

# MINISTRIES FOR THE BODY OF CHRIST

**A study on the gifts of the ascended Christ  
given to assure the advance of the church.  
Based on Ephesians 4:7–16**

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**W**ITH THE DESIRE TO PROMOTE AND FACILITATE the appreciation of the gifts and ministries that Christ gave to the church after his ascension, this study is presented. Initially we will consider the significance of the text of Ephesians 4:7–16 and then analyze the various ministries mentioned by the apostle Paul in verse 11.

The biblical text used in this document is taken from the New International Version, ©1996 by the Zondervan Corporation, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

<sup>7</sup>But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. <sup>8</sup>This is why it says:

*“When he ascended on high,  
he led captives in his train  
and gave gifts to men.”*

<sup>9</sup>(What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? <sup>10</sup>He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) <sup>11</sup>It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup>until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

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

Ephesians 4:7–16

Let us look more closely at the following affirmations made by Paul:

1. Christ distributed his gifts along with a measure of grace. The distribution is individual and personal: “to each one of us” (v.7).
2. The text found in v.8 comes from Psalm 68:18 and appears in the NIV as follows:

*When you ascended on high,  
you led captives in your train;  
you received gifts from men,  
even from the rebellious—  
that you, O LORD God, might dwell there.*

The Good News Bible (1992), renders the verse in this way:

*He goes up to the heights,  
taking many captives with him;  
he receives gifts from rebellious people.  
The LORD God will live there.*

This text should be understood in the light of Ephesians 1:20–22, where Paul refers to the exaltation and the dominion of the risen and ascended Christ to God's throne. In the Jewish tradition, Psalm 68 was applied to the feast of Pentecost and it is probable that the apostle follows that thought here, associating the quoted text with the triumph and ascension of Christ and his disposition to benefit his disciples in the manner shown in the verses that follow.

3. Verses 9 and 10 present Paul's reasoning that in order to ascend, Christ first had to descend from heaven to the Earth. His ascension is to demonstrate his power and authority over all and his purpose to fill all things.
4. Once ascended, from his place in glory, seated on the throne, he establishes a variety of ministries: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (v.11). This means that these ministries are related to the church whose history is initiated at Pentecost. Their specific mandate begins to function from the event of Christ's ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. We will later analyze these ministries in greater detail.
5. His purpose in providing these ministries is indicated in v.12:
  - ♦ to prepare God's people for works of service,
  - ♦ so that the body of Christ may be built up.

The goal is the building up of the body of Christ, which is achieved when God's people are prepared for works of service. At the same time, the preparation of the people is the responsibility of the ministries identified in v.11. It is important to observe that the order is consecutive: first comes the preparation of the people (A), then the works of service (B), for building up the body of Christ (C). This order shows the great importance of the granting of these ministries, for without them no provision is made for God's people to do the works of service so that, in consequence, the body of Christ would not be edified.

Graphically, we can diagram the progression in this way:

**Preparation of God's people**

**→ For works of service**

**→ So that the body of Christ may be built up**

6. Then the apostle shows the results achieved through building up the body of Christ:
  - ♦ We all reach unity in the faith
  - ♦ and in the knowledge of the Son of God,
  - ♦ and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (v. 13).

Thus it became evident that the purpose in view is not the distribution of ministries, nor the preparation of God's people, nor even the building up of the body of Christ. These are intermediate steps, certainly essential, which assure that we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. This is God's grand purpose: that Christ fill *"everything in every way"* (see Eph 1:23). God's original purpose in the creation of human beings is that we be conformed to the image of Christ (see Gen 1:26–27; Rom 8:28–30; Col 1:28–29). Here Paul clarifies that divine goal even further: that we *"become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ"*. What a marvelous and exalted objective!

This is illustrated in the graphic, now complete:

## PREPARATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE

→ FOR WORKS OF SERVICE

→ SO THAT THE BODY OF CHRIST MAY BE BUILT UP

→ UNTIL WE ALL REACH UNITY IN THE FAITH

→ AND IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE SON OF GOD

→ TO BECOME MATURE

→ ATTAINING TO THE WHOLE MEASURE OF THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST

7. In verses 14–16 Paul insists on the mutual responsibility of the believers so that all respond with faith and a willing disposition under the Holy Spirit's activity in them: *“From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”* No one is exempted from responsibility in relation to the rest.

## MINISTRY OF THE APOSTLE

As we consider apostolic ministry in greater detail, we will first observe how this ministry is fulfilled in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is our supreme model. Then we will look at the mission of the twelve apostles named by Jesus and their role in the early church as well as the ministry of other apostles mentioned in the New Testament. Then we will suggest an evaluation of the biblical teaching and some practical guidelines for application in our current situation.

### 1. THE APOSTOLIC MINISTRY OF JESUS

Jesus came to Earth as the Father's envoy (apostle) for the whole world (see Heb 3:1 and Jn 6:29,57; 8:42; 17:3,18; 20:21; etc.). Following is a list of some of the characteristics of his apostolic work:

- ♦ He was sent from the Father with a specific mission: the redemption of Adam's fallen race.
- ♦ He trained the leaders (apostles) of the new people of God.
- ♦ He laid the foundation for the church.
- ♦ He governed with wisdom, providing security, order and stability to his followers.
- ♦ He personally commissioned the apostles (Mat 10:1–5). He did not leave the matter to their criteria; they were not simply volunteers.
- ♦ The time that these men spent with Jesus was very important as was their familiarity with him and his deeds, including the reception of his teaching (see Matt 3:13–19; 28:18–20; Mk 16:14–16; Lk 24:45–49; Acts 1:8).

## 2. MISSION OF THE TWELVE IN THE EARLY CHURCH AND THE MINISTRY OF OTHER APOSTLES

### 1) The Twelve:

- ♦ From the outset they governed the new community with broad authority (Acts 4:32–37; 5:1–16; 6:1–7).
- ♦ They were responsible for the doctrine and formation of the Christian community (Acts 2:42; 5:28; etc.).
- ♦ They recognized their total dependence on the risen Christ, through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; 2:32–33; 4:8–12, 18–20).
- ♦ Using the keys to the kingdom, they assumed the responsibility to provide access to the kingdom of God, first to the Jews and then to the Samaritans and Gentiles (Acts ch. 2, 8, 10).

### 2) Other apostles:

- ♦ Besides the Twelve (with Matthias in the place of Judas Iscariot, Acts 1:15–26), other apostles are mentioned in the early church; for example: Paul (Acts 14:14; Rom 1:1; 11:13; 1 Cor 1:1); Barnabas (Acts 14:4,14); James the brother of the Lord (Gal 1:19); Silvanus (Silas?) and Timothy (1 Thess 1:1 with 2:6); Andronicus and Junias (Rom 16:7). It is possible that in some of these cases, as also in other instances in which the Greek word *apostolos* is used (see Jn 13:16; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil 2:25), the meaning may be simply that of messenger or envoy, limited in the technical sense to the concept of messenger.
- ♦ In the case of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13 and 14), they were commissioned by the principal ministries of Antioch, under the Holy Spirit's guidance, to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom and plant churches in other countries and cities.
- ♦ Together with the elders, the apostles met in Jerusalem to resolve an extremely important question that affected the nature of the church everywhere (Acts 15).
- ♦ Paul is the great example of apostolic ministry, planting churches, forming leaders, working with a varied team of men gifted in different ways, ordaining elders (pastors) in the new communities, resolving problems of conduct and morality in the churches and among the leaders, determining the essential body of Christian doctrine, etc.
- ♦ It is worth keeping in mind that the book of Acts is concerned principally with the extension of the gospel among the Jews and Gentiles and follows the more significant lines of that extension from Jerusalem to Rome. Therefore, it underscores the apostolic ministry of Peter and Paul.

We present therefore the list of the apostles mentioned in the New Testament:

**THE TWELVE (named by Jesus, including Matthias instead of Judas Iscariot)**

**OTHER APOSTLES:**

**PAUL**

**BARNABAS**

**JAMES**

**SILVANUS (SILAS?)**

**TIMOTHY**

**ANDRONICUS**

**JUNIAS**

### 3. EVALUATION OF THE BIBLICAL TEACHING

#### 1) Definition:

The word *apostolos* in classical Greek was originally a term used in maritime navigation to refer to the commissioning of a ship. The idea is that of dispatching the ship with its hold full of merchandise to a specific port where it would unload what is in the hold.

The essential significance of the word in the New Testament is: envoy, messenger, emissary or ambassador. It involves two basic ideas: a) an express commission, and b) a predetermined destination. The emphasis of the word is on the authority that is transferred to the person being sent. Thus its use denotes the authorization of the envoy to fulfill a particular mission or a task that is usually clearly defined. The messenger exercises the power of attorney for the one who commissioned him.

The word is used in the New Testament in two ways:

- ♦ in the general sense of messenger, and specifically as
- ♦ the designation of a definite role: that of Christian apostle.

(Note: These facts have been summarized from the article on "APOSTLE"  
in *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, pp. 126–136,  
Colin Brown, published by Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI)

#### 2) Classification:

In an article published in the magazine *Restoration* (Nov./Dec., 1981), the British author Arthur Wallis mentions three kinds of apostles in the New Testament:

- ♦ **Jesus Christ**, the "*apostle and high priest whom we confess*" (Heb 3:1). He came to Earth with the Father's power of attorney to fulfill his grand mission of our redemption. He laid the foundation of the church that will never change. He formed and commissioned other apostles to give orientation to his people and to promote the extension of his kingdom in every direction.
- ♦ **The Twelve** (including Matthias instead of Judas Iscariot). These are unique and irreplaceable. Historically, they lay the foundation of the church. As the "*twelve apostles of the Lamb*", they become the twelve foundation stones of the new society (Rev 21:14). Their main characteristic was that they had been with Jesus "*the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us*" throughout his earthly ministry (Acts 1:21). This fact gave them authority as "personal witnesses", a charge of great importance at the outset, when the New Testament was not yet formed.

- ♦ **The third kind of apostle is found in Ephesians 4:11**, together with prophets, evangelists and pastors/teachers, which Christ gave to the church following his resurrection and ascension, so that we all might reach “*unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*”. This group includes all those who, throughout the life of the church and in every place, receive the grace and commission from the risen Christ to lead his people with apostolic ministry.

### 3) Principal aspects:

Summarizing, we can mention as principal aspects of apostolic ministry the following elements:

- ♦ They are specifically involved in the building up of the church, especially with regard to its foundation (see Eph 2:20; 1 Cor 3:9–13, Eph 4:11–16). They are expert builders of the spiritual structure of the church, understanding the many details that make up the complete picture; able to supervise the building and evaluate the work done by all to that end. They receive a heavenly commission, a stewardship, to watch over the Lord's interests, so that all is done as he desires.
- ♦ They are responsible for ordaining elders and for the recognition of other ministries that emerge within the church (see Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6; Acts 16:1–3). In this task they work with the existing elders (the presbytery) of the locality when there are such.
- ♦ They watch over the progress of the communities that are under their responsibility (Rom 1:11; 2 Cor 10:14; 11:1–5; etc.). On occasion, they may intervene in a disciplinary case for improper conduct in the church (1 Cor 5; 2 Cor 2).
- ♦ They determine the doctrinal content of the teaching in the churches (see Acts 2:42; 2 Tim 2:2; Titus 1:9; Acts 20:26–32). In this sense, there are “pioneering” apostles who have already established the doctrinal content for the church of all times. Later apostolic ministry seeks to maintain commitment to “*the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints*” (Jude 3; 2 Pet 1:12–15; 3:1–2).
- ♦ They open new frontiers for the preaching of the gospel and the extension of God's kingdom (Rom 15:17–20; 2 Cor 10:14–16; Acts 13 and 14; etc.). In this task they seek to get the churches involved (Rom 15:24; Acts 14:26–28; 16:1–3).
- ♦ They form teams of persons with varied ministries so as to better accomplish their apostolic ministry (Acts 16:1–3; 20:4; Titus 1:5). This may result in the formation of new apostles and other ministries.
- ♦ They provide a sense of relationship and connection between all the churches, through their contacts with many and their work of coordination (Acts 15; 1 Cor 16:1–12; 2 Cor 9:1–3).
- ♦ The relationship among the apostles of mutual subjection and consensus is of great importance, so that the work might be done in unity (Gal 2:1–10; Acts 15).
- ♦ To be recognized as an apostle by some does not necessarily mean the exercise of apostolic ministry in other situations (1 Cor 4:15; Gal 2:7–8; 2 Cor 10:14–16). Apostolic ministry is a function relative to specific communities. Relations vary in different situations. It is conceivable that someone to have a valid apostolic ministry in certain places, but in other communities he is recognized simply as a

teacher or prophet, etc. Outside the area of his specific responsibility he cannot allege apostolic authority. Except in the case of Jesus Christ, there are no “universal” apostles.

#### 4. THE CURRENT NEED OF THE CHURCH

One of the difficulties that arises when we consider the biblical framework of apostolic ministry in comparison to our current context is the disparity that exists between our context and that of the early church. The Latin American world is characterized by pseudo-Christian societies, generally speaking, not completely pagan as in those times. In truth, our situation is marked by a religious syncretism with obvious Christian elements, but with a content that is notably materialistic and pagan.

In the midst of this social framework, there are Christian churches and congregations—both evangelical and catholic—which, on the whole, represent something like social islands, where the language and ideology are in marked contrast to the society around them and upon which they have little impact. However, in practice, most Latin Americans consider themselves already Christian, either because they were baptized as children in the church of their parents or because they attend mass or an evangelical meeting once in a while.

In this sense, our society is dissimilar from the majority of societies in the first century after Christ. At that time, very different social situations abounded. For example:

- ♦ Entire nations lived under the dominion of other empires, to which they paid tribute;
- ♦ The only religion based on a divine revelation—that of the Hebrews—was largely neutralized and limited to that ethnic group;
- ♦ Few persons could read and write;
- ♦ There were no grand and noble ideas or philosophies that inspired great masses of persons;
- ♦ Slavery was the characteristic life style of a large percentage of the human race;
- ♦ Pagan temples with degrading immoral practices were frequented by many;
- ♦ Social classes were relatively fixed with very little mobility between the classes.

Obviously, apostolic ministry, in a context of such characteristics, moved in a different way than would be characteristic in our current context. If the principal purpose of apostolic ministry is to establish the church in the social context, penetrate society with the message of Christ, present to people a viable alternative through the living evidence of a community that practices the teachings of Christ, then it is vital to interpret the focus of such ministry in practical and understandable terms for those who live in that social reality. The apostolic task cannot be isolated from its social and mundane context.

Surely, part of the problem of unfruitful evangelistic methods, not adapted to our context, is the lack of an integral apostolic vision. The evangelistic task must be incorporated and integrated in the apostolic vision. Biblically, the primary function—both chronologically and in terms of priority—is the apostolic function. Christ, as an apostle, evangelized, healed, taught and made disciples. From among them he chose some as apostles. In their turn, as apostles, they introduced the word of Christ and the kingdom

of God in their context—first among the Jews and then among the Gentiles—and then proceeded to teach the disciples and form Christian communities.

The work was accomplished with grace and anointing. The apostles, with liberty and authority, laid the foundation of the church, determined practical and doctrinal guidelines of the communities and dealt with the variety of situations that arose. It was a huge task. Without such work, the group of Christian disciples could hardly have faced their society with boldness or maintained coherence within their ranks.

In our societies today, on the other hand, we face a Christian context in decadence. There are profound differences and divisions among Christians, both in form and in substance. Many seriously question the activity and participation of the different ministries. This is the general picture although, fortunately, there are noteworthy exceptions. But they are exceptions, precisely because they are few and far between.

In this situation the prophetic ministry acquires great importance, since its emphasis is the call to return to divine principles. They apply the plumbline to the current situation and reveal its true condition in relation to God's revelation. They stand against useless human substitutes. They awaken concern. They bring together and motivate the dynamic elements of society in favor of renewal. They clarify the vision; they open up the spiritual horizon; they clearly focus on the divine objective.

But without apostolic ministry that translates all this into reality, that corrects errors, that lays a foundation and forms communities, there is little significant penetration in the social context and few new and viable models emerge. After the awakening, we must get on with the task. Following the vision, we need to proceed to accomplishment. Once the people are brought together, they must be formed in a coherent community, thriving, attractive. All this must be brought about with a singular purpose, with clarity and with effective methods.

Another element of enormous importance, which comes about through apostolic ministry, is the unity and universality of his vision. This is the vision that unifies his work and unites the Christian communities. Together, the apostles do the same work, although their activities at different times or in different places may vary greatly. Without an apostolic vision, the churches tend to distance themselves from each other and dedicate themselves to a variety of emphases, according to the particular grace of their pastors and other ministries in the community. The broad and singular vision of the apostle assures that the different churches maintain a close brotherly relationship and they are better able to view their different tasks as complementary rather than becoming competitive with each other.

## MINISTRY OF THE PROPHET

**T**he apostle Paul mentions prophets along with apostles in 1 Cor 12:28,29; Eph 2:20 and 4:11. Evidently, he considers them at the next level of importance, following apostles, although he sees their role as essential as regards the foundation of the church.

Concerning the tendency of some writers and scholars who interpret that there is no longer a place or a need in the church for apostles or prophets since the formation of the

NT canon has been concluded, we do well to keep in mind this reference from the *Nuevo Diccionario Bíblico* [New Bible Dictionary]:

Others have sought, at times, to identify this conclusion of the NT canon with a period in which prophecy will cease to exist, following 1 Cor 13:8ff; but this would require doing violence to the text, which clearly shows that such gifts will cease to exist “when perfection comes,” which is defined as when “we shall see face to face” (that is, following this life and age)...

Apparently, the argument is really based on the idea of interpreting prophecy as “new revelation,” that is, a concrete addition to the saving revelation in which God reveals himself to humanity as a whole through Christ. Yet it would seem that there is no solid reason on which to base such an inevitable equalization, neither in the OT nor in the NT. We may be in agreement that we are not to expect new revelations in reference to God in Christ, the way of salvation, the principles that govern the Christian life, etc. But it would seem that there is no valid reason that would impede the living God, who speaks and acts (in contrast to inanimate idols), to make use of the gift of prophecy to provide orientation of a specific nature to a church, a nation or an individual, or to alert or stimulate through warnings, in full accordance with the written word of God, which we should use to judge all that is said. Certainly, the NT does not understand that the work of the prophet involves doctrinal innovation, but rather to make known the word that is received from the Spirit according to the guidelines of truth that were once for all given to the saints (Jude 3), as a challenge and stimulation to our faith.

(*Nuevo Diccionario Bíblico*, Ediciones Certeza, 1994: Downers Grove, IL, p. 1129)

## THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

Although there is an obvious difference between the ministry of the prophet and the gift of prophecy, it may be useful to consider first the place of the charismatic gift of prophecy in the church, before taking up the subject of the prophet's ministry. Let us consider some of the following basic texts.

On the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the one hundred twenty disciples, the multitude who gathered in the street raised the question: “*What does this mean?*” (Acts 2:12).

In response, Peter quoted a prophecy from Joel (2:28–32), which includes these words:

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

Acts 2:18

With these words the apostle indicates that the prophetic gift will accompany God's people in this new era of the Holy Spirit. Let us look at other texts that enlarge upon the matter:

### 1 Corinthians 12:1, 4–6:

<sup>1</sup>Now about spiritual gifts [pneumatikon], brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant...

<sup>4</sup>There are different kinds of gifts [carismáaton], but the same Spirit.

<sup>5</sup>There are different kinds of service [diakonion], but the same Lord.

<sup>6</sup>There are different kinds of working [energuematon], but the same God works all of them in all men.

With regard to the meaning of the Greek words used, we can observe the following:

*pneumatikon* = spiritual values or manifestations

*carismaton* = gifts of grace

*diakonion* = services, or ministries

*energuematon* = energetic deeds, efficiency

### 1 Corinthians 12:7:

Now to each one the manifestation [fanerosis] of the Spirit [pneumatos] is given for the common good.

Here *fanerosis* could also be translated as evidence or exhibition.

Some Catholic scholars define spiritual gifts in this way:

Supernatural and free gifts, which perfect knowledge, speech, service and the administrative ability of people, not for personal profit, but for the good of the church.

Luke registers other instances of the use of the prophetic gift:

### Acts 19:5–7:

<sup>5</sup>On hearing this they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup>When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. <sup>7</sup>There were about twelve men in all.

In this case in Ephesus, the disciples recently baptized prophesy when Paul lays his hands on them; they also speak in tongues.

### Acts 21:8–9:

<sup>8</sup>Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. <sup>9</sup>He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.

Four daughters of Philip the evangelist manifested the same prophetic grace.

With regard to this, we can take note than Paul recognizes the liberty of women to exercise the prophetic gift, in spite of other restrictions:

<sup>4</sup>Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. <sup>5</sup>And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head —it is just as though her head were shaved.

### 1 Thessalonians 5:19–22:

<sup>19</sup>*Do not put out the Spirit's fire;*

<sup>20</sup>*do not treat prophecies with contempt.*

<sup>21</sup>*Test everything. Hold on to the good.*

<sup>22</sup>*Avoid every kind of evil.*

Here the apostle Paul warns against the temptation to despise prophesying.

### 1 Timothy 1:18; 4:14:

*Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight...*

*Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.*

In these texts Paul refers to the prophecies given over Timothy, probably on the occasion of his departure to accompany the apostle in his missionary (apostolic) work.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO PROPHECY?

As regards prophetic speaking, the simplest definition is to speak under the influence and inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the native language of the one who is speaking. Moreover, we can make the following observations:

- ♦ It is not the result of premeditation, deduction or reasoning, for its origin is not the mind, but the spirit of the individual.
- ♦ It is supernatural, a manifestation of the Holy Spirit (see 2 Pet 1:21; 1 Cor 12:7–11).
- ♦ the exercise of this charisma does not mean that the one who prophesies is a prophet. The prophet's office involves, besides the prophetic gift, other gifts and a divine call, a particular vocation.
- ♦ It is not essentially a gift of revelation. In this sense it is similar to the gift of tongues and the interpretation of tongues. That is, it does not necessarily include elements unknown previously to the one who speaks or to his hearers.
- ♦ It is not the result of the Holy Spirit's imposition. In this regard Ludwig Albrecht writes:

When prophesying, there is collaboration between the Holy Spirit and the human spirit. The person is an instrument of the Holy Spirit, rather like a colleague and partner, rational, free, cooperating and, therefore, responsible (see 1 Cor 14:31,32; 1 Thess 5:19,20).

(quoted by A. Bittlinger, *Gifts and Graces*, p. 111)

Arnold Bittlinger adds:

The wonderful —while still mysterious— aspect of prophetic speech, is that the Holy Spirit, in all his perfection, works in combination with the human spirit in all its imperfection. One consequence of this in our age, due to our weakness, is the fact that our prophecy is imperfect (see 1 Cor 13:9). Moreover, it is obvious

that the value and purity of our prophecy is conditioned on the state of the human channel (see Rom 12:6).

(*Gifts and Graces*, London, 1973: Hodder & Stoughton, p. 111)

For this reason it is necessary to try (judge) prophecy (see 1 Cor 14:29; 1 Thess 5:20,21; 2 Pet 1:20; 1 Jn 4:1). This judgment or discernment is not simply the result of a rational process, but also an operation of the Spirit. Therefore, surely, Paul suggests that in the meeting of the church, the prophets are those who are to judge prophetic manifestations.

The danger arises when we go too far; no problem is posed when we strictly limit ourselves to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of the discernment and examination of prophecy is not to dictate concerning what the Holy Spirit says, but to separate from it additional human thoughts arising in the mind or intention.

- ♦ Order and respect are required in the communication of prophecy, just as with other charismatic manifestations. That is the general sense of what Paul communicates in 1 Cor 14:27–33.
- ♦ The effect of prophecy on the believers is threefold (see 1 Cor 14:3): “*strengthening, encouragement and comfort*.” Let us analyze these words a bit further:
  - ♦ **strengthen** (literally, edify) [*oikodomen*, from *oikos*, house, and *doma*, build]. See 1 Cor 3:9: “*you are... God's building*” (see vs. 9–16). Paul considers that prophetic speech contributes to building God's house.
  - ♦ **encourage** [*paraklesin*, from *para* and *kaleo*, call alongside, i.e., to help, to lift, to counsel]. To see the use of this word in other texts, consider 2 Thess 2:16–17 (“*eternal encouragement*” and “*encourage your hearts*”); 2 Cor 1:3–7 (ten times).
  - ♦ **comfort** [*paramuthian*, with a meaning quite similar to the former word]. This verb means to calm and pacify. It has a greater level of tenderness and compassion. This consolation helps us greatly. It calms the torments of fear, anxiety and desperation. It helps us to rest in Christ Jesus. It is one of the most beautiful and gratifying functions of the prophetic gift.

Consider the use of this word in the following texts:

Philippians 2:1: “*comfort from his life*”

1 Thess 2:12: “*We dealt with each of you... comforting*”

1 Thess 5:14: “*encourage the timid*”

- ♦ The effect of prophecy in the unbeliever or untaught (see 1 Cor 14:24–25):
  - “*he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner*” (conviction)
  - “*and will be judged by all*”
  - “*So he will fall down and worship God.*”

The word used here for *judge* generally means attack, fall upon, put to shame. Paul affirms that prophecy discovers the sensitive and sinful areas of life and “attacks” them: “*the secrets of his heart will be laid bare.*” To see this operation of the Spirit, see Jn 2:25; 6:64; 13:11; 16:19; Acts 5:3–5; 1 Cor 2:11,15.

Then, the sinner is *judged*. The verb here means a preliminary judgment, that can be later rectified or ratified by the supreme Judge. Prophetic judgment opens the way to conversion and salvation of the sinner who is under conviction.

The third effect consists of the sinner, who is convicted and judged, turning to God. Paul knows very well that the effect may be negative (see Acts 13:44,45; 14:19; 17:5; 28:25ff.), but he indicates here the positive response as the divine intention.

- ♦ Since prophetic speech is able to edify the church and lead the sinner to faith in Christ, it is to be desired more than the other gifts (see 1 Cor 14:1,5,39). Evidently, the apostle believes that this gift is latent in every disciple (v. 31). We should place ourselves at the disposition of the Holy Spirit so that he might awaken in us this charisma.

## PROPHETS IN THE CHURCH

When the gospel witness reached Antioch in Syria, the apostles sent Barnabas to guide and orient the new disciples, mostly Gentiles. He sought out Saul of Tarsus whom he had known on his first visit to the apostles in Jerusalem following his conversion to Christ. Luke informs us that “*for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people*” (Acts 11:26). “*During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.*” One of them, named Agabus, “*stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius)*” (Acts 11:27–28).

Within a few months, by Luke's account, we discover that “*in the church of Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon..., Lucius..., Manaen..., and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’*” (Acts 13:1–2). The presence and activity of prophets in the framework of the church appears here as quite normal, for Luke does not feel the need to explain it as something unfamiliar.

Again, prophets appear in the council that met in Jerusalem to deal with the question of the activity of judaizers in the Gentile churches. The apostles and elders, having reached a decision in the matter, decide to send Judas and Silas to the churches “*to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing*” (Acts 15:27). When they reach Antioch —as Luke tells us— “*Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, did much to encourage and strengthen the brothers*” (Acts 15:32).

Once again Luke mentions the activity of prophets when Paul and company pass through Caesarea on their way to Jerusalem. He writes:

*After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said:*

*—The Holy Spirit says: “In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.”*

Acts 21:10–11

Paul refers to prophets in his first epistle to the Corinthians as well as in his letter to the Ephesians. It is obvious that he understands the importance of the prophets' role when writing to the Corinthians:

*“In the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers...”*

1 Corinthians 12:28

and also to the Ephesians:

*“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ himself as the chief cornerstone.”*

Ephesians 2:19–20

When he refers to his understanding of the “*mystery of Christ*,” he mentions the participation of apostles and prophets in the same revelation:

*“[The mystery] which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”*

Ephesians 3:5–6

In referring to the charismatic manifestations in the church in Corinth, he writes:

*“Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. The spirits of the prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.”*

1 Corinthians 14:29–33

Then he later exhorts:

*“Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored.”*

1 Corinthians 14:36–38

## THE SCOPE OF THE PROPHET'S MINISTRY

The role of the prophet is always in direct relation to the word of God, his revelation to men. Consider Hebrews 1:1,2a:

*<sup>1</sup>In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, <sup>2</sup>but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.*

The apostle Peter refers to the role of the prophets in ancient times:

*<sup>10</sup>Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, <sup>11</sup>trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. <sup>12</sup>It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you when they spoke of*

*the things that have not been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.*

1 Peter 1:10–12

One characteristic that marks and determines the prophetic ministry is his vision of the things of God, his deep appreciation for the way in which God contemplates things. The popular viewpoint does not move or discourage him; he insists that things must conform to the divine revelation.

One of the figures of a prophet that better illustrates his task is that of a man with a plumbline in his hand, like a good mason who wants to assure that the structure that is built upon the foundation is properly aligned and solid. Another graphic figure is that of John the Baptist, a “*voice crying out in the desert*” (Matt 3:3; Mk 1:3; Lk 3:4), who came to call men to repentance, so as to prepare their hearts to please God. The prophet's finger point to God's word, his purpose and foundation, while his voice calls people to set their lives in order according to the divine revelation.

The popular idea is that the prophet occupies himself largely with the future. But the biblical picture is different: the prophet calls people to account with regard to what God has spoken. The human tendency, distracted by his own interests and personal ambitions, turns away from God's will. He loses the sense of perspective in what he does. Therefore, the prophet attacks egotism so as to restore for God the central place in our lives. Thus the prophet must announce with clarity and anointing, without ambiguity, the word of God, i.e., his purpose to govern and orient our lives.

The text of Hebrews 1, mentioned above, underscores that God's revelation in the person of Christ is definitive and final. That means that God has made himself known perfectly and fully in Christ. This truth notably modifies the prophet's role from the moment of Christ's coming into this world. He is not God's mouthpiece to communicate new revelations, but to call people to come to terms with God who has revealed himself in Christ. The prophets affirm and confirm God's purpose in the world and in our life. They awaken the conscience of their hearers in order to place their life and their interests in proper perspective. They always keep in mind the ultimate and definitive evaluation that God establishes.

## MINISTRY OF THE EVANGELIST

The word *evangelist* [*euangelistes*] appears only three times in the NT. Besides Ephesians 4:11, the other two references are as follows:

*Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven.*

Acts 21:8

*But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.*

2 Timothy 4:5

The phrase, *Do the work of an evangelist*, is an exact translation of the Greek.

The noun *euangelistes* is defined simply as “preacher of the gospel, evangelist” (Arndt & Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, ©1957, University of Chicago Press). The verb *euangelizo* [evangelize] appears 54 times in the NT in Greek and is usually translated in our versions as “announce or preach the gospel”. The noun *euangelion* (gospel or good news) is found in the original text of the NT 76 times.

## THE CASE OF PHILIP

Since in the text of the NT the only persons specifically mentioned as evangelists are Philip and Timothy, we have little information to give us a precise idea of its meaning.

Philip appears first in Acts 6:5 as one of the seven men of confidence selected to serve tables in the “*daily distribution of food*” (6:1) and later in 8:5, following the dispersion of the disciples due to persecution by the Jewish traditionalists, where Luke relates that he goes to a city of Samaria and preaches the gospel. Luke informs us:

*6When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. 7With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. 8So there was great joy in that city.*

Acts 8:6–8

His readiness to preach the gospel to the Samaritans represents a significant turn in the church's advance, for until then almost all the disciples were Jews. Perhaps this fact explains in part why the apostles in Jerusalem, when they become aware of the event, decided to send Peter and John there, in order to confirm the new disciples as well as to complete the work done by Philip and pray for the new believers “*that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus*” (Acts 8:15–16).

Later on, in the same chapter Luke recounts that an angel of the Lord told Philip to “*go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza*” (8:26), where he met an official of the Ethiopian government. He preached the gospel to him and then baptized him. Then vs. 39–40 tell us:

*When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.*

The next (and last) time that Philip appears in the biblical text is the passage quoted above, Acts 21:8. The more obvious facts that we can gather from these biblical accounts, concerning the subject of our study, are the following:

- ♦ Philip was a faithful man, responsible and consequential, who enjoyed the confidence of both the apostles and the larger community of the faithful in Jerusalem.
- ♦ The sovereign action of the Holy Spirit is evident in his life, guiding him to preach the gospel, with noteworthy results.
- ♦ There is evidence of apostolic support for his evangelistic ministry, by both Peter and John as well as Paul.
- ♦ His ministry as an evangelist was evident in various cities, beyond his place of residence.

## THE CASE OF TIMOTHY

Timothy appears initially in the NT in Acts 16:1 as a disciple in Lystra, a city visited by Paul and Silas at the outset of Paul's second missionary trip. Luke informs us that he was the son of a *“Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek”*. Since *“the brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him, Paul wanted to take him along on the journey”* (16:2–3). From that time forward Timothy appears as the regular companion of Paul and Silas (see Acts 17:14–15; 18:5; 19:22; 20:4; Rom 16:21; 1Cor 4:17; 16:10; 2Cor 1:1,19; Phil 1:1; 2:19; Col 1:1; 1Thess 1:1; 3:2; 2Thess 1:1; Phlm 1:1). Paul mentioned the fact that Timothy was his envoy to Macedonia (Acts 19:22, with Erastus), Corinth (1Cor 4:17; 16:10), Philippi (Phil 2:19), Thessalonica (1Thess 3:2) and Ephesus (1Tim 1:18). While in Ephesus, Paul gave him various responsibilities; among them: limit the activity of some false teachers (1Tim 1:3–7; 4:1–10; 6:3–10), teach on intercession, especially for the civil authorities (1Tim 2:1–8), orient the conduct of women in the congregation (1Tim 2:9–15), recognize bishops (elders) and deacons (1Tim 3:1–13), set in order the manner of dealing with widows and older persons (1Tim 5:1–22), give orientation to those who are slaves (1Tim 6:1–2) and give instructions concerning integrity, humility and the proper attitude toward money (1Tim 6:11–21). In his letters to Timothy, Paul refers to him as his spiritual son (1Tim 1:2,18; 2Tim 1:2).

## SUMMARY OF THE BIBLICAL TEACHING

Based on the data we have seen in the above texts we can indicate some guidelines that seem to define the responsibility of the evangelist:

- ♦ His life, his burden and his activity of evangelism are an example to the church in the task of communicating the gospel to those who do not know Christ.
- ♦ He takes a praiseworthy initiative in communicating the gospel, while maintaining a relationship of confidence with the apostles. These seem to be the ones who recognize, confirm, support and adjust his evangelistic ministry.
- ♦ Especially in the case of Timothy, we observe the development of his ministry as a member of an apostolic team. In the case of Philip, a similar relationship is insinuated with the apostles in Jerusalem.
- ♦ Also in the case of Timothy, we see a broad responsibility in the church under the apostle Paul's orientation. This is not limited to evangelism; it includes teaching, exhorting, correcting, ordaining elders and providing extensive leadership for the church in Ephesus.

Since the apostolic task covers a broad field of responsibilities such as, for example, evangelizing, indoctrinating, bringing together and confirming those who turn to Christ, forming churches, overseeing their development and proper government, extending the activity of the church outwardly, seeking to develop unity and diversity among God's people, orienting and directing in disciplinary matters and maintaining the spiritual vision of the church, it is obvious that the apostle would be hard pressed if he tried to do it all alone. For that reason teams are formed that include a variety in ministry and focus. In the team the apostle acts as coordinator, architect or coach, in order to assure that the various tasks are accomplished, the localities adequately attended and the workers properly related in the best way. This great variety and breadth of mi-

nistry is what makes it necessary to send the members of his team to different locations from time to time. It is not difficult to think of the evangelist in this framework as the ideal assistant to the apostle.

## MINISTRY OF THE PASTOR

No activity in the church is more important than the pastoral task. There are and have been apostles and prophets, evangelists and teachers, deacons and deaconesses, but the pastoral ministry always was and will be the basic ministry, essential, fundamental in the church of Jesus Christ. Throughout its long history the church has lived through periods when there were no recognized ministries such as apostles, evangelists or prophets, but it has never existed without having some persons—both men and women—who assumed as their own responsibility the task of caring for the weak, the new ones, the fallen ones, the wounded and discouraged. We can all remember someone who extended us a hand when we felt disappointed, lost, uncertain and needing grace, fellowship and compassion.

The term *pastor* (or shepherd), just as with prophet and teacher, is found in both testaments of the Bible. Abel, the second son of Adam and Eve, was a shepherd of sheep (Gen 4:2) and following him many others exercised the same office. One of the most renowned in Israel was David, who became the second king of his people. As a shepherd David exalted his office as one who defended his flock against all aggressors and led the sheep to find green pastures and clean and safe water.

We find in Jesus Christ the best example and model for the pastor. His words registered in John 10:1–18, 27–30 explain to us why he is the good shepherd:

- ♦ He “*enters by the gate*” (v.2), i.e., he acts with propriety and legitimacy. He doesn't sneak around; he doesn't walk in the shadows.
- ♦ The “*sheep listen to his voice*” (vv.3,4,27). That is, they recognize him; his authority does not come from imposition or arrogance.
- ♦ “*He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out*” (v.3). He personally knows those who are under his care; they are not merely numbers or statistics. There is a personal relationship. He is interested in their welfare.
- ♦ The sheep “*come in and out and find pasture*” (v.9). They do not feel bound or abused. The freedom and nutrition they enjoy are a product of their pastor's good care and attentive orientation.
- ♦ The good shepherd “*lays down his life for the sheep*” (v. 11). Here we see his total dedication.
- ♦ They “*follow*” their shepherd (vv. 4,27). They have confidence that he leads them in the right pathway. This reminds us of David's expression in Psalm 23:6:

*Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

The following definition for pastor by the Scotsman R.A. Stewart appears in the *Nuevo Diccionario Bíblico*, Editorial Caribe, p. 1048:

The responsibility of the literal shepherd was, and continues to be, considerable; moreover, it is as ancient as Abel (Gen 4:2). He must find pasture and water in dry and stony ground (Psa 23:2), protect his sheep from climatic disturbances and dangerous beasts (cf. Am 3:12), and recover straying animals (Ez 34:8; Mat 18:12, etc.). When his duties take him far from the places frequented by humans, he would carry a bag for his immediate needs (1 Sam 17:40,49) and a tent could serve as his dwelling (SS 1:8). He used dogs to help in his task, just as today (Job 30:1). The fact that shepherds and their flocks live a more sedentary life in the cities is a sign of depopulation and disaster due to divine judgment (Jer 6:3; 33:12; Zeph 2:13–15). The shepherd responsible for his flocks was obliged to replace any lost animal (Gen 31:39), unless he could clearly show that the circumstances were beyond his foresight and control (Ex 22:10–13). Ideally, the shepherd should be strong, devout and self-sacrificing, as many were in fact. Yet at times there were scoundrels in an honorable profession (Ex 2:17,19), and inevitably some shepherds failed to fulfill their tasks (Zech 11, *pass.*; Nah 3:18; Is 56:11; etc.).

Such is the honor of this vocation that frequently the OT presents God as the Shepherd of Israel (Gen 49:24; Psa 23:1; 80:1), tender in his care (Is 40:11), but capable of dispersing the flock in his wrath, or gathering them again once he had forgiven them (Jer 31:10). At times the predominant note is of judgment, when human shepherds and the sheep receive equal condemnation and punishment (Jer 50:6; 51:23; Zech 13:7; and the application in the Gospels). Well might these unfaithful shepherds tremble when appearing before the Lord (Jer 49:19; 50:44). At times there is a note of compassion when the sheep have been abandoned by those who had the responsibility to care for them (Num 27:17; 1 Ki 22:17; Mk 6:34, etc.). Two shepherds mentioned with special approval are Moses (Is 63:11) and, although it might surprise us, the pagan executor of God's purposes, Cyrus (Is 44:28). Scripture underscores the serious responsibility that human leaders have toward those who follow them. One of the most solemn chapters of the OT is the denunciation of the false shepherds in Ez 34 (cf. Jer 23:1–4, and even more severely in Jer 25:32–38). These have preferred to fill their stomachs instead of caring for the sheep; they have killed and dispersed for personal profit those that were entrusted to their care; sadly, they have failed to fulfill their specific pastoral task; therefore God will return to gather the sheep and judge their shepherds. Beyond that, he will replace them with a single shepherd (Ez 34:23). This is critically interpreted as the union of the kingdoms from the N and the S, but is in greater agreement with the Christ who is expected.

Curiously, in the NT the noun *pastor* (gr. *poimen*), with reference to the church leaders, only appears in Ephesians 4:11. It is used in reference to Christ himself in John 10:11,14; Hebrews 13:20 and 1 Peter 2:25. However, the derivative verb *poimaino* (to care for the sheep) is used with regard to men in Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:1–4, as well as in Jesus' instructions to Peter in John 21:16. This use seems to insinuate that the biblical emphasis is placed on the task, the activity, the responsibility of the one who exercises this role and not on the title. It is not a title for boasting as, for example, “the reverend pastor”.

Two other terms appear more frequently in the New Testament to refer to those who preside over or govern the Christian communities. The one of most ancient use among the Hebrews is the term **elder** (Grk. *presbuteros*), which is sometimes transliterated as *presbyter*, especially in ecclesiastical literature. It literally means an older person, mature, and is used in a comparative sense, which means that an elder would not necessarily be considered a person of great age, but rather a mature person, greater in age than the majority of those under his care. The emphasis is on maturity of character, spiritual stability and a trustworthy trajectory, although it may also refer to his grace and patience in dealing with others. The elder, therefore, should be a person who is balanced, settled, worthy of confidence, of good judgment, recognized as such by his peers.

Among the ancient Hebrew people, the elders served with civil and social authority in the villages. They were persons of reference, men of weight in the community. They did not occupy their place by popular election, but rather due to their natural development and their sense of responsibility among their compatriots.

In the synagogues that were initiated during the Israelites' exile, the elders and scribes (or teachers of the Law) occupied the principal leadership positions. The scribes had a greater responsibility in the study and teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The apostle Paul gave clear instructions to Timothy and Titus concerning the recognition of elders (or bishops, 1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9). Their qualification did not depend on being close friends of the apostle or evangelist; nor did they exercise political power. The most important aspect was a solid and trustworthy character, good judgment and spiritual sobriety.

The other term used is **bishop** (Grk. *episkopos*), which means superintendent, supervisor or overseer. In the original Greek frame of reference the word was used in a general sense, with reference to magistrates, men who governed and were respected. In practice it is the equivalent of *elder*. In the early churches there was always a plurality of bishops or elders, which indicates that they functioned as a governing body in the community of the faithful.

Take note of the practically interchangeable use of the terms elder, overseer (bishop) and shepherd (pastor) in the following exhortation of the apostle Paul to the Ephesian elders:

<sup>17</sup>*From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the **elders** of the church...*

<sup>25</sup>*“Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. <sup>26</sup>Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. <sup>27</sup>For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. <sup>28</sup>Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**. Be **shepherds** of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.”*

Acts 20:17,25–28

## HOW DID THE MONARCHICAL BISHOPRIC EMERGE?

With the passing of time and due to the growth and extension of the churches, Christians felt the need to enlarge upon the ecclesiastical organization. After the first century of the church, when the first apostles disappeared as well as the “apostolic

fathers”, the Christians deemed it necessary to designate some who would exercise responsibilities beyond the strictly local sense. In time the term *bishop* acquired a hierarchical elevation above the elders. The bishops tended to exercise their authority over zones which later came to be known as *dioceses*.

In the diocesan structure of the Roman Catholic church, a single bishop exercises ecclesiastical authority in the diocese and the other pastors (or priests) work under his direction and responsibility. Obviously, there is no biblical basis for this structure; it is simply one of the ways that Christians responded to the perceived needs. In this regard, we have the following commentary from the *Nuevo Diccionario Bíblico*, Editorial Caribe, p. 983:

In the NT there is no evidence of government by a single bishop; James' position in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13; 21:18; Gal 2:9,12) was entirely exceptional, and the result of his personal relationship with Christ; but influence is something very different from office. Among the apostolic fathers, Ignatius is the only one who insists on a monarchical episcopate, but not even he affirms that it is an issue divinely instituted (an argument that would have been decisive, if it could have been determined). Jerome, commenting on Titus 1:5, observes that the singular bishop's supremacy emerged “by custom rather than by the Lord's designation”, as a way of impeding divisions in the church. What is most likely is that the monarchical bishopric had emerged in the local congregations when some gifted individual acquired a place of preeminence in a permanent way in the body of presbyter-bishops, or as the church grew, and the presbyters found themselves dispersed by the congregations in their area, so that only one of them remained in the mother church. Harnack thought that the elders constituted the governing body, while the bishops and deacons were the liturgical leaders and the administrators employed by them. Others have seen the origins of the later episcopate in the position occupied by Paul's assistants, Timothy and Titus; but these men never received the title of bishops, and we find in letters that they make no clear provision for the designation of personal successors. Whatever the reason may have been for the emergence of a monarchical episcopate, its effect was to divide the tasks and attributes of the presbyter-bishops, so that some of them became the responsibility of the bishop and others belonged to the presbytery.

## MINISTRY OF THE TEACHER

In the list of ministries that Christ gave to the church (Eph 4:11), *teachers* appears jointly with *pastors*, sharing the same article in the original language. On the other hand, apostles, prophets and evangelists appear each with its own article. This has caused some commentators to think that four ministries are presented rather than five, and that *pastor-teacher* is to be considered as a single ministry. Others believe that the two functions simply overlap or are interwoven. Although it is true that almost all pastors are also teachers, not all teachers are pastors. Probably, the use of a single article for the two suggests a very close association between two kinds of ministry that function in the same congregation.

Jesus placed great emphasis on the word and on teaching. In his great priestly prayer near the close of his ministry, which the apostle John registered in chapter 17 of his Gospel, Jesus said to his heavenly Father:

*<sup>6</sup>I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. <sup>7</sup>Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. <sup>8</sup>For I gave them the words that you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.*

John 17:6–8

Later he continues with the same emphasis:

*<sup>14</sup>I have given them your word and the world has hated them...  
<sup>17</sup>Santify them by the truth; your word is truth.*

John 17:14,17

In the Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20), Jesus ordered his followers to make disciples of all nations, “*baptizing them... and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*” The basic task of pastors is to teach the word and will of God. The word of God is the instrument that the Holy Spirit uses to carry out his work in the mind and heart of each disciple. The purpose of the teaching is the transformation of the life and conduct of the disciple until he becomes like Christ his Lord. The original word translated as *teaching* or *doctrine* is *didache*, which appears thirty times in the NT. It means teaching or instruction and consists of commandments that reveal the will of God (see Matt 7:28; Mk 12:38; Jn 7:16; Acts 2:42; 5:28; 1Cor 14:26).

The original word for teacher is *didaskalos* (from the same root) and refers to one who instructs and shapes the life of another person like an apprentice or disciple. It does not involve giving discourses or classes alone. Its emphasis is on communicating to others the knowledge of God's will so that their life is established on solid and eternal values (see Matt 7:24–27). It is what Paul shows to be his purpose in Colossians 1:28–29:

*<sup>28</sup>We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. <sup>29</sup>To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.*

## WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE DIDACHE (TEACHING)?

In order to teach the word of God to others, which is vital for development toward maturity, we must know it and put it into practice in our life. Since there are so many variant ideas about what we should teach, we should focus on the content of the *didache*. I take the liberty to quote here several paragraphs from a small booklet by Jorge Himitian on the meaning and characteristics of the *didache*:

1. The *didache* consists of clear teaching, instructions and commandments that reveal God's will for our life (see Matt 7:28–29 in reference to chapters 5 through 7 of Matthew; Titus 2:1–10). Generally, they are commandments such as: “*Love your neighbor as yourself*”; “*Do not judge, or you too will be judged*”; “*If you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*”

2. It is simple and clear: “*Children, obey your parents in the Lord*”; “*Bless those who curse you*”; “*Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery.*”
3. It is a definitive and complete body of teachings; it is not interminable (Acts 20:26–27; Matt 28:20).
4. It sets in order the deep relationship of men with God and with their neighbor completely: “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart...*”; “*Let your kindness be known to all men.*”
5. Its tone is generally imperative, for Christ is our Lord and Master. His teachings are not suggestions or counsels, but commandments. We are under his authority. The *didache* appeals to obedience. It establishes in a practical and concrete way the kingdom of God over our life. He that hears his word and does not do it, builds on the sand (see Matt 7:21–29).
6. It covers every aspect of life: work, family, sex, money, worship, service, etc.
7. It is centered on Christ, for he is the source for all teaching and also our example: “*Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart*” (see Matt 11:29; Eph 4:20–21).
8. The goal of all the *didache*, through the instructions and commandments, is to make us like Jesus. We frequently find in the biblical teaching the phrase “*even as Christ*” or its equivalent (see Eph 5:2,25).
9. Its content is equivalent to the moral aspect of the law (of Moses): “*Honor your father and your mother*”; “*Do not envy.*” However, the moral commandment is deepened and clarified so that we do not conform with a formal or external observance alone.
10. It is the word of God and therefore unchangeable. Its content cannot be modified, diminished or increased: “*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away*” (Matt 24:35).
11. It is universal. Its commands reveal God's will for all men in all generations (Matt 28:19–20).
12. Its content is not imposed by logic but by the authority of Jesus. In that which appears illogical in his commands is hidden God's wisdom that works to heal all the ills of our society. For example: “*If your enemy is hungry, give him to eat*”; “*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds*”; “*Sell what you have and give to the poor.*”
13. We need to know it, obey it and put it into practice (see Rom 6:16–17). We must remember it and be renewed in it through repetition (see 2 Peter 1:12–15).
14. It is the basis for every admonition, reproof and discipline in the church: “*Correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience and careful instruction* (2 Tim 4:2).
15. The early church was more concerned for the content of it than its occasional form of presentation. The form of the doctrine, its order by subject, its titles or divisions has a relative importance; it may be one way or another, but its content is absolute and invariable.

## HOW DID JESUS TEACH?

In response to the question: What did Jesus teach when he was on Earth?, K. Wegenast affirms in a paragraph taken from the *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*:

In brief, the answer is: God, his kingdom and his will, all themes of contemporary Judaism, which Jesus, in the manner of a rabbi or a prophet, spoke about in his conversations with the Jews. He differed from his rabbinic counterparts, not in his subject matter but in the radical way he handled it, consistently applying all he said to concrete situations in man's life with his fellow man, and involving himself personally in the subjects under discussion. Instead of merely giving theoretical teaching about God, his providence, his grace or his wrath, Jesus showed God's goodness and wrath at work in concrete situations (e.g., Lk 15:1ff). Instead of speculating on the kingdom of God, he announces its nearness (Mk 1:15;), and so issues a call to repentance and to a change of behavior (Mk 7:15; Matt 5:21ff).

*Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3, Grand Rapids, MI,  
©1978, Zondervan Publishing Co., p. 762

## TEACHERS IN THE CHURCH

With reference to the early church, the word *didaskalos* (teacher) appears ten times. Among those references, in Antioch five men are mentioned as included in the group of “prophets and teachers” (Acts 13:1). The context seems to indicate that they were the principal ministers of the congregation. In 1 Corinthians 12:28–29 Paul places teachers in third place “in the church,” following apostles and prophets, in a passage that underscores the diversity of ministries and gifts in the body of Christ. In 1 Timothy 2:7, Paul refers to himself by saying “*I was appointed... a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles.*” And in 2 Timothy 1:11 he affirms: “*I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.*” In 2 Timothy 4:3 he exhorts Timothy to be faithful to God's word “*for the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.*”

In Hebrews 5:11–12 the author laments the lack of maturity among those to whom he writes:

*<sup>11</sup>We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. <sup>12</sup>In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!*

And finally, in James 3:1, the author calls for a more serious evaluation of the teacher's role in the church: “*Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.*”

## INTERRELATIONS AMONG THE MINISTRIES

From the use of these terms in the NT it seems evident that the principal field of action of some of them is broader than the local congregation. The **apostle** focuses his vision and ministry in the fields where the gospel should be proclaimed, the kingdom of God extended and the church established. The **evangelist** appears as the extended arm of apostolic ministry, for he collaborates in the expansion of Christ's witness. The **prophet** stands out for his sharp vision of the heavenly plan and purpose and his precision in making this known. He also serves as an "inspector" of the work once done, so as to maintain faithfulness and coherence between the original vision and the realization of the work. The **pastor** gathers, bonds and conforms the community in a vital and coherent realization on the local plane. He is concerned for viability, cohesion, spirituality, fellowship and action in the community of the faithful. And the **teacher** works to assure that all grow unto maturity by teaching the will of God. His faithfulness to God's word and his grace in communication serve to maintain spiritual vitality, interest and incentive among the saints and clarity in the vision, knowledge and fulfillment of the divine purpose.

One of the principal points that serves as a backdrop or framework for the exercise of this great variety of ministries is the conviction of the essential and fundamental unity of the body of Christ. Our tendency toward egotism, localism and regionalism can blur a clear vision of the breadth of God's purpose throughout the earth. We must learn to accept the great variety and inevitable diversity within the church. The local expression is key but it is not alone. It would be impossible to maintain a broad vision of the church if it is not perceived on the local plane. All these ministries, in their normal development in the church, come to birth on the local scene. Therefore, pastoral ministry needs a clear and broad vision of the divine purpose, without sectarian attitudes.

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# APOSTOLIC MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH

Orville E. Swindoll

## INTRODUCTION

The importance of this subject emerges from its relevance in the ministry of Jesus Christ, as well as in the development of the primitive church. Our current interest is based on the conviction that the extension of the work throughout the country brings into relief the need for apostolic ministry. The focus of this study is not, in the first instance, academic, theoretical or polemic, although we are unable to completely avoid some of those nuances. We purpose to be eminently practical and approach the subject with humility and with an open mind and heart to learn.

Up to this point, our experiences of spiritual renewal have had to do principally with pastoral ministry. Some of the subjects we have dealt with in this area are:

- Christian discipleship and the formation of lives
- the formation and restoration of families
- relations between Christian brothers
- the unity of the church
- the plurality of pastors in a community
- home groups within the community
- the body of truth involved in the *kerigma* and the *didache*, and the teaching of these truths

We have also dealt with very important aspects of evangelistic ministry, as for instance:

- the lordship of Christ
- the gospel of the kingdom / God's government
- the objective of evangelism and redemption
- the importance of repentance, confession, baptism
- integral healing
- the responsibility of all to evangelize and make disciples
- the intimate relationship between evangelism and the unity of the church

But questions and situations have arisen whose solution is not found in strictly pastoral or evangelistic ministry. For instance:

1) There are situations that do not respond to a relation based merely on "ligaments" (Antioch did not have an initial "ligament" with Jerusalem. Jerusalem does not figure as a "mother church"). There is no clear biblical basis to affirm the authority of a pastor in one city over a pastor in another city (although there might exist a close relationship between them for other reasons).

2) There are congregations that progress well with good pastoral ministry. But to grow with a broad and integral vision, to achieve coherence and normal growth, they recognize that another kind of ministry is necessary that could open the congregation to a larger vision and that could lead them to the realization of that vision without losing the positive aspects achieved through effective pastoral ministry.

3) In classic evangelism there has been lacking a more effective coordination with the integral vision of the church. As evangelistic ministry involves the church in the extension of the kingdom of God, we believe that there is an implicit need for a larger focus to give it orientation.

4) When we observe in a certain brother gifts and grace (together with a good measure of experience and maturity) for the formation of leaders, the establishment of new

congregations, the orientation of pastors and communities with difficulties, etc., is it right to continue limiting such brothers to a completely pastoral ministry? Would it not be more convenient for everyone to recognize such a person for the grace that he has and encourage him to dedicate himself rather to those tasks that contribute to a greater extension?

5) Several questions emerge with regard to problems in the congregations:

- When a difficulty arises in a congregation that goes beyond the capacity or the authority of the local leaders to resolve it, to whom should the brothers appeal in search of a solution?
- What can be done to save a congregation from a disgrace or from falling apart when the local leadership abandons their responsibility, or incurs in sins that discredit them before the community?
- When several pastors in a city or in a community are unable to agree and there is a threat or danger of a division, isn't a ministry that is more than pastoral needed that can act with grace to resolve the situation? Isn't it worthwhile to be able to identify those ministries before a crisis occurs?
- There are situations bogged down in confusion, indisposition, traditionalism and stubbornness, that grow and afflict the entire Christian community and cannot be resolved without a wise ministry with a broad mandate and clarity regarding the goals and methods to use for their full realization. Clearly, in these situations a ministry with a broad scope is needed.

6) As the testimony of spiritual renewal and restoration is extended to different areas of the country, at times the case has arisen in which several pastors in the same region want to see spiritual renewal in their congregations. Wouldn't time be gained as well as the promotion of companionship among them if a ministry with translocal characteristics could provide them orientation together?

7) In practice, many Christian groups have recognized the need of a ministry that goes beyond what is strictly pastoral, but they tend to give that function another name, such as bishop, superintendent, district missionary, etc. One of the problems with such a scheme is that, since these titles are not biblical —or they are combined with responsibilities that are not biblically related— we find ourselves without reference points in the Scriptures to define functions and responsibilities. At the same time, this often gives place to unfortunate excesses or to arbitrary definitions. Moreover, this practice gives room for the creation of offices that perpetuate themselves and are sometimes occupied by men who, although they do not possess the necessary grace nor have a vital relationship with the churches and pastors, they carry out an institutional function (here we see the difference between organization and organism).

8) When the need appears to recognize new pastors that have arisen in a congregation, what other ministries would be authorized to grant them public recognition?

We do not ignore the problems and objections that are faced when we suggest the recovery of an apostolic ministry, using the biblical terminology. One objection comes from those who believe that this function disappeared with the early apostles of the primitive church. Such an idea is deeply rooted in the minds of very many believers, in spite of the lack of biblical or historical evidence.

A similar objection comes from those who allege that a necessary requisite for apostleship is the experience of having seen the resurrected Lord. Other say that once the historical foundation was laid for the church, or when the New Testament canon was concluded, there is no further need for apostles. That is to say, there is a kind of generalized mentality among Christians that leaves no room for the concept of a valid apostleship today.

Yet a study of Ephesians 4:11–16 seems to indicate the need of a continuation of

apostolic ministry (as well as that of prophets, evangelists and pastors/teachers) throughout the church age. Moreover, 1 Corinthians chap. 12 (esp. v. 28) underscores several characteristics that apply to the church at all times (her corporate unity, her diversity of gifts and ministries, etc.). Among them we see apostolic ministry.

It is our conviction that the restoration of the church in our times includes also the restoration of apostolic and prophetic ministries. We believe that ignorance or the failure to give more place to these ministries, if this continues to be the case, will make it very difficult, or even impossible, to recover the more important aspects in the projection and ministry of the church in these difficult times.

In the present study, we approach the subject under the following categories:

- I. The apostolic ministry of Jesus Christ
- II. Mission of the Twelve in the primitive church and the ministry of other apostles
- III. Evaluation of the pertinent Bible teaching
- IV. The church's present need
- V. Projection toward the development of the work with a recognized apostolic ministry
- VI. Some considerations and suggestions

## **I. THE APOSTOLIC MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST**

1) Jesus came as the one sent (apostle) from the Father for the whole world (see Heb 3:1 and Jn 6:29,57; 8:42; 17:3,18; 20:21; etc.). Some of the characteristics of his apostolic work:

- He was sent from the Father with a specific mission: the redemption of the human race.
- He formed leaders (apostles) of the new people of God.
- He laid the foundation of the church.
- He governed wisely, providing security, order and stability to his followers.
- He personally commissioned the twelve apostles (Mat 10:1-5). He did not leave the matter to their own criteria; nor were they simply volunteers.
- Their time with Jesus was very important as well as their familiarity with his person and deeds, along with receiving his teaching (see Mar 3:13-19; 28:18-20; Mar 16:14-16; Lk 24:45-49; Acts 1:8).

## **II. MISSION OF THE TWELVE IN THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH AND THE MINISTRY OF OTHER APOSTLES**

1) The Twelve:

- From the outset they governed the new community with full authority (Acts 4:32-37; 5:1-16; 6:1-7).
- They were responsible for the teaching and formation of the Christian community (Acts 2:42; 5:28; etc.).
- They recognized their total dependence on the resurrected Christ, through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; 2:32-33; 4:8-12, 18-20).
- Using the keys of the kingdom, they assumed the responsibility of opening access to that kingdom, first to the Jews and then to the Samaritans and Gentiles (Acts chaps. 2, 8, 10).

2) Other apostles:

- Besides the Twelve (with Matthias in the place of Judas Iscariot, Acts 1:15-26), there were other apostles in the primitive church such as, for example: Paul (Acts 14:14; Rom 1:1; 11:13; 1 Cor 1:1); Barnabas (Acts 14:4,14); James the brother of the Lord (Gal 1:19); Silvanus (Silas?) and Timothy (1 Thess 1:1 with 2:6);

Andronicus and Junias (Rom 16:7). It is possible that in some of these cases, as well as in other instances in which the Greek word *apóstolos* is used (see Jn 13:16; 2 Cor 8:23; Phil 2:25), the significance could be simply that of messenger or one sent, in a limited technical sense.

- In the case of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13 y 14), they were commissioned by the principal ministers of Antioch (under the guidance of the Holy Spirit) to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom and establish the church in other countries and cities.
- In conjunction with the elders, the apostles met in Jerusalem to resolve an extremely important question that affected the nature of the church in all places (Acts 15).
- Paul is the great example of apostolic ministry, establishing churches, forming leaders, working with a diverse team of men gifted in different ways, establishing elders (pastors) in the new communities, resolving problems of moral conduct in the churches and among the leaders, determining the essential body of Christian doctrine, etc.
- We should keep in mind that the book of Acts concerns itself mainly with the extension of the gospel among Jews and Gentiles and traces the most significant lines of that extension from Jerusalem to Rome. It underscores, therefore, the apostolic ministry of Peter and Paul.

### III. EVALUATION OF THE BIBLICAL TEACHING

**1) Definition:** The word *apostolos* in the classic Greek era, was originally a term used in maritime navigation to refer to the commission of a ship. The idea is that of dispatching a ship with its cargo to a specific port where it will unload the cargo.

The essential significance of the word in the New Testament is: someone sent, messenger, emissary or ambassador. It involve two basic ideas: a) an express commission, and b) a specified destination. The emphasis of the word is on the authority communicated by the sending agency to the one who is sent. That is to say, its use denotes the authorization of the one sent to fulfill a particular function or a task that is generally clearly defined. The messenger exercises the "power of attorney" of the one who commissioned him.

The word is used in the NT in two different ways:

(a) in the general sense of messenger, and

(b) in particular reference to the designation of a specific office: that of Christian apostleship.

(Note: This information has been summarized from the article on "APOSTLE" in DICTIONARY OF NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY, Vol. 1, pags. 126–136, Colin Brown, Editor, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Mich.)

**2) Classification:** In an article published in the magazine *RESTORATION* (Nov./Dic., 1981), Arthur Wallis mentions three kinds of apostles in the New Testament, as follows:

- Jesus Christ, the "*apostle and high priest whom we confess*" (Heb 3:1, NIV) He came to earth commissioned by the Father to fulfill the great mission of our redemption. He laid the foundation for the church that can never be changed. He formed and commissioned other apostles to provide orientation to his people and to extend his kingdom everywhere.

- The Twelve (including Matthias in place of Judas Iscariot). These are unique and irreplaceable. Historically, they laid the foundation of the church. As the "twelve apostles of the Lamb", they constitute the twelve foundations of the new society (Rev 21:14). Their principal characteristic were that they had been with Christ "*the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us*" during his earthly ministry (Acts 1:21). This fact gave them authority as "first-hand witnesses", a function of great importance at the

outset, when the New Testament had not yet been formed.

- The third kind of apostles is mentioned in Ephesians 4:11, together with prophets, evangelists and pastors/teachers, which are gifts that Christ gave to the church following his resurrection and ascension, and *"until we become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ"* (Eph 4:13, NIV). This group includes all those who, throughout the life of the church in all ages and places, receive the grace and the charismatic commission of the risen Christ to guide his people with apostolic ministry.

**3) Principal aspects:** Summarizing, we can mention as principal aspects of apostolic ministry the following elements:

- They are involved specifically with the edification of the church, and principally with its foundation (see Eph 2:20; 1 Cor 3:9–13, Eph 4:11–16). They are capable builders of the spiritual building of the church, understanding the various details involved in the overall picture; trained to supervise the edification and to evaluate the work done by all to that end. They have received a heavenly commission, a stewardship, to watch over the Lord's interests, to the end that all things be done as he desires.
- They are responsible to establish elders and recognize other ministries that emerge in the bosom of the church (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6; Acts 16:1–3). In this task the elders of the specific locality (the presbytery) are involved.
- They seek to assure that the communities under their responsibility remain healthy and stay on the right path (Rom 1:11; 2 Cor 10:14; 11:1–5; etc.). At times, they intervene in a case of discipline in the church for unacceptable conduct (1 Cor 5; 2 Cor 2).
- They determine the doctrinal content of the teaching in the churches (Acts 2:42; 2 Tim 2:2; Titus 1:9; Acts 20:26–32). In this sense, there were "pioneer" apostles who established the doctrinal content for the church for all times. Later apostolic ministry concerns itself with the *"faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints"* (Judas 3; 2 Pet 1:12–15; 3:1–2).
- They open new frontiers for the preaching of the gospel and the extension of God's kingdom (Rom 15:17–20; 2 Cor 10:14–16; Acts 13–14; etc.). In this work they generally get the church involved (Rom 15:24; Acts 14:26–28; 16:1–3).
- They form teams of men with varied ministries so as to more effectively carry out their apostolic ministry (Acts 16:1–3; 20:4; Titus 1:5). This tends to bring about the formation of new apostles and other ministries.
- They provide a sense of relationship and unity between all the churches, through their many contacts and their work of coordination (Acts 15; 1 Cor 16:1–12; 2 Cor. 9:1–3).
- The relationship between the apostles of mutual submission and consensus is of great importance, to the end that the work be accomplished in unity (see Gal 2:1–10; Acts 15).
- To be an apostle to some did not necessarily mean that their apostolic ministry covered others (1 Cor 4:15; Gal 2:7–8; 2 Cor. 10:14–16). Apostolic ministry is a function relative to specific communities. Thus the relationships varied in the different cases. It is conceivable that one might have a valid apostleship in some places, but in other communities he be recognized simply as a teacher or prophet, etc. Outside the area of his specific responsibility he cannot impose apostolic authority.

#### **IV. THE CHURCH'S PRESENT NEED**

One of the difficulties that arises when we consider the biblical framework of apostolic ministry in relation to our current context is the disparity that exists between our context and that of the first Christian century. Our continent is characterized by pseudo-Christian

societies in general terms, not completely pagan as in those times. In reality, we live in a religious syncretism with markedly Christian shades, but with a content that is largely materialistic and pagan.

In the midst of this social framework, there are Christian churches and congregations — evangelical and Catholic— which in their majority, represent a type of social islands, where the language and ideology are in marked contrast with the society that surrounds them and upon which they make little impact. Notwithstanding, practically all Latin Americans consider themselves already Christian, either because they were baptized in the church as children or because they frequent the mass or other Christian service from time to time.

In this sense, our society is different from the majority of societies of the first Christian century. At that time, very different social situations abounded. For example:

- slavery characterized the life style of a great percentage of human beings;
- pagan temples with degrading and immoral practices were frequented by many people;
- entire nations lived under the dominion of other empires, to which they paid tribute;
- the only religion based on a divine revelation —that of the Jews— was largely neutralized and limited to that race;
- few persons were able to read and write;
- there were no grand and noble ideas or philosophies that inspired the masses of people;
- the social classes were relatively fixed with very little mobility between the classes; etc.

Obviously, apostolic ministry, in a context with these characteristics, moved in a way that is different from that which would be characteristic of our current context. If the principal purpose of apostolic ministry is to establish the church in the social context, penetrate that society with Christ's message, present to men a viable alternative for living in a community that practices the teachings of Christ, then it is vital to interpret the focus of such ministry in terms that are practical and understandable to those who live in that social reality. It is impossible to isolate the apostolic task from the world context.

I think that part of the problem of evangelistic methods that are unfruitful and unadapted to our context is the lack of an integral apostolic vision. The evangelistic task must be incorporated and integrated with the apostolic vision. Biblically, the first function — both in priority and in chronological order— is the apostolic function. Christ, as apostle, evangelized, healed, taught and made disciples. From these disciples he chose some to shape as his apostles. And they, as apostles, introduced the word of Christ and the kingdom of God in their context —first among the Jews and then among the Gentiles— and then taught the disciples and formed the Christian communities.

The work was accomplished with grace and anointing. With liberty and authority they laid the foundation for the church, determined the general and doctrinal guidelines of the communities and faced the various situations that arose. It was a huge task. Without its realization, the communities of Christian disciples could hardly have faced their society with courage and maintained coherence within their ranks.

On the other hand, today in our society we face a Christian context in decadence. There are profound differences and divisions among Christians, both in form and in substance. Many seriously question the action and participation of different ministries. This is a generalization, although, fortunately, there are noteworthy exceptions. But they are exceptions, precisely because they are few and far between.

In this situation, the prophetic ministry becomes quite relevant, since its emphasis is the call to return to divine principles. They lay the plumb line to the current situation and reveal its true state as compared to God's revelation. Pronouncement is made against useless

human substitutes. They awaken concern. They bring together action groups in favor of renewal. They clarify the vision; they clarify the spiritual horizon; they focus with clarity on the divine objective.

But without an apostolic ministry that translates this into reality, that corrects the errors, that lays the foundation and forms communities, no significant penetration is achieved in the social context. After awakening, we have to put hands to the task. After the vision is clarified, we must proceed to its realization. Once the people are gathered, they must be formed into coherent communities, attractive and with impetus. And all this has to be done with a singular purpose, with clarity and with effective methodology.

Another element of enormous importance, that springs out of apostolic ministry, is the unity and universality of the vision. It is this vision that unifies the work and unites the Christian communities. Together the apostles do the same work, although their activities at different times or in different places may vary considerably. Without an apostolic vision, the churches tend to become distant from each other and dedicate themselves to diverse emphases, according to the particular emphasis of their pastors and other ministers in the community. The broad and singular vision of the apostle assures that the different congregations maintain a close brotherly relationship and they help them to perceive their particular activities as complementary rather than give place to competitive attitudes toward each other.

As we focus now on our own situation, we can say that for several years we have experienced a spiritual awakening that obviously has been the product of a prophetic vision and ministry that has acquired great relevance among us. This has given us greater spiritual discernment and sharpened our vision and our appreciation of God's eternal purpose in the formation of a people for his glory here in the earth. Our understanding today, as regards the divine objective, is much clearer than before. We have received light from heaven and we can better see where we are going.

But we need to have the awareness that vision alone is not sufficient. If we remain thus, we could frustrate God's purpose among us. An apostolic ministry is needed to carry the vision forward, to coordinate the activities and the relationships among the churches, to give the people of God a coherent expression, to discover—and in some place, lay—the true foundation and do all of this within the context in which we live.

In synthesis, the burden we desire to communicate to our brothers and colleagues in the ministry is, in the first place, the need of a clear awareness with regards to the absolute necessity of the apostolic ministry among us today and, in the second place, the exhortation that we pray together to the Lord of the church that he might raise up among us this vital ministry. We feel that this is one of the greatest needs of the church in this hour.

## **V. PROJECTION TOWARD THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WORK WITH A RECOGNIZED APOSTOLIC MINISTRY**

With experience that is as partial and as limited as our own, every projection of the work under apostolic orientation must necessarily be tentative. Yet, since work is always initiated with ideas, in the fear of God we dare to throw out some ideas for our colleagues to consider. We are not intimidated by the awareness that as we move forward we will need to make adjustments and corrections in the projections.

We will keep in mind, for our projections, two channels that will determine where we should advance, even though we do so with some apprehension. In the first place, we will seek to not overstretch ourselves with regard to what is revealed in the Scriptures. In the second place, we will seek valid and practical solutions for the situations presented in the introduction of this study. That is to say, we will seek to avoid getting into theoretical or hypothetical issues. In this way we believe that it will be easier to discover our errors and

make corrections as we move ahead.

We believe that a practical way of focusing on this subject is through a series of questions, such as the following:

- What would be the characteristics of apostolic ministry in the current situation and in our context?
- What is the proper framework, scope or perimeter for the action of such a ministry? How far should it reach? What are its limits?
- What are its credentials?
- What is its relationship with other apostolic ministries? What is its relationship with the pastors of the churches?
- What about apostolic teams?
- What responsibility do we have to encourage or give orientation to those whom we see emerging with a budding apostolic profile?

### **1) Characteristics of an apostolic ministry**

Our frame of reference here is what we have presented above under section III, paragraph 3). On that basis we can emphasize certain aspects that are especially "current" in our situation.

We are in need of some "expert builders of the spiritual structure of the church": men that understand how the final structure should look; men gifted by Christ to supervise the building from the foundation to the conclusion; able men experienced in the forming of lives, of families and of workers, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; men that maintain a close relationship with the Lord and who therefore have discernment and spiritual sensitivity.

These servants of God will then be able to help other colleagues find their place in the service and building, so that all the work is oriented toward the goal that pleases the Lord. They will understand when it is convenient to dedicate more time and ministry to certain persons or to specific situations. They will be able to counsel pastors and other ministers with respect to the difficulties they face, while keeping in mind the greater scope of the work.

They will be concerned for the ministry of teaching, that it might be consequential, practical and sufficiently broad for the formation of Christian disciples and communities. They will work toward the growth, health and holiness of these communities.

They will give orientation to the evangelistic work for those who are under their responsibility, so that they understand the goals, content and consequence that are expected. The work of extension and evangelistic testimony will be much more efficient if it is framed in an integral scheme of the church.

This ministry transcends locality, but it is not in constant movement. It is not a question of simply visiting or giving conferences. It moves forward with specific goals and acts with faith and executes the work until it is accomplished. It is dedicated especially to the formation and orientation of the local leaders. Its purpose is not to stay permanently in the place where the ministry is realized; once the work is done, its vision is raised to other sites.

The final goal is to establish the church in its social context in such a way that it penetrates as salt, light and leaven. Its vision is not sectarian, but broad and integral. It works ardently to accomplish and keep the unity of the church. It seeks to work in harmony with pastors and other ministers.

### **2) The framework and vision of apostolic ministry**

The scope of apostolic ministry is determined by a variety of factors. One is the grace

received from God that determines the vision. Some men are continually looking beyond where they stand, projecting themselves in their vision to greater objectives and conquests. They can never settle comfortably into a situation that is static. Another determining factor is the experience and the formation of the man that fulfills this function. A lengthy experience that is broad and varied will obviously have a broader scope.

Another element that fills out the picture of its scope is the level of growth and perception of the church in the context where the apostolic ministry develops. Evidently, the scope and function of apostolic ministry in a Christian framework where the church has grown over considerable time and reached a greater level of extension, will be different from the situation in a newer, pagan area or one with very little social penetration.

Yet, in general terms, we can point out some aspects of its scope. Although all apostolic ministry moves toward the formation of the Christian community in practical terms, it cannot limit itself to the formation or the success of a single congregation. Necessarily, its vocation is to form first one, then another, and then more, and continue in this manner. At the same time, it will be forming local leaders within each community, over whom it will exercise a certain spiritual ascendancy. Apostolic ministry can never settle for establishing a limited government. Above all, the apostle is a productive person: he is always reproducing himself. It is one of the reasons for which his ministry is so vital to the church in general.

His passion for the extension of God's kingdom is his food, it is the air he breathes, it is the goal of his prayers. Upon reaching his first goal, he moves on to the next. He is always looking beyond the current frontiers. He wants to see Christ's kingdom established in all the earth and in the hearts of all men.

However, no matter how far out he reaches, he never terminates his relationships with the churches from which he proceeds, nor with the ones he has established. He understands the vital need for this relationship. It is what provides support for his ministry. He is a man under authority. Independence is anathema to him. He is an arm of the body; without the body he cannot properly function.

He is a man of heavenly vision, a man with clear and firm relations. Moreover, he is a man of breadth and respectful of his colleagues and of other apostolic ministries. He cannot reduce the church to an extension of his personality or to a sect. He will perceive the different ministries as complementary, not competitive. He will seek to broaden the vision of all Christians, even when he must combat an element that works against the nature of the church.

He is not interested in getting involved in the work of another where the foundation has already been laid. He will seek to lay it in new places or dedicate his energies to restore it where it has been destroyed.

He will challenge and help the churches to extend their vision to new frontiers. He will move them to prayer, action and sacrifice. He will help them determine priorities related to God's eternal purpose, to leave aside pettiness in order to occupy himself with the greater interests of the Lord.

### **3) The credentials of apostolic ministry**

The credentials or endorsements of this ministry are the values and the backing that necessarily must always be considered together. They are a combination of factors that provide credibility to the ministry. We can mention some.

Above all, the ministry is backed by its own awareness of a divine vocation: a call and an anointing and grace to carry this burden. Paul demonstrates this clear awareness in several of his epistles: "Paul, servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart ..." (Rom 1:1); "called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God" (1 Cor 1:1); "Paul, apostle (not of men nor by men, but by Jesus Christ and by God the Father)..." (Gal 1:1);

etc. From that is derived the idea of power of attorney, as we mentioned before.

But Paul is not simply a man with a vertical orientation. He proceeds from a community; he is sent and supported by those who have been receptors and the fruit of his ministry (see Acts 13:1-3; 8:14). Perhaps this, more than anything else, explains why he returns, now and again, to his point of departure to tell of his activities and the results of his apostolic ministry (Acts 14:26-28; 18:22-23; 8:25; 11:1-14). It is his way of giving account of his ministry.

Paul shows that another endorsement that authorizes him to provide orientation and correction to a Christian community is the awareness of having brought it to birth in a spiritual sense (1 Cor 4:15-16; 2 Cor 3:1-3; 10:13-16; 12:11-12; Rom 15:17-21; Phil 1:3-8; 1 Thes chap. 2). This gives to the apostle a certain ascendancy or spiritual paternity that he uses to edify the church and form leaders. It also gives him ground to exhort or to call the attention of the brethren.

Another important factor is the plurality of the apostles. Christ did not ordain only one, but twelve at the same time. The apostles may have different areas of particular influence, where they exercise their ministry, but they are related among themselves. Thus, Paul was recognized and given support by Peter and other apostles in Jerusalem (Gal 2:1-10); Paul corrected Peter in Antioch for his improper conduct (Gal 2:11-14); the apostles met with the elders in Jerusalem to consider a question that affected the life of the church everywhere (Acts chap. 15). Their conviction regarding the unity of the church, together with their vocation as "expert builders" of the church, moves them to maintain an acute sense of teamwork, even when there is absent a detailed coordination among them.

#### **4) Their relationship with other ministries, and especially with other apostolic ministries**

It is to be expected, by the very nature of the ministry, that an apostle will exercise considerable personal initiative and self control. His acute sense of vocation means that he generates vision, energy and inspiration that involves and motivates others. However, so as not to "run in vain" and to avoid becoming sectarian, he finds it necessary to relate his ministry and his vision to others who have the same vocation. Obviously, the apostles are not going to superimpose themselves, but they have a need for each other in order to maintain an integral vision of the church. Each one has his particular emphasis and strong points; in the same way, they need to be balanced by the focus and action of the rest. They need, then, a kind of apostolic "forum", an occasional encounter and/or a stable permanent relationship, so as to assure a certain level of coordination in their respective activities.

Just as with every Christian disciple, every apostle should live under authority and under the "pastoral" counsel of a mature brother, worthy of his confidence and of firm character. No servant of God should develop a ministry by himself. That would only increase his temptations, make him more vulnerable to his weaknesses, debilitate his area of influence and increase the dangers of a moral or spiritual detour. Probably, he will find this kind of counsel and personal orientation in his own "spiritual father", in another apostle or in the pastor under whom his ministry developed. But it should be a defined and declared relationship that is stable, honest, close and functional.

#### **With the pastors of the churches**

In a strictly biblical sense, the pastors (or elders) of the local congregations function under apostolic authority. As we have seen in the Bible study at the beginning of this presentation, the apostles established churches, placed elders over them, indoctrinated them, corrected their errors, exhorted them, intervened when there were problems, etc. In fact, it would be impossible to imagine the development of the life of the churches,

according to the biblical image, without a clear apostolic supervision.

But in the current situation that prevails in the congregations, the majority of the pastors are not accustomed to such supervision. To many it would seem to be a strange and undesirable idea. In such cases, we have no interest in imposing a conflicting or polemic element, although it is our intention to call them to reflection and consideration of that which is presented here.

We recognize that the behavior of an apostolic ministry will depend on the level of his relationship with the pastors. Apostolic authority is acquired and not imposed. In the measure that it is recognized as such, it seems obvious that his participation in a community will be accentuated. His grace will be manifested in his ability to find his proper place in each situation. In any case, the results of his ministry will give him credibility.

When there is a relationship of confidence —or because the congregation itself was initiated under an apostolic ministry, or due to a later recognition— obviously, the pastors in such cases will accept the breadth of his vision, his ability in the formation of new leaders, his skill in discerning strange or tendentious elements leading to a detour in the development of the work and his instinct for coordinating and consolidating the different scopes and larger guidelines of the work. It would be proper then to manifest their support for apostolic ministry in other places. On the other hand, there would be no need to involve apostolic ministry in the minor details of the daily activities of the communities. At the local level, the pastors have full authority to govern, teach and edify the church, under the orientation, principles and doctrine provided by the apostles.

It is convenient to keep in mind that all the Christian communities conjointly make up the church. Therefore, it would not be proper that one community consider it useless to have a fluid and dynamic relationship with other communities. Precisely, at this level we perceive the value of recognized apostolic ministries to facilitate and promote this kind of fraternal contact and understanding.

Our current situation does not allow us to be more precise on this point. Therefore, we have limited ourselves to present the considerations and principles that we believe are worthwhile.

## **5) Apostolic teams**

We have already observed that no apostle is an independent authority. All are under the authority of Christ and related and coordinated among themselves. At least this is the picture we find in Holy Scripture.

But we not only see here the relationship between apostles. These builders of God's building also find themselves accompanied by other colleagues with varied ministries. In 1 Cor 12:28, Paul points out three basic ministries in the church: "*in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers*" It would seem evident that the prophetic and didactic ministries have a close relationship with the development of apostolic ministry.

The experience of the primitive church in the extension of God's kingdom reveals that apostles were always accompanied by other men that made possible a more extensive and varied ministry (see Acts 15:36-41; 16:1-3; 20:4-6; Eph 6:21-22; Phil 2:19; 2 Tim 4:21; Titus 1:5; etc.). In any case, it seems obvious that God joined these men to the apostle to fulfill a specific mission, and the apostle exercised over them a broad authority to coordinate their activities until the mission was completed. Some of them seem to have maintained a stable relationship with the apostle over a long period of time; the participation of others was more brief.

Biblically, it is possible to distinguish two different kinds of teams:

a) a team of two apostles (Peter and John, Paul and Barnabas). Probably, this style

harks back to the first instructions that Christ gave his disciples when they were sent out by twos to the neighboring towns. The basic reason would be to complement each other in the ministry.

b) a team of an apostle with several co-workers. This relationship is seen especially in the ministry of Paul, and his larger purpose would be to enlarge his scope to a broader area or to intensify the ministry in a varied way in a certain area. Possibly, in an early stage of development of the work, the first kind mentioned would be more likely. With the growth of the work and with more experience in apostolic ministry, the second kind might be seen more.

The apostle, with his vision and maturity, with his sense of vocation and wisdom, gives projection, orientation and stability to the entire team. The group enjoys many advantages of plurality and mutuality within a structure where the apostolic authority is clearly defined.

The effect of these apostolic teams in the areas where they function will be that of significant advance of God's kingdom. Many people will respond to the gospel of the kingdom; new ministries and leaders will emerge; elders will be recognized and the communities will be multiplied. There will be an effective penetration in the society because of the apostolic testimony.

## **6) Emergence of apostolic ministries**

With an apostolic ministry that is recognized and functioning over an extensive area, it would be natural to expect that other men with a budding apostolic profile begin to appear within the communities. Probably, they would be recognized by the fruit of their ministry in the formation of new communities or by their ability to form new leaders. They could be pastors whose vision and vocation lead them to dedicate a good part of their energies in areas beyond the perimeter of their local work, where they see encouraging fruit. They could be evangelists that do not stop with simply preaching the gospel, but seek to perfect and form new disciples in coherent groups with their own leaders. Or they could be prophets or teachers that work within an apostolic team where their ministry is developing more fully and they begin to give evidence of a profile with characteristics of apostolic ministry.

In any case, those that exercise a recognized apostolic ministry will be attentive to every evidence of another apostolic ministry in formation. They will seek to encourage them and provide orientation, conscious that they are witnessing an operation of the grace of the risen Christ, who is thus assuring the extension of his kingdom in the earth. They will recognize their responsibility toward those men and seek the best way to facilitate their development without pushing them too fast. If they observe errors or weaknesses that diminish their effectiveness, they will try to warn them.

The congregations that validate this kind of ministry will also observe the promising development of brothers or leaders that begin to give evidence of this vocation. They will afford them opportunities to bear greater responsibilities, according to their ability, gifts and maturity. They will seek to afford them a variety of experiences within the normal activity of the church, so that they might develop skills in the formation of disciples; they might learn to exercise their faith; they might increase their capacity to bear burdens, promote their life of prayer and, eventually, participate in the community's government. They will not rush them with promotions, that could spoil or pervert them, but neither will they seek to delay normal growth. Everyone needs "space" to grow, and they also need guidelines that point out the norms and principles for development.

Perhaps it is worthwhile to add this note of clarification. It would be wrong to think that a large percentage of pastors will become apostles. Apostolic ministry, evidently, is not a "superior level of pastor". The essential ministry for the church's edification is pastoral ministry. Better to be a good pastor than a poor apostle!

## **VI. SOME CONSIDERATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

Before suggesting some steps that we could take, I believe it is worthwhile to do a brief review of our experiences to this point. In the past fifteen or twenty years we have seen a wonderful work of the Holy Spirit leading many congregations in the country into spiritual awakening and renewal. We have also had many opportunities to give testimony of our experiences in other countries on our border and in Latin America in general. Much of this ministry has been characterized by its prophetic and didactic focus.

The new or renewed communities that have emerged have been oriented toward evangelistic ministry. This has developed basically through a mobilization of the renewed believers that proclaim the gospel of God's kingdom and are dedicated to make disciples of those who respond. Many families in this way have found Christ and been transformed at the same time into light and salt among their friends, relatives, neighbors, colleagues, etc.

Gradually, Christian communities have emerged with a functional structure that is different from what we have known in the past (as Evangelicals or Catholics). In these most of the pastoral and teaching ministry is done through a network of home groups, each with its own leader(s). These leaders do their work under the leadership and responsibility of a group of pastors (presbytery), functioning together before the community. In addition, new pastors have emerged from among these home group leaders.

With the passing of time, some ministries with translocal characteristics have emerged among the pastors, which have enjoyed a certain relevance and weight among these communities. These have functioned as an itinerant ministry in many parts of the country, as well as beyond our borders. In certain instances, other congregations and other pastors have requested of them the participation or some intervention in their local communities which goes beyond simple teaching or inspirational ministry.

These translocal ministries are appearing in different parts of the country (and beyond us, of course). In some cases, their profile has a distinctly prophetic accent; in others, a noteworthy didactic emphasis. There are also some that begin to show evidence of an apostolic ministry, with characteristics that are particular to that function.

We all recognize that the panorama presented in this way is not completely clear and could even be questioned. But we are surely in agreement that we should be attentive to this manifestation of God's grace among us.

Convinced of the biblical validity of this ministry, we should proceed to examine our current situation, in order to consider the steps we should take so as to develop apostolic ministry among us. With that in view, I will suggest some initial steps that we could take.

1) We should not concern ourselves very much at this time over the matter of titles. We are preeminently interested in functionality. Perhaps it is inconvenient to call anyone an apostle yet; it might be more acceptable to use the impersonal term: apostolic ministry. It will take us a while to become accustomed to these terms and to overcome the natural reticence of many (especially among the Evangelicals). However, once the concept is accepted, not much time will pass until the biblical terms can be used freely.

2) Since the subject with which we are dealing represents a rather novel step, let us recognize that a transition period of clarification is inevitable. No doubt we shall have to make adjustments and corrections in some aspects of our appreciation of this reality. Let us not fear to advance, nor should we vacillate in making the necessary adjustments.

3) We should encourage dialog between the brothers that are functioning in this translocal ministry, especially among those that are providing supervision or orientation to various communities and under whose ministry new leaders have been formed. In order to promote this kind of encounter, for the purpose of conversing, praying, studying and

clarifying these ministries, there will need to be some minimal norms to determine the participation, but it is worthwhile to have a broad criteria at the outset.

4) These men should have a a ready and humble disposition for an eventual clarification regarding the different kinds of ministry, their mutual relationship and their functionality. They should be honest and sincere in seeking the proper place of each one, and should be patient until there is clarity and consensus.

5) We believe that eventually the formation of a variety of apostolic teams is a probable outcome. It would now be premature to try to select those teams, because we are yet in the beginning, seeking to gain some initial valuable experience. But if we maintain the necessary breadth and patience, there could be a gradual definition among us of some teams with a variety of ministries.

6) These ministries should move with humility and without pretension, progressing according to the development of a generalized awareness among the pastors and Christian communities concerning the particular need of different areas and the spontaneous recognition accorded to apostolic ministries.

7) We suggest the opening of a sincere dialog and study in depth among all the pastors on this subject. What we have presented in this study may serve as a starting point, but in no way is it exhaustive.

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