

Response on the Question of Unity and Diversity

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I am a retired PCC minister and, as we have been encouraged to do so, I have been mulling over this past summer what 'unity' means in the context of today's PCC. I submit a few quotes from my reading and some thoughts that may already be obvious:

"Christian unity springs from Christian truth. Unity eludes us when we dodge the truth. Orthodoxy requires the clear rejection of every half truth." (p. 130, Thomas Odin, *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy*)

"... that no boundaries be required in either moral discipline or religious community...is... the defining illusion of hyper-toleration. Even tolerationists, who themselves rule the word heresy out of bounds are themselves asserting a boundary. Unlimited toleration is one of the controlling myths of the modern world." (ibid, p131,)

"Beware, lest in giving an answer, you agree to the terms of the question, which may themselves be deeply flawed." (NT Wright, *How God Became King*, p. 85)

Some personal thoughts:

How should we measure unity? Pantheism and pluralism reflect it well. But.....! If we are now embarrassed in the PCC by our lack of unity, what is pushing us to find it? Will we grasp at any basis to be able to claim it, such as being able to welcome a pluralism of beliefs including perhaps 'atheist pastors' as in the UCC? Therefore, it is critical to first have a definition of 'unity' so we know precisely what is being talked about. The meaning of many words has been changed recently by those who want to wield power. Outside the church unity now means 'inclusive'. Language is critical for this discussion.

Within the church unity must have boundaries and goals and an appended commitment to adhere to them. Inclusivity wants no boundaries except to exclude those who disagree with its current definition. Inclusiveness, but not unity, is temporarily evident in heaven where Satan is present to accuse us before God. The book of Job also tells us that Satan is in God's presence. Among Jesus' disciples Judas was included. Neither example reflect unity. Neither Satan nor Judas had Kingdom goals. Biblical unity has the bottom line of glorifying God and must not be a means for us to brag about how inclusive we are. Did the disciples really heed Jesus prayer for unity in John 17? The Synoptics tell us the disciples immediately launched into a discussion about who would be the greatest thus bringing division, not unity.

Biblical unity includes a measure of diversity, but not a diversity as the world understands it. Biblical unity produces harmony. The discordant sounds emanating separately from the tweeter and subwoofer in my stereo have little unity. But if both arise together from the same sheet of music we have harmony. Biblical unity is best illustrated by the diversity and yet persistent harmony evident in the Trinity. The Trinity must be the starting point for the CCD's quest for unity lest they take their definitions and resultant conclusions from the world. Each separate person in the Trinity is subservient to the other and each is committed to the one unifying goal of the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Heaven is not inclusive but perfectly reflects the unity and harmony we can only have in the PCC when we glorify Christ by loving and obeying his Word.

In its quest for unity, is the PCC trying to make visible what is invisible? It is not up to us to define the church. The church of Christ is defined by those who so love God's Son, Jesus, that they want to obey God's Word. God knows if I am trying to obey. So the essential question becomes, if I dare ask it at all, is this:

“How WOULD I know if I am living a life that pleases God?”

Each of us has to be able to give an answer - and there is only one way to get an answer. I have no choice but to go to God and ask him. And that means opening up and obeying his Word. Those who do will have unity.

God's Word reflects reality. We must resist the current obsession of needing to reshape reality to fit our feelings and desires lest we become, as in Alvin Plantinga's illustration, like the drunk who insisted on looking for his lost car keys under the street light because the light was better there!

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