

Kingdom, church and society

Three styles: What is the difference?

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I am pastor of a church situated in the center of the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina. Thus, what follows is a southern occidental reading of our reality. Obviously, from other viewpoints the focus could be different. However, since we live in a world that is becoming ever more globalized, we will certainly find common points of interest.

I am using the word style because that is what best represents our post-modern times. In reality, post-modernism is a cultural style that responds to socio-cultural conditions. If it is true that in traditional society a person's position was determined by his role, and in modern societies his position was determined by his accomplishments, in post-modern times a person's position is determined by his style. In the measure in which style changes, we should change with it, for otherwise our identity would remain in doubt¹. Vicente Verdu, one of the most perceptive researchers of contemporary phenomena, wrote a book called "El estilo del mundo" [The style of the world], that contains one of the clearest analyses concerning our times. And he justifies the use of the word style rather than spirit since style "better evokes the evasive appearance" of our society today². I would like to refer to some of the tendencies that this Spanish sociologist points out in order to situate us within the reality of our present society.

The style of this world

¹ Gene Edward Veith, *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1994), 85.

² Vicente Verdu, *El estilo del mundo: la vida en el capitalismo de ficción* [The style of the world: life in fictitious capitalism] (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2003), 9.

1. The style of this world is that of feeble thought

Gianni Vattimo defines post-modernism as a kind of information Babel, in which communication and the media acquire a central character. Post-modernism marks the overcoming of modernism with its closed models of the great truths, of consistent foundations. Post-modernism opens the way, according to Vattimo, to tolerance and diversity. It underscores the departure from strong or metaphysical thought, of well-defined philosophical world views, of valid convictions, in a move toward feeble thought.³ Post-modernism is a style of thinking that distrusts classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity, or the idea of universal progress. Against these "enlightenment" norms, it considers the world as contingent, unexplained, diverse, unstable, undetermined, a conglomeration of diverse cultures or interpretations. This focus tends to produce a grade of scepticism concerning the objectivity of truth, history, norms, and the coherence of identities.

2. The style of this world is that of globalization

The globalized world has installed the tendency of our world toward homologation, in spite of movements that are nationalistic, tribal and based on folklore. By some it is called the McWorld⁴. We live in a world of franchises, with a marked intention that we all eat the same food⁵, that we dress the same⁶, that we play in the same way⁷, that we live in generic cities⁸, that we have similar political and financial systems, under the same cultural component: Western, and especially, North American. That which is individual and diverse tends to simply "add" to the cultural homogenous package, for the purpose of introducing it more effectively.

The resurgence of Islam has given the impression that the world was repressing the tendency to become "Westernized" but nothing has changed in depth⁹. Pierre Bourdieu said that globalization is not a mechanical effect of the laws of technique or economy, but rather a political creation: a progressive creation of capitalism for the purpose of establishing the best conditions for its function and domination. A bland and captivating domination offering the same culture tends toward the development of business. Globalization has a North American color. The North American dominance began with fascination for its industries. Together with that came social and moral influence: divorce, fierce competition, civil rights, feminism, super individualism, stress, ecologism,

³ Gianni Vattimo, *El pensamiento débil* [Feeble thought], Ediciones Cátedra, 1995. Other titles by the same author are: *Más allá de la interpretación* [Beyond interpretation], Paidós, 1995; *Creer que se cree* [To believe that you believe], Paidós, 1996; *Después de la cristiandad* [After Christianity], Paidós, 2003; *Nihilismo y emancipación* [Nihilism and emancipation], Paidós, 2004; *La sociedad transparente* [Transparent society], Paidós Ibérica, 1998.

⁴ With the fall of the Berlin wall and the triumph of capitalism at the universal level, the expression McWorld was popularized to characterize the process of globalization with its correspondent cultural colonization.

⁵ McDonald's has 30,000 establishments in 120 countries with a daily clientele of 45 million persons. The firm refers to the world as "McWorld". Their penetration is so vast that, for example, the vast majority of Japanese children believe that Big Mac is a Japanese invention. The magazine *The Economist*, uses the McDonald's index to determine whether the exchange rate of different currencies is appropriately established.

⁶ Tom Ford, creative manager of Gucci, declared: "I do not say whether I like or dislike globalization, but I believe that the generation that follows mine will know nothing else. They are exposed to the same things at the same time and this creates a culture in which, throughout the world, people desire the same things and live in the same period" (*The New York Times Magazine*, 2-12-2001).

⁷ Every year Mattel manufactures 150 different models of their Barbie doll to provide for their customers throughout the planet, adopting Latin, African, Asian characteristics, while "her soul" continues to be white, blonde with blue eyes, because the purchasing countries themselves have demanded that the product be authentically American, that of the young lady from the West who "provokes new feminine illusions".

⁸ The cities are the same in their airports, their commercial centers, their offices, their hospitals. Pudong, a district of Shanghai, with buildings copied from the USA, according to the prime minister Zhu Rongji, is focused on becoming an oriental Manhattan". The demolition of older districts in the different cities of the world, to make room for skyscrapers and expressways, is a mnemonic technique of "emptying", whose purpose is to assure that all of us live in a "common place", places that are unreal, and yet everywhere.

⁹ Half of the adolescents in Arab countries declare their desire to emigrate to the West. Today there are more than a billion human beings enrolled to learn English, while *The Economist* reveals that in the USA only nine university students graduated in Arabic. Some 5000 Saudi princes have invested 600,000 million dollars in the USA. The *Al Yazira* chain recognizes "a certain Western mentality as the basis of our editorial policy".

neoliberalism, voluntarism, "gay", shopping plazas. It achieved the status of the primary economic power in the 1920s, achieved human glamour in the 1930s, reached its height of glory in the 1950s, swept away the financial world in the 1980s and became a world empire after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. Never before in human history has a single country amassed such power.¹⁰ North American supremacy following the fall of the Berlin wall is indisputable.¹¹ Military and financial arrogance has provoked a significant deterioration of the superpower's image. This means that globalized capitalism uses a new strategy. It does not work to impose its will, but to make friends. It does not seek to be feared, but to obtain the best results by being "enchanted". A presence that is subtle, bland¹².

3. The style of this world is that of the new capitalism

Capitalism has gone through three phases. The first was capitalism of production, occurring from the end of the 18th century until the Second World War. In this stage the important element was merchandise. The second was consumer capitalism, from the Second World War until the fall of the Berlin wall. Here the emphasis was on merchandise wrapped in the speech of publicity. And the third stage, the current one, which Verdu calls fictitious capitalism, emerged in the early 1990s. In this case, the emphasis is on the theatrical importance of persons. The first two kinds of capitalism had to do mainly with consumer goods, material well-being, but the current fictitious capitalism is about the senses, about emotional well-being. The first two supplied the reality of articles and services, while the current capitalism seeks to produce a new reality. That is to say, a second reality or fictitious reality, with the appearance of an improved reality. In this way capitalism ceases to be merely an economic and social organization, and becomes a civilization.

4. The style of this world is that of the show

The holy war, the moral responsibility of businesses, fair commerce, marketing with a cause, "transparency" in politics, the aesthetics of hybrids, football orgy, reality shows, universal video surveillance, the shopping culture, cities as theme parks, democratization, cloning, are all phenomena of fictitious capitalism, where reality is presented through the reality of the spectacle. According to Baudrillard, the contemporary world is characterized by a process of dematerialization of reality: a person's focus is no longer directed toward nature, but rather toward the TV screen; communication has become an end in itself and an absolute value. Everything is a spectacle, and for that reason it is necessary to convert the citizen into a spectator, and sell tickets to a homogenized planet. "The spaces where we buy, where we travel and where we live are being converted into a theater where we are actors and spectators, customers and artists".¹³ Or as the famous international consultant Tom Peters said: "The whole world is already in the business of the spectacle".¹⁴ The techniques of the spectacle are incorporated in religion, education or war, and no activity remains outside the scope of show business, for the citizens never

¹⁰ In the 16th century, imperial power was in the hands of Spain and Portugal; in the 17th and 18th centuries it was in the hands of France and England; in the 19th century it was the English and German navies; following the Second World War, the bipolarity was between the United States and the Soviet Union. Following the fall of the Berlin wall, one government alone decides the fate of the world.

¹¹ The US dollar is used in 83 % of worldwide transactions, and North American companies control more than half the riches of the planet. At the military level, the 2004 budget indicated that the USA spent on defense as much as the sum of the rest of the 191 countries on the globe. But its great potential is not found in its arms, but rather in sales. With 5% of the world's population, its production is equivalent to 43 % of the world's economy.

¹² The growth of Starbucks, the most dynamic company in the USA in the last ten years, having the greatest growth on the stock market, with 6000 businesses in 40 countries (among them Lebanon, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia) is typical of the new subtle penetration. While McDonald's offered an experience in food, Starbucks offers a chic experience, which penetrates through its international, intellectual appearance, with a bland and European style, friendly and artistic. Their coffee is comparatively expensive, because it is more than a product, it is a way of life.

¹³ Jeremy Rifkin, *La era del acceso* [The era of Access], (Barcelona, Paidós, 2000).

¹⁴ Tom Peters, *Liberation Management*, (New York, Knopf, 1992).

want to feel bored, so as to escape from the weight and gravity of reality. Erich Fromm sustained a half century ago that the state was interested in creating depressed individuals because it was easier to govern depressed citizens in order to manipulate them, and because the individual in such a state does not have the strength to protest or rebel.

But today the strategy is different. The present style of the world has shown that the individual who is entertained is the one who protests less and does not rebel. The title of Neil Postman's book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, reveals the objective at the present time¹⁵. In the midst of the 20th century the defense industry was a key to North American development. But today the first place belongs with great advantage to the entertainment sector¹⁶. In Spain in recent years, more than sixty entertainment parks have been built. Countries in crisis like Argentina in 2002, in spite of adversity, faces a growing demand for entertainment¹⁷. Everything must be entertaining. The struggle of the poor is no longer carried out through revolutionary acts nor with mass protests, but rather with rock music recitals. The only thing that is relevant is that it must be entertaining. In Great Britain the money spent in pastimes and entertainment has exceeded that of food and beverage. "We sell happiness", is the slogan of Disney, "for happiness is the best product in the world". Charles Baudelaire called art "the Sundays of life", the intervals in which aesthetic experience converts common times into festivals. But today, in the society based on spectacle, all the days of the week seek to entertain us to death; they can always be Sundays.

5. The style of this world is infantile

One of the largest publicity agencies in the world¹⁸, has coined a new term: AABKA, with reference to the new adults who are progressively turning into children: "Adults Are Becoming Kids Again". Some speak of this tendency with the phrase *Vice is Nice*, with reference to the infantile inclination to seek instant and constant satisfaction. Adults are playing more and more, not only in sports, but in games. Video games, contrary to common belief, is not a pastime exclusively for children and adolescents, but especially for adults.¹⁹ The Play Station is considered by Sony as a way of life for adolescents and young adults. We should not underestimate this infantilization. Our globalized culture is advancing toward an extraordinary child-like complacency or worship with the mentality of a child. More than ever in recent years large number of books have been written on the return to infancy. Young people resist becoming adults. The lack of political commitment, the substitution of social criticism for a passive maintenance of the status quo, the serious difficulties to assume responsibility, the abandon and negligence in the education of children, the most popular TV programs with a level lower than that of a high school adolescent, the return of heroes to the comic books, adult dress with bill caps, back packs, embossed polo shirts are all rapidly increasing. Not only is it an effort to erase the passing of the years in the physical appearance, but also in the conscience. A double life, in which adults seek to disguise themselves as different personalities, just as children do. Perhaps the peak of this expression, as a sign of the infantile behavior is the "larger than life" place given to sports as entertainment. Cities are seldom moved by a general labor strike, but rather by a football game. Football (or soccer) enables us to live a kind of infantilized reality, without having to suffer the more difficult elements of life. The feminine version is seen in the talk shows and the reality shows. While the men move

¹⁵ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (New York, Viking Penguin Books, 1986).

¹⁶ Neal Gabler in his book, *Life: The Movie* (New York, Vintage Books, 1998) sustains that the revolution in entertainment represents the most powerful social and economic force of our time.

¹⁷ Already by the end of the last century it was announced that entertainment moved to commercial locations would be the most significant phenomenon of the new century. Today we hear of *entertailing*, a contraction between entertainment and retailing.

¹⁸ Saatchi & Saatchi.

¹⁹ To the point that automobile manufacturers are inspired by morphologies of video games; that is to say, the reality imitates virtuality. Models of Toyota, Suzuki, Chrysler, for example, are copies of morphologies of video games.

toward the para-reality of the game, the women exchange their reality for the reality of the changing fortunes of the television personalities.

6. The style of this world is that of falsification

The concept of truth is in a crisis. In the post-modern model truth has been replaced by that which is probable or likely. This means that we live in a world of copies, of falsification, of double intentions, of recycling, of travestism in sexuality. The body with transplants and plastic surgery, the application of stem cells to avoid bodily defects. Cloning. More than a third of the market of music disks are pirated disks, which are no longer simply pirates since many of these firms belong to the corporate owners of the original brand²⁰. China has not only copied clothing and Western artefacts; they have copied the same capitalist culture. Today around the world even medicine is being copied²¹. In India and in other countries cosmetics are falsified; that is to say, they falsify the appearance of the appearance. Western cosmetics are copied in a cosmetic reproduction of the cosmetics. In Argentina there is a market called "*trucho*" (false), known as "La Salada" [Salad] at which thousands of persons from around the world purchase every week every kind of copied product. This is not a phenomenon exclusive to the developing countries, for the same things occur with the Chinese on Fifth Avenue in New York or at Piccadilly Circus in London. Not only is the merchandise falsified, but also the elements that guarantee its veracity: bar codes, packaging, logos, warranty certificates. With the digital system, in the reproduction of works of art, it is nearly impossible to distinguish the original from the copy.

Along the same line, the furor for that which is "retro" is a form of copying. The *revival* as a copy of the past.²² At the beginning of the 20th century there was an enthusiasm to embrace the future, an optimistic projection of vision, but the beginning of the 21st century has coincided with terror and no one wants to go further; everyone fears the future. It is as if history had bogged down and begun to revive past happenings such as nationalism, racism, ethnic-religious struggles, nuclear threats, Latin American populism, discourse concerning those who disappeared in the post-dictatorial governments, anti-globalization protests with the images of Che Guevara and the music of John Lennon. Much of what we are experiencing tends toward *déjà vu*, a reedition of the past, since there are few hopes of a better horizon. The present is perceived through a copy of the past. Commitment to the present circumstance is so weak that the only anchor it has is the past.²³

7. The style of this world is that of hyper-individualism

Luc Ferry has called our times the epoch of "ultra-individualism". Pascal Bruckner calls it "super-individualism" and North American sociologists, such as Lash, call it "narcissistic". Lipovetsky has qualified this period as that of a "second revolution of individualism", that is, the passing of limited individualism inaugurated in the 18th century to total individualism. At the present time, according to Touraine, we are not seeking to make sense of the world, but rather of "my" life. The system has imposed the model of personalization of merchandise (*custom-made*) so as to neutralize the misfortune suffered by consumers when treated as a serial product, within the rough earlier form of capitalism. Consumer capitalism offered great quantities of objects to increase the

²⁰ The music seal Emi, after fighting for years against the pirated brand Diva, today Marcal Records, decided to become associated with it and introduced in their product catalog of "originals" the products that had been copied.

²¹ Falsified contraceptive pills are used to keep from becoming pregnant.

²² The revival is seen in fashion, in automobiles, in the recycling of buildings, in the increased interest in historical novels, in the taste for the classics, in the volumes of complete works, in the rebirth of traditions and folklore, in the redecoration of hotels of high category to meet the style of the beginning of the 20th century, the proliferation of museums, as well as other evidences.

²³ A certain nostalgia for the past has always existed, but the progressive vision considered history as a creative process and force, whereas today it is the rhetorical remembrance that takes from the past to satisfy the demand of today's customers, but without future projection. History is not used as an instrument of subversion, but rather of preservation. History forms part of the world of the spectacle; it does not seek to awaken, but to be enjoyed. History is purged of tragedy and the future is left without projection.

sensation of well-being, but now, fictitious capitalism seeks to increase the impression of "being someone special". The system is not involved directly in convincing us to spend more, but to help us perceive our own worth.²⁴ The brand is not imposed, but cooperates to make "me"; businesses do not pressure us to spend for their benefit but to persuade us to invest, above all, in ourselves. In politics, it is no longer a question of emblazoning a strong and specific ideology, but in accommodating itself to the desires of the electorate. In the new psychotherapy, highly pragmatic, there is no effort to prescribe a change in the conduct of the patient if such a correction makes him uncomfortable: it is better now to use drugs. Businesses have to spend four or five times as much to capture a new customer as to maintain the one they already had, so that above all, they try not to scare him away. The bombardment of counsel (self-help books, publicity dictates, medical recommendations, media opinions) is interminably designed to make a better me.

Paradoxically to the centrality of the ego, this is accompanied by the lack of a clear identity. Today there is an agglomeration of substitute and contradictory *egos*. In fictitious capitalism, we do not talk of social classes, but only of different kinds of life. Instead of class struggle, there is now the struggle to be myself, and the revolution has been replaced by the commitment to be myself. The writer Walter Truett Anderson mentions four terms that post-modernists use to speak of the ego or of multiple identities. The first is *multifrenia*. This refers to the many different voices in our culture that tell us who and what we are. Post-modernism tells us that there is not an integrated personality, but rather a multiplicity of personalities. In truth, we are unable to know fully who we are. The second term is *protean* (coming from the god Proteus, a marine god known for its ability to metamorphose). The protean ego is able to constantly change in order to adapt to today's circumstances. "It may include changing political opinions and sexual behavior, changing ideas and the way they are expressed, changing the way we organize our own life". In third place, Anderson speaks of the *decentralized ego*, meaning that there is no self. The self is being redefined constantly, and going through changes. The fourth term is *the-self-in-relation*. This means that we live our lives, not as islands in relation to ourselves but in relation to other persons and to certain cultural contexts. To understand ourselves we need to understand the contexts of our lives.

When we join these four terms, we have the image of a person who has no center; he is stretched in many different directions, and is constantly changing and being defined externally by the different relationships that he has with others. In the past it was believed that our goal should be to achieve integrity. Post-modernism says: impossible. The development of psychiatric assistance, the proliferation of anti-depressant drugs, the enormous consumption of tranquilizers and happiness pills corresponds to this pathology that hyper-individualism has spread through our society: the individual who is afraid of disappearing in the "bus" and feels desperate due to the lack of community. He is unable to sleep, in order to avoid being homogenized, but suffering at the same time the weight of the cult of the ego.

In this hyper-individualism, the patient is the one who determines everything in today's world.²⁵ The executives of television producers, of publishing firms, of the cinema, attend courses on narrative structure, for the unique purpose of satisfying the public taste and then, on the basis of what they have learned they introduce corrections into the works done by the playwrights, writers and composers. Today productions are not those of the author, but of the work groups that seek to present a product that satisfies the public taste. The artists of earlier times sought to explore new worlds, and provoked surprise in their communication before the public. Because they went beyond what was understood by the people, they saw what others did not see, they were

²⁴ Publicity of L'Oréal: "Porque yo valgo" [Because I am worth it].

²⁵ In the world of art, the great artist was God. Later the artist was not God, but was seen as being touched by God's hand. But that has all changed. Today the great artists are confused with business men, they have ceased to be demiurges to become professionals, no longer celestial in order to be productive. The more money there is in play, the greater the participation of business men and less the geniality of musicians, writers, playwrights.

prophets, and therefore they felt that they were not understood. But today's artists do not try to bring a revelation of anything new; rather their task is to rework that which is known and accepted, and their great effort is to communicate it. Today, not being understood does not increase the appreciation of authors; rather it finishes them off. Artists today concentrate their dreams in mass communication, to the point that when they do something that "catches on", they feel obliged to repeat it over and over. Artists seek to be applauded but not misunderstood; they seek to be a media event, to become a part of the media world. Artists do not want to be prophets, nor pass into history; what they want is to enter into the world.

8. The style of this world replaces ethics with cosmetics

Fictitious capitalism seeks to present a kind image. Today awards of good conduct are given to firms that cooperate with the environment, that do not exploit their employees and do not manipulate the accounting. Universities give classes on ethics in business. In practice most businesses do not behave much differently over the last thirty years, but they submit to ethical diagnostics, in order to look clean.²⁶ The most important thing is not to fulfill the requirements of the authorities, which are often paid off, nor the labor unions; the concern is mainly with public opinion, an image of moral militance through marketing with a cause. On the individual plane, ethical relativity has become an anomaly. In regards to sexuality, post-modernism has raised the decibels to very high quotas of promotion and consumption, strong doses of erotism and vulgar genitality. There is a full apology of hedonism focalized in sexuality that is very studied, programmed and presented with persistent naturalness. Sex has become a consumer article of the masses through the porno web²⁷, erotic telephone conversations, contacts through classified ads, videos and soap operas; the consumption of sex has not only intensified, it has become significantly precocious. We can say that post-modernism lives "sexuality to the full", a full "resurrection of the flesh". This has a paradoxical effect: the exposition of intimacy in full sight annuls intimacy and causes the object to disappear. For once the whole field has been exhaustively explored, and the pupil has become satiated with the most explicit scenes, vision is blurred. The full view of the visible annuls excitement and the result is a satiety where desire agonizes for the object.

At the same time there is a crisis of heterosexuality. Homosexuality is not only accepted, it is already losing significance, precisely due to its success in penetrating the culture, so that it no longer attracts attention. Two sexes, today are considered not enough, even three is a bare minimum. The current trend, in accord with the most recent studies, is to be *queer* (strange). For the queer there is no determined sexual identity, just a thousand different grades of sex.²⁸

The style of the contemporary church

The church lives in constant tension between being in the world and being of the world. It is a cultural tension. Unfortunately, throughout the centuries the people of God from Abraham until today, are in this struggle and often succumb to what I call the cultural captivity of the church.²⁹ If this presentation had been done by a sociologist rather than

²⁶ Nike, Adidas, Reebok, who exploit children of the Third World, had to improve their work conditions in order to clean up their image. With a campaign against hunger, American Express seeks to clean up its image due to its excessive commissions. We see the same in big tobacco and other firms.

²⁷ In the United States, the typical customers are young and middle-aged men, with an income level between medium and high, for according to the American Psychology Society, the two activities to which the young traders and brokers on Wall Street dedicate most of their time are running and masturbation.

²⁸ Originally, the word *queer* was used as a synonym of "pansy (effeminate)", but today those who are *queer* are something else, even much more. The *queer* see the gay as bourgeois, situated in the normal category and even "classified" by the system as transvestite, transexual, *drag-queens*, and *drag-kings*, bisexuals or lesbians that conform to a fixed category. Those who are *queer* would be, on the contrary, unclassifiable, both as regards sex as well as other fields of the culture. Thus there are feminist men, lesbians that go to bed with men, and every kind of subversion of the dualist code.

²⁹ In the time of Zechariah, God confronts Judah as opposed to Greece. The Greek world is considered as that which brought to light scientific thought through observation, thought, and the development of a theory apart

a pastor, he would surely not have separated this point from the earlier one, but rather, just as we illustrated each of the characteristics of the style of our world with comments concerning art, fashion, politics, economy and commerce, in the same way one could include the element church since, unfortunately, the style of the contemporary church does not present a counterculture, but rather evidences a cultural adaptation to be envied by any cultural anthropologist. Of course, there are positive aspects in the contemporary church. But in this second point I intend to underscore the negative ones, or at least the risks that the church is facing today due to its cultural captivity.

1. The style of the contemporary church is that of a feeble theology

Capitalism, with its new bland cosmetics, is seen in the church that today elevates the matter of appearance, a bland style. Today we live in the time of the church that is *arty, friendly, slow*. A gospel without a kingdom, and without a king. A gospel without demands, without commitment. Protestantism today (Protestant and Evangelical churches) has two streams or manifestations as regards this blandness. On the one hand, a part of the people of God, those who inherited the Pentecostal-charismatic movement, has maintained from that movement the search for an experience, but lost the biblical solidarity; has given precedence to reaching persons so as to achieve numerical growth, but has displaced discipleship and growth in quality. Spirituality is offered only for the heart, not for the head. It is more therapeutic (emotional comfort) than theological (spirituality that affects the life integrally). There is no *didaché*, and therefore the people do not know what is good and what is bad. They are moved and entertained, but not transformed. The product that results is a *light* Christian, with a weak disposition to follow, without commitment, without the power to change his own life and much less to change society. On the other hand, there are those more bound by modernism; they assume a post-modern stance, as an overflow, and they speak of a feeble theology, in terms that evacuate the supernatural, with no divine intervention in history, no miracles and no power³⁰. Both streams have something in common, and it is a gospel without a kingdom.

2. The style of the contemporary church is that of a McDonaldized gospel

McWorld is colonizing the church with its values: individualism, marked by a gospel of self-help with an intimate, egocentric experience; consumerism fed by a religiosity of consumption that seeks self-satisfaction; materialism with a version of the gospel of prosperity and the seduction of money and power, of which both pastors and leaders have become victims. The Christian television networks that retransmit their programs in dozens of countries in the world, are a privileged vehicle for the transmission of the North American cultural gospel, producing around the world a church that reflects more the values of the reigning post-modern culture than the values of the kingdom of God, and sowing in the hearts of the undeveloped world's believers aspirations that have more to do with the *American Dream* and the criteria of Northwestern progress than with God's *shalom*. As someone said: the seed of the gospel was planted in Palestine, from there it traveled to Europe, from there to the United States, and from there we received the seed with the flower pot. In Latin America we received the worst versions of the *McDonaldized* gospel of North American flavor, through the mediation of certain Central American ministries, which add to the values of *McWorld* their own quota of authoritarianism, ostentation, manipulation, typical of our Hispanic American culture.

from the intervention of a supernatural power. And the Word of God will awaken the children of his people so that they will not assimilate the Greek culture. Today God has to awaken his people to avoid their assimilation of the post-modern culture.

³⁰ John D. Caputo is one of the thinkers that drinks from the philosophy of Gianni Vattimo, and it is he who has coined with greatest precision the term «feeble theology», taking this idea from his perception of God's «weakness». For Caputo, the existence or idea of a god, whether physical or metaphysical, who alters the world with his power, is mistaken. God should be conceived as a demand or claim without power that does not intervene in nature, accepting the conception of man as uniquely responsible for his deeds on earth. God is, therefore, an ethical necessity, required by the feeble virtues of man such as forgiveness, hospitality or charity.

3. The style of the contemporary church is that of the new fictitious protestantism

I see a parallel between the development of capitalism in its three phases, capitalism of production, of consumption and fictitious, with the development of Protestantism from the industrial revolution until today. Capitalism of production has a correlation with Pietistic Protestantism, with its emphasis on reason, work, self-renunciation, personal ethics. This Protestantism emphasized doctrine, dogma, produced the denominations, seminaries and modern missions. Later, from the 20th century, there followed a Pentecostal-charismatic Protestantism, that correlates with Capitalism of consumption, which elevated experience instead of reason, promoted the search for spiritual, physical and material well-being, instead of sacrifice, work and renunciation. The central theme of missions turns to massive campaigns. The denominations enter into crisis and the so-called independent church grow. And today fictitious Capitalism correlates to fictitious Protestantism, sharing methodologies and values: the central theme of mission becomes communications media, emotional well-being is promoted, egotism is reinforced, blandness in ethics and thought, personal affirmation and numerical church growth. Being aware that all generalization is unjust, the following table can help us understand:

	Pietistic Protestantism	Pentecostal-charismatic Protestantism	Fictitious Protestantism
Emphasis	Reason, individual ethics.	Spiritual experience	Individual emotional well-being
Characteristics	Surrender, abnegation, sacrifice, renunciation.	Devotion, preaching, gifts, manifestation of spiritual power	Feel good, progress, conquest, search for political and material power
Power	Work and self-discipline	Supernatural, through the Holy Spirit	Political, numerical and material
Ministry	Visiting pastor and missionary	Evangelistic pastor	Pastor of means, manager
Organization	Denominations	Independent church	Cell: Cellular church & emerging church
Central theme of mission	Church planting	Massive campaigns with miracles	Church growth, TV and other media
Truth	Result of biblical exegesis, dogma.	Result of the revelation of the Spirit, experiencia.	Result of individual and relativistic pragmatism

4. The style of the contemporary church is that of spectacle and entertainment

In Jesus' time, God's house of prayer had been turned into a market place. In our times, we have turned our worship into shows, and our temples into television studios. And this would not be so bad if we did not as a church reflect the style of show business. I mention by way of illustration, one of the most numerous and impacting spiritual events in the history of Argentina was not presided over by a pastor, but by a comic imitator, and there were no songs of worship, just musical numbers and artists with a measure of secular fame. Why an imitator rather than a pastor? Because everything has to be entertaining. Why secular artists instead of worshipers? Because what we are about is to put on a good show.³¹ In smaller dimensions, the same things happen in many

³¹ The Festival with Luis Palau in Buenos Aires, had many positive aspects. And what I say is not a criticism, but a simple description of what occurred, and I do so for the purpose of showing how the style of the world and that of the church is the same.

congregations. A good preacher is the one who tells many jokes, and he is not presented as a preacher, but as a “dynamic communicator”. Because everything has to be entertaining. In many countries, people prefer to attend congresses where those who minister are singers, not pastors. And the level of content that is transmitted is unimportant; what is important is that the *show must go on*. In reaction to this, new worship forms emerge such as those of the different emerging churches³². But again, the action is not a product of a biblical and theological reflection, but rather motivated by a comprehension and assimilation of post-modernism. Thus the temple-television studio of the mega-church is replaced by the prayer catacomb, that then becomes another fictitious scenography for a church that must follow the dictates of the post-modern society where everything is a show.

5. The style of the contemporary church is that of the infantile gospel

The average Christian today is opposed to sacrifices and waiting. He demands well-being and on immediate terms. The current generation professes what Giles Lipovetsky calls a painless ethic³³. A life that demands satisfaction without surrendering anything important in exchange, and certainly not in advance. The altar is no longer the place of death, but of reward. Christians are victims of the same evils as non Christians, such as compulsive buying and disorder, as some of the evidences of a culture in which the infantile ego is enthroned. To love yourself above all else, to love the child we all carry inside us. To let his errors pass without notice, and reinforce his accomplishments and enjoy him constantly. The extreme emphasis on inner healing as a permanent return to childhood. The indefinite postponement of young people as regards assuming the commitment of their affections, as part of their obvious resistance to becoming adults. The lack of commitment to social transformation. The serious difficulties of adults to assume responsibility. The magical idea that expects God to do what the believer should do. The denial of taking responsibility for your own life. Congregational tourism, that causes believers to constantly change churches, because of the show or the services that are offered, avoiding in that way the need to be disciplined. Pastoral leadership with infantile fantasies of becoming “the” man of God for the city. These are some of the characteristics of a church that reflects an infantile culture.

6. The style of the contemporary church is that of a falsified gospel

The church is not exempt from the influence of the world of falsification, of the copy, and the franchise. There is a pseudo-gospel that does not require people to change, whereas Jesus Christ says that we must be converted. Commitment is not required, it is enough to be emotionally involved. I can continue to be the center of my life, the one who orders my life. This is much less expensive than what Jesus requires: ***If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross every day and follow me.*** Deny myself? Crucify my selfish nature every day and follow him? The copy is less expensive. And since it is a gospel without a kingdom, numerical growth is confused with extension of the kingdom. The problem with this focus is that in Buenos Aires, in the last twenty years almost all the congregations have grown, but the state of the city is significantly worse than twenty years ago³⁴. That is to say, upon an analysis of the spiritual moral, economic, social and educational state of the city, we cannot see that the kingdom of God has been established in spite of the numerical growth. In favor of the numerical growth of the church, and with a pragmatic view of the reality, the prescriptions that work in other

³² Dan Kimball, pastor of the Vintage Faith Church, considers that the emerging churches are a reaction to the excessively ostentatious services of the mega-churches. Kimball, ex drummer of a rock group, directed a youth group for a mega-church in the '90s when he noted that the services were totally disconnected from the popular culture of the youth for which he was responsible. As fans of punk rock, many were not interested in a participation in the faith that was easier, but rather more interactive and demanding. Kimball introduced candles and began to read lengthy passages from the Bible, inviting those present to speak with him or to disagree concerning the reading of Scripture for them. “The youngsters prefer a dusty cathedral” rather than the big churches that were well lighted and too animated”, he said. *Diario Clarín*, Friday May 3, 2004.

³³ Giles Lipovetsky, *El crepúsculo del deber* [The dawn of duty] Barcelona: Anagrama, 1994.

³⁴ We enjoy the numerical growth that we have experienced, but regret that it is not accompanied by a growth in quality.

places have been copied. And the phenomenon of franchises that is an integral part of globalization is repeated today in the church. And it is roundly affirmed that "the vision that does not adapt is not adopted".

Since the objective of globalization is equalization through homogenizing, everyone has to work toward accomplishing the pastor's vision and, within a few years, if the vision was successful, the only one who is fulfilled, prospered and satisfied is the pastor, while the people fare poorly, without releasing their potential, without fulfilling their purpose. Of course, in order to fulfill the vision, the super-vision is required. And in a context like that of Latin America that means authoritarianism, control, manipulation. In some congregations there is a kind of Big Brother, with a super-vision typical of the sects. Because the vision justifies everything. Even to the point of bowling over the pre-existent visions, that is to say, of the kingdom of God, as for example: ***that you be united so that the world might believe***. "Unity is not what matters, because I am unwilling to negotiate the vision that God has given me".

7. The style of the contemporary church is that of hyper-individualism

The individual is the center, although he does not have a defined identity. The model of multiple egos equals that of multiple Christian identities, which is the same as the lack of Christian identity. Post-modern Christians are like a box of Lego pieces. This is optimal for voluble alliances and syncretism. In today's church the one in charge is the "customer"³⁵. The programs are the result of market research, as if the Gospel of the Kingdom were a product to be sold, and to be adapted so as to be acceptable to the masses. Anything that offends the consumers of this gospel should be suppressed.

Some churches, in order to satisfy the consumer, prefer to make no reference to sin, nor to sanctification, nor to self-denial, but rather to emphasize the temporal benefits of being Christian, and place the consumer in the center instead of God. The message is more centered in relieving the stress than in following the person of Christ. The "seeker sensitive" movement that involves a great number of mega churches in the United States and other parts of the world has taught that if churches want to grow they should become sensitive churches and fit themselves to the profile and the tastes of those who are seeking a church home. This has some positive aspects but it also means preaching about love and not about sin; teaching on positive thinking and self-help; investing in comfort and in installations for entertainment; being more tolerant with the behavior of their members, replace community worship with singing by artists.³⁶ For many pastors the goal is not to be part of a revival, but to become famous media experts. They do not seek to change the culture but rather to be accepted by it. They are not interested in being prophets, but rather great communicators.

8. The style of the contemporary church is that of replacing ethics with cosmetics

The god of the post-modern Christian cannot be too demanding. Since the post-modern individual obeys multiple logics, his religious posture also has multiple facets. Since it is a gospel without kingdom, there are no absolute norms, for all is relative. So it is we have, only to mention an example, thousands of pastors bound by pornography on the Internet, thanks to what Americans call the triple A: *anonymity, access and affordability*. The word pornography is derived from *perné*, meaning slave. And *porné* was the way prostitutes were called, as well as slaves, by those who could enjoy them sexually. So that today we must move against a world governed by a spirit of immorality, with a church led in large

³⁵ James Twitchell, in his book "Shopping for God" says that in the office building of Willow Creek, the evangelical church of greatest influence in the United States in the last twenty years, is found an inscription that says: "What is our business? Who is our customer? What is most important to our customer?"

³⁶ With great valor and authenticity, the principal proponent of this movement, Pastor Bill Hybels, following a study made among the members of his congregation, and which has been published in the book *Revel: Where are you?*, admits that much of what they did and taught to thousands of other pastors was not producing strong disciples for Jesus Christ, and that it did not help believers to be more responsible, nor to believe spiritually, nor to study the Bible more diligently.

part by slaves of that same spirit. The style of the contemporary church presents an intimate and materialistic happiness and the satisfaction of immediate desires, with a Christianity of no duty, that elevates well-being over good. A faith that has been emptied of austere duty, and decorated with "blessing".

The style of the kingdom

I request your mercy because my presentation appears quite negative as regards the state of the church. As I said, there are, of course, very positive aspects of the church today. But I have concentrated my attention on the negative, not only for reasons of space, but also influenced by the apostolic mission given by Paul to Titus: ***For this cause I left you in Crete, to correct what is deficient, and to establish elders in each city, as I commanded you***, and above all because of the call that God has placed on the church. I use the word style, not only because it is the word used by post-modernism, as I explained earlier, but also because it is derived from the Greek word *stylo*, which is the word used by Paul when writing to Timothy and telling him: ***If I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar (stylo) and foundation of the truth*** (1 Timothy 3:15). So that I using the word style in the sense, not of fashion, or simple appearance, but as a pillar, a column. That is the church's call, to be a pillar (*stylo*) of the truth. The problem is that if the church, instead of being a pillar (*stylo*) of the truth, is a pillar (*stylo*) of the predominant culture, it is impossible for the kingdom to be established in reality. Therefore, the church should reflect the style of the kingdom and free itself of cultural captivity. The parables of Matthew 13 were spoken by Jesus, so that we might be given to understand the mysteries of the kingdom, and reflect them.

1. The style of the kingdom is like good ground

Over against feeble thought and its correlation of feeble theology, the kingdom of God is like the seed of the word that falls into good ground: ***The one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown*** (Matthew 13:23). The cultural captivity of which the church is victim, has caused the Bible to lose its centrality. But according to Jesus, receptivity and obedience to the word is what determines the kind of ground, as well as the corresponding fruit. The gospel will be counterculture with transforming power only if the Word bears the status of truth. Otherwise, not only the church loses its liberating power; it also winds up captive of a culture where nothing is absolute truth: ***See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ*** (Colossians 2:8). Before a society that is disintegrating due to the erosion of the concept of truth, the church should recover its calling to be a pillar (*stylo*) of the truth.

2. The style of the kingdom is like a seed that grows

As opposed to an infantile society, the kingdom grows and bears fruit. When the church reflects the style of the world, and ceases to be an expression of the culture of the kingdom, it keeps its members in spiritual childishness. According to Galatians 4, spiritual childishness causes the believer, who is owner of all, to live like a slave. Thus we have a people of God, called to be at the head of reality, yet who live like the tail, playing church as if placing the devil under his feet, but living under oppression in their family life, economically and in society. An impoverished people, that plays "hide and seek", while running from reality. In the culture of the kingdom everything is born small, but it grows, matures, reaches its purpose, fulfills its transforming mission.

Much of the soil of the church is next to the pathway, without roots, among the rocks and thorns: three manifestations of immaturity. The problem is that while the church remains in a childish state, it will continue in cultural captivity: ***So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world*** (Galatians 4:3). It is necessary to guide God's people to maturity, based on the principles

of the kingdom. **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** (Ephesians 4:14). The spectacular numerical growth of the church in under-developed countries has not been accompanied by integral growth. And again, the deterioration of the concept of truth is a key, and the restoration of the centrality of the Word is indispensable. **Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ** (Ephesians 4:15). The distortion of what is good and what is bad among the people of God and even among pastors is a consequence of this immaturity. **Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil** (Hebrews 5:13-14). This immaturity results in an incapacity to serve as instruments of righteousness in the world. Therefore, the church must recover its role as a pillar (*stylo*) of the truth of the kingdom.

3. The style of the kingdom is like wheat

As opposed to the replacement of ethics by cosmetics, the Lord does not order us to uproot the evil, but to grow wheat. The distinction has to be evident. A counterculture must be manifested: that of the kingdom. We need to return to an emphasis on the need to be a distinct people, so that the world sees an alternative. Christianity as true "counterculture" is to live out the gospel and Christianity as the truth, from which all the facets of our living are articulated. Every aspect is permeated by the kingdom, everything is subject to it. This is much more than acknowledging a dogma and certain practices. We are talking about a distinct world view, based on the Word of God. For all transformation comes through the renewal of the understanding of a people that is not conformed to this world (Romans 12:2-3), the church as pillar (*stylo*) of the truth of the kingdom. For our truth is not one truth among many: it is *the* truth, Jesus Christ, the truth that makes us free.

Today the church is not a counterculture but a subculture of the world; that is to say, not something different from the predominant post-modern culture, but the same culture with certain characteristics native to the group. In this way we lose the ability to be salt or light. Jesus did not establish a subcultural community within the Judaism of his time, but rather a countercultural community, absolutely revolutionary, based on the mandates of the Sermon on the Mount. Yet many of these things are no longer taught in the church. As John Stott wrote, with regard to youth that is disenchanting and seeking something different: "Too often what they see in the church is not counterculture but conformity; not a new society that incarnates the ideals they have, but another version of the old society they have renounced; not life, but death. Today they would quickly apply what Jesus said of a church in the first century: **You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead** (Revelation 3:1)³⁷.

4. The style of the kingdom is like a mustard seed

Benjamin Barber, in his book *Jihad vs. McWorld* argues that the two greatest forces that determine the future of humanity are the forces of globalization (*McWorld*) and of fragmentation (*Jihad*) and that, practically, we should elect one or the other³⁸. We should not resign ourselves to a *McDonaldization* of the gospel, nor assume an integrist fundamentalism. We do not have to choose between these two forces. For Jesus taught that there is a third force that is at work in the world: the kingdom of God that is working through the subversive power of the mustard seed and that makes all things new.³⁹ The church should be a pillar (*stylo*) of that truth.

5. The style of the kingdom is like leaven

As opposed to a fictitious protestantism, we must recover the transforming ability of the leaven of the [Sixteenth Century] Reformation, the expansive ability of the leaven of Pietism with its missionary movement, the leavening ability of Pentecostal-charismatic

³⁷ John Stott, *ContraCultura Cristiana* [Christian Counterculture], Barcelona: Certeza Unida, 1998.

³⁸ Benjamin R. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld*, New York: Times Books, 1995.

³⁹ I recommend you read the book by Tom Sine, *The Mustard Seed Conspiracy*, Waco: Word, 1981.

Protestantism. The recovery of these three dimensions would produce a true revival. A move of the Spirit that fills the earth and produces transformations that affect the coming generations ("**to show in the coming ages**" 40). The mentality and theology of conquest, so popular today in the Latin American church, positions Christianity, not as a redeeming counterculture, but with the pretense of a dominant culture. It ceases to be Christian in order to become Christianity, it ceases to be leaven in order to become the dough. The category of conquest is based on the Old Testament. The category of the New Testament is redemption, not conquest. In Latin America we should learn from five centuries of a church that conquered but did not redeem. We must free ourselves of that cultural captivity and be a pillar (*stylo*) of the redeeming truth of the gospel.

6. The style of the kingdom is like a hidden treasure

In contrast with the style of entertainment that can only disenchant and add to the post-modern apathy, whoever finds the hidden treasure of the kingdom becomes joyful, and sells all that he has to buy the field. The church must free itself from the culture of the show and the idea that everything must be entertaining. We must clearly differentiate, as Mamerto Menapace said, between being entertained and being content. In Latin, *contentus* means content. For example, water that is in a glass is contained, content. When I pour it out, that water is *diverted*, without a container. The kingdom produces contentment, not diversion, entertainment.

7. The style of the kingdom is like a pearl of great price

In contrast with the falsified copy or pseudo gospel, stained by the search for human, political, numeric power, we as "merchants" should stop seeking those fake pearls, and sell all we have to buy the pearl of the kingdom. It is not political power that will transform our reality, it is not numerical power that will impact a city, it is not economic power that will position the church as a city set upon a hill. It is the power of the kingdom, the power of a church that lives differently, the power of proclaiming eternal truth, of which it is the pillar (*stylo*), the spiritual power of a church that sees on the streets the signs and miracles that back up its word, the power of a church united that lives with authenticity the love that it declares.

8. The style of the kingdom is like a net

In opposition to a fragmented and hyper-individualistic world, the kingdom of God is like a net. Such a revival, led by the Holy Spirit, of worldwide scope, with the transforming power to touch lives and social structures, and which transcends to the following generations, requires a united church: **that they might be one, so that the world will believe**. Unity is not simply an adornment of the church, but a requisite, a pillar (*stylo*) of the truth, and of revival. The kingdom of God is unique, and its principal agent, the church in each city, is also unique. In a world of cultural confrontations, the church must present a different model, of which it is an example. Such an example so far is our unfinished business. Without that visible expression of unity which Christ won on the cross, our message lacks uniqueness, and becomes simply another message.

Conclusion: An apostolic agenda

Jesus came to implant a new world view, a new culture (beliefs, values and behaviors). Such a culture is that of the kingdom. Thus he taught us to pray: **May your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven**. I believe that the key for the church to become again a pillar (*stylo*) of the truth is the full restoration of the pillars (*styloi*) of the church, which are the apostles: In effect, **James, Peter and John, who were reputed to be pillars (styloi), gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews** (Galatians 2:9). Simply by way of suggestions to illustrate the point, allow me to mention eight paths in which I consider it

⁴⁰ Ephesians 2:7.

is urgent that the church reflect the culture of the kingdom, and not the reigning culture of the world, so that it might truly be a pillar (*stylo*) of the truth:

1. An apostolic ministry that functions primarily for the unity of the church in each city

According to the New Testament there is only one church in each city. According to Jesus, unity is required for revival: that we be one for the world to believe. How much more in the fragmented society of the post-modern world. According to Ephesians 3, this apostolic task is not so much a question of the size of the ministry of someone in the city, rather it has to do with the revelation received concerning the mystery of the church, as a singular body in a city: ***the mystery made known to me by revelation... 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... that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body... Although I am less than the least of all God's people*** (Ephesians 3.3, 5-6, 8). The unity of the church in a city should be a priority on the agenda of an apostle.

2. An apostolic ministry that establishes the presbytery of a city

Such unity will be impossible if the apostolic ministries in a city are not integrated with a vision of the kingdom so as to establish the presbytery of the city, bringing together all the pastors of the city to begin to function as established in Ephesians 4, according to the different ministries, so that the church in the city might fulfill its ministry in the city. In many parts of the world there has been advance in unity through the formation of Councils or Confraternities of pastors. This is a progressive step toward unity. But it is still insufficient to accomplish it. The model of these organizations responds to a vision that is more institutional than spiritual and missiological. We should proceed to become the presbytery of the city, where these five (or four) ministries of Ephesians 4 are released so that the church might fulfill its function to minister, not only to the flock [of sheep], but also to the city.

3. An apostolic ministry that shepherds the pastors

The number one need within the contemporary church is the pastors. They are orphans, without a clear sense of direction, some are deformed, in need of emotional healing. They need apostolic fatherhood. At the same time as the apostles are concerned for the expansion of the gospel and the numerical growth of the work, it is indispensable to achieve the maturing of the leadership, especially of the pastors.

4. An apostolic ministry that fills the cities with the *didache*

The high priest said to the apostles: ***We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name... Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching.*** To which the apostles responded: ***We must obey God rather than men!*** (Acts 5.28, 29). To obey God rather than men implies filling the city with the *didache* (teaching, doctrine). When Christianity produced a cultural change, a change of world view in the Jewish world and in the Greek world, one of the essential tasks of the apostles was their teaching. For that reason, their adversaries commanded them to stop teaching. But they filled the city with their doctrine.

With post-modernism, it is essential in this cultural hinge, in this change of world view, to reinforce apostolic teaching, that is to say, the teaching of the world view of the kingdom, in the mouth of the apostles, so that people learn how to live. ***They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching*** (Acts 2.42). Not that of the pastors, but of the apostles. Because the pastors today do not clearly understand the New Testament *didache*. We need a strong reinforcement of apostolic ministry in teaching.

5. An apostolic ministry that understand reality from the point of view of the most needy

We rejoice in the growing awareness in the church of its need to exercise influence in all the different facets of our reality, including politics. However, behind that mentality of conquest, rather than redemption, there is a considerable search for power, and little biblical vision of politics that begins, precisely, to understand politics from the eyes of the victims. Although we are quite sensitive in Latin America to the subject of human rights,

there are few voices that arise to denounce the persecution and deaths that our brothers suffer in the Islamic world.

Please allow me, as a contrast to the gospel of the entertaining show, as a contrast to the pseudo apostles of ostentation, to honor at this moment the brothers that in these times are being persecuted in Ossira and other places on the earth. If God visited the oppression of his people, we should also be capable of seeing it. The same is true in relation to those who suffer injustice, poverty, misery, social displacement. The *sine qua non* condition that the apostles set before Paul to recognize him as such was that he not forget the poor (Galatians 2.10). When we observe today the caricature of apostolic ministry that, among other things, has modified the *sine qua non* condition of attention to the poor and to those who suffer, with a theology of prosperity that ignores suffering, an apostolic ministry is urgently needed that will recover the biblical vision, going beyond minimum assistance, guiding the processes of social transformation and well-being of human persons.

6. An apostolic ministry backed up with signs, wonders and miracles

In the post-modern world, where the truth is completely relative, and the truth of the gospel is only "our truth", it is necessary that "our truth" be validated with signs and wonders, the expectation that God will back up the word with signs and miracles, so that God's intervention in history be made known. Apostolic teaching and apostolic signs are two pillars for the unity of pastors in the city. Apostolic teaching levels the field and apostolic signs convoke and unite the leadership in a city: ***The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's colonnade*** (Acts 5.12). These things, apostolic teaching and signs, go together. We need to understand the dichotomy between teaching ministries and ministries of power. Nicodemus was able to recognize the authenticity of Jesus' teaching because of the signs that he performed: ***Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him*** (Juan 3.2).

7. An apostolic ministry with a strategic plan for the world

Apostolic ministry in a city establishes the presbytery of the city: ***appoint elders in every town, as I directed you*** (Titus 1.5). And the presbytery of the city recognizes at the same time the apostolic ministry that emanated in that city: ***In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) 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." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off*** (Acts 13.1-3).

The presbytery of the city, inspired by their apostles, establish a plan for the city. At the same time, the apostolic ministries recognized in the world, should come together, not only to share and reflect, but also to receive revelation for a strategic plan for the world, geared to reaching our present culture. In this presentation, we have considered the negative characteristics of that reality, but the present culture of post-modernism also offers extraordinary opportunities for extending the gospel.

8. An apostolic ministry that constantly seeks the Holy Spirit

All of us who are present were formed in the modern culture, but we must minister in the culture of post-modernism. All who are here were born in the era of Pentecostal-charismatic Protestantism, but we are witnesses of a fictitious Protestantism that we should change. All of us here were formed to lead a "local" congregation, but we soon discovered the biblical emphasis that the locality is not the parish where the temple is located, but the city. All who are here were formed to defend our denominational principles and interests, often against those of others, but today God is pressuring us to be active agents for the unity of the church in the city. All who are here were called to

pastor sheep, but we soon found ourselves shepherding pastors. All who are here were called to be pastors, but we are now pressed into an apostolic task.

That is to say, within a few years the map of our ministry was changed. We find ourselves at a hinge point in our ministry, enveloped in a process of change for which we have not been prepared, ministering in a society that is also experiencing a cultural hinge, with unexpected changes. All of us here need to be expressions of the power and the wisdom of God through teaching and apostolic signs, so as to impact that reality. More than obvious is our weakness, our incompetence, our limitation. But it is a great opportunity, if we are aware that we are weak, incapable, limited and vulnerable, so that his power might be perfected in our weakness. Thus it becomes indispensable that we seek ever more, and even with desperation, his Holy Spirit.

As apostles, pillars (*styloi*) of the church, which is the pillar (*stylo*) of the truth, we need a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit for these times. A marvelous time is before us, the best time of our ministry. We will see things that we have never before seen. We will see a mature church, whole, without stain or wrinkles, united. A church that will reflect the culture of the kingdom, and which in love and service will implant that kingdom in a needy world that belongs to God. Let us maintain our unity, dependency upon the Spirit, in expectancy, for inevitably the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord, as the waters that cover the sea.