

# **AFI**

**Apostolic consultation**



## **What's the future of the church?**

**31st of May - 2 of June 2012**

**Caserta - Italy**

**Hotel Jolly**

**English**

# AFI

**Apostolic consultation**

**What's the future of the church?**

**Caserta - Maggio 2012 - Hotel Jolly**

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Program

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## **Thursday - 31 May**

18.00 Opening - Welcome

20.30 Dinner

## **Friday - 1 June**

09.00 Devotion

09.30 - **Carlos Mraida** - *a God of relationship*

11.00 - *Break*

11.30 - **EdBretscher** - *responder*

13.00 - *Lunch*

16.00 - **Jorge Himitian** - *Nature of Apostolic Ministry*

18.00 - **Orville Swindoll** - *responder*

20.30 - *Dinner*

21.30 - *Time of fellowship*

## **Saturday - 2 June**

09.00 Devotion

09.30 - **G. Traettino** - *Apostolic Ministry e unity*

11.00 - *Break*

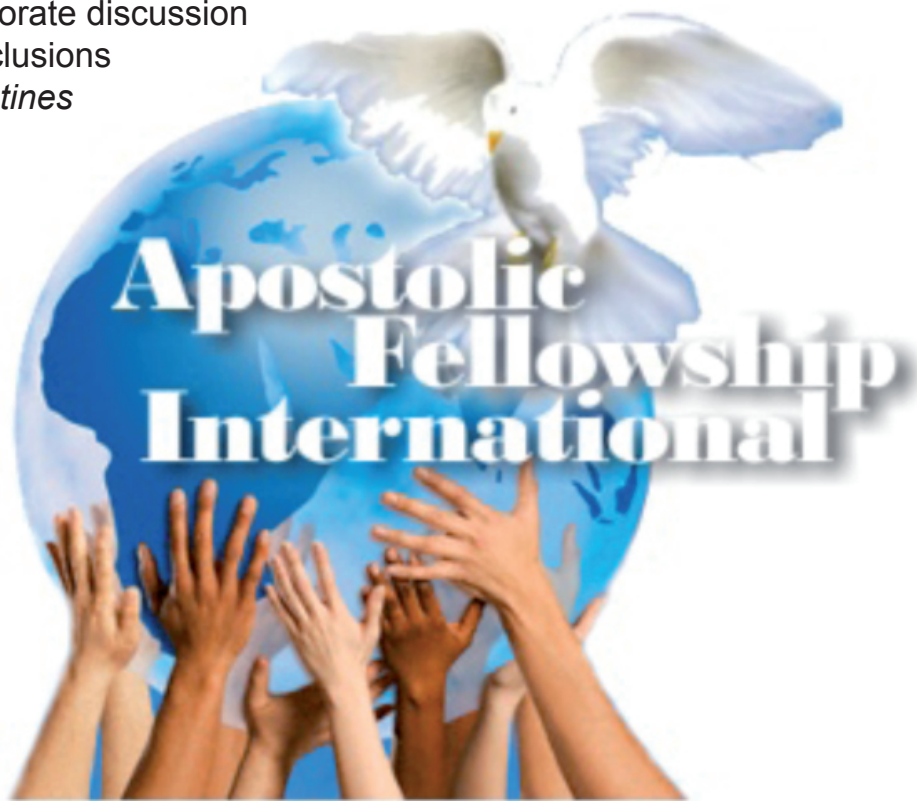
11.30 - **Cristian Romo** - *responder*

13.00 - *Lunch*

16.00 - Corporate discussion

17.30 - Conclusions

18.00 - *Greetines*



# **AFLI**

## **Consultation Apostolic**



**Caserta (CE), May 31 – June 2, 2012**

**My beloved brothers,**

**It is with great joy that we welcome you to this twelfth Consultation of the Apostolic Fellowship International. We give you a warm welcome and we wish you a particularly fruitful time as we listen to the papers and the responses to them.**

**The brothers of the International Apostolic Council wanted this meeting to take place in Europe, with the stated goal of feeding a seed which is still small, but which was sown here at the beginning of our journey and now only needs to grow and bring about the result for which it was originally given: to encourage the church to resume and continue with confidence and courage the path towards its fullness. Our stated goal for this session is to reflect anew on the issues at the heart of our calling and spirituality, which are strategic for the future of the church in its journey towards fullness, which is the declared purpose of God for humanity and for the whole of creation.**

**Pastor Mraida, who recently joined the Council of AFLI, will touch, with his usual mastery, upon the fundamental theme of relationships, starting from the very foundation of this reality: the internal workings of God. He will develop the theme A God of Relationships. Pastor Himitian will explain the nature and the role of ministries today, and in particular the apostolic ministry, for the work of healing and restoration of the church. His theme is The Nature of the Apostolic Ministry. I myself will take up a theme particularly dear to me, already dealt with several times, which I believe is essential to make possible and promote the unity of the Church in practical and historical terms: The Apostolic Ministry and the Unity of the Church. Responders will help us to critically examine the contributions of the speakers, to introduce and stimulate comments and contributions from the participants.**

**Last but not least, another goal we have for these few days together is to further deepen and develop our koinonia! May God fill you with His joy and... Welcome among us!**

**On behalf of AFLI,  
My love to you all.**

**Giovanni Traettino - Permanent Coordinator**

**Caserta, 31.05.2012**

## Carlos Mraida - a God of relationship

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Irenaeus and Origen share with Tertullian the responsibility for the formulation that continues to be, in the basics, that of the Catholic Church. Under the leadership of Athanasius this doctrine was proclaimed as a creed of the church in the council of Nicea<sup>2</sup>, and in the hands of Augustine, a century later, it received a formulation included in the so-called creed of Athanasius which is accepted by trinitarian churches until our days. After being clarified by John Calvin<sup>3</sup>, it was acknowledged by churches of the reformed faith<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 4.1 (NKJV).

<sup>2</sup> Year 325 A.D.

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

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

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

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

In Hebrew monotheism we are faced with the solitary “aloneness” of one, who has no one at his side. He is eternally alone. All other beings are subject to him. All possible communication would be unequal. On the other hand, in polytheism, with a plurality of gods, divine unity evaporates<sup>6</sup>.

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

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

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

Where is the union of the three? It is in the communion (fellowship) among the three. Communion is common union. The three persons are one because they are open to each other, they exist with each other and are for each other. To express this union, theologians, beginning in the Sixth Century, coined the Greek expression *perijóresis*<sup>8</sup>: each person contains the other two, each penetrates the others and is penetrated by them, each

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<sup>4</sup> Nuevo Diccionario Bíblico Certeza.

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

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

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

<sup>8</sup> From the Greek: Rotation, revolve around.

lives in the others, and viceversa<sup>9</sup>. Its significance is always that of interpenetration, that of being a reciprocal of each of the persons in the other two of the Trinity, living one in the other in a unique substance, as a circulation of love without mixture or confusion of persons. The divine *hipostasis* are one in the other without confusion, living and residing always together, without the possibility of being conceived separately. Thus in the Holy Trinity there are three *hipostasis* united by one *perijóresis*, that express the maximum grade of interpenetration and communion of love in the maximum grade of diversity.

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

Due to the *perijóresis*, each person acts in union with the others. The Father creates by the Son with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Son becomes flesh, sent by the Father in virtue of the life-giving Spirit. The Spirit descends upon the believers sent by the Father at the request of the Son. Tradition has manifested this in different ways: The Father engenders the Son in the womb of the Holy Spirit, or the Father gives breath to the Holy Spirit together with the Son, or the Holy Spirit reveals the Father through the Son, or the Son loves the Father in the Holy Spirit, or the Son and the Holy Spirit are recognized in the Father, and so on. All are declarations that show that it is all relationship, all participation, all circulation, all is given reciprocally, all are united by communion.

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

## II. The "second" *mystery*: A God who is incarnationally relational:

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

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

And then the "first" and eternal *mystery*, hidden and "dumb," was revealed to us: *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our*

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<sup>9</sup> Boff, pp. 9-10.

<sup>10</sup> John 5.18.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 2.10-11.

<sup>12</sup> Certeza,

<sup>13</sup> John 1.18 (NIV).

*eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us*<sup>14</sup>.

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

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

And as the Father sent the Son who was in his bosom, the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God<sup>17</sup>, the Spirit of the Son<sup>18</sup>. And the *mystery* that was “dumb” became tongues of fire. And the hidden *mystery* became visible signs and wonders for everyone.

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

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

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

In the common comprehension, the Trinity is reduced to a *mystery* of logic instead of a *mystery* of our salvation. It is more a curiosity than a reality that affects our existence as the church. This is what Immanuel Kant understood when he affirmed: “From the doctrine of the Trinity nothing of importance definitively results in practice, even when the pretension is made of understanding it; even much less when someone is convinced that it exceeds absolutely all our concepts. It is not hard for the student to accept that in the divinity we worship three or ten persons. For him it is all the same, since he has no idea

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<sup>14</sup> 1 John 1.1-2 (NIV).

<sup>15</sup> 1 John 1.3 (NIV).

<sup>16</sup> John 1.14 (NIV).

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

<sup>18</sup> Galatians 4.6, Philipians 1.19, 1Peter 1.11.

about a God in several persons (*hipostasis*). Moreover, nothing of distinction is derived that absolutely affects his conduct”<sup>19</sup>.

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

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

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

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

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

The most urgent apostolic task today is precisely to show the *mystery* of unity. Jesus affirmed the unity of the church making it parallel to the unity of the Godhead: *My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*<sup>21</sup>

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

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

<sup>20</sup> Boff, p. 29.

<sup>21</sup> John 17.20-21.

of the unity. Thus unity that necessarily requires diversity, expresses the God of relationships that are One and Triune.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In a hyperindividualistic world, the church should be an expression of the communion of the Holy Spirit, through networks of vital relationships that enrich and sustain integrally and continually the life of its members. And this in such a way that all

might have the possibility of being healthy, of growing in every facet of their life, and of experiencing the richness of significant relationships of love and surrender.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>22</sup> Ephesians 6.19.

<sup>23</sup> Acts 4.7, 18-20.

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

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

Unlike Kant, who was unable to foresee the practical consequences of the *mystery* of the Trinity, of the God of relationships, Yves Congar and others have pointed out the dangers of a unitarian concept of God, in the formation of leadership. One can justify ideologically the concentration of power in a single person. Jürgen Moltmann mentions the example of Genghis Khan: "In heaven there is one God alone; in the earth, one lord alone, Genghis Khan, the son of God"<sup>25</sup>. The similarity can be repeated in ecclesiastical leadership.

I see at least four negative implications for leadership:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>24</sup> Acts 4.29-30.

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

assigning tasks to help us sustain our ministry, things get complicated. And maladies in leadership are produced.

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

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

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

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

Then there are "goat" leaders, those that bang against the ceiling that I represent and because they want to continue growing, they try again, but since I don't give them more space because I am the ceiling, they begin to butt the ceiling with their horns, and they start to create problems. Then they rebel and if they are leading a group, they wind up dividing the church, or leaving with a group of people and forming another congregation. Things get worse if the system in which he was formed is like we said before where the one who grows, prospers only if he can become the pastor, because those who are coming up want

that desperately, and since their only hope of realization is in the church, they feel they have to form their own congregation to see if they can grow and become number one.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And today there are pastoral ministries that God has blessed in many ways, who need to lift the ceiling. One day four stretcher bearers broke up the roof to enter a home and get a paralytic healed. Today we need healthy ministries to break up the ceiling from within the house, the church, to heal the paralysis of many pastoral ministries that have great

potential, but find no models, no stimulus. We need ministries to break up the roofs over the temples, and to look upon the city. To install good pastors for the congregational program, so that they can elaborate a strategy for the city and the nation.

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

Let's don't kill more leaders, let's don't repeat those fatal cycles of death for leaders. Let's reproduce ourselves in them. Don't let your leaf fall. The well planted tree gives fruit in its season. You know how to bear fruit in your season; that is to say, there was a time in your ministry that your fruit was of one kind, but now you must bear another kind of fruit. The trees that you are not allowing to grow are your own fruit. Supervise them, minister to them, inspire them, but give them space. Continue to produce through their branches, through your descendants. Those who come from your own fruit will honor you if you let them grow.

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

- iv. "Unitarian" leadership provokes a lack of reproduction and impoverishes the conduction.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Conclusion:

In writing to the Corinthians Saint Paul says: *Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards (oikonomos) of the mysteries of God*<sup>26</sup>. In an apostolic consultation like this, that visualizes the church of the future in light of the God of relationships, each one should

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<sup>26</sup> 1 Corinthians 4.1.

evaluate his apostolic task as a steward. Simply as a way of concluding I would like to present three parameters that help us to establish our priorities.

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

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

In some cities there has already been an experience of unity at the first level, that of the Spirit<sup>27</sup>. The second level of unity, unity of the faith, requires the perfecting of the saints and the building up of the body, for which it becomes indispensable to recognize and activate the different graces that God has poured out and which until now were grouped only under the figure of "pastor". As administrators, the apostles need to lead this process of recognition of each other, and the activation of each one in the united mission in the city, which will enable them to move into the third level of unity.

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

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

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

*iii. Apostolic stewards of the mystery of the gospel.*

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

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

We should rebel against the dichotomy between teaching ministries and ministries of power. The church of the future must be a church with boldness in the proclamation and

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

<sup>28</sup> Acts 5.12.

<sup>29</sup> John 3.2.

signs that back it up. For this the apostles must administer the *mysteries* of God, convoking in prayer and ministering the fullness of the Holy Spirit to the pastors, so that they in turn do the same with the believers, so that all become witnesses.

*iv. Apostolic stewards of the multi generational mystery.*

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

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

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

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

## Giovanni Traettino - Apostolic Ministry e unity

### Reading:

*“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” (Eph 4:1-6,11-16).**

### Premise

#### The Framework for our Meditation:

**The Unity of God:** *“I believe in one God, the Father almighty...” **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” (Eph 1:9-10).*

**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” (Eph 4:1-3)*

## 2. The Three Levels of Unity:

<sup>3</sup> *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” (Eph 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

<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” (Eph 4:4-6)*

## 4. The Function of the Ministries

*“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” (Eph 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 – Knowledge – The plan.
- **The proclamation** of God’s mystery – Preaching.
- **The realization** of God’s mystery – 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).

***The apostolic ministry is the ministry of unity par excellence.***

**This is because Unity has to do with:**

- a. ***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.

- a. ***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!
- a. ***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 Christōs*”; 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,

**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 (eis*

oikonomian tou pleròmatos tōn kairōn) – *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 Testament). **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 15 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:

- a. *government* (through guidance, oversight, discernment, connection), and
- b. *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:

- a. *elders* and
- b. *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 towards 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”.

- **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, Neocatechumenate, 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

# **Jorge Himitian - Nature of Apostolic Ministry**

## **INTRODUCTION**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **I. THE PRINCIPAL MINISTRIES OF THE CHURCH**

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

1 CORINTHIANS 12.28:

*“And in the church God has appointed first of all APOSTLES, second PROPHETS, third TEACHERS, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those*

*able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues”.*

**EPHESIANS 4.11-16:**

*“It was he who gave some to be APOSTLES, some to be PROPHETS, some to be EVANGELISTS, and some to be PASTORS and TEACHERS, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants ... Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”*

**This text clearly indicates to us the following four truths:**

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

**Some general considerations concerning the ministries:**

- Paul says in the previous verses, Eph 4:7-8, *“<sup>7</sup>But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. <sup>8</sup>This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.”*
- The one who grants these ministries is the Lord, according to his sovereign will. Through grace he chooses certain persons for specific functions; calls them and gives them gifts or charismas to fulfill a specific ministry. That gift is a grace (ability) that a person receives to carry out a specific responsibility in the body of Christ.
- The fullness of all gifts, grace and ministries are in Christ; and he alone gives to each one what he desires, and in the measure that he determines. No one becomes an

apostle, prophet, evangelist or pastor/teacher by his own decision. The calling and the charisma for a specific ministry come from God.

- The gifts or ministries can grow, develop and be expanded according to God's will. Philip was one of the seven deacons in Acts 6; years later he is recognized as an evangelist (Acts 21.8). Barnabas and Saul are mentioned among the prophets and teachers in Antioch (Acts 13.1); later they are called apostles (Acts 14.4, 14). However, we should keep in mind that even these changes occur under the sovereign hand of God. Each one of us should reject the worldly and carnal idea of seeking a "promotion". Our greatest ambition should be to find ourselves in the center of God's will. If his will is that I be a deacon or a pastor until the end of my days, I have great joy and peace with that.
- The Bible tells us that "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29). However, to exercise a ministry it is not enough to have gifts and a calling; it is necessary, according to Paul's instructions, to have a character that displays Christian virtues, a good testimony and a trajectory. No matter how many gifts a person may have, he can be disqualified for the ministry if he does not have the requisites concerning his quality of life.

### **The principal ministerial gifts given by Christ to the church:**

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

- APOSTLES
  - PROPHETS
  - EVANGELISTS
  - PASTOR-TEACHERS
- 
- APOSTLES
  - PROPHETS
  - EVANGELISTS
  - PASTORS
  - TEACHER

## APOSTLES

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

### 1. The twelve apostles

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

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

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

### 3. Apostolic ministry of a permanent nature.

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

- Evangelize. Apostle means "one who is sent". He is sent to the world. He is a man who is near to the heart of God and burns with God's very desire that the gospel might reach all the world and every person (Rom 1:1, 5, 14, 15; 15:18-24).
- Accompany the evangelism with signs and wonders (2 Cor 12:12; Rom 15:19).
- Establish churches (1 Cor 3:10-11). Evangelization in new areas generates the birth of new churches. This task requires teaching the new communities, training the saints, forming new workers, ordaining elders, etc. Paul indicates that since he was the instrument for raising up the church in Corinth, that fact was the seal of his apostleship among them (1 Cor 9:2).
- Supervise the churches with apostolic authority: intercede for them, teach wholesome doctrine, encourage, instruct, correct errors, discipline the impenitent, etc. This supervision and ministry is done through personal visits, letters, and by dispatching apostolic delegates. The purpose of this apostolic covering is to assure that the new churches have a wholesome faith, live in holiness, maintain the unity, serve others in love and evangelize the world.

- To be the principal authority in the ecclesiastical structure. In the lists of ministry gifts, apostles always appear in first place. In 1 Cor 12:28, in the Greek, it says textually: “FIRST, apostles; SECOND, prophets; THIRD, teachers; AFTERWARDS ...” This order is not casual but intentional; it reveals the order of the ministries. The apostles, under Christ’s authority, are the principal authority over the churches and the other ministries. This is God’s order for the church and it is what makes unity possible. The overall direction of the work is the responsibility of the apostles, under the direction of the Holy Spirit.
- They are to be men with light and revelation from the Lord. We have already shown that the apostles together with the prophets are channels of revelation (Eph. 3:5). This revelation refers to the “*kerygma*” (the complete revelation of the mystery of Christ and the church) and the “*didache*” (the totality of the commandments that reveal the will of God) that was already given by the first apostles and is registered objectively in the sacred scriptures. But today, as always, we need ministries of revelation in two senses:
  - 1) To help the saints to understand “what is already revealed”. Through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit God gives to some of his servants light on the ancient truths of the Word, truths that have always been there, were read, but often not understood, because of the overgrowth of erroneous traditions, through cultural and religious conditioning, or due to our natural human limitations. The proper use of this gift has always brought to the church revival and renewal, and its abuse brings heresies.
  - 2) Because of the need of a circumstantial and particular orientation. Just as Jesus Christ gave to John a specific message concerning each of the seven churches of Asia, today we face the same need. God is able to reveal to his servants a specific word for a specific church, nation, or individual.

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

## **PROPHETS**

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

- In our references to the apostles we already pointed out that the prophets are also channels of revelation. What we have said concerning the grace of the revelation is applicable also to the prophets. For both are mentioned in the N.T. as ministries that receive revelation. (Eph 2:20; 3:5).
- In the order of the ministry gifts, they occupy the second place, both in 1 Cor 12:28 and in Eph 4:11.
- It is evident that the apostle has structural and spiritual authority over the churches that are under his ministry, while the prophet would seem to have mostly spiritual authority.
- Just as with the apostles, their ministry is both local and translocal.

- Two different profiles of the prophet can be seen:
  - 1) Prophets with the characteristics of Agabus, who apparently moved more in “words of knowledge” concerning persons and circumstances. The Lord revealed to him that a famine was coming over the inhabited earth, so that the disciples of Antioch sent economic help to their brothers in Judea (Acts 11:27-30). On another occasion he revealed that Paul would be arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 21:10-11).
  - 2) Prophets with the characteristics of Barnabas, Silas and Judas. Concerning these last two Acts 15:32 tells us: “*Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers*”. I believe that this profile differs somewhat from that of Agabus. Evidently, these developed more the ministry of edification, consolation and confirmation in the churches. Something similar is said of Barnabas in describing his ministry when he arrived in Antioch (Acts 11:23-24). Silas accompanied Paul following his separation from Barnabas, and was for a good time a member of his apostolic team.

## **EVANGELIST**

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

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

## **PASTOR-TEACHER / PASTOR or TEACHER**

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

Pastor - sheep (alegorical terms)

Teacher - disciple (literal terms)

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

# **II. THREE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF APOSTOLIC MINISTRY**

## 1) PRINCIPLE OF PLURALITY

- Jesus established twelve apostles.
- The minimum number required for plurality is two. Jesus sent out the twelve in pairs (Mark 6.7). The same with the seventy (Luke 10:1).
- Jesus said: “*If two or you are in agreement...*” (Mt 18:19). “*Wherever two or three...*” (Mt 18:19).
- In Acts we find the pairs of Peter and John / Barnabas and Saul / Paul and Silas, / etc.
- The apostles always established “*presbyters*” (plural) to lead a church. In Phillipi we read of “*bishops and deacons*” (Phil 1:1).

- Paul always functioned with an apostolic team.
- In Jerusalem the apostles and elders gathered (the first council of the church) to deal with the subject of circumcision (Acts 15). In later centuries many issues were decided by councils.

## 2) PRINCIPLE OF UNITY

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

## 3) PRINCIPLE OF AUTHORITY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### III. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE APOSTOLIC GIFT

#### THE APOSTOLIC GIFT INCLUDES:

1. The charisma of **revelation** ( Eph 3.3-5)
  - Revelation concerning the mystery of the kingdom of God
  - Revelation concerning the mystery of Christ
  - Revelation concerning the mystery of the body of Christ: the church
  - Clarity concerning the doctrine of Christ and of the apostles (*Didache*).
2. The charisma of **evangelization**. The apostle is a 'sent one'. Sent where? To the world. When he arrives in a new place, he job is to evangelize (Rom 1.1 y 5).
3. The charismas or the **gifts of the Spirit**. (Rom 15.18-19; 2Cor 12.12)
4. The charisma of **communication**. The apostle is a 'preacher' and teacher (1Tim 2.7; 2Tim 1.11) .
5. The charisma of **execution**: This is one of the aspects that differentiates the apostolic and prophetic gifts. The apostle has the gift of executing the vision. He has the gift to lay a foundation, plant churches, form lives, form workers, establish elders and edify the church (1Cor 3.10; 9.1-2).
6. The charisma of **government and paternity**: Wisdom, grace and authority to edify, to oversee and supervise, instruct, guide, correct, discipline, cover with full responsibility, patience and perseverance. The content of the epistles clearly indicate this function.

#### REQUISITES FOR FUNCTIONING IN AN APOSTOLIC MINISTRY

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

#### BURDEN AND PASSION OF AN APOSTLE

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

2. Have a burden and passion to make known to all the mystery that has been revealed. That all might know God, His plan and eternal purpose, the unsearchable riches of Christ ... (Eph 3.8-11).
3. Be zealous for the church to be edified with holy doctrine and according to the revelation of the Word. (Gal 1.6-9; 1Tim 1.3-4; 2Tim 2.2; 4.1-5)
4. Have a burden and passion for the unity of the church. He sees division as horrible, as a grotesque caricature of the new creation. (1Cor 1.12-13; Eph 2.14-16). For an apostle the unity of the church is not an optional accessory of the church; it has to do with its very essence and nature.
5. Have a burden and passion for the quality and holiness of the church. He is zealous that the church be built with gold, silver and precious stones. He preaches, exhorts, and teaches so as to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus (Col 1.28)
6. Have a burden and passion that all the church might reach its fullness in Christ. (Eph 3.19-20; 4.13)

#### **SPIRITUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF AN APOSTLE**

1. He is a man of faith. Even though God's objectives are elevated and humanly impossible to reach, he never says it can't be done. His language is always one of faith: Phil 1.6; 4.13; Eph 3.20; 4.13; 5.27.
2. He is diligent and sacrificial. The cost and suffering does not matter to him in order to reach his objectives (2Cor 11.23-28).
3. He is a spiritual man, not carnal. He is not jealous, greedy, with personal ambitions (1Cor 2.16 – 3.3). He does not seek his own, he knows very well that the churches he plants and cares for do not belong to him, but to Christ (2Cor 11.2).
4. He is passionate for Christ. (Phil 3.7-14). Christ is his life, his passion, his love, his goal. Christ is all he wants to gain; he is thirsty to know him and be like him.

#### **IV. THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER OF APOSTOLIC MINISTRY**

*<sup>1</sup>For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— <sup>2</sup>Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup>that is, 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 men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.*

Ephesians 3:1–5, NIV

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

(Ephesians 3:4), “*the mystery of his will*” (1:9), and “*the mystery of Christ and his church*” (5:32).

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

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

Ephesians 2:14–22, NIV

*<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 men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. <sup>6</sup>This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.*

Ephesians 3:4–6, NIV

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **The present danger of apostolic ministries**

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

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

But the concern that I want to underline is the fact that many strong and energetic ministries

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Orville Swindoll - The Nature Of Apostolic Ministry

I have been privileged to consider Jorge Himitian a close friend and admired colleague for over forty five years. We met when I was 35 and a father of four, while he was single, living with his paternal family in the city of Buenos Aires. I have seen all five of his kids come into the world and grow into adulthood. They are all wonderful kids and deeply committed to the Lord. We have ministered together all these years in many cities and in a large variety of countries. I believe I can say that I know him quite well. We have been in the home of each other on numerous occasions, and we have shared together significant triumphs and difficult trials. We have not always been in total agreement, but our love and appreciation for each other have overcome all the differences and bound us together for time and eternity.

My deep appreciation for Jorge is because I know him to be a man of absolute integrity, a man who is fair and gracious with all, but especially a man of deep devotion to the Lord. I say this because I think these characteristics are among the most important aspects of a Christian minister, and especially of all those involved in apostolic ministry. Jorge has keen spiritual perception, excellent judgment and a passion for the things of God. He chose many years ago to bear the cross of Christ and I am a witness that he knows how to handle losses and pain, injustice and mistreatment while continuing to trust his fate in the hands of an all-wise and all-loving God. The more time that passes, the more I appreciate friends and colleagues like Jorge. There seems to be little to add to Jorge's excellent presentation on the nature of apostolic ministry, and nothing that I would take away. But perhaps I can add a little background for the whole matter and contribute something of an anecdotal nature.

Our mutual concern for apostolic ministry goes back nearly four decades, when in Buenos Aires we began to think and to talk about it with some reservation and trepidation. It was in one of our annual pastors' conferences in Argentina in 1982 that it fell my lot to open the subject of apostolic ministry and to lay out some basic guidelines to promote dialog among the pastors. After a brief review of a number of topics that we had studied together over several years of close relationships, I posed some questions for consideration concerning the need for a larger scope of ministry beyond that which is strictly evangelistic or pastoral. In order to provide further historical background, perhaps I should mention that we had become comfortable with some significant adjustments in our thinking on the following subjects:

- The need for active Christian discipleship and the formation of those who choose to follow Christ.
- Strong relationships between believers that go beyond occasional or regular meetings.
- The essential unity of the church, as the Lord's purpose for his people, wherever they are.
- A plurality of pastors in each congregation.
- Home groups that function both for outreach and for deeper relationships among believers.
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In addition, we found ourselves pretty much "on the same page" in our understanding of a number of theological issues, such as:

- The lordship of Jesus Christ
- The gospel of the kingdom of God
- The objective of evangelism and redemption: that we become like Christ
- The meaning and importance of repentance, confession, baptism
- The responsibility of all believers to evangelize and make Christian disciples
- The formation and restoration of Christian families

Yet we were aware of situations that required that we move further ahead, and that eventually

led us to embrace a level of ministry and spiritual oversight that exceeded what we had known to date. Here are some of the considerations that we laid out on that occasion (I remind you that this was in 1982):

1. There are situations in ministry that go beyond the normal or traditional bonds of pastoral relationships. How should we face a situation today similar to that which emerged in Antioch with the conversion of a large number of Gentiles? Should Jerusalem simply name a pastor for Antioch?
2. There are congregations that develop well with a good pastoral ministry. But to develop an integral and broad vision, to encourage sustained growth and coherence, they need a ministry that would open the congregation to a larger vision and realization that is beyond the scope of a local congregation or simple pastoral ministry.
3. A classical evangelistic approach often lacks effective coordination with an integral vision of the church. Since evangelistic ministry leads to an extension of the kingdom of God, there is a need for a larger focus to provide orientation beyond simple congregational growth.
4. When ministries emerge with gifts and graces, together with experience and maturity, for the formation of new leaders, the establishing of new points of outreach, and the orientation of communities facing difficulties, can we continue to limit our approach simply to pastoral ministry? Would it not be better to recognize those gifts and abilities and encourage those persons to dedicate themselves to tasks that contribute more significantly to extension?
5. Several questions arise concerning problems in the congregations:
  - When a difficulty arises in a congregation that exceeds the capacity or the authority of the local leaders, to whom should the brothers appeal for help?
  - What can be done to save a congregation from disgrace or division when the local leadership abandons their responsibility, or incurs in behavior that discredits them?
  - When several pastors in a city or a community are unable to reach agreement and there is threat of division, would it not help to involve a ministry beyond merely pastoral oversight to resolve the situation? Isn't it better to recognize those ministries before a crisis occurs?
  - There are situations bogged down in confusion, indisposition, traditionalism and stubbornness that grow and afflict an entire Christian community and that can hardly be resolved apart from wise oversight and a larger mandate with clarity concerning goals and methods of implementation. Clearly, a ministry of broader scope is needed.
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6. As the testimony of spiritual renewal and refreshing extends to different parts of the country, sometimes we have seen that several pastors in a given area desire to experience spiritual renewal in their congregations. Would it not be well to promote greater companionship among them if a ministry of translocal characteristics could give them orientation conjointly?
7. In practice, many Christian groups have seen the need for a ministry that exceeds a strictly pastoral function, but then proceed to give that function a different name: bishop, superintendent, district missionary, etc. One of the problems of such a practice is that, because these titles often lack biblical authority, or because they combine responsibilities that are not biblically related, we lack Scriptural precedence to define functions and correct abuses. In addition, this practice allows for the creation of titles that perpetuate themselves and are sometimes occupied by persons who do not have

the grace necessary or a vital relationship with the churches and the pastors, and they wind up with an institutional function (product of an organization rather than organism).

8. When the need arises to recognize new pastors that have emerged in a congregation, what are the proper ministries that are authorized to grant them public recognition?

## CURRENT NEED OF THE CHURCH

One of the difficulties we face when we consider the biblical framework of apostolic ministry in relation to the social context is the great difference that exists between our context and that of the first Christian century. Western society in general is characterized by a pseudo-Christian posture, not completely pagan as in those times. In the midst of this social framework, there are Christian churches and congregations - both evangelical and Catholic that, broadly speaking, represent a type of social island, where the language and the ideology are in marked contrast with the surrounding society, and upon which they make little impact. Many of these people consider themselves traditional Christians, either because they were baptized as babies or because they attend mass or worship service from time to time. In that sense, our societies are not like the general picture faced by the early Christians. For example, consider some of the characteristics that were common:

- Slavery was the style of life of a very large percentage of human beings.
- Pagan temples with degrading and immoral practices were attended by large numbers of people.
- Entire nations lived under the yoke of other empires, to which they paid tribute. The only religion based on a divine revelation—that of the Hebrews— was largely neutralized and limited to persons of that race.
- Few people could read or write.
- There were few grand and noble ideas or philosophies to inspire the masses.
- The social classes were relatively fixed with very little mobility between the classes.

Obviously, apostolic ministry in a context with those characteristics operated in a different way than the style that would characterize it in our social context. If the principal purpose of apostolic ministry is to establish the church in the social context, penetrate the society with the message of Christ, present to men a viable alternative through a community that practices the teachings of Christ, then it is vital to interpret the focus of such ministry in practical and

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understandable terms for those who live in the social context. The apostolic task cannot be isolated from the worldly context. I think that part of the problem with unfruitful evangelistic methods that fail to adapt to our context is the lack of an integral apostolic vision. The evangelistic task must be incorporated and integrated with the apostolic vision. Biblically, the first function—both in priority and in chronology—is the apostolic function. Christ, as apostle, evangelized, healed, taught and made disciples. Of these he chose some to groom as his apostles. Then they, as apostles, introduced the word of Christ and the kingdom of God into their context—first among the Jews and later among the Gentiles—and then taught the disciples and formed Christian communities. The work was done with grace and anointing. With liberty and authority they laid the foundation of the church, determined the general guidelines for the communities and faced the varying situations that were presented. It was an enormous task. Without this action, the disciples could hardly have confronted their society with boldness and maintained coherence in their ranks. But without an apostolic ministry that translates the project into action, correcting errors, laying foundations and forming communities, we can hardly accomplish a significant penetration of the social context. And all this must be done with a singular purpose, clarity and with an effective methodology.

Another element of great importance is the unity and universality of the apostolic vision.

This vision unifies his work and unites the Christian communities. Without an apostolic vision, the churches tend to distance themselves from each other and dedicate their energies according to the particular grace and concern of their leaders. The broad and singular vision of the apostle assures that the different congregations are maintained in close relationship and helps them to consider their particular work as complementary to each other rather than give way to a competitive attitude.

#### **OUR EXPERIENCE IN ARGENTINA**

How did we make the necessary adjustments? We encouraged conversation and provided basic orientation, especially among the pastors more closely associated with us. In time, the concepts began to mature and we began to discern more clearly which of the ministers were having positive results in their outreach to others, and especially to other communities. Certain leaders among us have been largely recognized by most from the early days of our relationships, and over the years that recognition has become almost universal. From the first we avoided the use of the title apostle with reference to individuals, realizing that time was needed to overcome long-standing traditions. We preferred to use the more general term apostolic ministry in a generic sense and usually with reference to more than one individual. Today I think it is proper to say that there is little reticence in regard to the use of the term apostle, but we avoid the excessive use of it in any case. Sometimes we simply use a term like “the leading brothers”, or something similar.

## E.D. Bretscher - Responder

On reading Carlos Mraida's paper "What future for the Church – a God of relationships", I was particularly blessed by his whole exposition of the tri-unity of God. Three persons, one nature. This "threesomeness" speaks of the diversity which is essential to the establishing of relationships. The three persons are ONE because they engage with one another, live with one another and exist for one another. I would like to take as my starting point the following statement: "The persons of the Godhead subsist in relationship, which means that they do not HAVE a relationship but ARE relationship, because God is love. Love is His very essence. Hence a series of statements which explain the mystery of God's unity, how three distinct and different persons comprise one single God.

In Genesis we read that God created man in His own image. But: *The Lord God said, "It is not good for man to be alone"*<sup>1</sup> God does not make man a solitary being but places at his side another person who is not exactly the same. The mystery of unity in diversity already appears at the creation! By establishing the institution of marriage, God is already pointing man towards the objective of unity, establishing that *"the two shall become one flesh"*<sup>30</sup>. It is significant that, quoting this, in his Letter to the Ephesians Paul emphasises the importance of the unity between Christ and the Church, calling this a *great mystery*<sup>1</sup>. Writing to the Corinthians, he explains that *he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him*<sup>1</sup>. This mystery is further clarified when we discover Jesus' expectations expressed in His prayer for us, when He describes the process of this mystery: *that all of them may be one; as you, Father, just as you are in me and I in you. May they also be in us so that the world might 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 and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am.*<sup>31</sup>

What can bring us to complete unity is "the glory of God", the very essence of the nature of God. Because God is relationship, our fellowship with Him cannot but produce relationship, a relationship of his same essence and nature.

I find absolutely amazing the sequence in this prayer: *as you are in me and I in you, they also in us... I in them and you in me...brought to complete unity... and that the world might believe.* This "being in one another" speaks to me of the depth of the concept of relationship lived out and intended by God, of the capacity to "put yourself in someone else's shoes", to identify oneself with others. In his prayer for us, Jesus does not ask for power nor success. Neither does he ask for victories, nor protection from persecution, but only that we be preserved for the evil one and completely united! This is anything but a superficial unity: *that they be one, just like us*<sup>2</sup>. A high-profile unity, solid and eternal, permeated with the Father's very essence and glory. This is a request that still seems to us to be unattainable, almost utopian, when we look at the history and the condition of the Church. But Jesus knew He had transferred to his disciples the glory, the nature, the heart and the essence of the Trinity itself. And if Jesus considers it possible, it must be so!

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<sup>30</sup> Gen 2:18, 2.24; Eph 5: 31-32; 1Cor 6:17.

<sup>31</sup> John 17:22-23.

We all know the pious justification given by many: *but we are already one... in spirit! The invisible Church is already ONE*. But, until recently, only a few made any effort to work towards this prayer increasingly becoming the Church's primary purpose. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus teaches us the ethics of relationships. At the end of his discourse he concentrates on the possible problems, conflicts and abuses in relationships. We all know his teaching on this matter. And he concludes: *"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good... Be perfect therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect"*<sup>32</sup>. The key is to be found in the statement: *"I in them and you in me"*. Paul describes this process in a masterful way: *Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ*<sup>33</sup>. And he adds that the various ministries are given to build the *unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness*<sup>34</sup> of Christ<sup>35</sup>.

Another interesting statement in "A God of Relationships" is that in the outworking of love there are three elements: the one who loves, the beloved and the love uniting them. The fact that God, even before the creation of the world, should have chosen to adopt us as His sons<sup>36</sup> speaks to us of His nature being relational and familial. This explains why Jesus teaches us to call him Father, Dad, and introduces himself as the "Son of God" and why later on he calls us his brothers!<sup>37</sup> Brothers grow up within a family and their reference point are their parents who are concerned to bring them up with their same values. Good parents produce good children, and their relationships will be a real blessing. And we have the best parents in the universe!

We are all deeply aware of the devastating effects of sin in human society compared to this glorious divine project. We also understand the reason why Satan concentrates all his efforts on preventing God from reproducing His essence in human beings. They would become like Him! And it would mean Satan's final defeat. That is why he has always attacked everything in this world that expresses any kind of unity. Hence all the wars, the ethnic and racial hatred, family quarrels and attacks on peaceful co-existence. The Church itself has been and continues to be under attack from the forces of division present in our day, finding it hard to change the "worldly" mindset of its members.

As was already proposed during the AFI Consultation in Chile, I believe it is urgent to put together a detailed, practical apostolic agenda, aimed at radically "transforming" the mentality of the Church in our days. The priority must be to make each man and woman a disciple of Jesus. Someone who is to be baptised must understand he becomes not just a believer, but a disciple of Jesus! Perhaps we should even change the terminology we use in speaking of members of our churches, no longer calling them "believers", "members" or "the faithful" but... "disciples" – in order to give everyone a sense of God's project and path for their lives: *Christ in you, the hope of glory...every man completely mature in Christ*<sup>4</sup>. The objective of

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<sup>32</sup> Matt 5:44-48.

<sup>33</sup> Col 1:27,28.

<sup>34</sup> Note **perfect, completely**: Gr. Pleroo; pleroma = complete, filled, full, close to a full measure.

<sup>35</sup> Eph 4:13.

<sup>36</sup> Eph 1:5.

<sup>37</sup> Rm 8:29.

our evangelism must be to bring people to Christ and make them disciples who can bring others to Christ<sup>38</sup>, because only disciples can express the essence of Christ in their lifestyle and have His heart for “others” – whoever they may be.

Another consideration. We are all capable of loving, but human love is limited to our families (and today often not even that!) and the deserving. It tends to be a somewhat static love. God’s love, on the other hand, is a dynamic love, which flows, is ever fresh, matures, is lasting, giving of itself and pouring itself out. In the measure in which we faithfully maintain our fellowship with His Spirit, this same love will flow in us. *And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us*<sup>39</sup>. Without God’s love flowing through us, like the electric current in electrically powered machines, it is not possible to have solid, lasting and deep relationships. Relationships, even between good Christians, tend to continue mediocre and vulnerable. Over and above the superficial slogans exalting the new birth or the baptism in the Holy Spirit, there must be a visible, real and miraculous transformation within that does not fizzle out in a few days, but thanks to the revelation of God’s relational nature produces a discipleship process bringing each person increasingly to reflect that same nature – a process that takes effort and commitment.

The strongest, most credible and evident sign of the Holy Spirit’s presence in us can only be the demonstration of love, of His love – love for God and for the people He loves. The visible sign of the coming of the Kingdom of God is the ability of ordinary human beings to love everybody as Jesus did, whoever they are, saints or sinners, to see each individual with God’s eyes; a readiness to put them first, before our priorities, our rules, our traditions, our programmes, our natural inclinations, interests and commitments. This is the fruit of our salvation! And this does not come from us, but is the gift of God!<sup>40</sup> By grace we are saved from the domination of our **ego**, our flesh, the law, prejudices, rules, etc., to be able to love our fellow men.

For decades we have measured the presence and action of the Holy Spirit mainly by the degree to which His gifts are evident. Although we have also emphasised that the gifts are “works of grace” proceeding from love (1Cor. 14 follows 1Cor. 13), we have continued to measure the fulness of the Holy Spirit by the evidence of the gifts rather than the quality of our relationships. But *anyone who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen*<sup>41</sup>. Therefore, before seeking for the gifts, we must cultivate our fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

The grace evident in the church in Jerusalem is an important warning: *All the believers were of one heart and mind. No-one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was with them all*<sup>42</sup>. Intimacy with God and intimacy with the brethren led them to be able to minister with great power in the same “spirit of Christ”.

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<sup>38</sup> Rick Warren

<sup>39</sup> Rm 5:5.

<sup>40</sup> Eph 2:8.

<sup>41</sup> 1Jn 4:20.

<sup>42</sup> Acts 4:32.

Our mission is without doubt, as stated in our “mission”: “In the Spirit of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, to reconcile the lost, to reconcile Christians, to reconcile the world”<sup>43</sup>.

In the first place we need the heart, the essence of the Spirit of Christ, and then the power of the Spirit in order to reconcile the lost to God, Christians among themselves and the world with the Church. When we speak of reconciliation we must mean quality relationships marked by integrity, loyalty, courtesy, respect, honour and faithfulness. This is a big challenge because it calls on not just our own ability, but that of God in us. It is essential to make fellowship with Him the priority in our agenda, our time and our commitments. Intimacy with Him is the most precious thing we have or can share, because only when we are filled with Him can we feel and teach what He has given us in the Scriptures JUST AS he feels it and communicate His heart. Intimacy with Him allows us to teach others how to live intimately with Him. From Him, from this God of relationships, unity and love, our identity and our ministry will continue to become ever clearer: *I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind*<sup>44</sup>. We need to be sure of who we are and where God is taking us. A clear vision is a basic condition for raising up and motivating new leaders<sup>45</sup> in line with God’s heart and His very essence. The time is ripe for establishing right priorities. *He who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in Spirit.*

“Leadership” – and I would add “Apostleship” – “is the ability to put others to work to reach a common objective”<sup>46</sup>. Our responsibility is therefore highly demanding. If we are fathers, we have the privilege and, yes, also the responsibility, to equip our Isaacs and prepare our Jacobs better, so that they can lead the church and better express the essence and nature of Christ himself. Today we live in a confused and disintegrating world, or as Carlos has put it, a world full of orphans. The Church must be able to plant the Gospel in the experience of people here and now, before our generation slips into an eternity without God! “He who is unable to plant the Gospel in each individual’s experience, is putting at risk the very future of Christianity”<sup>47</sup>.

We need to move on to the operational phase. “Step-by-step planning is the necessary path to move from vision to reality”<sup>16</sup>. We must work at perfecting our relationships, learning how to work together, heart to heart. We need to invest time in developing quality relationships which can be a demonstration of how to build a relational church.

“Leaders – apostles – not only know what to do, but do it! To be successful one must define the goal, stay focused on that goal, assemble resources, get equipped in order to reach that goal, associate with solution-oriented rather than problem-oriented people, not allow obstacles to stop us or make us change direction, and embrace mistakes as opportunities to learn precious lessons to add to our pool of wisdom”<sup>17</sup>.

I believe that AFI is the right workshop for realising what I have just said. Only if we ourselves – despite the objective limits of geographical distance and different languages,

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<sup>43</sup> Mission Statement of the Evangelical Church of Reconciliation.

<sup>44</sup> 1Sam 2:35.

<sup>45</sup> Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership*.

<sup>46</sup> Rick Joyner, *Leadership*.

<sup>47</sup> Kirkegaard.

traditions and cultures – learn to live out our relationships “in the Spirit of Christ”, expressing the very character of God, can we influence and instruct the various ministries in our cities and nations so that they too can experience what we are experiencing, and teach it to their children. Fathers who become a reference point for their children and their children’s children. Fathers who make their contribution so that the Father’s Kingdom may come and His will be done here on earth as in heaven. Fathers who reflect, as Jesus did, the glory of the Father in a society in which orphans are multiplying at an alarming rate – orphans, slaves, the desperate. These are all creatures whom the Father loves and desperately wants to reach and bring back to Himself. We need “a partnership between God who creates and men who work”<sup>48</sup>. We need to become, here on earth, a visible, reproducible reflection of the Triune God, perfect in unity, in which Christ can be seen in us and each in the other!

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<sup>48</sup> Miroslav Volf (Contemporary theologian, Yale University).

## **Cristián Romo Jiménez**

All texts that speak of structural order and ministry of the Church have a strong emphasis on unity in their contents. This is because the design of the Church comes from eternity. It was made by the Trinity. In the new covenant there is no room for independent individuals, since the Church was designed by God, as part of his eternal plan of having one family into His likeness. If this is so, it is because God in his divinity is an example of unity and full functionality without having difficulties in equality.

In God's eternal plan, a clear model of this is the change of role existing between the Son and the Holy Spirit. We see Jesus submitting himself to the Father and the Holy Spirit. When Jesus is made Lord, the Holy Spirit submits to the Father and the Son. This is a wonderful example.

### **Levels and process of unity**

It is very difficult to advance in the levels of unity, if the guiding levels within the Church are not operating. Just as it is very hard to construct a building without the consent of an architect, the structural engineer, the builder or the specialists needed in such a construction.

It is utopian to think that God's plan will become a reality apart from what He prepared before the foundation of the world.

### **The Apostle and Unity**

If there is something transcendent in the apostolic ministry is the understanding of what the Church is. This has to be revealed by the Lord. For the Apostle bears the divine burden of design Jesus proclaimed for the Church, its edification and unity.

The Apostolic Ministry has received the revelation given by the Lord concerning the mystery of Christ and His body, the Church, as well as the responsibility of safeguarding the principles of the Kingdom of God.

If we remember that the Church is the only instrument of authority on earth, then we understand that when Jesus gave his disciples the task of discipling the nations, it has to be done on the basis that the Holy Spirit would teach them to do this, reflecting His divine essence here on earth.

In the words of Jesus when praying to the Father we see the dramatic request: "that all of them may be one, Father." John 17:21.

He also shows the result of this situation "...so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

All this reveals his love and the unparalleled unity of the Trinity in the pursuit of our redemption.

Therefore, one of the functions of the Apostles is to lead the Church to its divine origin, to the life of unity and thus encourage other ministries to do the same.

### **The responsibility for building unity**

Unity can only be built on the basis of ethics and mutual respect, becoming a reality through the recognition of the gift that God has given each one of us.

### **The building process**

In the process of building we need to understand that the apostolic ministry has the characteristics of service and authority (Diakonia and Episcopate). In these functions, it is plurality aligned with authority without which it would be difficult to build up the Church. Service and authority cannot be missing. Because responsibility without authority is a utopia and service without love sounds like something empty or hollow.

So the *koinonia* of the Apostles was and is essential if we are to achieve the desired end point of being the family that the Father longs to have. The apostle does not have an individualistic function but rather a function of body or team.

### **Thanks for the Kairos of God**

The wonder of the movement and outpouring of the Holy Spirit is that the Lord did not ask our permission to act. In His sovereign will, He did it and will continue doing it because it is written in his agenda. Acts 2:16-18

16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

17 ““In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams

18 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

So we rejoice because today the Holy Spirit is restoring what was distorted throughout history and, I think, we will continue to be surprised. What seems difficult is a matter of God's sovereignty. The divergent paths are experiencing a change in the geometry of God, because now we see how we are moving towards convergence.

Ephesians 2: 13-22

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. 17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and

prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.