

The New Religious Status: Unity

By

Curtis Dickinson

**“And be not fashioned according to this world:
but be transformed...” (Romans 12:2).**

Sooner or later we must face the fact that not all groups and organizations wearing the Christian name are in reality Christian. It is going to be some kind of bitter joke in the end, when the many people who keep working toward unity find that they have united outside of the Kingdom of God. The door to the Kingdom is not opened by majority vote.

It is hard to go against the unity movement. The good-will crowds, who are getting together in larger and larger numbers, are quick to brand anyone who doesn't join them as an odd-ball. He is divisive. If Tom, Dick and Harry want to unite and have one big brotherly church, and Joe wants to stay outside of it because he doesn't believe in it, Joe is pictured as the one who is dividing the church, But what if Joe is the one who is sticking with the truth, remaining faithful to God. Then he is the only one of the four who is not dividing from Christ.

Dr. D. R. Sharpe, in his book *“Call to Christian Action”*, contrasts the power of the small Communist bloc in the U. S. with the inertia of the great mass of so-called Christians. When he reminded a communist of the fact that there are over 75,000,000 Christians and fewer than 100,000 communists, the communist replied, “read again in your own scriptures the story of Gideon and the 300 faithful and you will have the answer. We (Communists) are Gideonites, we mean business... We will beat you in the end because we believe in our gospel; we will sacrifice for it and take life and death chances for its success.” He is winning, too.

The 75,000,000 nominal Christians are more concerned about being accepted, recognized, loved and honored by each other and the world than they are about the gospel. They have the mistaken idea that what God is after is a great mass of people, meeting in His name each week. If they can accomplish a big crowd in church they rejoice over the reaching of a success-status. If they can get these people together in a larger convention they are ecstatic. If they can get two or three such groups under one leadership, they have heaven on earth.

But what does all this getting-together have to do with God's purpose? Does such unity save them? Does it produce faith? Jesus said, “How can you believe who receive glory one of another, and the glory that cometh from the only God you seek not?” (John 5:44). Was He not saying, “How can you step out on faith to please God when you are really interested in pleasing each other? How can you take up the cross of faith and walk against the current, when you are only concerned with going with the current?”

If the masses involved in uniting were standing in a true Christian position, then of course we should all rush to join them. But when one examines the mass, he finds that the faith in the gospel is the exception, rather than the rule. If he conforms to this unity movement, call it Christian if you will, he is drawing away from truth and righteousness, not toward it. Therefore, he is going to have to face the fact that the modern religious movement is conformity to the world and in conforming to it he is denying the purpose of God. To take the route of Christian faith, then, often means a break with the very thing which the world thinks is Christian.

To quote the late Dean Inge, "History seems to show that the powers of evil have won their greatest triumphs by capturing the organizations which were formed to defeat them, and that, when the devil has thus changed the contents of the bottles, he never alters the labels. The fort may have been captured by the enemy but it still flies the flag of its defenders". This is exactly what has happened in multitudes of churches of our day. From their official publications they are teaching the very opposite of Scripture. Preachers, who are supported by Bible-believing people are standing in the pulpit each Sunday and presenting a satanic philosophy in the name of Christ. The church members sense that something is wrong, and wonder why their preacher takes liberties with the Bible. But they dare not raise their voices and oppose what is happening, because they will appear to be "divisive". They dare not withdraw, for they will lose status. They choose to conform, not recognizing that they are conforming to the world, and opposing God.

Another fact the Christian needs to face NOW is that neutrality is not the same thing as a Christian commitment. Like the mistaken leaders of government who think that non-communism is on the same side as anti-communism the neutral Christian thinks that by not taking issue, by living a middle-of-the-road life, he is on the same side as Christ. But just as the non-communist usually comes to terms with communism and finally becomes its supporter, so the neutral church-member usually comes to terms with the world, and eventually finds himself opposed to those who took a stand and were "transformed", instead of conformed.

One reason Christians find it difficult to resist conformity and live differently from the majority is the fear that the "transformed" or separated life will be sterile and lonely. In a sense this is true. Jesus was called a "man of sorrows", despised and rejected of men. He was not at home with the Pharisees, nor could He conform to the standards of the average man of the world. Consequently He stood alone. His lonely posture is characterized in the every popular hymn "I come to the garden alone." (But, of course, we enjoy singing it when our voices blend with the crowd!) Indeed, it was alone that Jesus faced the great decision to accept the Father's will and die the death of the cross. It was a decision He had to make alone, and alone He died upon the cross. In this sense, the life of faith is lonely. One's faith remains one's own, and one's decisions must often be made in spite of, and not with the approval of the crowd.

But this life is far from sterile and lonely. While Jesus was a man of silent sorrow, He was known to his close friends as one whose joy spilled over into their own lives. "These things have I spoken unto you," He said, "that my joy may be in you, and that that your

may be made full.” (John 15:11). The simulated joy identified by the belly-laugh and knee-slapping jokes has little to do with genuine content and happiness. The clown may be weeping inside the painted grin. But the person who is transformed to the life of Faith posses a peace that is deep inside, which flows from the fact that he is united with the Joy-giver Himself.

Look at the expression on the faces of a mob of rioters or a group of dancers. You will see the void and vacant look of people who are utterly lonely. They came together for fear they would be left alone, but are still lonely in the midst of a multitude of their kind. By the same motivation, fear, the multitudes are seeking a religious unity, but once they find it, their loneliness remains. In desperation they seek to force others into the same group. They would improve their status, by making it simply bigger!

But when one is transformed to the purpose of God, he is one with God everywhere and always. He doesn't have to have the crowd. He is part of the biggest cause that man ever knew, a cause that reaches back beyond Eden and stretches forward into eternity, encompassing mankind of every tribe and tongue and nation. And seldom will he find himself in any circumstance or any place but that he will soon find there is at least one other of the Faith, who also refused to be confirmed to this world.

Elijah, the honest prophet of God, came to a point where he was sure that no other believers could be found. Convinced that he was left alone in the world he begged God to take his life. But God answered that there were yet 7,000 in the country who had not bowed the knee to Baal. With this knowledge Elijah rallied to one of the greatest events in history. Many a Christian is ready to conform to the majority because he is convinced that if he resists the pressure of the group he will be alone, the only one of his kind, a fool defeated by the laughter of friends. But when he dares to take a stand, when he openly resists conformity, he soon learns as did Elijah that there were many others just waiting for a brave soul to lead the way.

The general movement toward unity has its influence on the local congregation, no matter how conservative and faithful to its traditions it may be. The newspaper, radio, TV and magazine and other agencies, organized just for this purpose, put great pressure upon the church to tolerate unbelief of many forms, rather than lose status in the community.

Let us remember two things. (1) we are not to expect the world's favor. Jesus said in John 17 — the same place where He prayed for unity — “I have given them thy word; and the world hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” The apostle John warned, “Marvel not, brethren, if the world hates you.” (1 John 3:13).

(2) We have instructions against uniting with unbelief. “Beloved, believe not every spirit; because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). The false prophets are popular these days. “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Romans 16:17). It is common practice for those of us who refuse to conform to be reminded that we are causing division. But the scripture here obviously refers to those who DEPART

from the doctrine of the apostles as the ones causing the division. “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11). This teaches that the believer, who is committed to the revealed truth of God, is to reprove those who in the darkness of their minds reject the truth. But usually the reversal takes place: the one who refuses to fellowship such unfruitful works is reproved by the church crowd. We are witnessing today the greatest volume of slander and vituperation ever heaped upon any group, and most of it is directed at Christian believers, and is coming from religious leaders, protestant, catholic and Jewish. Why? Because there are some Christians who refuse to fellowship with those who deny the Bible, ridicule Bible truths and advocate unity with Christ-rejecting groups.

The Bible says that we are to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). This is cited as basis for all kinds of unity. But the writer of Ephesians went on to explain that this unity is based upon certain truths about one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God, and that we all are to “attain unto the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God” (Eph. 4:13).

Certainly no genuine unity exists when the men do not accept faith.

Others cite the prayer of Jesus, “That they may all be one,” purposefully ignoring the rest of the statement, “Even as thou Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us” (John 17:21). The oneness of Jesus and the Father was a harmony of minds. This kind of unity is remaining in a congregation when one is not brought about by one doesn’t believe what the church teaches, nor merely by keeping your name on the roll.

Jesus was praying for a real oneness in faith a harmony with each other because we have faith in God’s purpose and revealed will. In order to get this kind of unity there is going to have to be a separation from much that is of the world, including the church being patterned after the world’s fashions. This requires some soul-searching and sacrifice, but it is the way that leads to real peace and life in the coming Kingdom of God. And the peace is such that the world cannot give, nor can it take it away. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, that you shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: you shall be sorrowful, **BUT YOUR SORROW SHALL BE TURNED INTO JOY**” (John 16:20).

“And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2).

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