

**THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE EARLY CHURCH:  
A SPIRITUALITY FOR A NEW HUMANITY  
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**<sup>32</sup> All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. <sup>33</sup> With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all <sup>34</sup> that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales <sup>35</sup> and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. (Acts 4:32-35)**



## INTRODUCTION

In behalf of the officers and members of the Upland Cavite Conference (formerly Kumperensya ng Timog-Kanlurang Katagalugan) I extend to you our solidarity greetings and warmest felicitations to this 19<sup>th</sup> National Council.

Today, let us reflect on the Spirituality of the early Jesus movement, which will serve as one of our concrete examples of a spirituality for a new humanity.

The Acts of the Apostles describes a powerful process – the growth of the early Jesus movement in the ancient Mediterranean world. This movement transforms people for a new humanity by proclaiming the good

news of Jesus Christ beyond the bounds of Palestinian Jewish communities into the Hellenistic Gentile world of the Roman Empire.

The early chapters of Acts describe the formation and nature of the first church in Jerusalem in the power of the Holy Spirit. The prophetic tradition, especially the prophetic Spirit, is one of the thematic consistencies in Acts. It is only natural that Luke, the author of Acts, who portrayed Jesus as Spirit-gifted prophet who “proclaim good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, set the oppressed free, proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19), also conceived of the first faith community of Jesus’ disciples as a Spirit-filled prophetic community, practicing justice and love.

After the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, all of his disciples received the “gift” of the Holy Spirit that empowered them to preach and teach with boldness and conviction. The Spirit also created an atmosphere of unity and mutual care among all the believers, which was strongly manifested in their sincere desire to pool their resources together by selling everything they had to meet everyone’s need.

Why?... First, because there is a strong possibility that they were experiencing a form of rejection from their society that led to their decision to live communally. We need to be reminded that they lived under the reign of

Imperial Rome, which brought great persecutions to them, and exacted hefty taxes from its colonies. This made their time critical and in danger.

Second, they shared their material possessions to maximize time and effort to bring God's message of love to as many people as possible. The excitement was there, and a centralized management of all available resources was needed to direct this attitude of eagerness and selflessness in an organized and efficient way. So we can safely say that, partly, it was an organizational necessity for the early church to voluntarily give up everything they had, and let the apostles manage these so they could have more time to share the Gospel. This could be an offshoot of their belief in the impending physical return of Jesus Christ or the "early parousia".

Third, their action was definitely a result of the Spirit's bidding that overpowered the inherent selfishness of human beings. It was a clear manifestation of conversion among the early followers of Christ, from a life of "me and mine" to a communal life of "us and ours".

How did the early church develop this kind of spirituality for a new humanity? Let us look deeper into their life and witness as a faith community by asking three important questions.

## WHO COMPOSES THE CHURCH?

First, *“Who composes the early church?”* Two things characterized the people who belong to the early church: **(1) they believed and (2) they are united** (Acts 4: 32). This community that manifested Christ was first believers. They were those whom society has marginalized: the outcasts, the tax collectors, the sick, the sinners, but have trusted in the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ, they have put their life in the hands of God.

These people have not only believed, but were also united. It is sad to note that individualism still pervades the church and society. The early church were in one heart and mind, they were united. We need to act like the heart. It systematically pumps blood through its chambers, and through the valves, and blood vessels. We have to move and act in unity.

Unity is strong and real only in situations where the power of some does not overwhelm others. We are overwhelmed by many expressions and experiences of oppressive forms of unity. Genuine unity is sustained in a spirit of humility, honesty, accepting each other's difference and shaping together shared visions and goals. It is only then that the unity we have in Christ becomes a gift of the Spirit.

The early believers were one in mind and heart, and this showed in their willingness to sacrifice to meet the needs of others.

## WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH?

Second, *“What is the nature of the church?”* Knowing the very essence of the early church is one of the keys in unlocking its secrets to success and the kind of spirituality they had displayed during critical times. In Acts 4:33, *“The multitudes of believers showed (1) power and (2) grace.”* This community was dynamic. The Greek word for power is “dunamis” from which the word dynamite was coined. Their witness was definitely explosive!

The early church was not only dynamic but also filled with grace. Grace is unmerited favor bestowed to everyone but charged to Christ’s sacrifice and suffering on the cross. If we want to manifest the same kind of spirituality like of the early church, we must be channels of God’s power and grace. A church that ceases to show God’s power and grace ceases to be a church!

This is the spirituality of the early church, that it explodes God’s life-transforming power. It offers God’s liberating grace! Let us turn our churches into havens of rest, into centers for people’s struggles, into wells of hope and grace for the downtrodden, sick and afflicted! Only then can we lead people into a kind of spirituality like that of Jesus Christ and the early church!

## WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH?

Third, we need to finally ask, *“What is the purpose of the early church?”* In Acts 4:33-35, we can see the word to unearth the answer to this question, the word: **WITNESS**. This is both a verb and a noun. As a noun, it speaks of a person who is credible and tells the truth. In any court of law, a witness becomes an asset, if he or she is believable and honest. As a verb, the word speaks of action that of the community of faith exists as a living witness of God’s power and grace. It exists as a pillar that stands proudly to proclaim that there is indeed hope in a hopeless world. Its sole purpose is to become God’s living word to a dying world!

Three elements characterized the witness of the early church: **(1) unity, (2) equality and (3) sharing**. They were truly united; they were at one heart and mind. They showed the unity in community. They proved unity in making all things in common to them. The church witnessed in equality and sharing. No one was above the other in terms of meeting needs. Everyone was important even the smallest, unnoticed members of their community. They showed concern for the orphans and widows. They cared for the lame and the leper. A poster which is displayed in one of my friend’s room during my seminary days, showed a picture of an old man begging. It quoted A. Loorthusamy of Malaysia. The poster read, “Society calls me a beggar, a

parasite and an eyesore. But what do you call a church which has allowed this to happen?”

The early church witnessed in equality and sharing; they pooled their resources and shared it. The result, no one was in need. For this to happen today, we, the church, which claim to embody the spirituality of Jesus for a new humanity, must advocate for people’s rights and welfare, and live out a Christ-like spirituality that will transform both church and society from an uncaring and greedy socio-political and economic system to that of equality and generosity. If we seriously consider this, then the Kingdom of God would definitely be built faster than what we have been doing in the past. This is the kingdom building: ***witnessing for unity, witnessing for equality, and witnessing by sharing***. This is the kind of spirituality for a new humanity that will lead to a relevant, contextual, dynamic and effective ministry. This is the purpose for which we, the church exists.

## **CHALLENGE**

It is my hope that as a church, we can also proclaim and live out the spirituality for a new humanity that exemplified by Jesus and the early church for these critical times. Let us show the way to a convicting and powerful

witness to God's love and grace. Let us *witness for unity, for equality, and by sharing*. Amen.