



Volume 7, Number 2 March/April 1996

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

Alan Morrison

Although the Christian can speak in terms of the bare letter as being 'dead', when compared with the bounties of the Spirit, the fact is that words themselves can carry a powerful charge which will shape our responses to them, for better or for worse. Sometimes, words are 'hijacked' from their Biblical roots in the name of a particular cause. A classic example is the word charismatic, which, simply considered from Scripture, mean *divinely gifted* - a term which really applies to every true believer rather than the limited sense in which it has come to be used in some circles today.

Another such 'hijacked' word is *ecumenical*. Although now having a negative association, this word has an innocent Biblical pedigree. The words *ecumenism* and *ecumenical* are derived from a Greek word *oikoumene*, meaning 'the whole inhabited earth' or simply 'the world'. In a primary Scriptural example, we are told that *the Gospel of/he kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come* '(Matthew 24: 14).

True ecumenicity, therefore, lies in the *spiritual unity* which exists on the basis of the *mutual indwelling Holy Spirit* in all believers throughout the world. This is a far cry from the now *prevailing false ecumenism*, which is founded on a very limited basis of faith. This began to pervade the Church more than a century ago, and has caused much confusion in churches today. This is because the word *ecumenism* has now come to take on a very different meaning to that in the original manuscripts - a fact which we will now examine.

The Phases of Ecumenism

In the historical growth of this movement there has been a three-phase development in ecumenical thinking. In the first phase, the emphasis was on creating some genuine unity among all those throughout the world who professed faith in Christ. In the second phase the emphasis shifted to include all those who were members of any denomination or religion. In the third and most recent phase, the concept of 'ecumenism' is being widened to its ultimate possibility. Now it is being proposed that we should include every human creature; the whole inhabited world in its *absolute* universal sense rather than in the *potential* universal sense of the Gospel offer.

In other words, phase one of the Ecumenical Movement emphasized the Church in terms of a *universal brotherhood of Christian faith*; phase two stylized it as a *universal brotherhood of mankind* as a whole. Thus, religious syncretism (from the greek *synkretismos*, a confederation) and religious universalism are realized within an organization which professes to represent the *Christian Church*.

Let us now examine the development of these three phases in some greater detail, in order that we can gain an understanding of the power which lies behind it.

Phase One: "Christians of the World Unite"

Just how did the false ecumenism develop? Initially, out of a sincere desire to fulfill the prayers of the Lord Jesus Christ about Christian unity in John 17:20-21. At the turn of the century, a group of Christians looked at the vast number of interests competing in the mission field, and came to the understandable conclusion that a sectarian spirit was detrimental to the witness of the faith to the world. The net result of this was a gathering of 1355 delegates in Edinburgh at the World Missionary Conference (AC) in 1910. This was the true fountainhead of what we today call the "Ecumenical Movement" - although others had talked about Christian Unity before.

The key organizer of the AC (1910) was John R. Mort (1865-1955), whose simple desire was to *'bring Christ within the reach of every person in the world, so that he may have the opportunity of intelligently accepting Him as personal Savior . . . It is our duty to evangelize the world, because Christ has commanded it'* (C.H. Hopkins, 'John R. Mort' A Biography', Eerdmans, 1980, p.232). Although many have sneered at the simplicity of this desire - especially in the light of the naiveté of the early ecumenists - it represented a genuine Scriptural purpose. Unfortunately, the nobility of such an aim was to be buried under a welter of developments which have ultimately led ecumenists away from the original design.

The AC gave birth to three principal developments: I) The International Missionary Council (IMC) in 1921; II) The World Conference of Faith and Order, designed to sort out "*doctrinal questions which divided churches* ", and III) The Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work, which was designed to deal with 'the relationship between Christ and economics, industry, social and moral problems, international relations and education'. In 1948, the 'Life and Work' Conferences united with those on 'Faith and Order' to form what we now know as the World Council of Churches (WCC).

Unfortunately, the organizers of that original WMC in Edinburgh had failed to reckon with the denominational liberalism and other forces which would mold their work into a very different creature. This brings us to the second phase of ecumenical development.

Phase Two: "Religions of The World Unite!"

The first deviation from the ideal of the first-phase involved a movement away from denominational Christian unity into out- and-out syncretism. So this second phase of ecumenism involved the widening of the boundary to include not only professing Christian denominations, but also other faiths - on the false assumption that all religions are different expressions of the same Divine principle.

Ironically, the first General Secretary of the WCC, Dr. William Visser't Hooft, has written one of the greatest refutations of syncretism, in which he rightly observed that it poses' *a form more dangerous challenge to the Christian church than full-fledged atheism'* (from '*No Other Name: The Choice Between Syncretism and Christian Universalism* " SCM Press, 1963, p10). Once Dr. Visser't Hooft retired in 1966, the second phase of ecumenism - which had been waiting in the wings with baited breath - was able to come into its own. It is most revealing that even Chambers English Dictionary defines *syncretism as 'illogical compromise in religion.'*!

There had been a hint of this direction many years earlier at the first *Universal Conference on Life and Work* (1925) in Stockholm. At that time, some of the conference leaders had immediately organized a subsequent conference called the "*Universal Religious Peace Conference* ", which published a book of devotions taken from the Scriptures of all the major religions. By 1930, when the *Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry* was held, one of the main conclusions of this influential report was that the Christian '*should regard himself as a co-worker with the forces within each such religious system which is making for righteousness'* (W. E. Hocking, '*Rethinking Missions* ', Harper, 1932, pp.326-327). The necessary contrast between the Church and the world now became subject to doctrinal erosion.

Ominously, towards the end of his life, the original AC organizer, John Mott, also began to have '*grave reservations about a world body not motivated by missions, and fears that the World Council of Churches might swallow the International Missionary Council'* (C. Howard Hopkins, op cit., p. 689). His fears turned out to be well-founded; for the second realdeviatio11 from 'first-phase ecumenism' came with the removal of independent missionary concern from the International Missionary Council, as that organization was absorbed into the increasingly syncretistic World Council of Churches itself in 1961. Thus the WCC had successfully brought international Christian mission work within the domain of an increasingly syncretistic Ecumenical Movement. The stage was now set for the third and final phase in ecumenical development.

Phase Three: "People of The World Unite!"

A major shift in ecumenical thinking occurred when there was a change in the way that *ecumenism* can be defined. In his second Reith Lecture (1978), Dr. Edward Norman, then Dean of Peterhouse College, Cambridge, rightly noted the fact that '*the word ecumenical itself has changed its meaning, and is now used by the World Council of Churches to*

mean, not just fellowship within the different Christian bodies, but within the entire human race '.

What we call *ecumenism*, therefore, has come now to involve the concept known as '*the integrity and unity of all creation* '. This is the new buzz phrase which, along with *peace and justice* ' (ecumeno-speak for liberation theology), forms part of the slogan of the '*Decade of Evangelism*' currently being trumpeted. This concept stresses not so much a common source of all Christian denominations, or even of all religious faiths, but rather the idea of the common source and essence of all *creaturehood* In other words, for the new ecumenist, Christian Unity has come to hold its significance in the *brotherhood of man* rather than in the *Children of God* - in the bonds of the *flesh* rather than in Christ.

This is surely a most subtle development. Instead of Christians taking the Gospel - with its exclusive message - into the whole inhabited world, and enduring with the difficulties and antagonism which this naturally causes, the Ecumenical Movement is now teaching that God indwells every person unconditionally - regardless of his religious affiliations. True spirituality has, therefore, become defined as 'any means by which one can realize one's divinity within'.

Holding It All Together

The new universalist, interfaith Ecumenical Movement leans heavily on two principal binding elements in order to maintain and develop its doctrine and activities.

The first of these is *mysticism*. The mystical traditions in the mainline denominations easily interact with those of the heathen religions of the world. Meditation practices, 'visualization' techniques, and breathing exercises are now being used to 'tap into' the spiritual realm. In this, such religious leaders as the Pope and the Dalai Lama are very much on the same plane. It is common in ecumenical-interfaith circles to hear of *Christian Zen* and *Hindu-Catholicism*. In their thinking, it is only a short phonetic step from Christ to Krishna!

A similar tendency to mysticism can be found in a number of 'Charismatic' groups today, in which gullible believers are chasing after a sensational religious experience through many channels - including the use of the 'visualization' techniques mentioned above. It is now no longer necessary to be a Christian in order to speak in tongues; neither is it necessary to adhere to Biblical teaching on the Gifts of the Spirit. Because many of the heathen religions have had ecstatic 'tongues-speakers' for thousands of years, these practices have provided the perfect ecumenical platform, whilst also unwittingly introducing Christians to the realms of religious syncretism.

The second primary binding element of the new Ecumenism is *political-utopianism* - the 'social gospel' manifested in liberation theology and support for revolutionary activities. When the WCC convened its Central Committee Meeting in Moscow in July 1989, the General Secretary, Dr. Emilio Castro, referred to the writings of Karl Marx as including '*hopes and dreams about a new humanity and a future transformed for the better*' (Christian News, September 25th 1989, p.13). Dr. Castro then went on to say: '*Marxists and Christians in significant measure share a common source for such longings, which makes it possible for them to do so much together* '. Even though Marxism appears to be a spent force in the world

today, this statement demonstrates the leanings of the WCC leaders and their willingness to bend the Scriptures to suit their aims.

The Great Commission

Because the Ecumenical Movement no longer confines itself to the simple desire to propagate the Gospel throughout the whole inhabited world, it has failed to retain the distinctives which are necessary for the spreading of the Truth which sets men and women free. It now involves the building of a global consciousness - a universal brotherhood fabricated on the pattern of humanity, with the religions of the world as the tapestry on which it is woven. For this reason, religious syncretism must surely be the greatest threat to the true Christian witness of the Church since it was almost destroyed by Arianism in the fourth century. Yet it will not do merely to shout empty rhetoric; we must strive to develop a real understanding of all the forces which have led to this phenomenon - for example, national sin, unbelief: an underestimation of the power of Satan, a lack of realism concerning the demonic nature of the world's religions, etc.

Towards the end of 1992, the Second World Parliament was held in the U.S. A. In many ways, the First such Parliament in 1892 was an event before its time. The world was still dominated by a nominal Christian Commonwealth, and the then Archbishop of Canterbury refused an invitation to attend, asserting that Christianity was the only true religion. Now, we live in a very different world - a world which is clamoring for peace, unity and stability at any cost. This event was a watershed in the formation of the conglomerate religion of the New World Order.

One reason why - prior to the Day of Judgement - there can never be the kind of peace and unity for which the world so longs is that such delights can only be found in the Lord Jesus (John 14:27). Therefore, that hope is withheld whilst so many in the world refuse to obey the Gospel - vitally necessary for eternal salvation (2 Thessalonians 1: 7-9). Moreover, the Lord Jesus did not come in order to establish *worldly peace* (Matthew 10:34-36). And no wonder! For the contrast between the Church and the satanic world-S)'stem, about which the Lord spoke after the Fall (Genesis 3:15) is still being played out to this day (1 John 5:19; and see John 17:15).

Satan's primary hidden purpose in the Ecumenical Movement is an attempted breakdown of this vital difference between his own offspring and the true children of God - to foster the illusion of a spirituality founded on the '*integrity and unity of all, creation*', rather than becoming a true child of God through conversion by the power of the Holy Spirit and the subsequent adoption into God's family. This breakdown is being effectively realized through the religious syncretism and Universalism of the Ecumenical-Interfaith Movement.

Such a breakdown (in understanding) is there for all to see in the World Council of Churches, which has, for many years, propagated a politically-utopian ideal rather than the pure Christian Gospel. On the syncretistic level, since 1975, the WCC has confessedly carried on a dialogue of mutual cooperation with *people of other faiths, people of other ideologies or of none*' - and not for the purpose of proclaiming the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ and His Gospel, but in order to make a major contribution towards the breaking down of every barrier to an imaginary world peace and unity.

All this does not mean that Christians ought to generate enmity towards those of other faiths, or even towards the Ecumenical Movement. But this knowledge should serve to make us vigilant, and desirous to demolish every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:4) - albeit in a spirit of love and compassion (Galatians 6:1). A Christian who presents to the world a carping, [roger-pointing, siege-mentality does not achieve much by way of evangelism!

Although the outlook may look bleak, the fact that we are in the throes of a worldwide, syncretistic, Christ-hating humanism does not necessarily mean that *'the end is nigh'*. Christians certainly hope that the return of the Lord Jesus will be soon. But in years to come, a faithful remnant may look back on our times and say that this was the era in which Biblical Christianity was once more rescued from total oblivion by those who watched and prayed and acted out their faith, and who - again - were despised in their day. This is where the challenge lies today; are we watching, praying, and putting our unique and precious faith into practice (2 Peter 3:15)? Or are we just letting things happen, barely noticing the gathering confusion and downgrading of Christian truth in the cause of a counterfeit unity. (Alan Morrison, a pastor from England)

UNITY - AT WHAT COST?

Jewel van der Merwe

In the past few weeks, Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ received the Templeton Prize which is given to a person who has shown extraordinary originality in advancing the understanding of God. It is actually called the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. The monetary value of the Prize is \$1,000,000 making it of more value than the Nobel Peace Prize. However, compared to Bill Bright's annual budget, \$1,000,000 was a "very very small amount". (Bill Bright on National Public Radio, March 6, 1996. Bill Bright has a very special project on which to spend his prize money. He believes this project will accomplish more to help reach the world with the message of God's love "more than anything that we can do and that is training the people to fast and pray." He believes that the best way to bring America back to her spiritual roots is "through mobilizing millions of pastors and laymen to fast and pray which is a historically proven and biblically proven way to release the power of God."

John Marks Templeton is one of the world's most successful financial investors. However, it is his reputation as a man of SPIRITUALITY that has made him one of the most respected personalities of the 20th Century. A New Revised Edition of THE HUMBLE APPROACH (1995) by John Marks Templeton gives insight into this man's thinking:

"The Theology of Humility seeks to build on the great theologies of the past and present and does not oppose any other theology. It welcomes the ideas and inspiring literature of all religions. But perhaps we should be open to the possibility of various new unprecedented

religions where the revolutions in our conceptions of time, space and matter significantly shape our theology. . . our names for God should be less heavily focused on personhood, since their usage favors man-centered concepts. . . The evolution of our universe would seem to be vast in its conception, yet curiously experimental and tentative, a truly creative work in progress. Perhaps human beings, so late an appearance in this evolutionary process, have been given some creative role in seeking to understand and interpret awesome any mysterious processes which science only now begins to fathom. We suppose that our part might be likewise to conceptualize and experiment over a wide diversity of possibilities in the physical and spiritual worlds. . . In the spiritual world perhaps diversity is also reflected in the variety of religions and in the multiplicity of denominations. It may be that this increasing diversity provides for a freedom and a loving and healthy competition without which there might be only lesser progress. Perhaps we should applaud the new research programs and the new organizations arising in each of the world's religions. "

In this book, New Thought is lauded as "*blazing trails for the rest of us to follow*":

"In recent centuries, hundreds of protestant denominations have been born from new concepts and new revelations. Multitudes of cults and sects have arisen in other major religions, also. But how many of these sponsor research for more new ideas? The New Thought Movement, which includes The Unity School of Christianity and The Church of Religious Science, is a rare exception, one which strives for continuous innovation.

Charles S. Braden writes,

'New Thought as now taught is the creation of a perpetually advancing mind. It is not satisfied with any system originating in other ages because systems do not grow while mind does. In deed, change and growth are the silent mandates of Divinity. '

This is the kind of spirit the humble approach encourages, the spirit that puts no limits on our quest for more understanding of God Elmer Gifford, a New Thought minister in Pasadena, writes:

The term New Thought is used to convey the idea of an ever-growing thought. . . man is an expanding idea in the mind of God. . . As mind advances, the old forms die, because they no longer serve or satisfy men's needs. . . New Thought can never therefore be a finished product and if it remains truly New Thought, it will never be completed enough to creedalize it. Thought can never be final and still remain thought. .

. . . . millions of intellectuals the world over have become disenchanted with backward-looking religious institutions. . In order to recapture the great thinking minds of the world, the clergy must turn their heads 180 degrees from past to future. . "

Note the diversity of recipients listed at the end of the book, just to name a few:

1973 -*Mother Teresa of Calcutta*

1975 –*Sir Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, was President of India and Oxford Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics*

1976 - *H. E. Leon Joseph Cardinal Suenens - was Archbishop of Malines-Brussels. A pioneer of the charismatic renewal and a strong proponent of Christian unity*

1977 - *Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare Movement, Italy which has become a world-wide network of over a million people in communes and private homes engaged in spiritual renewal and*

1979-*Rev. Nikkyo Niwao, founder of Rissho Kosei-Kai and the World Conference on Religion and Peace, Kyoto, Japan. A Buddhist world leader in efforts toward peace and understanding among religious groups*

1980 -*Prof Ralph Wendell Burhoe, founder and former Editor of Zygon Journal, Chicago. A leading advocate of an intellectually credible synthesis of the religious and scientific*

1982 - *Dr. Billy Graham - brought diverse denominations together and promoted respect for all peoples*

1988 - *Dr. Inamullah Khan, Secretary-General, World Muslim Congress, Karachi, Pakistan. Proponent of peace within and between the world's religions.*

1990 - *Baba Amte, India-A learned Hindu scholar and philanthropist who has relieved the poverty of millions in rural India - jointly with Professor Charles Birch, Sydney, Australia. Molecular biologist and strong proponent of process theology and environmental stewardship.*

1993 - *Charles Wendell Colson, Founder of Prison Fellowship- A strong Christian force for change in the American prison system.*

It is somewhat incongruous that obtaining power with God can be purchased for a \$1,000,000 "Unity" prize.

THE UNITY LIE

Greg Alston

There is a perilous move afoot in this last hour that threatens to deceive even the very elect (Matt. 24:24). Its power, like that of Eden's serpent, lies in its subtlety. It **appears** to be something that it is not and, woefully, most of today's Christian Church, in fulfillment of 2 Thess. 2: 11 are believing **the lie**.

What is the lie? It is the oft-heard and increasingly accepted notion that we should "unite." It is the same dictum that was issued by Nimrod at Babel and Constantine at the birth of the Roman Church and, today, declared by most prominent Christian personalities such as John Paul II, Billy Graham, Bill Bright, Chuck Colson and Pat Robertson. It is gaining acceptance at an exponential rate through movements like Promise Keepers, Denver Link, March for Jesus and the plethora of A. D. 2000 events. Coach Bill McCartney has issued a challenge to

any clergyman who does not plan to attend his February '96 Pastors' Conference in Atlanta: "He needs to be able to tell us why he doesn't want to go." This is my response to the coach's challenge and provides my reasons why I won't be attending the conference which is expected to field over 100,000 pastors and Christian ministers in Atlanta Georgia.

Why is it a lie? The call to \nite is wrong primarily because of the means that are used to achieve the unity. For example, the stated directive of Coach Bill McCartney is to downplay and/or disregard doctrinal distinctions because it impedes unity. The problem with that approach is that the Bible sharply enjoins the dismissal of sound doctrine:

Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine o/Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine o/Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him, for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds." 2 John 9-11

"But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition (doctrine, teaching) which he received from us." 2 Thessalonians 3:6.

"Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you." 1 Timothy 4:16

The foregoing scriptures make it abundantly clear that we are not permitted to "overlook" doctrine for any reason.

The Dilemma. But shouldn't we be "of one mind" and "keep the unity of the Spirit," and doesn't the Bible say that we should not be divided as illustrated in Philippians 2:2 and 1 Corinthians 1: 10? Yes, to both questions. To the best of our ability, we should be at peace with all men (Hebrews 12:14; Romans 12: 18). The question is not whether or not we should be united but rather how is real unity achieved. First we must realize that upon entering into the family of God, through true repentance, belief and confession (Acts 3:19, Romans 10:9, 10), we automatically are made one with all other truly born-again believers (Romans 12; 18). Ours is a spiritual unity that can never be broken or improved upon (1 Corinthians 12; 12, 13, Ephesians 2; 13-15; 4; 3, 4). Notwithstanding this blessed fact, we cannot deny that outwardly, the Body of Christ is divided today. Admittedly, this is wrong (1 Corinthians 3:1-4). We must ask ourselves two questions: 1) Why is it divided and 2) what can be done to alleviate the division?

"For you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?" (1 Corinthians 3:3). And, ". . . I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must also be heresies among you..." (1 Corinthians 11: 18, 19a).

From these scriptures, we find four reasons for division: 1) Carnality; 2) Envy; 3) Strife; and 4) Heresies. These are the reasons for divisions in the Body. Rather than forsaking doctrine to achieve unity, why not forsake the causes of disunity: Carnality, envy, strife and heresy (false teaching)? WE SHOULD NOT FORSAKE DOCTRINE TO ACHIEVE UNITY - WE SHOULD FORSAKE THE DEEDS OF THE FLESH AND UNITY WILL RESULT.

Right Teaching for Right Unity. Since we have already seen what is prohibited in the pursuit of unity (dismissal of sound doctrine), let us explore the godly, biblical means by which we should pursue "the unity of the Spirit." The fourth reason for division, heresy, means "false doctrine" or "false teaching." False teaching causes division. Conversely, sound doctrine and accurate teaching of the Word will promote unity in the Body of Christ (Ephesians 4: 11-16), Ephesians 4: 13 refers to "the unity of the faith." It is essential that we understand what "the Faith" is - what constitutes "the Faith?" If we know what constitutes "the Faith," we will know what to teach and what to embrace, the result of which will be the much sought-after "Unity" that we are so eagerly desiring these days.

The Essentials of the Faith. We learn from Hebrews 6:1, 2 what the elements (essentials) of the Christian faith are: 1) Repentance from dead works, 2) Faith toward God, 3) Baptism, 4) Laying on of hands, 5) Resurrection of the dead, 6) Eternal judgment. These are six elements of "the Faith." To this list, we may add the literal return of Christ (Acts 1: 11), His 1,000 year reign on earth (Revelation 20:6; Isaiah 9:6, 7, Matthew 9:35), Christ's Deity (John 1: 1; Hebrews 1:8). The triune nature of God (1 John 5:7), the Virgin Birth (Luke 1:27, 34, 35) and the inerrancy of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19-21). These are twelve essentials of the Faith. There are probably other "doctrines" that could be listed among the "essentials," but these are indispensable. If they were faithfully taught and eagerly embraced, the Body of Christ would not be divided.

Redefining the Faith. Coach Bill McCartney and other unity advocates maintain that the only essential is that "we love Jesus" or "name Jesus." This, when biblically appropriated, is indeed, an "essential of the Faith," However, it is just one of at least twelve (mentioned above). The one requirement of the "unity advocates" is listed as item number two above - "faith toward God." This is the Gospel of the Grace of God revealed in Romans 1:16. But is it the only essential? The answer is clearly no. "The Faith" (Acts 24:24; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 4:7) consists of much more than "The Gospel of the Grace of God" (salvation through faith alone). In encouraging us to disregard doctrine, unity advocates delete most of the essentials of the Faith which is tantamount to "denying" the Faith. Revelation 2:13 says to hold fast His name and do not deny the faith. Disregarding the doctrines of the Faith is the same as denying the Faith. We are not to "deny" but "earnestly contend for" the Faith (Jude 3), which includes: 1) Repentance from dead works; 2) Faith toward God; 3) Baptism; 4) Laying on of hands; 5) Resurrection of the dead; 6) Eternal judgment; 7) literal return of Christ; 8) Christ's millennial reign; 9) Christ's Deity; 10) the Trinity; 11) the Virgin Birth; and 12) the Inerrancy of the written Word. With this knowledge of what "the Faith" is, the plea that we need "only love Jesus" becomes obviously remiss and errant. Although one need only embrace item number two to be "saved," he or she will never "go on to maturity" (Hebrews 5: 14), "inherit the promises" (Hebrews 6:12) or "attain to the unity of the Faith" (Ephesians 4:13). We must adhere to the full counsel of God (Acts 20:27). The current unity movements, because of their aversion to doctrine are denying the faith and producing the kind of Christians that Paul described in 1 Corinthians 3: 1, 2:

"And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able. "

Why Unite? Some say that we must unite so that the world will come to Christ. The premise that Christian unity causes sinners to convert is, however, nowhere to be found in scripture. Rather, the Bible says the Holy Spirit convicts of sin (John 16:8), the goodness of God leads to repentance (Romans 2:4) and the preaching of the Word is necessary for conversion (Romans 10:14-17). Although some hold to the false premise of "unity for conversion," the majority of unity advocates, including Mr. McCartney, Chuck Colson, Pat Robertson and others wish to unite for a different purpose. In a taped interview on June 8, 1995, Coach McCartney shared with the listening audience the purpose for Promise Keepers. He stated that Promise Keepers will "rescue America," "end the welfare system," "stop all gang activity" and "eliminate racism." The documented goals of Mr. Colson and Mr. Robertson are likewise socially and politically motivated. They are coming together and striving together for "social change," whereas Philippians 1:27 says:

" . . . that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for 'the faith of the gospel'"

Our "unity" should be to promote "the faith of the gospel" (defined above) - not to "rescue America."

This reveals that both the means to attain and the purpose for the unity that these movements seek is seriously flawed. IN a nutshell, their position is: "Disregard doctrine to effect social change." Saints - this is not the gospel! Though it appears good and proper on the surface, a closer examination reveals treachery and certain harm to the true cause of Christ. In this day of ecumenical zealotry, we would be wise to remember the words of the Master:

Not everyone who says, Lord, Lord shall enter into the kingdom. . . therefore enter ye at the strait gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction and many there be that go in thereat; but strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life and few there be that find it.

(Reprinted by permission. SURE FOUNDATION MINISTRIES, Inc. Box 100161 - Denver, CO 80250 (Write for free newsletter.)

CHURCH UNITY

Opal L. Reddin

One of the most popular topics in Christian circles today is church unity. Many leaders are saying, "We must get together and bring the answer. to Jesus' prayer in John 17" Let us consider the *kind* of unity for which Jesus prayed, the fact His prayer was answered, and His prayer *continues* to be answered according to His will as revealed in the Word.

Jesus prayed for His disciples "that they may be one, even as We are one" (John 17:22). He said. "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word" (verse 20). We are awed as we contemplate God the Son praying to God the Father that

we might have the same kind of unity as that existing between *them*. Consider this kind of unity.

First, this unity is *spiritual*. The Father and the Son are one in essence from eternity to eternity (John 17:5; 10:30). We know God is Spirit (John 4:24), and God the Son in His incarnation became man with a physical body (John 1:14). Their essential unity was never broken because it is spiritual and immutable.

Second, this unity is in *truth*. Jesus said, "I am...the truth" (John 14:6), and He prayed, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:17).

Third, we see that this unity is in *love*. He prayed "that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that you have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them" (17:23, 26).

Jesus' prayer for unity was answered initially on the Day of Pentecost, and the Spirit-given unity was manifested in the Early Church. Acts records what we often refer to as the birth of the Church. The 120 plus 3,000 were brought into *spiritual unity* as all were filled with the Holy Spirit (2:4, 38, 41). They were in unity in the *truth*, continuing "steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (2:42) and in *love* with the fellowship and having "all things in common" (2:43, 44). The result was that "many wonders and signs were done," and "the Lord added to the church daily" (verses 43, 47). This is God's pattern for church unity.

All verses of Scripture that refer to church unity make clear that the true Church, the body of Christ, is one. The only way to be in the true Church is to be placed in the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit in regeneration: "The body is one...all the members...are one...for by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (I Cor. 12:12,13). "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him" (I Cor. 6:17), "You are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3; 28).

Nowhere are we admonished, to implement this unity, but Ephesians 4 tells us we are "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (verse 3) and that Jesus gave the five-fold ministry for the perfecting of the Body "till we all come to the unity of the faith", to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (verses 11-13), The faith is the body of orthodox Christian doctrine, well-known to the Early Church and preserved for us in the New Testament.

David Wells said, "There is no Christian faith in the absence of 'sound doctrine' (1 Tim. 1:10; Titus 1:9)." Without it we have neither the Father nor the Son (2 John 9). We are told to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). We must guard this faith (2 Tim. 1:13, 14; 4:3). We know that this faith was stated in *propositional* truths, for Paul wrote to the Corinthians: 'I plead with you...that you all speak the same thing. and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment' (I Cor. 1:10). On this basis churches have statements of fundamental truths. Belief and practice are inextricably linked (1 John 2:3-3:18).

There are two kinds of division-- one of God and the other of Satan. When Paul warned against division he was referring to false doctrine. Some "depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (1

Timothy 4: 1). John warned, "Many antichrists have come... They went out from us, but they were not of us" (1 John 2:18, 19). Regarding fellowship, he wrote, "If anyone comes to you and does not bring doctrine, do not receive him... for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds" (2 John 10, 11). Paul told the Romans to "note those who cause divisions... and avoid them" (16:17).

There is also *good*, necessary division-- the result of being separated from error by the truth (John 17: 17). Jesus said He came to bring division (Luke 12:51). He separated His church from Judaism that rejected Him (John 1:11). Paul maintained this separation by exposing the Judaizing heresy as "another [accursed] gospel" (Galatians 1:6-9). Without this division Christianity would have gradually become merely a sect of Judaism.

Current ecumenical movements attempt to bring all churches of all denominations into a *visible* unity. The Protestant branch of ecumenism is the World Council of Churches (WCC). Roman Catholics also have unity as their agenda as described in Vatican II and their New Catechism. A study of these two movements reveals the wisdom of our Assemblies of God bylaws. Article IX, section 11 states in part:

"The General Council of the Assemblies of God disapproves of minister or churches participating in any of the modern ecumenical organizations on a local, national, or international level in such a manner as to promote the Ecumenical Movement, because: We believe that basis of doctrinal fellowship of said movement to be so broad that it includes people who reject the inspiration of Scripture, the deity of Christ, the universality of sin, the substitutionary atonement, and other cardinal teachings which we understand to be essential to biblical Christianity."

The protection provided by this bylaw is needed now more than ever before. The WCC, in its statement of ecumenical faith, accept" not only all Christian churches but also any who believe in the "cosmic Christ." including Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and Animists. The Roman Catholic ecumenical movement works in various ways. The New Catechism has not changed the insistence that there is no salvation outside the church, referring to the church in Rome. All the objectionable doctrines are still there, including baptismal regeneration, grace inherent in the mass through transubstantiation, prayer to Mary, indulgences, and purgatory. Their salvation is a "faith plus works," the same Judaizing heresy anathematized by Paul (Galatians 1:6-9). The goals of Catholic dialogue with other faiths is to bring all Christians together in the one Church big enough to cover people in Islam and other false religions if they claim to be seeking truth.

Recently a group of Catholic and evangelical leaders drafted a document known as ECT, short for "Evangelicals and Catholics Together in Mission." I found the document to be a plea for visible unity at the expense of scriptural truth. For example, the one absolute essential for being in the true church, i.e., 'justification by faith," is barely mentioned, through it is one of the major doctrines that irrevocably divides Protestants and Catholics.

Two misunderstandings are widespread: (1) If we love people of all faiths, will we not desire visible unity with them? We must define *love*. Humanistic love will cause us to compromise the gospel to please people (Galatians 1:10), God's love refuses to compromise "the truth of the gospel" (Galatians 2:14), (2) If people speak in tongues, should we not desire visible unity with them, regardless of their doctrine? God desires that all people be filled with the Spirit, but

experience alone is not an adequate basis for unity, The oneness for which Jesus prayed demands truth; the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, guiding the Spirit filled "into all truth (John 16:13).

We have all seen that Jesus' prayer for the unity of His church was indeed answered and continues to be manifested. When we think clearly, does it not border on blasphemy to suggest that any prayer of our Lord would go unanswered or that the answer depends on human works? To work for visible unity builds human ego, but it is a work of the flesh. "Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3). Church history shows us that such unions have never produced revival; rather, to the contrary.

Ecumenical pressures will continue to mount, and various winds of doctrine will blow fiercely against the church. Should we succumb to a fortress mentality, hiding behind our orthodox doctrines and waiting for the Rapture to set us free from conflict? By no means! Jesus is building His church, and He invites us to march with Him as we storm the gates of hell, setting captives free, and establishing churches where the true gospel is preached in power and glory.

"Pentecost Now" is a clarion call to renew our commitment to the Acts pattern of church unity. The same message preached with the anointing of the Holy Spirit and lived in the same voluntary exactitude of holiness will bring the same kind of results as in the first century. Let the Church again be known as in Acts 2:42-47: "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, Then fear came upon them every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common... praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." This is God's will until Jesus comes. *Reprinted with Permission from ENRICHMENT, Spring 1996.* Opal L. Reddin, D.Min., is professor emeritus in Bible and theology, Central Bible College, Springfield, Missouri.