

## The Church is One

By Santiago Lange



We are given much to complaining, so much so that we even complain about beautiful things. God's most beautiful creation is often the target of our most bitter complaints. One of His most beautiful works is men and women united together in a great and beautiful mystery, the Church. Through the Church, believers see the love of Christ. Only "with all the saints" is one able to comprehend "the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge" (Ephesians 3:19). The colors of the love of Christ can be seen only in community. Those living in isolation choose for themselves a black-and-white existence. Sanctification without community is not sanctification. The Chronicler reports that when God's people praised Him together, the glory of the Lord filled the temple (2 Chronicles 5:11-14). The Lord is visible in the community of the Church. The Church, though beautiful, is sometimes disappointing, because it will never live down to our lowly expectations of pain-free relating. If the Church fulfilled our supposedly lofty vision for it, it would never fulfill the purpose for which God created it, for no one would mature and no Church would mature. Life would be easy, and there would be no need for God. Somehow, in the midst of a struggling community, God allows us to find Him.

So there is joy in the journey, strength in the struggle, and God in our midst. So let us give thanks that the Lord, who loves relationships, who in fact exists in three persons who relate with each other, and who has given us a community of pilgrims to journey and struggle with as together we await the great day when we shall all worship him together in eternity.

Until that day, the Lord will lead us forth, as He matures us together as a body. Paul describes this community and individual growing process in Ephesians 4:1-6:

(1) I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, (2) with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, (3) being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (4) There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; (5) one Lord; one faith; one baptism; (6) one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

The "manner worthy of the calling" concerns unity, which is maintained by humility, gentleness, patience and forbearance. All of these dispositions concern othercenteredness. Other-centeredness, though, comes through a brokenness that leads us to trust the Lord, not ourselves. And it is other-centeredness that establishes unity.

If unity is something we wish to preserve, it would help to know what it is. First, it is not uniformity; it is not being the same or thinking the same. It concerns gathering around the same things and being bound together because of them. Moths are attracted by the same light.

People are drawn together by the same interests. The same goal can rally numbers of diverse people.

Is there any greater list of common interests than the one Paul gives us in verses 4 through 6? The word translated "unity" comes from the word for "one," which is used in verses 4 through 6. Each of these Christian "interests" all believers have in common. Verses 1 through 3 tell us how to preserve unity, and this section gives us motivation for preserving it.

Actually the list is based on, and derived from, three listings within it: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Church throughout the ages has marveled in the mystery of the Trinity. And what better illustration of diversity within unity than that of God himself, expressing himself in Three Persons?

First, we all believe in the Holy Spirit, who is responsible in this context for the body of Christ. Together as the body of Christ, we are a temple of God, and the Spirit dwells within this temple (Ephesians 2:22). We are members, then, of each other, so if we damage another, we damage ourselves (Romans 12:5). And if we damage each other, the Holy Spirit grieves as well (Ephesians 4:30).

Second, we all believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, who is responsible for the hope of our calling, faith and baptism. Hope concerns our eternal union and reunion with Christ. Although believers differ over the details of the return of Christ, we are in agreement that we will be with Him together forever. We'll all be worshiping Him together in unison forever, so why not stop arguing over the manner of the events leading up to Christ's coming and get on with bowing down before Him together? We all share one faith. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). We all believe that the blood of Jesus Christ is all that qualifies us for a relationship with God. And if we have all been saved by grace through faith, no one has any greater standing than another, for the cross has made equals of us all. So what need is there for competition?

Baptism concerns our identification with Christ and His body of believers. We were all dead in our trespasses and sins, but our baptism into Christ made us alive together with Him and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:1-6). This is an unfathomable common experience, the depths of which we could never plumb in conversation.

Finally, there is one God and Father of us all. That means we are all members of ONE family. Family members have their disagreements, but wise and loving earthly fathers can often bring disagreeable siblings together. And brothers and sisters will even come together "for Dad's sake." Our heavenly Father is perfect in His wisdom and love, and He is over all (in authority over all of us), through all (ministering through us) and in all (residing in all of us). He can bring us together.

And we can all come together „for His sake“. □