

ECUMENICALISM Its Meaning and Menace

A reader some time ago asked what could be done in a local church in which there were persons who wished to further the cause of this movement, by many hailed as the greatest work of the Holy Spirit for centuries. The purpose of *this magazine*,* from its inception, however, has been to expound the Holy Scriptures, and to encourage all real believers to regulate their lives, and to bear their daily witness, in accordance with the teaching therein. In the words of the psalmist, they are exhorted to pray,—“Order my steps in Thy Word; and let not any iniquity have dominion over me” (Ps. 119:133). Hence, although the question is an urgent one, the space required to deal with the subject the writer would rather employ in the study of Scripture. Controversy, and particularly if it is for its own sake (and there are some who appear to love polemics), is a fruitless exercise, often resulting in estrangement and bitterness. But there are occasions when a stand must be taken for “the cause of God and of Truth.” Paul withstood Peter to the face because

he was to be blamed (Gal. 2:11). He warned Titus of “many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, . . . whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses” (Tit. 1:10, 11). But the heavenly principle that governed himself, and which he enjoined on his readers was, “Speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:5).

Ecumenism—Its Meaning

The word is derived from “oikoumene,” a word found in the Greek New Testament, for instance, in Luke 2:1,—“the world.” At that time, it denoted that part of the earth’s surface over which Cæsar ruled, sometimes called “the Roman earth.” Today, its meaning has been enlarged. It embraces the whole wide world. Hence, “ecumenism” is a world-wide conception. Locally, its principle is often adopted by a “District Council of Churches.” Nationally, it is expressed by “The British Council of Churches,” and internationally by “The World Council of Churches.” In these last two, “sacerdotalism,” on the one hand and “liberalism” (religious rationalism) on the other, are strongly influential.* The ultimate aim is “one world church.” Side by side with this “ideal,” is that of a “one world state,” with an universal parliament. All this seems desirable and attractive. Denominational sectarianism is, indeed, quite different from the state of things in the early church, but it must never be forgotten that what are called “sects” came into being because of error having crept in, and because of failure to deal with it. The ritualistic “churches” of Christendom hold to false doctrine and idolatrous practice. They are the real schismatics, because their systems have caused the schism. The Reformation cleansed, but not completely, “the Church of England,” for even in its evangelical prayer-book, the doctrine of “baptismal regeneration” is taught.* The folder issued by the W.C.C. for the January week of prayer for “unity,” this year in no less than three or four places, emphasizes this doctrine, which is a most deadly weapon in the hand of the great enemy of souls. A federation of “churches” under the presidency of the Pope, such as an English Primate recently professed to approve, would mean the embracing of this “doctrine of men,” and the “unity” which is sought would mean the “sinking of differences,” as it is euphemistically put, but, which would be in reality, the casting overboard of vital parts of Truth. Would not this be the dread sin of

*Sometimes also in regional councils of churches.

*Doubtless, this will be disputed, but the words are there, both in the “christening” service and in the Catechism.

apostasy? Indeed, the momentum that ecumenism has received in the past few years would seem to indicate that THE APOSTASY, as prophesied in 2 Thessalonians, chapter 2, is very near, and will usher in the coming of “The Man of Sin.”

The Menace of Ecumenism

The threat to spiritual liberty, locally, nationally, and internationally, is by no means a figment. It is very real. Even the denominational unions, by means of district “superintendents,” can exercise an unscriptural authority over the local church. There is, however, nothing whatever in the New Testament to warrant the setting up of national, regional, or district, bodies to organize, direct, or control, the affairs of a local assembly of God’s people. There is no such thing in the New Testament as “episcopal ordination,” that is the “laying on of hands” by someone in “apostolic succession.” A term such as, “The United Church of Canada,” for instance, has no Scriptural warrant. The term “church” is used as of a local assembly IN (not of) a city.

In apostolic days, a church came into being through the preaching of Christ crucified, risen, and ascended at God’s right hand. This Paul has described as “laying the foundation.” Not that he could do this, for the “Foundation IS laid, Which is Jesus Christ.” But his ministry, in the power of the Holy Spirit, presented Christ as the Great Rock Foundation, so that what is objectively real became subjectively real in the experience of his hearers, through teaching of the Holy Spirit. Thus a local church was formed—living stones built up upon THE LIVING STONE, Jesus Christ; and this is *the only pattern* for our guidance this day, and ever since the days of the apostles, and which is followed by those who are *Divinely* called to minister in lands overseas. That denominationalism has invaded this sphere is sadly true. But this is no excuse for departing from principles laid down in the New Testament Scriptures.*

It is therefore clear, at least to the mind of the writer, that ecumenism is a menace to the practice of those principles outlined above. It becomes, therefore, the duty of an evangelical local church to dissociate itself from a regional “council of churches” which includes modernist or ritualistic “churches” in its membership. Emphatically is such action essential where the district council recommends members of such “churches” to attend Mass in the local Roman Catholic building, which has been done. Nor should any sacerdotalist, of any communion whatever, be allowed to

*See appendix at end of this paper.

* This article was published in “Thoughts from the Word of God” (1966)

occupy an Evangelical pulpit. It ought not to be necessary to call attention to such matters, but there is much apathy and so-called "charity" amongst professed evangelicals that ecumenically-minded persons have been allowed freedom to introduce and to forward the practise of this false "unity." And once it has got a footing, it becomes increasingly difficult to control or eradicate. Much depends on the faithfulness of local churches. If they fail, the danger is that the Lord's displeasure will be incurred, and the testimony of the local church quenched. The parallel to this, *in the early days*, was the Lord's warning that the "candlestick" would be "removed out of its place." (Rev. 2:5).

Ecumenism and Apostasy

As far as it is possible for human eyes to see, the time is drawing near when these two words will denote one and the same thing; for not only is it the aim of the W.C.C., to bring into being a vast world-wide organizational union of "churches," but there are some who wish to include other "faiths," such as the best of Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Brahmanism, and other systems. And this will surely lead on to the coming of the Antichrist. Indeed, it will hasten that awful climax. "Transgressors are to come to the full," "Lawlessness is to abound" (Dan. 8:23, Matt. 24:12). The Lord Jesus said, "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). The outlook seems dark and foreboding, yet the believer is not to be depressed, but to be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain (Rev. 3:2). He is to obey the word of the Lord in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 and Hebrews 13:13, and, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts . . . live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present age; looking for That Blessed Hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:12, 13).

Appendix

In the days of the apostles, although there was uniformity of doctrine and practice in all the local churches, this was not maintained by means of a "headquarters," or a central controlling authority over the churches or assemblies. They all "continued in the apostles doctrine, and in the fellowship, and in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers." There was fellowship and inter-communion. Whilst the apostles lived—and this is particularly true of Paul—oversight was exercised by means of oral and written ministry. Upon him came "all the care of the churches" (2 Cor. 11:28). Paul and Barnabas ordained elders in every church"

(Acts 14:23). He called the elders and exhorted them (Acts 20). We read such words as, "As I teach everywhere in every church," "And so ordain I in all the churches," "the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord," "As I have given order to the churches of Galatia." (1 Cor. 4:17, 7:17, 14:37, 16:1). Although there are now no apostles, their doctrine and practice are clearly delineated in the New Testament. Thus the "unity of the Spirit," manifest in apostolic days, should have continued. Manifestly, it has not. The "one body" character (Eph. 4:4) of the whole church was also that, in miniature, of each local assembly—"Now ye are body of Christ, and members in particular" (1 Cor. 12:27). Rome claims to be this, in "apostolic succession," and its "unity" (rather uniformity) seems to lend colour to her claim, since she asserts that she is "one," and has no fellowship with external bodies. But, of course, the real test—Acts 2:42—is not true of her, except in travesty.

The apostles, except John, had departed to be with Christ when he was given "the Revelation of Jesus Christ." Then the local churches, each having its "angel" or messenger responsible to maintain the position of "a church of a living God, a pillar and ground of the Truth" (1 Tim. 3:15), were "one," though locally autonomous. But this was because the *One Head*, the Lord Jesus, was in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. (Rev. 1). Can it be said that this is the state of the "churches" today? And are we to expect a revival of these conditions? Some answer in the affirmative, others even claim to be *the church* of God in a locality, overlooking the fact that saints (those born again) are to be found in all the sects. The coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Ought not there to be a desire for a manifest unity ere His return? "Wilt Thou not revive US again that *Thy people* may rejoice in Thee?"