

Onward, Christian soldiers,
Marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus
Going on before;
Christ, the royal Master,
Leads against the foe;
Forward into battle,
See His banners go!

Onward, then, ye people,
Join our happy throng;
Blend with ours your voices
In the triumph song;
Glory, laud and honor
Unto Christ the King,
This through countless ages
Men and angels sing.

—Sabine Baring-Gould

Effects of an Ecumenical

OUR ECONOMY is spirited by new fads. They suggest that new purchases are in order. Many a hard-earned paycheck goes to replace clothing that has no fault other than its identity with old styles. The ability to possess the "latest" shows success, good taste, and progressive living in this materialistic society.

Fashion changes not only transfuse life into the economy's bloodstream, but they also offer strength to the ego. They appeal to the imagination and offer new interests to the restless. One cannot deny that new looks, even though costly, contribute a certain value to any people.

Fads are not limited to clothes, dances, games and cars. Practically every avenue of life has its changes in style. Thinking runs in fads. Thoughts change from that of concentration on having fun, as at the turn of the century; to a recent fad of psychiatric thinking when appointments with psychiatrists were a status symbol and good adjustment was mere self-knowledge; to the present space-age thinking where a rocket can be anything from a hamburger to a spacecraft booster.

Far from being immune to the shifting winds of fads, the religious world is most changeable and distributes its embraces freely. In the face of widespread criticism against Christian churches of their confusing and irreconcilable differences of opinion, the various expositors of higher thought and discipline flow along lines of religious fashion with almost flawless uniformity.

The fad is on. It is unity. Everyone who is anybody in the Christian religion thinks unity and understanding—tolerance, at least! The ecumenical church is the most necessary and eagerly sought goal of the Christian world today. Its platitudes of promotion are virtuous and clearly descriptive of the cause of Christ. But then, the labels always are such.

Under the leadership of Pope John XXIII, the first Ecumenical Council in decades was convened. Though Roman Catholic dominated, it has spurred

the most lubricated liberalizing that churches have experienced in centuries. The Roman Catholic Church, known to have been static in church liturgy, now stands near the front of this movement. Services have been streamlined, forsaking the Latin-speaking masses in several countries, church dress is being modified, and divisive doctrines are being reviewed.

The present Pope Paul VI, in previewing the first major document of his pontificate, advised that it would outline three roads toward a "living church" in line with the modern world.

"Our letter is a qualified announcement of our assumption to the chair of Peter." The Pope said, "It is a manifestation of our feelings and thoughts rather than an objective and organic treatment of a given theme." Pope Paul's background as a liberal in the Roman church practically assures that this opinion will be compromising in nature.

To the Catholic's description of Protestants as "the departed," the term "brethren" has been added. It is difficult to negotiate with the departed; that is, if they are not *brethren!*

Unity is never one-sided. So, as could be expected, Protestant leaders are suggesting that the term *catholic* in describing their "new-look" churches seems apt, since it accurately suggests universality. One leader in his book which stresses the importance of unification suggests that reference to the Roman Catholic denomination should include the use of both these terms. The use of the single word *catholic* is no longer understood to refer to a particular sect. And so the unity movement progresses through the propagating of principles and the clarification of technicalities that have significance only in deeper meanings with which the average layman does not concern himself.

Christians, beware! Food is not purified by antiseptic wrappers. Pudding sounds good, but the real test is in the tasting. The newness of a garment does not guarantee its fit. Some responsible and cautious thinking is in order.

Church upon Christianity

by Ray L. Straub

Were this quest for the general church unity an essential to practicing Christians, one ought to find such injunction in the Christians' textbook and guide, the Holy Bible. Movements whose essential motives lie without the boundaries of the Holy Writ would be futile efforts toward achieving such goals as are promised within. An examination of Scripture on ecumenicity is of the essence!

The ecumenical movement is one for the unity of mankind, authored by men. Of necessity, it ignores the real basis of unity in Christ and seeks to channel the masses through whatever thinking and discipline will accomplish its aims. Disunity is the problem; heresy is masked.

Jesus assured: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). Today's movement seeks conformity by those who put forth little effort to follow ALL of Jesus' teachings, and it seeks the cooperation of those who not only lack His acquaintance, but suggest that to doubt His divinity marks intelligence! Jesus warned that those who hear His sayings, but do not follow with actions, are building houses which stand but temporarily on sand (Matt. 7:26).

"... I am the way, the *truth*, and the life..." said Jesus (John 14:6). The ecumenical movement involves itself in efforts to mitigate the value of truth as preached in sound doctrine. Teachings are passed off as private interpretations and opinion. Opinions, being a personal possession, must be selflessly disregarded where unity is threatened.

Truth is eternal. It is not always convenient, but its existence cannot be jeopardized. Truth can be ignored, but this leaves one ignorant. Since it is truth that makes men free (John 8:32), it remains a prime and indispensable ingredient when one seeks salvation and resolves to fight the good fight of faith. Prisoners of sin will never find the hope and joy in a union behind bars that they would find in liberation!

Religious fads deserve analysis. A reasonable approach to this task is to see how current aspira-

tions harmonize with those of the Holy Spirit. "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

The Church, thrust into a hostile world by the Holy Spirit after Pentecost, was given a job. The goal of achieving a "brotherhood" was not foremost, even though it was valuable and real. She was sent to preach truthfully the gospel of Christ. "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me..." (Acts 1:8). Preachers who taught doubt concerning the reality of Jesus were called "anti-christ" (1 John 4:3).

A further, closely-connected essential duty of the Church was to safeguard the truth. Paul reminded Timothy that the Church of the living God was "... the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15).

His pastoral advice was: "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; *continue in them*: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4:16).

Paul's warning in 2 Timothy 3:13 and 14 exposes our present fad: "... Seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But *continue* thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation..."

For one to fail in his love for the truth is a most grievous spiritual shortcoming. "... Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved... God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth..." (2 Thess. 2:10-12). "And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of" (2 Peter 2:2).

Consistent with this attitude, there are stern warnings against the espousing of heretics. "...

Elder Straub is Vice-Chairman of the General Conference of the Church of God (7th Day). His membership on the Executive Board reaches back to August 1959. He is known to readers of "Aim," the magazine for young people, as their "Teen Counselor" since his points of reasoning on various problems appear in each issue. He is also pastor of the North Sacramento, California, church.

Mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrines which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Romans 16:17).

Heresies are characterized as works of the flesh in Galatians 5:20, as damnable in 2 Peter 2:1, and Titus 3:10 instructs that the heretic is to be rejected.

It is true that Paul confessed to walking after the way which was called heresy (Acts 24:14). A careful examination of this text, however, will prevent tragic misuse of it. Paul did not confess to being a heretic. He admitted that he fit the Jew's description of a heretic—no more! Let none presume that Paul's admission awards approval to such a spiritual malady. Paul was not a heretic to the Christian faith; he was considered so only by that sect from whose darkness he emerged through his conversion.

Instead of forsaking doctrinal accuracy for massiveness, we are warned against fellowshiping with "... the unfruitful works of darkness ..." (Eph. 5:11). The present ecumenical movement could not possibly be fruitful, lacking the awesome inability to set forth its true goals beyond that of bulky sameness. Unity is strength to those who wait on the Holy Spirit and follow His guidance. It is useless when it is a mere goal in itself.

It becomes rather obvious that universality merely speeds the Christian world to the place of complete spiritual anemia toward which it has steadily been traveling. Churches lacking essential

purpose grasp at straws in attempts to justify their existence. Universality quietly removes what little starch a unique religious teaching gives a church body. Quantity falsely suggests progress, and precious quality is outdated.

For its rewards togetherness has great potential, political strength. With good principles in view the massive strength of unified churches could be formidable, indeed! "Finally, the world will be forced to recognize Christian teaching," sigh the optimistic religious styl-ists.

The Church would do well not to expose naivete in this regard. Compromise on religious doctrine and practice to achieve togetherness leaves mere massiveness. Everything big is not strong.

Beliefs left to the ecumenical church are sufficiently watered down to where they lose identity in the oceans of good intentions fostered by every other kind of union in existence. The Church,

notoriously unfaithful to Christian principle, as demonstrated in her forthright censure of war during times of peace and approval of it during conflict, stands little chance of being effective where those more than her equal politically have failed.

The move for the Church is forward. May it ever be so! Not every tide that gives a lifting sensation will carry us in the right direction. One still needs to retain his perspective and reach for power to progress.

Forsaking essential qualities for conformity is a questionable transaction. Spiritual discernment reveals that it was our Saviour Who gave us birth into the world of abundant life, peace, and security, and it must be He Who will lead us on. Those who press toward varying goals must with all their sincerity and zeal travel without us. God's path appears quite definitely to take a different direction.

The other evening I was talking with an elderly man whose eyesight was almost gone. He remarked, "Now I know the meaning of the expression 'precious little.'" So many of God's greatest gifts are never prized until it is almost too late.

We rise each morning a new man. The fatigue of body, mind and spirit has somehow vanished in the hours of relaxation and suspension of consciousness. We are the same person, yet totally different. Problems which, the night before, seemed to have no solution now appear to be manageable.

Can you imagine an existence without night? Even if it were physically possible to live without sleep, how long could the human spirit continue without rest?

Another of God's greatest gifts is life itself. How totally incredible it is that we actually live. Made of dust, yet we live and breathe, think, plan, love, respond. We talk to God our Creator. We communicate with man our fellow-heir. We delight in the beauty of God's creation. We are gradually dis-

Precious Little

cerning the way God has ordered the natural universe. We marvel at the transforming power of love. In short, we live! Can you imagine that?

The only blight on life is sin. How strange and how tragic that man should turn from God to whom he owes everything and make himself and his own selfish plans the goal of his earthly life. How unbelievably perverse that the great gifts of God to man should be turned into weapons with which man repels the love of God. How wonderfully appropriate that those who acknowledge the Lordship of Christ should receive every gift in gratitude and turn it back in the service of adoration.

Let us recognize the true value of life and health, sight and sound now, before we are forced by the limitations of age or sickness into a position where there is "precious little" left.—THE STANDARD