



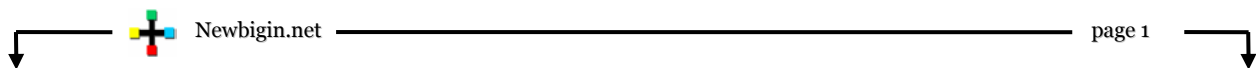
The Basis and the Forms of Unity: Second Peter Ainslie Lecture

1984

J. E. Lesslie Newbigin

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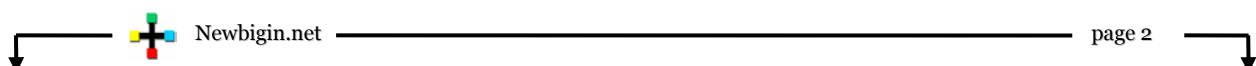
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I am greatly honored by the invitation to give the Peter Ainslie Memorial Lecture. The whole Christian world is in debt to the Disciples for the faithfulness and persistence of their advocacy of the cause of Christian unity; and, the establishment of this lectureship is a very fitting way of honoring a great man's memory by providing occasions for this advocacy.

It would be idle to pretend that the cause of Christian unity is a popular one at the present time. The ecumenical enthusiasm of the years following the second world war is now a matter of past history. We in England have recently lived through the collapse of the proposals for a covenant between the Church of England and the Methodist, Reformed and Moravian Churches. That event marks the end of the movement which was launched by the famous appeal to all Christian people of the Lambeth Conference of 1920. Unlike the almost contemporary call of the Ecumenical Patriarch for something like a league of churches to parallel the League of Nations, this was an appeal for full organic unity on the basis of the Bible, the ecumenical creeds, the two sacraments, and the historic episcopate in a representative and constitutional form. A year previously Anglican and Reformed Churches in South India, in the famous *Tranquebar Manifesto*, had called for just such a unity. For nearly thirty years, along with the Methodists in South India they worked and prayed together, until in 1947 a united Church was born.

I vividly remember how firmly we believed in those exciting days that our union in India would open the way for similar unions all over the world. Already there were negotiations on the same lines in Australia, New Zealand, East and West Africa, and Canada. Our own experience of the rich fruitfulness of a convergence of episcopal, synodical, and congregational traditions made us innocently convinced that it could be only a matter of time before others were eager



to follow. But it has not so happened. The Lambeth Conference of 1948 was unable to approve of what had been done in India. One after another the plans of union in different parts of the world in which Anglicans were involved were abandoned. The echoes of the Lambeth Appeal gradually faded into silence. And when the General Synod of the Church of England failed by a small margin to approve the English covenant proposals, it was clear that that sixty-year chapter was closed.

As one surveys this particular phase in the story of the search for unity it is not easy to point to any particular reason for failure. I have the impression that the most important reason is simply the inertia of denominational traditions, the inbuilt commitment of large organizations to their own self-preservation. This will always be an immensely powerful counter-force against any movement for reunion. It is surely for this reason that the proposals for a kind of unity which leaves the denominational structures intact are so attractive. 'Reconciled diversity' is the title by which these proposals are dignified. They are attractive just because they do not call the denominations to surrender their separate identities. They cost nothing and they achieve what they cost. They evade both the demand of truth which requires us seriously to wrestle with our differences until we come to a common mind, and the invitation of love which calls us to be ready to live as brothers and sisters in one family even while we fall short of full mutual understanding.

But beyond this negative factor, there are in the present scene powerful forces which positively attack the movement for reunion in the name of other commitments. Among these I would refer to three. There is, first of all, the new evangelical fundamentalism which is uninterested in old ecclesiastical structures and demands the proliferation of new forms of Christian corporate witness. This is a hydra-headed movement which it is difficult to characterize except in very broad terms. It defines Christian commitment in ways which make the old faith and order discussions irrelevant. It is, I think, best understood as a counter-attack against the increasingly explicit paganism of our modern western societies. It is, in this respect, part of the wider spiritual movement which expresses itself in resurgent religious fundamentalism all over the world and most notably in the world of Islam. It is something which must be taken very seriously and to which I must return in a moment.

There is, second, the often repeated and very understandable view that defines Christian obedience almost exclusively in terms of action for justice and peace between nations, races, and classes. For this view also, the traditional issues that have divided the churches through the centuries are irrelevant. And who can fail to feel the force of this contention? Many of the matters of which the Churches justify their separation are indeed small as compared with the greater matters of justice, mercy, and compassion. Yet there remains an inherent absurdity in a situation where churches preach

peace and justice to the world and are yet unable to achieve peace and unity among themselves. One does not have to live very long before learning that today's achievement of justice in the political order becomes the basis for tomorrow's injustice. If the Church is not to dissolve into a number of temporary political or ideological crusades, it must somehow be recognizable as the sign and foretaste of a justice which is God's eternal righteousness in the presence of which all are judged and all are forgiven.

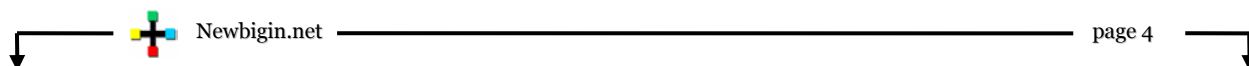
There are, thirdly, those who claim that unity must extend beyond the frontiers of the churches and include all the communities of faith by which men and women live: Judaism, Islam,

Hinduism, Buddhism, and the ideologies which do not claim to be religious. We have to go forward, it is suggested, beyond the narrow limits of ecclesial unity to the wider vision of the unity of humankind. This alone is the real ecumenism, for does not the word *oikoumene* denote precisely the whole family of humankind? Yes, indeed, but the question which remains unanswered here is: What is the center around which the human family is to be made one?

The Christian faith is that God has provided that center in the man Jesus Christ in whom both God's justice and God's peace are effectively made available to all human beings without exception. If this is not true, then one has to ask: What is the center which is being offered? However that center is defined, it will be in-competition with other proposed centers. There is no escape from this universal human predicament. If it is true, then it is surely necessary that the people who call themselves Christians, who affirm that Jesus Christ is indeed God's gift of justice and peace to the *oikoumene*, should themselves be so fully surrendered to his total gift and claim that all other gifts and claims are relativized, treated as of secondary importance, so that the name of Jesus is enough to characterize their corporate being.

The ecumenical movement rests upon the recognition of the decisiveness and finality of Jesus, and therefore the relativizing of everything else. The invitation to move from an interchurch ecumenism to an inter-faith ecumenism is not an enlargement of the ecumenical movement but a reversal of it. The World Council of Churches stands or falls on its fundamental confession "Jesus Christ God and Savior according to the Scriptures". It cannot accept an invitation to relativize the name of Jesus in favor of some other absolute. This is in no way to deny the necessity for serious inter-faith dialogue and cooperation; it is only to ask for clarity about its presuppositions.

In these rather negative remarks I have been trying very briefly to sketch the factors which seem to have effectively removed Church unity from the top of the agenda of most Christians today: the challenge of inter-faith relations, the call to political action, the upsurge of evangelical fundamentalism, and the inertia of denominational structures. I want now to speak positively of two



questions which these developments force upon our attention; namely, the question of the basis of unity and the question of its visible forms.

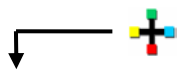
I take first the question of the basis of unity. Perhaps what I am now to say is obvious, but it is sometimes the obvious which is overlooked.

The basis for unity is in the triune nature and action of God. Because God the Father has given his Son to us, and in the incarnate Lord Jesus Christ he both freely declared his nature and effected his purpose, and because he continues by the work of the Spirit to disclose that nature and effect that purpose from generation to generation, from race to race, by drawing men and women to him, we are under the obligation of love and faithfulness to bring every thought, every activity, and every visible form of organization into subjection to him. There is one God and one mediator between God and human beings in whom he wills to reconcile all things to himself. Therefore those who are the bearers of his mission must themselves be reconciled. This is, perhaps, obvious, but it has implications for the movements in our time which relegate visible Church union to a low place in the agenda.

For those who are rightly concerned with mutual understanding between people of different faiths, it means that we bring to our meeting with them the simple testimony that God has in fact

done this, so that while we are humbly ready to receive new insights, correction and reproof from them, we continue steadfastly to direct their attention to Jesus as the one in whom God has made himself fully known. For those who are rightly concerned about political action, it means that we take our stand wherever possible on the side of the relatively just cause so far as we can discern it, and yet bear witness all the time to the justice of God manifested and effected in the cross of Jesus Christ, before which there is no innocent party but all are judged as enemies of God and at the same time accepted as beloved children of God.

For those who are so consumed by evangelistic zeal that they have no patience with the old-established Churches and their unwillingness to change, it means being willing to recognize that Jesus is greater than the understanding of him that anyone has. It means, therefore, being willing to accept fully the fellow-discipleship of those whose style of Christian life and witness is very different from one's own, because if anyone truly confesses Jesus as Lord, then he or she - like it or not - is part of the body of Christ; and I cannot cut myself off from that disciple without wounding the body of Christ. Finally, for those who cling too closely to the long-established denominational structures, it means recognizing and accepting the consequences of the fact that allegiance to Jesus means going the way of the cross, the way of gain through loss, of life through death. It means, therefore, being willing to surrender the security of the familiar, established order in order that Christ may be glorified in something new.



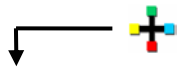
All of these four examples illustrate one thing, that there can be no movement towards unity except on the basis of a deep, personal commitment to Christ. As I have said, this may be obvious. But it still needs to be said. May it not be that the faltering of the movement for unity in the past two decades has been partly due to the fact that we have not sufficiently emphasized what we may call its interior dimension, this total commitment to Jesus which belongs to the most secret center of our being?

If I interrogate my own experience and ask what it was that made me move out of the secure shell of the Reformed tradition and become deeply committed to total solidarity with men and women of very different Christian traditions, I would have to answer that it was because I met men and women who were so truly in Christ, living a life hid with Christ in God, that I could not go on accepting separation from them in the life of the Church. It is this interior dimension which is surely central, the source of any real life that the ecumenical movement has. In so far as we have neglected this, often because we have simply taken it for granted and given all our attention to the externals of unity, we have lost the one spiritual resource by which unity is made possible. To say this is also to draw attention again to the fact that the most fundamental form of work for unity of the Church is sustained and persistent intercession. The initiative of men like Abbé Couturier of Lyon can never become outdated.

The outward expression of this inward relationship will be witness to the sufficiency and finality of Christ in every human relationship. Timidity about the claim of Christ to be the Savior of the world (and there is a lot of this timidity in our churches) cannot co-exist with a deep and costly commitment to unity. It is only if Jesus is indeed supreme above every other name or power or principle or program that the unity of his people is really essential. He is, in simple fact, the one in whom the Father purposes to unite all people, all nations and all created beings, making peace by the blood of his Cross. Because this is so it is of the very essence of the Church that it should be one - a sign and firstfruit and instrument of that unity. To put it again in another way, the unity of the Church is only truly understood in conjunction with its nature as holy, catholic, and apostolic. It is to be holy, totally consecrated to God in Christ to the exclusion of every other claim; it is to

be catholic - embracing all humanity and all truth in all its manifoldness; it is to be apostolic - continuing in all nations that mission which was entrusted to it as its birth in the words of Jesus, "As the Father sent me, so I send you." Only so will it be one.

As I have said, these thoughts on the basis of union are perhaps obvious, but they need to be stated again and again because the obvious can be the most neglected. When we move from the discussion of the basis of unity to the discussion of its forms, we move into areas of controversy where little can be taken for granted.



Perhaps I can best begin by referring again to the model of 'reconciled diversity', to which I referred earlier. The important thing about this model for unity is that it takes the denominations as its starting point. The essential components of the universal church in this scenario are the denominations. Each of these will, of course have its own ecclesiology with its distinctive view about the relative importance of the local congregation, the synod or assembly, and the bishop or chief pastor. All of these ecclesiological differences are, so to say, bracketed out. The basic unit of the universal Church is the denomination, however diverse and mutually incompatible may be the principles upon which the various denominations are internally structured.

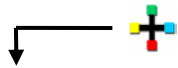
What is a denomination? You are familiar with the judgment of Richard Niebuhr that "Denominationalism represents the moral failure of Christianity."<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, in a volume of essays published six years ago, denominationalism is celebrated as the great and dynamic gift of American Christianity to the evolution of Christendom<sup>2</sup>.

It is true, I think, that denominationalism had its prime source in the American religious experience. John Wesley used the phrase "real Christians of whatever denomination", but the word on his lips had its original non-technical sense. It simply meant Christians of whatever label. Wesley had no intention of forming what is now called a denomination. The idea would have horrified him. What is now called a denomination is neither what would have been called in Wesley's day a church nor what would now be called a sect. To quote the words of Winthrop Hudson, in the book to which I have referred, "No denomination claims to represent the whole Church of Christ. No denomination claims that all other churches are false churches. No denomination claims that all members of society should be incorporated within its own membership."<sup>3</sup>

It is basic to the idea of the denominations that the Church in its New Testament sense cannot be fully identified with any visible human institution. The Church is essentially invisible: what is visible is a variety of human institutions which represent diverse essays in the direction of churchliness, living, one hopes, in friendly rivalry but making no exclusive claims to the name of the one holy catholic Church.

This idea of the Church is so much part of our culture that it is difficult for us to stand back from it and look at it critically. Perhaps it will help us if we recognize, as I hope to show, that this way of looking at the Church is one aspect of Western Christendom's at-tempt to cope with that profound change of consciousness which 'called itself "the Enlightenment", and of which we are the heirs.

1. Social Sources of Denominationalism, page. 25.
2. Denominationalism, Edited by Russell E. Richey (1977).
3. Op. cit., page 22.

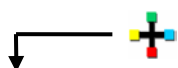


If we turn to the New Testament it is clear that the word 'Church' is applied quite simply and realistically to visible bodies of very sinful human beings. It is applied equally to local congregations and to the entire body of those who belong to Christ. Schmidt, in his article in Kittell's dictionary, helpfully shows how this double usage is possible. Like the word "Kingdom", the word Church, *ecclesia*, is a dynamic word which requires the subjective genitive to describe the one whose power is at work. The kingdom is the kingdom of God - God's active putting forth of his kingly power. So also *ecclesia* is shorthand for *ecclesia tou Theou*, the assembly of God - God in action to draw all persons to himself in the crucified and risen Christ. Both these words are misconstrued when the noun is taken in isolation from the action of God which is the source of it. The Kingdom is the kingdom of God i.e. God assuming his sovereign power. The Church is the assembly of God, God drawing people by the power of the Spirit into the allegiance of Christ. God is thus acting in Corinth, in Ephesus, in Rome, in the household of Priscilla and Aquila, and everywhere in the world, and so in all these places one can speak of this as a single action: God assembling his people. It is one action of God in each place and in all places because God is equally present in each place and in all places.

This action is for all people. In contrast to what is said of the denominations, it is claimed that all members of society should be incorporated into this gathering. The Church is in fact simply the provisional incorporation of all humankind into the new humanity of Jesus. It is a very striking, and often unnoticed fact that the primitive Church refused to take advantage of the protection which Roman law gave to what were called the private cults, and never used to describe itself by any of the Greek words such as *heranos* and *thiasos* which were freely used by the many religious fraternities of the Hellenic world. These were companies of people seeking personal salvation through various forms of learning and discipline and religious practice. They enjoyed legal protection for the same reason that denominations enjoy legal protection in our society: they did not make the total and exclusive claim which the Church made and which it expressed in its self-chosen name: *ecclesia tou Theou*, a claim which the State is bound to acknowledge. The *ecclesia* was the Public assembly to which all citizens were summoned by the town clerk to discuss and settle the affairs of the city. The *ecclesia tou Theou* could only be the assembly to which all men and women, citizens, slaves, Romans, barbarians, were called not by the town clerk but by a much higher authority - an assembly in which even the imperial claim of Caesar could only have a subordinate place.

The Church of the New Testament is a visible body of men and women who have ascertainable names and addresses, and it does claim the allegiance of all without exception.

It is not a denomination. That is why, although hostile critics like Celsus referred to Christians as members of a *thiasos* - as one might say, a denomination - no Christian of the first three centuries



ever used that word of the Church. They understood the Church to be the assembly to which God Almighty was summoning all peoples. That is why a collision with the imperial power was inevitable.

We know what followed that collision. The classical world ran out of spiritual and intellectual fuel. The empire submitted to the Church, and the Church inherited some of the powers of the



Empire. The long centuries that followed the baptism of Constantine created the Christian civilization of Europe, but finally ended in the disastrous religious wars of the seventeenth century. It was not surprising that Europe turned its back on the attempt to interpret public affairs in the light of the Christian vision. In that decisive moment of conversion which those who passed through it called "Enlightenment", Europe hailed as the dawning of a new light, in which things could be seen as they really are, a vision of reality based on the concepts of the autonomous reason and con-science. The old vision was dismissed as superstition. The centuries in which Europe had been Christianized were seen as the Dark Ages. A new age dawned in which light would banish darkness and truth would banish dogma. Of course, like all conversions this one was long prepared. But the decisive turning point was here.

The crucial point for our present purpose - what happened to the Christian vision - was that, being banished from the public sector, it was relegated to the private. The Christian faith became a private option. The Church was no longer the *ecclesia tou Theou* but a religious fraternity for those who wished to make use of its services. The public field - for example, in education - is now controlled by the Enlightenment's view of how things are. World history is no longer taught according to the outline suggested by the Bible, in which the key figures are Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Paul and the clue to the meaning of history is found in the events recorded in the New Testament. It is taught on the basis of the belief that history is to be understood as the story of the development of civilization and its climax is, of course, the modern world, or that part of it which calls itself civilized and developed. In this vision the biblical figures disappear into the margin and the central place is occupied by Greek art and science, Roman law, the rise of the nation state, the industrial revolution and the new technology.

The other model for world history is left for the private instruction of the members of the religious societies who choose to exercise the private option. The visible form of this privatized religion is precisely the denomination, a body of people who, exercising their freedom as autonomous individuals, join together to practice and propagate the religion of their choice. Such a body actually makes no total claims. It does not claim the allegiance of all, but only of those who care to join. It is not the *ecclesia tou Theou* of the New Testament. It is precisely a *thiasos*, a private association of religiously minded people. And even if all of these associations could agree to co-exist in friendly cooperation, the result would not be the Church as the New Testament portrays it.

If we are faithful to the New Testament, then, we have to confess that all our denominations are living in an illicit syncretism with an alien ideology, the ideology of the Enlightenment, of the sovereign autonomy of the individual, of the pursuit of private happiness as the innate right of every human being, of a world which is-as far as its public life is concerned - radically atheist. We shall not understand what is going on in the world today, the fury - for example, of the popular Islamic assault on so-called modernization, unless we see how cultures rooted in older traditions view our kind of civilization as an evil force, a threat to basic human values, destroying the foundation of society by rejecting the sanctity of the marriage vows, dissolving the ties of obedience that bind children to parents, and exalting self-interest and ruthless competition as the keys to success. The Christian Churches have lived for two centuries in an illicit syncretism with this pagan ideology and are now reaping its bitter fruit.

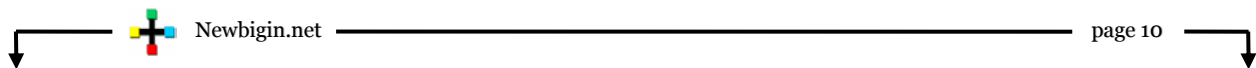
The Christian Church is not a series of alternative options for the private life. The Church of God, as it is portrayed in the New Testament writings is nothing less than the provisional in-corporation of all humankind into Jesus Christ as the one Lord to whom all allegiance is due. That calls for a visible form of unity in each place and in all places such that every human being of whatever race

or nation, of whatever style or character, of whatever taste or temperament, can find in it the true home where the special gifts of each are exercised for the good of all. Such a society, in contrast to the denomination as we know it, must make a total claim on every human being, but it can only make that claim if it is as open-textured and as many-faceted as the human race itself.

What could be the visible forms of such a society? I have appealed to the New Testament as the authoritative source for our understanding of the Church's nature. Does the New Testament offer us an authoritative pattern for its visible form? For many centuries people have thought so. Until within living memory theologians confidently appealed to the New Testament for infallible proofs that the congregational, presbyterian, episcopal or papal model was the only one having divine authority.

We are no longer able to accept these infallible proofs. This is not only because they cancel each other out. It is because we recognize that the visible forms of the Church have changed in the course of history. Indeed we can see these changes taking place within the pages of the New Testament itself. The institution of the twelve apostles is the earliest of all the visible forms of the Church portrayed in the New Testament, but it disappeared within a generation. Clearly the Church order implied by the Corinthian letters is very different from what we see in the Pastorals.

The visible forms of Church order change. It is proper that they should do so. The Church's structures are continually being adapted to the structures of society. If the Church were a *thiasos*, a private



association of religiously minded people, it could, no doubt, develop its structures entirely to suit the convenience of its members. But if it is truly the *ecclesia tou Theou* and therefore the provisional in-corporation of humankind into Christ, then its structures will be shaped in accordance with the structures of society. The Church, in other words, can only be a sign of God's intention for all humankind if it is in each segment of society a relevant sign of God's intention for that segment.

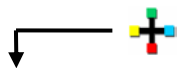
So the Church has to be the Church for the village, for the city, for the nation, for the community. Hence there have developed through history such structures as the parish, the diocese, the province. No doubt this always brings danger. The Church may become the Church *of* the nation or the community, instead of the Church *for* the nation or community. In the effort to be relevant it may lose its power to confront the world with the claim of Christ. In seeking to be the Church for the nation it may become the national Church, a sacralized version of the national ethos. We are then in the world of the *ba'alim*, the false gods. But the existence of these dangers must not lead us to suppose that the structures of the Church can remain immutably fixed through all the changes of time and place through which the Church must pass in its mission. We cannot read off one divinely given ordering of the Church by appealing either to the New Testament or to any later century - the fourth, sixteenth or any other.

Does this leave us, then, with no given criteria for judging between alternative models of unity? I take it for granted that unity cannot be something merely invisible and spiritual, or something which is expressed only by occasional gestures. I take it that unity in Christ is a kind of mutual solidarity which requires all the members to take the same kind of responsibility for one another as is implied in Paul's metaphor of the body. The solidarity is indeed a critical solidarity. It involves and requires freedom for mutual correction and criticism, as well as for mutual sustaining and comforting.



But what guidance do we have as to the visible form of this unity? If we have to reject the absolutist and exclusive claims that have been made in the past for pope and bishop, presbytery and congregation, are we left with no guidance from the New Testament as we seek forms of unity relevant to our contemporary?

To me there are two principles which are embedded in the very center of God's revelation of himself in Jesus Christ and which can provide us with the essential criteria we need. The first I would call the principle of leadership in the way of the Cross. At the heart of the gospel record stand the words of Jesus: "Follow me." These stand at the very beginning of all the four Gospels. Only at the end do we learn fully what following means: it means going the way of the Cross. Anyone who has seen Pasolini's film of "The Gospel According to St. Matthew" will have indelibly printed on one's memory the picture of Jesus striding ahead of his disciples, pausing



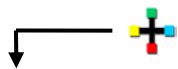
every now and then to throw a few sharp, pithy words to them over his shoulder, and then storming forward to face the next bastion of evil or suffering that holds out against the invading reign of God. That picture, I think, defines one essential aspect of the Church's unity. The Church is the company of those who follow Jesus in his encounter with the rulers of this world. He leads, they follow.

But when he calls them to follow it is in order that they also may call others. This pattern of personal leadership is indelibly printed into the life of the Church. Leadership means taking personal responsibility for decisions which may be costly. It means not sheltering behind majorities. It means the courage to take lonely decisions. But - and here is the difference from all other leaders—it is leadership in the way of the cross: not self-aggrandizement, but self-negation. "if anyone would follow me let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." When Jesus launched his Church into the world with the words "As the Father sent me, so I send you", he accompanied the words with a sign. He showed them his hands and his side. And the apostle Paul shows that he has understood this, for when his claim to apostleship is questioned, his answer always is, quite simply, that he has followed Jesus in his tribulations.

Here, then, is the first principle which is embedded at the very heart of the record: personal leadership in the way of the cross. The second I would describe as the principle of supreme care for the marginal. This stands out unmistakably in the teaching and the practice of Jesus. He cared supremely about those whom society relegated to the margin; the outcastes, the untouchables, the hundredth sheep, the little ones who are easily caused to stumble. A ninety-nine per cent majority was only an imperious call to look after the one that was missing. Here is no deification of majorities but a sustained concern for the last and least.

These two elements, deeply embedded in the witness of the New Testament, provide criteria for decision about the forms of the Church and visible unity. I repeat that these forms must always be relative to the structures of the society within which the Church has to minister. The Church does not exist for itself, but as sign, instrument, and foretaste of God's purpose to sum up all things in Christ. Therefore the Church is always for the society within which it lives, and its outward forms will be such as will enable it to function assign, instrument, and foretaste of God's intention for *that* society. But in seeking relevant forms it will be controlled by the two criteria I have suggested. At each level - local, regional, provincial, national, global - it will seek to ensure both the freedom for personal leadership modeled on the leadership of Jesus, and the provision for involving all the membership as far as humanly possible in the life and activity of the whole. This

will call for a Proper balance and a mutually correcting and sustaining interaction at every level between the personal and the synodical elements in Church leadership.



If this is accepted and we can agree to abandon the untenable claims for dominical authority traditionally claimed for structures which have developed at different times in different circumstances, there is room for a great deal of flexibility in relating the structures of the Church in different places to the differing structures of society. In particular, those of us who stand in the Protestant tradition will have to abandon the idea that the nation-state provides the ultimate parameters of Church order, and recognize that some sort of personal pastoral primacy recognized throughout the world will have to accompany the development of conciliar structures of unity on a transnational level.

I do not think it is possible to go beyond these very general indications in speaking of the forms of visible unity. But I am sure that we depart decisively from any foundation in the New Testament if we accept as the basic units of a future united Church the denominations as we now know them. They are not the building blocks of the universal Church. They represent the retreat of the Church into the private sector when the public world was abandoned to the pagan ideology which rules over the so-called developed world. The struggle for Christian unity cannot be severed from the recovery of a genuinely missionary confrontation with our so-called modern culture, in which the Church will be seen again as the *ecclesia tou Theou*, the Assembly to which God summons all peoples and in which no other sovereignty is recognized but his. Such a confrontation will restore us to the authenticity of the early Church which knew that the claim of Christ was finally incompatible with the claim of the power that ruled the world.

The victory of Christ is won not by force of arms but by the power of faithful endurance. We need to recover that image of the Church which the New Testament gives us but which we have almost discarded: the company of those who follow the Lamb. But for that we shall need above all a recovery of that interior dimension of the struggle for unity - a total personal commitment to Christ which makes any separation among those who share that commitment intolerable.

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