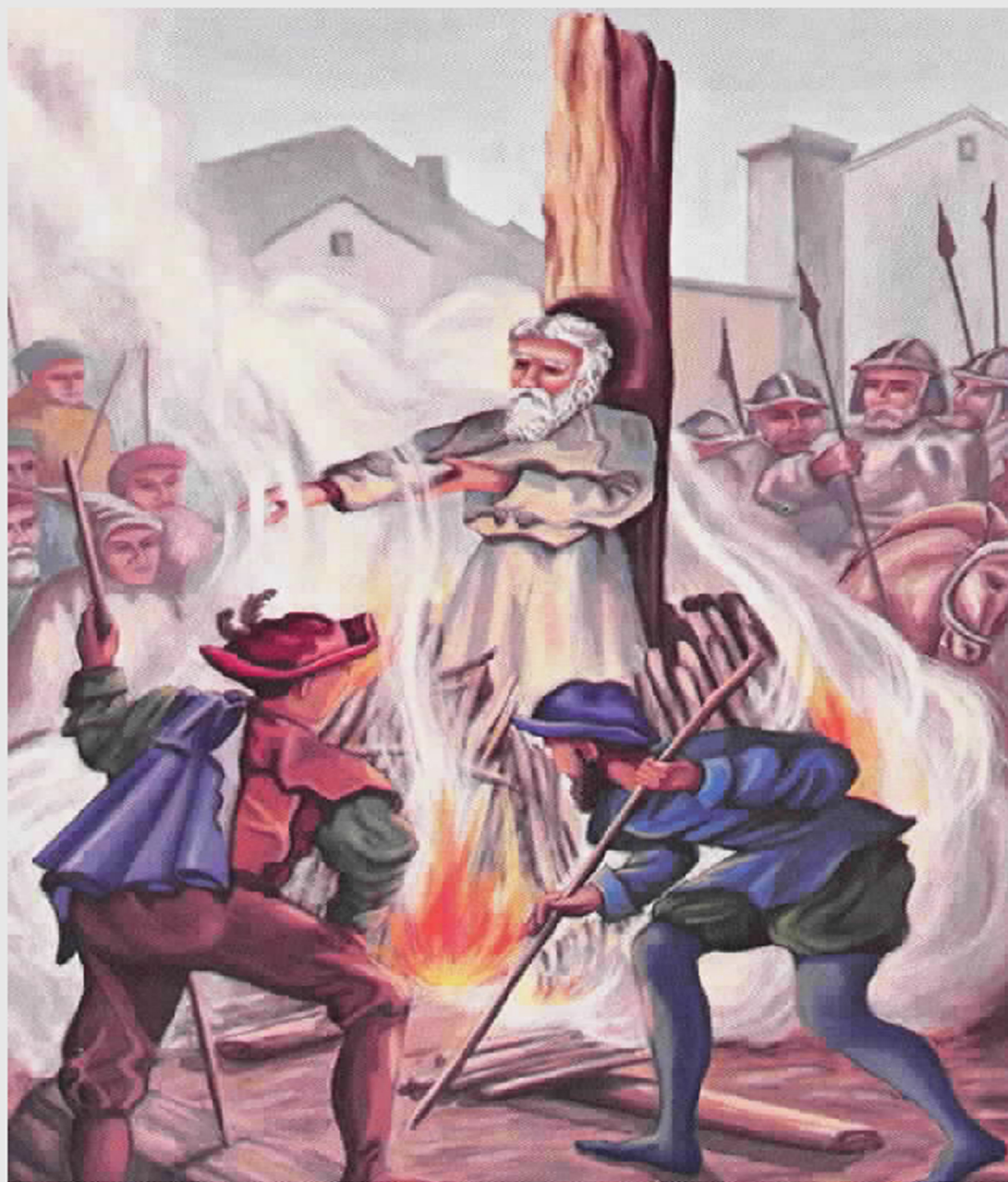


Christian Duty and Church Union



CHRISTIAN DUTY AND CHURCH UNION

Before setting forth our understanding of the timely topic “Christian Duty and Church Union,” we wish to state *most emphatically* that we are saying *nothing whatever against godly Christians anywhere, at any time, whether in any church or out of any church*. We are discussing *principles, doctrines, and practices*—not individuals. Why not? Because Jesus Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death “for *every man*” (Heb. 2:9; 1 Tim. 2:5,6).

The very unity so earnestly desired today was already once achieved back in the Dark Ages, when bigotry, hatred, and intolerance prevailed. Those living back there who differed with a united and recognized church system were defamed, abused, and accused as disrupters of the religious harmony of that era. All of the great reformers of the past were viewed as divisionists and were characterized in a derogatory manner by such terms as “*Protestants,*” “*schismatics,*” “*nonconformists,*” “*heretics,*” and “*Separatists.*” Thus it is rather strange today to see Protestant religious bodies stumbling over one another in beating a path to the Papal council table, especially in view of the past failure of Papacy’s leadership to achieve the peaceable fruits of tolerance

and goodwill—in spite of the vast power and authority they exercised at that time. Is it any wonder, then, that some question not only Catholicism's right but also its ability to champion the cause of freedom and to stem the tide of materialism and the ensuing dictatorships?

The Catholic hierarchy and clergy are very willing to counsel Protestants and other mixed groups on the merits of the ecumenical spirit but are themselves disinclined to request Protestant counsel and instruction for their Catholic congregations—because, from their standpoint, *true* church unity consists in coming back into the Roman Catholic fold, which they are graciously window dressing to make their separated brethren (*separati fratelli*) feel more accommodated and at home. Catholic doctrine and practice are in direct contradiction to the spirit of ecumenism, which they preach but expect to be carried out on *their* terms.

Satan is seeking to undermine religious and political liberty, and eventually to throttle freedom of expression and conscience by the clever strategy of using catchy but irresponsible and dangerous slogans. The slogans purport to foster the spirit of unity, tolerance, peace, and brotherhood, but in reality, they are sacrificing moral and doctrinal principles—and thus are striking at the very roots of true doctrinal and religious reform. Honest

dissent, constructive criticism, and candid opinion are the necessary ingredients to true progress.

Let us not be deceived or shamed into believing that we or others are divisionists or strife-mongers simply because we dissent from and criticize the ecumenical spirit of unity in religious circles as it is being espoused by leaders in our day. The current ecumenical trend has a great emotional appeal, and therein lies the danger. If followed blindly, the ecumenical spirit is prone to still the tongue and deafen the ear to the plea of reason or logic, leading instead to a frenzy of delusion. Be it remembered that Jesus, our Master and Savior, was crucified as a political insurrectionist and as a rebel by the leaders of his day. Luke 23:2,5 reads: "And they began to accuse him [Jesus], saying, We found this fellow *perverting the nation*, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King.... And they were the more fierce, saying, He *stirreth up the people*, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place." John 19:12 adds, "And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him [Jesus]: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar." Was not the Apostle Paul similarly accused? "These [that is, Paul and Silas] that have *turned the world upside down* are come hither also; ... and these all *do contrary to the decrees of Caesar*, saying that there is another king, one Jesus" (Acts

17:6,7). “This [Paul] is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place” (Acts 21:28). And in the Old Testament, the Prophet Elijah was accosted by King Ahab with the words “Art thou he that troubleth Israel?” (1 Kings 18:17,18).

Now the question arises, What is the present and the future responsibility of the Lord’s people concerning the ecumenical movement? Some feel that there should be no change in our message or activities—that we are to take “no thought for the morrow” but are to let the morrow “take thought for the things of itself” (Matt. 6:34). It is true that Jesus instructed, “Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer: For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist” (Luke 21:14,15). However, as may be noted from the context of the Luke narrative, this Scriptural advice particularly applies *after Christians are delivered into the hands of the religious and political rulers* because of faithfulness in proclaiming God’s Word. What, therefore, is the responsibility for Christians now, that is, prior to the coming persecution?

While we are not to take *anxious* thought for tomorrow, while we are not to be overly concerned about what the future may hold for us, yet we are to make *some* preparation for the

future—just as we buy groceries for the coming week and prepare for a convention long in advance. To be forewarned is to be forearmed, and thus it behooves us to take a reasonable and moderate amount of our time to become familiar with Papal arguments and to fortify ourselves with short, pithy Scriptural replies—replies that are brief and to the point—for long, involved reasoning loses the edge of its effectiveness.

Gideon's army originally consisted of thirty-two thousand men. However, God desired a smaller number, so the army was subjected to two tests before being privileged to represent Him in the coming contest with the Midianites. First, those who were fearful were told to depart from Mount Gilead.

“Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand.

“And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there....

“So he [Gideon] brought down the people unto the water: and the LORD said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink.

“And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water.

**“And the LORD said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place.”
(Judges 7:3-7)**

This account is a picture of events at the end of the age, soon to come. Gideon represents Jesus, and the three hundred portray the last members of the body of Christ. A dog customarily drinks water by bending its head and lapping up water with its tongue, all the while keeping its eyes open, looking ahead. And so those Christians who figuratively scoop up handfuls of water, bringing prophetic truths to their mouth, with their eyes alert and glued forward in anticipation, determined to be as thoroughly ready and awake as possible—and with their heads bowed in humility, reverence, prayer, and praise—are most pleasing to the Lord. By the possession of such characteristics, they show their submission to the divine will.

In proportion as the subjects of Christian unity and church union come more and more to the forefront before the public in the near future, demanding attention, it will be our responsibility to respond with a correspondingly stronger message. In dis-

cussions with the public, we should identify the truth with the principles of the Reformation movement, saying that we are not alone in our dissent, for others, both past and present, have been wary of Papal aberrations in doctrine, as evidenced by the powerful message contained, until recently, in the preface of almost every edition of the King James Version of the Bible. (Unfortunately, these prefaces are now being intentionally deleted from nearly all King James Bibles.)

We are to be “wise as serpents, and harmless as doves,” and to consider ourselves “as sheep in the midst of wolves” (Matt. 10:16). Where possible, we should change conversations or rephrase questions directed to us to a more suitable manner for giving a wholesome and constructive reply that will benefit our hearers. Jesus used this method when others interrogated him. At present, we should emulate his conduct in skirting or avoiding unnecessary danger, as he did in the earlier part of his ministry by going up to Jerusalem privately and confining his activity to the Galilee area when his enemies sought to apprehend him. He used that tactic because “his hour was not yet come” (John 7:30). When that hour drew near, however, he pursued an opposite course of action: He threw caution to the wind and set his face toward Jerusalem and certain death. Jesus stated the principle: “He who seeks to save his life shall lose it, and he who seeks to lose his life for my sake shall save it” (Luke 9:24 paraphrase).

John the Baptist's course, which brought him into conflict with Herod, is in some degree typical of the course of events that may be expected by the gospel Church in the days ahead. The fulfillment of John the Baptist as a type will probably be along the following lines. When a partial union of Church and State takes place, it will become the duty of the true Church, the forerunners and the announcers of the Messianic Kingdom, to reprove the civil powers as well as the nominal church systems, declaring their union unlawful and contrary to the Word of God. As the well-known hymn goes, "Where duty calls or danger, be never wanting there."

In the Second Psalm is found the following prophetic utterance:

"Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?

"The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying,

"Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.

"He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.

"Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.

“Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.

“I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.

“Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.

**“Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”
(Psa. 2:1-9)**

In Acts 4:25-29, the Apostle Peter provided meaningful insight into the significance of the Second Psalm and furnished clues for its fulfillment at the conclusion of the Christian or Gospel Age.

“Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?

“The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.

[Note especially the remaining verses.] “For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,

“For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

“And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word.”

The danger of the future to the Lord’s people consists in an experience of mass hysteria from various quarters. In this fourth chapter of Acts, the Apostle Peter gave the Second Psalm a *partial* application at the beginning of the Gospel Age in the experience of our Lord Jesus Christ and the circumstances surrounding his final trial and crucifixion. But the Apostle Peter also furnished clues as to the proper fulfillment of this Psalm at the conclusion of this age, when the Lord’s people will have a similar experience.

Before discussing the coming mass hysteria, we will read an account from an ancient and interesting document that was found in the Vatican at Rome. Called “Pilate’s Report,” it purports to be the original document or letter of Pontius Pilate, governor of Judea, to Emperor Tiberius Caesar concerning the circumstances that led to the crucifixion of Christ. We quote Pilate’s words in part: “Often in our civil commotions have I witnessed the furious animosity of the multitude, but nothing could be compared to what I witnessed in the present instance. It might have been truly said that on this occasion all the phantoms of the infernal regions had assembled at Jerusalem. The crowd appeared not to walk: they were borne along, whirling and rolling like living waves, from the portals of the Pretorium, even unto Mount Zion, with

howlings, screams, shrieks and vociferations, such as were never heard in the seditions of the Panonia, or in the tumult of the forum.”

The next reading is from the Gospel of Matthew:

“But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask [for] Barabbas [to be released], and [to] destroy Jesus.

“Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They *all* say unto him, *Let him be crucified.*

“And [Pilate] the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they *cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified.*” (Matt. 27:20,22,23)

Mark 15:14 says, “And they [chief priests and people] cried out the *more exceedingly, Crucify him.*” Luke 23:23 states, “And they [chief priests, rulers, and people] were *instant with loud voices*, requiring that he might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed.” John 19:6 reads, “They [chief priests and officers] cried out, ... *Crucify him, crucify him* [that is, like a chant].” And Matthew 27:24 supplies still more information: “When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.”

The mass hysteria will be such at the end of the age that laws will be enacted to curtail personal liberties. The plea will be necessity for the public welfare—the necessity to quiet the disorder and the anger of the people. One step after another will be taken, until finally it will be thought necessary to formulate a simple law of religion. Thus Church and State will be united, in a measure, in the governing of the United States and Europe. The laws, which will be as simple as possible to suit all the so-called orthodox (that is, popular) religious views, will be calculated to repress and to prevent growth in grace and in the knowledge that is now “meat in due season” (Matt. 24:45). The plea and justification will probably be the prevention of socialism, infidelity, and political eruptions of the lower and the independent classes.

The underlying lesson for the Lord’s people becomes apparent. In the near future as a part of the trouble, but before the greatest trouble when the Day of Wrath bursts upon the world and wrecks the entire social fabric of earth—preparatory to God’s grand, new, and better order, which is promised under the true Christ—a severe hour of trial and testing will come upon the truly consecrated Church.

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For more information on the subject “Christian Duty and Church Union,” see the book *The Keys of Revelation*.