

International Apostolic Fellowship

Theme: Towards the fullness of the church:
Unity – **Quality** – Quantity

The apostolic ministry and quality of and in the church

Introductory notes for joint consideration

Premise:

- Buenos Aires 2005 – "*Towards Fulness*"
- Brazil 2002 – "*The apostolic ministry and the unity of the church*"
(The contribution of the apostolic ministry to the unity of the church)

What do we mean by quality?

The quality envisaged by Christianity is holiness! This involves:

1. The very basis of the nature (name, identity) and life (the quality and internal dynamic) of God:

- **God is holy!** ("Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts" *Is 6:3*; "God's solid foundation stands firm" *2Tim 2:19*). A holy name, a holy character, a holy identity!

Thus the Scriptures say:

- "Be holy, because I am holy."
- "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."
- "Dear friends, now we are children of God... we know that when he appears, we shall be like him... Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure... No one who lives in him keeps on sinning... No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God." (*1Gv 3:2-3, 6,9*).

But also...

- **God is love!** (*1Jn 4:8*). Within the Godhead are holy love relationships!
- As it is written:

"I have declared to them *your name*, and will declare it, that *the love with which you loved me may be in them*, and I in them." *Jn 17:26 NKJV*.

And again: "*The Father loves the Son...*" *Jn 3:35*.

The quality and the internal dynamic of the Godhead are holy.

So the Scriptures say:

"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God... God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him." *1Jn 4:7-8,16*.

2. God's quality (nature) made manifest in Christ

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us... We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." *Jn 1:14*

"...the image of the invisible God" *Col.1:15*

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

Because:

holiness is at the heart of God's nature and of the relationships between God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

"I and the Father are one", "We will come to him and make our home with him", **"As I and the Father are one"**; the dogma of the Trinity: **"One God in three equal and distinct Persons..."**

holiness is the character and the person of Christ

Therefore

personal holiness

holiness in relationships.

Throughout the history of the church, genuine passion for Christ has always produced a strong love of holiness. For it is from/in that passion that the desire to follow Christ and imitate Christ is born. It feeds off the fire of desire and longing for God and cultivates fellowship with the Spirit 'within' and the contemplation of the Lord. It cultivates the desire to be transformed into His image and likeness, considered as the purpose and ultimate goal of the Christian life. To this end it concentrates on purity of heart, understood as the source of action. It believes in the possibility of growth, progress and spiritual and moral transformation.

This stream of life and spirituality emphasises the importance of a change of heart from within ('the inner man') and the development of attitudes and habits that are holy, imitating Christ. As Bonhoeffer said, it takes seriously Jesus, his call to discipleship and the spiritual disciplines.

The apostle and holiness

"Holiness, agreed, but how?"

The Nicene Creed

The statement of the *Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed*:

"I believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic church",

tells us:

1. That there are four distinguishing marks/requisites (resulting from a process of discernment and 'distillation' on the part of the early church) which form the essence of the church. The first three concern *a. unity, b. quality and c. quantity*; the fourth concerns the missionary characteristic of the church, its apostolic foundation (the Twelve and their message: "the apostolic witness"), and the ministries (apostles) that are still foundational for the church;
2. That these four requisites are intrinsically related. In particular, as concerning our subject, the apostolic nature of the Church, therefore the apostolic ministry, is intended to promote the unity, holiness and catholicity of the Church. Unity, quality and universality (therefore, its spread and multiplication – *katholikòs/universal*; but also its wholeness, totality, fulness: *hòlos/whole*).

Thus one could say that the Church is called to be *one, holy and catholic*; and that the apostolic ministry is called to inspire, direct, facilitate and coordinate from within all the work necessary for its unity, quality and quantity.

It can also be observed that each of the remaining attributes (unity, holiness, quantity) can come together in a mutually fruitful relationship with the others.

The apostolic contribution to the holiness of the church

But what is the *specific contribution* of the apostolic ministry for and in view of building up the *quality* (holiness) of the church?

Great in every way because this has to do with the *revelation, proclamation and building up* of the 'mystery of God' (Christ), with the primarily apostolic responsibility of "*laying the foundation*"¹ of Christ and the life (*quality*) of Christ.

The "grace" of the apostle

The Mission Statement of the *International Apostolic Fellowship*, in defining *the nature of apostleship*, correctly understands the "**Revelation of the mystery of Christ and the Body of Christ**" to be the basic, foundational element, the fountain of grace – one might say – of this ministry.

Apostles (and prophets) – as someone has observed – "have become decisive ministries because *the grace of God* has placed them² at the point where the mystery of Christ breaks out and is manifested"³. It is for this reason that their ministry remains foundational for the church.

This is Paul's original "grace", and that of any apostle, the fruit of that special 'revelation', which – one might say – made of him the mystic who constantly draws on the *mystery of Christ in us* and the expert builder able to build according to the plan revealed by God in Christ.

Grace! Grace! Grace!

The "grace" of the revelation of Christ (revelation) is the basis of the "grace" for proclaiming Christ (*kerygma*), of the grace to build and administrate (construction) according to the "*economy of God's grace entrusted to me for you.*"⁴ Grace to receive the revelation of Christ⁵; grace to preach Christ⁶; grace to build Christ⁷.

It has been well said by Watchman Nee, "No man can attain to apostleship through natural or other qualifications; God must make him an apostle if he is ever to be one."⁸

Thus the grace that is at the source and the heart of the mystery of God is the fountain of grace that is also the basis of the apostle's calling and ministry/commission (proclamation and construction).

¹ "By the grace God has given me, I laid **a foundation** as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. **11** For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, **which is Jesus Christ.**" **1Cor 3:10-11.**

² "I... do not even deserve to be called an apostle... But **by the grace of God** I am what I am." **1Cor 15:9-10.**

³ "Surely you have heard about the administration (Gr. 'oikonomia') of God's grace that was given to me for you, **3** that is, **the mystery made known to me by revelation**, as I have already written briefly. **4** In reading this, then, you will be able to understand **my insight into the mystery of Christ**, **5** 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.**" **Eph 3:2-5.**

⁴ **Eph 3:2** – Translation from the original text. The term "oikonomia" here describes the combination of different activities needed to organise and carry out God's plan (cf. **Col 1:25**: "I have become its servant by *the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fulness*").

⁵ "Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.'" **Mt 16:17.**

⁶ "Although I am less than the least of all God's people, **this grace** was given me: **to preach** to the Gentiles **the unsearchable riches of Christ**, **9** and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things." **Eph 3:8-9;**

"... by the commission God gave me **to present to you the word of God in its fulness – 26 the mystery** that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints." **Col 1:25-26.**

⁷ "**By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder**, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. **11** For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ." **1Cor 3:10-11.**

⁸ *The Normal Christian Church Life*, Washington D.C., International Students Press, 1969, p. 17.

Christ! Christ! Christ!

Indeed, God's secret (mystery) is simply Christ! while the secret (mystery) of Christ is the Body of Christ! God reveals himself in Christ. Christ reveals himself in the Body of Christ (the Church). And while God is glorified in Christ ("*I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do*", Jn 17:4); Christ is glorified in his disciples ("*And glory has come to me through them*", Jn 17:10), the Church that is His Body.

So while in the Epistle to the Colossians Christ appears as the fulness (the '*pleroma*') of God⁹, in the Epistle to the Ephesians it is the church that appears as the fulness (the '*pleroma*') of Christ.¹⁰ God in Christ! Christ in the Church! Christ, God's dwelling place by the Spirit¹¹. The church ("*which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way*"¹²), "*a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit*"¹³. "*To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*"¹⁴

The apostle's administration

A. The apostle's life

1. Choose Christ

- *A deep conversion and personal commitment to Christ*

Paul's splendid words to the Philippians¹⁵:

"Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things; I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ... know Christ... becoming like him ..." Phil 3:8, 10, 12.

"I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" Gal 2:20.

⁹ "... by the commission God gave me **to present to you the word of God in its fulness – 26 the mystery** that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. **27** To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. **28** We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. **29** To this end I labour, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me." Col 1:25b-29;

"...so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know **the mystery of God, namely Christ, 3** in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Col 2:2;

"And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may **proclaim the mystery of Christ**, for which I am in chains." Col 4:3.

¹⁰ "... And he made known to us **the mystery of his will** according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, **10** to be put into effect when the times will have reached their **fulfilment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.**" Eph 1:9-10;

"... that is, **the mystery** made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. **4** In reading this, then, you will be able to understand **my insight into the mystery of Christ...** **8** ... this grace was given me: to preach ... **9** and to make plain to everyone *the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. 10* His intent was that now, **through the church**, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, **11** according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord." Eph 3:3-4, 8-11;

"This is a profound **mystery**—but I am talking **about Christ and the church.**" Eph5:32.

¹¹ "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." Jn 1:14.

¹² Eph1:23.

¹³ Eph2:22.

¹⁴ Eph3:21.

¹⁵ "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. **8** What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the *surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things*. I consider them rubbish, that I may *gain Christ* **9** and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. **10** *I want to know Christ* and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, *becoming like him in his death*, **11** and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. **12** Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. **13** Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, **14** I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. **15** *All of us who are mature should take such a view of things.*" Phil 3:7-15.

- *Live for Christ:*
 "For to me, to live is Christ *and to die is gain.*" Phil 1:21.
 "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" Gal 2:20.
- *Be taken hold of by Christ and take hold of Christ*
 "I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.
13 Brothers, *I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it.* But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, **14** I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Phil 3:12-14.
- *Seek to glorify Christ*
 "I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always *Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.*" Phil 1:20.
 And to run towards Christ's glory means accepting the glory of the seed which, if it falls into the ground, but does not die, does not bear fruit¹⁶.
 As someone has said:
 "Christ's experiences become the prototype of a Christian's experiences.
 Sharing in his sufferings is the distinguishing mark of following Christ."
- *Lay down one's life for Christ*
 "You died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God." Col 3:3.
 "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. **15** And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again." 2Cor 5:14-15.

¹⁶ "Jesus replied, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. **24** I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. **25** The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. **26** Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me. **27** Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? "Father, save me from this hour"? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. **28** Father, glorify your name!'" Jn 12:23-28.

2. *The character of Christ*

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ – A life of Grace

The Love of God the Father – A reconciling life

The Fellowship of the Holy Spirit – Cultivating the Presence of God

3. *Christ's Way*

All this means *making Christ's Way my own*, embracing Christ's way¹⁷ which is the witness (gr. *martyria*) in everyday life¹⁸ and through the total humbling of the self,¹⁹ of the continual, complete giving of my life. As someone has said: "'To love' is a form of the verb 'to die'"²⁰. And another author, commenting on Philippians 3:10²¹, writes:

"The apostle longs to know Christ in such a personal and intimate way that he may enter into the deep experience of his resurrection and sufferings... Why is the resurrection mentioned *before* the cross? This can only be satisfactorily explained by remembering that... it is only as we know that new life, which is his risen life, within us by our union in faith that we enter into the depths of his sufferings... **The thought of a spiritual union with Christ in his death and resurrection, which is at the very heart of Paul's experience and teaching, is the key here. So close is his intimacy of knowledge and experience with his Lord that he can regard his apostolic career as an inner participation in his sufferings, which has almost the character of identity.** But the identity is never complete... there is no confusion that might suggest a 'mystical absorption' with Christ or detract from the unique finality of the Saviour's work at Calvary."²²

Thus self-denial, humility, service... And then... following Christ, in Christ's style (teachability, humility, purity of heart, meekness...), hiding oneself in Christ, Christ's emptying of himself ... Serving the cause of love and unity... "to the very end"²³

¹⁷ "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. **8** We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; **9** persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. **10** We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. **11** For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body." **2Cor 4:7-11.**

¹⁸ "But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. **21** To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. **22** 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.' **23** When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly." **1Pt 2:20-23.**

¹⁹ "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: **6** Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, **7** but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. **8** And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" **Phil 2:5-8.**

²⁰ "Amare, voce del verbo morire", Antonio Bello.

²¹ For a better understanding of the context, here are verses eight to ten: "What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ **9** and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. **10** I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" **Phil 3:8-10.**

²² Ralph P. Martin, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, Leicester, IVP, 2a ed. 1987, pp. 51-52.

²³ "He had always loved those in the world who were his own, and he loved them to the very end" **Jn 13:1** (TEV).

B. The apostle's proclamation (*kerygma*) – the person (the name) and the work of Christ, the church²⁴

The grace to announce and impart (proclamation) the mystery of Christ and of the Body of Christ.

- **Preaching the person and work of Christ**

With the grace to present Christ in a living way, to impart the revelation of Christ,²⁵ to give birth for Christ; to inspire love and passion for Christ, for the work of Christ, for the church ...

"Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, **23** *but we preach Christ crucified...* **24** *but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."* *1Cor 1:22-24.*

"For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord... **6** For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." *2Cor 4:5-6.*

"You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. **3** You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts." *2Cor 3:2-3.*

"You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? *Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified."* *Gal 3:1.*

- **... The character of Christ**

*New life in Christ²⁶
Christ in our life²⁷*

- **... Christ's Way**

"Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. **19** For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. **20** But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. **21** To this you were called, because **Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.** **22** 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.'
23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."
1Pt2:18-23.

²⁴ "The apostolic message is the proclamation of the truth of the FACT OF CHRIST. This expression "the fact of Christ" refers to the totality of what is implied in the event of Christ's coming, his person, his work and his words, his death and resurrection, his exaltation, the coming of the Holy Spirit and the creation of God's people, the church." Jorge Himitian, *El ministerio didactico de la iglesia*, Editorial Logos, p. 13.

²⁵ "Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? **2** *You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody.* **3** *You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.* **4** Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. **5** Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. **6** He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." **2Cor 3:1-6.**

²⁶ "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" **2Cor 5:17.**

²⁷ "...this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. **28** *We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.* **29** To this end I labour, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me." **Col 1:27-29;**

"Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. **3** For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. **4** When *Christ, who is your life,* appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." **Col 3:2-4.**

C. Teaching the apostolic *didachè* – the words of Christ²⁸ (all of them²⁹) – the will of Christ.

This proclamation involves practical training in Christian living (discipleship!):

*"We proclaim him [Christ], admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labour, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me."*³⁰

Thus the grace to make disciples of Christ, from Christ³¹, bring to maturity in Christ³².

The targets of apostolic teaching: the individual and the community.

- The individual must manifest Christ.
- The church must manifest Christ (His nature, character, spirit ...), the church dimension of the "mystery of Christ" (Ephesians).

It follows then that the apostle is called to responsible spiritual fatherhood:

- a. to bring to birth in Christ;
- b. to bring to maturity in Christ

D. Building quality

1. The fundamental agent: the Holy Spirit > new life > partakers of the divine nature > fellowship with the Spirit.
2. The apostolic ministry –
The responsibility to recognise (ministries) and ordain (to offices in the local church). The responsibility to watch over their personal integrity, faithfulness to 'sound doctrine' and holiness in ministerial relationships, within the local church and between churches.

i. The team of Ephesians 4 ministries³³

ii. The offices in the local church

Elders – maturity

Deacons - service

Briefly:

- The coordinator responsible for ministries aimed at maturity – *ministers and elders*
- The coordinator responsible for ministry aimed at service – *deacons*

Promoting discipleship and the process of transformation

²⁸ "For I gave them the words you gave me." **Jn 17:8.**

²⁹ "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** and **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.** And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." **Mt 28:19-20;**

"I have become its servant by the commission God gave me **to present to you the word of God in its fullness.**" **Col 1:25.**

³⁰ **Col 1:28.**

³¹ "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you." **Gal 4:19.**

³² "...teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ." **Col.1:27-29.**

³³ "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, **12** to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up **13** 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. **14** 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. **15** Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. **16** 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." **Eph 4:11-16.**

The Kingdom – God’s government in us and among us

- Fellowship with the Holy Spirit
- Fellowship in the Holy Spirit

In conclusion, the apostle is a servant who has received 'not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father' (Galatians 1:1) a commission to carry out. The substance of his commission is to reveal the mystery of Christ and the Body of Christ. This is therefore the content of his preaching and the essence of his authority, on the basis of which he must organise his work. The authority (*exousia*) conferred on him is in direct proportion to the mandate he must accomplish and of which he must give account to God.

This mandate usually has limits in time and space. During his lifetime, in a given territory and/or with certain persons, he must carry out his share of the work, needful to bring in the future fullness of Christ and the Body of Christ.
