

Do we really need Apostolic fathers? (Graziano Crepaldi)

Over the last few years we have entered into an incredible season of church history. As we travel around the world we see many movements of God growing and expanding in such powerful ways. We know that this is just the beginning of what God wants to do in transforming the nations with his amazing love. Without doubt there is a clear rediscovering of the apostolic ministry that many of us have been in search of for such a long time.

We have recognized some of these apostolic churches more for their commitment to Jesus and sacrificial character than for the size of their buildings and beauty of their meetings.

It became clear to us that these kinds of communities seem to be the most organic and natural form of church that we have ever seen. This is the church that we have inherited from Jesus and that survived generations of persecution and religious digression. In many teams and with many believers all over the world there is a longing for the apostolic church to come back. There is a deep desire to see God manifesting Himself through these movements today. The incredible appearance of these churches continues to make their presence seen and felt as was with the vision of the apostolic fathers. This seems, after 2000 years, to be again one of the most revolutionary and relevant strategies to change the world!

“As the Father sent me, so I send you.” (John 20:21)

Jesus was sent from the Father in his apostolic mission. Jesus himself as a father of the disciples sent them into the world with the great task of creating new apostolic families. The mission seems to be very clear, but as we read in the gospel of John there was a problem for the disciples to see the Father in Jesus and therefore Jesus as a Father (Isa.9:6).

“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. Why, then, do you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (John 14:9)

This question of the disciples arrived after a long time spent with Jesus and we can see that it was a big surprise for him hearing them talking in this way. Some years later the church of Corinth, among many other problems, had difficulty in recognizing Paul as an apostolic father. **“For even if you have ten thousand guardians in your Christian life, you have only one father. For in your life in union with Christ Jesus I have become your father by bringing the Good News to you”.** (1 Cor. 4:15)

Since some time I have been ministering in many groups and different nations and especially in our western countries many believers are concerned for the lack of spiritual fathers in the church. Many are dreaming to work and live side by side with apostolic fathers. Where are they? How are they trained? Why are they hiding? Who has kidnapped this powerful people? If the disciples had problems to recognize Jesus as a father and the church in Corinth rejected her apostolic foundations then we might have the same kind of problem!

We have become unable to see where the spiritual fathers of our nations are and therefore we tend to hear often and listen carefully to the messages of those who God had never sent! **“For this reason the Wisdom of God said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles; they will kill some of them and persecute others’”.** (Luke 11:49)

We are not made to live without apostles, prophets and especially fathers. How can we survive such a misfortune?

We read in the Old Testament that the people of God found a very quick solution to this problem through creating leaders and idols in their own image.

“When the people saw that Moses had not come down from the mountain but was staying there a long time, they gathered around Aaron and said to him, ‘We do not know what has happened to this man Moses, who led us out of Egypt; so make us a god to lead us’”. (Ex. 32:1)

Some time ago one of our leaders in training called me for a meeting to inform me that in the time I was not around he finally met the leader (a woman) he was looking for. After I asked him what God has told him concerning this connection his answer was that this woman was able to meet his inner needs and that she has become a picture of God the Father for him! Another person came to me and told me “I forgive you for not being the leader I have expected you to be “. I am totally shocked from these words and still very puzzled of such an attitude! Everything seems to be focused on us instead of God and therefore this road is not going to lead us very far. Instead of asking who are the people that the Father has sent and therefore listen to God’s message for our nations we have looked for someone that meets our own needs and spoke a message that warms our souls. This has become a fruitful business that made us insensitive to the ways of God! In other words my own heart is the measure of what is valuable instead of what God speaks.

In many of our European countries the word “father” doesn’t mean anything anymore, because the enemy was able to destroy the model of the family and the calling of man was limited to the role of a “working machine”.

People and churches that are not able to relate to their spiritual fathers and more specifically to apostolic fathers very often turn back to prophetic mothers, pastors and teachers in order to get comfort, meet their deep need of security that can be found only in God and continue to look busy. This was in some ways the attempt of Peter on the mountain of transfiguration (Luke 9:33) to build 3 prophetic shelters to “finally enjoy God”. Jesus’ goal was the “cross” and the apostolic sending of his

disciples to all the nations. We need to be very careful not to stand against the apostolic plan of God. It might be something that we do unconsciously and not with evil intentions, but it is still very destructive for us and for His Church.

Let's look at some attitudes/sins that make us blind to recognise apostolic fathers and also some of the ways to be able to see them again.

- **“Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, the which is idolatry” (Col 3:5).** The main problem is that we need to be rid of our own false picture of leadership and repent from idolatry. The church has become a place to worship people instead of worship God. Some years ago a woman told me that I was the best leader she ever met. Some weeks later the same person told me that I was the worst leader she ever had. The problem was that I had not greeted her once after a meeting! It is incredible how attitudes can vary when you create false gods! In the past few years we've met people that discovered a model of a spiritual father only in Christian video clips found on the internet.

This has developed a kind of a lustful attitude where people have disconnected themselves from reality (more difficult to live) and started virtual relationships they always dreamed to have. They can turn off and on their “fathers” with a simple mouse click. Wow!

- **“He himself bore our sins” in his body on the tree, so that we might die to those sins and live righteously. “By his wounds you have been healed” (1. Pet. 2:24).** We need to receive healing from our wrong picture of fatherhood and motherhood. It is impossible to see the Father if we are not going through the path of the cross and receive a totally new picture from God.

Because of their hurts some people came to think that we shouldn't have leadership at all in the Church. The problem is that we will keep projecting our past pictures of leadership into the new fathers and mothers that God wants to give us. If inside of us we are still checking for proofs that we cannot trust leaders, we will surely find something. This will create room for criticism and judgment and finally destroy authority figures. In other cases we tend to transform the image of the spiritual father in a kind of “Santa Claus” that should be always there to give us gifts, affirm us and protect us and stand behind whatever we do.

- **“You did not choose me; I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit...” (John 15:16).** We cannot choose fathers that we would like to have. This is a process that works the other way around. The fathers and mothers choose sons and daughters. Sons and daughters can choose to follow their fathers and mothers. As I look back to the spiritual fathers that led me in these 20 years I see some clear points. These people have been so different from me, they have called me into their vision, they didn't need me - I needed them, they often “offended” my soul (mind, emotions, will) in order to make me a spiritual man, they stretched to the limit of what I could bear, they didn't substitute God's the Father but they helped me to get near to Him.
- **“But Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God “ (Luke 9:62).** God is giving us spiritual fathers when we stop to control leaders (and God) through our expectations. The past needs have the power to control our future. We risk finding ourselves every few years still at the same starting point! We cannot excuse wrong leadership, but it is clear that God used difficult people to train great leaders like Samuel, Joseph and Moses.
- **"Honor your father and mother so that it may go well for you and that you may have a long life on the earth" (Eph. 6:2-3).** We need to recognize that we need fathers more than teachers. This might be a total change in our church vision. Actually it will bring us to a new level of relationship. Consequentially we need to stop the game of substituting fathers with mothers and apostles with prophets. Only then can we really enter into a culture of honor in relationship with spiritual authorities and God will do more than what we can ever imagine. When we start to trust the fathers and mothers that God has given us we will make them better leaders for the future. It is incredible what God can do through “wrong” leaders and how he can transform us and them in the process!

We need to repent from our pride and make place in our hearts for a discipleship call. This is primarily a calling of becoming sons and daughters of God before being God's workers. Humble people have a deep respect for their fathers, because they know where they come from. It was a very shameful time for the Corinthians when Paul had to remind them what he has done for them as a father. Let's check our relationship with our spiritual fathers and mothers and let us turn back to them so that we will not damage our own children.

God the Father sent his best apostle (Jesus Christ) to show us the reality of his Kingdom and is going to continue to use the model of apostolic fathers to multiply his family on earth. Let us welcome his work and do it in his ways.