

*Stone-Campbell Dialog  
Great Communion Service/SCD Meeting*

## The Challenge To Unity

( Challenges for the future, where to do we go from here, how do we make unity a reality in our churches and lives?)

Crestwood Christian Church (DOC)  
Sunday Nov 1, 2009  
Lexington, KY

By  
Dr. Rick Hunter

Almost every Christian reform or restoring movement did more than reform or restore the existing structure. Therefore, the challenge to unity (in this context) is always a departure point, a ship leaving port with a destination in mind, but without a charted course.

More specific to our faith-tradition, Richard Hughes and C. Leonard Allen, in their book, "ILLUSIONS OF INNOCENCE," state that, "...some Americans have fully identified their religious denomination or even their nation itself with the purity of first times. The illusion thereby fostered in the minds of these Americans is that they are an innocent and fundamentally natural people, who, in effect have stepped outside of history, culture, and tradition...they have often confused the historic peculiarities of their limited experience with universal norms that should be embraced by all."

Therefore, this unity that we seek is tied to a variable so pervasive (primitivism) that it seems to outlive every attempt to eradicate it, but we must bring our best and our brightest minds to keep thinking, questioning and gaining one more step ahead.

Leon Festinger, in his book, WHEN PROPHECY FAILS, wrote, "A man with a conviction is a hard man to change. Tell him you disagree and he turns away. Show him facts or figures and he questions your sources. Appeal to logic and he fails to see your point...finally, suppose that he is presented with evidence, unequivocal and undeniable evidence, that his belief is wrong: what will happen? The individual will frequently emerge, not only unshaken, but even more convinced of the truth of his beliefs..."

Festinger's, research is based on the theory of **cognitive dissonance** and speaks to the challenge of Unity we are discussing now, and that we have come to know as foundational to the **Kingdom** agenda.

The COC of my upbringing has had it fill of **samurai** Christianity. Salvation in Christ is inextricably tied to the fact that a believer knows there is one (earthly) church in which salvation is to be found, **and we are it**. There is one name by which Christ would know his true disciples, **and we have it**. There is one plan that authorized the how and who of worship, **and we are the sole practitioners**.

But, it is apparent that at this time we are living in, God is stirring our spiritual pot...yes! **I believe I hear Ezekiel's voice in the valley of the dry bones, that these bones can live again.** And, if I am not mistaken, we are starting to see the bones come together; those that are testifying that we can live, that we do live.

So, where do we go from here, how do we make unity a reality in our churches and in our lives?

1. Continue to prepare the soil, the equipment, the seed, for the **farmer-preacher** just behind you.
2. Remember, that we live and work at a point of convergence between our reality of time and God's divine time schedule
3. Never underestimate what God may and can do with the one person you take time to mentor and teach. He or she may lift and influence Ten-thousand
4. Teach the Bible as a tool of grace—the scriptures, principles, practices and reality of unity are already there
5. Never allow a **reformer-person** to stand as a herald of unity **alone**. (did not the prodigal's father wrap him up as a sign of protection?)
6. Provide opportunities of area/regional gatherings to affirm and encourage those embracing God's unity. **People need fellowship affirmation**
7. Pray specifically—call out names, encourage those out front
8. Ask God's special mercy for those experiencing **disorientation and disillusionment** in their journey to freedom
9. Ask God's forgiveness individually, and collectively for our complicit acts of sectarianism
10. Establish support scholarships for those entering or already in seminary/ Christian Universities that have this mind
11. Look for and take advantage of opportunities of unity the Lord brings to you.

He drew a circle to keep me out:  
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.  
But love and I had the wit to win;  
We drew a circle and took him in.

(James Woodroof, "The Church in Transition")