ENGLISH



The Kingdom of Heaven on Earth

8 - 11 May 2018

Fuerteventura

AFI 2018

Giovanni Traettino

The Kingdom of Heaven on Earth

***

The church's responsibility for the social transformation of nations
The church's responsibility for the moral transformation of nations

---

"Our Father in heaven… your kingdom come;
Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"
Matthew 6:9-13

Dear brothers,
It is a great joy to be together again, as guests of the beloved pastor Angel Manuel Hernandez Gutierrez. Our thanks to you and to your precious fellowship that is hosting us, the *Iglesia Misiòn Cristiana Moderna*. It was my personal wish to meet here for this year's consultation, because from the very first meeting with Pastor Angel and his fellowship we felt a great affinity between his spirituality and that which we have cultivated over these years. I am therefore delighted that we can meet together here for this nineteenth meeting of AFI.

Welcome and Introduction

I welcome this opportunity, as the Permanent Coordinator of AFI, to give my warm, brotherly and affectionate welcome to all the sisters and brothers who have set aside these days, in some cases sacrificially, to renew our relationships, deepen our fellowship, and reflect together on an issue that we believe is of strategic importance, certainly for our own way forward, but also and more importantly for the progress of the whole church in the 21st century. After last year's reflections on *"The challenges facing the church in the modern world"*, this year our theme is *"The Kingdom of Heaven on earth",* with particular attention to the *responsibility* of the church for *moral transformation* and for what I believe is in many ways connected to it, *social transformation*.

The whole area associated with these challenges is of particular concern to apostolic ministries, but also affects those of us who find ourselves in positions of leadership or coordination, who are inspirational or influential in the life of the spiritual family to which we belong. This is not always an easy position; among other reasons, because we may – perhaps unconsciously – be conditioned by psychological influences, states of mind, mentalities and inherited theological and cultural traditions, embraced in a simplistic and uncritical manner, which limit our understanding of God's plan and prevent us from having a clear vision of reality.

It can be crucial for our life and ministry to listen, open our eyes and become aware of this reality, because it may be that our certainties, our paradigms, our understanding and our churches are being challenged and are beginning to show their limitations in confronting the reality of the world around us; a world which is increasingly changeable, characterized more and more by powerful processes of opening up ("globalization"), and at the same time by a parallel defensive withdrawal on the part of many social groups, whether ethnic, cultural, political or spiritual.

I am thinking – on the Christian side – of the "spirit" of denominations built in a strongly defensive and "tribal" fashion, or of the "sovereignism" producing worrying new forms of nationalism. I think of the defeatist and escapist theologies which give birth to terrified, pessimistic narratives leading to negative interpretations of the present and visions of the future without depth or hope. These produce resignation and a rejection of responsibility for the "common good" in the present, and a lack of perspective and vision for the future yet to come of the Kingdom of God in the Church and in history.

In preparing for this meeting, I read the contributions of the other speakers and was edified by the positive perspective of faith accompanying their thinking and encouraged by their shared exercise of the crucial virtue of hope for the purposes of God's plan for history and the church. God reigns! Hallelujah!

The role of the Church as a connector

Now, as someone has observerd: *"One of the most difficult issues in the study of the Kingdom of God is its relationship to the church."*[1] And we are here to consider the **function** of *the church as God's instrument to promote social justice and morality*, its role as a connector and an interface. This immediately raises the question of our understanding of the church (its nature and extent, its substance and historical "visibility") and of its historically "varying" and "variable" levels of faithfulness to its mission to be the *salt* and *light* of the world ("the church of the saints" or "a holy whore"?). This is a debate that has continued to fascinate Christians throughout the ages, and it is still crucial in our generation. It is of decisive importance for the "progress towards the fullness" of the future of God's purpose for the world and for the contribution that the church is called to make to the success of this strategy.

Kingdom of God, Church and Society

It will be helpful here, as we begin our deliberations, to recall the contribution of the thoughts developed in the first decade of our journey (2000-2010). For this reason I invite you to read the papers available on our website (www.afint.org) from the Consultations in Chile in 2008, Nigeria in 2009 and Italy in 2010.

In Chile we began to examine the theme of *"Kingdom of God, Church and Society"*, continuing with the same theme over the following two years in Nigeria and Italy. It seemed clear to us, as was highlighted by the main contributions in Santiago, that there is a *connection* and *continuity*, a close and deep-rooted relationship, which from a Christian perspective can and must be established between these three realities: the Kingdom of God, the church and society.

I quote:

> "The theme of the Kingdom is foundational for the Church and intersects its path towards its fulness; because the path towards fulness coincides with the process of growth and the increase of the

[1] GE Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, The Lutterworth Press, Cambridge, 1991, p. 105

Kingdom; and because the fulness is in fact the fulness of the life of the Kingdom, the Kingdom of God fully realized. This is true at the personal level (the person being the habitation of God by the Spirit), at the interpersonal level (the community as the habitation of God by the Spirit), and at the ecological and universal level (the earth and the universe filled with His glory!). By then God will have healed, inhabited and filled with Himself all relationships and the whole creation! A new creature! A new community! A new creation![2]

And again:

"In the course of these deliberations… we stumbled across the theme of *"Transformation"*! The subject of *Fullness* and that of the *Kingdom* raise the question, in God's economy, of *Transformation*: transformation of the *individual* Christian and the Christian *community*, and – to the degree that they are transformed, even if partially (though truly!) – that of *society* and of the *land* in which we live.

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

"The *bridge*, the connection between the Gospel of Desire and the Gospel of the Kingdom, is the *Gospel of the Incarnation!* [3] God's purpose was to *inhabit* and *experience* man – the new tabernacle (!) – *from within*: a tabernacle no longer made of walls of cloth, wood or stone, but walls of flesh. It was inaugurated by God in Christ (*"Sacrifice*

[2] Giovanni Traettino, *Kingdom of God, Church and Society*, AFI Santiago, 2008

[3] As someone has said: "The Incarnation is the spiritual and theological foundation of commitment in the practical sphere"

and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me"[4]), and is continued in Christians through the breaking in and indwelling of the Holy Spirit (*"Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you."*[5])

"But all this would be incomplete if we did not comprehend that the ultimate purpose of the Gospel of Desire, of the Kingdom and of the Incarnation is *the Gospel of Transformation*! God's desire has always been the complete recovery of man in order to transform him, *from within*, in his personal life and his relationships, into His own image and likeness!" [6]

The earth and creation

The same plan of redemption and transformation also, naturally, includes the earth and all of creation. So the final outcome of the story will not be – as some believe or appear to believe – *destruction* but, as with the resurrection of Christ, "new heavens and a new earth": *renewal and transformation*! As it is written: *"Then He who sat upon the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.'"*[7] And elsewhere: *"creation groans and labors with birth pangs… the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God."*[8]

The manifestation of God's children

The manifestation of God's children! In the "person" of the believer; in the "person" of the church! The Christian inhabited by God and the church inhabited by God are His strategic investment in the future of humanity and of the creation, since in the Christian understanding of history, the "pre-political" dimension of relationship with God and with our brothers precedes and is the foundation of the "political" dimension of the commitment of Christians and the church in society and in the world. The political dimension must be rooted and engaged (steeped in, motivated by and practiced in) the workshop of the "pre-political" relationship with God and with others. The transformation of the Christian and the church precedes

[4] Hebrews 10:5.
[5] 1 Corinthians 6:19.
[6] *"Welcome"* at the AFI Consultation , Lagos 2009
[7] Revelation 21:5
[8] Romans 8:23,19

and is the spiritual foundation of their desirable and possible contribution to the transformation of the *agorà* and of the *polis*; the highly complex and challenging dimension of the city, work, government and the state. To summarize: from the "inner forum" to the "outer" one!

Christian responsibility

From this premise we can understand the need for a renewed awareness of "Christian responsibility" in society and politics: a need founded on the divine logic of the Incarnation as the spiritual and theological foundation of practical commitment. *"I care!"* "Immersion", so to speak, precedes "fellowship". The life of God "within" precedes the effectiveness of Christian life "on the outside". The immersion in Christ of the Christian and the church comes before the effectiveness of the Christian's relationship to society (the social body) and the state. Commitment in the social and political arena becomes, for the Christian, *"a demanding way of living out the Christian commitment to serving others"*[9]; politics becomes the collective (or social) organization of Christian love (*agape*), a way of extending and giving everyday practicality to the Christian inspiration of love for one's brothers, for one's neighbor and for the world; the responsibility to which every Christian is called of seeking the "common good" of the city. As it is written: *"And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace."*[10] And in the Gospels: *"Love your neighbor as yourself"*!

Christ therefore, *the life of Christ* in the Christian, makes *the life of the Christian* possible and effective in the church. Christ, *the life of Christ* in the church, makes *the life of the church* possible and effective in society and in the world. Christ, the *transformation* brought about by Christ in the Christian, makes the *transformation* of relationships in the church possible and effective. The *transformation* produced by relationships in the church (*and between churches!*) makes the *transforming action* of the church in society and in the world possible and effective.

[9] Pope Paul VI
[10] Jeremiah 29:7

Delays

The gap between our personal and community experience and the moral and social impact of the Gospel of the Kingdom is explained by our slowness in making and continuing to make room for the government of God in our lives and relationships. Walking "in the flesh" is unfortunately more common than walking in the Spirit! Conflict and division often get the better of the search for unity and reconciliation. The secret remains the same: life in Christ: *"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing"*[11]; and Christian unity: *"that they all may be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. And the glory which you gave me I have given them, that they may be one just as we are one: I in them, and you in me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that you have sent me, and have loved them as you have loved me."*[12]

The instrument of the church

On this basis, starting from a church that remains vigilant in its relationship with the Holy Spirit (*inner life*) and cultivates *from within* the integrity of its testimony (*holy living*), the church will be able to develop more and more credibly and effectively its function as the primary "agency of the Kingdom", in its relationship to humanity in general and in the varying manifestations of society particular. The "aroma" of the lives of the disciples and the "atmosphere" of fellowship life will become, like the yeast in dough or a seed of wheat that falls into the earth and dies, a powerful factor in making fertile the life of the "city". As someone has said: "It's the essential things that make life worth living." The "evangelistic example" of the church will spread its influence principally, as in Jerusalem, by attraction and imitation. It will in fact have acquired an enduring capacity of *koinonia* and *service*, which are the two main rivers of grace which in this season we can – as an outgoing

[11] John 15:5
[12] John 17:21-23

church – pour into society and the world. So, a "church of fellowship" and a "church of service".

A church of fellowship

A church of fellowship because it witnesses to the authenticity of our being grafted and rooted in the "God of relationships"; a reflection of the transforming power of the *"glory"*[13], the *"mindset"*[14] and the *"Spirit of Christ"* thanks to the effectiveness of his presence *in us and among us*. A church that manifests the "continuity" of the life of God in our lives and aims to "infect" and involve our neighbors in our life of fellowship…

A church of service

A church of service! Because it is a witness to the possibility of surrendering our pride to God, of a counter-cultural victory over the selfishness and individualism that characterize our age, the two mortal enemies of social life and the promotion of the "common good". As someone has called it, *"the church of the apron"*, referring to the apron that Jesus used at the Last Supper while washing his disciples' feet. "We must react against the idea of the church triumphant, acting as God's viceroy on earth… and strive to follow the example of Jesus, who stated that he had come to serve."[15] We must resist every temptation to return to a Constantinian church. As Bonhoeffer wrote from a Nazi prison: "The church is only the church when it exists for others… The church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others."[16]

[13] "…the glory which you gave me I have given them, that they may be one just as we are one" John 17:22

[14] "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness" Philippians 2:5-7 NIV

[15] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Mich. USA, 1989, 1991.

[16] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, New York, Macmillan, 1967, p.211

The specific calling of AFI

In concluding this reflection, I would like to ask myself and you a question: In response to this theme – "Your kingdom come" – what, if any, is the identifying characteristic of apostolic ministry? More particularly, what is the calling and mandate of AFI? of AFI with its awareness of the "Gospel of the Kingdom" in the church and in relation to the church, as a real, albeit partial, expression of the action and life of the Spirit in the church? Especially in terms of fellowship and service? In fellowship among ourselves and in service to the world and the church?

And as a stimulus to reflection, I think of the words of my dear brother Himitian on the occasion of our first meeting in 2000 in Positano:

> "We need to create an international place of reflection, for prayer, for revelation, to hear God and listen to one another. We need communication and we need to know what God is doing in different parts of the world, as well as what is he saying. We need to renew our covenant with God. It is a covenant of faithfulness and loyalty to the revelation of the mystery of Christ; a covenant of integrity, of self-denial, of consecration as well as a covenant of love, respect, humility, companionship and friendship between each other."

Thank you!

Giovanni Traettino

Sudarshan Jyoti Komanapalli

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN ON THE EARTH:
The church as an instrument of God's voice on issues of morality in the light of the changing times

I would like to preface my presentation by saying: "I hope to stimulate a conversation rather than propose a final statement on the issue".

I would also like to stipulate I believe that just as God does not change, the foundational moral values He has given do not change. However, the changing times give us the responsibility to seek His discernment on present issues and challenges. That being said…

We live in an era where most things that were considered foundational are now considered relative. Truth, morality and ethics are now viewed through the eyes of changing times, circumstance and the public good or harm. These categories cover the values which we live our lives both personal and public.

1. How then do we as the Church respond to changing times, moral absolutes, ethical requisites is a world that is multi-cultural, multi-religious and at the same time individualistic and agnostic? How do we stay true in a world where truth has become relative?

A. We first start with a definition. According to the Oxford dictionary **Morality is: "Principles concerning the distinction between right and wrong or good and bad behaviour."**

Every society has chosen principles, which guide or govern their behavior and actions. This then gives ground to laws that they follow in their homes and in civil society. The laws then punish what is considered wrong.

However, in many western societies the concept of what is right or wrong has been rendered relative to personal beliefs and values. This gives rise to children being taught to find their own way.

B. The Church must address these issues

"Jesus taught rules, commands, and morals as central to being one of his followers. One only has to read any of the gospels to see Jesus taught a lot about what is right and what is wrong. He taught of our need to love others and God, our need to forgive others, our need to be holy. He made moral statements like this, "If you love me you will keep my commands" (John 14.15). Teaching obedience to the commands of Christ is also commanded to the Church by Christ in Matthew 28.18-20, *"And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,* ***teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*** *And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* Jesus has commanded us specifically to teach others to obey **everything** he has commanded. This is a command to teach his rules and the moral code he taught. In order for the church to be faithful, it must teach these things."---Rev. Levi Secord, Riverview Baptist church, St. Paul, MN

2. What is our Foundation?

A. Scriptural Standards

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:

Fear God and keep His commandments,
For this is man's all.
For God will bring every work into judgment,
Including every secret thing, whether good or evil."(*The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ec 12:13–14). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.)

"Honor all *people*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the King. "(*The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Pe 2:17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.)

"It is actually reported *that there is* sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife! [2] And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. [3] For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. [4] In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, [5] deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.
[6] Your glorying *is* not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? [7] Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. [8] Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth.

Immorality Must Be Judged

[9] I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. [10] Yet *I* certainly *did* not *mean* with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. [11] But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.
[12] For what *have* I *to do* with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? [13] But those who are outside God judges. Therefore *"put away from yourselves the evil person."* (*The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Co 5:1–13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.)

"Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil;
Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness;
Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!"(*The New King James Version*. (1982). (Is 5:20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.)

"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, [12] teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, [13] looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, [14] who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works.
[15] Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you." (The New King James Version. (1982). Titus 2:11-15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson)

B. The Ten Commandments as Foundation

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (DECALOGUE)
Ex 20:2-17; Deut 5:6-21

I am the Lord your God,
you shall not have strange gods before me.
God, as our creator, wants us to love him above all else.
You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
God's name and all things dedicated to him should not be misused or treated lightly.
Remember to keep holy the Lord's day.

God wants us to dedicate specific periods of time to him since worship is of the greatest importance.
Honour your father and your mother.
The family is the basis of society. Respect and obedience is due to parents and other lawful authorities.
You shall not kill

To destroy or harm human life, made in God's image, is a rejection of God's gift, the person and society.
You shall not commit adultery.
Marriage is the only legitimate context for sexual acts. Adultery violates this sacred bond and destabilises families.
You shall not steal.
Personal property is needed for human well-being. Stealing is an attack on personal and civic life.
You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.
To lie or attack a person's reputation is an attack on human dignity. It is an injustice in itself and leads to further wrongs.
You shall not covet your neighbour's wife.
To desire what is evil is itself evil. Impure thoughts corrupt our minds and can lead to immoral actions.
You shall not covet your neighbour's goods.
God wants us to make full use of the gifts he has given us, not to crave possession of the gifts of others instead.(Catholicfaith.org.uk)

C. The Commandments form the foundation for the following categories:

Spiritual

Physical

Ethical

3. Letter vs. Spirit

"But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not *in* the oldness of the letter." (*The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ro 7:6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.)

4. Jesus Model

"For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you."(The New King James Version. (1982). (John 13:15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson)

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:"(The *New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Pe 2:21). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.)

"But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. [2] Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. [3] Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, [4] they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. [5] Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" [6] This they said, testing Him, that they might have *something* of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with *His* finger, as though He did not hear.

[7] So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." [8] And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. [9] Then those who heard *it,* being convicted by *their* conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest *even* to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. [10] When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"

[11] She said, "No one, Lord."

And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."(*The New King James Version*. (1982). (Jn 8:1–11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.)

As we see, God has set forth in scripture and modeled through Jesus Christ our Lord a blue print for morality. If we believe that God does not change and His word does not change but endures, we must also embrace and teach His moral foundations. In the same breath however, we must view and address the issues in light of grace and the spirit of love. As we see these qualities merge in Christ let them also be manifest in the Church.

Sudarshan Jyoti Komanapalli

Carlos Mraida

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN ON THE EARTH:
The church as an instrument of God's voice on issues of morality in the light of the changing times

Rebellion against God the Father: the mother of all battles

Introduction

I have been asked to share some reflections that might help us understand the interaction and responsibility of all who are present, concerning *"The Church as an instrument of God's voice in matters of morality, in light of our changing times".*

Many of the principles and life styles that we as Christians and the society in general sustain are being challenged: heterosexuality, monogamy, marriage for life, parental responsibility, the sanctity of human life in the early stages of development, in their most vulnerable moment and in their conclusion.

This matter is not only a challenge to the principles of Christian faith but a challenge to the very concept of truth. We face a systematic denial of the moral authority of the church, and of its legitimacy to establish and even express its convictions concerning these and other matters. For decades there has been a serious effort, organized and active, on the part of militant radicals.

We could approach the subject from a moral viewpoint, and develop each of these questions which we find on the table for discussion today. Yet that would obviously require a different presentation for each one of the subjects, for which we do not have the time. It would also require a specialized focus on each one of them, for which we would need the input of specialists, and I do not claim to be such.

We could also deal with the proposed question from the viewpoint of theology, ecclesiology, ethics, sociology, psychology, missiology, anthropology, or pastoral responsibility. Each focus would be quite appropriate. However, I prefer to approach the matter in a broader way which, as I understand it, is to get to the root of the question. Therefore my presentation will be from the viewpoint of cosmology.

The cosmos

The apostle John, by using the verb "we know" affirms two convictions of the church: *We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one* (1 John 5.19). Allow me to begin by asking: Does the church today have this dual conviction? Does the church live according to a father/son relationship with God, with all its practical implications? And, does the church today know that the whole world is under the control of the evil one?

I believe that ultimately these moral questions imply a rejection of God's fatherhood over the life of men and women, and a denial that this is more the result of personal decisions, which respond to a system of domination *(kratos)* by the father of lies.

When we deal with the ethical questions of our times, we often ignore what the New Testament community sustained with clarity, and that has to do with that system of demonic domination, known as *kosmos*. Perhaps the first reason for this ignorance is the dualistic character of the word *kosmos*, or world. In this context it does not mean universe, nor the land inhabited by humans, nor humanity, nor a specific epoch, but rather basically an order, a system of domination controlled by Satan, which is contrary to God.

If we think of what is generally considered demonic, this is a micro approximation. We think of occultism, witchcraft, sorcery, etc. But this lacks a macro vision. I refer to the *kosmos*, the system of domination that is under the control of the *arjón tou kosmou* (prince of the world), who exercises his dominion through positions of power, which Paul calls rulers (*arjás)*, authorities *(exousías)*, the powers (*kosmokrátoras) of this dark world* and *spiritual forces of evil (pneumatiká)* (Ephesians 6.12).

These forces are of intelligence incorporated in the cultures, nations and social institutions. These powers are "fallen angels" that abandoned their mission to affirm life, for which God commissioned them for the purpose of promoting his own interests.

The ethical questions are more than the mere result of moral decisions by persons. There is an intricate structure of domination that exercises its spiritual power over the means of communication, educational systems, institutions (including the church), corporations, governments, and exercises its decisive influence over persons. If we do not recognize this fact, our struggle will only be against flesh and blood.

World view

Satan is the one who holds the control over this system of domination. He is the *kosmokrátor* par excellence, the prince of this system known as *kosmos.* He is the source of spiritual, philosophical and moral powers of this world, which the Bible calls the rudiments of this world *(stoijéion tou kósmou*, Galatians 4.3, Colossians 2.8, 20*)*. This ordered system of powers and precepts conforms a world view, which is more than a perspective of the universe; rather, it is a comprehension of the whole of life. As a consequence, this view of reality is presented as ethical principles and moral compartments.

Then we also need to understand that Christianity is more than a collection of beliefs and values; it is an integral comprehension of the world, and therefore a world view that competes against other world views. Cultural war not only has to do with abortion, homosexual rights, etc. Those are only minor battlegrounds. The real war is a cosmic battle between world views, between the Christian world view and the diverse secular and spiritual world views.

We are not only dealing with groups of atheistic or homosexual militants, or those who favor abortion, or feminists. Greater forces are in action, invisible powers presented as current ethics, and that pretend to dictate the future. The means of social communication, the entertainment industry and the educational systems are their programs, promoted by national and supranational governments which are the preferred means of establishing the demonic agenda.

Ethical consequences

The system of demonic cosmic domination is expressed in dominating relationships on the human plane. Interpersonal relations of manipulation, control and distortion (domestic

violence, sexual perversion and deviation, inequality of opportunities, masculine domination and feminism, abortion, etc.), unjust economic relations (social inequality, unjust distribution of riches between nations and individuals, poverty, indigence, marginalization, etc), oppressive political relations (that promote fissures), violent racial relations (based on hate and discrimination), generational relations marked by division and gaps.

Fallen angels

These powers are not truly angels, but rather persons and their institutions. They also include the spiritual nature in the heart of such institutions and structures.

These powers are in God's creation: …*whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together* (Colossians 1.16-17).

These were created by God to serve his purposes. But now they are fallen angels. These powers have rebelled and fallen. They did not recognize their place, but rather sought for themselves an absolute value, enslaving humanity. All these structures, whether intellectual, moral, social or religious, contain seeds of the good creation. There could be neither society nor history without the existence of structures that are religious, intellectual, moral and social. We cannot live without them. But they have fallen. They are unable to serve us as they should have done. They demand an unconditional loyalty of both individuals and society. Instead of reflecting the truth, they turned into adversaries of the truth. Instead of serving the purposes of humanity lived to the fullest degree, they sought to dominate, coerce, corrupt and enslave, requiring for themselves absolute power. The power they pretend to have is in the origin and consequence of demonic character.

Walter Wink, professor of biblical interpretation, found meaning in the fact that the messages in the book of Revelation are directed to the "angels" of the seven churches, not to the churches themselves. The angels would represent the corporate personalities of the churches, bearers of the vocation assigned by God to those churches.

In the same way, the angel of a culture, system, nation or institution is the bearer of the divine vocation of that culture, nation, system or institution. Governments, communications media, educational systems and institutions are "creatures" whose original purpose was to glorify God and contribute to the general wellbeing. And when they refuse to do so, their spirituality falls, becomes flawed and subservient to the system of demonic domination. Therefore the demonic nature, in this corporate comprehension, is the spirituality produced when the angel of a culture, a government, an institution turns away from God's authority and his divinely assigned vocation.

They no longer serve as mediators of the creative and redemptive purposes of God; we see them now trying to separate us from God's love[1], lording it over those that live far

[1] *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Romans 8.38-39).

from God's love[2], with the intention to enslave with their rules[3], keeping people subject to their control[4]. These structures, these powers that were created as our servants, have become lords and tutors of human beings.

Demons do not live in a subterranean world, but rather "over" the socio-spiritual structures that make up the only real world. When a specific power becomes idolatrous, that is, when it seeks a vocation different from that which God established and makes its own interests of domination and destruction its highest end, then that power becomes diabolical.

The task of the church is to unmask this idolatry and declare to the powers the creative purposes of our Father God, his manifold wisdom, in order that they might subject themselves to the divine vocation and fulfill their mission in the world (Ephesians 3.10). The church should carry out this task, recognizing first of all its own fall, its idolatries. Evil is not only personal (individual) but also structural and spiritual. It is not simply the result of human actions, but the consequence of enormous systems over which no individual has complete control. Only by confronting the spirituality of a world view, culture, government, institution and its physical manifestations can the full structure be transformed.

Unmasking the powers removes their invisibility and, therefore, their ability to oblige others unwittingly to fulfill their orders. The task of redemption is not limited to individuals that have been transformed, but also to transform their world views, governments, fallen institutions. That redemption will culminate in the salvation, not only of individual persons, but also of nations[5].

The war

There is a cosmic war that finds expression on the earth. That war, the mother of all battles is a confrontation, in the final analysis, against God's fatherhood. For the rejection of God's fatherhood implies the rejection of his authority, his world view, while provoking a distortion in the identity of his children and in their moral behavior, such as the loss of their inheritance as heirs. Therefore, the redemption that provides us freedom from slavery to that system of domination is the operation of the spirit of adoption that restores the proper father-son relationship[6].

Psalm 2 clearly expresses this confrontation. We see here mutiny, conspiracy, rebellion, not of a few individuals, but of an entire system: *Why do the nations conspire and the people plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One (2.1-2).*

The conspiracy is against the Lord and his anointed one. In v. 7 we find the matter of fatherhood: *He said to me, you are my Son; today I have become your Father.* It turns out to be absolutely indispensable that the Son should reveal his total subjection to the Father, and that his identity as Messiah is based on that fatherhood.

---

[2] *In which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient* (Ephesians 2.2).

[3] *Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules…?* (Colossians 2.20).

[4] *So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world* (Galatians 4.3).

[5] *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* (Matthew 28.19); *Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed* (Revelation 15.4).

[6] Romans 8, Galatians 4.

Founding narrative

Every world vision has a founding narrative that is its reason for existence, an explanation that codifies its beliefs, establishes and affirms certain moral principles and procedures for its fulfillment, gives meaning to our relationship, and explains our creation.

The plot revealed in Psalm 2 has a founding narrative, a way of thinking that repeats itself until it is realized. In the psalm we are told that *the people plot in vain (1).* The verb *jagá* makes reference to a thought that is declared and presented as an assumed response by everyone. This deceitful narrative that comes from the father of lies is accepted among the people, stating that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has enslaved people, repressed and restricted their individual liberty. Thus the purpose of this mutiny is to get free from the government that the Father exercises through his anointed son: *Let us break their chains, and throw off their fetters (3).*

It is the kings of the earth and the princes that come together and establish this deceptive world view[7]. But behind them are the spiritual powers, rulers and authorities that have established a corrupt spirituality in the human powers, corrupting their divine vocation.

Meanwhile, the Father in heaven laughs and scoffs at them and their plans, knowing that his plan, the story of salvation, occurs triumphantly and the demonic powers will be terrified[8]. And his people, his children, those that are in his kingdom and live on the mount of holiness[9], request and assume their inheritance of authority and government over the nations[10], proclaiming decrees in the spiritual world[11] while breaking the demonic powers and shattering them like a potter's vessel; a reference to their system of domination, world view and narrative.[12]

The final battles

The cosmic confrontation is not only engaged in the spiritual sphere, but also in the ideas, for as we saw, it is a confrontation of world views with their correspondent narratives.

In the twentieth century, as well as in others, there were three great battles that defied Christianity and that were nothing but rejections of God's fatherhood and his world view and, consequentially of the lordship of his anointed Son.

The first of those great spiritual-ideological battles was Darwinism. The second was Marxism. And the third great battle was the Freudian mindset. While both Darwin and Marx lived in the nineteenth century, their ideas found expansion in the twentieth century. And

---

[7] *The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One* (2).

[8] *The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger, and terrifies them in his wrath* (4-5).

[9] *I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill (6).*

[10] *Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance (8).*

[11] *I will proclaim the decree of the Lord; He said to me, You are my Son; today I have become your Father (7).*

[12] *You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery (9).* The apostle Paul expresses it in 2 Corinthians 10.4-5: *The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world, on the contrary, that have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

the three have world views that directly attack the idea of God as Father, authority, and confront the biblical world view with a naturalist and materialist viewpoint. The three ideologies attacked "the establishment", whose foundation is the concept of authority which is itself based on fatherhood. A deconstruction was proposed for the figure of Father, on the natural plane, the social and the psycho-sexual plane. As Freud would say, to eliminate the illusion of God as proto-father or primitive all powerful father that defends us from dangers. And the three had as their objective to break free from the "bonds" of that Father's authority, including the ethical consequences they produced.

The current battle

The great battle of the twenty-first century is also an attack on God's fatherhood and the search for human emancipation from his authority, in denial of the human identity as a creature made in the image of his creator. This battle against the Father, and therefore against his children, the church, is the generic ideology. Robert Sarah expressed it thus: "In fact, if God is no longer Father, the citizen ceases to be a son. Thus he is no longer a person that receives everything from his father; he becomes an individual, left to himself in the organization of the world and left to his own destiny. Since he no longer receives his identity (from Him in whose image and likeness he was created), he must construct his own, based on his own reasoning. Currently, with that generic ideology, the person is abandoned, insulted, destroyed, with the destruction of his values, his sexuality, and is little more than an animal. He is abandoned to his own design and, therefore, gradually loses all contact with the Source, the fatherhood of God, that which illumines his conscience".

As we have seen, every system of domination must have a myth of domination, a founding narrative, a story that explains how these things came to exist, and which is repeated with insistence and is "confirmed" with sufficient frequency in the daily life, until it ceases to be a narrative and is accepted as truth and reality. And when that happens, the people accept the story even if it is destroying their life. The narrative that the spiritual powers have established in our days through the communications media, the entertainment industry, governments, the curriculum content of the educational systems, is the myth of this generic ideology.

It is an ideology (that is, a closed system of thought) that defends the idea that the differences between man and woman, in spite of the obvious biological differences, do not correspond to a defined nature, but are merely cultural and conventional constructions, designed according to the roles and stereotypes that each society assigns to the sexes.

Even though the generic ideology has no scientific base at all[13], it is imposed through governments through international organisms such as the United Nations Organization and its agencies such as the People's Foundation, UNICEF, UNESCO and OMS that have put

[13] For a serious scientific study of the subject, see: Lawrence Mayer, Paul R. McHugh "Sexuality and Gender. Findings from the Biological, Psychological, and Social Sciences", https://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/introduction-sexuality-and-gender Doctor Lawrence S. Mayer is a psychiatrist, epidemiologist and mathematician, and professor of the Department of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University and professor of Statistics in the University of the state of Arizona. He has worked in such prestigious centers as the University of Princeton and the Mayo Clinic. Doctor Paul R. McHugh studied in Harvard and is considered the most important North American psychiatrist of the last half century. For twenty five years he served as Head of Psychiatry in the Johns Hopkins Hospital. The study shows that there is no scientific evidence on which to base the affirmations of the generic ideology.

together many documents with the particular categories of this ideology and have become some of their principal channels of defense. The generic ideology proposes total liberation. Some ethical ideas derived from this generic ideology are:

1. Problems of identity and sexual practices. This ideology affirms that sexes do not exist; only roles, mutant sexual orientations, which can be modified in life as long as desired.
2. Acceptance and promotion of abortion. What follows from the death of the father is the death of the mother and later of the child. And by not favoring the true sense of maternity which God designed, in the union of man and woman, the offspring loses its dignity as a gift and becomes an object. In fact, the groups that defend this ideology are mostly radical militants who favor unrestricted abortion. The key to their agenda of total liberation is the freedom of the woman from the slavery of reproduction, through contraception and abortion.
3. Destruction of family relations[14]. The persons who deny their own nature reinvent themselves according to their own sentiments and volition, denying that the family is the pre-established reality by creation. Of course, all of this attacks directly the common and traditional idea of the family, a reality based on the union between a man and a woman very clearly defined, from which a son or daughter is conceived. The idea that we have concerning what makes a family, and the meaning of society, is gradually transformed. There are as many new models of the "family" as the new kinds of ideas that exist.
4. Loss of the rights of parents in the formation of their children. The family, the natural society, existed before the State or any other community, and possesses certain rights that are inalienable. But the generic ideology introduces a way of seeing life as obligatory programs in the schools, because parents are already culturally programmed to keep affirming the current roles of masculine and feminine.

Underlying this ideology is the concept that the "liberation" of the individual depends on the "assassination" of the father, since patriarchy is the institutionalization of masculine control over women, children and society, perpetuating the subordination of the woman. Obviously, the understanding is that such patriarchy finds its foundation in religious ideas and in the figure of God as Father. As affirmed in the thesis of the Da Vinci Code, religions are an invention to oppress women. This is the reason for their task of deconstruction of everything religious.

The same old enemy

Some find the origin of the rebellion against God the Father in Darwin, Marx, Freud and in the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche, with his theory of the superman, and his supposed remedy for the desperation provoked by the death of God. Already in the last century Jean-Paul Sartre and his libertarian nihilism, adds another link in the chain. Others go further, affirming that the liberation from the fatherhood of God occurred long ago when the western democracies were formed in a deistic context. The significant thinkers of rationalism (from Voltaire to Diderot including d'Alembert) made room for the famous

[14] Pope Francis in *Amoris Laetitia,* published in March, 2016, says that the generic ideology "presents a society without sexual differences, and vacates the anthropological foundation of the family".

French Revolution, that is presented by the secular school as the genesis of the liberation of men with regard to the God of the Christians.

In reality, biblically speaking, we find this already in Genesis 3.5. The "liberation" from God is provoked by the enthroning of the ego: Adam and Eve seeking to be themselves the gods of their lives. This focus led and leads to the abandonment of the human being in his condition as a person (in the image and likeness of God) to become simply an individual, separated from his Father and from his purpose. From then on, for the ego everything is possible.

Psalm 2 affirms that the ego seeks to throw off the government of God the Father and of his Son the Messiah. Therefore, ideologies such as those mentioned, find room for maximum development in the midst of a hyper individualistic culture like our own[15].

Individualism in its maximum expression is the denial of all authority beyond the ego, it is the deification of the ego, the base of rebellion against God the Father. And when it comes to finding answers from the church for the ethical problems presented to us by the world, we must not forget that the ultimate enemy in this rebellion, is none other than the ego. Therefore salvation consists in the denial of self, the daily crucifixion of the ego, and obedience in following the Son. The battles will be meaningless if we concentrate only on the moral problems and forget the egoistic base that rebels against the Father. At the close of the nineteenth century the famous author Dostoyevski said: "If God does not exist, anything goes".

The system of domination established in the *kosmos* by Satan occurs because the authority that God gave to the human being was surrendered to Satan because of the egoistic rebellion against the Father.

Responses from the church and their limitations

The church has sought to respond to this system of cosmic domination in different ways[16]. We could summarize these in seven propositions:

1. An escapist world view: Furious, ironic and resigned, Francisco I of France wrote to Pope Alexander VI: "The sun rises for me just as it does for others. I would like to see the clause in Adam's testament that excludes me from the distribution of the world leaving it only to the Spanish and Portuguese". Adam's Testament was called the Treaty of Tordesillas that divided between north and south the navigation of the Atlantic and the new American territories between the Spanish and the Portuguese. And the reference of Francisco I is probably to a Syrian apocryphal passage, that refers to the death and testament of Adam in which is traced a dividing line where the earth is the place of sinners, suffering and death, and the new heavens are the place where the sons finally have authority.

For many years the church has sustained an escatology with a "Tordesillas line" and a "Testament of Adam" which proposes the thought that heaven belongs to God, and the earth to the devil. This provoked an escapist missionology, not taking into account earthly

[15] Luc Ferry has called our time the epoch of "ultra individualism", Pascal Bruckner has baptized it as "super individualism". Giles Lipovetsky has called this period the "second individualistic revolution" or the step of individualism limited to total individualism.

[16] For a larger development of the responses of the church to the social problems, see: *Carlos Mraida, La política y el ministerio apostólico, AFI: Marcianise, Italia, June 8-11, 2010.* In it I present 12 postures which the church has assumed before the social question.

problems, since in the end the earth is bound for destruction. In the current dispensation, according to some believers, the world is demonic territory and any involvement of the church to respond to earthly problems would result in a kind of prostitution and surrender before the powers of this world. This posture has effectively turned the earth over to the devil and his system of domination, and has obviously provoked the church into being incapable of transforming the reality, which favors the advance of evil in the earth. One of the great paradoxes of our time is that many non Christians show a greater concern and compassion for those who suffer and for the problems we face, than Christians themselves. The indifference of many Christians would leave anyone perplexed.

2. World view of cultural captivity: In this case the culture of our time with its values and beliefs penetrates the church, and the church becomes captive to the culture. It is what I believe is occurring for the most part with the church today[17]. We see a church that is the captive of individualism, through a personalized gospel, privatized and individualistic. Captive to the narcissistic egotism through a gospel of self help. Captive to the entertainment culture, in which the church becomes mere attendants for the religious show that is offered on the platform. Captive to materialism, through a gospel of prosperity that turns the Father's house into a market. Captive to the consumer culture, through an egocentric gospel of offers in which the people only expect to receive. The church falls into cultural servitude adopting the world view of the system of domination. Obviously, it cannot transform the reality.

3. Revivalist world view: For many evangelicals the response that the church should give is to pray for a revival that would produce the conversion of a significantly large group of persons and in this way change the culture and the social disaster. And that revival will come through evangelism, so as to change lives that will change the world. "We can change the world one life at a time". The now deceased and distinguished evangelical leader Bill Bright held meetings for prayer and fasting with this in mind. He sustained: "In my opinion, the only way to change the world is to change individuals. Changes in persons, in sufficiently large numbers, will produce changed communities, changed cities, changed states and nations; yes, in a very real sense, a changed world. Jesus Christ is the only one who can change persons from within. We can help to change the world by leading people to Jesus Christ"[18].

As is obvious, I fully share the call to evangelization and to pray for revival. I believe that evangelism is central in the life of a disciple and a congregation. I also believe that the lives of persons change, their behavior is transformed and this has a marvelous effect on their surroundings and relationships. However, for twenty one centuries the church is changing the hearts of men, but society is getting worse, morally speaking. It is evident that the mission needs to be broader. And the hope for revival, which I also share, through

---

[17] For a more extensive development of this situation, see: Carlos Mraida, *The challenge the church faces in South America*. AFI, Consultation: Challenges to the church in today's world. Rome, May 31, 2017.

[18] Quoted by James Davison Hunter, *Para cambiar el mundo: La ironía, la tragedia y la posibilidad del cristianismo en el mundo actual,* (Buenos Aires: Peniel, 2015), p.21. I appreciate the valuable contribution of Dr. Hunter, whom I follow in many of his treatises.

misunderstanding has provoked a kind of paralysis, and we find ourselves awaiting something that doesn't arrive. And while we await the revival, the system of demonic domination gets stronger.

4. World view of moral protest: In some countries evangelicals have come together to object to questions of public morality, mostly in relation to sexual sins (pornography, abortion, prostitution, homosexuality). This has been an important step to get out of the escapist escatology and participate in society. I have marched in many of these manifestations, and recently in one in favor of life and against the depenalization of abortion in my country. However, this perspective leaves the devil and his system of domination to exercise the initiative, and place the church in a position of reaction and "negative" approximation, and in most of these cases the reaction arrives late because the devil has already won the cultural battle through the communications media and the political lobby.

As a collateral effect, its micro ethical focus that reduces the moral question to that which is sexually related, has provoked an image that Christians are people of the conservative right, that are only interested in these matters, that only protest these issues, that never express themselves in those matters that society understands as their most deeply felt needs, such aa poverty, the unjust distribution of riches, the violation of women, education, health and other social struggles in which the contemporary church does not participate.

5. World view centered on politics: This perspective affirms that bad laws are the result of bad decisions taken by individuals that are politicians, legislators that give form to politics. Therefore, to change the reality, the active participation of Christians in polítics is necessary, and God's people should vote for those who have correct values for public office, so that they might make the right decisions. Tom Minnery affirms: "Christians have the same possibilities to determine good public policies and not just protest against bad political decisions"[19]. The belief held by many good North American and Latin American believers is that when their nation has a born again president, everything will change in society. But this illusion does not recognize that this has already occurred and, even so, no cultural changes have occurred, the system of demonic domination in those nations governed by born again presidents, has grown.

I firmly believe that politics is an area of action for those Christians with a vocation for service in that area, which should be exercised, not in spite of their faith, but because of their faith, and that the church should awaken such a vocation in its members. But I also have the conviction that the transformation of the culture which we all desire escapes the possibilities of politics and government. We must demystify politics, freeing it of the illusion of omnipotence, and clearly establishing what politics can do and what it cannot do.

6. World view of moral reformation: Here the perspective is directed toward changing the

culture through a renewal of civil society. Different from the perspective just mentioned, this one recognizes that although politics has its place, it is very limited in what it can truly

[19] Tom Minnery, *Why You Can't Stay Silent: The Biblical Mandate to Shape Our Culture.* (Wheaton, Tyndale House, 2001), p. 58.

accomplish. Don Eberly states it this way: "The most urgent matters of our time are of social and cultural nature, for which there are no easy solutions by the government"[20]. The way to accomplish this is through the intermediate organizations, voluntary associations that become means of social correction when other forms of public action, such as legislative change, are not enough. These movements seek to build character dealing with individuals as capable and responsible to exercise self control.

Without a doubt the positive contribution that these movements propose is valuable, but their posture errs by excessive emphasis on voluntary action, and lacks sustainability for the long haul, since it does not modify the course and direction of culture in its totality.

7. World view of cultural materialism: This view sees culture not as a combination of ideas but as a combination of tangible goods. Above all, it is based on material, concrete things[21]. Ideas, values, and beliefs are not floating in the air, but rather expressed through tangible things. And a culture changes when new cultural goods are introduced, concrete products, whether books, cellular phones, buildings, etc. Younger evangelicals have been captured by this world view. In recent decades there has been a massive production of cultural goods like music, books, publications, theology, Christian movies, etc.

These have been a motive of marvelous enrichment for the church, of which all in one way or another have been and are currently participants, but not only has this not significantly affected the reality of society and its system of demonic domination, but has fed the appetite for religious consumerism.

These seven responses, besides their own limitations as world views that are sustained as we have pointed out, also face limitations common to all. The first is that they present a partial focus of the church's mission, losing sight of its integral nature.

In the second place, they ignore the ultimate enemy against which we struggle, which is our ego. And they have in common the fact that they are individualistic responses. From evangelization and revival that pretends to change the world one person at a time, to the institutions of moral reformation that seek to empower the individual by developing character and self control, passing through the moral protest, political participation and cultural production. This individualistic perspective, part of the individualistic gospel that we have received and transmitted, believes that cultures are constituted and transformed through the actions of a large group of individuals. But not only are we unable to respond to the problem with the same problem, but this focus on culture as a large sum of individuals is incorrect. Culture is not the product merely of isolated individuals, but of institutions and the elite that govern them. Individuals have beliefs and values, and as such constitute part of a social order and its institutions. Yet at the same time these institutions and the larger social order of which they are part not only provide the framework of significance and social relationships in which individuals function, but they also "act" upon the individuals, influencing the formation of the structures of their conscience.

---

[20] Don Eberly, "*Compassionate Conservatism: Voluntary Associations and the Remoralization of America"* (discourse in Heritage Foundation, 8-11-1999), quoted by Hunter, p. 27.

[21] Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Rediscovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IVP Books, 2008), p. 10. Quoted by Hunter, p. 46.

In the formation of culture, individuals participate, but the power of the institutions (state, market, education, mass media, science and technology, family) and the elite that govern them is much larger.

This individualism is fed by the Old Testament vision that history is something like the biography of great men. This founding narrative of many models of mission and pastoral work ignores, neither more nor less, the central fact of the history of salvation: the coming of the Messiah, his redemptive sacrifice, his supreme exaltation, the impartation of the Holy Spirit and the establishment of the Body of Christ in the earth, the church as the corporate, community and cultural response of the kingdom of God on earth.

Efforts based on the individualistic response produce good individual results, but do not influence the social scheme that makes such changes sustainable. Thus the extraordinary numerical growth of the church in Latin America has not produced significant changes in the culture. The elite keys of power have not been affected, the formative institutions and of transmission of the culture have not been restructured (education, communication media, entertainment, publicity, sports).

In the third place, to individualism is added voluntarism. But voluntary action, as laudable as it may be, does not recognize that we are not aware of the major issues that shape and direct the life of a culture, and that operates very much below (or above) what most of us are able to consciously perceive. And which constitute precisely that system of domination firmly entrenched in the structures.

Present challenges

For the more conservative evangelical groups the great challenge of our world is secularization and its moral effects on the culture. And therefore the task of mission is the re-sacralization of society, that is to say, go back to including God in all the spheres of society, and with him, the recovery of a lost moral consciousness.

For the more progressive evangelical groups the great challenge of our world is inequality, and the task of mission is to achieve a more just and equitable society.

The problem is that both sectors recognize only part of the puzzle of our world. And therefore they believe that the challenge that they perceive is the preeminent problem. But a more biblical viewpoint, essential to the reality, shows us the multiplicity of challenges and the tremendous complexity of the causes.

For that reason I celebrate the fact that in this consultation of AFI, we are not choosing between morality and social justice, for we see both problems. It has fallen to me to think about the moral challenges in this presentation, but I want to make clear the integral nature of the problems, and a consideration of Christian ethics from a biblical perspective. Therefore, within the thematic framework that has been requested of me, I want to present two more challenges.

The challenge of the loss of the concept of truth

The rebellion against God the Father as absolute authority brought with it as a consequence the absence of the concept of truth. When there is no more absolute authority, neither is there absolute truth. The result is an emptiness in the discourses and a loss of confidence in the word as a description of reality. Much more so if we are dealing with the Word of God,

that is, the Word of him who is no longer recognized as authority. Thus, the weight which that Word might have for the moral posture of the people is quite questioned today.

The more liberal Christians have sought to respond to this challenge by renegotiating the significance of the Word in forms more acceptable to the current secular conceptions. From that position comes the rise of theologies of immanence that seek to provide responses to the social problems. The price has been the loss of fidelity.

More conservative Christians have tried to respond to this challenge of post-truth, by resisting the attack against the authority of the Word of God, while attacking the various currents of the world that undermine that authority. The price has been in many cases isolation, loss of relevance, the definition of identity by reacting to what others say, and in many cases by assuming hostile and aggressive attitudes toward those who think differently, placing in doubt their identity as children of a loving Father.

As is obvious, we need to find an alternative path that connects love for others with faithfulness to the Word. Or to say it in biblical terminology, to have a pertinent mission incarnated in the reality that, just as the Logos that became flesh, might be full of grace and truth. A faithful mission that follows the truth in love[22].

The challenge to live in Babylon

The second is the challenge of difference, as Hunter calls it: How do we think of others who are different from us, with different values, beliefs, and behaviors? How do we relate to them and to a world that is not our own? We live in a pluralistic world, that is, with a simultaneous presence of multiple cultures and world views. This was not the case in the past, where Christian culture was dominant in the West. Today there is a confrontation of world views in conflict. This pluralism will probably continue being a fundamental characteristic, and for some permanent, in the social order of the world in which we now live and will do so in the future.

This has direct incidence on the life and mission of the church. Just as an example: most Christians have a firm posture concerning homosexuality, which emerges from explicit and clear biblical content. That is to say, homosexuality is sin. Having said this, how do we perceive those who, even knowing our conviction, decide to live that style of life? How do we approach them? How do we reach them with the gospel? Have we developed a compassionate and loving spirit toward them? How do they perceive us? Have our manifestations of moral protest in relation to this subject been accompanied by acts of love equally massive toward these sinners?

Some, the more conservative evangelicals, assume a defensive attitude. The “other person” is a threat to the church. Again, the price for trying to be faithful to the biblical values, in many cases has been isolation and rejection of the others. On the other hand, the

---

[22] John 1.14: *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.* John 1.17: *For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.* Ephesians 4.15: *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.* 2 Juan 1.3: *Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love.*

more liberal evangelicals have tried to do just the opposite. Minimize any difference of those who are not Christians, and thus avoid conflicts and tensions so as to be more accepted, seeking to erase the image that, according to them, the more conservative ones have given to Christianity, as something reactionary, antiquated, repressive, insensitive and discriminating. As in the former challenge, the price paid to show themselves more relevant and inclusive, for many has been the loss of faithfulness to the values of the kingdom of God.

Finally, the difference is a great challenge, a challenge to live in Babylon. A lot of evangelical Christians and especially those in leadership believe that it is a question of living according to the laws of Israel. That is, firmly impose a life style and the values of the Kingdom in the midst of a society that is not under the King. This, besides being a theological absurdity that renders useless the work of Christ, ignores the pluralistic reality in which we live, whether we like it or not. The values of the Kingdom are not to be imposed. And even though as citizens we should work to promote the best laws, it is not laws that will change our culture. There are no complete and sustainable political solutions for the deterioration of family values, for the lack of decor or the propagation of vulgarity. The role of the State in these matters is less important than we sometimes think. It is true that laws are not neutral but rather reflect values. But laws cannot generate values. I repeat that this does not mean that we should not work and even struggle for the propagation of better laws. But the belief that the State can resolve these problems that go beyond the borders of a nation, that have a universal scale, precisely because they are beyond the reach of the state, is an illusion.

This is why I believe that it is essential that we face the challenge of difference, or of pluralism. If, as I have been saying, we are in the midst of a war, it is fundamental that we understand how to fight that war.

The paradigm of the Conquest

For many Christians today, especially in Latin America, the conquest of the promised land narrated in Joshua and Judges, has become the founding narrative of their mission. In fact, the number of congresses, seminars and gatherings that use in their title the word "Conquest" is overwhelming. Obviously, this is something more than a slogan or theme for a Christian event. The intentional use of the word conquest reveals an underlying world view, and a specific posture in facing the challenge of difference.

The use of triumphalist motivating phrases such as: "reclaim the nations for Christ", "conquer the areas of influence", "capture the spheres of power", etc., far from revealing a sense of victory that is assumed to be contagious, they reflect a language of loss, defeat, deception, anger, frustration, and a desire to conquer.

This is a new edition of the constantinian project of Christianity in which the objective is for Christians to conquer the power and from there to remold the world in the image of the church (or to be more precise, according to the beliefs of the church). This world view leads to the dichotomy of winning or losing[23]. The church wins or loses the world, and this dichotomy leads to triumphalist verbalization and pragmatic deception. Even

[23] That great man of God, James Dobson, expressed it quite intentionally, but incorrectly in my criteria, this way: "The winning side is the one that wins the right to teach what he believes to his children. And if we can do that, writing the study plans, teaching them what to believe and providing them the example of what we want them to understand, in a generation we can change the entire culture".

more serious, when the church is able to achieve the power to impose its values, in the midst of the culture war, history shows us that the gospel of love becomes cruelty and hate. The righteousness of God's kingdom becomes oppression and inequality. Five centuries of conquesting Catholic Christianity in Latin America, and of imperial Protestant Christianity in the world should teach us that conquest must not be our motivation nor our mission. Conquest is a category from the Old Testament, but not from the New. The New Testament category is that of redemption, not conquest.

Perhaps the most serious charge, in regards to our subject from the outset, is that the spirit that underlies this world view of conquest is the same that operates in the system of demonic domination. It is the intent to establish Christianity as a dominant culture that obliges conformity upon everyone.

This has been the grave error of the church throughout the ages and of which today we are victims, while in the past we were victimizers. Today there is a direct confrontation of secular radical groups, atheists, homosexuals, feminists, of the generic ideology and others against the church, that is characterized by hate and persecution, not only because they represent values absolutely contrary to that which as Christians we sustain, but because in the past they have felt persecuted, discriminated, oppressed, discarded, and even hated by the Christians, and now is time to even the score.

Those who in the past were victims today are victimizers, and vice versa. Thus conquest should not be our goal, nor motivation, nor perspective. We do not belong to the system of domination. We are in another spiritual kingdom. We should break with the logic of human dominion over others, of imposition, of christianization, of constantinian culture. Jesus said that the powerful ones of this world impose their rule and lord it over the nations, exercising dominion over them. But he said that the church must not repeat that model, but rather His model, that of surrender and service[24]. The one who needs to submit is not the other person, but the ego, giving ourselves to love and service for others.

John Howard Yoder said that the political novelty that God brings to the world is a community of persons that serve instead of govern, that suffer instead of imposing and inflicting suffering. Imposed dominion is contrary to all that is the kingdom of God. The responsibility of Christians is to transform the culture radically, not imposing values from above, but by a deeper process: live out the vocation of love and service in the daily reality.

The immense majority of those that promote the scheme of conquest are extraordinary Christians, faithful and loving God and the people. But I believe that without realizing it their proposal leads us to fall into Satan's trap and his system of imposition. Behind that, even when the motivation is correct there is an unconscious desire for dominion. Without a doubt we are in a cultural war, a war of world views, against the system of domination imposed by the devil and supported by the ego. But we do not battle by the flesh that responds to that system of domination. Our weapons are not carnal[25]. The prince of this world is the one who rules through imposition, intimidation, domination. But that reign of fear and death was destroyed by the Lord, not with those weapons, but with his

---

[24] *Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many"* (Matthew 20.25-27).

[25] 2 Corinthians 10.3-4

loving surrender on the cross[26]. If the system of demonic domination is basically a rebellion against the Father, the way to counter that system of domination is manifested by the works of the Father, the deeds of love, where the church is an expression in our time of his fatherhood over all, including for those that believe, live and promote different values[27].

The cosmological tension

Clearly, these challenges and the responses of the church to them, from this cosmological reading that I have proposed, is the result of the tension presented by Jesus with regard to his disciples who are in the *kosmos* but not of the *kosmos.* That is to say, presence without ownership. Presence in the *kosmos* avoids the escapist and isolationist temptation of the escatology of the future. The lack of identity with the *kosmos*, avoids the cultural assimilation and captivity, as well as the various missionologies that result from escatologies of the realized Kingdom.

This cosmological tension proposed by Jesus, finds its escatological expression in the well-known phrase "already but not yet". The escatologies of the realized kingdom, completed here and now, incorrectly affirm that the work of redemption has been absolutely completed and therefore the church is not involved in that struggle to which the New Testament refers. What is true is that the kingdom of God has come, but the kingdom of evil has not left. For now, the kingdom of God lives in tension, contradiction and combat. The church lives this escatological reality. It is a community called to be *now* what the world is ultimately called to be, but *is not yet*.

The church as alternative community

I want to conclude by recapitulating what I have said and to present a proposal that suggests a more integral response, corporative and not individualistic, faithful, loving and relevant to the ethical problems we face in the world, maintaining presence, not ownership, in tension. The work required to face the moral and social problems presented to us by today's world is much more than launching spasmodic crusades to fight for certain causes. The question is much more profound. It is to become as the Lord's church an alternative community to the *kosmos.*

As we have seen, the *kosmos* is under the evil one. That is, it is a system of domination that operates through spiritual powers that rule over cultures, nations, institutions, and that exercise influence over the moral decisions of people. There is a cultural war between distinct world views and Christianity. These powers are fallen angels, creatures of God that rebelled against him and abandoned the vocation to which God called them. This cosmic war is a rebellion against the fatherhood of God, as the source of authority and identity. The battles of the past are part of this same war of rejection of God's paternity. The current battle is the generic ideology under whose umbrella are most of the moral problems we face today. But the basic enemy is the enthroned ego expressed in a

---

[26] Hebrews 2.14

[27] *But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect* (Mathew 5.44-48).

hyper-individualistic culture. Facing this the church has responded in a variety of ways, but all of them start from the same individualism they try to combat, with a partial vision, not integral, of the mission, while ignoring the system of demonic domination that lords it over both the cultural structures and the persons. The intent to recover the cultural dominion has installed the paradigm of conquest in the church, which carries implicitly the same spirit of the system of domination. The complexity of the picture reveals the cosmological tension expressed by Jesus who said that we are in the world but we are not of the world, and his escatological correlation of "already but not yet".

I believe that to lead apostolically in order for the church to become an alternative community to the *kosmos*, requires a response that overcomes the partiality of the options we have considered, overcomes the individualism through a community response, and that exceeds the mere voluntarism through the powerful intervention of the Lord through his Body.

I believe that in the Great Commission of Matthew 28, we can find some tracks for an apostolic agenda that helps to perfect the church as an alternative community.

1. *All power is given to me*: The authority that Jesus had and imparted to the church is what comes from the Father. If the war, the mother of all battles, is rebellion against the Father, the church as alternative community to a *kosmos* that lives ignoring that Father, should recover daily living with the Father. God the Father must cease to be a mere theological or doctrinal affirmation, so as to become an experience of living that affirms God's authority and his identity in the life of believers. Most of the evangelical churches have emphasized principally the figure of the Son. Most of the Pentecostal and charismatic churches have emphasized the person of the Holy Spirit. God the Father does not have significant incidence in the life of the people and the community. However, God has revealed himself in the Bible as Father, Jesus is the way to the Father and the Holy Spirit cries: Abba, Father. That is, God's fatherhood is central in the gospel. Therefore, the devil presents himself as the alternative father, the father of lies. John establishes a double apostolic affirmation that we should affirm in apostolic ministry: *We know that we are the sons of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.*

2. *All power is given to me in heaven and in earth.* The mission of the church as alternative community has a clear frame of reference of authority that the church must establish in the *kosmos* with prophetic voice and action. This spiritual action is directed toward the spiritual powers of evil, not only reproving them, but making them aware of the manifold wisdom of God, so that the structures that are under their dominion experience the redemption of the gospel. That authority should be declared prophetically also to the elite human powers (governments, communication media, shapers of opinion, etc.). This includes political participation, but it exceeds that. It covers all public spheres.

3. *Therefore, go.* The church as alternative community is not absent from the reality, nor does it flee with its mind on the future, But rather it goes to the *kosmos.* It is not of the *kosmos*, but rather is sent to the *kosmos*; it is in the *kosmos*. This speaks to us of the faithful and pertinent presence of the church as regards the reality. As Hunter as well stated, a culture that is genuinely alternative cannot emerge without a faithful presence in all the areas of life. The reality of increasing corruption and sin in our world is not only the result of the lack of influence of Christianity on the culture in general. It is also the manifestation of its absence in key areas of the culture. We are dealing with "an abandonment of the calling

to be a faithful presence… a demonstration of the areas in which the church is not whole. A healthy body exercises in all the spheres of life, not just in a few. The lack of stimulus in the vocation, has given rise to a culture of mediocrity in many vocational areas"[28].

4. *Therefore, go, and make disciples*. The church as alternative community is a community of disciples. This has to do with the nature of the church. And it is a pending issue in the church today and an area of privileged labor for apostolic ministry. The church not only proclaims the victory of Christ before the demonic powers and their system of domination, but incarnates that victory by living a new life, a new kind of social relationships. As Hendrik Berkhof stated, with Christ "a new force has made its entry on the scene of the history of salvation: the church… The very existence of the church, in which Gentiles and Jews… live together in fellowship with Christ, is in itself a proclamation, a sign, an example to the powers that their uninterrupted domination has reached its end… All resistance and any attack on the gods of this era will be fruitless, unless the church itself represents resistance and attack; unless it demonstrates through its life and its fellowship the way in which people can live free of those powers"[29].

The church does not possess a culture different from the *kosmos*, rather it *is* a different culture. It does not have a social strategy, it *is* a social strategy. It does not have a social ethic, it *is* a social ethic. Its life style judges the *kosmos* and at the same time attracts it. But judgment begins with itself. For the ethical challenges of the New Testament are directed to the church first of all.

The church must be different from the world, truly an alternative community. Change in the reality is not the result primarily of actions, but of being, which is manifested in actions of transformation. The church as alternative community is salt and light in the *kosmos.* The church as alternative community is seen in its life style in accord with the total values of the kingdom of God, and not simply a denunciation of the moral problems of others[30]. Today we are concerned with the laws that politics can propagate by being salt and light.

5. *Make disciples.* The church as alternative community is a maker of disciples. This includes evangelization, which is essential, but it is much more. It includes learning the Bible and the spiritual disciplines, but it is much more. Discipleship involves the entire life. The problem that believers have today is that they have been previously discipled by the non Christian culture, with its world view of life and reality. A leadership is needed that

---

[28] Hunter, pp. 144-145.

[29] Hendrik Berkhof, Christ and the Powers (Scotsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1962, p. 41 s. Quoted by Hunter, p. 232.

[30] The Spanish journalist Víctor Lapuente asks: Why do the white evangelicals of the USA vote massively for a prophet of materialism, hedonism and narcisism like Trump? Why do Italian Catholics support Berlusconi? Why do so many religious voices in Eastern Europe celebrate opportunistic despots? It seems a contradiction that the most fundamentalist voters align themselves with the most immoral leaders. And he quotes the historian and Baptist pastor Wayne Flynt who pointed out that that there has been a moral shift in the leadership of evangelical Christians. Today they mobilize against those sins that they do not commit, such as homosexuality or abortion. For a heterosexual man it is easier to accept the prescription against homosexuality than the precepts against omnipresent greed in the life of anyone. Instead of questioning our own behavior and trying to control impulses that can be damaging for ourselves and the community, we prefer to judge the conduct of others. And he concludes saying to this temptation to see the straw in someone else's eye called out by Jesus himself now has been added economical and political stimulus. The result is hate your neighbor like you love yourself. Víctor Lapuente, *"La primera tentación de los cristianos",* Diario El País, Madrid, 18-4-2017.

understands the nature of the cosmic confrontation and disciples the church for a time like that in which we live. The leaders of the church are not prepared for this, and changing that is apostolic work. If this work is not undertaken the result will be a church that, having received all authority, continues to be captive to the culture and its system of domination.

6. *Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.* The church as alternative community disciples and submerges the nations in the world view of the Father, in order for fatherhood to be restored with all its values. It submerges them under the authority of the Son, so that the nation becomes subject to his lordship, through the work of the Holy Spirit. We must work so that the laws that promote sin will not be sanctioned, because they will bring social and personal suffering. And we must work so that better laws be promulgated that help us to live a more human life. But the transformation of the culture will not come through the laws, but through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit of God.

7. *Teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you*. The church as therapeutic community does not forget the *didaké*. This is essential. People are not empty receptacles when they are converted. In their life they have content, beliefs, values and specific experiences. Not all of it acquires new meaning and/or is filtered by their new faith; rather it may wind up being absorbed by their earlier world view. Assuming that they were christianizing certain beliefs, in reality they were paganizing the gospel. But it is also important to note that the *didaké* comes after the submerging. That the people obey everything that Jesus taught, cannot be imposed; it cannot be forced. The persons and the nation first have to be submerged in a relationship with God, so that they can then learn to live as the Father desires. To try to live in Babylon with the principles of Jerusalem is an absurd utopia. That the church pretends that the nation live according to the principles of the kingdom of God when the people don't belong to the kingdom, is an illusory pretension. The beliefs, values and behaviors of the kingdom are for those who submit their life to the king. Again, this task of conversion and teaching should start with the church itself. Apostolic ministry today should make inseparable the *kerygma* and the *didaké*.

8. *And behold, I am with you all the days, until the end of the world. Amen.* The exalted Christ now becomes present through the church as alternative community that has an incarnational life style.[31] The presence of the living and exalted Christ is incarnate in the life

---

[31] Juan Manuel Montané in his Master's these is theology, entitled: *The contextualization of the apostolic Kerigma, p. 160, quotes Alan Hirsch who refers to four aspects of an incarnational life style:*

• Presence: If relationships are the key means for transfering the gospel, it means that we are going to have to be present among the people in our circle. Our lives are our message and we cannot absent ourselves from this equation.

• Proximity: Jesus met with people from all levels of society. He ate with the Pharisees, tax collectors and prostitutes. If we are to follow his steps, we will have to be directly and actively implicated in the life of the persons we want to reach. That not only implies our presence, but a genuine availability, spontaneous and sustained with the friendships and communities we inhabit.

• Lack of power: If we seek to act like Christ, we cannot depend on the normal forms of power to communicate the gospel. We must incorporate the model of Jesus with absolute seriousness (Matthew 23:25-28; Filipenses 2:5). This implies commitment to service and humility in our relationships with the world. Unfortunately, much of the history of the church shows how little we have assimilated this aspect of the incarnation of Christ in our understanding of the church, leadership and missions.

• Proclamation: A genuinely incarnational focus will require that we be always ready to share the gospel with the persons in our world. We cannot extract this aspect from the equation and faithfully follow our calling. We

of the church and the church is incarnate in the reality of the nation, making present God's fatherhood. The incarnation is the unique response to the challenge of the loss of the concept of truth. A church that backs up with deeds what it believes and proclaims. And the incarnation is also the only response to the challenge of the "other one", of pluralism and difference. Love and service for others, even though sinners, was the incarnational model of Jesus. Just as he assures us of his presence, the church as alternative community is made up of disciples that are fully present all for each other, and for those who do not belong to the community. When the love of the Father becomes present through us in the places where we are, and in the tasks that we do, the absence of God in the world gives place to his presence.

Conclusion

We are called to be in the world, without being of the world. It is time to assume an interaction with the non constantinian *kosmos*. A church that does not seek to dominate the world, nor to define its identity or mission through opposition to the domination of the world. We live in a world with a post-christian world view, even in countries whose majorities continue to deny that. Far from assuming the conquest as our founding narrative for our mission in these times, we should know that more than ever before we are a people in exile. As was true of the primitive church in the context of social oppression and absolute immorality of the Roman empire.

In this context many of the differences that have divided the church in the past become irrelevant. In this context the recovery of the central place of the church as the Father's family, becomes essential. Its condition as a community of the Father's love makes it indispensable in the midst of the ultra individualistic vacuum. For that reason, those that affirm anti-institutional tendencies that favor the exodus from congregational life, and encourage the number of those who no longer gather with others, saying that it is a wholesome trend and sign of a new and revolutionary expression of Christianity, are profoundly mistaken, and are being utilized by the system of demonic domination. For such tendencies are the result of a logic of consumerism that converts individualistic choice into the central and uniquely sovereign factor. The idea that today has become established[32], that each person assemble the spiritual elements that he needs and that have value to him, constituting in this way millions of experiences of "personalized churches", in fact belong to the consumerist world view of the system of domination, boosted by the therapeutic demands of the individual. More than an expression of revolutionary Christianity, it is an expression of individualism and consumerism characteristic of the system of domination, whose effect seeks to undermine the structures of the church, the only reality capable of constructively resisting the worst of the current culture, which is egotism.

We reject every idea that the hyper-individualistic reality, consumerist, materialistic, narcisistic, hedonistic, and of narcotic entertainment and its moral effects cannot be transformed. That such a reality must be accepted and cannot be challenged. No. Our Lord overcame the princes and powers, made a public display of them, triumphing over them on the cross. We are not bound to them. Jesus Christ the Lord broke their sovereignty, and

---

are in essence "a tribe with a message" and that means that we must assure that we are being faithful in the transmission of the message that we bear by means of proclamation. (Hirsch 2009:148).

[32] See Hunter, pp. 412, 477-478.

therefore all change is possible. We will not accomplish it by using the fallen spirituality of domination and conquest. Our task is to take away their invisibility by declaring the victory of Christ over them. Our existence as the church, as the family of the sons and daughters of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, already demonstrated that the rebellion of the powers has been beaten! Our task as alternative community is to live this out and proclaim it.

Carlos Mraida

Jorge Himitian

THE RESPONSABILITY OF THE CHURCH IN THE SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE NATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Darrow Miller, in the introduction to his book Reformulation of Social Justice (Editorial YWAM) says:

> *We live in times of wealth in the West, in juxtaposition with an intolerable poverty. Injustice and corruption continue to paralyze nations, and a majority of the world's population suffers the consequences.*
>
> *In a world of abundance that has the capacity to produce enough food for all, twenty-five thousand people die daily from hunger. The majority are children.*
>
> *We violate the environment as if its only reason for existence were human consumption.*
>
> *Genocide - the systematic, institutional war against women - has wiped out 200 million women in the world. Only in India, a million human beings are killed every year because they are women.*
>
> *Women and babies are reduced to mere objects, to the point that every year, between forty and fifty million babies are killed before they are born, just because they are inconvenient.*
>
> *It is estimated that currently, on a global scale, 20.9 million men, women and children are enslaved in forced labor or sex trafficking.*
>
> *In the US, some 293,000 children are sexually exploited.*
>
> *More than 50% of Latin American women have suffered violence by men.*
>
> *Where is justice? Where's the compassion?*

To this, I incorporate the following, more current information:

- 1 billion people in the world live in poverty
- 400 million children live in extreme poverty.
- 795 million people suffer from malnutrition.
- 6 million children under 5 die of malnutrition every year.
- 663 million people lack access to drinking water.
- There are 781 million illiterate adults. 65% are women.

- 57 million children do not attend school.
- Almost half of the world's population lives on less than $ 75 per month.

In the vast majority of nations, there is social injustice, structural poverty, hunger, malnutrition, illiteracy, unemployment, labor exploitation, sexual exploitation, domestic violence, gender identity issues, racism, abortions, neglect of the environment and natural resources, forced immigrantioin, refugee camps, unfair profit distribution, inhumane prisons, drug trafficking, drug addiction, insecurity. As well, in some countries we have the scourge of terrorism, wars, totalitarian governments, religious persecution, and weapon arsenal build up.

Bob Kennedy (murdered in 1968, at 42) said: "It is unacceptable that most of us consider as inevitable ... poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, racism, corruption ... Apathy is the acceptance of the unacceptable."

Does the church have any responsibility in the transformation of the nations? Is it part of our mission, as children of God, to fight for a world where there is more justice and peace?

The answers can be quite varied, and some even conflicting, according to the sector consulted.

Currently, there are basically two main positions within the more moderate stances on this subject. Both positions affirm that, yes, the church has a responsibility in the transformation of nations; however, one maintains that it's action must be indirect, while the other affirms that the church must include in its integral mission program a direct action for the transformation of the nations.

Those who argue that the church's contribution should be made indirectly do not accept any participation of the church or Christians in politics nor in different areas of government. The contribution made indirectly would consist of preaching the gospel, making disciples, planting churches, works of mercy, and sending missionaries to all nations. As a result of this approach, the great numerical growth of the church in the nations and of discipleship, sweeping transformations would take place in society.

There are those, on the other hand, who believe that the church must be—not as an institution but through its members—involved in all areas of society: politics, economics, justice, law, government, education, science, arts, communications, health, work , sports, entertainment, etc. These maintain that love of neighbor is not confined to practicing goodness and justice only on a personal level but also at the community, social and national level, in order to seek the integral well-being of all the nation's inhabitants and of the world.

Personally, I think that positions A and B are not exclusive. If we move forward with the wisdom of God and learn from the mistakes and successes that church history has taught us during its 2,000 years, I think it is possible to harmonize both positions. My understanding is that they are complementary.

WHAT DOES THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND ITS JUSTICE INCLUDE?

- God is the creator and Lord of all creation (Genesis 1 and 2). By inherent right, everything that exists belongs to Him. (Psalm 24.1)
- God created man in his image and likeness. This means that every man is valuable and deserves fair and respectful treatment in all areas of society.
- God is good, and desires that all the inhabitants of the earth benefit from the temporary as well as eternal "shalom".
- God, by creating us in his image and likeness, gave us dignity, courage and spirituality to be able to relate to him. He gave us potential capacities that allow for our personal development: abilities to work, to plant and harvest, to imagine, to create projects, to build, to invent. He made us social, gregarious beings and gave us the ability to speak, to communicate and to understand each other. He gave us the ability to reproduce, to marry, to have children, to form a family, to grow and multiply, to have friends, to be a community, a nation, many nations, and to fill the earth and govern it. He gave us different aptitudes to learn, to acquire knowledge and skills, to create culture, to serve our fellowmen. He gave us the ability to teach, to impart knowledge, skills, trades, professions, so that we can all develop, and become a healthy society in which love, justice, and peace reign. God is love, he is righteous, and a God of peace; He wants there to be love, justice, and peace among all the inhabitants of the earth.
- Sin ruined the image of God in us and distorted the Lord's beautiful project for humanity. Personal ambition, greed, selfishness and the arrogance of the human heart generated hatred, wars, inequities, crimes, thefts, slavery, and all kinds of injustices. Perverse and unjust systems were created at the social, institutional or national level. Power structures were created, accumulation of wealth, labor exploitation, corrupt governments and judges, totalitarian governments, economic laws that favor the most powerful, illegitimate appropriation of lands and natural resources, inequality of rights, plunging the majority of the world's inhabitants into misery. God put resources on the planet earth, sufficient enough that, if well worked and administered, there would be food and social well-being for all. The economic market, supply and demand, and invested capital have been deified, and the economy has been structured to benefit a few, to the detriment of the vast majority of workers who produce these riches.
- Although as men we sin and abandon God, he has never disregarded mankind, nor the nations.
- The prophets, over and over, denounced injustice, corruption and bribery.

> *Your rulers are rebels, partners with thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow's case does not come before them. (*Isaiah 1:23)

> *Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees…!* (Isaiah 10:1)
>
> *Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, saying, "When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?" skimping on the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat.* (Amos 8:4-6)

These called the authorities and the nation to repent.

> *Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.* (Isaiah 1:17)

To whom does James address the following in his epistle? (I hope it's the world and not the church).

> *Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you.* (James 5:1-6)

Jesus, very early in his ministry, expressed some very difficult words his disciples—simple men of little education—concepts difficult to understand, in all their dimension, at that moment of speaking:

"***You are the salt of the earth ... You are the light of the world ...***" (Matthew 5.13-14).

If he had told them, "you are the salt of Galilee", or "the light of Israel", although it would sound exaggerated, it would have been a little more feasible. But to tell these simple Galileans—men of the despised northern province of one of the smallest countries of the Roman Empire—that they are the light of the world sounds almost irrational and outside of all human probability. But that was exactly what he told them.

Also, on the same occasion, when teaching them to pray, he pointed out that the first concrete thing that they should ask of the Father every day is that His kingdom come, that His will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6.10), not simply in the church but on earth. This means that they had to pray for his will to be done in all the nations of the earth as it is done in heaven. Jesus would never ask his disciples to pray daily for something impossible to accomplish.

The motivating factor of Jesus' ministry was compassion. This means that he cared for the suffering and pain of his fellow men, to the point that he denied himself and devoted his life to serve, comfort and help those who suffered, both to seek their eternal salvation and their physical and temporal well-being. He did not just teach and preach but also healed, fed, liberated. Peter, preaching about Jesus, says: "*He went about doing good* ..." (Acts 10.38).

His concern was expressed for the poor, the despised, the marginal. Several times he taught and commanded those who had wealth to give to the poor. He told the rich young man: "*Sell what you have, give it to the poor, and follow me*." Zacchaeus promised to return everything stolen, and give half of his goods to the poor.

Jesus was very clear in teaching that the greatest commandment is to love God and, the second, to love your neighbor as yourself. He did not limit himself to saying that you have to love your brother, but your neighbor, and even your enemy.

He said to his disciples, "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven*" (Matthew 5:16).

After the grand work of redemption, his death and his glorious resurrection, Jesus met his disciples to tell them that he had been given all authority in heaven and on earth, which is why he sent them to make disciples in all the nations, baptizing them and teaching them to live according to the will of God.

The kingdom of God and its justice is the justice that comes as a consequence of the establishment of the kingdom of God—of the lordship of Christ—in a person, in a family, or in a community. The community of disciples, like salt and light, has a powerful influence on the society and the nation in which it is found. This influence is exercised in two ways: (1) by evangelizing and achieving the conversion of many fellow citizens into disciples of Christ, and (2) by being "mixed into", involved, committed, as yeast in the dough, in all areas of society, transforming it by means of the values of the kingdom of God, so that it become a nation in which there is more and more justice and brotherly love.

Another powerful resource is found in what Paul says in 1 Timothy (2.1-2): *I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.*

SOME HISTORICAL DATA

The first communities of disciples understood the doctrine of Jesus very well. The first pages of the book of Acts of the Apostles show us that loving God and loving our neighbor are two sides of the same coin. The poor, the widows, the needy were cared for in their daily needs.

Bob Moffitt, in his book "If Jesus Were Mayor (Chapter 3) writes:

> *In the course of history, the Church generally understood that social and cultural transformation was part of its task*. (Pag.39).

I've summarized some concepts expressed by Moffitt.

A vision, unknown at the time, entered the Roman Empire of a God who is love, and who teaches to love one's neighbor; that a Christian master should recognize his slave as a "brother"; that being merciful is a virtue and not a weakness; that the husband should love his wife as himself. Christians rejected the practice of abortion and infanticide that was widely practiced in the Roman Empire. In times of great epidemics, when doctors still fled from the sick, the only ones who took care of them were Christians.

And despite the decline that came to the Church as an institution by joining with the State in the fourth century, the gospel of Christ was gradually transforming the culture of Europe by establishing customs inspired by the Christian faith. The list is too long to name all the men who influenced the centuries to follow in the construction of a worldview and a basically "Christian" culture in Europe.

Bob Moffitt describes it in this way:

> *The church developed charitable actions aimed at helping the unemployed, the orphan, the widows, the wounded, the sick, the traveler, the victims of disasters and the poor of the community. The care of the poor was a constant concern among people like St. Thomas, Ignatius of Loyola, St. Patrick, St. Francis of Assisi*. (id.Pag.46)
>
> *God used the Church and the Protestant Reformation to transform societies in Switzerland, Germany and Holland. ... Although Luther believed that good works could not make atonement for sin, this did not make it any easier for Christians to care for the poor or to influence the world.* (Pg.48)
>
> *John Calvin visualized the church as a small society within a larger society, as an embryo of what represented a new and total order of the world. ... When in 1550, 60,000 refugees flooded Geneva, from France, Calvin founded a private ministry with bases in the Church that became a model throughout Europe. This ministry served a wide range of needs, serving the sick, the orphan, the elderly, the disabled and the terminally ill. The help was linked to the work ethic. Deacons were trained to find long-term solutions to poverty (job re-training, temporary housing, tools to start a new business); and how to discern between the poor who deserved help and the one who did not deserve it*. (P. 48-49)

John Stott, in his book Involvement: Being a Responsible Christian in a Non-Christian Society says: (pp. 23-25)

John Wesley remains the most outstanding example ... The change that came to Britain during this period is well documented in the excellent book by J. Wesley Bready, England Before and After Wesley... where Bready describes the profound savagery of much of the eighteenth century, which was characterized by:

"The torture of animals for sport. The brutal drunkenness of the people, the inhuman trafficking of Africans, the capture of compatriots for export and sale as slaves, infant mortality in the asylums, the general obsession with gambling, the cruelty of the prison system, and the penal code, moral chaos, prostitution ... bribery and political corruption ... the prevailing falsehood and degradation in Church and State ...

Then the situation changed. In the nineteenth century slavery and the slave trade were abolished, the prison system was humanized, working conditions in factories and mines were improved, education became available to the poor, workers' unions began to be organized , etc etc.

How did that movement originate towards humanization, that passion for social justice and that sensitivity to human injustices? There is a response that fits the unshakeable historical truth. It was derived from a new social conscience. And although, as it is admitted, that social conscience had diverse causes, its main source was the evangelical revival of practical and vital Christianity, a gospel that revealed the central postulates of the New Testament ethics, made the fatherhood of God, as well as the brotherhood of men a reality, emphasized the priority of the person over the possessions and guided the heart, soul and mind towards the establishment of the Kingdom of Justice on earth ... It contributed to the transfiguration of the moral character of the people in general, more than any other movement recorded in British history. [Wesley] was the man who restored the soul to a nation.

John Stott continues saying:

The evangelical leaders of the next generation gave themselves with equal fervor to both evangelization and social action ... and the inspirer of them all, William Wilberforce. ... They were called the Clapham sect [a village near London where several of them lived] ... The first issue that brought them together was their concern about the situation of the African slaves.

I summarize a part of what Stott narrates:
Wilberforce, as a member of the English Parliament, in 1787, presented a first motion in Parliament concerning the abolition of the slave trade, established three centuries earlier. His motion was rejected unanimously. It was discussed again every two years, and then every year, until it was approved in 1807, 20 years later.

Wilberforce continued fighting for the abolition of slavery, which was finally abolished in 1833, 44 years later! Three days after, William Wilberforce died. The State had to pay 20 million Sterling Pounds to the owners of the slaves.

Stott writes:

> *Anthony Ashley Coope was elected member of the British Parliament in 1826, at the age of 25 years. First in the House of Commons and then in the House of Lords as the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, he dealt in turn with the condition of the mentally ill, children employed in factories and mills, the chimney sweeps, women and children in the mines, and children in the slums, among which in London more than thirty thousand were homeless, and more than a million throughout the country lacked education. Most of the great philanthropic movements of the century have emerged among the evangelicals.*
>
> *The same story can be told in the United States in the 19th century.*
> *Charles Finney was convinced that a powerful impulse towards social reform emerges from the gospel, and that the abandonment by the church of the reformatory social action grieved the Holy Spirit, and was an obstacle to revival. The following statement by Finney is indeed surprising: "the great enterprise of the church is the reformation of the world".*
>
> *The members of the opposition-to-slavery forces came mostly from those who had been converted at Finney's evangelistic campaigns.*
>
> *Among them was Theodore Webb who dedicated his whole life to the fight against slavery. He was converted through Finney's ministry, and for a time he was his assistant. However, we cannot take Webb for the American equivalent of Wilberforce, because Webb was not a parliamentarian. In fact, the campaign against slavery in the United States was carried out not so much by heroes of the Reformation but by a large number of unknowns, moved by an impulse of a religious nature, and an evangelical spirit that originated in the great revival of 1830.*

WHAT HAPPENED TO US?

John Stott, titled the first chapter of the book mentioned previously: *DOES THE SOCIAL COMMITMENT CONCERN US?* and it starts like this:

> *It is inconceivable that followers of Jesus Christ ever had to ask whether they were concerned about social commitment and that a controversy had arisen about the relationship between evangelization and social responsibility. For it is evident that in his public ministry Jesus went through the places "teaching ... and preaching" and that "he walked doing good and healing". Therefore, evangelization and social responsibility have been intimately related throughout the history of the church.*

In the mentality of the evangelicals, to which most of us belong, there is underlying an inherited theology and eschatology that could be summarized in two phrases (two lies): (1)

heaven is from God and the earth is from the devil, and (2) the imminence of the second coming of Christ.

Both thoughts dominate the collective subconscious of many evangelicals. Consequently, they have nullified the action of most churches and Christians in regard to getting involved in the affairs of the world. With this attitude, we have given the nations over to the free action of Satan, so that he can do what as he pleases, while we have concentrated on the "salvation of souls".

It is easy to understand how these two ideas have blocked us for several generations, and how they have managed to inhibit us from a more determined action and participation in the transformation of nations.

For example, according to secular surveys, in Argentina 8% of the population is evangelical . According to this percentage, among the 257 national deputies, there should be at least 20 evangelicals. Do you know how many we have? Only one. And among the 72 senators, we have a single evangelical senator. This disproportion is the result of having a wrong theology.

Consider the first lie: "Heaven is from God and the earth is of the devil."

My Bible, and yours, declares a very different thing: Psalm 24.1:
"The earth and its fullness belong to the Lord; The world and those who dwell therein".

The planet earth, and everything in it has a sole and legitimate owner. All the inhabitants of the world have been created by God and for God. Everything and everyone belongs to the Lord.

God gave the administration and government of the earth to man, created in his image and likeness. The devil is a liar and a thief. When man sinned, Satan usurped what God had given man, but Christ, with his death, redeemed and rescued all that was his. For this reason, the risen Jesus declares to his followers: "*All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth* ..."

This idea that the world is of the devil comes mainly from a misinterpretation of some expressions of Jesus. On three occasions Jesus referred to the devil as "*the prince of that world*". (John 12.31, 14.30 and 16.11).

The word world in the Greek is *cosmos*. It has in the N.T. five different meanings:

1) Universe (Ephesians 1.4).
2) Planet Earth (Psalm 24.1; Mark 16.15)
3) All mankind (John 3.16).
4) The material and temporal (Matthew 16.26; 1 Corinthians 7: 33-34).
5) The sinful and diabolic human system of rebellion against God (1 John 2.15-17).

The context of each passage makes its meaning evident.

When Jesus says that the devil is the prince of this world he refers to the sinful and diabolic human system, not the planet earth.

Paul uses another expression to refer to the same thing: "*the god of this century*" (century is *aion* in Greek, and refers to this era). Satan is not the owner of the planet earth nor of mankind. The Bible declares that everything is of God, by God and for God (Romans 11.36, Colossians 1.16). Satan is the prince who heads the worldwide movement of rebellion against God. But he has already been defeated by Christ on the cross.

The second lie is the imminent nature of the second coming of Christ.
The word *imminence* does not exist in the Bible referring to the second coming of Christ. Jesus said that the day and the hour nobody knows, only the Father. Some ask me: Do you not believe that Christ is coming soon? I answer: Yes, I believe it, because Jesus said so: "*I will certainly come soon*." But...2,000 years have already passed. What does *soon* mean for God? Compared to eternity, 2000 years are nothing.

When I was young, preachers told us: "now, now, Christ is coming. All the prophecies have been fulfilled. Nothing is lacking for the Lord to come. "

I believe that we should live as if Christ will come today or 2,000 years from now. My personal impression is that we have not yet seen the best part of history.

We need to have a multigenerational view, a project that points to the next 100, 200, 500 or 1000 years. There are many prophecies that have not yet been fulfilled, but all will be fulfilled.

In the first century, some brothers from Thessalonica refused to work because they believed that Christ would come very soon. And Paul, in his second letter, among other things, says: *The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.*

Let's go back to our question: What happened to us?

John Stott (much more academically than I can) points out five causes of the abandonment of social consciousness by many evangelicals in the last 150 years. (I've made a summary of his words.

1) In the face of the advancement of theological liberalism, many concentrated more on defending the fundamentals of the Christian faith. This gave rise to "fundamentalism". And they neglected the social dimension of the gospel.
2) In reaction to a "social gospel" emphasized by liberal theologians, many went to the other extreme.
3) As a product of the generalized pessimism that produced the First World War, many concluded that any reform of society was useless.

4) This neglect was also due to the influence of premillennialist theory (J.B.Darby, Scofield and others). This theory holds that the world will go from bad to worse until the return of Christ, therefore it is useless to seek the transformation of the nations.
5) There were many middle-class people converted, and they were inclined to maintain the status quo and, in general, were indifferent to the situation of the poor and other social issues.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Thank God, since the second half of the twentieth century the evangelical church (the "evangelicals") has slowly awakening to the reality that evangelization and responsibility for the social transformation of the nations are two inseparable aspects of the mission of church.

In 1966, the North American conference on world missions, unanimously presented the "Wheaton Declaration" in which it urged "all evangelicals to openly and firmly defend racial equality, human freedom and social justice in all their manifestations in the whole world."

In 1974, at the International Congress on World Evangelization, the Lausanne Covenant was signed, stating that "evangelization together with social and political action are part of our Christian duty." *

In 1982, the Consultation was sponsored by the World Evangelical Alliance and the Lausanne Committee. The official report was entitled: Evangelization and Social Responsibility: Evangelical Commitment.

The Lausanne pact not only refers to "social responsibility" but also to "social and political action". The latter causes a negative reaction in many evangelicals, who affirm that the church should not interfere in politics. Almost everyone agrees with the humanitarian tasks of the church, especially in health and education programs; however, there are unjust social structures and systems that can only be corrected through political action.

The Pentecostal movement, of great numerical growth in the twentieth century, in general, did not show much interest in social action, largely because of its fundamentalist roots and the emphasis on the "imminence of the second coming of Christ."

The charismatic or neo-Pentecostal movement, for the most part, has concentrated its emphasis on spiritual gifts and worship. Some, in the last 30 years, have turned to the "prosperity gospel", and to a distorted concept of the kingdom of God, in terms of

domination, power, money, mega-churches, great shows, and the "conquest" of the nations. Without a vision of the kingdom in terms of service, love of neighbor, and redemption.

However, a growing sector of the charismatic movement and the evangelical church in general has been awakening and has acquired a new awareness of the responsibility of the church in the social transformation of nations.

In A.F.I., from our beginnings we emphasized the unity of the church, the reign of God, the apostolic collegiality, the mission of the church in the world, the progress of the church towards its fullness (quality, unity and quantity). And in 2008, in Chile, the theme of our Consultation was: Kingdom, Church and Society. In 2009, in Nigeria, our motto was: Transformation: Kingdom of God, Church and Society.

In 2010, in Italy, Giovanni Traettino said: “I would like us to work on a document concerning the principles and values that should govern our actions or approach to politics.” I do not believe that we are, at least in our context, capable of producing a document or a proposal on a Socio-economic Project Before producing such a proposal, we would need to have a Social Doctrine of the Church, which serves as the basis of socio-economic projects.

In 2012, in Italy, Mr. Traettino reminded us of a paragraph of the Lausanne Covenant:

Although reconciliation with other people is not reconciliation; with God, nor social action, evangelization; nor political liberation, salvation; however, we affirm that evangelization and socio-political commitment are part of our Christian duty. Because both are necessary expressions of our doctrines about God and about man, about love for our neighbor and obedience to Jesus Christ. The message of salvation also implies a message of judgment on all forms of alienation, oppression and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist. (Lausanne Covenant 1974, sec.5).

THE CHURCH AND THE STATE

I think we all agree that the church, as an institution, should not have any political party flag. The separation between the Church and State has been convincingly demonstrated throughout the 2000 years of its history. (See at the end note JH Chile 2008) *

But we cannot say the same about church members in their role as citizens. How good it would be for a nation to have among its legislators, rulers and judges holy men and women, children of God, with high quality professional and academic training, to put their skills at the service of the common good. What a blessing it would be to have among its public servants Christians committed to the kingdom of God and its righteousness, filled with the Holy Spirit, with wisdom, with vocation for service, with clear and new ideas of life lived out within a society. We need Christians well prepared to knowledgeably participate in all aspects of national and world endeavors: politicians, law makers, lawyers, economists, businessmen,

executives, scientists, teachers, doctors, merchants, industrialists, legislators, judges, governors, and everything else. This would be a concrete way to love your neighbor.

At the same time, we must bear in mind that we live in nations where there is an increasing ideological, ethnic and religious pluralism. That is why we cannot impose a theocracy. Not even God does that. If in any country, at some time in history, Christians become a majority, they should respect existing minorities. The kingdom of God is not an imposition but a proposal. Our strength lies in being a model for life, family and society. Our task is to teach, educate and convince; not dominate but serve. To be a city set on a hill. We must be able to demonstrate, with solid apologetic arguments, that we have the superior proposal or alternative for society.

For this, it is essential that we change our worldview concerning the responsibility of the church in the transformation of nations. We must impart a new vision to the professionals and entrepreneurs of our communities in the countries of our world (especially the new generations). We must begin today, so that in 20, 30, or 50 years, we will have holy, very well prepared disciples, with excellent professional training, committed and active in the transformation of their country.

THE STATE

Man is a social being. He is designed to perform as a person within a community. When this community grows, it must be organized in order to achieve a harmonious coexistence within a framework of order, harmony, justice, freedom and respect for the rights of each one. To ensure this social coexistence, authorities become necessary in the various areas and functions that insure a well-organized society.

Anarchy prevents personal development as well as development of a society as a whole. That is why the Bible says: "*Let every person submit himself to the higher authorities. Because there is no authority except from God, and those that are by God have been established* "(Romans 13.1). The sum total of that authority is what we call the State.

A nation is not governed by an individual. There are thousands and thousands throughout the country that make up the State. From their various positions, public officials have the duty to serve the citizens of a nation to achieve the common good. In a democratic government, the people elect their rulers.

Unfortunately, many authorities use their positions for personal advantage and gain. Ambition of power, vanity, arrogance, egotism, greed is present in the hearts of many politicians. The Bible says that "*the love of money is the root of all evil*." The ambition of riches leads to administrative corruption, receiving bribes, embezzlement of funds, the promulgation of unjust laws to favor personal or sectoral interests, etc.

We need just laws and just men in the nation. In addition to a fair and just economic system. "*Righteousness magnifies the nation, but sin is an affront to the nations*" (Proverbs 14:34). Thousands of morally virtuous and professionally capable men are needed to occupy the different positions in government.

Blessed is the nation whose rulers are honest and just, who look upon their position of authority as a place of service, who truly love the people and are there to serve them with equity!

POLITICS

EMILIO CASTRO (Uruguayan, former Secretary General of the WCC), at the III Latin American Congress of Evangelization, in Quito, Ecuador, year 1992, said:

1. *The gospel includes love of neighbor. It is impossible to love God without loving your neighbor. Love makes us responsible for our neighbors. Responsibility, solidarity, in modern societies is organized and manifested through the political structures of society. ... There is no way to love today without a concern for politics. It does not mean that we all have to be militants of a political party; here there are also vocations, specific calls. ... But yes, it means that we all have a collective responsibility for the public, and that we must inform ourselves and we must enter that arena inspired by the love of God in Jesus Christ.*
2. *There is no Christian political program for society. This is the temptation that permanently assaults us: to create parties that are predominantly Christians or Evangelicals trying in this way to convey a project in society that has the authority of the Gospel. ... Here perhaps we should apply the similarities of Jesus: leaven, salt in the middle of the dough, Christians entering political life to pierce through different structures from within ...*
3. *While the gospel cannot be reduced to a political program, it implies, because it is the full manifestation of God's love for all his creation and for each of his creatures, fundamental values must be affirmed or offered to the community when looking for alternatives to the present situation. ...*

Politics, on the one hand, is the art of living as an organized society. On the other hand, it is the art of governing. For this, laws, institutions, authority structure, administration, society project, and values are needed. It covers all aspects of life in society. The universal foundation of every society must be the equality of all men, freedom, love of one's neighbor, justice, respect for authorities and laws, solidarity, honesty, etc.

Governing is one of the noblest and most necessary occupations for social coexistence. Governing is a service given in favor of the entire community. But at the same time, it is one of the jobs that most lends itself to personal ambition, abuse of power, vanity, corruption

and injustice. To be a good public official, two fundamental conditions are required: one must be a person of integrity, as well as be suitable for the specific function.

What could be better than have Christ's disciples, with a life of holiness and high-level of professional training, to occupy those positions of service?

ECONOMY

Today there is a great ideological vacuum in the world, the absence of a social doctrine that serves as a foundation for a new socio-economic proposal. We need a new philosophical synthesis of social justice, a new proposal that channels macroeconomics towards microeconomics.

With the industrial revolution, and more recently with the technological revolution, the riches of the world have increased enormously. However, the gap between the rich and the poor is ever increasing. We need a new "Carl Marx" or a new "Adam Smith" to emerge, but full of the Holy Spirit and the wisdom of God for the blessing of millions of families of all nations. Capitalism and socialism have already demonstrated their virtues and their great defects. The world needs a superior and surpassing proposal.

It is not up to us, the pastors, to elaborate that project for the nations; we are not economists. But our responsibility is to inspire, challenge and transmit a new vision of the role for Christians within society. We must impart to the professionals and entrepreneurs of our communities, and especially to the new generations, a new vision of our mission in the world, motivated by love for our neighbor. We should encourage them to create circles of professionals and challenge them to meet to study, pray, discuss, elaborate, and propose ideas. This will take years of reflection and preparation.

OTHER AREAS OF LIFE IN SOCIETY

I have mentioned only three of the areas of national life and involvement. Of course, there are many others. It is the responsibility of the church, of Christians, to be light and to enlighten all aspects of life in our nation and the world.

I will add to the three already mentioned at least the title of more potential disciplines (without pretending that this is an exhaustive list)

1. Government
2. Politics
3. Economy
4. Education
5. Health
6. Jobs

7. Security
8. Science
9. Arts
10. Communications
11. Agriculture
12. Industries
13. Handicrafts
14. Commerce
15. Foreign trade
16. International relations
17. Environment
18. Natural resources
19. Social Security
20. Social Welfare
21. Social justice
22. Entertainment
23. Sports and physical activity
24. Etc.

ACTIONS THAT THE CHURCH (not as an institution but through its members) CAN GRADUALLY ADDRESS

1. Pray, intercede for our city, nation and other nations. For our rulers and for all men.
2. Preach the gospel of the kingdom of God. Make disciples of all nations. Evangelize with signs and miracles.
3. Impart to the disciples the vision of an integral mission, in order to be factors of social transformation.
4. Increase the number of disciples.
5. Plant communities of disciples (churches) in all neighborhoods, villages and cities of our country and the world with this vision.
6. Grow in holiness, integrity, love of neighbor, service, generosity, with healthy and strong families.
7. Aspire to excellence in everything we undertake.
8. Encourage young people to excel in their studies and prepare themselves to occupy the most important positions in society, starting with the simplest jobs.
9. Develop service vocations.
10. Detect the most urgent needs of the people of the neighborhood, of the city, of the nation, in order to initiate processes to overcome those needs and to remove the causes that produce them.
11. Sanctify all trades, professions and positions with the conviction that everything we do is of God and for God.

12. Form homogenous groups of professionals, businessmen, merchants, politicians, in all areas, to develop ideas, projects, and proposals for the good of our nation at the local, national, regional and international level.
13. Encourage the development of socio-economic proposals which are increasingly just and in accordance with the values of the kingdom of God. Both capitalism and socialism have demonstrated their shortcomings. The world needs something new inspired by God.
14. Develop scientific and apologetic arguments to make our contribution in all areas of society.
15. Invest in social services and social action.
16. Teach occupational skills and crafts; give training in administration.
17. Grant microcredits for small businesses, and accompany them with training and supervision.
18. Open schools and universities to train new generations with this vision.
19. Form companies with the objective of creating sources of work with decent wages, with possibilities for professional and economic growth.
20. Work with the government in all areas (municipalities, schools, hospitals, marginalized, drug addicts, prisons). Sometimes the government has resources, but they do not have people with a vocation of service to carry out certain projects.
21. Encourage disciples with a political vocation to prepare to serve God and others in a specific area of society.
22. Move towards the unity of the church in each city, in each region, in the nation, in the continent and in the world.

If we unite as one body, uniting our ministries, our resources, our gifts, our congregations after the same goal and the same vision, millions will be converted. We can have the best schools, the best universities, the best companies, the best media, the best hospitals, the best professionals, the best deputies, the best leaders, the best orchestras. If we put everything we are and we have at the disposal of our neighbor and our society, the world will see the glory of God and know his love. And we, like a city set on a hill, will be the light of the world.

Isaiah 2:1-3

This is what Isaiah son of Amos saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem

In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths. "The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Habakkuk 2:3 and 14

For the revelation awaits an appointed time it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay. For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

Jorge Himitian

Vinci Barros

PAUL, AQUILA AND PRISCILLA: LEAVING A LEGACY FOR YOUNGER PRIESTS

- Many people achieved significant things during that period; but here is an example that illustrates the idea of using the house itself to build the church.
- There are many other accounts in the Scriptures that are not entirely consistent with one another.
- The Bible is a story of love, relationships, fellowship and the life of God.
- In the Scriptures we find stories that serve as a perfect model in every respect; not all biblical stories conformed to the unity and commitments of Christianity, yet they did not fundamentally fail.

Some examples:

- Adam and Eve: Accused
- Abraham and Sarah: Fear
- Isaac and Rebecca: A Lie
- Samson and Delilah: They ruined their lives after making many mistakes
- The Scriptures reveal the failures in the lives of gods and saints, highlighting our imperfections and showing that the only way to be happy as a couple and as a family is to be fully blessed by God.
- God always begins his work in our home. The perfect example
- Let's look at the example of Aquila and Priscilla. The Bible records just one argument between them, but they surely had many!
- I won't tell you about the love scene involving their parrots, but I'm not sure I liked it very much. Sometimes Priscila is mentioned first, as if to show that she was more outgoing than Aquila.
- Through this model, God will resolve the rivalry within the church. I simply wish to highlight the nature of rivalry in ministry.
- The church must learn to view rivalry as people imbued with the kingdom of God on earth.

Examining ourselves in the Scriptures

- Acts 18:1–2 – Paul, Aquila and Priscilla are neighbours.
- Acts 18:3 – The ideal couple is one that divides up daily tasks not for personal convenience, but for the advancement of God's kingdom.
- Acts 18:4 – Don't let work take over your lives… the focus is on Jesus! Go out and work!
- Philippians 1:21 – For me, to live is Christ.
- Acts 18:13 – The ideal couples are those who work together in the same office, but who leave room for others to join them.
- Above all, the ideal couple is hospitable. Pablo.

Aquila and Priscilla

- Acts 18:18 – Perfect in the mission of the Kingdom of God.
- Acts 18:24 – Those who were well versed in the Word.
- Acts 18:26 – Teachers of the Word.
- Acts 18:27 – Committed to the faith, sharing their men to help the church grow
- Acts 19:1 – Engaged in furthering God's purpose. They had a vision for the growth of the church.

Aquila and Priscilla and Paul

- Acts 28:23 and 30:31 – Paul had already set an example by renting a house.
- Matthew 4:13 – Jesus also lived in a house by the sea and later taught his disciples in his home.
- Romans 16:3 – Priscilla and Aquila, friends of Paul.
- Romans 16:4 – Risking their lives.
- Romans 16:5 – The church used to meet at her house.

This exemplary couple lives not for themselves, but for others – if possible, even laying down their lives for their brothers and sisters! We are called to build up their church.

We need:

- Word, prayer and action
- Witnessing and training
- Discipline – commitment – the life of God
- Multiplication – a sign of life

What's your house like?

- Does your house look like Aquila and Priscilla's?
- Is your house a lake or a spring?
- Let's turn things around.

Psalm 90:12 – *Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.*

What did God say to me?

- Live life to the full with God
- She is passionate about Him
- Touch people's hearts so that virtue may flourish
- Always love, wherever you are, whoever you are talking to, and win souls for the Lord.
- Share Jesus, who is our life

Each of us should strive to leave a legacy. Some leave behind research that has led to a vaccine, a discovery, a treatise, a collection or a contribution to humanity. But who leaves behind something to nourish the heart?

Wake the shepherds

- We have failed as 'spiritual parents' by not immediately involving many members of this new generation in the spiritual work.
- It is possible to invest in the next generation.
- There's still time for a bumper harvest.
- God wants us to understand the importance of spiritual fatherhood.

What is spiritual fatherhood?

- When one generation passes away, it leaves behind what it has for the next.
- It conveys a spiritual legacy that can be refined or multiplied.
- It is not a cold, static and flawed structure – a system – but a living organism.
- Our legacy is to share a humble and broken heart.

Challenges

- Lack of vision

- Lack of resources
- Spiritual investment
- Over-caution
- Miedo
- Lack of mutual support

The new generation of leaders begins with the new generation of sheep. It's a change of mindset.

- Paul entrusted the young Timothy with great responsibilities (2 Timothy 2:1–5).
- 2 Timothy 2:2 – Entrust the teaching to faithful and capable men, so that they, in turn, may entrust it to others.
- 1 Timothy 3:6 – He must not be a recent convert, lest he become conceited. Age does not define a recent convert.

The continuity of the work

- Young people bring up young people, sheep bring up sheep, shepherds bring up shepherds.
- Just as Paul did with Timothy, by sharing the burden and delegating authority. Leaders must have the vision and the drive to train new leaders, whilst keeping their sights set on the next generation.
- A generation that passes on the best it has to the next.

A view of the pass

- It must not be for personal gain; we are 'stepping stones' on this path, so that the younger generation may surpass us, reach greater heights, and glorify only the One who called us out of darkness into His marvellous light.

Practical examples

- Soldier (2 Timothy 2:3–4) – A soldier does not serve wherever he pleases; he is constantly given orders.
- Athlete (2 Timothy 2:5) – An athlete trains by repeating the same exercise dozens, even hundreds of times. They eat a varied diet.

- Pastors should adopt the same attitude, through fellowship with God, grounded in the Word, and through intercession.
- Leadership and football – Top athletes devote hours every day to training, which brings them medals and fans.

The right mindset

- Team spirit: Even the most skilful or fastest players can let the team down if they don't pass the ball. There's no point in trying to do everything on your own; you have to trust your teammates and pass the ball to the newest or least experienced player.
- Discipline: Experienced players have the ability to see the bigger picture. They move about in search of opportunities. They push beyond their own limits, driven by a need for motivation.

We need:

- Agreeing to sit on the bench
- Keep the objective in mind
- Celebrating a team-mate's goal: Rejoicing with those who rejoice
- Play by the rules
- Listen to the referee's whistle: The referee is our conscience, enlightened by the Holy Spirit

1 Corinthians 4:14–16

- I am not writing this to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For although you have thousands of guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers… I urge you to follow my example.
- This is the legacy I wish to leave behind: a heart filled with passion for the Lord's work and for carrying it out as God intends us to.

Vinci Barros

Translates by DeepL Translate

Carlos Mraida

Walking through my town

Where is your spiritual dividing line?

"*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you! How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!*" (Matthew 28:14)

- Jesus' desire: to extend his protection and care over the whole city.
- Pastoral care in your town requires a paradigm shift.

1) THINKING ABOUT THE CITY: The city is our mission field.
2) FROM SINGULAR TO PLURAL: Without unity, it is impossible to lead a city.
3) MOVING FROM EVENTS TO PROCESSES: Leading the city means thinking in terms of a long-term process.
4) MOVING FROM ACTIVITIES TO A UNITED MISSION FIELD: to minister to the city, we need a plan for a united mission involving as many of the city's congregations as possible.

Shepherding your city requires an inner change.

"Do not be small-minded" (Isaiah 54:2): small-mindedness lies within us.

- ➔ **Pastoral care in your town needs new blood**
- ➔ **Where is your spiritual dividing line?**
- ➔ God tells us to push those boundaries
- ➔ The Spirit is calling out to those who once believed.

Carlos Mraida

Translated with DeepL Translate