

Bringing Catholics and Protestants Together

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At the time of the Reformation, Protestants considered the Roman Catholic Church as being so Apostate that it should be considered nonchristian while the Roman Catholics considered the Protestants to be heretics and thus also nonchristian.

Whether either side was right or wrong either partially or fully, it matters little to us here and now because Scripture clearly teaches that the sins of the father are NOT passed on to their children. The results of those sins are obviously passed on but the guilt is not. As an example, when the whole generation of Israelites who came out of Egypt perished in the wilderness because of their unbelief, their children were blameless. So we, both Catholics and Protestants, are also blameless for the sins of either or both sides of a dispute which is now some 500 years old.

As we are separated from each other through no fault of our own, let us consider how all of us who call ourselves Christian can come together to love each other as Jesus would clearly like us to.

Some of us feel the need to study both history and Scripture to clearly understand the official positions of all parties both now and then. While I personally have taken that route, I see others on both sides who look more at the love shown now by individual participants and make a more emotional determination.

I do not believe that it is up to each and every Christian to individually determine the validity of each doctrinal point. While some things seem obvious, sincere Christians have disputed other matters for centuries. While in the past I considered anyone who disagreed with my conclusions as just being wrong, I now acknowledge that they very well may be looking at a particular subject from a different perspective which makes their conclusions quite reasonable or my position which is extremely reasonable to me may not be entirely accurate.

Of course, I still have critics that believe that any humility I might express would be appropriate as they honestly believe that I am completely downright wrong. As long as such critics hold that view, I have a definite advantage over them as I can learn from them but they cannot learn from me. Thus I get to improve, if not perfect, my belief system while they galvanize theirs in what ever state they are presently in.

The specific suggestion I make now to bring us together is

really quite simple: "Let's emphasize where we are in agreement rather than only dwelling on where we disagree." This does not mean that we abandon our disagreements but only that we put them in proper perspective.

As being a businessman for literally decades, I see a parallel with certain business practices. If you want to sell a particular product such as a bar soap, you must create a brand that is perceived to be different than other brands. This is a two step process. First you emphasize the differences and then you sell those differences as advantages.

Now for this example, it is assumed that your new bar soap has certain attributes that the competition does. First of all, it must actually clean. If you just sold a smooth rock as a new bar soap that never wears out, you would never get anywhere because it would not actually clean. But if you just made it a little harder than all the other products, it might not give as much lather as the others but it would definitely last longer.

You then sell the product using the money saving quality of a long lasting soap. You also can sell the convenience of not needing to continually get out a new bar. But what about the negative aspects, namely that it does not clean as well? Well as long as it does actually clean, simply ignore that aspect. You play up the differences that are perceived as benefits and deliberately downplay the differences that may be perceived as disadvantages.

Now let's look at Christianity. If your purpose was to make a business out of Christianity, you would establish your version as being different. You would then sell the advantages of the difference as being more "spiritual" or more "Bible centered".

This can be taken as a very nasty accusation of various new churches who in all candor honestly believe they are doing God's work by serving individual Christians and potential Christians who would not otherwise be adequately served.

Let's take these existing separated Christian groups at face value and just assume their individual motives are pure and are more than willing to bring the body of Christ into a more perfect communion.

Now how can we emphasize how we are in agreement and yet maintain being Christian. Now the problem does not present itself to an individual with respect to the Christian church he attends as the basis of attendance is two simple tests; first that the individual is a Christian and second, that the church he attends is in fact a Christian church.

The question is always with the other person. The two actual questions are; first, is he really a Christian, a "true" believer, and second, is the church he attends truly a Christian church.

When a person examines his own faith and the faith of his church he naturally uses a much different standard than he measures someone else's faith and the faith of that person's church.

I have to assume this "double standard" is really just "human nature". I don't expect to change "human nature" but if we all are conscious of it, perhaps we can compensate for it in our own logical analysis and decision making.

I specifically suggest we go back to the most ancient Christian creed we know, the Apostle's Creed. This served well for the first centuries. It was modified and amplified by the Nicene Creed. The reason for that additional creed was not a defect with the first creed but rather an effort of heretics to change the meanings of words to circumvent the meaning of the creed itself. We can use the first creed and yet also submit to the second by using the second to interpret the first whenever necessary.

The Apostle's Creed says:

"I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day He rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen."

According to the early church, adherence to this creed was evidence that the individual was in fact a Christian. This held true universally right through the beginning of the 1500's. For many Christian churches it still holds true. I suggest that this ancient creed serve now as our uniting tool to identify who in fact is a true Christian. It is a simple step to identify a church as Christian by the very same test, namely that it adheres to this creed. To follow the business model of the bar of soap, we have now defined what a bar of soap is. While this is really a quite small step, it is in fact a step.