***THE CHURCH TOWARD IT’S FULLNESS***

***FULLNESS - Unity - Development***

**Reading: Ephesians 1:3-14**

By a curious irony of history, all the terms used to describe the movements aspiring to a new future have the prefix “**re**-”: **re**naissance, **re**form, **re**volution, **re**awakening (**re**vival), **re**newal… **re**storation.

As someone has said, “They sought their future in the past and shaped the renewal of the present by a dream that was looking backwards.” A dream that nevertheless produced something that up to that point had not existed. There was a longing to regain the “origins” and this unwittingly produced the future.

**A new season**

Perhaps for the first time in the history of Church reform movements (with the possible exception of Gioacchino da Fiore), different leaders of the movement known by the name of “restoration” are aware of the novelty of the project on which they say they are working.

This is not a mere return to the past, whether that of Revival, or Reformation, pre-Tridentine or post-Vatican II Catholicism, or the sub-apostolic church or even the original church.

What is involved in fact is the ushering in of a “**new time**”, the building of a completely new future, the summing up, the summarising, a going beyond and crowning of the march of the people of God through these last two thousand years to come out of Egypt and the desert of the various cultures, idolatries and traditions which have delayed the entry into the Promised Land of God’s plan for His Church.

There is an ever-growing conviction that the **various histories** are converging on a **single future**.

**The problem of roots**

We are evangelicals and recognise our heritage in the various biblical, enthusiastic, radical and reforming movements that have leavened and stimulated the path of western Christianity, both before and after the Reformation.

We recognise in this “tradition” a nature and a quality that is prophetic, indispensable for the fulfilment of God’s purpose for His Church and the world.

We have no desire, therefore, to deny our evangelical inheritance, but build on it, progressing towards the goal.

It is precisely as “**sons of the prophets**” that we are aware of how radical the God of Abraham is. We know that He is the One who can put ‘*the axe to the root of the tree’* to cut down its trunk, yet still leaving life in it to bring forth a branch or shoot; he can cut off the branches of the natural olive tree and graft in a wild olive; he can take the Kingdom away from people, movements or churches who do not bear the fruits of repentance, to give it to a people who will listen to Him, obey Him and work with Him to build His kingdom.

As “sons of the prophets” we also know that the people of God have a **priestly** and **royal** element, invaluable for **the continuity** of the Church.

We face the future with the memory of all our heritage. While we look forward to and build the future, we are nevertheless not forgetful of our relationship to the past lived out by **all** our brothers who have preceded us and the present experience of **all** those who are today a part of the Church.

* The Protestant Reformation rediscovered **the Word**
* The “enthusiastic” charismatic and pentecostal movements rediscovered **the Spirit**
* The radical movements, both Catholic and Evangelical, insist on **the visibility of the Church** and take seriously the **demands of discipleship**.

The Word, the Spirit, the Church: all for **the achievement of the fullness** that is at the centre of God’s heart and his purpose for the future. (\*)

**The theme of fulness**

The term and the concept of fullness (Greek *pléroma*) in the New Testament bring us back in the last analysis to God Himself as the root, source and basic resource (*“God’s solid foundation stands firm”* 2 Tim 2:19), inheritance and ultimate goalof the universe (*“For he must reign until…so that God may be all in all”*).

A project in which the whole of the Trinity is involved – the purpose of God (“his good pleasure which he purposed in Christ”).

1. **The Father** from whom everything proceeds and to whom everything returns – *Unity*
2. **The Son**, the face (character) of the Father, the fullness of holiness – *Quality*
3. **The Holy Spirit**, God’s mission/church (man, the believer, the fellowship, creation), the increase of the kingdom – *Quantity*

In brief, the fullness of the life *which is in God and proceeds from God* (the kingdom) manifested in Christ, which must be manifest in the believer, in the church, on the earth and the whole universe. A God, that is, who desires to enter the world, who is already the Lord of the “external” universe, but desires to become the Lord and “inhabitant” of the “internal” world as well.

**Unity – Quality – Quantity**

We can imagine this by saying that the term and concept of fullness is like something in three dimensions, suggesting an alternating but continuous and increasing process (movement) of unity, quality and quantity.

**Unity**: fullness firstly involves unity, and its practical expression, which is “love” (‘together with all the saints to grasp…’).

From God’s unity (which is in God), to the unity of the Spirit (from unity with the Spirit), to the unity of the faith, to the unity of the Body, to the unity of all things.

**Quality**: Then comes quality, or, if you like, **holiness ( “**high and deep” Eph 3:18). And here the concept is in relation to the full measure of maturity, to the man as an adult, fully mature, to the completeness of the indwelling of God, to the riches of his grace.

***This quality is present in a full measure in Christ. The fulness of Christ* is the quality of Christ. He is the measure of all things** (people and fellowships). He is the face of the Father. All the fulness of the divine nature is manifest in him. “For God was pleased to have *all his fulness dwell in him*”, Col. 1:19; and “For *in Christ* *all the fulness of the deity* lives in bodily form”, Col. 2:9.

***The fulness of the person* is the quality of the mature believer (person) in Christ.** And this involves *being conformed to Christ* – being filled with Christ – the full stature of Christ.

***The fulness of the church* (the fellowship) is the quality of God’s life expressed in the Body of Christ.** The Body filled with the life and supernatural works of Christ (character and charisma; *dunamis* and *exousia*)

**Quantity:** quantity has to do with **the complete measure in terms of numbers** (“how wide” Eph 3:18): “basketfuls”; “the full number of the Gentiles” and “all Israel”.

**What? Christ, the Body of Christ.**

From what has been said thus far it is clear that two things are at the centre of God’s attention:

**Christ** – *The person* as God’s dwelling place – “In his image and likeness”.

**The Body of Christ** – *the fellowship* as God’s dwelling place – “a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit”.

As it is written: “Therefore, when Christ came into the world , he said “*Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me;…Then I said, “Here I am…to do your will, O God.”* First he said, “*Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire…”*Then he said, “*Here I am, I have come to do your will.”* Heb 10:5.

“A body you prepared for me” – **Christ**

“A body you prepared for me” – **The body of Christ** (a collective person)

“A body you prepared for me” – **The believer** (“Offer your bodies”; “…your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you”).

And the church is the historical agent of the Kingdom of God, the ultimate purpose of God. (“I will build my church”; *“Through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known”*; *“the fulness of him who fills everything in every way”*).

**How? The means**

What are the instruments that God uses to realise his kingdom in historically, that make it possible for His will for mankind and the world to be carried out?

Someone has expressed it thus:

**1. The grace of God** and

**2. The gratitude of man**

**1. Grace speaks of the primacy of God, His sovereignty, the priority of His initiative over Man’s response. *The grace of God* *visits* (visitation/s !!!) *man***. It is God who manifests Himself and intervenes.

* **It is the primacy of importance** of God’s intervention in the fulfilment of His plan for the history of mankind and the earth, and
* **It is the priority that belongs to God’s initiative** over man’s response.
* **The grace is God visiting man. Visitation!**
* **The grace is God who manifests Himself and intervenes!**

***The Christmas story: Mary***

*“Greetings, you who are* ***highly favoured****!”*

*“Do not be afraid, Mary,* ***you have found favour*** *(grace) with God”* Lc 1:28,30

***kecharitomène!***

**God is *charis*** / God is grace!

At the heart of the Christmas visitation is God and His grace:

God who gives grace!

The initiative is His! The gift is His!

**“Mary is the living proclamation that at the start of everything, in the relationship between God and His creature, is grace”**

***“Grace is the action by which God stretches out and leans towards His creature (a person, a race, a nation, a continent, etc.); the convex angle that comes to fill the concavity of man’s desire for God. God is love, as St John says (1Jn 5:8), and as soon as one leaves the confines of the Trinity, that is the same as saying that God is grace”***

“The God of the Bible non only gives grace, but is grace”.

*“I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and will have compassion on whom I will have compassion”* Ex 33:19b

**See for example, in the Old Testament:** the call of Abraham, the birth of Isaac, the choice of Jacob, the calling of Moses, the choice of David… **And in the New Testament:** the choice of the apostle Paul… Paul’s dream that takes him into Macedonia…

***For the Church too…***

**Grace is the profound nucleus *of* His being and the root of His existence.**Grace is that by which it is what it is: ***“But by the grace of God I am what I am”*** 1Cor 15:10

By the grace of God the Church is what it is, the movement in Brazil, in Argentina, in the South of the world, is what it is…

**For this reason I personally believe that to explain the different revival movements it more accurate, in terms of the macro-system, to speak of ‘visitation’ rather than ‘revival’.** It is interesting that Torrey, I think it was, speaks of revival in terms of visitation:

**“A Revival is a time of God’s visiting his people.**

***By the power of His Holy Spirit He imparts new life to His people, and through them reaches out to sinners*”.**

In short, a true revival is new life from God: *“from the presence of the Lord”*. Having said that, some of the classic works on revival have made a distinction between **partial revival and general revival**. In the category of **partial revivals** we could quote, by way of example, *the Great Awakening* (with Wesley and Whitefield), the *Second Awakening* (with Finney, Moody and the Salvation Army), and then *the holiness movement, the pentecostal and charismatic movement*, and the various subsequent “waves” up to our own time. The **general revival** is still to come:

***“A GENERAL AWAKENING, on the other hand, takes place when the new life from God is not confined to particular isolated regions, but belongs to the whole of Christianity throughout the world”***

Is that not very similar to the scenario of the ultimate fulness? Just think:

*“The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house”* Hag 2:9 *“Be patient… until… the autumn and spring rains”* James 5:7

**2. The gratitude of man.** The second element is man’s response. **Man’s personal and collective response: *The individual*** (persona) ***and the Body!*** The contribution and collaboration of the life, gifts, offices, ministries. *“By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect”* 1 Cor 15:10.

**God challenges us, and requires an answer.** The requirement for *this answer makes us responsible*. For the Son of God to become incarnate required ***Mary’s “yes”***! Grace generates responsibility: *responsibility for an answer*. And faith is the necessary and indispensable response to bring in and fulfil God’s will in the world. Man is called to respond with initiatives to fulfil the calling that God gives him. God has chosen to make us his fellow-workers.

**When? The time**

The question now is “when”, “at what point in time” will God’s visitation come?

To understand this better it will be useful to investigate these two key concepts in the Scriptures:

**1.“Kairos”**

**2.** “**Fulness of time”**

1. **“KAIROS”:** “there is a time!”. It has to do with the time of the visitation and the fulfilment of the will of God. So that, in the **Old Testament**, it sometimes indicates the moving or decisive time given by God, the time fixed by God, the moment determined by God once and for all. In the **New Testament**: *the fateful, decisive moment of God’s visitation, with the enormous human responsibility to discern it:* for example in *Jerusalem,* which did not recognise its hour of salvation, of recognising the *time of the Messiah*. Remember Jesus and his waiting to know the times established by God for him: *“My time has not yet come”* / *“The time has come”. Jesus’ death* comes “**at just the right time**”.

**So, God’s kairòs, truly given by God, cannot be determined by man’s autonomous decision.**

It is God who decides beforehand the decisive “moment” in which to actuate his plan of salvation, for the glorious manifestation of Christ, the times he has reserved for himself, the times and boundaries of the nations for them to seek him.

But the believer can recognise the Kairos determined by God for the decisive moments of his personal life: 2 Tim. 4:6 *“The time has come for my departure”;* the Kairos of the fulfilment of personal promises from God: Zechariah fails to see it and is punished. Therefore it is important to be vigilant *“for you do not know the day or the hour”* Mt. 25:13.

Thus the philosopher Pittaco says, **“Understand the value of time”**. He who does not, destroys himself and goes to ruin.

GOD HAS ESTABLISHED DIVINE APPOINTMENTS

* FOR PEOPLE
* FOR CHURCHES
* FOR NATIONS

BE SURE NOT TO MISS THEM!!

BE SURE TO LAY HOLD OF ALL THE BLESSINGS AND ALL THE GRACE PREPARED FOR YOU!!

1. **THE FULNESS OF TIME** (the concept of) – This is in relation the complexities of the specific historical context prepared by God for the realisation of his plan. The N.T. speaks of:

* The fulness of the Jews
* The fulness of the Gentiles
* The fulness of time for the incarnation of Christ: “**But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his son...**” Gal. 4:4
* The ULTIMATE fulness of time / the moment of a powerful historical, theological and spiritual coming together: “**The mystery**” to be “**fulfilled when the time was fully come**”.

**The example of Jesus’ incarnation**

1. The *political contribution* of the Romans
2. The *intellectual contribution:*

A universal language (Latin and Koiné Greek)

Greek culture

1. The religious contribution of the Roman, Greek and Hebrew religions

**Contemporary examples:**

**Argentina,** Brazil, Chile…: two interesting “textbook cases”. This can be extended to the whole of the **Southern World**.

**Why now?**

**What is the political, intellectual and religious context?**

* ***IS IT THEIR KAIROS?* A visitation?**
* ***IS IT THE FULNESS OT TIME FOR THEM* concerning the Gospel?**

Does this concept of “kairòs” or “fulness” necessarily imply the impossibility of extending this movement geographically or historically (that is in space or time)?

**No! Not necessarily!**

Because we are on the frontier of the future! And if we live out our “visitation” to the full we can become a blessing for the whole earth and for future generations!

* Become a “detonator” for a GENERAL AWAKENING!

a) From a partial visitation to the general one.

b) From the church in one nation (or part of the world) to the church throughout the world.

c) From the South to the North of the world!

In past centuries:

the wind from the Middle East

the wind from the North

to the East

to the West

to the South

**the wind from the South**

**Has the time come for the wind to blow from the South to the North?**

But we do know for certain:

**“As surely as I live…the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth”** Num 14:21

**THE FINAL PERSPECTIV**

**What does the future hold for us then?**

We believe in the coming of the Kingdom. We believe in the restoration of the church (**not** in “Restoration churches”). We believe that the “times of restoration” that, according to the Scriptures, precede the Return of Christ, will continue. We believe that the Kingdom, even though in ways that are at times hidden and mysterious, is continuing to grow.

So, “work in progress”. Therefore it is vital to remain open, **aware of the “pasts” but at the same time free from them**, ready to *bring out of the storeroom new treasures as well as old* with which to build the future.

**Our past** is in the whole of Christianity

**Our future** is in the God of hope, with His promise to “make everything new”.

**Our present** is to actively listen to what the Spirit is saying, today, to the churches.

**The horizon**

**The virtue of Hope**

**The ministry of Reconciliation**

**The final bringing together** (*anakephaleòsastai*)

*“He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 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

**The Kingdom of God and the church**

The kingdom of God is *already with us* with Christ’s coming into history, but we must continue to pray and work so that **his kingdom may come and be manifested in its future fulness.** We must be vigilant and attentive, each at his own post, like the night watchman in Jesus’ parable *(Mk 13:33-37)*

Only when Christ appears to bring history to a close will we be able to lay down our tools and follow him to a better future. Until that time each of us is called to strain towards the goal that is Christ, the Body of Christ.

***“…and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever’”***

**Man filled The church filled The universe filled**

**The person** – *“in the image and likeness”* of God

**The fellowship** – *“a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit”*

**The earth** – *“As surely as I live…the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth”* Num 14:21 *“Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”* Mt 6:10