

5-1-1963

A Study of the New Testament Basis for Christian Unity

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36042

A STUDY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT BASIS
FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the
Western Evangelical Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Divinity

by
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May 1963

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

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Statement of the Problem

In contemporary Christianity there is an active potent force. The manifestation of this force is evidenced by various organizations and is known as the ecumenical movement. It is the objective of this movement to seek Christian unity and to make it visible to the world.

In spite of the vast amount of discussion, both past and present, concerning the subject, there is little agreement as to the nature of Christian unity. This has been shown in Chapter III of this paper. Therefore, it is the purpose of this study to discover what constitutes the nature of Christian unity, as taught in selected passages of the New Testament, to learn the basis upon which Christian unity may be made manifest to the unbelieving world, and to analyze the philosophies of unity of the World Council of Churches and the National Association of Evangelicals for their conformity to the New Testament teaching.

Justification for the Study

The ecumenical movement is of great importance for Christendom. It is perhaps the most important movement of

this century in Christianity. It is a new trend in Church history. Kenneth Scott Latourette states that, " . . . Christians of different denominations are working together as never before and in a growing variety of ways."¹ Latourette further says that:

The centuries-long movement toward divisions has been reversed. No longer is the trend toward more and more rifts in the "seamless robe of Christ". . . . With gathering momentum Christians have been drawing together.²

Therefore this study is justified for the following reasons:

1. Unity as a live issue today has affected or probably will affect every Christian organization, and, in turn, every Christian. This can be seen in the growth of the World Council of Churches. In 1948, when the Council was formed, there were 151 member Churches. In 1961, after the Third Assembly, there were approximately 200 member Churches, with 350 million members.³

2. Christians not only are drawing together in visible unity, but also are discussing the nature of Christian

¹Kenneth Scott Latourette, The Emergence Of A World Christian Community, p. 44.

²Ibid., p. 17.

³News Item in the Oregonian, December 6, 1961.

unity as they have never done before. The World Council of Churches now has a somewhat definitive statement on this subject, but there is still considerable disagreement as to the nature of unity. Also, there has been little appeal to Biblical authority and teaching in seeking unity by the majority of those in the ecumenical movement. Thus, this paper has sought to give the New Testament teaching on the subject of unity and to attempt to supply this deficiency.

3. This study is justified also by the personal interest of the writer in Christian unity because of the relationship of the Salvation Army to the movement. The Salvation Army was a charter member of the World Council of Churches, joining in 1948. The Salvation Army has maintained one delegate on the Central Committee from that time, and in 1961 The Salvation Army was represented at the Third World Assembly of the World Council of Churches by twelve delegates from four continents. The Army delegation was representative of the international scope of its work. At the present time The Salvation Army has one delegate on the Central Committee and one delegate on the Executive Committee in the United States.

Objectives of the Study

In solving the problem stated above, the following

objectives have been guides for this study:

1. To discover how one becomes a member in the body of Christ.
2. To discover the New Testament doctrine of the term the "Body of Christ".
3. To discover the relationship between the Body of Christ and the visible Church on earth.
4. To discover the basis upon which individual Christians are united to each other.
5. To discover the basis for working together as Christians from the objectives listed above.
6. To discover the philosophies of unity of the World Council of Churches and the National Association of Evangelicals.
7. To compare these philosophies with the New Testament concept of Christian unity as discovered in this study.

Limitations of the Study

This report was limited to select passages from the New Testament which refer to the area of investigation. The majority of these passages were taken from the Pauline Epistles. Passages from I Peter and John's Gospel are used as supporting evidence for the Biblical teaching. Since the writings of the men, from whom the passages have been chosen, represent over half of the New Testament books, the passages

chosen are characteristic of the teaching of the entire New Testament.

Also, this investigation has concerned itself with only two of the organizations in the ecumenical movement--the World Council of Churches and the National Association of Evangelicals, in the United States of America. This was done because these two groups have shown the main philosophies of Christian unity as they obtain today.

This study has not given a complete report of the World Council of Churches or its Commissions, but has only given enough of its history to show its philosophy of unity. Also, this investigation has not undertaken an analysis of the National Association of Evangelicals, but has given the views of representative leaders of the group.

Definitions

Inasmuch as the subject of this paper is concerned with the nature and manifestation of Christian unity, reference is often made to the Church. There are many shades of meaning for this term and the writer feels there should be a common understanding of what he means when he uses this word.

In this paper, the term "the Church" has referred to what is known as the invisible Church of the believers of all ages. The term "the visible church" has referred to the

whole of what is known as Christianity visible on earth. The term "the churches" has referred to denominations or extensions thereof. The meaning of the word "Church" when used by others in this paper has not necessarily followed the above definitions, but when such differences of meaning are present their variation from the meaning cited above is evident.

Assumptions

It has been assumed to be true for this paper that the Bible is the infallible, authoritative word of God. It is the revelation of God to man, and all of Christian belief and life are based upon its teachings. There is no higher authority for Christians than this book. Therefore, every view of Christian unity must be judged in the light of the authoritative Scriptures.

From the above it has been assumed that a doctrine must be Biblical to be Christian and that only those persons are Christians whose lives and beliefs are in accordance with the teachings of the Bible, particularly in the New Testament.

Method of Procedure

The criteria for this report has been an inductive study of select New Testament passages relating to the nature of the Church, and the unity of the believers. The research

was in the area of discovering Biblical meanings.

Once Biblical meaning had been determined, this study moved on to consider the relation of doctrine to Christian unity. Then, in Chapter Four, a survey of primary sources was made for the purpose of discovering the main philosophies of the nature of Christian unity in the ecumenical movement. This has been a historical approach as concerns the World Council of Churches.

Finally, a comparison was made between the New Testament concept of Christian unity and the philosophies of unity of the ecumenical movement studied in this paper. In this connection, also, a comparison has been made between the New Testament basis for manifesting unity and the views of the organizations investigated in this paper.

Statement of Organization

Chapter Two contains the studies of the New Testament teachings, as to how one becomes a Christian, the New Testament doctrine of the term "the Body of Christ", and the basis upon which Christians are united to each other.

Chapter Three has shown the relationship between the Body of Christ and the visible Church on earth. The chapter concluded by explaining the basis upon which true Christian unity can be manifested to the unbelieving world.

Chapter Four contains the report of the philosophies

of unity in the ecumenical movement, according to the limitations of this study.

Chapter Five contains the summaries and conclusions of the study, including the comparison between the New Testament concept of Christian unity and the philosophies of unity of the ecumenical movement studied in this paper.

Sources

Three versions of the New Testament have been used in this study--the King James Version, the Greek New Testament and the New English Bible. The latter has been the basic source used in explanation of Christian salvation. The reasons for its use in specific passages is explained in the body of the study.

The New English Bible was published in 1961 in England by a committee of Biblical and literary scholars, according to a statement in the introduction. It was their purpose to give

. . . a faithful rendering of the best available Greek text into the current speech of our own time, and a rendering which should harvest the gains of recent biblical scholarship.¹

It should be pointed out that the New English Bible is not a revision of an earlier version; it is a completely new

¹The New English Bible, New Testament, p. vii.

translation from the original. The task of the translators has been conceived

to be that of understanding the original as precisely as we could (using all available aids), and then saying again in our own native idiom what we believed the author to be saying in his.¹

In doing this they felt they had returned to the practice of the translators of the King James Version.

In reviewing the New English Bible, F. F. Bruce does not negate the method of translation used. For example, his comment on the translation of the prologue to John's gospel is that considerable success has been achieved in expressing the full meaning of their text. He views the use of translators drawn from principal non-Roman denominations in Great Britain and Ireland as a guarantee of the theological and ecclesiastical impartiality of the New English Bible.

Bruce further feels that the translators are to be congratulated for the excellence of their achievement in this new translation,² and he reminds us that all good translations have been greeted with hostility at first.³ As he closed his review he expressed the desire with the translators

¹Ibid., p. ix.

²F. F. Bruce, "The New English Bible," Christianity Today, V (March 13, 1961), 8.

³Ibid., p. 5.

that under the providence of Almighty God this translation may open the truth of the scriptures to many who have been hindered in their approach to it by barrier of language.¹

¹Ibid., p. 8.

CHAPTER II

THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING CONCERNING THE BODY OF CHRIST

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I. INTRODUCTION

There are several symbols used in Scripture to designate various aspects of the Church. One of these is the symbol of the human body. This figure is used more than fifteen times in the New Testament.¹ This figure is used extensively in this study and there are several reasons for doing so.

First, this figure, as used by Paul, teaches the unity and diversity of the Church. Second, because of this, a true picture of Christian unity can be formed upon the basis of a study of this term. Third, this term is found in literature of the ecumenical movement and a Biblical investigation will help solve the main problem of this study.

In Colossians 1:18 the body is called the Church.² It is to be noted that Christ is called the head of the body

¹See Appendix A.

²Colossians 1:18, "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence". K.J.V.

which is the Church. This reference to Colossians 1:18 is sufficient to show us that the body of Christ is related to the Church. It will be part of the problem of this chapter to discover in what manner the body of Christ is the Church.

II. MEMBERS IN CHRIST

In determining the relationship of the body of Christ to the Church it is necessary to discover the relationship of the body of Christ. The writer wishes to show in this section the relationship of the individual members of the body to Christ and how this relationship comes about. The method of showing how one becomes united with Christ will be through a study of the greetings of several of Paul's epistles. Paul's manner of addressing the recipients will show their relationship to Christ and, in part, what it means to be a Christian.

The following greetings of the epistles are taken from the New English Bible:

From Paul, apostle of Jesus Christ at God's call and by God's will, together with our colleague Sosthenes, to the congregation of God's people at Corinth, dedicated to him in Christ Jesus, claimed by him as his own, along with all men everywhere who invoke the name of our Lord Jesus Christ--their Lord as well as ours (I Corinthians 1:1, 2).

From Paul, apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will, and our colleague Timothy to the congregation of God's people at Corinth, . . . (II Corinthians 1:1).

From Paul, apostle of Christ Jesus, commissioned by the will of God, to God's people at Ephesus, believers incorporate in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:1).

From Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus to all those of God's people, incorporate in Christ Jesus, . . . (Philippians 1:1).

From Paul, apostle of Christ Jesus commissioned by the will of God and our colleague Timothy, to God's people at Colossae, brothers in the faith, incorporate in Christ (Colossians 1:1, 2).

The reasons for use of the New English Bible in this section are as follows:

1. The particular words used by the writer from the New English Bible explained what he wanted to say better than from another version. Justification for this is noted further on.

2. Bishop Newbigin, a leader in one part of the ecumenical movement, makes use of the same words in his comments on Christian unity.

God's People

It will be noticed from the quotations above that several phrases are common to each quotation. One of these is the phrase which refers to the recipients as God's people. In these verses the translators of the New English Bible have translated the Greek word hagios as "God's people". The translators of the King James Version, on the other hand,

render the word as "saints". Literally translated this word means "holy ones".

The translators of the New English Bible have not made an error in their translation. There are two words in the Bible which signify holiness. These are the Hebrew kadosh and the Greek hagios.

The primary meaning of kadosh is "to set apart by God as his very own." It conveys the idea of divine ownership. We read in the Old Testament . . . of the holy nation, separated from the rest of the world to be God's very own.¹

Thus Kik reminds us that the root idea of holy is that which has been set apart for God and separated from anything which is ungodly. The Greek word hagios conveys the same meaning in the New Testament as kadosh did in the Old Testament.²

F. F. Bruce describes the word hagios as meaning "the people whom God has set apart for himself".³ Alford, in his Greek Testament says the term

is used in its widest sense, as designating the members of Christ's visible Church, presumed to fulfill the conditions of that membership.⁴

84. ¹J. Marcellus Kik, Ecumenism and the Evangelical, p.

²Ibid.

³F. F. Bruce, The Epistle To The Ephesians, p. 25.

⁴Henry Alford, The Greek Testament, III, p. 68.

Therefore justification has been shown for translating hagios as "God's people". Certainly those who have been set apart for God as his own are His people. It has been noted that the recipients of these epistles are called God's people, but how did they become such? The answer to this question is given in the following remarks.

Incorporate in Christ

In Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians another phrase is seen which is common to all three. The phrase spoken of is this: "incorporate in Christ".

Even in I Corinthians 1:1, the phrase "in Christ Jesus" could have been rendered the same way, for the Greek word en has been translated by the New English Bible as "incorporate in" in Ephesians 1:1, Philippians 1:1 and Colossians 1:1. On the other hand, the King James Version translates these passages as I Corinthians 1:1 is translated above.

Why is there a difference between the translations of the King James Version and the New English Bible? It may be explained by the fact that the scholars of the New English Bible translated the idea of the phrase, while the King James Version translated the Greek word en in a literal manner. The reason for the different method of translation

is given on page eight of this study. In spite of the difference, it seems that all would agree with the meaning of the contemporary translation.

Thus the study of the epistles under consideration shows that in three directly and two others indirectly, God's people are those who are incorporate in Christ. Being incorporate in Christ is the manner in which these people became God's people. It is necessary now to determine the manner of personal incorporation into Christ. This phase of the study follows.

There is one more common phrase that must be looked at in the passages quoted above. In Ephesians 1:1 and Colossians 1:2, according to the King James Version, it is "the faithful" that are incorporate in Christ.¹ The New English Bible, on the other hand, has translated "the faithful" as "believers incorporate in Christ" in Ephesians 1:1, and "brothers in the faith, incorporate in Christ" in Colossians 1:2.² It would not be an injustice to render this last phrase, "the believing brothers, incorporate in Christ", for

¹Ephesians 1:1, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:" K.J.V.

Colossians 1:2, "To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." K.J.V.

²See pages 12 and 13 for these scriptures.

this is the sense of the term "faith" here in Colossians.

F. F. Bruce corroborates the above rendering for he states: "Paul describes those to whom he sends this letter as 'saints and believing brothers in Christ' who live at Colossae."¹

In Ephesians 1:1, Bruce says the saints are "believers, i.e. those who have placed their whole-hearted trust in Jesus as Son of God, Lord and Saviour."²

Commenting on Colossians 1:2, Charles A. Erdman describes "the faithful" to mean not only trustworthy but trustful.

It is their faith which has brought them into their relation to God, and also into their relation to one another. . .

This faith was "in Christ". The phrase is used by Paul to express the deepest truth, the most profound reality, in the whole sphere of belief and teaching. By it he meant to define that mystical union which exists between Christ and the believer, that relation by which Christ becomes the very sphere in which one lives.³

To sum it up: in the passages we have been studying, Paul is writing to those who are God's people, set apart for God;

¹F. F. Bruce, Commentary on the Epistle to the Colossians, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, p. 178.

²Bruce, The Epistle To The Ephesians, p. 25.

³Charles R. Erdman, The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon, p. 32.

people who are incorporate in Christ, and who are such because they are believers in Christ's sacrifice. These people became God's people by becoming incorporate in Christ Jesus, and the means of incorporation was belief in Christ. They were not always God's people, for there was a time when they were not incorporate in Christ Jesus and were unbelievers.

Peter corroborates Paul's teaching when speaking to Christians in his first epistle. He tells them that once they were not a people but now they are the people of God (I Peter 2:10). Earlier in the epistle he gives us a clue as to how they became God's people. It was by faith in Christ. Speaking of Jesus he says, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom though now you see him not, yet believing. . . . receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls".¹

The fact that faith is, from the human side, the basis for eternal life is found in a statement by John. The purpose for his book was that "ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:31).²

From the verses that have been studied it has been

¹I Peter 1:8, 9, K.J.V.

²John 20:31, K.J.V.

shown that belief in Christ is the vehicle by which we are incorporated into Him. This belief is faith in His death as the means of our salvation. There is of course a reason for these believers in the New Testament to be in Christ. Without Christ they were lost in their sins and deserved death (Romans 3:23). God's wrath abode on those who were not in Christ (John 3:36). Those who were not in fellowship with God were in sin. (I John 1:6). Thus, the significance of being in Christ can be seen. The fundamental purpose was to create a people for God, a holy race, a new humanity.

Before the Fall man was under a covenant of works, wherein God promised him (through Adam, the federal head of the race) eternal blessedness if he perfectly kept the law. Through the disobedience of the federal head, Adam, the creation was cursed, the race fell, humanity suffered, and the community became disrupted. Through the obedience of the new federal head, the second Adam, a new and blessed creation came into being, a new race was lifted up, a new humanity received healing, and a new community experienced unity and harmony. The old covenant of works was displaced by the new covenant of grace.¹

All these benefits required some action on the part of the recipients of God's grace; they had to exercise faith and believe in Christ. Bishop Newbigin declares that "it is through faith that we enjoy all the privileges of incorporation in Christ . . ."² It is not by our works that we enter

¹Kik, op. cit., p. 58.

²Lesslie Newbigin, The Household of God, p. 40.

into fellowship with Christ; neither is it through religious rites. Newbigin further states:

What marks us as members in Christ is not circumcision or uncircumcision but "faith working through love", . . . To be in Christ is to be a part of a new creation wherein the Spirit rules . . .¹

This is an experience with Christ of salvation from sin by the grace of God through personal faith in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:8; Romans 5:1).

Newbigin sums it up in this manner:

The blessing of eternal life belongs to those who have faith righteousness. We are justified by faith; Christ's work is a propitiation by faith; . . . By faith we are saved; by unbelief the Jews were cut off from God's covenant and by faith Gentiles have their standing in it . . . faith is, from the human side, the constitutive fact of membership in the people of God.²

In summary then, membership in God's family, which is by incorporation in Christ, comes through the faith of the individual in Christ and his sacrifice on the cross. As F. Pieper has said,

Only personal faith in the forgiveness of sins which was purchased by Christ's satisfactio vicaria and is proclaimed and dispensed in the Gospel makes one a member of the Christian Church.³

¹Ibid., p. 36, 37.

²Ibid., p. 52.

³F. Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, III, p. 397.

The Content of Faith

Up to this point it has been shown that personal faith in Christ is necessary for salvation from sin and thus for becoming one of God's people. Now in this section the writer wishes to determine how much doctrinal content faith includes.

Is the personal faith mentioned above merely a subjective experience or does it contain some objective content? Does not trust in Christ mean belief in what He had done and what it means, rather than merely a trust in His name?

Paul declares the existence of one faith in Ephesians 4:5.¹ There is divided opinion as to whether this faith refers to the subjective experience of the believer or to the objective content of faith.

J. Marcellus Kik feels that the faith experience of the believer is the meaning of faith in the Ephesian passage, yet the faith spoken of there could never become an experiential reality unless there was a defined content.²

Faith does not originate out of thin air but by means of the message delivered by God-sent preachers who proclaim the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things. This gospel is one. Without objective faith that is one there can be no subjective faith that is one. Diverse gospels produce diverse

¹Ephesians 4:5, K.J.V.

²Kik, op. cit., p. 65.

faiths.¹

In commenting on this verse, F. F. Bruce states:

Faith may denote the act and attitude of believing or it may mean the substance of one's belief. In both senses it is true that Christians have but one faith. It is true if we think of the one faith as the faith which they place in Christ as their Lord and Saviour; it is true if we think of it as "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).²

Paul sets forth the objective content of faith in I Corinthians 15:1-4. The passage is from the New English Bible.

And now, my brothers, I must remind you of the gospel which you received, on which you have taken your stand, and which is now bringing you salvation. So you still hold fast the Gospel as I preached it to you? If not your conversion was in vain.

First and foremost, I handed on to you the facts which had been imparted to me: that Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised to life on the third day, according to the scriptures; . . .

Four things are emphasized here by Paul; the written word, the atonement of Christ, His resurrection from the dead, and the knowledge of salvation. No doctrinal basis is complete without each of these truths.

Twice in this passage Paul told his readers that these truths were "according to the Scriptures." He accepted the Scriptures as the Word of God. As Murch has said,

¹Ibid.

²Bruce, op. cit., p. 78.

The Bible contains an absolutely new and exclusive revelation from God found nowhere else. It tells how a sinful man may become right with God. This constitutes the uniqueness of Christianity over against all other religions of discovery.¹

The second element Paul presents is that Christ died for our sins. Jesus Christ is our Saviour. He took upon Him the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13); He redeemed us with His own blood (I Peter 1:18, 19). He died that He might deliver those who were in bondage (Hebrews 2:14, 15).

He took upon Himself the dreadful guilt of our sins and bore it on the cross. Christ endured the positive wrath of God, the pains of hell and death, and the second death, in our place. The Lord Jesus because of His love tasted eternal death for us on the cross. Thus it is that Christ's cross, His shed blood and His exhibited love constitute the message which breaks the heart of man, changes sinful lives and constitutes a new loyalty in one's obedience to God. The example of the moral teachings of Christ will never do that, but the blood of His cross will.²

The resurrection from among the dead, the third teaching, was the attestation by Christ of what he had accomplished on the cross.

The resurrection is the apologetic doctrine of Christianity . . . It cannot be dissociated from primitive Christianity . . . it is God's seal upon the claims of His Son.³

¹Murch, op. cit., p. 24.

²Ibid., p. 26.

³Ibid.

The fourth emphasis of Paul in this passage is "the knowledge of salvation". These four elements are the gospel which Paul had preached to the Corinthians. The Corinthians had received this gospel and had taken their stand upon it. This gospel had brought them salvation and they had been converted. Even now the gospel was bringing them salvation. Their present life was one in which their faith was active to help them live the Christian life. In response to the faith of the believer God gave them the witness of the Holy Spirit which is the assurance of salvation, for His Spirit beareth witness with the believer that he is one of God's people (Romans 8:16).¹

In this section emphasis has been laid upon the objective content of faith as Paul set it forth in I Corinthians 15:1-4. Faith is also subjective, i.e. the faith of the individual is inward and spiritual. The term faith denotes belief and trust.² The sinner comes to God and lays his sin at the Saviour's feet and trusts Jesus to forgive him.

It has been stated that faith consists in knowledge, assent and trust. Without knowledge one cannot apprehend the way of salvation; without

¹Romans 8:16, K.J.V.

²Erdman, op. cit., p. 32.

assent there is no acceptance of that revealed;
and without trust salvation is not attained.¹

The Unity of Faith

Faith, as well as having an objective content of sound doctrine which is the gospel, is to have unity. Paul introduces us to the concept in Ephesians 4:13.

So shall we all at last attain to the unity inherent in our faith and our knowledge of the Son of God-- to mature manhood, measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ.²

Commenting on this verse Kik states that:

Christ felt that the unity of faith was so essential to the life and well-being of the Church that he endowed the ministry with the gift of the Holy Spirit in order that the Church might come into the unity of faith. The net result would be that "we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine".³

In a previous verse in Ephesians 4, Paul has made reference to the one faith. In this verse he speaks of attaining unity of faith. Yet if there is one faith why is there need for attaining a unity of faith? The answer is that all Christians have the same faith as regards its substance

¹Kirby, op. cit., p. 11.

²Ephesians 4:13, N.E.B.

³Kik, op. cit., p. 69.

but not as regards clearness and purity; because the object of faith may be diversely known, and knowledge has ever such a powerful influence on faith. Therefore . . . true and full unity of faith is then found, when all thoroughly know Christ, the object of faith, alike, and that in His highest dignity as Son of God.¹

Following along this theme, Bruce puts the same thought in somewhat different terms. He speaks of the unity of faith as a spiritual maturity in the corporate groups of believers. In order for there to be corporate maturity there must be spiritual unity. This is the unity spoken of in Ephesians 4:3 where the Spirit fosters a community of believers in a unity of heart. Bruce interprets "the knowledge of the Son of God" as being an experiential knowledge rather than mental comprehension; as an increasing personal acquaintance with Christ in corporate and individual experience.²

Paul speaks of the unity of faith in relation to false doctrine, and reveals the importance he places on true doctrine. As we have noted, Kik feels that the result of our unity is in order that we won't be swayed by false doctrine. As we mature in our spiritual experience we gain stability and are able to stand and not be tossed about.³

¹Alford, op. cit., p. 118.

²Bruce, op. cit., p. 87.

³Ibid., p. 88.

In Ephesians 4:13, which we have been studying, knowledge of the Son of God is added to faith in the Son of God. The fact that knowledge is stressed here adds to the strength of the view that faith has objective content.

The Scripture teaches that unity is inherent in our faith and knowledge of the Son. Unity is a natural quality of the faith of God's people. True Christians are already united in what they believe about the Son. For "faith and knowledge that has the Son of God as the object will bring about genuine unity--a unity that can be destroyed only by heresy."¹

As we have seen, Paul, in I Corinthians 15, reminds the Corinthian Christians of the gospel he had preached to them. Perhaps he had this in mind when he spoke of the unity of faith. In the Corinthian passage previously discussed, Paul relates the preaching of the gospel by himself to the salvation received by the Corinthian believers.

The Gospel recorded in I Corinthians 15, and preached by Paul included belief in the sacrifice of Christ and in the resurrection of Christ. Paul attests the fact that these matters were true because they happened just as the Scriptures said they would. His Gospel also included a knowledge of sins

¹Kik, op. cit., p. 45.

forgiven by God's people.

Thus, certain doctrines must be true for one to become a Christian. Without these doctrines being true no one can be saved, and unless personal belief is exercised then individuals will not be saved. Of course, personal faith is not merely trust in a doctrine but in the reality of that truth. Therefore, if we are Christians according to this view we possess unity--a unity of faith and not only a unity of faith in the objective sense, but a spiritual unity. More on this subject will be discussed later.

Unity of faith consists of agreement on the essential teachings of Christianity. There can be no permanent unity of Christians without this.

The glory of the Christian Church has been the unity of faith throughout the centuries; her shame has been deviations from revealed truth and neglect of Scriptures as the source of faith and life.¹

III. THE BODY OF CHRIST

Introduction

The present day disagreement in the ecumenical movement is not as to whether the Church is the body of Christ. There seems to be agreement on this. However, the real

¹Ibid., p. 70.

question to be answered is whether or not the body of Christ, which is the Church, is in its essential nature a visible organization or an invisible organism. There is agreement that the Church must in some manner be visible, but there is the problem as to whether the Church is only to be something visible; and yet if it is to be visible the marks of visibility need to be defined.

Thus far this paper has attempted to show what it means to be in Christ. The discussion has been centered on the relationship of the individual believer to Christ and how this relationship is brought about.

Our discussion now turns to the relationship of Christ to believers as a group. It is this writer's task to show from the New Testament the relationship of believers as a group to Christ. This involves a study of the term "the body of Christ", and will be an attempt to discover what the body of Christ is, the relation of the body to the term "Church", and to discover if the body is visible or invisible in its essential nature.

Believers Are The Body

As noted earlier, there are more than fifteen passages in the New Testament which refer to believers as being the body

of Christ.¹ Kik believes these passages

reveal that the underlying thought behind the figure is to show a spiritual relationship between Christ and believers. Dependence upon Christ receives emphasis in the figure while the thought of a visible structure does not appear. . . . Organizational unity receives little attention . . . because it would tend to hide the stronger, deeper more lasting bond--Christ Jesus.²

Attention will now be given to several of these passages as found in Paul's epistles. These will be quoted from the New English Bible, and reference will be made to these passages throughout this section.

For just as in a single human body there are many limbs and organs, all with different functions, so all of us, united with Christ, form one body, serving individually as limbs and organs to one another. (Romans 12:4, 5).

Because there is one loaf, we, many as we are, are one body; for we partake of one loaf. (I Corinthians 10:17).

For Christ is like a single body with its many limbs and organs, which many as they are, together make up one body. For indeed we are all brought into one body by baptism, in the one Spirit, . . . now you are Christ's body, and each of you a limb or organ of it. (I Corinthians 12:12, 13, 27).

He put everything in subjection beneath his feet, and appointed him as supreme head to the Church, which is his body . . . (Ephesians 1:22, 23).

There is one body and one Spirit, as also there is one hope held out in God's call to you; . . .

¹See Appendix A

²Kik, op. cit., p. 99, 100.

to the building up of the body of Christ He is the head and on him the whole body depends. Bonded and knit together by every constituent joint, the whole frame grows through the due activity of each part and builds itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:4, 12, 16).

. . . for the man is the head of the woman, just as Christ also is the head of the Church. Christ is indeed the Saviour of the body; but just as the Church is subject to Christ, so must women be to their husbands in everything. . . . For no one ever hated his own body: on the contrary, he provides and cares for it; and that is how Christ treats the Church, because it is his body of which we are living parts. (Ephesians 5:23, 24, 29, 30).

He is moreover the head of the body, the Church. . . . Yet it is from the head that the whole body, with all its joints and ligaments, receives its supplies, and thus knit together grows according to God's design. (Colossians 1:18; 2:19).

Most of these verses have been quoted completely. In them we find much teaching in regards to various aspects of the body of Christ.

There are several main teachings that are evident as these verses are studied. Our review of these verses will be taken in relation to five main teachings, as suggested by Kik, who said

First, the body exists as an organic whole; second, the figure is employed to stress the relationship of Christ to the Church; third, the body comes into being through Christ; fourth, the body receives its unity through union with Christ; and fifth, the concept is spiritual.¹

¹Kik, op. cit., p. 100.

In commenting on the first matter, Paul uses the human body to teach us about the Church. The human body is an organism. It is a whole, made up of related parts that work together.¹ An organism is also something that is alive, as the human body is.² The human body is one--it is an organic whole.

Throughout these passages the believers as a group are likened to a human body. Just as the human body has characteristics which can be seen, so does the body of Christ. The human body is one and has many parts with various functions; in like manner, the body of Christ is one. There is only one body of Christ. This one body of Christ also has many parts which are necessary to the well-being of the whole. (Romans 12:4, 5)

This truth is emphasized over and over again in the verses quoted above. Believers, as a group, not only are likened to the human body, but also are called a body. They are an organism--an organic whole. They are one but each individual believer is a part of this whole. I Corinthians 12:27 says that each of us is a limb or organ of the body of

¹E. Thorndike, Thorndike Century Junior Dictionary, p. 588.

²R. B. Kuiper, The Glorious Body of Christ, p. 114.

Christ. Believers are a body, not just a body in general, but the body of Christ specifically. The believers, as a group, are the body of Christ because of their relation to Christ. Being united to Christ they form one body. (Romans 12:5)

The verses quoted above in Romans and I Corinthians set the explanation for the metaphor. In Ephesians and Colossians the truth of this metaphor is mentioned and applied, but the basic reason for the metaphor itself is not given.

Paul, writing to the Corinthians, describes them as God's people. They were individuals who had been set apart by God as His own. They were holy ones because of their relation to God. He describes them as being in Christ. They lived as followers of Jesus and were dependent upon him for spiritual life. In I Corinthians 12:12, he tells them that Christ is like a single body which has many limbs and organs. Adam Clarke feels that the term "Christ" is used to express the Church or the whole body of Christian believers.¹

In the next verse, (I Corinthians 12:13), Paul tells his readers they have been brought into one body. He concludes in verse 27 by explaining that they are Christ's body with each individual a necessary part of this one body.

¹Adam Clarke's Commentary, VI, 259.

Another truth that has been alluded to is that the body of Christ is a living organism just as the human body; it is a living whole.

It has been stressed in this section that the body of Christ is an organism and a whole. Applying this truth to present day discussion Kik states:

Most scholars agree that an overall organization did not exist in the first century church; yet the apostle teaches clearly that one body did exist. Because individual or groups of Churches have separate organizations does not imply a fragmentation of the body of Christ. . . . The possibility of a fragmented body because of separate organizations is an absurd idea if one grasps the fundamental significance of the figure used in Paul.¹

The Head Of The Body

It has been found that believers as a group constitute the one body of Christ and are an organic whole. In keeping with the plan of section III of this chapter we look at the second truth which comes from a study of the passages quoted above. This truth is that Christ is the head of the body which is called by His name.

It is noted that Christ is the head of the Church, the supreme head, not only of the Church but of all that has been created (Colossians 1:16, 18). From the preceeding passage

¹Kik, op. cit., p. 99.

the glory of Christ's headship is taught. Paul describes for us the majesty of Christ as the Son of God and His functions in that position. Not only is Christ the head of all but he is even the head of the Church.

As we have seen from the passage in I Corinthians 12, there is a relationship between Christ and the believers. They were related to Christ because they were a part of His body.

In the passage under consideration now, a new truth is presented. Paul makes a distinctive contribution to New Testament Christology. He affirms that Christ is the head of the body, which is the Church.

Christ and his people . . . are viewed together as a living unit; Christ is the head exercising control and direction; believers are His body, individually His limbs and organs, under His control, obey His direction, performing His work. And the life which animates the whole is Christ's risen life, which He shares with His people.¹

Even as in Romans 12:4, 5, the believers are united with Christ to form one body.²

Bruce explains that the use by Paul of the term body in Colossians and Ephesians is to show "the relation which

¹Bruce, Commentary on the Epistle to the Colossians, p. 201.

²See page 30.

the Church, as the body of Christ, bears to Christ as head of the body."¹

Paul uses the figure of the body and the head in order to bring out certain aspects of the relation between Christ and the Church.

Bruce states that

from this conception of the Church as the body of Christ we can best understand how Paul can speak of believers as being "in Christ" and at the same time of Christ as being in them. For they are "in Christ" as members of His body . . . He is in them because it is His life that animates them.²

The third teaching of this section is that the body receives life from its head, for Christ is the saviour of the body. This life is spiritual life (Ephesians 5:23). He gives life to those who believe on Him. In I Corinthians 10:17, Paul is speaking of the remembrance of Christ's death. The Corinthians, remembering the words of Christ, broke the bread and drank from the cup, which were the symbols of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. This sacrifice was made that the lost might have life. Thus the teaching of this passage is that those who partook of the loaf i.e. believed on Christ received spiritual life.

¹Bruce, op. cit., p. 202.

²Ibid., p. 203.

John's commentary is similar to Paul's. Christ was the one loaf that was broken that all might live--He was the bread of life. Those who ate this bread, i.e. those who believed in Him would have life (John 5:35, 48, 51).

Christ is the head of the body of believers, and as such the whole body depends upon Him for their existence. He is

the author and dispenser of light, life and salvation to the Christian world . . . from him . . . all the mercy and salvation of the Gospel system is to be received.¹

Not only is the body dependent upon Christ for its existence, but for the continuance of its life. Each part receives the needed nourishment for its growth, that the body as a whole may be as God wishes it. (Colossians 2:19)²

The whole body receives its supplies for growth from the head, and thus grows according to God's plan as each part is dependent on the head. To quote Bruce again:

So it is under the direction of Christ that the various parts of His body function harmoniously together, since they all share one common divine life and grow to maturity under the fostering care of God. . . .³

Actually, without Christ there is no body for without

¹Clarke, op. cit., p. 517.

²See page 31.

³Bruce, op. cit., p. 251.

the head the body will die.¹ The Church, which is Christ's body, has come into existence through His death and resurrection. The Christian life is only such as it is lived in Christ. It is not that we have life because we are in the body but that we are in the body because we have life.

Unity through union. We now come to the fourth teaching of this section. The members of the body are only members because of their union with the head. Earlier in this chapter there was a discussion of the manner in which the member was united with Christ. It was shown that belief was necessary for incorporation into Christ. Through faith the individual became one of God's people.

The subject of this paper has been the discovery of the nature of Christian unity. Up to this time there has been little use of the word unity, yet all has been written to show what unity is. More direct use of this term is now possible.

It can be stated that the members of the body achieve unity because of their union with Christ. They are united with each other because each has become united with Christ, the head of the body (Romans 12:4, 5; I Corinthians 10:17).

¹Kik, op. cit., p. 102.

Some would speak of this as a spiritual unity. Gilbert Kirby, a leader in The World Evangelical Fellowship, expressed his feeling that:

Among all who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity and truth there already exists a real and undeniable spiritual unity which binds us together despite our denominational differences, our geographic remoteness or anything else which would appear to separate us. The Church is one because Christ its Lord is one, and all who are united to Him by faith are also united to each other. Our spiritual unity is supernatural in origin.¹

Visible or invisible. It is to be noted that the fifth and final principle teaching was that the body of Christ was spiritual. This concept refers back to the manner in which the members were incorporated into the body. Naturally, if incorporation into the body is through the sacraments, as some writers suggest, then the body would not be spiritual in its essence. However, if incorporation into the body is through the Spirit and personal faith, the body would be spiritual.

In support of this, the New Testament teaches that we walk by faith and not by sight, and that the essence of faith is the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1). There is a distinction between the temporal and the eternal, between

¹Kirby, op. cit., p. 11.

the material world and the spiritual world (II Corinthians 4:18).

In the Old Testament the prophets reminded Israel that only those with clean hands, a pure heart and who spoke truth in his heart dwelt in God. Paul taught this also in Romans 2:28, 29.

For he is not a Jew which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter.¹

Thus the prophets and apostles did not equate the outward Israel with the inward Israel. To them they were two different groups.

God Himself is a spirit and thus our relationship with Him must necessarily be spiritual. Christ taught this concept in John 4:24. He declared that God was a spirit and if we were to worship Him it must be done in a spiritual manner.

Paul reminds believers that their warfare is not against material objects but against spiritual wickedness (Ephesians 6:12).²

The Church which is the body of Christ is a work of God through the Holy Spirit. It is through the Spirit that

¹Romans 2:28, 29, K.J.V.

²Ephesians 6:12, K.J.V.

new life is received. "Establishing and strengthening unity among the people of God falls within the province of the third person of the Holy Trinity".¹ The Spirit is the agent by which we enter the body.

In I Corinthians 12:13, Paul taught the readers that by the Spirit of God they were baptized into the one body; for by the workings of the Holy Spirit of which they all drank and received they were brought into the body.² On the day of Pentecost there was a spiritual fellowship of the disciples and this fellowship was a reality wherever Christians gathered. This was because Jesus had sent the Spirit to be with the disciples when He left this earth. He told them that wherever they were gathered, even in a small group, He would be there. Thus it is in the person of the Holy Spirit that Christ is present with His body.

God designed that Christians have a vital bond with Christ. Through the Holy Spirit the believer enters into a relationship with Christ. A living relationship to Christ and fellowship with him is authored by the Holy Spirit.³

Pleper states emphatically that:

¹Kik, op. cit., p. 48.

²Clarke, op. cit., p. 261.

³Kik, op. cit., p. 50.

The Church is invisible . . . because the constitutive factor of the Church, faith in the heart, is invisible for men and known only to God (1 Kings 8:39; Acts 1:24). Therefore Christ says regarding the visible coming of the Kingdom of God on earth: "The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation . . . ; neither shall they say, Lo here! Lo there! for behold the Kingdom of God is within you (Luke 17:20-21)."¹

Since incorporation into the body of Christ is a spiritual experience and the body is composed of all who have been incorporated by personal faith,

it is not difficult to understand why this aspect of the Church should be characterized as invisible. We cannot tell with certainty who have been regenerated and who are in a regenerate state. Only God omniscient is able to do that.²

Thus it can be concluded that the body of Christ is spiritual and not material--invisible and not visible in its essential nature.

IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter it was the writer's purpose: to discover, in an overall sense, in what manner the body of Christ is the Church, to show how one becomes a member in Christ, to determine what the body of Christ is and its relation to the Church, and to discover if the body of Christ is visible or

¹Pieper, op. cit., p. 408.

²Kuiper, op. cit., p. 27.

invisible in its essential nature.

The summary of the findings of this chapter follows.

Members In Christ

1. God's people are those who are incorporate in Christ.
2. Personal faith is the means of becoming incorporate in Christ.
3. Personal faith is both objective and subjective.
4. Unity of faith includes agreement on the essential teachings of Christianity.

The Body of Christ

1. The body of Christ is an organic whole--an organism.
2. Believers as a group are the body of Christ.
3. Christ is the head of the body.
4. The body of Christ and the Church are one and the same.
5. The body receives its life from the head.
6. The members of the body are united with each other because each has become united with Christ the head through personal faith.
7. The basis for unity among Christians is their spiritual union with Christ.
8. The body of Christ, the Church, is basically a spiritual entity; therefore it is invisible in its essential

nature.

It was found that the individual becomes a part of God's family by means of personal faith in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. This faith is subjective but faith also has objective content which consists of sound doctrine, which is the gospel (I Corinthians 15:1-4). There is to be unity of faith among Christians in both aspects of faith. Thus, there is both a spiritual unity and a doctrinal unity.

Those who are members of God's family are the body of Christ. Their faith in Christ has brought them into the body. The Scriptures teach very clearly that the Church and the body of Christ are one and the same. All those who are members of the body are also members of the Church. It was found that the body of Christ, which is the Church, is spiritual, because incorporation into the body is a spiritual experience. Since the body is basically a spiritual entity, it is invisible in its essential nature.

As the relation of Christ to His body was discussed, the basis upon which individual Christians are united was discovered. The basis for their unity was their union with Christ. Their unity was based upon the common ground of their relationship with Christ.

CHAPTER III

THE BASIS FOR THE MANIFESTATION OF UNITY

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THE BASIS FOR THE MANIFESTATION OF UNITY

I. INTRODUCTION

This report began with seven specific objectives in mind. There are yet four which need some attention. Two of these are: (1) the relationship between the body of Christ and the visible church on earth and (2) the basis upon which Christians may show forth their unity. These will be studied in this chapter.

In the previous chapter it was discovered that the body of Christ is in its essential nature a spiritual entity, and as such is not seen. It was also discovered that the body consists of individual persons who make up its various parts.

Today there are in existence groups called churches and individuals who are known as Christians. One of the areas of investigation in this chapter will be to find the relationship between the body of Christ, which is the true Church, and the above-named groups and individuals which make up the visible church on earth, as this writer has defined it. Is the visible church the same as the body of Christ? Are all the members of the visible church members of the body of

Christ? It is the immediate interest of this writer, in the first section of this chapter, to discover the New Testament teaching concerning this relationship. When this relationship has been discovered it will then be possible to discuss the basis for visibility.

II. THE VISIBLE CHURCH

In discussing the visible church, we need to be aware of the fact that it can be considered in two aspects.¹ It can be conceived as consisting of all those who are members of the churches. In another sense it may be stated that the membership of the visible church coincides with the membership of the body of Christ (the invisible Church), i.e. only those who are members of the invisible Church are truly members of the visible church.² Thus much confusion in the ecumenical movement may result from a lack of a clear definition of the visible church.

In speaking on this point of differentiation, Francis Pieper says the Christian Church (invisible Church) consists of only those who have received forgiveness of sins. Nothing

¹In order to have a better understanding of the following discussion, the reader should have well in mind the definitions of the "Church" given by the writer on page 5.

²Kuiper, op. cit., p. 26.

else can bring one into the Church. No relation to the churches will make one a member of the Church except there be a relationship with Christ. Pieper would agree with the view that only those belonging to the invisible Church are truly members of the visible church.¹

He speaks of the visible church in the sense of local congregations and churches and excludes from its fellowship the unbeliever for he states:

When we speak of a Christian congregation or local church, we always mean only the Christians or believers in the visible communion. The congregations, too, consist only of believers. As the wicked and hypocrites do not belong to the Church Universal, so they are no part of the congregation either. This is the clear teaching of Scripture.²

The New Testament Teaching

Pieper has introduced us to the concept of local churches and congregations of which the New Testament also speaks. These groups are confined to particular and definite localities on earth for these are churches and congregations which can be written to and spoken to.³

The manner of this study will consist of an analysis of the greetings of Paul as found in several of his epistles.

¹Pieper, op. cit., p. 419.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

These are representative of the teaching throughout his epistles and the New Testament. Reference has been made previously to the greetings of Paul in relation to a study of membership in the body of Christ. These greetings are quoted on pages 12 and 13 of this report. Two additional passages will be included here and will be taken from the New English Bible as were the others.

From Paul, an apostle, not by human appointment or human commission, but by commission from Jesus Christ and from God the Father who raised him from the dead. I and the group of friends now with me send greetings to the Christian congregations of Galatia. (Galatians 1:1, 2).

From Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the congregation of Thessalonians who belong to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. . . . (I Thessalonians 1:1).

There are many other references to local churches found in the New Testament.¹

It will be noticed from reading all of the quoted passages that Paul is addressing certain groups of people in specific places. These places were definite, local and visible. The New English Bible makes use of the term congregation in speaking of God's people, whereas in the King James Version the term used is church. The New English Bible is attempting to put into contemporary language the thought of the Greek term used, as we shall see. However, it is well to

¹See Appendix B.

notice the use of the term church in the King James Version as well, for we are more accustomed to this word in discussions of organized groups of Christians.

The Greek word translated congregation and church is ecclesia (ἐκκλησία). This is defined by Thayer in the following manner:

Prop. a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place; and assembly. . . . in the Christian sense, a. an assembly of Christians gathered for worship. . . . b. a company of Christians, or of those hoping for eternal salvation through Jesus Christ; . . . 1

Therefore, the ecclesia is an assembly, a group of people meeting for a special purpose; in other words it is a congregation. Thus when used by Paul in his greetings, ecclesia refers to a group of people of a certain classification, namely God's people. This is seen in the verses from I and II Corinthians, Ephesians, Philipppians and Colossians quoted above. (It was discovered in the previous chapter just what it means to be a member of God's family). There is no hint in these verses or elsewhere that these epistles were addressed to people that were not believers. The greeting was to only those who were set apart for God.

Joseph Henry Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 196.

Paul teaches in I Corinthians 1:2 that it was impossible to be a member of the congregation of God's people in Corinth, i.e. the church of God in Corinth, unless one was "claimed by Christ as His own". This is the plain teaching of this verse. The epistle Paul wrote to the Colossians was addressed to God's people at Colossae. These people were "brothers in the faith" and "incorporate in Christ", and were each a member of the body of Christ because of their personal faith. Thus we see that the only ones greeted in this epistle were those who were God's people. And again, the letter sent to Thessalonica was written to a group of people in that city who "belonged to God". If a person didn't belong to God he wasn't a part of the church of God's people, according to Paul.

When writing these epistles to these places, Paul addressed only those who were believers, incorporate in Christ, belonging to God and claimed by Christ as His own. It was such persons who made up the local assembly of God's people. In other words, the ecclesia (the congregation or church) was made up only of those who were God's people. If a person did not belong to God then he was no part of the congregation. In Paul's view the local church was, by definition, believers in fellowship with each other. It was not conceived of primarily as an organization. Dr. Nobel Sack

expresses this opinion when commenting on the Church.

Early Christianity thought of it as a spiritual fellowship expressed in the term "ekklesia" (the called out ones), or the "body of Christ". These terms applied to the company of believers, not only in a local sense, but in a universal sense. But after Constantine's time they evolved a new concept of unity. As one scholar puts it: "From now on there was a new emphasis on the Church as an organization."¹

In the introduction of this chapter it was noted that there are groups called churches and individuals known as Christians which make up the whole of Christianity on earth. The purpose of this section was to discover the relationship between these groups and individuals and the body of Christ. The analysis of Paul's greetings has shown that the local church was by definition, a company of believers in fellowship, i.e. a spiritual fellowship. Also it was found that only those who were God's people were members of the local, visible, church.

With the above definition of the local church well in mind, its relation to the body of Christ may then be shown. The New Testament teaching is that the basis for membership in the local, visible, churches is the same as for the invisible Church. This teaching goes a step further and says

¹Nobel V. Sack, "The Problem of Unity In The History of the Christian Church" (paper read at the Pacific District Conference Annual Ministers' Conference General Conference Mennonite Church, Dallas, Oregon, January 26, 1961), p. 11.

that each of the local, visible, churches is the body of Christ. Kik commenting on Paul's idea in I Corinthians 12:27,¹ supports this view.

He (Paul) says, as it were, all that I have described of the universal church, holds true of the Corinthian church. Each individual church has the attributes of the universal and can be described, as Paul does, to be the body of Christ. The Corinthian church was not a fragment or splinter. Paul said "Ye are the body of Christ".²

Church Catholic Visible

The New Testament teaching defines the term ecclesia, translated as church and congregation, as a company of believers in fellowship with each other. However, what about today? What is the relationship of the body of Christ to the "churches"?³

A common concept in the contemporary period is to view the churches as organizations. This thought sets the stage for further comment. It is evident that the churches, as organizations, include in their membership those who are not truly God's people. These are people who belong to the visible, organizational churches but are neither a part of the invisible Church nor of the local, visible, churches.

¹See quotation on page 30.

²Kik, op. cit., p. 108.

³See definition on page 5.

Kik explains this broad view of the visible church which includes persons who are not true believers and calls it the "church catholic visible".¹ "The Church in this sense consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion . . . "2 He then refers to the invisible church by stating:

The concept of an invisible and visible church upon earth does not imply that these are properly two Churches, but one Church contemplated in two different aspects--internal and external.³

The churches include in their membership those who are not truly God's people. Thus, while the external church includes the invisible, there are those in the external church who do not properly belong.⁴

The church catholic visible is made up of particular churches, by which Kik means denominations. If a particular church does not have the marks of the church catholic it ceases to be a church and becomes a synagogue of Satan.⁵

The church catholic visible has a relationship to the particular churches, for common to both the church catholic visible and the churches are the ministry, oracles, ordinances and the presence of Christ and His Spirit. The particular

¹Kik, op. cit., p. 93.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 94.

⁵Ibid., p. 96.

churches are more or less pure as they reflect to the world what the true Church, the body of Christ, is.

It has been determined in the previous chapter that the body of Christ is invisible, and may properly be called the invisible Church. Only those belong to this Church who are united to the Head by the indwelling of the Spirit.

Summary

In this main section, the New Testament teaching was discovered to be that the local, visible, churches consist only of those who are truly God's people. In taking a broad view of the visible church which looks at churches as earthly institutions, we may say that persons are included in its membership who are not truly believers. The visible church in this view is not one with the body of Christ and may not properly be called the body of Christ. There are two main reasons for this:

1. The visible church thought of as consisting of organizations can never be equated with the body of Christ because the body is an organism and not an organization.¹
2. The body of Christ is composed of only those who are God's people. As long as earthly institutions called

¹G. Campbell Morgan, The Corinthian Letters of Paul, p. 154.

churches have as part of their membership, non-believers, they can never be called the body of Christ.

III. THE BASIS FOR VISIBILITY

One of the problems facing the ecumenical movement is how the unity of the body is to be manifested. Some say, if there were one organization called the Church, unity would be shown. Others say we manifest our unity through doctrinal and spiritual agreement. In this section the writer's search is for the basis upon which Christians may show their unity as found in the New Testament.

The Pattern of Unity

The first thing to be done is to make sure there is agreement as to the basis of unity. If there is no agreement at this point, there is no unity to manifest.

It was seen in chapter two that Christians are united to each other when they have been incorporated by faith into Christ, and thus have become parts of His body. They are united because of their common relationship to Christ, the head of the body. Paul, in Colossians 2:18, 19, is attempting to show that false teachers who do not maintain contact with the head of the body

have no true part in that body, since it is from

Christ as their head that all the members of the body acquire their capacity to function in harmony with one another.¹

It may be said, therefore, that the basis for unity is one's relation to Christ.

If there is agreement that unity exists, the next step is to discover what gives visibility to the body. The answer to this is to be found in membership. The body is made up of members and if visibility is going to be shown by the Church it must be done by the members for they are the Church.

It is obvious that the members cannot all come together in one place to manifest unity, "nor may a representative body of the aggregate membership entitle itself as the 'visible' church for it is at the most a partial representation."² Nor can organizational representation be the basis for the manifestation of unity. It must be found elsewhere. In fact, the motivation for visible unity comes from Christ Himself. This is evident in John 17:20, 21, where He said,

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.³

¹Bruce, op. cit., p. 251.

²Kik, op. cit., p. 96.

³John 17:20, 21, K.J.V.

Clearly then, Christ did pray in these verses for a visible oneness among believers, for if the world is to learn of Christ, the teaching will have to come from the followers of Christ. The reason why believers are to show oneness is in order that the world may believe in Christ. This oneness, or it may be termed unity, must be visible if it is to be seen by non-believers. Christ "definitely prays the Father to establish a visible unity among his followers that the world may believe in his mission."¹

It is evident also, as Kik has pointed out, that Christ "defined the unity He desired with the clause 'as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee.' The particle cannot be ignored if one would interpret the mind of Christ. . . . "²

In further support of this, Godet noted that Christ prayed for oneness for his followers and then described the type of unity for which he was praying.

Jesus describes it as a unity of the most elevated order; it partakes of the nature (*patris*) of that of the Father and the Son. As the Father lives in the Son and the Son lives in the Father, so the Son lives in the believers, and, by living in them, He unites them closely with one another. . . . It is by being in Christ and through Him in God (in us), that believers find themselves living in each other.³

¹Kik, op. cit., p. 42.

²Ibid.

³F. Godet, Commentary on the Gospel of John, II, 341.

It is to be noted that Godet alluded to the fact that the type of unity in this prayer partakes of the divine. The unity of the believers was to be patterned after the relationship of the Father and the Son. Along the same line also, Kik says, "the concord that exists between the Father and the Son forms the pattern of unity for which the church must strive."¹ This means that this pattern can be considered as being threefold: one in doctrine, one in purpose and one in love.

The Basis For Making Unity Visible

Not only does the motivation for visible unity come from Christ but also the basis upon which believers may make their unity visible comes from Christ. The pattern of unity referred to above which consists of doctrine, purpose and love describes this basis.

In the Godhead there is certainly a unity of truth. Jesus claimed that He represented the Father in what He said and that "The teaching that I give is not my own; it is the teaching of him who sent me".² Jesus reported to the world the truth that He had heard from the Father.³ Again in John 12:49 Jesus explains that He speaks not for Himself but for

¹Kik, op. cit., p. 42.

²John 7:16, N.E.B.

³John 8:26, N.E.B.

the Father, and speaks the words given Him by the Father. Since Jesus stressed the need for agreement in regard to the truth of God, the Christians basis for visible manifestations must include agreement in regard to truth.

This concept is in line with the discovery made in chapter two concerning faith. The personal faith of Christians was found to be both subjective and objective. It was also discovered that believers are to have a unity of faith which consists of agreement on the essential teachings of Christianity as found in I Corinthians 15:1-14 and agreement as to the experience of salvation from sin.

The Christian's unity of experience and doctrine no doubt eventuates in a unity of purpose. The pattern of Christ we are analyzing shows this concept--Jesus and the Father were united in purpose. In the very familiar passage of John 3:16, we are told that God gave His Son to die. Jesus was willing and eager to do the work of His Father (John 9:4). Jesus explained that He gave His life freely and no one could make Him go to the cross. Christ came to do the will of His Father, which purpose He declared to be the salvation of the lost (Luke 19:10). Christ, being God, loved the lost as much as the Father did.

The final part of the basis for the manifestation of unity is love--the love of one Christian for another. Christ

had taught His disciples to love Him and to love one another (John 15:17). The Bible says that God is love (I John 4:8). One of the fruits of the Spirit is love. Love is in the very nature of God and thus is in the Christian who has been made a partaker of the divine nature (II Peter 1:4).

In this main section an attempt has been made to discover the basis upon which believers may show to the unbelieving world their unity in Christ. We have seen that the unity between the Father and Son forms the pattern of this basis. The basis is truth, purpose and love. As believers love one another and agree concerning truth and purpose, their unity in Christ will be made manifest.

IV. SUMMARY AND EVALUATIONS

Summary

This chapter was made up of two main sections. In one area the relationship between the body of Christ and the visible church was discussed, and the basis for making unity visible was discussed in the other section.

In summary it can be stated that:

1. The invisible Church is the same as the body of Christ.
2. There are two aspects of the visible church in its relation to the body of Christ.

a. The New Testament teaching was that the local, visible, churches consist only of those who are God's people.

b. The visible churches as earthly institutions have persons included in their membership who are not true believers.

3. In order to find a basis for manifesting unity, there already must be unity.

4. The basis for manifesting unity is the pattern of unity of the Godhead.

Evaluation

The fact that there are two aspects of the invisible church in relation to the body of Christ may be a cause for misunderstanding in the ecumenical movement. It makes a great deal of difference to the movement and the type of unity it envisions, as to what is meant by the term the "visible church". Based upon the New Testament definition, the visible church is one with the body of Christ and is in fact the body of Christ. But the visible church as the group of organizations called churches is not one with the body of Christ. Furthermore, it may not properly be called the body of Christ.

The unity of the persons of the Godhead forms the pattern for the basis upon which believers may manifest their unity in Christ, and the believer's relation to Christ is the basis for unity to one another.

CHAPTER IV

PHILOSOPHIES OF CHRISTIAN UNITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

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PHILOSOPHIES OF CHRISTIAN UNITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

I. INTRODUCTION

Today the ecumenical movement manifests itself in several organizational patterns which are attempting to bring to fruition a concept of Christian unity. One of the most important of these organizations is the World Council of Churches. The Council makes the plea for unity, yet only in the past year has it made any type of a definitive statement about the nature of the unity which it is seeking to find. The National Association of Evangelicals is a part of the ecumenical movement also. In contrast to the World Council of Churches, the Association feels that true Christians do not need to seek unity since they already possess it, but only need to seek to determine how to manifest their unity in Christ. This chapter will investigate these two main philosophies of Christian unity in the present-day ecumenical movement.

II. THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

There are not only differences as to the nature of unity, but even the word ecumenical is not always clearly

defined. The word comes from a Greek term which means "the whole inhabited earth"; thus it means universal or world-wide.¹

In this age the word has been given a new meaning. As J. Marcellus Kik has noted, "Today the word ecumenical is given the implication of unity as well as that of world-wide."² In addition, Kik notes that Nathan Soderblom says that "the term 'ecumenical' refers to the expression within history of the given unity of the Church."³

In keeping with what Kik and Soderblom have said, Kik cites the words of Dr. Visser 't Hooft, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, who feels that

The ecumenical movement therefore embraces all such bodies as, on an international, national or local plane, seek to give expression to the solidarity and the fundamental unity of Christians of different confessions and denominations.⁴

Along similar lines, Dr. Norman Goodall believes that Christians constitute a distinctive world-community--a single oikoumene of Christ. To him the ecumenical movement is not a single organization but is a movement to bring unity to the Church.⁵ However, no one definition can be given for the

¹Cf. The Analytical Greek Lexicon, p. 285.; Cf. Thayer's New Testament Greek Lexicon, p. 441.

²J. Marcellus Kik, Ecumenism and The Evangelical, p. 2.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Goodall, op. cit., p. 4.

word ecumenical. It needs to be defined and defined again. The movement is a living thing; therefore the meaning of the term is dynamic.¹

In the ecumenical movement today there are two main schools of thought attempting to give new meaning to the Greek word oikoumene (*οἰκουμένη*). Kik notes that

The first would limit the ecumenical movement to fostering good relations among existing Christian churches, manifesting their fundamental agreement and stressing their spiritual unity.²

The other school of thought would bring the Church into an empirical existence that can be seen. Advocates of this position want to make the unity of the Church visible by an assimilation of all denominations into one visible organized church.³

Since these two schools of thought are represented by two of the organizations of the ecumenical movement, the World Council of Churches and The National Association of Evangelicals, they need to be given further study.

III. THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

The World Council of Churches, after three world assemblies, has not yet finally defined what it means by

¹Ibid., p. 3.

²Kik, op. cit., p. 3.

³Ibid.

unity. For some time it has seen the need to think more deeply about the nature of the unity for which its advocates are praying, but it was not until the last assembly in New Delhi that it came very close to a definitive statement.¹

Previously, in the statements made by the Council throughout its existence, they said that no definition of the Church was intended, nor was an attempt made to describe the nature of the Church. Even in their latest statement in New Delhi, in 1961, this feeling was stated again.² Thus their position remains tentative. Their statement on unity is "not intended as a definition of the Church, and it does not presuppose any one particular doctrine of the Church".³

The First World Assembly

The first Assembly of the World Council of Churches took place in Amsterdam, Holland in 1948. The theme of the Assembly concerned the Church. There were two theological and two sociological sections on the study of the Church. The following is a report of their findings.

The universal Church has a given unity in Jesus Christ, for God has given this to His people. "In spite of

¹W. A. Visser 't Hooft (ed.), New Delhi Speaks About Christian Witness, Service and Unity, p. 93.

²Ibid., p. 116, 117.

³Ibid., p. 94.

their divisions, they were one in Jesus Christ".¹ It seems that some of the main differences between Christians had to do with the nature and mission of the Church. As to the nature of the Church, they claimed that

We all believe that the Church is God's gift to men for the salvation of the world, that the saving acts of God in Jesus Christ brought the Church into being; that the Church persists in continuity throughout history through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.²

There were three main differences amongst the churches in the Assembly: (1) the relation of the visible church to the new creation in Christ, (2) the relation between objective redemption and personal salvation and (3) agreement was lacking as to the place of the ministry in the Church.³

In spite of all these differences, however, they insisted that

the Body of Christ was a unity making it impossible for them to forget each other or to find agreement on isolated questions while leaving others unreconciled . . . Beneath their disagreements, there was an agreement in a unity that drew them together and would not let them go.⁴

The shame of the Church is her sin, the Assembly said. Because the Church has become estranged from Christ, sin has come into the Church. The World Council of Churches came

¹Arthur Lemuel Carl, A History and Philosophy of The World Council of Churches, p. 68.

²Ibid., p. 70.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 71.

into existence to help restore the Church to unity in Jesus. It has helped Christians recognize their unity in Christ. They are sure of one thing: there was only one Lord and one Body, and thus the Church could not rest with its present divisions.¹

Although there was and could be only one Church, the ideal was yet to be reached, so the Council was only an emergency solution between division and unity.

In all the discussions concerning unity there needed to be some theological basis. As Carl has noted,

When those holding to widely divergent views were able to get together in church unions or ecumenical movements, many questioned what the basis for such a union was . . .²

The Council had set up as the standard of membership a Christocentric statement. Confession of Jesus as God and Savior was made the very basis of the organization. As to theology they operated thusly:

Though there was room for varied interpretation, the basic theological formulations held by the Church from antiquity, were affirmed.³

In the first Assembly the doctrine of the Church was given the major emphasis. The Assembly concluded that the Church came into existence through Christ's redemptive work

¹Ibid., p. 72.

²Ibid., p. 2.

³Ibid., p. 90.

and the Church was given for the salvation of men.¹

The Second World Assembly

The second Assembly took place in Evanston, Illinois in 1954. The theme was "Jesus Christ, The Hope of the World".

The report of the section on Faith and Order contained the discussion of unity, and attempted to make clear what was believed about it.

It was a fact that the Church possessed a oneness in Christ in spite of the disunity of the churches. This unity was not simply a sentiment but given by God as the Holy Spirit revealed the work of Christ.²

This same view was evident in the first Assembly. The concept of the unity in Christ was discussed more thoroughly in the second Assembly. The unity of the Church had its essential reality in Christ Himself. "The Church was not divided in Christ for in Him there was an indestructible unity."³

The report went on to say that in spite of this unity of the Church in Christ, the Church has not realized the fulness of this unity. The reason the fulness of unity has not been realized is because of division in the Church. There is a type of diversity in the Church which is good, but when diversity disrupts the manifest unity of the body, then it

¹Ibid., p. 91

²Ibid., p. 108.

³Ibid.

changes its quality and becomes a sinful division.¹

At this point the report did not explain what the manifest unity of the body is, making it difficult to know exactly what is meant when speaking of a sinful division. Yet, the report goes on to mention divisions which the Commission denotes as sinful. These include the schism between the East and the West in 1054 A. D.; the Reformation of 1517 and the rise of the Free Churches. Regardless of the good motives of these separations, "sin seems to have characterized the divisions",²

The Council claims to make no definition of unity; yet to this writer, it seems far from logical to call divisions sinful without a clear view of the nature of unity. The Council further claims to have given no statement on the nature of the Church either; yet the report on sinful divisions seems to presuppose a certain view of the nature of the Church, namely that the Church is an earthly institution rather than a non-material or spiritual entity. May it then be said that a separation from this earthly institution constitutes a sinful division?

This report concluded with the idea that the perfect unity of the Church would not be totally achieved until the

¹Ibid., p. 110.

²Ibid.

end of time. Several actions were suggested for use by the Churches, three of which are found in the statement of unity of the third Assembly, namely; the Church is to have one baptism and one eucharist, all ministries are to be recognized as valid, and the churches are to act together in all matters possible.¹

The Third World Assembly

The third Assembly of the World Council of Churches took place in New Delhi, India, in 1961. The theme was, "Jesus Christ, the Light of the World".

The section on Unity at the New Delhi Assembly made the most definitive statement thus far concerning unity as seen by the World Council of Churches. The report began thusly:

The love of the Father and the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit is the source and goal of the unity which the triune God wills for all men and creation.²

Later the Council became more explicit and stated that the statement on unity is for the Church on earth during the present age.

The Lord who is bringing all things into full unity at the last is he who constrains us to seek the

¹Ibid., p. 111.

²Visser 't Hooft, op. cit., p. 92.

unity which he wills for his Church on earth here and now.¹

The definitive statement was framed by the Commission on Faith and Order in 1960. It was a statement on the indispensable elements of visible unity.² It reads as follows:

We believe that the unity which is both God's will and his gift to his Church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the task to which God calls his people.³

The Council admits that there has not been common consent on the interpretation and the means of achieving this goal. However, it declares that "we are clear that unity does not imply simply uniformity of organization, rite or expression."⁴

All the implications are not as yet apparent. It is stated that no common interpretation has been made, but an

¹Ibid.

²J. Robert Nelson, Overcoming Christian Divisions, p. 94.

³Visser 't Hooft, op. cit., p. 93.

⁴Ibid.

interpretation was given by the report. One thing is clear to them, however, and it is that

the achievement of unity will involve nothing less than a death and rebirth of many forms of church life as we have known them. We believe that nothing less costly can suffice.¹

It is stated that unity is not simple uniformity of organization; yet, from the forceful quotation above, it strongly appears this is what they are actually striving for. The motivation for the disruption of traditional forms of church life is the vision of the one Church, which vision has become the inspiration of the ecumenical endeavor.² What is meant by the one Church is not explained in official statements.

There are several important elements in this statement which describe the unity the Council seeks. The first is that in Christ alone the Church has its true unity. Unity is not of our making but we become united as we receive the grace of Jesus. Even as Christ has come visibly into this world and has redeemed men, so our union with Christ must find visible expression.³ The New Delhi statement declares that those who are baptized are the ones who are in Jesus.

This interpretation is supported by Nelson who says,

¹Ibid., p. 94.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 98.

"baptism is the one way of normally entering the Church and is to be recognized by all Churches"¹. Evidently, they believe there is more to becoming united to Christ than just receiving His grace. In this regard, they further state that there needs to be more study into this area to understand what the one baptism by which all have been sealed into the one Lord means.²

The focal point of study in this area has become the person and work of Jesus Christ. Study has sought to determine what unity in the one Lord actually means.

The unity which is given is the unity of the one triune God from whom and through whom and to whom all things are. It is the unity which he gives to his people through his decision to dwell among them and to be their God.³

The second element is that which "is unity being made visible to all in each place". This phrase uses the word "place" in two ways. It is used in the primary sense of local neighborhood and also under modern conditions, of other areas in which Christians need to express unity. Place also refers to all Christian people in every geographical area regardless of race and class.

¹Nelson, op. cit., p. 65.

²Visser 't Hooft, op. cit., p. 97.

³Nelson, op. cit., p. 98.

A third element concerns the important part the Holy Spirit has in Christian unity. The Holy Spirit is the one who effects, in the life of the Church, all the elements that belong to her unity. Any achievement of fuller unity for the Church is dependent upon the Holy Spirit's presence and leadership.¹

To state the Council's concept of unity to this point in the New Delhi statement, it may be said that those who are baptized and confess Jesus as Lord and Savior are then brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship. Notice that the word one is strongly emphasized in the statement on unity. The word "fellowship" is chosen because it describes what the Church is. The fellowship is for those who follow Jesus Christ. Because of baptism and confession of Christ as Lord and Savior they are fully committed to him and to one another. They are to join together in every phase of Christian activity. Fellowship does not imply a rigid uniformity of structure, organization or government for "a lively variety marks corporate life in the one Body of one Spirit".² This last sentence needs to be seen in the light of earlier pronouncements by the second Assembly which declared in

¹Visser 't Hooft, op. cit., p. 97.

²Ibid., p. 98-99.

essence that denominations are sin.¹

Since denominations are sin and the achievement of unity will involve the destruction of many forms of traditional church life, the above statement does not give hope for continuation of denominations. This writer does not presume to speak for the Council, but the most that can be said is that there seems to be contradiction here.

The fourth phase of this statement conceives of those of the fellowship as holding the one apostolic faith which is witnessed to by the Old and New Testaments. Commenting on apostolic faith they say:

This is nothing else than those events which constitute God's call of a people to be his people. The heart of the kerygma is Jesus Christ himself; his life and teaching, his death, resurrection, parousia and the justification and sanctification which he offers to all men. The creeds of the Church witness to this apostolic faith.²

In regard to doctrine, their position is based upon two distinctions: (1) intellectual formulations of faith are not to be identified with faith itself and (2) fellowship (κοινωνία) in Christ is more nearly the pre-condition of sound doctrine than vice versa.³

¹Carl, loc. cit.

²Visser 't Hooft, op. cit., p. 99.

³Ibid., p. 110.

In commenting further upon the New Delhi statement, they declare that the heart of Christianity is Jesus Christ, so it is most important for those outside the Council to know what is meant when they speak of Christ. Because of the importance of Christ, the Faith and Order Commission has found the focal point of its study in the person and work of Jesus Christ.¹ This study has yielded no pronouncement by the Council as to a definition of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

In the concept that the fellowship of the Church is to preach the one gospel to men in every generation where they are, we find the fifth phase. "In the faithful preaching of the Word the living Christ is present as our contemporary in every age; . . . "2

The sixth element is one of the most important factors in seeking unity for the Church; those of the fellowship are to break the one bread together. The Lord's table is one, not many. "In humility the Churches must seek that one table."³

The seventh factor conceives of those of the fellowship of every language and culture and age joining in common

¹Ibid., p. 96.

²Ibid., p. 99.

³Ibid., p. 100.

prayer in praise to God. Certain common factors in worship are found in the divided Churches, and this common heritage in worship must be expressed more fully.

The corporate life of Christians should reach out to the whole world.

In the fulfillment of our missionary obedience the call to unity is seen to be imperative, the vision of one Church proclaiming one Gospel to the whole world becomes more vivid and the experience and expression of our given unity more real. There is an inescapable relation between the fulfillment of the Church's missionary obligation and the recovery of her visible unity.¹

This statement is the clearest thus far in affirming the desire of the World Council of Churches to seek a unity consisting of one visible organization. There seems to be the implication that if the world is to see and hear the gospel proclaimed it must be proclaimed by one organization called the Church.

The final factor of the statement of unity concerns the ministry and the members of the churches. All ministers and members are to be accepted by the whole fellowship.

All agree that the Whole Body is a royal priesthood. Yet one of the most serious barriers to unity is our diverse understanding of the nature of the ministry within the corporate priesthood.²

This problem can only be resolved by the Holy Spirit.

¹Ibid., p. 100-101.

²Ibid., p. 101.

"He will, if we faithfully search, reveal to us the ways in which we can have a ministry accepted by all."¹ Biblical, theological and historical studies must continue so that there will be a true ministry. Mutual recognition of members would be largely taken care of when the ministry is accepted by all.²

The nature of the ministry is a barrier to unity in the view of this report. The Council implies that the ministry is a barrier to a visible unity which is founded in one organization.

The churches must pray and work for such unity as was outlined by the report on the Section on Unity. This unity is not yet a part of Christendom but must become so.³ It is the belief of the Council that this is the type of unity "God wills for all men and creation".⁴

Summary

The World Council of Churches concluded the second Assembly without having defined unity. However, denominations had been defined as sinful. Therefore, denominations must be done away with for the Church to have unity. If the

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 102.

³Ibid., p. 93.

⁴Ibid., p. 92.

Church was to be the Church, it must be unified for it carries the message of reconciliation. If there is no unity of the Church, the message of reconciliation is denied.¹

At the third Assembly in New Delhi, a statement on unity was adopted. This statement includes the philosophy of unity of the previous two Assemblies and becomes quite definitive as to the nature of the unity which the Council is constrained to seek for the Church on earth here and now.²

Unity is God's will and is found in Jesus Christ alone. Unity is being made one in Christ, yet this unity must be made visible.

Unity among Christians must be manifested wherever Christians are found. Baptism is the one way of normally entering the Church, and is to be recognized by all churches. Confession of Jesus Christ as God and Savior must be made. No mention is made in the Section report as to whether this confession is merely intellectual assent or is a personal faith which results in an experience of salvation from sin.

Evaluation

Those who follow the above formula stated by the

¹Carl, op. cit., p. 142-143.

²Visser 't Hooft, op. cit., p. 92.

Council become one fellowship, which still does not mean rigid uniformity of structure. The Lord's Supper should be one for the Lord's table is one. The common life of Christians is to be directed into the world for service and witness. The one Church must proclaim the one Gospel to the world if the world is to believe. If there is to be unity "both church membership requirements and the status of the ordained ministry should be agreed upon by all churches".¹ If this kind of unity is to be achieved, many forms of church life must be reborn.

It is implied by such statements that this can only be achieved by church union. Visible unity is possible only when the sinful denominations are done away with and we find our unity together in one fully committed fellowship.

The principal conclusion to which this writer has come is that the World Council of Churches has given us a statement and commentary on the unity of the Church, which if carried through to the end they desire will eventuate in one visible organization. This view is disclaimed by the Council in several statements. However, from the statements made in the Report on The Section on Unity, which have been noted, no other conclusion can be reached.

¹Nelson, op. cit., p. 95.

IV. THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EVANGELICALS

Introduction

We have seen that the World Council of Churches represents the school of thought which wishes to make the unity of the Church visible by an assimilation of all denominations into one visible organization. Another school of thought in the ecumenical movement is represented by the National Association of Evangelicals. This view stresses the spiritual unity of the Church and seeks to help churches manifest their fundamental agreement.

The National Association of Evangelicals lays stress upon two main themes: spiritual unity and doctrinal unity. These are essential for true ecumenicity. The Association is based upon a biblical confession of faith that accepts the Bible as the only infallible and authoritative Word of God.¹

Any institution which calls itself a church must subscribe to certain fundamental biblical truths. These are a belief in the deity of Jesus Christ, His virgin birth, His sinless life, His miracles, His vicarious and atoning death, His bodily resurrection, His ascension to the Father and His personal return in power and glory.² " . . . Anyone joining

¹James DeForest Murch, Cooperation Without Compromise, p. v.

²Ibid.

such a church must accept these biblical truths as a heart experience and through the Holy Spirit, be 'born again'.¹ To be a Christian is to be one experientially through a personal encounter with Jesus. This is an experience of faith. Sacramental salvation is not truly salvation in the biblical sense, nor is salvation merely an intellectual assent to a set of doctrines.

The NAE further believes that the only ecumenicity authorized by the Bible is that ecumenicity in which the Church is led and guided by the Holy Spirit in cooperative evangelical action . . .²

To be evangelical is to hold

to the absolute supremacy of Scriptures as a rule of faith and practice and to justification by free grace through faith. An evangelical may be recognized by the fact that he holds firmly to the sola scriptura and sola gratia of the Reformation.³

Doctrinal Unity

In preview, some general statements have been made of the philosophy of unity of the National Association of Evangelicals and are noted above.

According to the Association, essential Christian doctrine is of prime importance in any discussion of unity

¹Ibid., p. vi.

²Ibid.

³Kik, op. cit., p. v.

among Christians. Without this there can be no unity. Theology takes an important place in this study. A common faith is one of the bases for Christian unity.

That the Bible must be the source of Christian doctrine is stated by Dr. Robert Lee, one of the founders of the Association. According to Dr. James De Forest Murch,

Dr. Lee made clear that Christ must be central and supreme in any movement for the unity of Christians and that the Holy Scriptures are the source and authority of Christian doctrine.¹

Many today in the ecumenical movement do not accept the Bible as the authority for Christian doctrine. The Orthodox churches accept tradition along side of Scripture as an authority for the doctrines of Christianity. Evangelicals would concur with Kik that,

only the acceptance of the authority of Scripture warrants hope that true union of Christendom may be accomplished. The mind of Christ concerning unity has found expression in the written word . . . Appeal to the authority of the revealed will of God was characteristic of the early church and also the church of the Reformation.²

Evangelicals say that only in the Bible is the common faith found which can unite Christians. There are those called Christians who hold a different position in regard to the place of the Scriptures. Because of this difference,

¹Murch, op. cit., p. 56.

²Kik, op. cit., p. 29.

Christian unity demands a separation from those not holding the true Biblical faith. There must be separation from the false if there is to be true unity. Also, there must be the separation of the believers from the non-believers because all those in the churches are not believers.¹

Spiritual Unity

A second element in this philosophy concerns the Church. What is the Church? What is its relation to the individual Christian? The Evangelical has an answer for these questions.

The Church is a matter of faith and not of sight. If the Church were visible then there would be no need to affirm faith in her. The Church is also one and universal. For the declaration of perpetuity and continuity, faith looks at revelation rather than a hierarchy. These views come from the affirmation of belief in the Holy Catholic Church.²

The Church precedes history and was formed in the mind of God and existed before the foundation of the world. This is expressed by Paul in the verse from II Timothy:

Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy

¹George Ford, "Ecumenicity, A Threat To Christian Unity" (Paper read at National Association of Evangelicals Convention, Denver, Colorado, 1962).

²Kik, op. cit., p. 75.

calling, not according to our works, but according to his purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.¹

It has already been stated that to be a Christian one must by faith accept Christ as Savior and be born again of the Holy Spirit. To be a Christian is to be in Christ and thus to be a member of his Body.

When a sinner accepts Christ as Savior and thus becomes a member of the body of Christ and becomes, at the same time, one with all who are of Christ throughout the earth, he has joined the Church. We see now that the nature of the Church is basically spiritual. The nature of the Church is spiritual for it is a sinner who has accepted Christ as Savior and has become a member of the Lord's body and, at the same time, one with all who are of Christ throughout the earth.²

The Church is all those who know Christ through faith. Christians have a spiritual unity through knowing Christ. "Evangelicals have a spiritual unity already and their fellowship, cooperation and oneness can be manifested apart from organic unity."³ As Kirby has pointed out, among all

¹Ibid., p. 76.

²Gilbert Kirby, "Why Evangelicals Can't Accept Modern Ecumenicity," United Evangelical Action, XX (April, 1962), p. 11.

³Clyde W. Taylor, "Ecumenical Strategy in Foreign Missions.", p. 14, Reprinted from United Evangelical Action.

who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity and truth

there already exists a real and undeniable spiritual unity which binds us together despite our denominational differences, our geographic remoteness, or anything else which would appear to separate us. The Church is one because Christ its Lord is one, and all who are united to Him by faith are also united to each other. Our spiritual unity is supernatural in its origin.¹

Dr. Stephen Faine, after a careful study of the Bible, concluded that the nature of unity is

primarily spiritual. He insisted that federative action must have a protected orthodox basis without intrusion of criteria not really essential to the evangelical position . . .²

Evangelicals do not equate the visible churches with the one Church. It is impossible to equate the visible church with the mystical body of Christ. Theologians have spoken of the invisible and the visible Church. The conception of the invisible has been stressed because the visible church presupposes the invisible and proceeds from it.³

While the full concept of the invisible Church includes the redeemed of all ages, a narrower concept relates the Church to the earth at a given time . . . While in a sense those who belong to the invisible Church on earth are visible yet only God knows those who are truly his.⁴

¹Kirby, op. cit., p. 11.

²Murch, op. cit., p. 56.

³Kik, op. cit., p. 92.

⁴Ibid., p. 93.

Evangelicals recognize that there must be a visible manifestation of the spiritual unity of the Church. Naturally, Christians wish to see the lost won, and if by cooperating with other Christians this can be done more effectively all the better. Yet "effective partnership does call for a general agreement on some common basis of agreed doctrinal belief based on the supreme and final authority of the Holy Scripture."¹

The motives for cooperation of Christians must be positive. These motives must be love for one another and for God and His Son, Jesus Christ, and a desire to serve others. Carl Henry warns that love cannot be a shield for lack of sound doctrine when he claims that

Genuine Biblical love is impossible apart from sound doctrine. Since God is love, all love issues from his being. Love is the fruit of the Holy Spirit created in the heart of man by the Spirit (Romans 5:5; Galatians 5:22). The same God who is love is also truth. Therefore love must correspond to truth. Thus if it is not grounded in sound doctrine love is not true love even though called by that name. Conversely, sound doctrine cannot be loveless; the Christian is commanded to love as an expression of the doctrinal framework of the faith.²

Visible unity is not to be an end in itself. It is to be the means to the evangelism of the world. The final

¹Kirby, op. cit., p. 20.

²Carl F. H. Henry, "Unity: Quest and Questions," Christianity Today, VI (November 24, 1961), p. 29

answer to the problem of reaching the lost for Christ is not one of ecumenicity or of a world-wide organized church.¹ Church unity alone will not bring the lost of the world to salvation.

The prayer of Jesus in John 17 for the unity of Christians was a prayer for evangelism. Christians were to be one so that the world would believe in Him. Kik feels that this prayer was for some type of visible oneness. This oneness is to be that of a unity like the Son had with the Father. Christians are to be one in doctrine, one in purpose and one in love that the world may believe in Christ. This is the evangelistic motive for visible unity.

The visible unity of the Evangelical is a unity in diversity. In the visible expression of the Church there are differing gifts and functions. There is a variety in denominational government, modes of worship and the nature of the ministry. This diversity does not destroy Christian unity which, as we have seen, is basically spiritual and is based upon fundamental Scriptural truths.

In 1951, an organization was formed known as the World Evangelical Fellowship. This organization is related

¹Taylor, op. cit., p. 15.

²Kik, op. cit., p. 41-44.

to the National Association of Evangelicals in several ways.

The same basic considerations which brought the National Association of Evangelicals into existence and made it a factor of importance in the religious eye of America caused Evangelicals of other nations to desire similar organizations through which they might have fellowship and united action on the basis of a common faith.¹

The National Association of Evangelicals wanted to remain an American organization but had a deep interest in other evangelicals around the world. They gave information which helped others to set up similar organizations. A very friendly relationship existed between the National Association of Evangelicals and the World Evangelical Alliance of Great Britian. In 1948, a conference of evangelicals was held in Switzerland to consider establishing a world fellowship. This conference had been proposed by leaders of the National Association of Evangelicals and the World Evangelical Fellowship. Most European nations were represented as well as leaders from both groups. Again in 1950, meetings were held by leaders of these two groups which called for the formation of a world fellowship.

In August 1951, the Constitutional Convention met in the Netherlands. The time was right for the formation of a world fellowship. The delegates, from over twenty nations,

¹Murch, Cooperation Without Compromise, p. 178.

by an overwhelming majority voted in favor of a world fellowship for evangelical cooperation. Following the vote the delegates proceeded to consider the Constitution for the group. The message to the evangelical world from this first conference summarizes the evangelical view of Christian unity.

The World Evangelical Fellowship, in recognition of the unity in the body of Christ of all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, affirm their unity in the Spirit with, and express their fraternal greetings to all our brethren in Christ the world over, whether individuals, churches or societies, who hold "like precious faith" with us. The hour has truly come when all the born-again Bible believing Christians should unite in order to strengthen their fellowship in the Body of Christ, to bear wider witness to His infallible Word, and to better evangelize the world until He comes. We look to Him that we might be enabled "to speak the truth in love with all lowliness and meekness, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace".¹

Even though the evangelical already has spiritual unity in Christ and a measure of doctrinal unity so that he might cooperate without compromising his beliefs, there is a lack. The fulness of Christian unity for the evangelical looks forward to the time when the Church comes "in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."² Thus far we have not yet attained unto

¹Murch, op. cit., p. 189.

²Ephesians 4:13, K.J.V.

this hope.¹

Summary

The following is a summary of the findings of this section.

1. The National Association of Evangelicals conceives of Christian unity as consisting of two areas--doctrinal unity and spiritual unity. Every aspect of unity is a part of one of these areas.

2. The Bible is declared to be the source and authority of Christian doctrine. Unity in their concept is based in part upon a common faith, by which they mean an agreement to and an acceptance of a statement of faith.

3. Spiritual unity is that unity which individuals have as they exercise personal faith in Christ, become incorporated into His body and are thusly united to every other believer. The Church is spiritual for its membership is spiritual.

4. This spiritual unity between believers must have a visible manifestation. This is done individually or corporately, only as the members of the body cooperate, with a

¹Nobel V. Sack, "The Problem of Unity In The History of The Christian Church" (paper read at the Pacific District Conference Annual Minister's Conference General Conference Mennonite Church, Dallas, Oregon, January 26, 1961), p. 11.

common faith as a basis, and love one another. This visible unity is unity in diversity; for in the Church there are differing gifts and functions.

CHAPTER V

COMPARISONS AND CONCLUSIONS
OF THE STUDY

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COMPARISONS AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

It was the purpose of this study to discover what constitutes the nature of Christian unity, as taught in selected passages of the New Testament, to learn the basis upon which Christian unity may be made manifest to the unbelieving world, and to analyze the philosophies of unity of the World Council of Churches and the National Association of Evangelicals for their conformity to the New Testament teaching. This has been done except for the comparison of the philosophies of unity with the New Testament teaching.

This chapter will include first a summary of the findings concerning the main problem as it has been analyzed thus far. Following this, the comparison of the New Testament teaching and the ecumenical organizations investigated in this report will be presented. Then will come the conclusions of this study.

I. SUMMARY

New Testament Teaching

A study was made of New Testament passages relating to the body of Christ. As these passages were studied a

conception of Christian unity was brought forth. Study was also made in the New Testament about the visible church and making unity visible. A summary of the findings of these areas of this study are:

1. The basis of Christian unity is to be found in the relation of the individual to Christ; He is the focus of unity. When the individual exercises personal faith in Christ as the sacrifice for sin he becomes incorporate in Christ. This means that through personal faith the individual is made a part of the body of Christ. Because the believers are united to Christ they are united to everyone else in the body. This is spiritual unity. The nature of unity not only includes the above concepts but also includes a basic agreement of doctrine, for faith is both subjective and objective. This basic set of doctrines is found in I Corinthians 15:1-4 and is the Gospel. There is not only spiritual unity but doctrinal unity as regards the Gospel.

2. The basis of the manifestation of unity is found in the pattern of the relation of the Son to the Father in the Trinity. It is threefold and includes truth, love and purpose.

In regard to this it was found that the invisible Church is the same as the body of Christ. The visible church here on earth composed of non-believers cannot be the body of

Christ since the body of Christ is composed only of those who have believed in Christ. In order to manifest unity, unity must already exist. The existence of this unity is based upon faith--subjective faith in Christ as Savior and objective faith which has as its content sound doctrine.

The unity of the Godhead becomes the basis upon which Christians may base their visibility. This pattern is three-fold and includes truth, purpose and love. Christians can only join together as they are agreed as to the above.

The Ecumenical Movement

The World Council of Churches. The body of Christ is one and it finds this unity in Christ but there has been division and the Church, the body of Christ, has become estranged from Christ. Sinful division has disrupted the manifest unity of the one body. The Council, in the third Assembly, set forth a concept of unity about the Church on earth during the present age. The Council conceives of the fellowship of Christians as those who are baptized in water and confess Jesus as Lord and Savior. When they have been baptized and made confession they are then brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship.

This fellowship, the one Church, must proclaim the one gospel to the world. It is implied that this can only be

achieved by church union for visible unity is only possible when the sinful denominations are done away with. This writer concluded in this section of the paper that the World Council of Churches has given a statement and commentary on unity which, if carried through to the end they desire, will eventually in one visible organization.

The National Association of Evangelicals. The concept of unity of this Association is based upon the Bible as the source and authority of Christian doctrine. The nature of Christian unity consists of two main ideas, for unity is thought of as both spiritual and doctrinal.

Spiritual unity is that unity which individuals have as they exercise personal faith in Christ, become incorporated into His body and are thusly united to every other believer. Therefore the Church is spiritual for its membership is spiritual. Unity in their concept is based in part upon a common faith, by which they mean an agreement to and an acceptance of a statement of faith. They also believe that spiritual unity must have visible manifestation. Visible unity is a unity in diversity.

II. COMPARISONS

The National Association of Evangelicals view of Christian unity compares favorably with the nature of

Christian unity as discovered in this paper; however, the concept of unity of the World Council of Churches is found wanting. As will be seen, their entire search for unity is based upon a false premise.

The Council said that the body of Christ is divided and that this is the shame of Christendom. Christendom is divided because there are denominations--separate organizations, into which Christianity on earth has been separated. The Council further states that this separation is sin because it has broken the unity of the body of Christ.

The Council's concept of the body of Christ is that it is the group of organizations on earth called churches. All groups that call themselves Christians and which composition is of persons calling themselves Christians make up the body of Christ. This concept is a false one, according to the findings of this study.

First, after careful study of the Scriptures in this paper it was found in chapter two that the body of Christ and the Church are the same. Secondly, it was found that the body of Christ was in essence spiritual and thus invisible. Thus we see that the body is not the denominations and churches here on earth as the World Council of Churches has stated. Since the body is not the organizations on earth called denominations, divisions between denominations and

and churches is not a division of the body of Christ. The body of Christ is a spiritual entity and cannot be divided in the way set forth by the World Council of Churches. Division in the body comes only when parts of the body sever themselves from it.

The World Council of Churches is now in the process of seeking unity for Christianity. The type of unity being sought is based upon the false concept, stated above, that Christians are a body which is divided. Since the body is the group of organizations on earth called churches and division has separated these groups, unity can be gained only by bringing these groups into union with each other. However, the body, which is composed of true believers, is not divided and does not need to seek unity. The parts of the body are already united with one another because they are united to Christ, who is the head of the body. The Council neglects to see that everyone who professes to be a Christian is not one. Only true believers are Christians and only true Christians compose the body of Christ. Therefore, there is no need to seek unity for all true Christians possess it.

The desire the Council has to make unity visible is a worthy goal, but because of an incorrect premise concerning divisions and the body of Christ it is searching in the wrong direction for the true means of manifesting unity. Because

the body of Christ is not composed of organizations but of individuals there is no need to manifest unity through a union of the Churches.

Christian unity is manifested through the lives of persons who are believers, either as individuals or in their corporate relationships.

III. CONCLUSIONS

The Nature of Christian Unity

The nature of Christian unity is spiritual and is based upon the personal faith, both objective and subjective, of the individual in Christ. It is union with Christ which brings about unity between Christians. It may be concluded therefore that "union is unity". This is the New Testament teaching and it may further be concluded that the position of the National Association of Evangelicals is in keeping with the New Testament teaching.

On the other hand, there is the view of the World Council of Churches. The Council feels that union brings about unity but it is a union of organizations. It may be concluded therefore that there is "unity through union".

It may be further concluded that the position of the World Council of Churches regarding the nature of Christian unity is not in keeping with the New Testament teaching.

The Basis for Making Unity Visible

Groups composed of Christians, such as churches and councils and associations, can only cooperate with each other when they agree on a common basis of relationship to Christ. This common basis is a common faith, which is both objective and subjective in Christ. Upon this standard, Christians, either as individuals in cooperation with other individuals or as groups in cooperation amongst themselves or with other groups, may make visible their unity to an unbelieving world.

In the New Testament teaching there is a difference between Christian unity and the manifestation of this unity for unity is spiritual and invisible and the manifestation is visible. This writer concludes that to the World Council of Churches there is no difference between unity and the manifestation of this unity, for unity is achieved only through a union of visible organizations. This is at the same time the manifestation of this unity. Therefore, Christian unity is equated with the visible expression of unity.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

NEW TESTAMENT REFERENCES TO THE BODY IN RELATION TO BELIEVERS

Romans 12:4, 5.

I Corinthians 10:16, 17.

I Corinthians 12:12, 13, 14, 27.

Ephesians 1:23.

Ephesians 4:4, 12, 16.

Ephesians 5:23, 30.

Colossians 1:18.

Colossians 2:19.

Colossians 3:15.

APPENDIX B

NEW TESTAMENT REFERENCES TO LOCAL CHURCHES

Acts 2:41; 8:1,3; 9:31; 11:26, 28;13:1; 14:19-23, 26-28;
15:1, 32, 36, 40-41; 18:22,23; 20:17.

Romans 16:15, 16, 23.

I Corinthians 1:2; 6:4; 7:17; 11:16, 18, 22; 14:4, 5, 33, 35;
15:9; 16:1, 19.

II Corinthians 1:1; 8:1, 18, 19, 23, 24; 11:8, 28; 12:13;

Galatians 1:2, 13, 22.

Ephesians 1:1.

Philippians 1:1.

Colossians 1:2; 4:15, 16.

I Thessalonians 1:1; 2:14.

II Thessalonians 1:1-4.

I Timothy 3:5, 15.

Philemon 2.

James 5:14.

III John 6, 9, 10.

Revelation 1:4, 11, 20; 2:1, 7, 8, 11, 12-29; 3:1, 6, 7,
13, 22; 22:16.