

# Unity in The Body of Christ and The Holy Way

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### Unity in the Body of Christ

#### Introduction

At the 2008 Holy Convocation there were a number of themes that surfaced, and as part of a reflection on that gathering, I would like to spend some time reflecting on those themes. This Holy Convocation was a time of God reminding us of many things. Perhaps it was simply that God wanted to reinforce the heritage of The Holy Way after a sort break from Convocation, but I think there was more to it. In many ways the atmosphere of this Holy Convocation felt like a new beginning.

During this Convocation, as Dolly Stube read from Ephesians 4, it occurred to me that we were revisiting all the elements of "The Beauty of Holiness" by E.B. Stube. At that point there was a pleasant feeling of dejavu for me, having first read that book at a very impressionable time of life in 1976. Unlike many other Christian books I have since read, the teaching contained in "The Beauty of Holiness" left a lasting impression, and the next day as a few of those books were doing the rounds a few people were smiling in recognition. Therefore in this setting, it seems very appropriate to me that since the Holy Spirit was intent on reinforcing some familiar lessons, we should take some time out to remind ourselves of some foundational Holy Way truths.

In this long teaching version of "Unity in the Body of Christ" I plan to underwrite the importance of these truths as presented in the Bible, and therefore their important for The Holy Way.

## Some Historical Perspective On Unity & the Charismatic Renewal

Writing this section feels a little strange for me, because I do not feel like an authority on the Charismatic movement, but since I joined a charismatic church soon after becoming a Christian, and enthusiastically participated in Charismatic churches throughout most of that period when God's revelation of what needed to be changed was literally fresh and new, I am at least qualified to pass on some useful wisdom and historical perspective.

In today's society it is difficult to make any comparisons to that period. There are a number of reasons for this, and we could summarise some of these by saying:

1. The revelation of God has moved on. I am not saying that the old revelation has past its use by date, certainly not! It is just as vitally needed as it ever was. However, times have changed and the church in general has also changed.
2. Many other streams of revelation have been added, some good and others not so good. The point is, that far from clarifying what God is doing these last days, some of these other streams of revelation have tended to muddy the spiritual water.
3. The fact that the spiritual water is a little muddy these day, should immediately tell us that the devil has succeeded in encouraging Christians to promote self centred or mixed / inaccurate theology, and the general state of the church confirms this.
4. Added to all this, the western world in general does appear to be a far more self centred place these days. Unfortunately much of this self centeredness has steadily drifted into the church as well.
5. Even though I am not into end time speculation, there is no doubt that the world is a more desperate place to live. Everything moves at a faster rate, and people have less time for God, for church, and less time for each other. This seems to agree with many Biblical comments concerning the last days.

We should also note that unity in New Testament times was also different. The concept of individualism had not developed very much for the simple reason that individuals were at much greater risk. In villages and towns everyone depended on each other for all things: food, trade, security, knowledge, etc. Today the western world has to continually emphasise the need to work together. Paul needed to state the need for unity, but did not need to repeat this mantra endlessly as we do today. People knew how essential unity was in their communities. Paul did not need to teach this, what he needed to do was to teach on what this meant as a Christian. Consequently we now have Paul's teaching on the body of Christ. Apart from the teaching of Jesus, Paul's writing was the first major step in establishing a theology of how the Body of Christ functions in local communities and generally on earth. He did this by relating it to how the society of his day was compelled to work together as a community.

Today on the other hand we look at Paul's writing from a different perspective. The very foundations of "Body Unity" theology have changed (though of course it is only our position that has changed – God is still the same!). Likewise, the platform that Ed Stube built upon when promoting unity in the body of Christ is now a different shape. It is now much more difficult for people to understand what unity means. At a superficial level we still find ways of declaring unity, but most of these have been at the expense of compromising Biblical truth. It is now more difficult for Christians to be truly unified. The irony is that the more difficult it is, the more important it is.

Also on the theology side, the theology and revelation of the Charismatic movement has tended to become twisted by the various movements that have followed it, to suit the needs of individual churches and church movements. This was to be expected, but now it can even be difficult to recognise it.

The very nature of the Charismatic movement allowed for a more Spirit lead experience, with time spent afterward sorting out how or even if this worked theologically. So it is not difficult for more

modern day movement to apply this same methodology and then readjust it all much more.

## Back To Human Methods

Apart from a few exceptions, most of the motivation these days is bring everything back to a position of, let's built the church by "doing what works," according to church surveys and personal experience. Let me illustrate this for you. About 2001, a Pentecostal church I know of went through a major series of changes. The average age of people in this church had been going up for a number of years, and the congregation numbers were going down. The new Pastor made the difficult decision to slowly remove all the elements that were part of the standard "Charismatic" service. So over a few years, out went such items as:

- a) Worship contributions from the congregation. No longer was the worship leader to leave any spaces where anyone in the congregation could start a song as "prompted by the Holy Spirit." Worship leaders were expected to become well practiced in the art of "**leading** the congregation." The unwritten part of this is of course that you are expected to stay in control of the congregation (or else someone else would soon be filling your spot on the roster).
- b) No longer were people allowed to prophesy in church without first checking it with one of the leaders. Within a few years this alone had killed most of the prophetic in the church.
- c) No longer were tongues (and interpretation) to be given, except they be "checked out first" – this knocked tongues and interpretation almost immediately on the head. Since this was one of the most uncomfortable moments in the service, many would have a loud Amen.
- d) Singing in tongues was to be strictly regulated, and if it did not sound very musical, the worship leader was to move on in a hurry by starting another song or using some other prearranged tactic. This of course cut down the amount of singing in tongues dramatically.
- e) Ok, you get the picture – in general the amount of spontaneity was to be drastically reduced and replaced with well planned alternatives that appeared to be spontaneous but were probably part of standard variables that had worked in the past.

They say it is another variation of a Pentecostal church. However to me it has simply become a traditional church, with a now more understandable and less formal service. The outcome of all of this was an increase in attendance. I should add that it was probably a good thing for that church, because it seems that the "Charismatic elements" had become little more than rather tired old habits that were killing it as a church.

To say what I just said, is a sad but accurate reflection of the truth. In contrast, the Charismatic movement of the late 1960's, 70's and even the early 80's was dynamic! There was nothing tired about the worship or the services. Ok there were always a few irritating people in a congregation that seemed to miss the point and would regularly over do it, but they were the exception.

Let me unveil a secret for you. These days most churches I hear about start because a Pastor and a few other people want to start something and sometimes (a very small percentage of these) manage to succeed. I know that sounds reasonable and perhaps obvious, but most Charismatic churches of the late 1960's, 70's did **not** start like that. On the contrary most church leaders were trying to prevent this "Charismatic thing" from happening, but God had other plans for them and turned their world upside down. There were many stories where the congregation led the way, the Holy Spirit was being poured out and it was not possible for the Pastor to stop it from happening.

I was a part of two of these churches. In these examples the leaders were very sympathetic but they were a little frightened of all the spontaneity, and were trying to bring everything back to some kind of order. As everyone knows, if you do that for long enough today, you will succeed in the end, because the move of the Spirit literally moves somewhere else or the people become

discouraged. But in the 1970's, over a period of seven years one of these churches grew from 50 to more than 500 people. This was because the people refused to be satisfied with the traditional order of things. In the evening service especially, worship would burst from the congregation, many people were not afraid of starting a song that was on their hearts, giving a prophesy, word of knowledge, etc. This made it an exiting and often unpredictable place to be.

This excitement can of course be difficult to cope with. It can create problems, but most of the congregation thought that enthusiasm was a very exiting problem to have!

By reflecting on the history of the Charismatic movement you can see that we have already uncovered some different types (or perhaps motivations) of unity. Ed Stube used to often say that "liturgy means the work of the people." When the Holy Spirit motivates the people to worship in Spirit and Truth, and motivates the people to demand a more perfect (or more honest) form of worship, then we have the seeds of a revival that is truly born of God.

A difficulty today is that worship in general has also moved on. It is now a practiced art form. The professional worship leader has returned, and it seems that even in the local church, it is important to at least be semi-professional in your approach. Of course there were always professional worship leaders, but previously they used to play the organ. Now they are more likely to sing and play guitar or keyboard. It seems that we have once again passed through the lengthy process of substituting modern songs and instruments, for the hymns and instruments of our forefathers.

At some other time, as a musician, I would like to discuss with you some of the other difficulties that today's music and methodology promotes, but for the moment let's continue with the main theme of unity, and reveal some insight from the New Testament.

## Unity in the New Testament

Unity was one of the dominant themes of the Convocation, but it is one of the more difficult themes to pin down. It is difficult because it means many things, has so many applications, and is a term often twisted by those that like to control churches. Therefore whenever it is mentioned people tend to stare into the distance, and scratch their heads. However, from a Biblical point of view, there is plenty of material to draw from.

There are a few passages in the New Testament that are heavily supporting the theology of unity. Perhaps the most important of these is the "high priestly" prayer of Jesus for his disciples and *"for those who will believe in me through their message"* (John 17).

Again and again (42 times – and no I did not count them all myself-!!) the Father and Son are linked together as - you/me, I/you, and us. Poetically John uses another forty-two times to link all disciples to either the Father and or the Son - I/you/those, they/yours, you/them/me, I/them, they/you/me. The message is loud and clear, John is modelling how pivotal this relationship is. The reader is being asked to meditate on this relationship. According to this prayer, Jesus wants us to model a relationship for the world that is similar to that which exists between him and his Father. *"I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me...May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me"* (John 17:20, 21, 23). Yes, there can be no mistaking the intent of Jesus; he really does consider that the relationship between Christians is meant to mirror the intensity/depth of the relationship of the Son with the Father.

Now before we all roll our eyes upward and complain that it's not possible, we should consider a few very important things:

The heritage of The Holy Way, is that we fully acknowledge the ability of the Holy Spirit to lead and prompt our steps. We also acknowledge that this is not humanly possible for this method to succeed in unifying us unless we are truly prompted by the Holy Spirit. And although I know there

is more to the Glory of God than the working of the Holy Spirit in us; never-the-less John 17:22 states *"I have given them the glory that you gave me, **that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me.**"* This firmly points to the unifying work of the Holy Spirit in the believer. It is this Glory that enables us to be seated with Christ in heavenly realms, even though our feet are firmly planted on earth, and we know that without this Glory we can not do it.

We know that the authorities refused to acknowledge this Glory in Jesus, and had blinded themselves to it, but any reading of the New Testament reveals that the powers of darkness could not ignore this Glory, because it was the very nature of Jesus. He only needed to physically approach an area to trigger a response of some kind. Sometimes these responses were verbal, *"What do you want with us Son of God?... (Mt 8:29)*, and other times they were physical *"He fell to the ground and rolled around... (Mk 9:20)*. On the mount of transfiguration this Glory was visible, as it was for Moses.

We have received the Glory that the Father gave Jesus. Christians are meant to be spiritually active beings, actively living and working in close relationship with the Holy Spirit. Sons of the living God, and heirs with Christ. In this sense we have the Glory of the Father and the Son. This is the Glory that enables us to work in unity. Physically it may be impossible, because we all have different lives and different jobs, and different personalities, but those that walk according to the Spirit are called to relate on a spiritual level as well. This is the whole point of being seated in heavenly places. We are not seated there because it is a theologically sound concept. We are seated in heavenly places because it is the **only way** we can work together spiritually and fulfil our calling in Christ.

Not only are we to relate and pray on a spiritual level, we are designed by our Maker to be creative on a spiritual level – bringing into being the things that are revealed in the Spirit. This is prophetic work in the spiritual dimension. Whether this happens through interactive vision, the spoken prophetic word, through healing, or some other way, it will only happen (and stay happened), when we have the mind of God and are in tune with His will and can operate from the place of heavenly authority. In this way we also reveal the Glory of God to a fallen world. These are precious moments, and when this happens we have the physical evidence of true unity with God.

## The Trinity

Another picture of unity can be found in the theology of the Trinity. Peter encourages us to "participate in the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). Ultimately this divine nature is the nature of the Trinity. It is peculiar to Charismatics and Pentecostals to get carried away with the work of the Holy Spirit, and be a little confused when it comes to the Trinity, but the Trinity is a perfect example of dwelling in one another at a perfect level. Of course it is not possible for flesh and blood to fully replicate this, but on a spiritual level this is indeed what we are called to do, and therefore it is the target we should aim for; and without a target to aim for, we will certainly not hit the mark.

Perhaps it is simply a reflection of the divisions in society that makes people think it impossible madness for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to be "One God." However the nature of God can not be diminished by the narrowness of our minds. The unity of God is an excellent illustration for us. The words of Jesus, "my Father is always at work to this very day, and I, too, am working" (Jn. 5:17), reminds us that the unity of the Trinity is not passive, it is not one of those, mutual recognition, say some nice things about each other meetings (after which we carry on as we did before). It is an active thing. They are constantly and seamlessly working as one to achieve divine objectives and purposes. It could be said that:

- a. Unlike most of mankind's efforts, this unity does not diminish or compromise – effectiveness, purpose, or any other value.
- b. This type of unity is not based on faith or hope, because in perfection, no faith or hope is required (perfection excludes all doubt).

- c. The unity of the Trinity works on the basis of perfection and perfect understanding and therefore does not need any one entity to be in charge (after all, they are One!).

Of course we could be trivial and say they don't need to waste time on committee meetings, or submit ideas to a congregation for approval, or get permits before creating things, etc. -- Ah, the benefits of being the dudes at the top! Yes we could say that, but we won't go there (just letting you know how my mind really works!).

This concept of active unity is worth dwelling a little longer. For example, I note that the Trinity somehow manage to be permanently active, and also achieve a state of permanent rest. A peculiar state indeed and something I'm sure we would all look forward to achieving.

In a more general sense, the concept of active unity points us firmly towards "HOW" spiritual unity actually works. I know Ed would agree with me that if a church operates in a passive way; that is, by letting those in charge do the ministry for the people, then that church is already half dead. The focus of leadership must be to prepare the people for the work of ministry, not to minister on behalf of the people (Eph 4:12). We are called to a deeper level of spiritually active ministry. In similar fashion the Trinity also works seamlessly and continually in unity encouraging and preparing people for the Kingdom and Kingdom ministry.

History tells us that the process of slowly becoming "traditional," leads slowly towards death. As soon as any group of Christians decides it is too busy and needs to employ a minister to do it for them, the process of death has begun. That is why there are many thousands of churches around the world slowly disappearing. Fortunately some of these are replaced by others that have rediscovered real New Testament life. The Holy Way has a heritage of actively training people for the work of active spiritual ministry; let us never lose sight of how important this heritage is.

## **A Spiritual Temple**

Please note: We read in Ephesians or other places about unity, but it never talks about organisation or any specific outward structure. With words like "Church" our minds substitute thoughts of buildings, priests, and structure, but really "Church" is another way of say "The Body of Christ" (or the called out ones – *ecclesia*). I get the impression this is not a new problem. When discussing church problems, I note that Paul never tells people to "tweak" their organisational structure, but he does tell people to renew their mind! Paul tries to avoid comparisons with organisations, and instead responds by talking about relationships, focusing on their relationship to God and their relationship to each other. "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14; Col. 2:16-23).

There are passages where the Spirit is said to dwell in the Christian community, pictured as a temple, rather than just the individual (e.g. 1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:20-22). This is the more standard picture of unity and one we are more used to meditating on. The first of these passages contains a severe warning for any who would cause division in the fellowship, as was happening in the Corinthian Church: "If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him: for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple" (1 Corinthians 3:17). Such is God's concern for oneness.

The Holy Way was born out of a group that lived in community. It is now very difficult for the western world to understand or return to any real concept of community living. I lived in genuine community style living for over 25 years, and it saddens me to admit that unfortunately we have to acknowledge individualism as the established norm for today, it is the position the church is in. Therefore we have to get on with it, because as the church has discovered, inaction also achieves disunity.

Unity is a spiritual blessing that flows from Christians working at the perfect level and acknowledging that there is "*one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all*" (Eph. 4:5-6).

**Ps. Spencer Scrutton**