



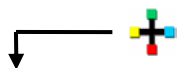
Which Way for "Faith and Order"?

1969

J.E. Lesslie Newbigin

What Unity Implies: Six Essays After Uppsala (ed. Reinhard Groscurth; Geneva: WCC Publications, 1969): 115-132.

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I

"The restoration and fulfilment of the unity of the churches is the most urgent task to which Faith and Order has to call them." With these words the Committee on Faith and Order of the Uppsala Assembly, after giving its full agreement to the decision to pursue the study programme "in the wider context of the study of the unity of mankind and of creation", re-asserted the traditional role of Faith and Order.¹

For some among the most ardent Christians of our day, this concern for the visible unity of the Church appears archaic. They believe that there are much more urgent tasks to which the churches have to be called. This impatience with the traditional concern of Faith and Order can arise from two quite different kinds of conviction. There are those who are passionately convinced that the supreme task facing the churches is to bring the saving good news of Jesus Christ to the millions who have never heard it; that nothing should be allowed to hinder this; and that organizational unity, so far from being a help for this purpose may actually be a hindrance. The largest churches are often the most lethargic in evangelism, and some of the smallest are among the most active. Ecclesiastical unity is not a priority for Christians unless it can be shown (which in this view it has not) that it leads to more vigorous evangelism.

There are other equally ardent Christians who are convinced that the most urgent task facing the churches is to teach mankind how to live as one family, to share the world's food among the hungry, to destroy the powers that exploit men for the profit of others, to break the shackles of racial domination and social injustice. The churches are to be judged, and will be judged by God, according to their record in meeting these demands. If ecclesiastical unity makes for more effective social action it is to be welcomed. Certainly most inherited ecclesiastical divisions are irrelevant to any real social issue. But churchly unity in itself is also irrelevant. What matters is effective involvement in the real concerns of mankind.

¹ The Uppsala Report, *op. cit.*, pp. 233 ff.



In different forms both these protests express the same conviction – that the only thing which matters is the Church's mission to the world, and that unity is important only if it speeds the Church on its mission. Faith and Order must listen to these voices, if for no other reasons than that they echo the voices of its founding fathers. Bishop Brent confessed that the impulse which drove him into his early struggle for the visible unity of the Church was the conviction generated at the World Missionary Conference of 1910, that the world mission of the Church could not be accomplished by a divided Church. The great pioneers were men who were also deeply concerned either with the world mission of the Church, or with its social witness, or with both, and convinced that a divided Church could not effectively either preach the Gospel to the world, or bring healing for its secular maladies. Faith and Order has always been concerned about the *visible* unity of the Church (in contrast to those who were content with some sort of invisible and purely spiritual unity) but it has been concerned with this in the context of our Lord's prayer "that the world may believe".

Therein lies a perennial source of tension. There will always be – on the one hand – the danger that the concern for visible unity becomes an end in itself; that one turns one's back upon the world and becomes absorbed in the intricate problems of theology and practice which are raised by the quest for ecclesiastical unity. There is then – on the other hand – the danger of a reaction, a sort of nausea regarding the Church and an attempt to save the world with some sort of programme which leaves the Church behind. Since God is exceedingly merciful these efforts are not wholly without fruit; they do help to keep the world from corruption, but they also make the work of Faith and Order more complicated.

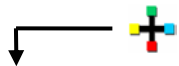
This tension has always been part of the life of Faith and Order and will continue to be so. Several factors can be distinguished in the contemporary manifestation of this tension. The study on the Missionary Structure of the Congregation arose from the concern of the Department on Studies in Evangelism, which found that the very forms of congregational life were a major hindrance to the Church's evangelism. The pursuit of this exciting study has led some participants to the point where they have no further use for the Church in any of its existing forms and call us – in the classic separatist style –



to come out of the sinful Babylon and form new communities of the saints in the places where men really make their decisions by which the world is changed. The growing discernment that God is indeed at work in the great movements of secular history and in the cataclysmic changes in the non-Christian religious cultures has led many to the conviction that we can become fellow-workers with God only by leaving behind our ecclesiastical ghetto and working alongside men of other faiths and no faith to do the things that God wants to have done in the world; and that it is in such groups of fellow-servants of God that the real lineaments of the Church will be discerned. The growth of what may be called a secular ecumenism, a widespread sense among men of all races that the human family is one and that everything which in practice denies this is an offence against God, has led many Christians to feel that the real task for our day is to manifest the unity of mankind rather than to manifest the unity of the Church.

No one whose conscience is functioning normally could fail to feel the force of these movements. Presumably most of those who read these lines will be professional ecclesiastics, and one may express the hope that none of them is a total stranger to that sense of irrelevance and futility which one can feel when coming from dealing with the issues which face mankind as a whole to the issues that sometimes take up so much time in ecclesiastical discussions. Yet Faith and Order is committed, and rightly continues to confess its commitment, to a primary concern for the manifestation of the visible unity of the Church. That commitment rests upon a few basic convictions which can be shortly indicated without being developed in any detail

- the conviction that no human situation is truly understood except in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ;
- the conviction that no human need is fully met except in a relation of repentance, faith and love towards Jesus Christ;
- the conviction that mankind can only be made one through the reconciliation wrought by God through Jesus Christ;
- the conviction that the Church, however much it may be stained and corrupted by the sins of its members, is not irreformable,

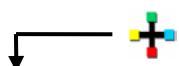


but that so long as the word and sacraments of the Gospel are present in the midst of its life, God the Holy Spirit is at work in them to bring forth fruits.

Sustained by these convictions, Faith and Order continues to concern itself with the manifestation of the visible unity of the Church. It does so, as the Uppsala Assembly stated, within the context of the concern for the unity of mankind. This means that the question which Faith and Order has to ask is not: How can these shattered and twisted bits of the Church be put together again? But: In what ways is the Holy Spirit leading the Church to true catholicity? The visible unity of the Church is to be sought always and only in the context of the Church's calling to be the place where men of every sort will live together as one family in the mutual forgiveness which is made possible by God's forgiveness of our sins through Jesus Christ. To state it in another way: the questions which (in the context of the work of Faith and Order) have to be posed to every existing ecclesiastical body are not only the questions put to it by the other churches, and not only the questions put to it by what the New Testament shows us about the forms of the Church, but also the questions posed by the world within which it is set. The question to be asked will not be simply: What is the form of church order in which all the Christians in this place can live together in one visible fellowship according to the pattern given in the New Testament? But rather: What is the form of church order which will effectively offer to all the *human beings* in this place the invitation of Jesus Christ to be reconciled to God through him? and: What is the form of church order which will effectively offer to *mankind as a whole* this same invitation?

To say this is not to eliminate the tension about which I have spoken. The tension cannot be eliminated and must not be. It can be properly understood only by means of a true eschatology. There is a false eschatology which practically identifies the Church (however defined) with the eschatological kingdom, and therefore finally leaves the world to destruction.

The outline of this false eschatology becomes visible in groups who emphasize exclusively the need to increase the number of those who are explicitly committed to Christ and neglect to place equal emphasis upon the choices to be made and the task to be accomplished



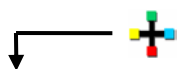
in contemporary secular history. This can appear as an exclusive or excessive emphasis upon Church growth, or in a total concentration upon "being saved", understood as an interior and private event which settles the ultimate eschatological question. In both these forms this is false: the first isolates the Church from the whole purpose of God for the world and makes of it exclusively a remnant saved out of the world and not a leaven given for the world; the second isolates the individual from the saved and saving community and makes salvation a private privilege rather than a sharing in the completion of God's purpose for the whole creation.

There is also a false eschatology which finds ultimate meaning in the development of the human community and has no place for death and judgement. In this view all that matters is that the Church should bear "the form of the servant" but the biblical understanding of the mission of the Servant of the Lord is lost. Everything is subordinated to the demand that the Church should be relevant to the needs of the world. The Church then becomes a rather ineffective auxiliary to a

variety of social and political movements, and loses its authentic character as the bearer of a Gospel which can deal with sin, guilt and death.

The human community this side of death cannot be the object of ultimate loyalty. One can deceive oneself by using abstract phrases such as "justice", "human solidarity" and "world peace", but if these take the place of the actual human beings whose situations they refer to they can become instruments of dehumanisation. The Bible itself speaks typically not of justice as an abstraction but of the righteous judgments of God which are always directed to the human person in the presence of God. The human community cannot be understood in fully personal terms from a point of view which has no perspective beyond the death of the individual human person.

A true eschatology acknowledges the reality of judgment (and therefore the necessity for conversion) and at the same time acknowledges that God's purpose embraces new heavens and a new earth, a City and not only a Church, and that the Church, which is the sign and instrument and first-fruit of God's new creation, is not the whole of it. Without a true eschatology, both evangelism and social action are robbed of the dimension of grace, and the search for the visible unity of the Church becomes an irrelevance. With it, the tension



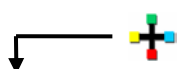
remains between the concern to build up the Church and the concern to leave the Church for the sake of the world. But it is a fruitful tension. Within that tension the search for visible unity is understood as the quest of true catholicity – a catholicity which is continually received as a fresh gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church which is willing to abandon its own life for the sake of the world.

In recalling Faith and Order to its primary task, the Uppsala Assembly also expressed its dissatisfaction with the word "manifestation" as a description of what has to be done. There is a sense in which what we are doing is to bring to light a unity which is there, although hidden. But this is not the whole truth. The disunity of the Church is not simply an illusion which has to be dispelled; it is a sin which has to be repented of, a wound which has to be healed. Things have to be recognized, but things have also to be done. Therefore, the Assembly spoke of "the *restoration* and fulfilment of the unity of the churches" as the most urgent task to which Faith and Order has to call them. There is a work of healing to be done which requires immense patience, a background of knowledge and a practical skill which do not come without hard labour. This is the specific task of Faith and Order within the wider fellowship of the World Council of Churches, in collaboration where appropriate with other Departments of the Council, and in fellowship with all the theologians of non-member churches who are willing to give their help. It is the task for which Faith and Order has been, in some measure, equipped by the grace of God through more than half a century of experience. It should be pursued with vigour and without apology.

II

The Uppsala Assembly Committee, on Faith and Order began by considering the significance of the statement adopted at the previous Assembly on "The Nature of the Unity we Seek".¹ The adoption of this statement was an important moment in the history of Faith and Order. Its importance may be gauged by the number and strength of the opinions expressed before the Third Assembly against any attempt to define the nature of the unity which the World Council of Churches seeks. At the very beginning of its history, immediately after the founding Assembly, the Council had to face the

¹ The New Delhi Report, *op. cit.*, pp. 116 ff.

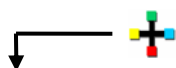


criticisms of those who feared that, by joining the Council, they had committed themselves to some particular view of the unity of the Church, or had relativized their own ecclesiologies. The

answer to these fears was contained in the declaration of the Central Committee at Toronto³, which stated that the Council sought to promote the study of the Church's unity but that by membership in it the churches were not committed to any particular view of the nature of that unity. This statement was, and has remained, an extremely important basic document of the Council. There were many who expressed the view that any attempt to go beyond this, and to state more precisely the nature of the unity we seek, would threaten the very basis upon which the member churches had come together. It is, therefore, an extremely important fact that, after many years of discussion and revision, a statement on the nature of the unity we seek could be accepted by the Assembly, and that the statement has been generally welcomed and accepted among the member churches.

The primary emphasis of the statement falls on the unity of "all in each place" who confess the name of Jesus, but it immediately goes on to make clear that this local unity is to be the local expression of a universal unity which embraces all in all places and all ages who have confessed the same Name. The biblical basis for this emphasis can be most simply stated by reference to the teaching of the First Epistle of John – especially chapter 4 verses 7 to 21. The primary manifestation of the gift of God's love in Jesus Christ must be the mutual love of those who have received it. This mutual love is to be manifested first of all in love for the brother whom we have seen. If this is lacking, nothing else can make up for it. "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another." Here is the primary "visible" mark of the Church. If Christians do not love their Christian neighbours enough to live with them in one family, other evidences of their discipleship will not atone for this defect. Therefore, the unity of all in each place is fundamental. But this unity is not the unity of which Christ speaks unless it is recognizably an out-cropping of that wider unity which binds together all who confess him as Lord. If it is not it is not

³ The Church, the Churches and the World Council of Churches, reprinted in *A Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement 1927-1963*, edited by L. Vischer, St. Louis, Mo., 1963, pp. 167 ff.



Christian unity. Therefore, while it is logical to speak first of the unity of all in each place, it is essential to the truth of the statement to add immediately that this unity must be recognizably an expression of the Catholic unity of all in every place and time who bear the Name of Jesus.

The course of events since the Third Assembly has made it necessary to develop further the New Delhi statement in two directions.

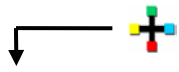
The meaning of the phrase "each place" calls for a great deal of reflection. It was always recognized that "place" could not be defined only in geographical terms, that it must include the circumstances in which men and women are made – in effect – neighbours and colleagues even though they live far from each other. Studies since the Third Assembly have directed far more attention to the significance of these non-geographical "places".

The practical implications of the phrases "in all places" and "in all ages" require a great deal of further study. What, specifically, is needed in order to satisfy the requirement that local unity shall be recognizable as a local expression of the unity of the Catholic Church in all ages and places? Many of our most difficult problems are involved in trying to answer this question.

We shall give some attention to the questions which present themselves when we look in these two directions.

1. In a static society of the traditional type, the place where a man lives is also the place where he works, pursues his private interests and enjoys his leisure. His whole life is lived among the same group of neighbours. In such a society the visible form of the Church which corresponds to the first clause of the New Delhi definition will be a single geographically determined congregation. But it is characteristic of modern mobile and developing societies that a man lives his life in several neighbourhoods. Not only is it typical of modern urban man that his place of

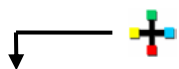
work, where he spends the greater part of his waking hours, is remote from the place where he has his home and his family; it is also true that his leisure hours are likely to be spent in other places and among other people. There are, therefore, many "places" where he is to be found, many neighbourhoods within which he lives. The people with whom he works are not his



neighbours in the place where he resides, and those with whom he spends his leisure *may* be still others. If, in such a society, the form of the Church is related exclusively to the place of a man's residence, then the consequence may follow that the great part of his working life falls outside of the influence of his faith. Alternatively it may happen that the form of church life is unrelated either to the place of residence or to the place of work, and a man's religion becomes conformed to the pattern of his leisure-time activities. Or again, if the forms of the Church could be so perfectly adjusted to this multiform pattern of society that there was some form of Christian togetherness related to each of these sectors of a man's total life, would the effect be that his religion contributed to the disintegration of his personality into a number of unrelated "roles" rather than to his integration into a whole person?

There are many questions here which call for research and experiment, but it is quite clear that the unity which we seek will have to include a great pluriformity if it is to fulfil the fundamental theological requirement upon which the New Delhi formulation is based. It is in relation to this need for pluriformity that we must consider the classical discussions concerning the form of the Church, discussions which have often centred round the attempt to absolutize one element among all the forms of church order which have appeared in history. One must emphasize the fact that the need here is not only for study but also for experiment. This implies also the willingness to take risks. It implies a willingness to believe that the Holy Spirit can lead the Church outside of the lines that have been laid down in the past, even in the very ancient and venerable past. The Uppsala Report has focused our attention upon the fact that true catholicity depends upon the continuing activity of God the Holy Spirit within the Church. We cannot doubt that we in our generation will be called upon, by the manifest leading of the Holy Spirit, to contemplate innovations as radical as that which the Early Church was called to make when the Holy Spirit bade Peter go and visit the house of Cornelius. Such radical departures from tradition will cause debate and dissension in the Church now, as they did then, but these must be faced in a spirit of courage and responsibility.

At one point this need for experiment confronts us with a very urgent practical question: at the point of inter-communion. One of

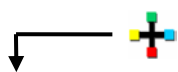


the striking features of the present situation is that groups of Christians, drawn from different traditions into shared involvement in some concrete human situation, have insisted – sometimes against ecclesiastical authority – that their discipleship required of them a common sharing in the Eucharist. This demand does not arise from a relativizing of the existing ecclesologies. Nor is it a mere demonstration – a gesture unrelated to the full responsibilities of churchmanship. It is not a sort of ecclesiastical promiscuity. It arises precisely out of that conviction which has been the strongest element in the thinking of those who have opposed the practice of intercommunion between divided churches – namely the conviction that the common sharing in the Eucharist cannot be severed from the common sharing in the whole life of the Body, and vice versa. Many of those who have been engaged in responsible and costly experiment, directed towards finding the true form in which the Church is to be present in a given "place" (for example in the midst of the civil rights movement) have been led to the conviction that, as a necessary part of this "form" of the Church in that place, they must be able to share together in the Eucharist.

Such a development presents the churches with an urgent choice which they cannot evade.

If all such actions are treated merely as acts of disobedience (there may be some which should be so treated) then the effect will be that some of the most dedicated Christians will be driven to forms of reformation which involve a total breach with the existing forms of the Church – with all the tragic consequences which this must entail. If, on the other hand, such acts are approved, then this calls for a thorough re-thinking of much of the traditional teaching regarding the forms of the Church. What cannot be done in such situations is to postpone decision, in the belief that theological study is a matter which should not be hurried. Real decisions are made according to a time-table which is determined by God and not by the theologians. Real decisions have to be made at the time when real choices are presented. It is an illusion to imagine that we can take our own time about deciding. Decisions which we do not make at the proper time are taken out of our hands.

2. The New Delhi statement also spoke about unity "in all places" and "in all ages" and the Uppsala Assembly called attention to the need for theological exploration of the implications of these phrases. Two groups of questions are raised here.



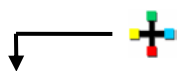
What are the forms of the Church's life which are necessary to ensure that it is recognizable as one body in all places and in all ages?

What are the conditions which must be fulfilled if any form of Christian togetherness in one "place" is to be recognizable as a local manifestation of the unity of Christians in all places?

A. It was one of the early achievements of Faith and Order, in the 1920's, to secure a wide-spread agreement among Protestants that the form of a future united church must include elements of three forms which had traditionally been opposed to each other: episcopacy, presbytery or synod, and congregation. The series of plans of union produced during the 1920's, one of which -that of South India – has produced a united church, would have been impossible without this consensus. The time has probably now come when it will be necessary to give much attention to two other elements in the total picture of church order – the conciliar and the papal.

The development of councils of churches at all levels has been one of the characteristic features of church life in the past half-century. It is difficult to believe that the churches could have made even the weak and fumbling attempts they have made to cope with the needs of rapidly changing societies without the means of councils of churches. They have made it possible, in many cases, to develop new forms of ministry to men in situations with which the traditional forms of the Church were incapable of dealing. It may, therefore, be asked whether these councils are merely *instruments* of the churches, or whether they are not also partial and embryonic *forms* of the Church, or rather elements in that plurality of forms in which alone the Church can effectively minister to man in the pluriformity of his social existence. This question of the meaning of councils of churches will take on a new sharpness as the discussion of the possibility of Roman Catholic membership in the World Council of Churches proceeds.

In the earlier days of Faith and Order, owing to the absence of Roman Catholic participation, the question of the place of the papacy in the totality of church order was not much considered. It is not only the full participation of Roman Catholic theologians in the work of Faith and Order, but also the increasing pressure upon the churches to act coherently as a single world-wide family in the context of man's

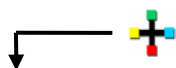


growing sense of the oneness of the human family that makes it inevitable that this question should be raised. The same arguments which have led reformed theologians to recognize the value of a personal episcopate within the *totality* of the Church's order, may also lead non-Roman Catholics to recognize that there is a place for a centre of primacy within the total ordering of the life of the churches as a world-family.

The present discussions by Roman Catholic theologians on the concepts of collegiality and conciliarity in their relation to the Petrine office open the way for a fresh consideration of this matter by those outside of the Roman obedience. So long as non-Romans were confronted with the assertion that there is no salvation outside of the papal communion, there could be no real dialogue. It is a quite different matter if the questions are posed in such forms as the following: What does the New Testament teach concerning the place of Peter among the Apostles? What bearing does this have on our understanding of God's will for the form of the Church today? How far do the demands for effective Christian witness and action in the world of to-day point to the need for a centre of primary pastoral and teaching authority for the whole Church? These questions must surely form an essential part of the agenda of Faith and Order in the coming years.

These questions concerning the forms of the churches' global unity must be discussed in the context of the wider unity of mankind and of the Church's role as the sign, instrument and foretaste of that unity. This means that these queries will be asked not only in the form: What kind of global unity, and what forms of universal authority, does the New Testament and the traditions of the churches authorize?, but also in the form: What kinds of structure, of authority, of fellowship will enable the Church to minister to man in the pluriformity of his social existence? By what kind of order will the Church be recognizable to men as the one family into which it is God's will to draw all men by the Holy Spirit to be one body whose Head is Christ?

When the question is asked in this way, it will be seen that the answering of it will require not only the knowledge of theologians and biblical scholars, but also that of sociologists and students of politics. The forms of the Church's unity cannot be conceived



without any reference to the forms of man's natural social life. If the Church is to be truly present as one family in each "place", and also recognizable as one family in all "places" then its structure will also have to be complex and pluriform, so ordered that men in every "place" receive a relevant and intelligible invitation to become related as brothers to those who are given to them in that "place" as neighbours. At this point the work of Faith and Order will call for collaboration with the Department of Studies on Mission and Evangelism and with Church and Society.

B. The clarification of the phrases in the New Delhi statement about "all places and all ages" also requires a question to be put – so to speak – in the other direction. The statement says that the unity we seek requires not only the unity of all in each place who confess Christ, but also that such unity should be recognizable as the local manifestation of the unity of the Catholic Church. Not all local groups of Christians are so recognizable. We spoke earlier of the need for bold experiment, and for trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to lead the Church far beyond its accustomed paths. This radical boldness, based upon trust in the Holy Spirit, is not to be confused with a mere vitalism which wishes to rush in wherever something interesting is happening. This latter can easily degenerate into a kind of paganism in which whatever is vital and prolific is identified with the divine. Not everything that flourishes is the work of the Holy Spirit. The marks of the presence of the Holy Spirit are the explicit acknowledgment of Jesus, release from guilt and the maturing of the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace and the rest. The more we insist upon the necessary pluriformity of the Church, if it is to be truly present as one body in each "place", the more we have to insist upon the necessity that all who bear the Name of Christ should have a strong personal experience of the reality and power of the Holy Spirit. Pluriformity requires strength, not weakness, in the elements from which the forms are wrought. Insistence upon uniform and rigid structures can be a substitute for inner spiritual strength. Pluriform and flexible structures can only exist if the material is strong. The search for relevant structures in a pluriform society must go along with the deepening of the personal experience of every member of the reality and power of the Holy Spirit.



Perhaps the word "pluriformity" is too colourless a word to express what is needed here. We are at the beginning of a period in which organized structures of society are being broken up, accepted patterns of behaviour overturned, venerable axioms disputed. We must expect that this process will continue with increasing violence for some time. It is easy to say that the current ecclesiastical structures are inadequate for such a time and that we need new, varied and flexible structures. But it is also easy – very easy – to go on from this to a whole series of futile essays in assimilation and adaptation by which the Church loses its own authentic being and message. We have to look forward to a time when Christians have to bear their witness from within a great variety of new and changing human groupings which are being shaped by all kinds of violent and often contrary forces. If they are to do this it is not only necessary – negatively – to set loose to the forms of church life inherited from the past: it is even more necessary – positively – 'to strengthen mightily these things by which alone the Church lives as an ordered society within a disordered world.

I refer to the things by which a deep and unshakeable personal commitment to Christ is sustained. These include, I believe, the Scriptures, the sacraments and a ministerial order through which word and sacraments are continually made available to the whole Christian society, by which the whole society is able, through common prayer and worship to celebrate continually God's unconquerable purpose for the whole creation.

III

Is the restoration of the visible unity of the Church something of really primary importance for the Christian today? Is it not far more important to be concerned with the unity of the whole human family? It would be quite unrealistic to publish a volume such as the present without taking these questions very seriously.

It is necessary to ask what exactly is meant by the phrase "the unity of mankind" in the context of the present discussion. There is no doubt that this phrase has strong emotional reverberations at the present time. The development of means of travel and communication have brought us for the first time in human history to the point where ordinary men and women in all continents are aware of

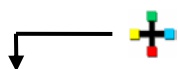


the fact that their destiny is linked with that of people in all other parts of the world, that in the long run none of us can prosper unless all share in the development of a higher standard of living, and that – on the other hand – the disaster of nuclear warfare could destroy human civilization as a whole. Five years ago, in the middle of the "Development Decade" one would have written that mankind was being united in a common drive for "development", aimed at bringing the "under developed" countries up to the level of the "developed". Today the hollowness of these ideas has become rather obvious. "Development" is not a criterion by which any significant judgment can be made unless we have answered the question "development in which direction?" When the students of the so called "developed" countries are proclaiming in violent terms their total repudiations of the kind of society which has been held up to the "under developed" peoples as the goal of their efforts, it becomes rather absurd to speak of "development" as the goal towards which mankind is moving forward in unity.

The truth surely is that men know that they depend upon one another; that this knowledge now embraces the whole human family in a way that was never so before, but that this knowledge does not create unity. It can indeed give an extra element of violence and bitterness to the fears and resentments and envies by which brothers have been divided from one another since Cain slew Abel.

To speak of the unity of mankind is to speak both of what is and of what ought to be. The

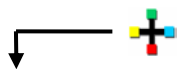
phrase would have no emotional power if it did not include in its connotation both of these elements – both an assertion that mankind is in some sense one, and also a conviction that men ought to be one in a sense in which they are not. The tragedy of our human situation is that in both respects we are deeply divided. We do not agree about what it is that constitutes the human unity that is, or about what is needed to create the unity that ought to be. A Buddhist, a Marxist and a Christian can all speak with deep feeling about the unity of mankind. But in their understanding of what constitutes the given unity, and in their programme for achieving the unity that ought to be, they are separated by irreconcilable differences of belief. Nothing worthwhile is accomplished by their agreeing to talk about the unity of mankind. There is no escape from the painful and even tragic necessity of confrontation between the rival faiths about what that unity is and must be.



The Christian Church exists only as the sign and first fruit and instrument of God's purpose for mankind as a whole. This purpose is one which reaches beyond death and sets the human person in a context which transcends the particular historical process in which he is involved. The Church knows that the full dignity of the human person is restored to him here and now when he accepts the status of a son of God through Jesus Christ. This dignity is given not as the end product of an age-long process of development, but here and now as a gift of supernatural grace. The Church believes that this gift of sonship here and now has become possible because the Son of God was made man, suffered, died and rose again. The unity which God has given to mankind is -our common creation in his own image; the unity which he wills to give to mankind is by the restoration of that image which includes repentance, the forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with him through the blood of Christ. The true service which the Church can render to the unity of mankind is its own living witness to the reality of a restored and shared sonship manifested in the existence of a reconciled family embracing all men of every description – manifested in its life and interpreted by its preaching of Jesus Christ.

In the great prayer of John 17, our Lord is reported as saying that he had given to the disciples the glory which the Father had given him, that they might be one, in order that the world might believe that he was the one sent by the Father. The glory here spoken of is the glory of an only son of the Father. It is the glory of restored sonship. This is Christ's gift to men – that they should be restored to the dignity of being sons of God. But this dignity is contradicted if those who have received it are not recognizable as one family. Only if the world can recognize in them the one family in which all men of every kind can be at home, will the world believe that in Jesus alone is the true unity of mankind to be found.

How is the world to recognize this? What kind of visible order will embrace all the vast variety of human circumstances, temperaments and abilities without destroying the unity of one family? How can God's people be so free and foot-loose that they can be instantly and relevantly present in each new situation into which men are thrust by the ever accelerating processes of social, political, cultural, economic and technical change, while remaining nevertheless recog-



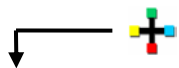
nizable as one people bearing witness to our Saviour? How can we find structures for a common life which are flexible enough to set Christians free for service and witness in every new situation, and yet firm enough to save us from being "carried about by every wind of doctrine" and dominated by every self-appointed "leader"?

The quest of such unity will require a more rigorous and humble self-examination than we have yet brought to it. There is no part of our inherited ecclesiastical structures which will not have to be critically examined again and again with this supreme question in mind.

But more than this critical self-examination is needed. The visible forms of the Church are

not given once-for-all with the Gospel; they are continually being re-created by the work of the Holy Spirit. The Uppsala Assembly has given the right direction for the work of Faith and Order with its document on the Holy Spirit and the Catholicity of the Church. The Church can only be truly "for all men" according to God's will, if its members are willing to be driven by the Holy Spirit into relevant engagement with the concerns of all men in all their varied and changing situations. It is in this sense that the search for unity is to be pursued "in the context of the unity of mankind". It is not that there is given to us another concept of human unity than the evangelical one, and that we must fit our quest for Christian unity into it. Rather, Christian unity is to be the sign and instrument of God's offer of unity for mankind through the Gospel, and that for this purpose the Church must develop such "joints and bands", such sinews and tissues of common Christian life, that those who have received from Christ the gift of sonship may be enabled to live one common life while being engaged to the full in all the varied situations of mankind.

The Bible gives us no ground for believing that God has other plans for the unity of mankind than that which he has set forth in Jesus Christ and of which he has made the Church to be first fruit, sign and instrument. In the great high priestly prayer Christ is reported as saying that he does not pray for the world, but for those whom God has given him. It is through them that the world is to be brought to faith in its one Saviour. This is not popular doctrine at the moment, but it is scriptural.



At an earlier stage in the ecumenical movement it used sometimes to be said that unity was necessary for the sake of mission. This was, of course, never more than part of the truth. Today it might be nearer the truth to say that mission is necessary for the sake of unity. That too would be much less than the full truth. But it draws attention to the crucial point for this moment in ecumenical history. "The unity of mankind", conceived as some kind of secular hope, is an idea which evokes a ready response among people who are divided in their ideas about what it means. It would be a grave error if Christians should begin to think that the unity of the Church is something smaller than this, something sectarian and unworthy of the greatest effort. The only programme for the unity of mankind about which the Church can speak with confidence is the one which was announced by him who said: "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." The Church is the first-fruit, the sign and the instrument of that promise. It is her business to go to and be present in every human situation to manifest and proclaim, without arrogance but also without timidity, that thus only can mankind find its unity. The same Holy Spirit who empowers her for this mission, will also teach her the forms of unity by which it may be made possible for all men everywhere to recognize in her the true family of God, to believe in Jesus as Saviour and to find in him the dignity of sonship.

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