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One Lord and One Body: Implications for the Common Faith of the Church

Allan J. McNicol

Honoring the 200th anniversary of the *Declaration and Address*

That the Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one; consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the Scriptures, and that manifest the same by their tempers and conduct, and of none else; as none else can be truly and properly called Christians.¹

It remains a wonderful unknown in my life why certain phrases or incidents, many from earliest experience, continue to come to mind with some frequency. One particular early personal experience occurred while reading a journal article highlighting the importance of the church. The writer ventured that he was not bothered by the occasional insults directed his way because he was a Christian. It was a different matter when critics would assault the

¹ Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address of the Christian Association of Washington: Proposition One* (Washington, PA: Brown & Sample, 1809). This quote is found in Thomas H. Olbricht and Hans Rollman, ed., *The Quest for Christian Unity, Peace, and Purity in Thomas Campbell's Declaration and Address Text and Studies* 46 (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2000), 18. The same text, with slight differences in punctuation, is available in Frederick D. Kershner, *The Christian Union Overture: An Interpretation of the Declaration and Address of Thomas Campbell* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1923), 81. Also worthy of note is Glenn Thomas Carson, Douglas A. Foster and Clinton J. Holloway, *One Church: A Bicentennial Celebration of Thomas Campbell's Declaration and Address* (Abilene: ACU Press, 2008).

church. “Why,” he wrote, “don’t people realize that Christ loved the church and gave his life for her to make her holy and without blemish?”² Today when I listen with some frequency to issues people have concerning the church, more often than not this comment comes to mind. I think it represents intentional teachings nourished within Churches of Christ. One cannot separate loving Christ from loving the church.

The church matters! Or, with apologies to our cultural origins among the plain folks of European heritage, somewhat paradoxically, we have maintained what others would describe as a “high” doctrine of the Church.³ Thus we arrive at Thomas Campbell’s famous proposition, which marks the origin of much of this theology. If we ignore the dismissive asides that Campbell’s *Declaration* emerged in the rudimentary setting of American frontier religion, and its initial modest impact,⁴ we may appreciate its fundamental theological insight. There is only one church. We draw attention to the key sentence in the *Declaration and Address*: “The Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally and constitutionally one.” Such a claim must have seemed odd on the Western frontier plagued with a plethora of sectarian Christian groups. If such a claim is taken seriously then this statement has

² Cf. Ephesians 5:25–27.

³ I note a similar point made by Everett Ferguson in, “Churches of Christ: Who We Are and What We Ought To Be,” *Christian Studies* 18 (2000/2001), 46, where he echoes his article eventually published as “Church, Doctrine of The,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, Anthony L. Dunnivant and D. Newell Williams (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 209. Ferguson concludes that by balancing the movement’s strong emphasis on personal liberty we have sought to maintain a “high” doctrine of the church.

⁴ Henry E. Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity: A History of the Restoration Movement*, rev. ed. (Abilene: ACU Press, 2003), 92, states what happened after the publication of the *Declaration and Address* in December 1809, “They published their document, built a meeting house, and waited for things to happen. Nothing did.” This would not be the first or last time an important theological insight would go unnoticed. In this case the will to survive among the multiple sects of the frontier temporarily choked out Campbell’s message.

significant implications for our theological thinking. Despite the fact that the theological heirs of the Campbells have shown the same propensity for rancor and division that was present in the religion of the frontier they encountered, the human weaknesses and shortcomings of later followers should not nullify this key insight.

We need to remember that as we live in the time of the transition from the old to the new creation, the imperfections of believers are readily apparent. From the humble circumstances of first-century Christianity, the New Testament epistles make this point clear. We should not concede the high ground of our theological claims to the cynics. Let us examine the implications of Thomas Campbell's claim more closely.

Restoration or Unity: Are they Incompatible?

Broadly speaking the theological heirs of the Campbells (Thomas and his son, Alexander) have steered their ecclesiology by one of two dominant pole stars: either unity or restoration. Echoing Thomas Campbell's painful encounter with sectarian frontier religion, they considered divisions among believers to be shameful. Division is an open wound reflecting blatant disregard for the prayer of our Lord for the unity of his disciples (John 17:6–26). Careful reading of John 17 did not allow them to conclude that Jesus prayed only for some hypothetical spiritual unity. As Jesus of Nazareth was the visible incarnate word of God, so must his followers reflect openly their unity, not only spiritually with the Son, but materially, in visible fellowship with one another (John 1:14, 18; 17:20–26). This often translates into viewing our fellowship as an ecumenical movement seeking to heal the divisions within Christendom.

Historically, this is the context in which much of the theological activity of the Disciples of Christ has occurred. It is no accident that they have distinguished themselves disproportionately in the Protestant ecumenical

movements of the twentieth-century. Yet these ecumenical ventures have produced few instances of working unity among the denominations that continue to proliferate.

The second motif playing a dominant role in the ecclesiology of Thomas Campbell's theological heirs is restoration. This image was implicit in many of the appeals to scripture in the *Declaration and Address*. Campbell presumed that a reasonable person following conventional standards of analyzing an historical document could determine the faith and practice of the early church by reading the New Testament. This perspicuous reading of scripture became foundational in our movement. It continued through most of the past two centuries. Later developments in ecclesiology and theology beyond the New Testament were viewed with suspicion. In good Enlightenment fashion, after the process of "clearing the way ... by removing the stumbling blocks—the rubbish of the ages,"⁵ all that was necessary to be a faithful Christian was to follow the presumed pattern of Christianity in the New Testament. This would result in the original Church being restored. Supposedly, this would be the basis for the unification of all Christians. Although Thomas Campbell's son Alexander referred to this movement as the "New Reformation," the "Restoration Movement" became preferred.

There is much commendable here. It is a sound principle to seek the purest forms of a tradition in its origins; but it is clear that problems have emerged. At the heart of the enterprise rests the issue of resolving the thorny combination of rigorous historical research of scripture and a serviceable interpretation of the text among ordinary people that provides authoritative guidance for the community. Fortunately, this juggernaut is not the topic of

⁵ Kershner, *The Christian Union Overture*, 96–97. The language is taken from Campbell's *Declaration and Address*.

this essay. Nevertheless, the wreckage which has spilled forth from this enterprise is strewn across the landscape.

Anticipation of what was about to happen can be seen in the fruits of Thomas Campbell's own work. His reconstruction of the faith and practice of early Christianity along the lines of viewing the New Testament as a blueprint for the constitution of the Church convinced few. His followers were soon absorbed into a Baptist Association. Even on the frontier, other Christian groups produced different outcomes as they sought to recover "first-century Christianity" through the lenses of their inherited presuppositions.

Among the theological heirs of Thomas Campbell, Churches of Christ and conservative Christian churches embraced restoration most avidly. Visiting Churches of Christ around the world, I am struck by the fact that it is the plea to restore New Testament Christianity that attracted most of our intellectual leaders in the first place. I, too, am formally committed to the principle of restorationism, in the form of patternism it is not fruitful. Historical research has its limits too!⁶ But it has shown, conclusively, that the New Testament writings were never meant to function as a blueprint for organizing the church. The fashionable maxim "It is not a salvation issue" is a case in point. Often a Trojan horse in the cause of ecclesiastical freedom, it is only

⁶ After surveying the textual evidence of the Bible emerging from the earliest Christian centuries, D. C. Parker comments, "I am struck by how little we know (certainly I know) about almost everything I have written about. Given the tiny number of manuscripts to have survived from antiquity, our theories can be no more than provisional attempts to understand these fragments of the textual tradition" (*An Introduction to the New Testament Manuscripts and Their Texts* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008], 348). Parker's remarks are pertinent not only to the study of the New Testament text, but also a study of the form, structure, and life of the early church. Unfortunately, reading the New Testament as the constitution for the church has often led interpreters to universalize what may have been only occasional beliefs and practices. There are many things we know about the ancient church. Let us admit there is a lot we don't know.

the latest misuse that presumes the blueprint model.⁷ This approach promotes division in the body of Christ.⁸ It is time to re-assess what we are seeking in attempting “to restore New Testament Christianity.”

We have observed that heirs of Thomas Campbell have usually centered their vision on one of two motifs: unity or restorationism. In the past two hundred years the two have had their particular problems.⁹ Yet, neither motif captures Campbell’s intuition about the ancient church’s common faith. At the core, he presumed, “The church is one.” It is time that we returned to this fundamental theological principle, reexamining its basic shape, and determining its implications for ecclesiology today.

A Proposal

The church is a community owing its existence to God’s faithfulness in the history of Israel and the ministry, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Shaped by this revelation, as God’s new creation in the time between the times, the first and second coming of Christ, and as a contrast-society to the powers of the age, its existence is sustained by the word of its living Lord.

This is a comprehensive definition. Often we confine our understanding of church to the activities of a congregation in one place, a particular

⁷ That is, because a teaching or practice cannot be documented within the pages of the New Testament as essential for salvation it must be placed in an area of total liberty. The next step is as Richard Neuhaus has famously noted, “Any orthodox doctrine that is regarded as optional will soon be proscribed” (*First Things* 191 [March 2009]: 63).

⁸ An even more negative assessment of restorationism with respect to the journey of the Disciples of Christ can be found in M. Eugene Boring, *Disciples and the Bible: A History of Disciples Biblical Interpretation in North America* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1997) 412–413.

⁹ My critique of the blueprint model of restorationism was delivered at the Christian Scholars Conference at Pepperdine University in 1989. The paper, entitled “Theological Method on the Bible Among Churches of Christ: A Proposal,” is available at http://www.austingrad.edu/academics_mcnicol_resource.html.

communion, or the totality of the various fellowships we encounter. But these may be nothing more than expressions of contemporary religiosity rather than what the Bible means by church.

This essay underscores Thomas Campbell's Scriptural claim that, "the Church of Christ on earth is essentially one." Or, "the body of Christ is one." Although this insight is often disregarded by Campbell's theological heirs, it has not been entirely forgotten. We should keep our eyes on this prize rather than focus on peripheral themes. When people grasp its centrality, some call it "high church doctrine." In terms of current ecclesiological discussion, it can be viewed as a "third way" between Evangelicals, who hardly have a doctrine of the church, and Catholicism, which has its own concerns.

We believe that Campbell's insight that "the body of Christ is one" is constitutive for the common faith of Christians. Stated simply, the gospel provides the account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus for our salvation and demands we claim salvation by entering into the one body in baptism and maintaining communion with other believers and the Lord at his Table. This should be the focus of restoration.

Procedurally, we will look at a cross-section of texts in Matthew, Ephesians, and Justin Martyr. Then we will point out that neither Evangelical nor Catholic ecclesiology is consistent with these mainstream propositions of the ancient church. A "third way" needs to be affirmed. We conclude by exploring the implications for the Stone-Campbell movement.

Matthew's Doctrine of the Church

The word *ekklēsia*, usually translated "church," appears only two times in the Gospels, both in Matthew (16:18; 18:17). This is an appropriate place to begin our discussion.¹⁰

¹⁰ In Matthew the term "kingdom of heaven/God" occurs frequently. The terminology seems to overlap similar subject matter that usually incorporates concerns

Matthew 16:18 occurs in a critical section of the Gospel. It introduces a unit concerned with discipleship (16:13—20:34). Here, Jesus instructs his disciples about the conduct he demands from his followers. As in other Matthean texts¹¹, Peter is the spokesman for the disciples, inquiring of and receiving instructions from Jesus. Matthew 16:18 is the central verse in a triad (16:17–19) where Jesus responds to Peter's confession of him as Messiah. Although Peter's primary role is to function as representative of both the twelve and all later disciples, the fact that he is first to do so will turn out to be important for the ancient Church.

After Peter is told that the confession that Jesus is Messiah is a matter of divine revelation (16:17), the spotlight is thrown on the second statement to Peter in 16:18. Jesus tells Peter that “upon this rock (*petra*) I will build my church.”¹² Although a multitude of interpretations flow from the *Petros/petra* word play, the simplest reading is that in 16:16 Peter declares who Jesus is and in 16:18, on the basis of the confession of messiahship, Jesus declares who Peter is.¹³ Reference to “this rock” echoes the idea of the cosmic rock thought to be under the sanctuary in Jerusalem holding at bay the nether-world raging below (“the gates of Hades”).¹⁴ Jesus, the builder of the church,

involving the people of God and their destiny. But a distinction should be maintained. Hans Kvalbein states: “The kingdom is the specific area or realm of God's end-time salvation that emerges with Jesus' ministry (cf. Matt 11:11–12)” (“The Authorization of Peter in Matthew 16:17–19: A Reconsideration of the Power to Bind and Loose,” in *The Formation of the Early Church*, ed. Jostein Adna, WUNT 183 [Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2005], 150–151). On the other hand, the church is the community that lives within this realm.

¹¹ Cf. 15:15; 18:21; 19:27–30; 26:33–34.

¹² In the Greek text there is an obvious word play Jesus makes between *Petros* (Peter) and *petra* (rock). As far back as Matthew 4:18 we learn that Simon was this disciple's first name and Peter was a second name. *Kephas*, the Greek form of the Aramaic, appears frequently in Paul.

¹³ Kvalbein, “The Authorization of Peter,” 153.

¹⁴ Ben Meyer, *Christus Faber: The Master Builder and the House of God* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1992) 259.

God's assembly of the last days (the new temple), selects Peter, the fisherman, as the kind of rock on which his church is built.¹⁵

Peter is the rock because, as spokesman, he is the beginning of a line of disciples being called to embody the faith.¹⁶ Jesus views his followers as a community or assembly of the faithful of the last days. It is not an institution or a corporation, but a dynamic entity, a family with one Father (Matt 23:8–12), a school with one teacher, Jesus (Matt 10:24–25).¹⁷

This is in keeping with the third response of Jesus to Peter in Matthew 16:19. Here Peter is promised the keys to the kingdom of Heaven.¹⁸ Whatever is bound or loosed on earth also stands confirmed in the heavenly realm.

The interpretation of Matthew 16:19 must be governed by the repetition of the terminology in Matthew 18:18 which is part of a wider context in 18:15–35. In keeping with the context in Matthew Jesus is giving instruction to his community. The topic under discussion is what to do if a brother sins.

¹⁵ The later idea of the investiture of Peter as the progenitor of a line of ecclesiastical officers resident in Rome (apostolic succession) is totally foreign to the text. This notion develops later in church history, reaching its zenith in Catholic Counter-Reformation exegesis.

¹⁶ Kvalbein, "The Authorization of Peter," 167, notes that in Matthew Peter is the first called to follow Jesus (4:18); the first to confess him as Messiah (16:18); and later he is said by Paul to be the first to see the risen Lord (1 Cor 15:5); and in Acts he is the first to proclaim the gospel to the people of Jerusalem (Acts 2:14–40).

¹⁷ Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 80, states it well: "[For Matthew] to be a church means to assume the commission and the authority of Jesus, to live as he did, to suffer as he did. To be a church means discipleship. ... Far from providing a doctrine of the church, Matthew says that there is no essence of the church apart from its practice and destiny, and hence no possibility of being a church apart from worldly action and suffering in conformity with its sole exemplar, Jesus."

¹⁸ This is the source of the innumerable fanciful stories of Peter standing at the gates of heaven and dictating the conditions for entrance. The verse is often linked with Isaiah 22:15–25 where Eliakim is given the key to open and shut the gates of the house of David. That text becomes the basis for rabbinic discussions of "binding and loosing" on matters of rules for entrance and sanctions in a community. In our view that is not a fruitful direction to pursue. Cf. Donald Senior, *Matthew*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998) 191–192.

We learn in 18:15–17 that after one is wronged he gains a brother by convincing him to admit sin. This takes place in the presence of the one grieved before several witnesses or the whole assembly (*ekklēsia*). This is followed by teaching on forgiveness (18:21–35). In contrast to the scribes and Pharisees, who on these matters are accused of closing the kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 23:13), the disciples, following the example of Jesus, may gain a brother by showing forgiveness. Exclusion may be exercised only after agonizing decisions by the whole community.¹⁹ This vocation, given to the whole community (church) in 18:17–18 was first extended to Peter, the community's first spokesman, in 16:19.²⁰ As a living fellowship, the church is a community of reconciliation showing humans the way to overcome their sins. This is true for the Twelve and all other believers.

Not only is reconciliation based on forgiveness, a major theme in Matthew 16–18, which centers on community discipline; it is a prominent motif throughout the Gospel. It is noteworthy that Matthew stresses forgiveness as a wider theme in Jesus' ministry, with implications for the central communal activities of the church (the assembly of the last days), such as baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Matthew begins his narrative by announcing the meaning of the name Jesus ("the Lord saves"), adding "from their sins" (Matt 1:21). This major theme is developed throughout the Gospel. No doubt Matthew knows that John baptized for the forgiveness of sins.²¹ Out of respect for this, he records a dialogue between Jesus and John (Matt 3:14–15). The purpose of the dialogue is to address the fact that although Jesus was baptized by John, it

¹⁹ Kvalbein, "The Authorization of Peter," 157–164.

²⁰ Ibid., 164. It is noteworthy that Peter has to learn the true impact of this demand for forgiveness. First, in Matt 18:21–22 Jesus instructs Peter that it is forgiveness which is the true coin of the kingdom, echoing Lamech's call for revenge in Gen 4:24. Second, after betraying Jesus, Peter learns the power of forgiveness.

²¹ See Luke 3:3; Mark 1:4; cf. Matt 21:31–32.

seemed inappropriate for him to receive a baptism instituted for sinners.²² Ordinarily, as with John's baptism, the one who became a disciple was baptized for the forgiveness of sins. At the end of Matthew this practice is confirmed in the wording of the Great Commission. Here, baptism is affirmed as the universal rite for all peoples (Jew and Gentile) initiating the Christian walk (Matt 28:19). Thus at its beginning and ending Matthew stresses the importance of baptism for the messianic community.

In this life the disciple regularly prays the Lord's Prayer which highlights the need to forgive others as we have been forgiven.²³ This prayer was said regularly at the Table in the ancient church. Matthew's account of the Last Supper (Matt 26:26–29) stresses the importance of forgiveness. When the earliest Christians, during their assemblies, read Matthew's account of the passion of Jesus they were reminded that his life's blood was poured out for the forgiveness of sins (Matt 26:28). As the reconfigured Passover sacrifice, Jesus' death was now reckoned to be the place of God's forgiveness. The bread and the cup sitting upon the table provided vital testimony to that reality. The rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper crown Jesus' royal teaching on forgiveness.

We are saying, essentially, that Matthew's narrative gives a dynamic account of the founding of Jesus' community (the church) and the processes (the common faith) that were to sustain it in the world. At first glance, Jesus' call to walk the path he chose to walk sounds more like a call to a lifestyle than the foundation of a doctrinal system. But this is not the whole story. Passing on this dynamic model of discipleship required regular teaching and the establishment of basic practices. For Matthew, Jesus walked this walk and, as the great teacher, commissioned his disciples to imitate him and teach

²² Ibid.

²³ Allan J. McNicol, "The Lord's Prayer: The Touchstone of Christian Spirituality," *Christian Studies* 20 (2004): 17–18.

others (Matt 28:19–20). But what was implicit in Jesus’ ministry became explicit in Paul’s writings as he sets forth the implications for life in the common faith in this one universal community.

Paul Embraces the Common Faith of the One Church

In Galatians 1:6–8 Paul declares, “But if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you let him be eternally condemned.” In 1 Corinthians 15:1–2 he addresses the Corinthian churches: “I preached to you the gospel which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast.” Paul records that the churches in Judea, hearing of Paul’s change from persecutor to believer said, “He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy” (Gal 1:23).

As we will see shortly Paul understands that this common faith finds visible expression in the life of one universal community, the church. When factions and parties appear in the church of Corinth, Paul is outraged (1 Cor 1:10–17). This should not be. Based on the presumption that each body has one head, Paul, seeing the body fracture, asks rhetorically, “Is Christ divided?” (1 Cor 1:13). In other words, if what exists at Corinth really is the body of Christ it cannot be divided since Christ is not divided.²⁴ Notably this is not an argument based on some metaphysical description of the essence of the church but on the nature of Christ himself as the one heavenly Lord and his vital connection with his spiritual body.

Although Paul’s letters are earlier than Matthew, they display similar concern for the oneness of the body, and for baptism and the Lord’s Supper

²⁴ Stig Hanson, *The Unity of the Church in the New Testament: Colossians and Ephesians* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1946), 75, states, “The unity of the Church is based on the fact that Christ is one. The condition of such an argumentation is however, that Christ is one with the Church, and on this relationship the unity of the Church is fundamentally founded.”

as means of grace enhancing life in that body. This is clear in Ephesians 4:5, where Paul declares, “(There is) one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”²⁵ What does Paul mean by “one faith,” the central term in this triad? Is it congruent with what we mean when we refer to the “common faith” of the one body?

Ephesians 4:5 is part of a wider unit affirming the unity of believers in the body of Christ (Eph 4:1–6). In Ephesians 1:18 Paul shows concern that his readers “may know what is the hope to which he has called you.” From Ephesians 1:18–3:21 Paul expounds on that hope. In 4:1, he exhorts his readers to lead a life worthy of that hope and calling (cf. Eph 4:4b). As with Matthew, the life of the church (the new creation) centers around discipleship. It is marked by the cultivation of humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearance in love (Eph 4:2; cf. Col 3:12).

This call for humility is not just an appeal to manifest appropriate virtues. It connects with earlier argumentation in chapter three and is important for following the sequence of thought in the letter. Paul asserts that the goal of the reception of the Gentiles into the people of God was a divine secret, revealed in the establishment of the church. It is a cause for celebration with cosmic implications. In Ephesians 3:10 Paul asserts that this unification has stripped the unseen powers and forces that oppose God of their claim over the world (cf. Col 2:15). Nevertheless, this marvelous reality should never lead the church to be conceited, especially the Gentiles who outnumber Jews in their reception of the Gospel; thus the summons to humility and gentleness in Ephesians 4:2. Only a mode of life that opposes and denies the claims of

²⁵ Some raise the issue as to whether Ephesians is a genuine writing of Paul. My teacher Nils Dahl wrestled with this issue. For our purposes we accept the decision of the ancient church that included this letter in all of its collections of the Pauline writings. For Dahl’s view of the authorship problem, see Nils Alstrup Dahl, *Studies in Ephesians: Introductory Questions, Text – & Edition - Critical Issues, Interpretation of Texts and Themes*, ed. David Hellholm, Vemund Blomkuist, and Tord Fornberg (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 48–72.

the hostile powers will, like Christ, be vindicated at the last day. Four times in Ephesians 2:13–17 Paul stresses that this newly minted unity between Gentile and Jew brings peace. In Ephesians 4:3 Paul asserts that this peace constitutes the bond that unites us in Christ through the Spirit (cf. 4:13).²⁶

This brings us to the focus of our study in Ephesians: the sevenfold statement on oneness in Ephesians 4:4–6, especially the call to maintain the one faith.²⁷ Paul signals the importance of the “one body” by placing it first in his list. He again echoes that the church is the indivisible extension of Christ’s lordship over a community that now has cosmic scope (Eph 1:19–23). Infused with the Holy Spirit, it is energized by maintaining hope in an eternal inheritance.²⁸ As at Corinth, Paul was aware of divisions afflicting churches in the province of Asia. Given that reality, he speaks of the more comprehensive unity of the body of Christ with its Lord, often drawing insights from popular terminology about the cosmos.²⁹

²⁶ The Greek word *henotēs* (“unity”) is used only here and in Eph 4:13 in the New Testament. In 4:13 unity is the final goal of the giving of gifts from Christ for the building up of the body of Christ.

²⁷ Structurally the unit seems to be a welding of verse four with its triple statement of being called into “one body, one spirit and one hope” with verses five and six. The latter verses are neatly balanced with four substantives on oneness linked to four references to the word “all” (Dahl, *Studies in Ephesians*, 417). The emphasis on “being called” in Ephesians 4:4 echoes back to the first verse (Eph. 4:1). There is also a close connection in wording between Colossians 3:12–15 and Ephesians 4:2–4, which is usually explained by literary dependence of Ephesians upon Colossians. The pattern in Colossians of listing similar virtues (as in Ephesians 4:2–3) and the reference to peace followed by being “called into the body” is particularly striking.

²⁸ John Muddiman, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* in *Black’s New Testament Commentaries* (London/New York: Continuum, 2001), 183.

²⁹ As if to highlight the significance of “one lord, one faith, and one baptism,” the three substantives (being masculine, feminine and neuter) are each preceded by different Greek forms of the word for one. Even linguistically it is a beautiful demonstration of unity in its multiplicity. Dahl, *Studies in Ephesians*, 469, thinks that a group in the church, known to the original readers of Ephesians, housed an ascetic way of life by claiming access to the divine mysteries. They regularly used cosmic terminology to reinforce this belief. In Eph 5:21–33 Paul turns this approach on its

The essence of unity is disarmingly simple. It is found in one God who has united the cosmos as Creator and in one Lord. By the creation of the one body on the basis of “one faith” and “one baptism,” the Lord Jesus duplicates the unity of the creation in the spiritual dimension, routing other claims to lordship.³⁰ What is this one faith? Some would suggest it is the faith and trust of believers. This has a noble usage in Ephesians (Eph 2:8; 3:12) but here it is implausible. More likely it refers to the key beliefs of the one body.³¹ This set of beliefs (the common faith), expressive of the Gospel, likely was affirmed at the baptism of these converts.³² We have noted Paul also refers earlier in Galatians 1:23 to this body of beliefs as “the faith” (cf. Rom 1:5; Gal 3:23–25).³³ A primary goal of Ephesians is to deepen “the unity of the faith” (Eph 3:13).

Ephesians is a reminder, primarily to Gentiles, that they are the beneficiaries of incredible blessings mediated in Christ’s body, the church. They are now freed from various and sundry lords that could never deliver them from evil powers. They are also reminded that they should not surrender to those demeaning the common faith. Paul probably has schismatics in mind,

head. Truly Gen 2:24 (a text under discussion) points to a great mystery: the union of Christ and the church. But this does not mean that our union with Christ in the one church is a totally esoteric matter only available to a few privileged persons who can penetrate this mystery. On the contrary, this exclusive union of Christ and the church is straightforward. It warrants the fidelity of the husband to his wife. Thus, it has profound practical implications.

³⁰ Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, Sacra Pagina, 17 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), 288–289.

³¹ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, 42 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 240. Also Hanson, *Unity of the Church*, 153–154.

³² As we noted with Matthew, baptism into the proprietorship of Christ is one of the key elements of the common faith. The addressees are being reminded of the implications of this action when they first took on the responsibility of discipleship. Paul does not refer to the Lord’s Supper in this text; but it is clear that elsewhere he names it as a matter of central significance to the faith (1 Cor 10:14–22; 11:17–34).

³³ The Pastorals regularly have this understanding of faith as a body of beliefs (1 Tim 1:2; 3:9; 4:1–6; 5:8; 2 Tim 4:7; Titus 3:15).

who claim special insight into divine mysteries. Paul exhorts his readers to hold steadily to the lordship of Christ and the common faith in the unity of the Spirit. The common faith of the ancient Church that there is one Lord and one body is strongly affirmed in the Pauline tradition. So it should be today.

Justin Martyr and the Common Faith³⁴

In the second century, summaries of the common faith begin to appear. They are strong indicators of what the church really believed. Nowhere is this so true as with Justin, a major second century interpreter of the faith.

Justin takes for granted the unity of Christ and the one body, the one church, the depository of the received truth of the Christian tradition. For our purposes Justin's significance is his defense of the foundations of the common faith. Central to these foundations was the belief that Jesus in the flesh was the revelatory Word of God and the benefits of his life are appropriated in baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Justin left no doubt as to what he believed about Jesus. It was the faith which was taught from the time of the apostles. Explaining this belief to Trypho the Jew, among other things he states that Jesus is the true Son of God, born of a virgin, suffered and crucified under Pontius Pilate, and ascended into heaven after being raised from the dead.³⁵ On this basis the Father bestowed upon him the honor of Lord.³⁶ Numerous other passages reflect and expand upon this conviction.³⁷

³⁴ Justin Martyr was a major interpreter of the Christian faith. His writings came in the decades of the mid-second century. His major works were two *Apologies* to the Roman emperor on behalf of Christianity and a treatise (*Dialogue with Trypho*) attempting to show to a typical Jew that Christianity represented the appropriate closure to the story of the Hebrew Scriptures. He is one of the most significant figures of mainstream second-century Christianity.

³⁵ *Dialogue with Trypho* 85.1–2.

³⁶ *Dialogue with Trypho* 85.4.

³⁷ The revised collection of texts of August Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln der alten Kirche* (Georg Olms: Hildesheim, 1962), 4–5, list the fol-

What was entailed in the acceptance of Jesus as Lord was also central for Justin. With respect to what Justin wrote, Everett Ferguson states, “Faith, baptism for the forgiveness of sins, and the new life are what constitutes the Christian.”³⁸ Justin’s description of the rite of baptism corresponds to what we know took place in the ancient Church.³⁹ His theology stresses not only that baptism results in the forgiveness of sins but that it constitutes the new birth and an illumination of the Spirit leading to the reformed life.⁴⁰

As was common in the ancient Church, the newly baptized believer was brought into the assembly to partake of the Lord’s Supper for the first time.⁴¹ Justin offers two descriptions of this practice in chapters 65–67 of his *First Apology*. Here the actual manner of observance (with the exception of the cup of water on the table) reflect the precedents of the biblical account. Justin’s stress on the first day of the week as the time of observance is significant. Theologically, Justin explains that the bread and the cup consecrated to the Lord are no longer ordinary food (*First Apology* 66:2). In the ensuing explanation, Justin seems to draw an analogy between the incarnation and our participation in the bread and the cup. In the incarnation the divine *logos* cohered in Jesus’ flesh and blood for our salvation. By analogy, those partak-

lowing passages: *First Apology* 13, 21, 31, 42, 46, 61 and *Dialogue with Trypho* chapters 63, 126, 132.

³⁸ Everett Ferguson, *Baptism In The Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy In The First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 242. A full discussion of the many references to baptism in Justin is found in 227–244.

³⁹ For a recent readable description of this understanding of baptism that is given by a Harvard scholar in a Catholic magazine, see Kevin Madigan, “The Redeemed Life: Baptism and Resurrection in the Early Church,” *Commonweal* 136/4 (February 27, 2009), 20–23. This is a scintillating summary of the function of baptism in the ancient church.

⁴⁰ Justin, *First Apology*, 61; 66:1 (cf. *Dialogue with Trypho* 138.1–3). The reference in 61.5 to John 3:5 is startling because this is one of the few echoes of the Gospel of John in all of Justin’s writings.

⁴¹ Justin refers to the Lord’s Supper as “the Eucharist,” the standard terminology of the second century.

ing of the consecrated bread and cup are also nourished unto salvation. In this way the one body is perpetuated and nourished by the one Lord.

For Justin, baptism and the Lord's Supper were "essential to the fullest Christian life."⁴² Justin's understanding that the divine society founded by Christ and the apostles exists as God's light to illuminate a bleak world illustrates the spread of the common faith by the second century.

Between Evangelicalism and Catholicism

The importance of the key biblical insight that just as there is only one Christ, so there can be but one church—his body, is easily grasped. For example, it is inconceivable that in the first century there were believers in Jesus as the flesh and blood Son of God who died for their sins who were indifferent to identifying with a visible fellowship of those redeemed by Christ. Similarly, considering oneself a believer in good standing without being baptized would be preposterous. Rites were integral to the life of the earliest Christians. Baptism initiated believers into the new creation, the resurrected life of their Lord, and into the visible body of Christ, the place of forgiveness of sins. Moreover, this concept of what it means to be a believer was reinforced at the Lord's Table when the assembly feasted regularly in anticipation of the great banquet of God's new world. To affirm, as many contemporary Christians do, that salvation is by grace through faith in the atoning death of Christ, separate from those rites and a vital relationship with a faith community, would have struck the early believers as extraordinarily curious. Indeed, the view that a local fellowship functions primarily as a means to inner spiritual growth, hardly reflects the New Testament idea of church.

⁴² The quote comes from Leslie William Barnard, "St. Justin Martyr: The First and Second Apologies," in *Ancient Christian Writers* 56 (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 20.

While there is much to admire in the missionary fervor of modern Evangelicalism, the same cannot be said for its understanding of the church.⁴³

At the other extreme is Catholicism. In Catholic theology the visible body of Christ is understood to be holy and undivided, consisting of all those who are in communion with the bishop of Rome. Because the ecclesial body and eucharistic body are reckoned to be one, only those in fellowship with the Catholic church are welcome at the altar to receive communion from the priest, Christ's visible representative.

There is no question that this position represents a "high" doctrine of the church. Its inner consistency gives it considerable force. But on its face in practical reality it is hardly plausible. To view millions of believers as "separated brethren" who cannot come to this "altar" because they cannot in conscience accept a number of unbiblical teachings is sectarian. There are many hindrances to faith. Do we need to carry the additional burden of making the edifice of Roman Catholicism a necessary precondition?

As a third way, between Evangelicalism and Catholicism we need a recovery of biblical insights about the nature of the church and its common faith, expressed through its ordinances. In this essay we have underscored how Thomas Campbell pointed us in the right direction.

Conclusion

This essay has shown that Thomas Campbell identified a foundational theological principle when he stated that "the Church of Christ upon earth is ... one." Our analysis of early Christian writings has demonstrated that major figures of the early church believed that there was one Lord (Jesus Christ) who had one body (the church).

⁴³ See, for example, Stanley J. Grenz, "An Evangelical Response to Ferguson, Holloway & Lowery: Restoring a Trinitarian Understanding of the Church in Practice," in *Evangelicalism and the Stone Campbell Movement*, ed. William R. Baker (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press 2002), 228-234.

The present polarization in contemporary Christianity between Evangelicals and Catholics on ecclesiology presents an opportunity for Campbell's proposal, a third way, to be heard. Beyond question, Campbell's heirs have a mixed record in terms of their faithfulness to this principle. On one side an intensive pursuit of the chimera of ecumenical unity among denominations has borne little fruit. On the other side a preoccupation with patternism has produced even more division. Yet, the light still shines. At this critical moment, will there be those among us who will provide clear biblical teaching and encourage its implementation? If so, the Stone-Campbell tradition may finally realize its true potential.

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