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NATURE AND QUALITY OF THE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION:

The overarching theme we at IAF have adopted since 2004 is “THE CHURCH TOWARD ITS FULLNESS.” To this title, we have added three key words to specify the fullness the church must and should achieve: “QUALITY, UNITY, and QUANTITY.” Last year, at our meeting in Argentina, under this overarching theme, we addressed the concepts of FULLNESS, UNITY, and DEVELOPMENT—that is, how to move toward church unity. This year, we will continue to explore other aspects of this overarching theme.

It is my turn to speak about the first of the three words: “QUALITY”; that is, “The Nature and Quality of the Church.” The church must grow in Christ until it reaches the fullness of its quality, as God foretells in His Word.

Before getting into the topic, out of love for those who weren't there last year, and also to refresh the memory of those of us who were, I would like to quickly review some concepts that we expressed in our previous meeting.

Over the past 40 years, the Holy Spirit has brought about a powerful movement of spiritual renewal in the church worldwide, a movement of which we are all a part. For many of us, the word 'restoration' was key, helping us see that the church needed to recover important truths, ministries, and gifts that had been neglected over the centuries. However, the concept of 'restoration' has also, without our realizing it, conditioned or limited our vision of the fullness of the church that God intends to build here on earth before the end of time.

Jesus didn't say, "I will restore my church," but rather, **"I will build my church"** (Matthew 16:18). If by "restoration" we mean the recovery of biblical principles that we as a church had lost or ignored in past centuries, that's quite correct. But if, when we speak of the restoration of the church, we intend to return to being like the churches of the first century, that's not entirely accurate. Let's remember that many of the churches in New Testament times were quite problematic. The Corinthians were worldly. The Galatians were turning back to the Law. In Ephesus, there was a threat of division. Of the seven churches in Asia, few serve as good examples for us. Even the church in Jerusalem didn't want to leave Jerusalem and preached only to the Jews.

Studying Paul's early epistles, one gets the impression that at the beginning of his ministry he believed the church would be fully built up in his generation and that Christ would soon return. But studying later epistles, such as Ephesians, makes it clear that Paul foresaw the church reaching its historical fullness in future centuries, before Christ's return.

"...So that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus..." (2:8).

"...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..." (4:13).

"...In order to present himself to himself as a glorious church, without stain or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish." (5:27).

I. OUR TWO ABSOLUTE REFERENCES FOR BUILDING THE CHURCH

1. God's Eternal Project (Our first reference is in the past remote)

Our ultimate reference point for building up the church is not the church of past centuries, nor even the first-century church. Our primary reference is the church before all ages, the church God intended to have before the foundation of the world. God revealed this plan in its entirety to the apostles and prophets of the first century, and Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians is its most complete exposition (Eph. 3:1-11).

This entire eternal project of God can be summed up in one word: CHURCH.

The church was not born in the mind of God 2,000 years ago when he sent his Son into the world. The church was in God's mind and heart from eternal ages, from ***"before the foundation of the world"***.

The church was not God's 'Plan B' after the fall of man. The church is God's 'Plan A' from before there were men or demons. The fall was a deviation, an attack against God's eternal plan. Redemption was simply returning things to the original plan.

The church is the family that God intended to have according to his good pleasure and the pure affection of his will, from before the foundation of the world.

The father of Jesus Christ intended to be the father of a large family
(unity).
OF BILLIONS OF CHILDREN (QUANTITY)
SHAPED IN THE IMAGE OF YOUR SON (QUALITY).
(Ephesians 1:4-5 / Romans 8:29)

In reality, God has only one eternal plan. The creation of man and woman, the institution of marriage, procreation, the incarnation of the Word, the redemptive sacrifice of the Son, his resurrection and exaltation, the coming of the Holy Spirit—all are in the same vein, pointing to the same end: the fulfillment of God's eternal plan.

2. The work completed at the end of time (Our second reference is in the distant future)

In Revelation 21:9ff., the angel says to John, **“Come here, and I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”** Then he led him up to a great, high mountain and showed him the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. This extraordinary city described below is not heaven, but the church. (This is confirmed by verse 2 of the same chapter.) It is the completed project, the church built in its entirety. The bride, the wife of the Lamb. Jesus Christ has succeeded in presenting to himself a glorious and holy church, without spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Hallelujah!

The three characteristics of this church-city:

QUALITY: **“Having the glory of God, and its radiance was like that of a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal”** (v.11). **“...The city was of pure gold, like clear glass...”** (v.18).

The entire description speaks of holiness, purity, light, transparency, and glory.

UNITY: It is one city, surrounded by a great wall 65 meters high. Jesus Christ has one bride, one church.

SIZE: This city is gigantic, larger than any other city in the world, and is three-dimensional. It measures 2,160 km long, 2,160 km wide, and 2,160 km high (v.16). (Mount Everest is less than 9 km high.) It will be made up of billions of people.

We already know how the story ends. The one who said, **“I will build my church,”** sits on the throne of the universe and has all the power to do it. **“The will of the Lord will prosper in his hand; he will see the fruit of his suffering and be satisfied”** (Isaiah 53:10-11).

Where and when is the church built?

It is here in the world and before the coming of Christ. Afterward, there will be no more evangelism, no more conversions, no more numerical growth of the church. Afterward, there will be no more discipleship, no more pastors or teachers to build up the church.

- According to 1 Corinthians 3, the building of the church with gold, silver, and precious stones is done here.

Jesus, through the washing of water which is the word, prepares the church here, in order to present her to himself as glorious and holy (Eph. 5:26-27).

II. NATURE AND IDENTITY OF THE CHURCH

What is the church?

- It is not a material building, it is men and women redeemed by the Lord.
 - It is not a legal institution, it is a family, the family of God.
 - It's not just the clergy, it's all of God's people.
- It's not a congregation, although the church meets regularly. When we disperse during the week, we are still the church; we are the church 24 hours a day, every day of the week. We don't go to church; we are the church.

The church takes its identity from the identity of God, from the character of God.

- Why should the church be holy? **(Quality)**. > Because GOD IS HOLY.
- Why should the church be One? **(Unity)**. > Because GOD IS ONE.
- Why does God want many? **(Quantity)** > Because GOD IS LOVE. He created every human being out of love. All were created by God and for God (Colossians 1:16). He included everyone in his eternal plan. All people have been created to be adopted as children of God through Jesus Christ. God wants everyone to be saved and become part of his eternal family (1 Timothy 2:4). Hell was not created for humankind, but for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). Although not everyone will be saved, since God does not impose his will on anyone.

The church is the expression of God's character: Holiness, Oneness, and Love.

III. THE REASON FOR BEING AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

What is the purpose of the church in the world?

"...to the praise of the glory of his grace" (Eph. 1:6). ***"...so that we may be to the praise of his glory"*** (Eph. 1:12)
"...To show in the coming ages the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus..." (Ephesians 2:8).

The church exists to manifest the glory of God to the world_____

What is glory?

In the Bible, the word 'glory' generally relates to manifestation, revelation, and visibility. That is why Psalm 19 says: ***"The heavens declare the glory of God"*** (19:1). ***'Glory' is the visible manifestation of God's invisible attributes. "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made"*** (Rom. 1:20). Creation, in a most eloquent way, reveals to all humanity the existence, greatness, and power of God.

But the full manifestation of God in the world was Jesus Christ. The invisible God became visible in the incarnation of the Son. **"He is the image of the invisible God"** (Colossians 1:16). John says, **"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth"** (John 1:14). And Hebrews 1:3 affirms that Christ is the radiance of the Father's glory and the exact representation of his being.

But today Jesus Christ is not physically and visibly present on earth, but he is present through his body which is the church.

Through the Holy Spirit, Christ is present in his church today.

Jesus said to the Father, **"The glory that you gave me I have given to them so that they may be one, just as we are one"** (John 17:22).

Paul declares: **"In him all the fullness of the Deity dwells bodily, and in him you have been brought to fullness"** (Col. 2:9-10). All the attributes and virtues of the Father are in him.

And Christ, indwelt by the fullness of the Father, is in us. **"Christ in you is the hope of glory"** (Col. 1:27).

Paul bursts into praise because the Father **"has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places"** (Eph. 1:3). He doesn't pray for more blessing but for more revelation so that we may fully know **"the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints"** and **"the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe"** (Eph. 1:18-19).

Why did God place such glory, blessings, and power within us? So that His glory might be known on earth through His church.

The prophecy says, **"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea"** (Hab. 2:14; Isa. 11:9). How will this happen? Through the manifestation of Christ through his church.

The invisible God became visible through Jesus Christ 2000 years ago; and today, the glory of Jesus Christ is made visible in the world through the quality of his church.

1. The church is called to manifest to the world the glory of God through LOVE and UNITY

The Church, as a community reconciled with God and with humanity, is God's visible offering to all the divisions of humankind. Salt and light, the model of what God offers to all nations.

In a divided, hostile world, where individualism, selfishness, injustice, competition, and war reign, the church is that part of humanity which, in Christ, is once again one with God and with its brothers and sisters. The church, in its essential nature, is synonymous with forgiveness, peace, reconciliation, love, and service. The church is the end of individualism, division, war, and the unjust distribution of wealth.

The church is the "Shalom" of God established among men to manifest to the world the greatest of all miracles: that Jews and Arabs are one in the Messiah. (In this

Currently, Jewish Christians in northern Israel have given shelter in their homes to Arab believers from southern Lebanon, whose homes were destroyed in the recent war. When nations that call themselves Christian understand what it means to be Christian, instead of killing, dominating, and exploiting poor nations, they will put their wealth and all their capabilities at the service of those nations. They will understand that being Christian means being like Jesus Christ, who, though rich, became poor to enrich many. That day will come, and the world will know the glory of God through his church. ***“For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed”*** (Romans 8:19).

2. The church is called to manifest to the world the HOLINESS of God through its HOLY CONDUCT.

The term saints is used about 60 times in the NT to refer to all the redeemed, the children of God.

HOLY means separated from sin and consecrated to God.

In practice, being holy means not telling lies, not uttering bad words, not insulting anyone, not stealing, not taking home what is not ours, not giving or receiving bribes, not speaking ill of our neighbors, not complaining, not having sexual relations outside of marriage or before marriage, not holding grudges, not being greedy or selfish.

A saint is the employer who pays the best wages he can, the worker or employee who works diligently and with excellence, the ruler who is not corrupt, the legislator or judge who does not sell out for a sealed envelope, the entrepreneur or professional who uses his ability to promote the development and progress of all people and families.

Holiness means families living in peace and harmony. Wise and kind husbands. Submissive wives with gentle and peaceful natures. Respectful and obedient children. Boys and girls who arrive at marriage chaste and virginal. Elders respected and revered by the younger generation. Children raised in the love and fear of God. Responsible, diligent, and faithful workers. Virtuous, happy women full of good works.

A glorious church means a people made up of disciples who learn to be humble, patient, kind, generous, sincere, good, joyful, and honest. Disciples whose lifestyle is one of loving, forgiving, serving, confessing their sins, obeying, submitting to authority, and paying taxes. Men and women who trust in God, who love their neighbor, who help others, who weep with those who weep, who rejoice with those who rejoice, who are one with their brothers and sisters. Disciples who return good for evil, who endure injustice, who give thanks to God for everything, who overcome temptation, who live in the joy of the Lord, who pray without ceasing, who bear witness to Jesus, who make disciples, who use their money to serve others, and, above all, who love God with all their heart.

To be a saint does not mean to be perfect, but to want to be. If a saint sins, he confesses it; if he offends, he asks for forgiveness; if he is offended, he forgives; if he makes a mistake, he acknowledges it; if he steals, he repents and returns what he stole.

A saint is one who loves God and obeys Him out of love. He loves his neighbor as himself. Help those in need. Share your possessions with the poor. Feel the pain of others as your own. Comfort the sorrowful. Do not mock others, especially the weakest. A saint is one whose greatest desire in life is to be and live like Jesus.

THIS IS THE CHURCH THAT GOD WANTS, A HOLY CHURCH WITHOUT SPOT OR WRINKLE, OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT, A CHURCH THAT MANIFESTS TO THE WORLD BY ITS LIFE AND CONDUCT THE LOVE AND HOLINESS OF GOD.

This is the kind of church that God calls us to be and to collaborate with Him in building.

IV. HOW IS THIS QUALITY ACHIEVED?

The answer is in Ephesians 5:25-27.

“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”

Two extraordinary events that will produce the CHURCH are specifically mentioned here. GLORIOUS AND HOLY:

1. The sanctifying sacrifice of Christ 2. The washing of water by the Word

The actor in both cases is Jesus Christ.

Christ, through his redemptive sacrifice, sanctifies the church.

To sanctify means to separate it from sin, to purify it and consecrate it to God.

It is important to note that the text does not say: “He gave himself up for her **to save her**,” but **“to sanctify her.”**

1. THE SANCTIFYING SACRIFICE OF CHRIST.

Christ died for our sins. In His sacrifice we have: _____

- Redemption: the forgiveness of sins (Eph. 1:7)
- Atonement: To purify through sacrifice -
- Propitiation: To appease wrath through sacrifice (Rom. 3:24 and 5:9)
- Reconciliation: To regain peace and communion with God. (2 Cor. 5:19)
- Justification: by faith (Rom. 5:1)
- Free access to the presence of God, to the Most Holy Place (Heb.10.19-22).

Christ crucified our old self. In His sacrifice we have: _____

- Victory over sin (Rom. 6:2 and 22)
 - Victory** over the old self. (Rom. 6:6)
 - Victory over the flesh (Rom. 8:12-14)
 - Victory over principalities and powers (Col.2.13-14)
 - Victory over the devil and the fear of death (Heb.2.13-14)
 - Sanctification through the offering of the body of Christ (Heb.10.10)
- “By one offering he has perfected forever those who are being sanctified”*** (Heb. 10:14)

2. THE WASHING OF WATER THROUGH THE WORD

This is where our responsibility as ministers and collaborators of Jesus Christ lies today; because Christ's redemptive and sanctifying sacrifice was already accomplished on the cross. When He said, “It is finished,” everything was accomplished completely and perfectly on the cross. What is lacking for the church to reach its fullness in quality, unity, and quantity? The communication of the Word in its fullness is lacking. _____

That is why Paul says: ***“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a servant... so that I may fully proclaim the word of God, the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations but is now disclosed to the Lord’s people... which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ”*** (Col. 1:24-28).

THE TWO ASPECTS OF THE WORD OF GOD: THE KERYGMA (ANNOUNCEMENT) AND THE DIDAKÉ (TEACHING).

The Gospels, in relating the ministry of Jesus in terms of the word, point out, time and again, that Jesus taught and preached: Matt. 4.23; 9.35.

The Greek verb for "to teach" is 'didaskein' and is repeated 135 times throughout the New Testament. The verb for "to preach" is 'kerissein' and is repeated 61 times.

The noun for 'didaskein' is: 'DIDAKÉ', (appears in the NT 30 times – Matt.7.28 / Acts 2.42); or also: 'Didaskalia' (21 times – Mark.7.7 / Rom.12.7). Both are translated into English as 'doctrine' or 'teaching'. _____

The one who teaches is called 'didaskalos' = teacher (59 times).

The noun form of 'kerissein' (to preach) is 'KERIGMA' (8 times – Rom. 16:25 / 1 Cor. 1:21; 2:4). Translated into English as 'preaching'. In English, 'preaching' refers to the act of preaching, but in Greek, kerygma also includes the content of the message. Perhaps it is more similar to the word 'proclamation', which encompasses both meanings.

The one who preaches in Greek is called: 'Kerus' = preacher, herald (3 times)

The Word of God comes to us in basically two ways, as TRUTH and _____
as a COMMANDMENT.

Examples of Kerygma:

- “Christ died for our sins”***
- “That Word became flesh”***
- “Jesus Christ is Lord”***
- “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”***

Examples of Didaké:

- “Love your neighbor as yourself”***
- “ Children, obey your parents.”***
- Do not judge, or you too will be judged.***
- “Love one another”***

The entirety of truth is the Kerygma, and the entirety of the commandments is the _____
DIDAKÉ

<u>In Greek</u>	<u>KERIGMA</u>	<u>DIDAKÉ</u>
<u>In Spanish</u>	PREACHING	DOCTRINE or TEACHING
<u>Its content</u>	TRUE	COMMANDMENTS
<u>His way</u>	AFFIRMATIVE	IMPERATIVE
<u>Reveals</u>	THE PERSON AND THE WORK OF CHRIST	THE WILL OF GOD
<u>Appeal to the</u>	FAITH	OBEDIENCE

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DIDAKÉ:

1. It basically consists of commandments that reveal the will of God
2. It is simple and clear
3. It orders the profound relationship of man with God, with himself and with his neighbor

4. **Its tone is generally imperative**
5. **Demands obedience**
6. **It encompasses all areas of life:** Family, work, sex, money, worship, service, human relationships, etc.
7. **It is a defined and complete body of teachings.** (It is not endless.)
Matthew 28.19-20; Acts 20.26,27
Most of the didache can be found in 10 chapters of the NT: Matthew 5, 6 and 7
Ephesians 4, 5
and 6 Romans
12, 13, 14 and 15.
8. **Its content is equivalent to the moral part of the law** (e.g., the 10 commandments, or Lev.19.13-18)
9. **The goal of the didache is to make us like Jesus.** The expression "like Christ".
10. **It is the word of God; therefore, it is immutable.** Its content cannot be changed, modified, diminished, or increased. ***"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away..."***
11. **It is universal.** Its commandments reveal God's will for all people of all times. Matthew 28:19-20.
12. **Its content is not imposed by logic but by the authority of Jesus.**
13. **It is necessary to know it, experience it, and share it.**
14. **We can only obey the didache in the power of the Holy Spirit** (Ezekiel 36:26-27). We will discuss this more fully in the next chapter when we talk about the kerygma.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE KERIGMA

1. The apostolic kerygma is the proclamation of the truth about "the fact of Christ".

The expression "**the fact of Christ**" is a theological phrase, and it refers to the entirety of what happened when Christ came into the world. It includes:

- YOUR PERSON,
- ITS PRE-EXISTENCE

- HIS INCARNATION
- HIS LIFE AND WORK
- HIS PASSION AND DEATH
- HIS RESURRECTION
- HIS EXALTATION AND LORDSHIP
- THE OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT and THE RISE OF PEOPLE OF GOD, THE CHURCH

2. The central core of the Kerygma is the proclamation of what happened in the death and resurrection of Christ.

1 Corinthians 1.18 to 2.5.

What happened on the cross in the spiritual realm according to the revelation given by God to the apostles and prophets?

- The Son of God bore all our sins upon his body (Isaiah 53)
- He bore our curse (Gal. 3:13)
- He took away our sins (Heb.9.26)
- He made propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10)
- He reconciled us to God (2 Cor. 5:19)
- He tore the veil, giving us free access to the Most Holy Place (Heb.10.19-22)
- He crucified our old self (Rom. 6:6)
- He sanctified us (Heb. 10:9, 10 and 14)
- He broke down the dividing wall of hostility and made us one people (Eph. 2:14-16)
- He overcame the principalities and powers (Col.2.14-15)
- He defeated the one who had the power of death (Heb. 2:14-15)

What happened in the resurrection and exaltation of Christ in the spiritual realm according to the revelation given by God to the apostles and prophets?

- He received all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18)
 - He was exalted to the highest place, far above all power and authority (Eph. 2:19-22)
- He received the Name that is above every name, He was proclaimed Kyrios (Lord), King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
(Philippians 2:11; Revelation 19:16)
- He sat down at the right hand of the Father in majesty on high (Heb.1.3-4)
 - He was made head of the church (Eph. 2:22-23)
 - He raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:4-6)
 - He made us kings and priests (Rev. 1:5-6)

3. In the kerygma there is power (dynamis). The kerygma is the power of God for the salvation and transformation of those who believe.

The kerygma is an outpouring of the Spirit, a phenomenon of supernatural operation. It contains Spirit (pneuma) and power (dynamis). The proclaimer must not be a mechanical repeater of the message, but a person burning with the Spirit who proclaims God's truth through the witness of the Spirit within.

4. The kerygma appeals to faith, for it proclaims the truth.

That truth is not a concept. It is a person. That truth is Christ. When someone hears the truth and believes it, they are receiving the truth, they are receiving Christ through "hearing with faith." (Galatians 3:2-5). The kerygma evokes and infuses faith, life, grace, and power. Those who receive God's testimony experience God's power. The kerygma proclaims that everything has already been accomplished through the death and resurrection of Jesus. And those who hear with faith participate in what has been accomplished and apply it to their own lives. This is the dynamic of the kerygma. ***"It pleased God through the foolishness of the kerygma to save those who believe."***

5. Both the kerygma and the didacheh are the word of God, 'logos'. Therefore, their Contents are absolute and unchangeable.

6. The Kerygma and the Didacheh must go together.

The kerygma deals with truth, and the didacheh with the commandments. The former appeals to faith, and the latter to obedience. They must go together like the locomotive and the train cars. The power resides in the locomotive. It is the locomotive that makes it possible for the cars to be transported. The kerygma is the locomotive, and the cars are the didacheh.

7. The Kerygma reveals THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST

Who is Christ?

- John 1:1-18 •
- Philippians 2:5-11 •
- Colossians 1:12-20 •
- Hebrews 1:1-14 •
- Revelation Chapters 1, 4, and 5

The work of Christ:

- FOR US, in his death and resurrection • IN US, through the Holy Spirit • AMONG US, making us church
- THROUGH US. Our mission in the world.

CONCLUSION:

Christ's sacrifice on behalf of his church has already been fully accomplished.

For the church to become glorious and holy, we must communicate to it, in every possible way, the entirety of the Kerygma and the Didache. ***"Christ... whom we proclaim* (kerygma), ***admonishing everyone and teaching* (didache) ***everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ Jesus."*** Amen****