

PROPHETIC TRUTHS FOR TODAY

Unveiling the End-Time Events

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

ECUMENICALISM—UNITY—SEPARATION

IN RECENT YEARS we have heard a great deal about the ecumenical movement, and the spirit of ecumenicity. We might, first of all, define this popular word, and the various forms in which it appears. The word “ecumenical,” when used as an adjective, means a universal, or worldwide attitude. And it is selected mainly by churchmen to denote Christian unity efforts; in other words, it involves an all-inclusive program in achieving Christian unity. The noun “ecumenicity” means the quality or state of being ecumenical. And the word “ecumenicalism” refers generally to the doctrine or the theology of major councils and ecumenical movements.

HISTORY OF THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

This popular movement and the spirit of ecumenicity, are relatively modern. Students of the Reformation movement know very well that the 16th century breakaway from Rome did not advance the ecumenical activity, certainly not as it is understood in our time. The great reformers were men of tremendous convictions. None of them was willing to dilute his theology for the sake of expedience. When certain friends of Luther and Zwingli prevailed upon these men to meet and seek a harmonious relationship, the record reveals that the reformers parted company without even shaking hands.

This was not an admirable position to take, but *it demonstrates that in those days the leaders in Protestant Christianity had strong convictions which they would not yield up for the sake of achieving organizational unity.*

Historically we find really nothing in the way of an ecumenical activity before the nineteenth century, and even then it was limited in scope, never going beyond a cooperative program for the purpose of achieving certain inter-denominational goals. No one envisioned a world church or the massiveness of the present-day program of ecumenicity.

The first efforts during the nineteenth century toward the achievement of some degree of unification, that is, in a limited sphere, was the organization of the British and Foreign Bible Society. It came into existence in 1804. Its purpose was to spread the Scriptures by means of co-operative action. The American Bible Society, a counterpart of the British, was founded in 1816. It had a similar goal, namely, spreading the Scriptures through a co-operative enterprise.

The next development was the organization of the Young Men's Christian Association in 1844, and in the following year it became international in outlook. It was definitely Christian and evangelistic in its objective. Even D. L. Moody gave a great deal of his time in promoting the Y.M.C.A. in many of our major cities.

Moreover, the World Evangelical Alliance began its work in 1845. It sought to counteract dangerous trends, particularly certain sects which had emerged in Protestantism. This movement was also committed against Roman Catholicism, and it vigorously opposed the blending of false streams with Protestantism.

Finally, the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions was born in 1886 under the direction of D. L. Moody. It was in this work that Dr. John R. Mott became very famous for several decades. The purpose of the movement was to exert a strong influence in colleges and higher institutions of learning, in order to enlist young people in full-time Christian work. This activity reached a degree of maturity at a famous meeting held at Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1910. The conference was a great interdenominational gathering, and known best as the World's Missionary Conference. The overall purpose was to stimulate world-wide missionary activity.

All of these developments were conservative and sound efforts made to secure cooperation in major Christian activity. Nothing in the way of an international ecumenical movement was envisioned, or a super-church. But as one might expect, innovations, or more liberal-minded men, moved in and expanded the whole program beyond anything which the previous activities had sought to achieve.

THE MODERN ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

In 1908 we have an extremely important date in that the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ was founded. While it embraced the federation idea (not church union), still it envisioned a far-reaching program for the church in seeking collectively to change the whole world order. Liberal-minded theologians and ministers moved rapidly ahead and they broadened the whole scope of church activity everywhere.

The next step in the ecumenical development was the Universal Conference of Life and Work which convened in Stockholm, Sweden, in the year 1925. This meeting actually gave the impetus to the launching of the world council idea.

Archbishop Nathan Soderblom of Sweden is generally recognized as *the father of the modern ecumenical movement*; at least he was one of the leading architects of this modern development within Churchianity. The whole program commenced to expand rapidly during the subsequent years. In the year 1927 an important conclave was held in Lausanne, Switzerland. Still another one was held at Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1937. No formal launching of a World Council of Churches was achieved because the Second World War came, and this global conflict disrupted the plan for a formal crystallization of such an organization. In the year 1948, or following World War II, the historic moment came at Amsterdam, Holland, when the World Council of Churches was launched.

Obviously it absorbed such an organization as the Federal Council of Churches, that is, the new program superseded the earlier limited ecumenical activities. At Evanston, Illinois, the Second World Council of Churches was held in 1955, at which time 1500 delegates were present. The assembly represented 161 million Protestants. Delegates, consultants, and visitors were present from 48 nations, including a few from the satellite nations within the Soviet orbit. No doubt this was the largest representative gathering of Protestants since the Reformation days. The meeting of the Third World Council of Churches has just been held, in India.

Now, then, we have provided an abridged history of the whole ecumenical movement.

THE OBJECTIVE OF THE WORLD COUNCIL

We have witnessed the emergence of the most massive, all-inclusive religious organization ever conceived by man, especially outside of the Latin Church. **Like the ancient builders on the plains of Shinar, the same attempt is now made to circumvent God's program on earth.**

The original purpose of God for the human race was to cause it to spread out over all the globe. Instead, these early inhabitants of earth constructed the tower of Babel, a structure so massive that it was hoped its pinnacle would reach up into heaven. That generation wanted to perpetuate, or historify its civilization.

The very same spirit seems to characterize the builders of a modern tower of Babel. Truly the present ecumenical movement is geared to bigness and to a centralization of its program. Instead of accepting God's program for the church, which is simply witnessing everywhere regarding the Gospel, the present-day innovators wish to make an extraordinary impact upon the world through the unification of all the forces in Christendom. *The idea that God's people are pilgrims and strangers here is repudiated.* The present program of the World Council of Churches contradicts the New Testament blueprint for the Church.

The modern builders of ecumenicalism are advocating a super-church even if they do not say it in so many words. The leaders are, nevertheless, advocating a program broad enough to include Roman Catholicism.

Dr. Eugene Carson Blake said recently, "The Council is open to the Roman Catholic Church if it wishes to join the ecumenical movement." Dr. Roswell P. Barnes said in 1959, as the executive secretary of the World Council of Churches, "The forthcoming ecumenical council of the Roman Catholic Church, announced by Pope John XXIII, clarifies the attitude of that Church toward Protestants and the Orthodox." Further he said, "It will contribute significantly to understanding and Christian harmony." Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam, Dr. Edwin Dahlberg, and other top leaders of the National Council of Churches hold identical views, and are advocating further overtures to Rome.

Their ultimate goal is international unity in Christendom. By this unity it is hoped that the whole world order may be changed economically, socially, politically, and religiously.

THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT HAS NO TRUE BIBLICAL BASE

The favorite passage of the promoters of ecumenicity is the prayer which Jesus offered, when He said, **“That they may be one, as thou art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe thou has sent me”** (John 17:21).

They misunderstand the whole prayer of our Lord. He never prayed for ecclesiastical, external, or denominational unity, as any casual reader of this passage ought to see. *Christ prayed for His own, those who were blood-bought and redeemed*; it was not a prayer for organizational unity at all. Our Lord never prayed for an institutionalized, all-inclusive, external unity in Christendom.

To advocate an external unity is the same as to advocate the universal brotherhood of man and the universal fatherhood of God. Christ told the biggest religious leaders of His day, **“Ye are of your father the devil.”** Christ repudiated an ecclesiastical oneness such as the one advocated by the World Council of Churches. He said, **“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace but a sword”** (Matthew 10:34). Luke refers to a similar position taken by our Lord: **“Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, nay; but rather division”** (Luke 12:51).

Christ was a disturber of men. His prosecutors said to Pilate, **“He stirreth up all the people.”** In the synagogue at Nazareth He created a cleavage. He broke the calm. Some of the people sought to throw Him over the cliff in anger because of His teachings. When He arrived in Gadara, He stirred up the whole community, until the people requested Him to leave their shores. He created a stir and cleavage in the Sanhedrin. Even within the family, the sons and daughters of Joseph and Mary took offense because of Him, and did not become believers until Christ had risen from the dead.

The New Testament presents a spurious ecumenical activity emerging in the end-time, when apostate Churchianity will become so universal and all-inclusive that actually a super-church is created.

According to Revelation 17, *the apostate Church is a great harlot and it will ride the beast, the political Antichrist*. What the present-day innovators are doing is to condition Churchianity for the final apostasy. The day is not far off when Roman Catholicism, the diluted branches within Protestantism and the Greek Orthodox Church will move into one vast world federation. This will end disastrously, however, by divine judgments inflicted upon the whole system.

Christ divides men. The cross separates true believers from nominal Christians.

Our Lord taught that unity, fellowship, and oneness can only be realized in the household of God. Not one word of Scripture can be produced which expresses a desire of our Lord to see crystallized an ecclesiastical, external, and world unity of religious organizations. It is the unity of faith which is expressed. **“One faith, one baptism, one body.”**

By no stretch of imagination can this be applied to ecclesiastical and denominational unity.

THE ECUMENICAL PROGRAM VIOLATES DIVINE INJUNCTIONS

In the Bible *separation is the dominant principle enunciated*. The children of Israel were *forbidden to intermingle* with the idolatrous people surrounding them. The very geography of Palestine taught separation. When the streams of the descendants of Seth and Cain were fused, or blended, the judgment of God was the result—the flood.

Paul writes, **“Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you”** (II Corinthians 6:17). John writes, **“If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed”** (II John 10). The apostle Paul puts it plainly when he exhorts believers to disengage themselves from the unworthy, especially, **“those having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof: from such turn away”** (II Timothy 3:5).

SUMMARY

Some of us, including this writer, are opposed to this broad ecumenical movement because the whole program is clearly identified with the apostasy of the latter-days. Call the roll of the World Council leaders, look at the roster of names, and you will find the high priests of liberalism in key places, as e.g., Oxnam, Sherrill, Dahlberg, Blake, etc., etc. These are not evangelical in outlook.

The World Council of Churches is unworthy of support because it has sidetracked two of the major purposes of God set forth in Scripture.

- First, the literal fulfillment of His purpose with the nation Israel in the kingdom period.
- Secondly, the Evanston conclave voted down decisively the matter of accepting a literal return of Jesus Christ.

Both of these precious truths, which have been cherished by believers through the centuries, are no longer matters to be proclaimed by the World Council of Churches.

Moreover, we have reason to oppose the program as advocated by the World Council of Churches, for it magnifies the social gospel at the expense of the message of redemption. It seeks to change the present world order through sociological, educational, religious, and economic panaceas.

The Scriptures point out that *the true Church is a witnessing body, dedicated to tell forth the good news that Christ Jesus has come into the world to save sinners*. The Church which Christ sent forth was not an institutionalized, massive, catch all system seeking to bring together every religious organization from the unitarian to the evangelical.

We read concerning the apostate system of the end-time, **“Come ye out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins . . . for her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities”** (Revelation 18:4, 5).

It is nothing less than fantastic to believe that God can achieve His purpose through a diluted, spineless, ecumenical movement which holds that Unitarians, Universalists, Roman Catholics, and Greek Orthodox can fellowship with Bible-believing evangelicals. By trying to do so, men are reversing the law and spirit of the Scriptures and substituting for these expediency.

Some of my statements may be vigorous, but they are based upon firm convictions. It is not implied, however, that no fine people are within the ecumenical movement. No doubt there are many true believers within that system. I believe those who have adhered to it are either naive, misinformed or confused as to the real objectives of this vast ecclesiastical movement.

Evangelicals should stay out of it altogether.

It should be said with emphasis that evangelicals are not schismatics, neither are they committed to a program of splintering for the sake of disrupting religious bodies. Many evangelical organizations have properly merged, and not so few large evangelical interdenominational activities are promoted by these Bible-believing Christians.

Many liberals are groundless in their charges that fundamentalists are guilty of sowing the seeds of discord in Christendom.

When clear spiritual issues are involved there is no alternative, and for this position, Paul, John, and Jude give the instructions as to procedure: **“If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not in your house, neither bid him Godspeed. For he that biddeth him God-speed, is partaker of his evil deed”** (II John 10-11). When the precious faith is being tampered with we must do as exhorted, **“to contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints”** (Jude 4).

Unity in Christ is a priceless blessing, and all born-again believers should promote unity which is based upon a scriptural relationship in Christ. Bigotry has no place in evangelicalism. But when principles and positions are diluted for the sake of achieving external unity, then we must resist such efforts. It can only produce an artificial unity and great compromises which neutralize the effectiveness of the Gospel.

There is now too much popularization of Christianity, and very little willingness **“to go outside the camp bearing his reproach.”**

Groups which are completely evangelical in doctrine are nearly solidly outside the World Council of Churches, and for reasons which are stated in this message on ecumenicalism.

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