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# The Highest Mountain

## Author's notes on the millennium edition

People who express strong views sometimes have to face those views in later years when their opinions have changed. It can be embarrassing. My opinions have moved a long way over the years, but some principles that mattered to me thirty or forty years ago are at least as central to my thinking as they were then. It is not forty years, but just sixteen, since I first launched *The Highest Mountain* into the public domain. My writing style and other aspects of my thinking and expression have changed, but I still believe that it is unacceptable for the church to be splintered into warring factions.

I was not alone in my views about denomination back in 1984, but my thinking is even closer to 'mainstream' as we enter the new millennium. There are no less denominations, but there is much more openness and a much more apparent desire for unity. I have continued to write on this subject and, in *The Nebulous Church* I expressed views on how ordinary people, like myself, can go about the business of influencing the church to become increasingly open and united. But the process of change is never simple. Whole populations do not readjust their thinking in one quick sweep. People change one-at-a-time. There are many people for whom my more recent writings may be a step too far just now, but it doesn't matter. God is not the impatient being that some preachers have described!

Some aspects of the original text need explanation, because times have changed; and some of my statements now look a bit harsh - so I have added some brief footnotes.

In releasing this edition of *The Highest Mountain* on the Internet (a medium unheard of in 1984), I am pocketing my embarrassment about elements of style and jargon that I now try to eliminate from my writing. Forgive me if it jars, but pray with me that more of God's people will open their hearts to one another and play their part to help bring Jesus' prayer to its fulfilment...

*"that they may be one"*



# The Highest Mountain

Derrick Phillips

# The Highest Mountain

*“Father, the hour has come ...that they may be one”*

*(John 17:1,11)*

It is hard not to be moved by the intimacy of John 17, the prayer of Jesus to his Father, near the end of his human life. This is one of those ‘beautiful’ chapters of the Bible (like 1 Corinthians 13 or Hebrews 11) which is often admired, read and quoted, but perhaps rarely taken seriously. We can easily be moved in the sentimental sense, without ever changing our position in reality.

Personally, I find this passage disturbing, not because of some obscure message which I have found in it, but for its best known, and most frequently quoted, verses - those praying for unity in the Church. The message is inescapable since it is repeated four times in the prayer (verses 11,21,22,23) and is therefore undoubtedly the central theme. Of the eight different requests in the prayer, only this one is mentioned more than twice. Unity is the prayer’s main request and that is what disturbs me. It is a prayer, not a sermon, so it needs to be fulfilled, Yet the Church is divided.

As we look at the Church in our country today we see a lot of activity, truth and life - but unity? Most towns of average size have churches of at least six denominations. Even quite small villages have two or three separate churches, sometimes with no more than a hundred worshippers between them. There is widespread division, with scarcely a sign of significant movement towards the unity for which Jesus prayed<sup>1</sup>.

Jesus taught His disciples that, if they prayed in faith, they could move mountains (Matthew 21:21). In fact a lot of His time with them was spent instructing them in the way of faith and prayer. Prayer is central to the Christian faith. We believe that He has made us kings and priests (Revelation 5:10) and that we can speak directly to the Creator Himself; and we believe that prayer works. That is why I find John 17 disturbing. If the main theme of the prayer of faith of Jesus Himself cannot be fulfilled, what chance for my prayers? The prayer is clear and unambiguous; but the Church remains divided.

Like many Christians, I have been aware of this prayer from the early days of my commitment. But I avoided its challenge by comforting myself with mental reservations. Perhaps Jesus did not mean complete unity? Perhaps it is all meant for the future? Maybe for some last minute magical transformation from today’s hotchpotch to the perfect Bride of Christ? Or could it be that the unity is there already, if we look from God’s point of view? These arguments no longer satisfy me. I am compelled to believe that Jesus meant exactly what he said.

Jesus prayed *“that they may be one, even as we are”* (v11). There is nothing partial or incomplete about the unity of the Father and the Son. The only thing which limited their unity at the time when Jesus prayed this prayer was Jesus’ physical body. His body bound him to limitations of time and physical location. Surely, in that sense alone the Church may be divided (by physical location) and be true to this prayer.

As far as timing is concerned, Jesus prayed for *“them”* (His disciples) and *“for those who believe in Me through their word”* (v11). This is a timeless thought which could be applied to the first generation or any subsequent age. The fulfilment is to be the experience of the first generation that is prepared to seize the opportunity, and enter into the promise.

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<sup>1</sup> How glad I am that this has now changed! I see much more openness today and have been thrilled to observe many more united meetings and shared activities. Times are changing, but we still have a long way to go.

As for a magical transformation ... He prayed *“that they may be one ... that the world may believe”* (v21). He wanted this unity to be lived out in reality for the world to see - and believe. He wanted it to be seen from man’s viewpoint in this current age. *“By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another.”* (John 13:35)

This then is what concerns and stirs me. If his words had been a sermon, I could write it off as an unattainable ideal. If they had been ambiguous, or could be referred to another age or another place, I could put them out of my mind as beyond my immediate concern. But this was Jesus’ prayer of faith which has to be fulfilled. Ideal it may be, but impossible it cannot be, *“for with God nothing shall be impossible”* (Luke 1:37). This unity is possible, is God’s will and is essential for the fulfilment of his purposes. Looking at the outward circumstances, I am obliged to say that disunity is a mountain of a problem – but prayers are stronger than mountains.

## 2

### The depths of denominationalism

It is startling to recognise just how far the Church has moved from God's ideal of unity, and I am moved to shame by many of the words and actions performed in the defence and perpetuation of denomination. Too often the defence of truth has been an excuse for inhuman behaviour. When we look back on inquisitions<sup>2</sup>, holy wars, massacres and martyrdoms it is quite easy to distance ourselves; to say it was them and not us. But whoever we blame for the excesses of more violent times, we cannot absolve ourselves from the evils of our own generation.

If sin is committed first in the heart, how are we to classify some of the present day excesses of schism? Christians separate from one another in anger and fear over matters of personality, or practice, or doctrine. Thereafter we spread rumours, we gossip, and we avoid one another in the street. If we refuse to acknowledge someone's existence, are we not treating them as dead? Even wishing them dead? And how different really is that from the acts of the Inquisition? I am sure that many persecutors of the past were full of sincerity - but sincerely wrong.

I would like to think that such behaviour was rare, but it isn't. Time and time again I have come across rival churches whose members deliberately avoid one another. Christians who, for one reason or another, have left congregations, have then been spurned by their former friends. I have even known groups being instructed by their leaders to avoid contact with this or that believer. There is a scriptural precedent for excommunication, but not for the purpose of preserving a denomination.

This matter of excommunication is a classic example of misuse of the scripture. Many Charismatics fell as deeply into this error as the Exclusive Brethren and the Roman Catholics did before them. The only specific example of excommunication in the New Testament Church was that of the Corinthian man living in open immorality (1 Corinthians 5), and he was later reinstated (2 Corinthians 2). The only instructions Jesus gave in the matter provided for specific steps to be taken *openly* - for the protection of the accused and the accuser (Matthew 18:15-17) and that too applied to matters of sin. Yet Christians today are being thrust out of churches secretly<sup>3</sup> (i.e. without explanation to the church) and for reasons of doctrine, or lack of submission (which is usually a misnomer for a personality clash with the leader). This is not God in action. A great deal of responsibility rests on the leaders in these matters; but I will return to that later.

Denominationalism has become completely out of hand. The Reformation was not the beginning of division, because there were many quarrels before; but since then the process of continuing revelation has led to division upon division, until today we have almost more denominations than we can count. So is revelation sinful? That cannot be so. We cannot reject or decry the genuine moving of God's Spirit in revival, recovery, rediscovery or revelation. But somehow it seems that promising moves often lead to the formation of new denominations, and the fossilisation of further division. Is this really inevitable? Why should evil come out of good? Can this process ever be reversed? It had to be possible if the Lord intends it ... and he says he does. But how?

There can be no move towards unity so long as we accept denominations as normal. Many of the examples I have quoted are extreme, but nevertheless genuine experiences for many people. On the other

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<sup>2</sup> Even the Pope has now acknowledged that the Inquisition was guilty of unacceptable excesses (Vatican announcement 12 March 2000).

<sup>3</sup> During the late 1970's and early 1980's there was an inglorious period of 'purging' within some Charismatic groups.

hand, most Christians exist within denominational groups, never actually opposing other Christians, but rather living in practical ignorance of their existence. Of course they know that other churches exist, but have no fellowship or contact with the people there. If that does not concern us then we will remain divided.

Church division has become so much a part of our experience that we have learned to live with it. As Christians we do not feel properly introduced to one another until the question had been answered 'where do you worship?' - and 'Birmingham' is not a satisfactory answer! So long as we accept denominationalism without shame, we will never change. It is a matter of shame for me to call myself a Baptist, Pentecostal, Anglican, Free Evangelical, or any other title which suggests a narrowing of my definition of the local church to exclude genuine brothers in Christ. Jesus did not create denominations, the Holy Spirit does not create denominations. Denominations are the result of fear, jealousy, pride, self-seeking or other attitudes of the flesh. Denominations are the backwash of past moves of the Spirit which have become safe and ineffective backwaters. We are forced to recognise that division is an evil thing, is often of the flesh and engineered by the devil; and we need to repent of it. 'Forgive us our denominations', must be our cry. Then we will be open to hear the Spirit directing us into God's way of unity.

# 3

## The slippery slope

Many Christians will be quick to point out that people who have left denominations have invariably formed new denominations. That is undeniable. But the fact that past moves led this way does not excuse us for sitting still now, and doing nothing, refusing to hear any new directions the Lord may give us. Certainly, past moves have taken us down a slippery slope to the same schismatic end. Rather than stop moving, we need now to move on with an awareness of the dangers, and of the mistakes which led us into denominationalism.

Those who have been involved in the most recent moves of God could be slowest to recognise themselves as a denomination. Outsiders may recognise the symptoms first. I well remember talking with a friend some years ago, during a certain group's convention, and recognising together the seeds of denominationalism already showing. Today, that group is generally recognised as a new denomination<sup>4</sup>. But most people inside the movement still do not see what has happened to them.

When does a movement become a denomination? I suppose, if we are strict about the meaning of the word, it has to be when the group acquires a 'nomen' (Latin for name). In other words, the identity of the group has become so recognisable that they - or, more usually, others - are able to put a name to the movement. This may be the name of the founder or leader, e.g. Wesleyan; or the name of the central doctrine, e.g. Baptist; or that of the place of origin, or headquarters, e.g. Roman Catholic; or the name of the denomination's magazine. By that time the identity is clear, because the movement has slowed down, or even stopped. It is like putting a flag of discovery on the spot where the revelation ran out. Meetings may still be lively and church activities may still be blessed; but the central theme of the movement has become clear and has stopped changing. So, it is possible to identify the emphasis which has emerged and put a name to the denomination.

However, the point of departure was long before the point of settling down. The real error is not the naming of the denomination (that is at least honest), but the division itself. The breaking up of God's Church is the real evil. So, at what point did that happen? Many of those who have left existing structures and churches had no choice. Wesley, for instance, was expelled from the pulpits of the Church of England. Did he sin or did they? Certainly, their action was divisive, but did he therefore become denominational at that point?

People who leave denominations often have no alternative. To stay would be to stifle their conscience, to ignore the moving of the Spirit, and to uphold a system which they feel to be out of God's current will. In many cases there is no choice, because the 'establishment' closes its ears to God's word and does not allow them to stay. God does not condemn a person for the act of abandoning the man-made structures of the past, but he abhors the formation of further divisive groups.

In their early stages, movements of God often attract Christians from all kinds of backgrounds. As the revelation spreads, many come to hear the word. The meetings are attended by people who also give their allegiance to denominational churches, and they are welcomed, encouraged and taught without distinction. There is excitement in the air, and change is the order of the day. Scarcely two meetings are alike, and the movement gathers pace and numbers. Before long, a structure is subtly imposed on God's

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<sup>4</sup> The expression 'new churches' entered the language long after this booklet was originally written.

movement; lines are drawn and positions are defined; people who thought they were moving with the group suddenly find they are somehow outside, caught on the wrong side of a boundary which did not seem to be there a short while ago. This is the real point of schism, the point where power bases are set up, rules made, doctrines defined. The tragic consequences of living truth being turned into concepts and formulae are reaped as people are hurt and precious lives are damaged. From now on it is all downhill. We cannot call ourselves the local church whilst deliberately excluding local people who we know to be Christians.

These divisive impositions do not happen suddenly. The first mistakes which set us on the slope often happen in the midst of great blessing. The Israelites were scarcely through the Red Sea, and were still hearing the rumblings on Mount Sinai, when they set up the golden calf. The Corinthians were having the most marvellous meetings when they began to follow the personality cults of "*I am of Paul, I am of Apollos*". It is interesting to note that Paul deals with this matter first in his letter, before the problems of the immoral man, or the unruly meetings. The underlying problem is nothing less than idolatry. Someone or something becomes central, instead of the Lord himself. Brother So-and So is the principle exponent of the word, and his words begin to matter more to the group than their own inner voice of revelation. His books and articles are given priority, and his principles form the distinctive character of the movement.

Alternatively, it is the doctrine which is enthroned, or a particular experience or form of worship. In this case, no one man is idolised, but all are judged in relation to the accepted truth. Either way, eyes are diverted from the Lord Himself, and we fail to notice that He is still moving on, like the pillar of cloud in the wilderness. If new leaders emerge, they may be expelled for their non-conformity. New truths are sometimes expounded, but are cast aside because they challenge the accepted form. It is impossible to stop the Spirit moving on, and if we do not move with Him, we will lose touch and get left behind.

Leaders need to take particular care in these matters. Vigilance is essential and new revelation should be constantly sought. Now leadership must be developed and encouraged, and self-preservation avoided at all costs. All the time, our personal doctrines and revelations must be kept in proportion. I believe in 'believer's baptism', but I do not imagine that, at the judgement seat of Christ, the degree of wetness will be an important point at issue! But the refusal to fellowship with a brother in Christ certainly will.



# 4

## Leading division

*“My brothers! Not many of you should become teachers, for you know that we teachers will be judged with greater strictness than others”*

*(James 3:1 Good News for Modern Man)*

... harsher judgement for leaders? What a responsibility this is. Of course, it is just that the leader should be highly accountable, because he can do so much to lead people forward into God’s purposes, or to entrap them in the present, or the past. In this matter of division, the leader is a key element. If leaders separate from one another the people usually follow. What would happen if the people stayed together? The reason they do not is bound up in our wrong understanding of the nature of church leadership. In a woven garment a split which is started at the top will readily rip all the way down the cloth. A knitted garment behaves differently. Too much emphasis has been placed on vertical relationships in the Church, so that divisions between leaders are too readily transmitted to the people. So much of the accepted wisdom about leadership is fundamentally and dangerously wrong.

Leaders do not possess their followers. Paul told the Ephesian elders *“feed the church of God”* (Acts 20:28). Peter was urged by Jesus to *“feed my sheep”* (John 21:16). The flock always remains the property and possession of Jesus Himself. Yet I have heard leaders accuse other leaders of ‘sheep stealing’. That suggests they believe they are the owners of the flock. If the sheep are able to find good food under another man’s ministry, what right have we to be jealous? Our responsibility is to do the job which God has given us. Jesus described His own concept of the good shepherd; the one who lies in the entrance to the sheepfold, and who is himself the door ... *“I am the door: if any man enters through me, he shall be saved, and go in and out, and find pasture”* (John 10:9). What does it mean to go in and out? Why, the sheep who knows his shepherd will go out in safety and return with joy. He is not helped by being trapped in the fold and fed on old food all year. Fresh pasture is what he needs, and for that he must go out.

In the letter to the Hebrews we have a rather strange reference to a priest named Melchizedek (more about him later) and an aside about the weakness of the readers, and their reliance on milk instead of solid food (Hebrews 5:10 - 6:3). Far too many Christians are on a permanent diet of pre-digested spiritual food, served up through the person of their leader. What they need is to go out and discover, experience, and eat from the lush pasture, which will tax their digestion, but make them strong. Meat has to be chewed. The leader who keeps his flock bound to himself weakens his people. Jesus said *“my meat is to do the will of my Father”* not keep studying it.

The biblical term for the local leader is elder, which is a relative term. The elder is not a different kind of being; he is the same as the rest of the people, but more experienced. His leadership depends on his continuous growth together with the people. If he dares to protect his power base by standing still himself, and preventing his people from growing, he misses the point of his ministry. A problem any leader will have to face as he allows his people to grow, is that some of them may grow so fast and strong that they overtake him. How many parents have to look up to their teenage sons? The wise parent recognises that his task is to bring up equals. The adult son is no longer under his parents’ control. He should respect them for their contribution to his life, but he no longer expects to obey them .. Christian leaders too must

strive to make their people as strong as themselves and allow them, if necessary, to receive sustenance and training from other sources.

The point of what I am saying is this: each separate Christian group in any town is actually only a part of the Church in that town. The individual leaders have no right to demand the loyalty of their separate followers. Those people belong to the whole Church of Jesus in that area. If the leaders are prepared to let the people in and out, they will surely find pasture and be fed, and the whole Church will grow. If they keep the people bound up to their own ministry, they will inevitably starve the people of much that is important, for no man has the monopoly of God's truth.

The traditional concept of leadership makes such informality impossible. We have based our model of leadership on the wrong originals. There are world leaders who function quite effectively by a system of tyrannical inflexibility. Others exercise considerable flexibility of principles by politically manipulating the democratic process to stay in power, but neither is the model for Church leadership. The principles of Christian leadership are fundamentally different, and the books of Judges and I Samuel can provide significant clues to God's mind in this matter.

I was given my early Christian training and teaching in an evangelical, fundamentalist tradition which regarded the period of the Judges as the classic low spot of Israel's history. The great national heroes, Moses and Joshua, were both dead. The Israelites were in the Promised Land, seemingly by the skin of their teeth! Numerous hostile tribes were still in the land, posing a continual threat to the safety and purity of the chosen people. The centre of the worship of Jehovah was in a tent, guarded by a few priests, including some of dubious reputation. The tribes of Israel were spread around Canaan in a loose-knit federation, with no national leader. I was taught that the key statement to the whole book is the final verse (Judges 21:25) *"In those days there was no king in Israel: everyone did what was right in his own eyes."* So, naturally, it followed that they all did wrong. Or did they? There, so I was told, was the chosen race in a state of total disorganisation, pushed about, discouraged, being led by men (and, dare we admit it, a woman?) who had obvious flaws and weaknesses. By our standards, we would expect God to abandon them.

Strange to speak, the Bible does not take such a discouraging view of the period. Certainly, they were weak and disorganised, but look what God did with them when they turned up in strength to fight alongside Gideon (Judges 7:1-8). He reduced their strength to 300 men. Perhaps God wanted them weak? The New Testament commentary can be seen in Hebrews chapter 11, in the well-known roll of faith. The list of men and women of faith runs through history generation by generation, until verse 32, where we are suddenly given five names all from one period. Which period? Well - Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah and Samuel were all Judges. David is the only king mentioned in this chapter. These judges showed what faith means. They held on to their position only while they acted in faith and in God's will. They were weak, to be sure, just like you and me, and that is why they needed God. They were perfect examples of God's word through Paul... *"God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the things that are strong... that no man should boast before God"* (I Corinthians 1:27,29).

God's absolute statement on this period is to be found at the point of transition from Judges to Kings. The people came to Samuel demanding a king *"to judge us like all the nations"* (I Samuel 8:5). Samuel, in a state of concern, took the matter to the Lord, Who declared, *"they have rejected Me from being king over them"* (I Samuel 8:7). This apparently haphazard, disorganised, chancy system of government by the Judges was actually what God wanted. The appointment of kings was considered an affront to the Lord Himself and a substitute for the rule of God. Why? Because when every man did *"what was right in his own eyes"*, some

did good and some did evil. In the book of Kings, we find that evil rulers tended to be followed by the mass of the people; and there were not many good kings.

Jesus reflects these thoughts when He says, *"the rulers of the gentiles lord it over the ... it is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant"* (Matthew 20:25,26). God's plan for leadership is a flexible, developing, sometimes transitional, never official system based on life. Like the wise parent, the leader seeks always to make himself redundant as his charges grow. He concerns himself with his function and responsibilities, not with his office and status. Politicians have to build up their image, because in the world we only exist in the opinions of those who recognise us. The wider our sphere of influence the bigger we are. That is what the world means by great men. In the Church *"your life is hidden with Christ in God"* (Colossians 3:3) so you can be great even though no-one knows or sees.

The whole process of church leadership is temporary and will pass away, for the Lord *"...gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as pastors and teachers ... until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ."* (Ephesians 4:11,13). God is aiming for unity and perfection, and leaders are given purely to serve that aim. Their role in individual situations become irrelevant when those they serve are no longer children. Like the Judges, they are appointed from among normal people, with all their human frailties, to be earthen vessels containing God's treasure (I Corinthians 4:7). Like the earthen vessels of Gideon's army, they must be prepared to be broken and dropped so that the light can shine out and God's purposes be accomplished (Judges 7). Leaders must be prepared to hold their position with a loose grip. They must always be prepared to return to secular work (see Paul, the tentmaker - Acts 18:3). It is not their position which is important, it is the job which they have to do. If leaders will take heed to this, perhaps Gideon's miracle of victory can be repeated in our day.

This concept of leadership is totally in opposition to most that is seen and taught on the subject throughout the Church. Leadership is seen as a reward, an ambition and an office. Leaders set themselves apart, sometimes by special clothes, and often by superior attitudes, *"lording it over"* the people. Men often act as if their initial appointment made them into a different kind of person, and refuse to recognise when their current work is over or their ministry needs new direction. Such men persist in old routines, not having the personal security to be able to step down. Those who adopt such attitudes are treating their ministry like a secular career, and preventing their people from moving forward towards unity. Like the Pharaoh of the Exodus, they have the people trapped under their control and influence while God is saying, *"let my people go, that they may serve me."* (Exodus 10:3). What would happen if we did let God's people go? If we allowed them to *"go in and out and find pasture"*? Why, they might find out that other leaders and other groups in their area have some more of the truth. They might find deep relationships with the Christians in their street who go to the 'other churches'. They might find it impossible to continue basing their faith, their relationships, and their life on the teachings and practices of one denomination alone. It would destroy the neat cohesion of our denominations. Better still, by allowing the sharing of lessons learned, and experience gained, through a wide variety of leadership gifts, it could take us toward the seemingly unattainable *"unity of the faith"* (Ephesians 4:13). Leaders must not be rivals, nor must they trap their people into restrictive bonds of loyalty to themselves. When God said, *"let my people go"*, He intended that they should remain free, and not taken into another form of bondage.

## 5

### **Idleness and idolatry**

It has been said that a nation gets the government it deserves. I am sure that is true of the Church. People cannot just sit back and blame their leaders for division, for it is the responsibility of us all. Leaders are often placed in almost impossible situations by their churches. When Israel rejected the rule of the Judges, it was the people who demanded a king. Saul did not fight for his appointment by political manoeuvring; in fact, he tried to hide. (I Samuel 10:20-24). Many a weak man has become a tyrant after being forced into a position of responsibility and power by the indolence of his people.

The sickness of pastor dependence is common among modern churches. If there is a pastor or minister, the tendency is to leave it to him to preach, to shepherd, to visit the sick, to counsel, and to follow up the weak and the wayward. The man who is forced to act like a superman can perhaps be forgiven if he begins to have illusions about himself. The dependant flock and the possessive shepherd are two different aspects of the same problem.

On the other hand, if there is no minister, churches often still wallow in idleness while ‘waiting for God to send a pastor’. There is no-one to push the responsibilities on to, so nothing is done. All the time, the horizons remain limited to the confines of the denomination.

The traditional minister/pastor/elder role is modelled on the wrong order of priesthood. The only recognised order under the New Covenant is that of Melchizedek (see Hebrews 5 and 6). Jesus was of this priestly order and all believers (not just leaders) are also made “*kings and priests*” (Revelation 5:10) according to the same pattern. Melchizedek is a strange character, of whom few details are given in the Old Testament (Genesis 14:18-20). From our point of view, the significant thing is that he was actually without credentials. He could not show a badge of office, or a certificate of appointment. He could not point back to an earthly anointing or induction ceremony. He was the representative of all those who stand only on their recognition before God as individuals. God’s priesthood is for normal human beings like you and me, frail and weak, but powerful under God’s hand. No other priestly order is to be recognised, so there is spiritual responsibility in the Church for all of us.

The mistaken development of a Levitical priestly class is a dangerous feature which is not limited to the traditional denominations. Many house churches and charismatics fall into the same errors. A self-deprecating attitude among the people allows, in fact encourages a Big Brother class to emerge who, with varying levels of strictness, direct the activities of the people. We see little of the spirit of Philip, who “*went down into the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them*” (Acts 8:5). He stayed there working away until the Jerusalem church eventually heard – and sent Peter and John to help. Philip did not need the apostles’ permission to go; he already had his instructions from Jesus (Acts 1:8). A wise leader once said, “I would rather the people did something and made mistakes, than that they did nothing at all.”

So, what is it about pastor dependence which reinforces division? It is all a matter of direction. By making idols of our leaders we prevent God from doing what He would in *all* the people. The leader, falsely placed in a priestly position between God and the people, becomes the source of God’s word. While the people look to one man for their direction they are not seeing God in one another and the group’s structure works from the top down, rather than through inter-linked relationships. Many people, of course, are happy to have things this way, even if the leader becomes a tyrant, because they feel absolved from personal

responsibility. Most Christians accept this kind of structure because they have failed to recognise what God has done in their own lives.

False humility is the enemy of God's working in power in individual lives. It is an insult to the completeness of what Jesus did on the cross. For *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."* (Galatians 2:20). We do not need leaders, sermons and meetings to put God's life into us. What we need is the inner life of Christ through the Holy Spirit. God does not want us to stand up with the support of external crutches, but by the inner strength of the Spirit who *"will teach you all things"* (John 14:16-26). The leader's role is to steer a moving force, not to drive it. People need to look to the Holy Spirit for their motive force.

As a young Christian, I was taught that going to church was an essential part of my spiritual life. A coal fire, they said, will burn well while it is kept together, but a coal which falls out is quickly extinguished. A clever illustration, except there is no such thing as 'going to church'. The Church is not a place, but the people of God. What is more, the source of life is not the Church, its buildings, or its meetings; but God Himself who lives in the people. Many Christians readily acknowledge that the building is not the Church, but they will revere the meetings in the same way as others revere ancient stonework. Even in house churches<sup>5</sup> you will find quite ordinary people talking normally one minute, then changing to hushed and reverent tones for the hour or so of the meeting. Thus, the church is separated from their normal life.

But the Church *is* our normal life. If we are in Christ, we *are* the Church. We do not become the Church when we meet on Sundays (or whichever day we might gather) for *"where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in their midst"* (Matthew 18:20). This text does not imply that, by reverent concentration, we conjure up the image of Jesus in the meeting. That is the unholy concept of the seance. We can see Christ in one another as we look to each other as friends. The Church is our relationship with one another in twos, threes or may more. It is our knitting together in friendship.

Through various circumstances, my wife and I were forced into a prolonged period without regular meetings<sup>6</sup>. We had been taught to expect to backslide if we missed regular church. But our experience proved to us that we are *"kept by the power of God"* (I Peter 1:5). Our staying power in Christ does not depend on our good works or regular observances, but on His grace alone, by which we were saved. There are no boundaries to the grace of God. Certainly, the Bible exhorts us to be *"not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together"* (Hebrews 10:25). But there is a world of difference between giving up meetings altogether and living in bondage to a constant round of meetings, whose normal quality is such that we would actually be surprised if God spoke to us. There is a middle ground.

The meeting-based concept of the Church maintains existing divisions and prevents Christians from really getting to know one another. So long as the meeting is the all-important soul and centre of our Christian life, we will remain divided. Meetings are of all types and inevitably have characters and personalities of their own. Each Christian tends to go to the type of meeting that most suits his personality. Consequently, he will travel across the town, or to the next town or village, quite as naturally as he would if he were going to the cinema, the bowls club, or the music society. Travelling to meetings is not wrong in itself, but if that is virtually the whole of our Christian experience, we may be missing the Church.

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<sup>5</sup> Many of the groups formerly known as 'House Churches' have now moved their meetings into school halls and community centres.

<sup>6</sup> I could not have known, when I wrote this in 1984, that this period would extend for over 25 years. This experience helped develop my understanding of the meaning of 'church'.

Conversation is quite different from meetings. It is in conversation that we get to know people and develop relationships. It is not structured and formalised; it is an expression of the real person. But conversation and traditional style meetings do not go together, and our numerous meetings often crowd the real relationships out of our lives. God's plan for the Church is not based on the group as a starting point, but the individual. First, we have Jesus Himself, the Second Man, "*a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God*" (1 Peter 2:4). But then we have "*you also*" (i.e. you in the same mould as Jesus and by the same power of God) "*...as living stones are being built up as a spiritual house*" (1 Peter 2:5). The strength of the Church is in each individual, and in the way that individual is joined to those above, below and on either side of him.

By putting distractions in the way, churches have often prevented believers from seeing God himself at work in their own lives and those of their friends. We have made idols of many good things. Buildings, leaders, doctrines, ceremonies, meetings and even the bible, have been enthroned in place of God. Evangelicals have been accused of having a new Trinity - 'God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Bible!' He wants us to put all these things in their proper place and rest in His power alone for our support. When ordinary believers are prepared to stand on their own two feet, supported only by the power of God, the possibility of genuine church life will begin to appear.

The emphasis on structure in many groups produces a form similar to the style of large modern buildings. Major constructions often start with a rigid steel framework, add cross beams and then fill in the sides with brickwork to make the building look complete. The structure or framework is crucial and the bricks are relatively dispensable. Denominations can be like that. The people are not living stones lending individual character and support to the building. In fact, if you take all the bricks away, the building will still stand. So it is that many of our denominations have been losing congregations, but their organisation and structure remains intact. Such structures will stand with or without God. But that is not the way God wants to build.

If we want to see a strong Church, we must be strong as individuals. We must also be strongly bound together.. Instead of placing our prime allegiance in a building or a meeting, we need to be loyal to one another. We need to be bound to our Christian neighbours in a mutual commitment to support one another in the normal Christian life. If we cannot love our fellow Christians, then our meetings are hypocrisy. The greatest contribution which the Christian can make to Church unity is to open his heart and his home to those Christians, whatever their current denomination, who live nearest to him. The alternative to denominations is love.

## 6

### Raising the stakes

The perfecting of the Church is not a casual matter; it is the most important life objective for every believer. We cannot categorise the achievement of unity under the heading of 'Would Be Nice'. The completion of God's plan for the Church is absolutely critical for the whole world – "*for the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God*" (Romans 8:19). Or, to use another biblical metaphor for the Church, the preparation of the bride is an essential pre-requisite to the end of the age (Revelation 21).

Of course, I realise that change is a colossal gamble for almost everyone in the Church. Luther had to balance his faith with the risk of being cut off from everything he had previously known as the Church. So today, the concept of accepting change involves risk. Maybe our lives will be safe; the Church in the modern western world does not nowadays have to consider the martyr's stake. But the gambling stakes are often high in terms of emotional and material security.

I am mindful that many people have an important material interest in maintaining the status quo. Many people such as bishops, moderators, organisers, administrators, secretaries etc., depend for their livelihood on denominational structures. Will they easily accept changes which annul their functions? It is easy to misunderstand or even condemn their fear, but from a human point of view, there is little difference between the fear of redundancy for a denominational worker and one working for a manufacturing company. Unemployment is the same for either. This concept of unity is not without cost.

Also, for local leaders, even those who support themselves by full time employment, there are risks to consider. The risks are just as daunting for those leading within the newer groups as for those accredited by one of the traditional denominations. How can such people heed the call to "*let my people go*"? Many will be sincerely worried that, by loosening their grip on the people they will allow them to fall into error. Most leaders are genuinely convinced that their ministries are keeping their people in the truth. What would happen if some of their people got into the habit of going to other meetings, and developing relationships with those of differing experience? Certainly, Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would lead them into all truth – but can we be sure? Isn't it safer to keep a rein on the people of God to avoid heresy? It depends on how much we trust God.

But there are risks for people at all levels of responsibility. The familiar pattern of meetings seems safe, though often unspectacular; they may only rarely be inspiring, but at least they are predictable. For many people, the concept of meeting new people and receiving new ideas is threatening. In any case, if we stop filling our time with meetings and start sharing our lives in the community on a deeper person-to-person basis we could be exposed to hurt. Meetings, and the busy evangelical round of activity, are a convenient escape. What is more, many Christians rely on the weekly round of meetings to keep their batteries charged. O that we would learn to plug direct into the mains!

I can understand the problem of facing major issues, because I have experienced such challenges in my own life. At one stage I was deeply convicted of the need to resign my membership and diaconate at a particular church. It was not because the church was bad. In fact, we were experiencing great blessing at the time. The problem was that my wife and I had compromised our beliefs by becoming members some years earlier when we first arrived in the area. We found that we were not allowed to lead in youth work

or Sunday school without first officially joining the church. For many people this would not be a problem, but we were personally convinced that official membership diminished the importance of our spiritual membership of the body of Christ (*"for by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body"* - I Corinthians 12:13) so, for us, it was a compromise. Several years later, when we were reminded of this issue, we did not know how our friends would react. We were enjoying near revival conditions and we loved and respected our fellow workers; but would they misunderstand our stand and turn against us? In the midst of this the Lord seemed to be saying "are you prepared to do My will, even if it means being absolutely alone?" The decision was obvious, and we were misunderstood at first. But we were not rejected. Ultimately our rejection of compromise said more than numerous Bible studies and sermons about the meaning of the Church. There have been other turning points in our life, and the issues have always been clear when it has been God who was putting on the pressure. When God speaks, he must be obeyed. We need to beware of insensitivity towards those around us in the way we act on our convictions. But we do not bless our fellow Christians by ignoring the Lord's direction.

I realise that in discarding the crutches of denominations, habitual meetings and familiar forms and practices many people would be made to feel insecure. Such a drastic change involves risk taking, and how can we know that it will work? Obedience to God has always involved risk. The priests, who walked into the Jordan carrying the Ark of the Covenant, had no guarantee that they would not be swept away by the swollen river. Peter had no evidence that the water would support him when he stepped out of the boat to meet Jesus walking across the waves. Obedience requires faith which often involves taking risks. But in another sense, we have to raise the stakes. Those barriers which divide believer from believer need to be removed in order to let God move among us. The risks are certainly great and many difficult challenges will have to be faced. But we cannot remain in disobedience when God speaks. We are obliged to accept change.

Change, of course, means giving way. We have to be prepared to face up to being wrong about a score of issues we hold precious. We must recognise this. If churches disagree on individual issues they cannot all be right. That means that some of them, perhaps all of them, are going to have to change. Am I so proud as to suppose that everyone else will do the changing and I alone will be proved right? Perhaps, if I allow that my brother could be right, I will find that God can be trusted to lead both sides into his truth.

For a long time I believed it to be virtually impossible to be a born-again Christian and remain a Roman Catholic. Then I found that Roman Catholics were being blessed by the Spirit at the same time as 'acceptable' Baptists and Anglicans. As someone once prayed, "God, you are pouring out your Spirit in all the wrong places!" I came to recognise some of the legalistic errors I had been party to as an evangelical-of-the-evangelicals. I began to see that one church's errors are no worse or better than another's. We are all guilty and we all need to repent.

The *"unity of the faith"* is our incredible objective (Ephesians 4:13) and God is able to achieve this miracle. The *"unity of the Spirit"* is the starting point (Ephesians 4:3), and that means opening our hearts to one another *now*. Of course, it is risky, but it is the pathway of love, and it is our only way forward. Buildings, books, liturgies, meetings and doctrines should be moved aside from the centre of our Christian life, so we can enthrone Him who rightly belongs there: *"Christ in you the hope of glory"*. And we need to honour all those in whom Christ dwells, and seek to know them and share our lives with them. Doctrinal differences ought no longer to separate between believers. We may not yet find it possible to see eye to eye on doctrine but let us at least look one another in the eye, and smile. We must work to maintain the precious unity of the Spirit. In an environment of fellowship and humility, God will raise up the leaders who will be



given to the church to lead it into the unity of the faith. At this stage, none of us could define exactly what unity of the faith will mean, but I have no doubt we will know it when we have it. The achievement of this goal, will enable Jesus to boast of the completion of His work in the perfection of his bride.

## Death or glory

My longing is that God will stir the hearts of his people to recognise the seriousness of the choices laid before us. The prophetic challenge of Jimmy and Carole Owens' "Come Together"<sup>7</sup> largely missed the mark despite its enthusiastic reception. The message was clear, but it was lost on us. 'Come Together' is not so much a pleasant thought as a vital necessity for the Church.

For centuries the Church has been engaged in civil war. Christian has attacked Christian in word and deed and the ineffectiveness of the witness is evidenced by the disinterest of the world. We have been ministering death instead of life. Civil war destroys a nation and it lays it open to outside attack. It saps strength and leaves wounds which may take generations to heal. God does not want us to fight each other. *"our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but ... against spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places"* (Ephesians 6:12). Those spiritual forces have little to fear while we argue with one another. We may have thought we were in God's will in our separate groups because God sometimes blesses our meetings. But what else was there for Him to bless? What He really wants is for us to live together day by day in such a way *"that the world may believe"* (John 17:21).

The mistake many preachers make is to believe that the world is looking on admiringly and yearning for our message. The tragic truth is that the world often looks on the modern church as an irrelevance - almost a sick joke. We preach that men should love one another but can't even sit together to worship God. How can we bring life to the world with such a spoiled witness? John said, *"If someone says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, he is a liar"* (1 John 4:20). Should we be surprised that the world does not believe our testimony. The problem of denominationalism is that serious - by preserving disunity we may persuade people away from Jesus.

God's vision for us is *"glory in the Church by Christ Jesus"* (Ephesians 3:21), not in some distant age, but right now. He is not expecting to show His glory in circumstances totally separated from the realities of our experience, for God is not a cheat. He is not planning to allow the Church to roll on in all its imperfection, until the day when He appears unexpectedly, waves a magic wand, and transforms us from our sorry state into bridal perfection. The Church is not Cinderella. No! God has every intention that we should succeed in *this* age. In the perfected, united Church the Lord will demonstrate to the world and angels alike what the power of his grace can do in ordinary men. The perfection of the Church is an achievable goal and it is worth risking everything for such a prize. Those whom he has justified, he *has* glorified. It is *his* work.

The simplest form of the perfect Church is expressed in the phrase *"where two or three are gathered together in my name..."*. When love operates at such a level we can see the fulfilment of the two greatest commandments ... to love God and to love one another. The relationship is strong because love flows vertically as well as horizontally between myself, my brother and God. Love flows in three directions and *"a threefold cord is not quickly broken"* (Ecclesiastes 4:12). If I make an alliance with my neighbour only, outside the will of God, that is not the Church. No amount of committees of religious men can create God's unity. On the other hand, if I say I love God, and refuse to fellowship with my brother, I stand judged

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<sup>7</sup> The musical, "Come Together" was a recent memory when I wrote *The Highest Mountain* but may be unknown to today's readers. It carried a message of Christian unity; but its more immediate outcome was to boost the Charismatic movement and cause that group to become 'mainstream'.

as a hypocrite. When we can come together with any two or three believers, from any part of the Church, from any background, at any time – then we have unity.

## 8

### One Church

How then will the perfect Church be structured? How grouped? How ruled? How instructed? How developed? It is one thing to criticise the evils of the present, but when we strip away all the traditions, the habits, and the practices, what have we left? There is no beauty in nothing. But the true Church is full of beauty. The starting point for the Church is the individual believer, and his relationship with the living God. *“for by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body”* (I Corinthians 12:13). I believe in the promise of the Holy Spirit who alone is able to empower the life of the individual Christian. Every Christian is individually *“complete in Him”* (Colossians 2:10) and is able to stand. Each *“living stone”* is strong in itself and therefore fit to be placed together in the great building of the Church.

The church becomes the Church when two believers are together. That is the second step of God’s master plan. Put together two living stones, individually shaped by the grace of God, then the building is begun. Because this is a starting point it is a key point. The relationship between myself and my brother is an essential to the strength of the building as is my personal relationship with God. Our love is the mortar which holds the Church together. My commitment to my fellow Christian is vital and must be absolute. If he strays, then I should seek him. If I stray, he should seek me. We submit to one another, not because of inequality, but because our bond is the strength of the Church. Incidentally, I should not be surprised that he has been shaped differently from me; that too is part of the Master Builder’s plan.

So what about meetings? Of course, there will be meetings, but they need to take their proper place. The New Testament spends chapter after chapter dealing with the way we conduct our lives, our personal righteousness, and the power and grace which God has made available for us to achieve His will. Little instruction is given about how to conduct meetings and when or where. It is impossible to prove conclusively from the New Testament whether the early church met on Saturday or Sunday, or whether they met at regular times at all. No doubt they met, but there does not seem to have been a rigid and regular pattern. But they were a living Church. They were not trying to maintain a form to prove they were alive; they just lived! There is no value in meeting just for the sake of having a meeting. In the profit-seeking business world such a time-wasting concept is not tolerated. Meet for a purpose and, if we have no purpose, don’t meet.

This all depends on what we define as a meeting. The Church in Jerusalem were together frequently (Acts 2:42-47) but I see no suggestion of their having had a weekly programme posted on the temple notice board. (Some people would probably be happier if the New Testament had given us a neat and tidy pattern to follow.) If I get together with a few Christian friends simply because I like them and want to spend time in their fellowship, is that then a meeting? It is certainly an honest, valuable, and purposeful reason for getting together. Personal relationships are the cement of the Church. On the other hand, there may be a passage of Scripture we all want to study, a selection of needs we want to pray over, or a visiting speaker we all want to hear. Those too are valid reasons for meeting together. But to meet because it is the traditional time, then scratch together a few songs, some kind of theme, and a hastily contrived message to fit the occasion, is neither honest nor purposeful. It is unrealistic and takes up valuable time that God could be using in building essential relationships, developing home life, or allowing his people to rest from their legitimate labours.

The type of meetings to which most of us are accustomed is sectarian and preserves division. They tend to reinforce prejudice rather than encourage change. Centrally led meetings have their place in evangelistic or apostolic ministry, but as a normal diet or as the central point of Christian experience, they are over-rated. Relationships come first, and good meetings will flow from there.

How many meetings can you have in an area? To turn the question around: How many people can you have in an effective meeting of a given type? Some speakers can effectively preach to ten thousand people; some can only hold an audience of fifty to a hundred. Some meetings require participation and discussion and are too big if they exceed twelve to fifteen people. Logically, there is room for a number of simultaneous meetings to be going on in the same town. The problem comes when these meetings start to think of themselves as distinct churches. That is schismatic and therefore sinful. It is not necessarily wrong for people to meet regularly for a few months to study baptism, or the Holy Spirit; but if they become Baptists<sup>8</sup> or Pentecostals we are back to division again. I see meetings as being extremely flexible expressions of the life of the Church. Differently gifted leaders may minister frequently in their homes, hired halls or special buildings, on subjects or in ways which are individual to them. The people are free to receive from all and to develop a breadth of the knowledge of God. But no leader had the right to build himself a special following or a private flock. He too must submit himself to others in his area to broaden his own awareness, and to avoid spiritual narrow mindedness. The Church belongs to Jesus alone.

There is only one Church. That Church includes all those who believe the gospel of the risen Christ and submit to His authority (I Corinthians 12:3). It excludes all those who are merely religious, who are false professors of the faith, who claim the name of Christian on the basis of church connection rather than personal faith in Jesus. There are absolutes. We cannot exclude those who God includes, or include those who God excludes. The Church is divided by God, for purely practical reasons, into the church in Jerusalem, the church in Corinth, or the church in our town. This is a purely practical division and the boundaries are those of geographical acceptance. Some areas may be a little hazy around the edges, but, basically, we all know where we live. Our spiritual home is with the Christians among whom we live. If we travel a distance for regular fellowship (I exclude occasional visits) then we may be running away from something. God did not design His Church with wheels and we have no right to alter His design.

We need not worry too much about the precise definition of the boundary of the locality. Boundaries only matter to owners, and all the churches are owned by God. We are members of one great Church, not a self-contained local unit with strictly defined limits. The question is not so much 'where do I belong?' as 'with whom can I share my everyday life?'

The local nature of the Church is essential because it is an expression of the ordinary life lived in a community and joined in deep, personal commitment to other Christians "*that the world might see*". Such a commitment and relationship cannot be carried on over long distances, or merely within the confines of meetings; it requires frequent contact in all the circumstances of daily life.. Sunday-best Christianity is a sham, which cannot easily be kept up in front of our neighbours and day-to-day contacts. The ordinary acquaintances of our lives need to see what God has really done in us, and to see in our relationships with one another that indeed "*God is love*" (I John 4:8).

*"... You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the great and foremost commandment. And the second is like it, 'you shall love your neighbour as yourself' " (Matthew 22:37-39)*

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<sup>8</sup> No offence is meant to any particular group. My point was, and still is, that to define ourselves by a denominational label of any kind may distract from the church itself.

## The achievement of perfection

Is the concept of one Church an impossible dream? I conclude that it is not. It is the ultimate goal of all that God has been doing throughout the years. I have grieved at the constant return to division after each new revelation; but I know that there has never been a time when Satan has gained a lasting advantage. *“and we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose”* (Romans 8:28).

Incredible though it may sound, the ultimate end of division is good. One crack in the pot may pass as acceptable, but when it is shattered in little pieces we know only a miracle will repair it. Eventually, if we go on to the final conceivable division, we have only ourselves. We are then back to the starting point! I must stand before God as solely responsible for my own decisions. I cannot blame the movement, or the leader, for my actions. At the Nuremberg war crime trials many former Nazis tried to exclude their actions by saying that they were only obeying orders. Human justice could not accept that excuse, and neither can God’s perfect justice. I must answer for myself. We are all equal and have equal responsibility for the way we use our lives. We also have equal freedom to give or withhold our fellowship from others, and carry equal responsibility to maintain *“the unity of the Spirit”*.

The majority of Christians today are probably still within the denominational and institutional churches. But, on the other hand, I believe that the tremendous shaking that the Church has experienced, particularly in the past 25 years, has put those who really trust in their denominations in the minority. Changes happen frequently, and people are coming to expect them. We are learning again that the source of our life is Jesus himself, and the responsibility for maintaining contact with the Lord is our own.

We need not physically leave our present groups to experience freedom, though some may have to. But spiritually we must open our hearts to let go of our prejudices and devote ourselves to God’s new direction. In nature plants grow, blossom and die, then their death enriches the soil from which new life springs. Denominational Christianity must die, but much of the goodness contained within it will be preserved. Whatever direction we now take, our new experience will be based on the background and experience we already have. The soil in which the perfect Church will grow will be formed from the death of what we have today.

Denominationalism is not the fulfilment of God’s commandments and was not the objective of the Spirit’s stirrings. We cannot escape from the recognition that it is of the world, and the Bible tells us *“do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...”* (Romans 12:2). We must turn away from world conformity and turn instead to seek God’s perfection. This is our over-riding priority. Nothing else is more important as an objective for our lives but to fulfil our Lord’s desires. It demands repentance from denominational attitudes, as soon as their true nature is revealed to us; the renewing of our minds; recognition of the unity of the Spirit; the opening of our hearts to people of different backgrounds and doctrines; a readiness to admit that we have been wrong; and a willingness to accept dramatic changes to our way of life and manner of worship. These factors will make possible the ultimate miracle of the unity of the faith. This is the *“pearl of great value”* (Matthew 13:46) and we must sell everything we have so we can possess it.

A pearl is a wonderful example of a composite unity. At its centre is a pain around which layer upon layer of lustrous covering is added, each layer perfectly fitting the one before. At the core of our faith is the gospel of Jesus' pain, "*that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures and that he was buried, and that he rose again according to the scriptures*". All other aspects of our belief spring from that central truth and gain their essential character from His sacrifice. We cannot know exactly what the end of the unity of the faith will be, and if we try to add a layer before the basics are complete, the pearl will rattle! But we know that, however big it becomes, the essential character and beauty will remain the same, and the old-fashioned gospel will remain the centre.

It is this gospel which has already created in us the power to succeed and unite. In John 17 Jesus said "*I have given them my glory*". Can the glorious fail? Rather than argue endlessly about doctrines of sinless perfection, we need simply to recognise the power of the work Jesus has already done in us.

Many Christians alive today have seen the most incredible progress in the development of the Church. In this century, and especially in the last 20-30 years, we have seen the recovery of huge areas of previously neglected truth<sup>9</sup>. I can think of no more shaming epitaph for this generation than that we allowed the momentum to run out. We are capable, by the power of His glory given to us, of bringing about in this generation the fulfilment of Jesus' desires for His Church.

***" ... that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity ..."***

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<sup>9</sup> And so it has continued. However, the period from 1945-1975 was particularly fruitful in recovering freedoms and understanding that had been either forgotten or suppressed at earlier times.