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***The Apostolic Ministry
and the Unity of the
Church***

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Introductory notes for a joint discussion

The mission of the apostle

The *task* entrusted to the apostle is essentially defined by his **mission** (*Gr.* 'apostello'; see also the *Heb.* 'shaliah').

His *term of office* relates to:

- **The revelation** of the mystery of God
- **The proclamation** of the mystery of God
- **The construction** of the mystery of God

That is to say, through obedient intelligence (the *thought* enlightened by intimate and personal communion with God, by inquiry and reflection in *prayer*), faithful transmission (the *word*, especially in preaching and teaching, of the '*apostolic witness*'), the edification (through the renewal and restoration, and thus the continuation of the '*apostolic service*') of the mystery of God.

This *commission*, received "*not from men nor through any human being, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father*" (Gal. 1:1; see also Eph. 4:11 "**It is he who gave some... others... others**"), is the subject of his revelation, its weight and his responsibility. The content and heart of this mandate are the foundation that, first and foremost, he is called to lay in the lives of individuals and communities.

The Apostle and Unity

But what is the *specific contribution* of the apostolic ministry to and in view of the building up of the *unity* of the *Church*?

Great in every respect because it concerns the revelation, proclamation and building up of the 'mystery of God', and the primarily apostolic responsibility to "*lay the foundation*" (1 Cor. 3:10–11).

The apostolic ministry is the ministry of unity par excellence.

Unity, in fact, concerns:

- a. the foundation of God's very life (identity) and nature (qualities and internal structure) (2 Tim. 2:19 "**God's solid foundation stands firm**"), revealed and manifested in Christ ("the image of the invisible God" Col. 1:15).

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

- b. the foundation of God's action and manifestation in history through the Church ("extension" of the Incarnation!? > 1 Cor. 12:12 "*outos ò Christòs*"; Eph. 1:22–23 "*the Church... the fullness of him who fills all in all*").

"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 striking to view the Church's journey as "**a journey from the Trinity to the Trinity**" ("the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named" Eph. 3:14–15).

Because:

- unity lies at the heart of God's nature and revelation (Father/Son/Holy Spirit)

"I and the Father are one", "*We shall come to him and make our home with him*", "**As I and the Father are one**"; the Trinitarian dogma: "*One God in three equal and distinct persons...*").

The Trinity reveals itself as a unity of persons in a complex (*structured > episcopè*) and inseparable (*Covenant! Berit-Diatèke!*) of love (*koinonia*) and service (*diakonia*). This unity concerns the very identity of God. This unity precedes and grounds the unity of/for the Church, which proceeds from it and is nourished by it. Therefore, unity is not and cannot be an option. Certainly a plural unity, but unity nonetheless. Certainly the unity of a relationship, but still unity. Unity cannot be an option because it concerns the very nature of God, and therefore the nature of the Church. (In this sense too, 'The Trinity is the Church before the Church').

- Unity lies at the heart of the nature and revelation of the Church, which is the reflection and image of God's Trinitarian life ("The Church is an image of the Holy Trinity" – Vladimir Lossky).

The Body of Christ, the Church as a covenant of relationships, as a communion (see the Trinity) in which unity and plurality are inseparably intertwined.

- Unity lies at the heart of the goal of universal 'reconciliation', which is God's ultimate purpose in history (Eph. 1:10; Rom. 11:36).

Therefore, precisely because unity is so radical and central to the foundation of God, of the Church ("the pillar and foundation of the truth" 1 Tim. 3:15) and of the final "recapitulation" of all things in God, it necessarily follows that the apostolic ministry (both individual and

collective), as a fundamental ministry, must be, and cannot but be, a ministry of unity. Indeed, **the ministry of communion and unity par excellence**. As the catalyst and coordinator of the other ministries of Eph. 4:11, as the central and ultimate point of reference for the koinonia, the diakonia and the episcopè of the churches and the Church, as the continuator of the apostolic service in the church (historical continuity), as the ultimate guardian of fidelity (truth) to the 'original apostolic witness' (i.e. the Old and New Testaments).

The building of unity

The authority (*exousia*) conferred upon him (recall the Hebrew *shaliah* and the rabbinic principle whereby the agent is like the principal!) is closely linked to the *mandate* he must fulfil and for which – as 'principal agent' and 'plenipotentiary' – he is accountable before God.

And yet this authority is authenticated and made firm, not only by fidelity to the Word, but also by communion with and submission to the apostolic college. Consider in this regard the so-called Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15). But also the attitude of the apostle Paul who, three years after Damascus, went to spend fifteen days with Peter (Gal. 1:18), and after 14 years of intense ministry, returned to the most distinguished apostles – James, Cephas and John – to set out to them the content of his preaching and receive confirmation and approval (an interesting precedent for the development of a practice of 'recognition'!) to reassure him that he had not run in vain (Gal. 2:2). Or again, the humility shown by Peter in accepting correction and rebuke when necessary (Gal. 2:11–16).

Personal episcopè

This development is carried forward (the theme of continuity = communion and truth) through the two constituent elements of apostolic action:

- the *episcopè* (Acts 1:20) and
- the *diakonia* (Acts 1:25)

That is to say, the two essential functions of:

- a. *governance* (through guidance, oversight, discernment, and connection), and
- b. *service*

Concretely delegated to the *offices* (not to be confused with ministries) – of apostolic 'constitution' (the '12'/the New Testament), in continuity with and modelled on the Old Testament – of:

- a. *presbyters* and
- b. *deacons*

Who are, so to speak, 'the right hand' and 'the left hand' of apostolic action in the governance of local churches.

Collegial episcopacy

Whilst there is a personal and, so to speak, individual dimension to both the call and the apostolic mandate, it is undoubtedly true that the apostolic mandate is not confined to the personal dimension, but requires, by its very nature, for the proper exercise of its functions and for the objectives of its action, a 'collegial' dimension as well. There is an episcopè and a diakonia of which the individual apostle is the holder (with spatial boundaries and temporal limits). There is an episcopè and a diakonia of which the apostles are collegially the holders ('jointly and severally') in relationship and communion with one another (Acts 18:28 "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 sense, of the collegial nature of the apostolic ministry. Of apostolicity as service to the unity and 'catholicity' (in time, space and truth) of the Church.

Therefore, the ***koinonia of the apostles*** is necessary for the linkage, the connection, the organic unity (and, progressively and in perspective, also organisational = *visible!*) of the local (in the translocal dimension), national and continental (the international, universal, '*catholic*' dimension) communities presided over by them (*episcopè*).

This allows for the recognition of the space for the exercise of individual ministry, but always within bonds of unity and truth with the collective episcopè, with the sphere and responsibility of collegial apostolic governance. **Ultimately, the apostolicity of the Church is entrusted to the apostles in communion of love and truth amongst themselves.**

The *koinonia* and unity of the apostles are necessary as an authoritative diakonia for the universal Church to grow in love and truth (from truth in charity to truth in unity) within our particular churches, and throughout the Church as a whole, in view of that 'fullness' already expressed in Christ, which remains God's indispensable goal for the whole Church.

Giovanni Traettino

Jorge Himitian

Apostolic ministry and the Church's unity

INTRODUCTION

The unity of the church has become a common topic over the last several decades in most Christian circles. We thank God for that fact. Still, it is one of the more important subjects to be dealt with adequately, especially in the Protestant sector of the church.

Often, when unity is mentioned, the application is made exclusively to the congregation or denomination of the person addressing the issue. Although that is a valid starting point, it is incorrect to limit the issue to such a small frame of reference. Others enlarge the circle a bit as they seek unity with others who are similar to themselves. For instance, the unity of all charismatics, or of all Pentecostals or of evangelicals in general.

Most Christians are in favor of fraternal unity. They prefer that the denominations continue intact, each maintaining its own identity, but they would like for all to deal with each other with love, respect and proper ethical conduct, as well as sharing in activities from time to time. Although this would mean significant progress for many—for which we thank God!—and is in fact occurring in many places, still we should see such a step as an intermediate goal.

There are also those who say: “We are one in Christ; our unity is spiritual in nature.” This is partially true. But it is also true that in practice we Christians are divided. The situation is similar to that of a marriage where, even though in the eyes of God the man and his wife are one flesh, they are in fact separated.

What is the responsibility today of apostolic and prophetic ministry in this matter? And what can and should these ministries do to move forward toward the unity of the Lord's church in fulness, just as Jesus requested of his Father in John, chapter 17?

I. THE REVELATION OF THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL

⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. ⁹And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

Ephesians 1:7–10, NIV

The key thought in this text which reveals the “mystery of his will” is “*to bring all things ... together under one head.*” This verb in Greek is *anakefalaiosastai*. The prefix *ana* means *anew* or *again*, and the root is *kefalai*, which means *head*. It means “to reunite under one head.” The significance of the text is that God revealed to us the knowledge of the mystery of his will, which is to “unite all again under one head,” which is Christ.

This expression was used in ancient times after an army had been defeated, broken and scattered and then acquired a new general under whose command the entire army was reunited, regrouped and reorganized. The affirmation presupposes that originally it was all harmoniously united and then that unity had been broken, so that they were all divided. However, God, in his foreknowledge determined in himself to reunite all again under Christ as head.

The world (*cosmos*) was created by God. *Cosmos* means harmonious order. God created all things in unity, order and perfect harmony. The root of the word “universe” is ONE. The universe was one under the command of Christ as head.

What was God’s original plan? The unity of everything and everyone: a world united, beautiful and harmonious; man in fellowship with God, united in love to his creator. The husband united with his wife, with his children and with his neighbor. A united society, mutually supportive, with strong bonds, without selfishness or rivalry. Humanity living in peace and love, where each one, filled with the love of God, loves his neighbor as himself. And man in harmony and unity with all creation.

Unfortunately, man rebelled against God. He accepted the proposal presented him by God’s enemy and sinned. Thus sin entered into the world and through sin, death. Death means separation, division. Man became God’s enemy as well as the enemy of his neighbor. Jealousy arose, envy, conflicts, homicides, fratricides, wars, injustice, divorce, greed, unjust distribution of riches, social conflicts, racial discrimination, etc. Man’s history has been stained by blood, full of hate, violence, crime and death, far from the model for society that God had projected. Nature itself was affected by man’s sin and the fall of God’s viceroy over his creation.

The model for the kind of society projected by God can be summed up in one word: the CHURCH.

II. WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

Although the affirmation seems obvious, I believe it is pertinent to clarify at the outset that the church is not a physical building where we meet to worship God.¹ Nor is it a human institution of a legal or juridical nature.²

The church is that part of human society which is now in Christ. We are the children of Adam who have acknowledged Christ as our Lord and, in virtue of the redeeming sacrifice of the Son of God, we have been reconciled with God and with our neighbor.

In a world that is divided, at enmity, where individualism reigns supreme, with pride, injustice, competition and war, the church is that portion of humanity which is united in Christ with God and with the brothers and sisters in God’s family. The church, in its essential nature, is synonymous with forgiveness, peace, reconciliation, love and service. The church is community,

family, unity; it involves a holy kiss, a brotherly hug, broken and shared bread, fellowship of material goods, sincere affection; it is the end of loneliness and individualism, the end of divisions and wars. The church is God's *shalom* shared among men which show to the world the greatest of all miracles: THE CHURCH. The church is God's visible proposal to resolve all the problems of humanity: the salt and the light, the model which God presents to all the nations.

¹⁰*His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord*

Ephesians 3:10–11, NIV

III. THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

The holy Trinity is itself the model of this unity. Jesus prayed specifically for the church:

¹¹*I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name--the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one ...*

²¹*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.*

John 17:11, 21, NIV

Jesus asked of the Father the visible unity of all his disciples, not in heaven but here on the earth, according to the sublime model of the holy Trinity. He prayed for unity and holiness.

The church is the fulfillment of God's dream for the earth, his eternal project for humanity. That dream was fulfilled potentially on the cross:

¹⁴*For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵by 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, ¹⁶and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility*

Ephesians 2:14–16, NIV

In Jerusalem

God's dream became visible in the earth on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended and filled the hundred and twenty disciples, and then three thousand, with the power of the resurrection of the Son of God. Luke described the scene with much grace:

⁴⁴*All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere*

hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 2:44–47, NIV

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.

Acts 4:32, NIV

This social project of God for humanity can be realized only in those that are in Christ, those who have fled from the life style and the corruption of the world and have been made participants of the divine nature. In this manner, at last, the first community emerges in the world but lives according to the will of God. Selfishness has been overcome by the love of God that now lives in the hearts of the disciples through the Holy Spirit.

In Jerusalem the number of the disciples grew rapidly, yet *“all the believers were one in heart and mind.”* And the church continued in unity. The apostles stood together in a united ministry. There were no selfish conflicts, such as had characterized them before Pentecost, for they had learned to walk in the Spirit.

The church was a dynamic and versatile community; they met in the temple and in the homes, but they always maintained their identity and their unity. The Bible text never refers to them as *“the churches”* (in plural) in Jerusalem. The church, in singular number, always refers to the totality of the believers in a city.

“And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47, NIV).

“On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem” (Acts 8:1, NIV).

“But Saul began to destroy the church” (Acts 8:3, NIV).

In times of persecution, the entire church was unable to meet in a single place. However, this did not change the reality of their unity; they continued in unity as the church, functioning as a single body, with a single pastorate, even though they were only able to meet in their homes.

In Antioch

The gospel spread to other regions and cities, meaning that the church spread out as well. It is in Antioch that there arises for the first time a large church with a *“mixture”* of Gentiles and Jews converted to Christ. And even though the first Christian council had not yet met in Jerusalem, nor had the epistle been written to the Ephesians, God’s life in every disciple, whether Gentile or Jew, was so strong, the embrace and the love between brothers and sisters of different races and backgrounds so authentic that, without having studied theology or ecclesiology, they were experiencing the glorious reality of simply BEING THE CHURCH in its purest expression. Men and women, Jews and Greeks, rich and poor, slaves and free, now in Christ, were one. They constituted *“the church at Antioch”* (Acts 13:1). A plural and multi-cultural ministry shepherded the church. There was a diversity of gifts: prophets and teachers, but not a diversity of churches. It didn’t occur to anyone to even suggest the

formation of two different churches in the city: a Gentile Christian Church and a Jewish Christian Church, or the GCC and JCC denominations. The ancestral division between Jews and Gentiles had disappeared. The Gentiles, formerly resentful against the Jews for despising them, now loved them. They were brothers. When they heard that there would be great hunger in the earth, they immediately sent help to the brethren that lived in Judea (see Acts 11:27–30).

The principal concern of the first century apostles was the unity and sanctity of the church. The resolution that came out of the Council in Jerusalem was precisely to avoid the division of the church on the issue of circumcision. For the apostles the church's unity was a non-negotiable issue.

IV. DIVISION IN CORINTH

When Paul learns that in the city of Corinth there are conflicts among the Christians and that four bands existed in the church, he wrote them an urgent letter. It is directed explicitly *“to the church of God in Corinth”* (1 Corinthians 1:2). Observe the term “church” in the singular. Paul does not admit under any circumstance the possibility of the division of the church within the city. Functionally, there must be a church in Corinth and another in Thessalonica, for they are two different cities, but not two or more churches in the same city.

Paul's first argument is overwhelming and clear: *“Is Christ divided?”* (1 Corinthians 1:13). Paul was an apostle who understood the revelation of the mystery of Christ and of the church. He knew that the church of Christ constituted two sides of the same coin. He knew from his own experience that to persecute the church was to persecute Christ. If Christ is one and cannot be divided, the same is true of the church.

“³⁰For we are members of his body. ³¹For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. ³²This is a profound mystery— but I am talking about Christ and the church.”

Ephesians 5:30–32, NIV

The division of the church is a grotesque caricature of the new creation, for it is an attack against the very essence and nature of the church. It is incoherent.

If division, jealousy, contention, ambition, envy and competition, so prevalent in the world, subsist in the church, then the greatest contradiction has been reached and the church has lost its essential nature. It has become carnal and its conduct is the same as the world (see 1 Corinthians 3:3–4).

With apostolic authority Paul corrects this division that is rearing its head in Corinth. In no way will he allow one church under Paul, another under Peter, another under Apollo and another under Christ. The church does not belong to Paul, nor to Peter, even though they have been God's instruments. The church belongs to God and to no other. Paul and Apollo are

servants, not lords. The foundation of the church is not an apostle or other leader; it is Jesus Christ. No one can lay another foundation (1 Corinthians 3:5–11).

Lewis B. Smedes, in his book *All Things Made New* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970) has written:

“There is only one Lord Jesus Christ. Does he have only one body to do his work in the earth? Or have we really created many bodies of Jesus Christ? When Paul questioned—horrified and unable to believe it— ‘Is Christ divided?’, he was reacting to a consummated fact. On the other hand, that was his way of arguing to the effect that, given the church’s identity, its division was unthinkable, contradictory, inconceivable ...

“It is impossible to conceive of a divided body; it is contradictory, unthinkable. And yet it is true. Paul does not say: This cannot happen here. He says: This horrible situation is anti-natural ...

“If in a community—whether in Corinth or anywhere else— there are various bodies, seated at various tables or even in conflict with each other, we have arrived in our sin to the horrible impossibility: Christ is divided. And here is where the most urgent and difficult healing process should be initiated in prayer ...

“The current situation of the body of Christ should be deplored and declared intolerable. It is less tolerable at the local level, where competing communities, exclusive, embittered and capriciously separated, all pretend to be the body of Christ.”

pp. 212–214, in the Spanish edition

V. APOSTLES AND PROPHETS: CHANNELS OF REVELATION

¹For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— ²Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. ⁴In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵which 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.

What was the circumstance that motivated Paul to write this letter from his prison in Rome? During his third apostolic trip Paul dedicated three years of ministry to the city of Ephesus. The city had been moved by a great awakening (Acts 19). All indications are that a large number of

Jews had believed in the Messiah and an even larger number of Gentiles. The Christian community in that city, just as in many other cities, was made up of Jews and Gentiles converted to Jesus Christ. The frequent use of “we” and “you (plural)” shows that Paul addresses explicitly those two defined groups. He does not deny nor gloss over that reality which, in fact, did generate tensions and difficulties among the brethren, and he saw a threat of division because of the impositions of the judaizers on the one hand, and on the other, the converted Gentiles who perceived themselves as second-class members. The old roots of racial rivalry between Jews and Gentiles could sprout again.

In the first three chapters of the epistle and in half of the fourth, Paul, with apostolic authority conferred by the revelation he received, clearly rejects any thought of division, such as the formation of two churches in the city of Ephesus, one Jewish and the other Gentile. Everyone that understands the biblical revelation concerning the church knows that such is diametrically opposed to the work of the cross. It would be the equivalent of building again the dividing wall that Christ destroyed on the cross. With great clarity and heavenly authority Paul proclaims and affirms the unity of the church, not only for the Ephesians but for all generations as well.

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

Ephesians 2:14–22, NIV

⁴In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵which 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. ⁶This 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 single 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).

The foundation established by the apostles upon the church's unity was so clear and so firm that, in spite of the struggles, heresies and great difficulties that were evident in the succeeding centuries, the church always sought to maintain her unity. Historically, the church has always seen itself as ONE, HOLY, UNIVERSAL and APOSTOLIC.

VI. HISTORICAL DIVISIONS

The first official division of the church did not occur until the year 1054, in what the Western church calls "the Eastern schism." But that division did not have a great effect on the people. Rather, it was a division at the international level of authority. In each city and nation the church continued to maintain its unity.

The present division of the church began in the sixteenth century. And the current picture of thousands of denominations in all the world is much more recent. Luther believed in the unity of the church. He desired to be a reformer within the church of the West, but was left no option, for he was excommunicated. We know the history well from that time forward. More and more divisions occurred. Some were caused by doctrinal differences, others for more noble reasons. Often the traditional church did not understand the need to be more pliable in the face of legitimate changes that came with awakenings. On other occasions, because the agents of renewal went too far beyond wholesome orthodoxy.

The practical reality is that today the church, especially in the Protestant sector, is divided. The current division of the church has no biblical or theological foundation. It can only be explained historically as we observe with pain what happened, knowing that it never should have occurred.

VII. TWENTIETH CENTURY MOVEMENTS

The Pentecostal movement

At the beginning of the twentieth century the Pentecostal movement was born. God sovereignly poured out his Spirit in spontaneous prayer meetings, with no preestablished liturgy. Outpourings of the Spirit, charismatic manifestations, power, healings, conversions, prophecies and miracles begin to be more and more frequent. The possibility of knowing God experimentally imparts to the believer the necessary fervor (“fire”) for the expansion of this movement locally and round the world. In a relatively short time it becomes the fastest growing religious movement in the world. Yet with this expansion the divisions grow and multiply on a large scale.

Toward the middle of the twentieth century, another great division is observed: between the Pentecostals and the non-Pentecostals. (Thank God, this is now practically overcome, or at least in the process of being overcome.) The Pentecostal movement in general never dealt with the problem of the division of the church; it inherited the existing historical divisions and, through a lack of theological reflection on the matter, multiplied them through its own dynamic and spontaneity.

More recent movements

Over the last forty years, the sovereign move of the Spirit of God has reached all parts of the world, leaping across denominational barriers, even the seemingly insurmountable ones, such as the division between Catholics and Protestants. Those of us who are present here can give testimony to the fact that we too have been reached by this move of God. Some have defined it as a “charismatic movement,” “neo-pentecostalism,” “renewal movement,” “church restoration,” etc. We are not concerned to find the most appropriate name, but rather to faithfully interpret God’s intention and orientation in the movement at this transcendent juncture in history, so that we might collaborate with him.

In the decades of 1960 and 1970, a key word in many of these charismatic or neo-pentecostal circles was “restoration.” The vision and the faith that had been received was to the effect that in the present move of the Holy Spirit, God would restore in the church the spirituality, the principles and the truths that had been lost in the course of its history. We are aware that the recovery of biblical truths began in the Sixteenth Century Reformation, yet we are also aware that it should continue until the recovery is complete. Some of the more important truths and practices that were revealed to God’s servants in many parts of the world in our times are: worship, the gospel of the kingdom, the unity of the church, discipleship, God’s eternal purpose, the continuing validity of all the gifts and ministries (including the apostolic gift), the church’s integral mission in the world, etc.

Many have sensed a growing conviction that God’s purpose is to visit his church in all the

world and restore it completely to the foundation established by the apostles and prophets of the first century. In greater or lesser measure, many today are experiencing a spiritual renewal and are gradually returning to biblical principles. This is a fact of very positive significance and a great challenge to our faith. We are also aware that every change and transition creates tensions and presents new dangers.

VIII. A GREAT HISTORIC MOMENT (A *KAIRÓS* OF GOD)

A significant point of inflection has been produced in our generation. The many divisions that originated from the time of the Reformation as divergent lines have begun to break and be transformed into convergent lines. Today there is a “rapprochement” worthy of note between the different sectors of the church. The aggressive and bellicose attitudes of the past are being laid aside. There is now dialogue, aperture, reflection, fellowship, change, reconciliation. There are risks as well, and some of them are serious, such as: unity without holiness, without truth, without the purity of the faith. This is a humanistic brand of ecumenism that has no true regard for what is believed or how a person lives. Clearly, that is not the unity that God desires.

The progress toward unity is very significant, but still minute. It is significant if it is seen to be the beginning of a continuing process; otherwise, it is insignificant.

Our great question in regards to the subject proposed here is the following: In the face of the current situation of the church, with its complex and undeniable divisions, what should we do? What does the Lord want us to do?

More specifically, as set out in the introduction, what is the responsibility today of apostolic and prophetic ministry in this regard?

I perceive, in an overall view, three options or three possible paths to be followed.

1) MAINTAIN THE PRESENT “STATUS QUO” OF DIVISION

We are experts at arguing our points. We can justify the present division of the church with rational arguments, illustrations and even Bible verses and examples. For instance, that unity will be experienced in heaven, that unity is a spiritual and invisible reality, that the denominations are like the twelve tribes of Israel, or that the church is like a great tree with many branches, etc.

Many have developed a “theology of resignation.” I call it the theology of the fox, because when the fox discovered it couldn’t reach the grapes, it decided, “I’ll leave them since they are still green.” So it is with many who understand that unity is the will of God, but do not have the faith to believe it can be reached here on the earth.

2) START A REVOLUTION

We can take the biblical truths and attack the denominational structure, with a determination to establish unity ourselves. This path has already been proven; the only result has been to produce more divisions.

3) PROCEED IN A HOMOGENEOUS EVOLUTION

In biblical terms this is GROWTH. The growth of a child is a homogeneous evolution. The changes are not traumatic, but natural, normal and gradual. In the same way the unity of the church is to be a gradual process brought about by God himself in his people. In Ephesians 4:13–16, Paul refers to this process:

“...¹³until 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. ¹⁴Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶From 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.

(NIV)

Paul mentions in Ephesians chapter 4 three progressive levels of unity:

- **Unity of the Spirit:** *“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit”* (vv. 2–3). To live at this first level of unity we need humility, meekness, patience and love, *“through the bond of peace.”*
- **Unity of the faith:** *“Until we all reach unity in the faith”* (v.13). We see here two facts: first, that it is a process, and second, that at some point we will all believe the same. We are in that process.
- **Unity of the body:** *“The whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament”* (v.16). God is at work uniting his church. The day will come when all God’s children will be joined in a single body, held together under the unique head, which is Christ.

Our responsibility is to believe that God wants to do this and that he is able to do it. But faith is more than that; it is *“being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see”* (Hebrews 11:1). Faith is the declaration: God will do it! And with that faith, pray that it be done; with that faith, meet with your brother, love him, be reconciled with him, learn from him and, in fellowship with all the saints, believe together until we all *“attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”*

IX. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF APOSTOLIC MINISTRY TODAY

In the New Testament we find three kinds of apostles:

The twelve apostles: These are unique since they personally witnessed the life, death, resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. Moreover, they received the direct teaching of Jesus. Once Judas was gone, the one who replaced him had to meet those conditions (Acts 1:15–26).

Other apostles from the first century: The Lord established other apostles, such as Paul and Barnabas who, with the original twelve, received the revelation of the mystery of Christ and the church (Ephesians 3:1–7). They had the responsibility of a pioneer, unique and unrepeatable, of laying the doctrinal and *kerygmatic* foundation of the church for all time (Ephesians 2:20). That foundation is complete and unchangeable, not admitting further additions or modifications (see Galatians 1:8–9).

A continuing apostolic ministry: According to Ephesians 4:11–16, Christ will continue to raise up some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastors/teachers until the edification of the body of Christ is completed. The function of these apostles is to evangelize (with signs and wonders), establish churches, establish elders, supervise the churches, be the principal ministerial authority in the churches that are under their responsibility and to receive and communicate the revelation concerning the mystery of Christ and the church. The reference to “receiving revelation” does not involve revelation at odds with that received by the apostles and prophets of the first century. (If this occurs, those who teach such should be rejected and declared anathema.) The reference is rather to the illumination of the Holy Spirit who provides a clear and faithful comprehension of the ancient revealed truths that were given originally to the apostles and prophets of the first century, which are registered in the holy Scriptures. These truths have often been ignored and covered over throughout the centuries under the shadow of traditions and errors. We thank God for those he is raising up in the church today around the world, giving them revelation concerning the ancient truth of his word.

The distinctive character of apostolic ministry and the responsibility that this implies

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”* (2 Corinthians 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 accented 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.

CONCLUSION

The restoration of the apostolic ministry without a vision of the unity of the church fosters this kind of danger. What is the future of ministry that is built around one person? What is the mid-range and long-range projection of renewal movements? We need to seriously reflect on this present reality and on the church’s unity with a view to establish clear parameters for a biblical ecclesiology.

The first great challenge before us is to cry out to God, asking him to pour out upon all of us and upon his ministers that are rising up in many parts of the world, *“the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that [we] may know him better”* (Ephesians 1:17). May God, by his Spirit, reveal to the apostles and prophets of our days the mystery of Christ and his church. There is an urgent need for true apostles of Christ.

Our second great challenge is to learn to walk together. This is not easy. It is costly. But it is the only path that will save us from individualism, personalism and from errors and heresies,

and liberate us from the temptation to use the gifts that God gave us to build our own kingdoms. It is the only pathway to becoming the true church, the church which the Father dreamed of and which the world and the angels long to see.

We need to create an international space for reflection, for prayer, a space for revelation, to hear God together and to listen to each other. We need communication and we need to know what God is doing in different places in the world, as well as what he is saying. We need a space to dream and to awaken, to fly and to land again.

We need to renew our covenant with God, a covenant of faithfulness and loyalty to the revelation of the mystery of Christ. A covenant of integrity, of self-denial, of consecration. A covenant of love between ourselves, of respect, of humility, of companionship and friendship.

²⁰May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, ²¹equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Hebrews 13:20–21, NIV

²⁰Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Ephesians 3:20–21, NIV

ENDNOTES:

1. Even in the case where most people, including believers, refer to physical buildings as churches, this is an error. No physical structure is a church. We do not go to church; we ARE the church. This error, which is broadly accepted and which may seem unoffensive and without importance, nevertheless has serious consequences since it distorts the vision of the church given to us by God, both in regard to its unity and to the commitment of believers to live completely consecrated to God, without the false dichotomy between the sacred and the secular.

2. Even in cases where the church has a legal instrument (or several such instruments), in order to attend to certain temporal matters such as: civil association, foundations, non-profit institutions, etc. with papers of incorporation, the great error is to confuse the identity of the church with these temporal institutions and determine the activity of the church on the basis of statutes or human rules of order.

Jorge Himitian

Ernest Komanapalli

THE SECRET OF JOY

The apostle Paul writes about this very emphatically. He says that it's all in our minds. Everything is first in our minds and then reflected in our lives.

There are circumstances that steal our joy, over which we have no control even though we are men of God. It is the Lord who allows certain difficult circumstances to occur. If our attitude is right, we will be victorious over these circumstances and not victims of them.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul says that true unity and joy are only possible in Jesus. In the four chapters to Philippians, he speaks about the mind.

A second thing that can steal our joy is other people. They can bring us joy, but they can also steal it. We can't isolate ourselves from people. We're among them. We see all kinds of people. We hear all kinds of things. And yet, we have to rise above it all.

Worldly things steal our joy. We need to be very careful that worldly things don't overwhelm us and steal our joy.

Four attitudes that produce joy despite the circumstances, people, and things that happen in the world.

The first attitude: Simplicity of mind (Phil. 1.21 and 27).

“For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” This is being simple of mind. Having one mind, one purpose. In verse 27 it says, “...that you stand firm in one spirit, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.” We have gathered with one mind to fight together for the faith of the gospel. One mind. We cannot all have the same thoughts, but we can all have the same mental disposition, a single attitude, which is to lift up Jesus Christ in this international apostolic gathering.

The second attitude: A submissive mind (Phil. 2.3-4).

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”

We have gathered here, brothers, and we must have this attitude: to prefer one another. To give thanks to God for my brother, for his gifts, for his inspiration. We are here to

encourage one another, to lift one another up. To be grateful that God allowed us to come and have fellowship with my brother.

The third attitude: A spiritual mind. (Phil. 3:19-20).

"...They think only of earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, from where we also await a Savior..."

Our mind should be heavenly, spiritual, and not earthly.

We are strangers and pilgrims. We have one purpose, one work to do: to unite the body of Christ. Our citizenship is in heaven. While we are on earth, we have a commission; we are commissioned people. You are specially chosen. God has a purpose through you. May God be glorified through your life, and may our joy be complete.

The apostle Paul wrote this letter from prison. Despite his circumstances, his heart was full of joy. Our natural minds would tell us, "This can't be." Paul overcame his circumstances and all those things that could have distracted him. Despite the suffering and the chains, he had joy. His attitude and mind were spiritual, not earthly. A spiritual mind sets us above our circumstances.

Let me tell you something personal. I went to Southampton. Tony Morton's wife wasn't well, but I saw Tony saying to me, "God is good, Ernest. God is good." He wasn't complaining. He was praising God. In my heart, I was weeping because Hanna wasn't well. She had, on another occasion, been leading worship, which had been a great blessing to me. The next thing I heard from her, she was sick, she wasn't well. But Tony's attitude was: God is going to heal my wife. Victory over the circumstances. Today she is perfectly healthy and rejoicing. This is the spiritual mind. We don't put our thoughts on things. We focus our minds on the spiritual, and God hears, answers, and heals.

The fourth attitude: A secure mind . (Phil. 4:7-8)

"And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." That is our security. We are safe in Christ. Verse 8 tells us what to think about in everything.

These four chapters all speak of this—of our mind, of our attitude: a simple, submissive, spiritual, and secure mind. May this be our unanimous way of thinking about Christ Jesus.

Ernest Komanapalli

Orville Swindoll

When God visits his people

Who doesn't enjoy the visit of a good friend? Such visits give us the opportunity to catch up on news and happenings, to refresh the friendship and recall together memorable and delightful experiences. But it's still just a visit and therefore the moment will come when it's over, obliging us to return to the daily grind. Aware of this reality, we usually try to squeeze out of the visit together everything we can.

The Bible shows us that God too, from time to time, visits his people in a special way. Such times of visitation make it possible for us to enjoy a significant advance in our relationship with him and they always bring refreshing and renewal. They also require that we be more sensitive to his voice, more attentive to the things he wants to tell us and do in us on those special occasions.

A person's life is not simply a routine where everything unfolds according to a monotonous scheme. On the contrary, life is full of hills and valleys, light and shadows. There are times when learning is easier, when we can incorporate with greater facility matters of which we were formerly unaware. Children, for example, find it much easier to learn new things than adults. Young people in love are more inclined to listen to each other than couples who have been married fifteen or twenty years. A new follower of Christ often seems more hungry and thirsty for the things of God and his word than a person who has been a Christian for many years.

Understanding this reality helps us to appreciate Jesus' lamentation over the city of Jerusalem, as recorded by Luke:

⁴¹And when He approached, He saw the city and wept over it, ⁴²saying, “If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. ⁴³For the days shall come upon you when your enemies will throw up a bank before you, and surround you, and hem you in on every side, ⁴⁴and will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize **the time of your visitation.**”

Luke 19:41–44 (NASB)

With the coming of Jesus the Messiah and the announcement that “*the kingdom of God is at hand*”, God purposed to bring about a profound and marvelous change in the situation of the people of Israel. He wanted to change their funeral dirge into dancing, their sighing into song. He wanted to exchange the tablets of the law for a wonderful experience of God’s grace in the heart. He desired to restore the children to their parents and the parents to their children and make the relationship between husbands and wives more loving and considerate. He wanted to lift the burden off those who were overloaded, open the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf and, at the same time, return hope and happiness to the discouraged and distressed.

Yet no matter how compassionate and merciful the expressions of Jesus, the people at large closed their hearts to him. Following an initial enchantment, they refused his invitation to a new life of intimacy and responsibility. They could not be convinced of the advantage of leaving behind their long-held traditions in order to embrace a life of faith and surrender to the will of God.

So the door of opportunity was closed to them: opportunity to experience a new life full of adventure and projection, after which they had no option but to return to the tired routine of the past. They lost their opportunity; their brightest hope disappeared. It was now only a matter of time until they faced the inevitable consequences of their unfortunate error.



The word translated *visitation* in Luke’s text means “an occasional demonstration of divine

power” o “a visitation of grace that manifests itself as protection or loving care”. Curiously, it’s the same word that means “the bishop’s role”: that of caring and concern. The same word occurs in 1 Peter 2:12:

*Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in **the day of visitation**.*

In this way Peter exhorts his brothers in the faith to live in the world according to God’s will and holiness, so that in the day when God reveals his power and glory, others will glorify him for the faithfulness of those who were followers of Christ. Until God reveals himself in glory and power, many will not realize the value of an intimate relationship with him.



In the Greek version of the Old Testament (Septuagint), the same word appears in Genesis 50:24, when Joseph speaks of his confidence in God’s purpose for his people:

*And Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die, but God will surely **take care of you** [or, visit you], and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob.”*

Here the word is translated “take care of you”. In this way Joseph understands that when God visits his people (“takes care of them”), their life of slavery in Egypt will come to an end.

That occasion finally arrived many years later, as we read in Exodus 3:16–17 in the words of God to Moses, when he commissioned the latter to deliver Israel from bondage:

*¹⁶Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, “The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, ‘I am indeed **concerned about you** and what has been done to you in Egypt. ¹⁷So I said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey.’”*

Here the same word is translated “concerned about you”. Other versions translate the passage:

“I will visit you”.



Several lessons from these texts seem rather obvious:

P **God is the only one who is able to determine the times** when he will visit us in a special way, so as to reveal to us the abundance of his grace, his care and concern, his protection.

P **It is our responsibility to be attentive on those occasions** when God works in ways that we had not anticipated, involving us in his sovereign purpose. This attitude of expectation and docility before the Lord should always characterize our relationship to him.

P **We need to understand that such a divine visitation implies a wonderful “window of opportunity”** that will not always be open. When God visits his people we are able to see significant spiritual growth and experience greater grace and enlightenment. Or we can lose it and suffer the consequences of a listless and dull spiritual existence.

God has determined to visit his people. Will we be ready and responsive to him?

Orville Swindoll

Ariovaldo Ramos

The Church as the third daughter

Bible reading: Luke 15:11-12

“A man had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the estate that is coming to me.’ So he divided his property between them.”

This is a very well-known word, but I wanted to share some thoughts with you.

The first is that we have a man with two sons. When the younger son surprises his father with this, the son kills the father in his heart. He breaks with his father and leaves. He was taken aback by life, and without his father, he didn't know what to do; he threw everything away and fell into misery. Then, while he was away, the father was resurrected in his heart. He finally understood the father's kindness; simply by thinking about what his father did for his employees, the father was resurrected in his heart. He returned only to ask for a job; he didn't feel he had the right to be treated like a son. It was then that the father surprises his son. Before the son finishes his speech asking for forgiveness, the father embraces him and takes him back into the family, gives him the family ring and the clothes of a prince.

And there, at that moment, without realizing it, the father makes a mistake. He orders the fattened calf slaughtered to make a roast in honor of his younger son. Why do I say he made a mistake? For two reasons: First, because the calf belonged to the older son. When the younger son asked for his inheritance, the father divided the property between them. So, that animal belonged to the older brother. The second reason I say the father made a mistake is that he expected something different from his older son. He thought he had one son, and then he discovered he had another. When the older brother arrived and saw the celebration, he said, “I don't want to be part of this.” And that astonished his father. The father had been counting on the older son to celebrate his younger brother's return just as he did. But not only did he not celebrate, he surprised his father by showing that his heart had never been in tune with his father's. He said, *“Look, all these years I've served you... and you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.”* The father was astonished, for he understood that what was his belonged to his sons. Furthermore, he had already divided his property between his two sons. Therefore, the father said to him, “You could have thrown as many parties as you wanted.” The problem, once again, lay in the hearts of the sons. The first son had problems with his father, and so did the

second. Their hearts were not tuned to that of the father. They knew the law of the father but not the spirit or the heart of the father.

I believe that when Jesus Christ speaks of these two sons, he is actually trying to tell us about a third son; the son the father would have liked to find on the day of the barbecue. When Jesus came to earth, he found his people divided into two groups, as Luke describes in the same chapter 15 of this parable, in verses 1 and 2: *"Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to him to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.'"* Some, the tax collectors and sinners, those who at some point turned away from God, are like the younger son who asked for his inheritance and left. The others, the Pharisees and scribes, are represented by the older son who stayed with the father, seemingly. In reality, they were saying something like this about the Father: 'It's bad with him, but worse without him, so I'd better stay.' But they never understood the Father. Perhaps that is why they frighten

the younger brothers and sisters. I think Jesus is talking about a third child, which I call the church, a daughter perhaps.

Yes, she would love the Father for the Father's sake. And she would love her brothers and sisters for their own sake. She, the Church, would be the third son or daughter who would always live with the Father, through the Father, and by the Father. The Father would be her source of joy, her source of life.

The brothers and sisters would be her missionary dreams. She would go out to find them and win them back. She would make any sacrifice so that they might know the Father as the Father truly is.

I understand that when Jesus recounted this, finding his people divided into these two groups who failed to understand the Father, and exclaiming, "I will build my church," he meant: I am going to bring forth the third son, who will love the Father as I love him, who will serve him as I serve him, who will find in him the same joy I find, whose food and drink will be doing the Father's will, and who will love his brothers and sisters as I loved them, even to the point of giving my own life. I believe this is our calling.

We are leaders of the Lord's church by the inexplicable mercy of God, and I understand that this is our mission.

It is interesting to consider that this parable is followed by two others. The first is the parable of the lost sheep. *"What man among you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?"*

What is the answer to a question like this? The answer is: Nobody. Nobody would leave ninety-nine sheep in the desert to go looking for one. First, they would go to the sheepfold to take the ninety-nine, and then see what could be done for the one that was lost. And Jesus seems to be telling us: I am going to bring forth a new son who will do anything to find those who are lost; any sacrifice.

And the other parable: *“Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it?”* This makes us to feel that the drachma is very valuable. It seems that Jesus is saying: I am going to generate a third son so that every human being can be redeemed through whatever work is necessary.

Finally, I would like to say that being the third son implies something more. Yes, it implies loving the Father as Christ loved Him, to the point of making the Father's will His food and drink, His pleasure and joy; loving God's children as Christ loved them, to the point of giving His life for them; but it also means taking care of the Father's things. Considering what that father said to the eldest son, *“All that I have is yours,”* I think that all the leaders of the church of Jesus Christ, as you are (and I don't include myself in this select group), need to serve as high- ranking officers in the forces of God's kingdom, the top command, the great strategists. Thinking about the Father's things, about what interests the Father on this earth where we are, so that His will may be done, His glory recognized, and His Name exalted; so that people may know God. Because there is no human being who does not subsist by the grace of God. And our role is to make them recognize God, the One on whom they all depend and for whose sake they continue to live. We have this responsibility before the Lord. We are not here to take what belongs to the Father and do the same as the younger son. Nor to do what the older son did.

Understanding that we are only slaves, but Jesus Christ said, *“I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends.”* But you tell everything to a friend; you expect cooperation from a friend. A friend gets involved, taking care of our things as if they were their own. Oh, that by the grace of God we may become strategists! And that, looking at the world, we may ask ourselves: Where are we going to attack it? Where are we going to establish the authority of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?

Where are we going to evangelize? Where are we going to intercede? Where are we going to focus our efforts?

Ariovaldo Ramos