spirit in prayer life. Remember Solomon's, Elisha's and the apostles' 10-day prayer before Pentecost.
- Praying in the Holy Ghost. This enables one to speak mysteries to the Lord and develop one's own specialized ministry gifts (Jude 20; 1 Corinthians 14.2).
- Learning to wait on the Lord so he can show us what we do not know as well as renew our strength (Isaiah 40.31; Jeremiah 33.3).
- Honesty with ourselves and with God in confessing our sins to him and seeking his mercy instead of trying to justify ourselves (Psalm 51.11).
- Committing ourselves to a life of unconditional love and generosity toward others and also to love and please the Holy Spirit by whom we have been sealed until the day of redemption.

Hence, holiness or consecration ensures that individuals and the community in the church can realize God's purpose for their lives. It is in this sense that the life of several people within and outside the Bible have been truly pitiful. Their destinies were truncated, a great loss to the generations they were called to lead, such as Eli or Samson. I am sure you can add several other examples from contemporary times.

Holiness, consecration and perfection open the door to empowerment and exaltation to excellence by the power of God's Holy Spirit. It is the price that all those who would lead others must pay to access divine strength that enables us to do exploits in our generation.

If the above be true, is it not then time that each of us to seek God for a spirit of holiness and excellence, praying several hours a day as the Lord and his disciples did, with our minds and also in the Holy Spirit, like the apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 14.18), if we want to see him move mightily again in our lives, families, ministries, fellowships, countries and our generation? (compare Revelation 1.10 and 4.1: once in the Spirit, the Lord always calls us higher).

The writer of Hebrews noted: *You have loved righteousness and hated iniquity* (consecrated and made yourself uncommon), *therefore the Lord your God has anointed you with oil above your fellows*. The prayer for more holiness and anointing for excellence is one that all of us must continue to pray throughout all of our life. We must also help others to commit to a life of consecration and perfection as the Lord will come, not only for a church that is perfect and without a wrinkle, but one that does exploits (impossible things) in his name (Ephesians 5.27, Daniel 11.32b). Daniel prophesied that those who know their God (his holiness, which is what the angels in heaven sing around him), would be strong and do exploits. This is the basis for all extraordinary attainments by the church in his name. This is also the guarantee that none of the wiles of the enemy against the church would prosper or succeed. Let us pray.

---

## References

- Adeboye, Enoch (2009) *Becoming a Special Carrier of His Glory*, Lagos, CRM
- Nee, Watchman (1971) *Spiritual Authority*, New York, Christian Fellowship Publishers Inc
- Mounce, W.D (2006) *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testaments*, Zondervan
- Rick Warren (2002) *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth am I Here for?* Grand Rapids, Zondervan
- Holy Bible, *New King James Version* and *Comparative Study Bible*