

THE IDEA OF A CHURCH CATHOLIC, REFORMED AND EVANGELICAL

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Introduction

ON SUNDAY the 4th of December, 1960, Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, Stated Clerk of the United Presbyterian Church, was invited to preach in San Francisco's Grace (Episcopal) Cathedral. His sermon was entitled "A Proposal Toward the Reunion of Christ's Church"; and it challenged the Protestant Episcopal Church, the Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ in America, and the United Presbyterian Church to join in conversations looking to a union of those denominations, forming one church which would be both *catholic and reformed* in its essential character. Dr. Blake's sermon was enthusiastically endorsed by California's Episcopal Bishop James A. Pike and, indeed, the church union plan became nationally known as the "Blake-Pike Proposal" and almost immediately captured the imagination and support of leading churchmen all over the United States. On April 9-10, 1962, a formal consultation was held in Washington D.C. to consider the Blake-Pike Proposal, and each of the four denominations mentioned in Dr. Blake's sermon sent delegates. They set about organizing a permanent "Consultation on Church Union" and invited the Evangelical United Brethren, the Polish National Catholic Church and the Disciples of Christ denominations to become members.

Dr. Blake, in his sermon, had urged the churches to look to a united church that would be catholic and reformed; the Washington consultation affirmed that participating denominations were discussing the "possibility of the formation of a church truly catholic, truly reformed, truly evangelical." The addition of the adjective "evangelical" was intended, no doubt, to describe generically the witness of those Christians (e.g., the Methodists, and the Congregationalists in the United Church of Christ) who feel that the adjective "reformed" does not quite represent the fact that they see themselves

historically as a little less bound by Scripture, tradition and doctrinal confessions and a little more bound to the "continued guidance of the Holy Spirit" than those churches usually designated "Reformed".

It is my purpose in this paper to briefly set forth the image of the Church of Jesus Christ as it is seen in the so-called Catholic, Reformed and Evangelical traditions; and then to examine them altogether to see if the varied images can be reconciled into one composite image that might be properly described as catholic *and* reformed *and* evangelical. This is a large order for a paper of so small a compass, but the attempt might be valuable as a starting point for fruitful discussion. And such a discussion is just as important for us here in the Philippines as it is in the United States of America. Many of us in the separated churches in the Philippines sense keenly that we are under the judgment of our Lord Jesus Christ who wills His Church to be one. We, too, sense the scandal and the waste and the ineffectiveness of our divided witness. We, too, are aware that in the face of mounting materialism and secularism and other Godless "isms" we can no longer afford the luxury of our historic divisions.

And, like those churchmen in the United States discussing the Blake-Pike Proposal, many of us in the Philippines are inspired to imagine that the one visible Church of Jesus Christ, whatever its form and whenever it comes into being, must indeed be truly catholic, truly reformed and truly evangelical—for we too behold the vigorous ministries of Christian denominations from each of those traditions and we agree that the vital witness of each belongs in the unified whole.

Let us turn, then, to a description of the image of Christ's Church as it is conceived in the Catholic, Reformed and Evangelical traditions. We will limit our discussion to the image of the Church in its visible and earthly manifestations, for that is the primary focus of the Blake-Pike Proposal and, also, of the modern ecumenical movement as a whole.

The Catholic Image of the Church

We must first off understand what we mean when we use the word "Catholic" in this paper. We use the word as a generic term to describe those churches, notably the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Churches and the Anglican Communion (particularly the Anglo-Catholic wing) which place greatest stress on the

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Apostolic and doctrinal continuity, the sacramental offices, and the liturgical heritage of the Church. We do not use the word "Catholic" to refer to the Roman Church alone—for indeed the Roman Church is only one of the Catholic churches (though it is the largest) and is regarded by nearly all the others as in some respects deviant from true Catholicism. Nor do we use the word "Catholic" in this paper to refer to the universal Church of Jesus Christ; for in that sense every one of us is a Catholic. In this paper we are narrowing the use of the term to refer only to those whose practices and whose understanding of faith and order are traditionally *Catholic* in contrast to *Protestant* practices and understanding.

Bishop Angus Dun in his book, *Prospecting for a United Church*, affirmed that to Catholics "the Church is the great society, with its essential institutions, established on earth by God to bring men into right relations with Himself and with one another under Him."¹ This society was, according to the New Testament, organized by the Apostles and functioned under their leadership. Across the centuries it has continued to perpetuate the teachings and sacraments of Jesus Christ as transmitted to the Apostles; and it has preserved the Apostolic traditions in doctrine, worship and prayer. The Holy Bible of the Old and New Testaments and the Sacred Tradition, especially the pronouncements of the first seven Ecumenical Councils of the ancient undivided Church, and including the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, constitute the vehicles in which the teachings of Christ and the Apostolic traditions have been carried forward.

Through the Church, which is regarded by Catholics as the "mystical body of Christ" and the very continuation of Christ's incarnation, God's saving grace is imparted to the believer pre-eminently (but not exclusively) in the holy sacraments. As Bishop Dun has stated:

Catholicism is sacramental through and through. Its worship is most characteristically a holy action of the Church. . . . The Church does not talk to people chiefly; it acts upon them and for them. It takes them up into its life.²

The Catholic is incorporated into the mystical body of Christ by Holy Baptism and this incorporation is reaffirmed in the Sacrament of Confirmation. The Church blesses the vocation of the Catholic,

¹ New York: Harper's, 1948, p. 46.

² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

whether it involves Matrimony or Holy Orders. Through the Sacrament of Penance the Church restores the Catholic as often as he falls into sin. And in the last hour of his earthly life, the Catholic receives from the Church the Sacrament of Extreme Unction. The good Catholic believes that his growth in grace is dependent in large measure on his being the recipient of the sacraments of the Church; and chief among all the sacraments through which God imparts his saving grace is the Sacrament of Holy Communion (Eucharist). In the Holy Communion, the Catholic believes that he is offered Christ's Body and Blood, the very Bread of Life.

In the Catholic view, the validity of the sacraments is guaranteed by, if not actually dependent upon, the orders of ministry. Again, Bishop Dun has written:

This priesthood is a gift of God to his Church. Its authority comes from above. Its origins are seen in Christ's empowering and commissioning of his apostles as his plenipotentiaries. The Church's bishops are the bearers of the authority and sacramental power in apostolic succession. To be without them is to lack the ministry which God in Christ has given to his Church.³

In the light of this interpretation, the role of the layman in the Church appears to be little more than that of receiving the sacramental ministry of the priesthood. Actually, Catholicism does stress the fact that the efficacy of the sacraments as respects an individual is dependent on his own subjective intention and faith. Thus, the role of the layman is not purely passive. Even so, the emphasis is on what is done to and for the believer. Walter Marshall Horton, in his *Christian Theology: An Ecumenical Approach*, puts it bluntly as follows:

. . . the dominant emphasis of the whole Catholic system is still upon what is *objectively* done to and for the believer through the clergy in the sacraments, dogmas, laws given to him by the Church, rather than what he subjectively feels, thinks and does. . . . All Catholics stress the apostolic authority of the hierarchy and its commissioning from above. . . all stress the literal identity of the consecrated Bread and Wine with Christ's Body and Blood. . . all stress 'the faith' of the Church rather than the 'faith' of the believer. In all its forms, Catholicism is a complete social system, objectively given, to be obediently and humbly received.⁴

³ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁴ New York: Harper's 1958, p. 233.

This is the place to point out that in the Catholic view the Apostolic ministry is not only the keeper of the sacraments, but the guardian of the deposit of faith as well. The proclamation of the true faith of the Church (basically that which is summarized in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds) is regarded as a means of grace along with the sacraments, and, indeed, both are held to be essential for salvation. But it is not too much to say that Catholicism in practice exalts the celebration of the sacraments above the preaching of the faith, for it regards the sacraments as presupposing the faith. Not only that, but in the Catholic view, the very celebration of the sacraments is yet another way of proclaiming the faith.

Catholics frequently list the marks of the Church as follows:

- 1) It is *one*. That is, the Church is a unique, spiritually organic and indivisible unity—divinely established, with Jesus Christ as the head of the body. It proclaims one faith and acknowledges one Baptism.
- 2) It is *holy*. That is, the Church is the guardian and keeper of the means of grace, namely, the true faith and the sacraments, which are the divinely ordained means of both salvation and holiness. Also, the Church is holy in its essential being because the Holy Spirit dwells within her. The Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church, its power, inspiring both the Scripture and the Tradition and leading men on towards attaining the Christian ideal.
- 3) It is *catholic*. That is, the Church is for the whole world. It is destined to include all men of all times, races and nations. It is catholic both *de jure* (by right) and *de facto* ("in fact" for it is established all over the world and it has expanded from twelve Apostles in Palestine to millions on every continent).
- 4) It is *apostolic*. That is, the doctrines, practices and institutions of the Church are those of the Apostles.

The Anglican Communion at its Lambeth Conference in 1888 put forth what is called the "Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral"—a four-point statement of principles from which Anglicans would be willing to begin to discuss union with non-episcopal (non-Catholic) churches. The four principles are regarded as the *terminus a quo* from which there can be no dispensation; and in substance, as far as Anglicans are concerned, they constitute the minimum requirements for a church that would be "truly catholic". The four points of the Quadrilateral read as follows:

- A) The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as "containing all things necessary to salvation," and as being the rule and ultimate standard

of faith.

- B) The Apostles' Creed, as the Baptismal Symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian Faith.
- C) The two Sacraments ordained by Christ Himself—Baptism and the Supper of the Lord—ministered with unailing use of Christ's words of institution and of the elements ordained by Him.
- D) The Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and people called of God into the unity of His Church.⁵

The Reformed Image of the Church

Those denominations which stand in the tradition of what some call "classical Protestantism" look back to Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin as the great interpreters of the Christian heritage they prize. These denominations, notably the different Lutheran churches, the Swiss, Dutch and French Reformed churches and the various Presbyterian churches, among others, are the spiritual descendants of the 16th Century Reformation in Germany and Switzerland. There is no significant difference theologically between the sons of Luther and the sons of Calvin—and indeed, important unions between Lutheran and Reformed churches have already taken place, especially in Germany. So, when we try to define the so-called "Reformed" image of the Church what we say would enlist the near unanimous agreement of Luther's descendants and Calvin's. In this paper we are broadening the term "Reformed" by making it refer to those who are of the classic Reformation tradition. We must recognize, of course, that some Lutherans might be unhappy, largely for historical reasons, to see themselves blanketed-in with Swiss Reformed Christians, Presbyterians and others under the label "Reformed". But as a matter of fact, this attempt to bring the Lutherans into our thinking in this paper is done on purpose—for there is no good reason theologically why Lutherans should not join with the other denominations in at least discussing the Blake-Pike Proposal. Basically, a church which aims to be "truly reformed" *ipso facto* aims to incorporate most, if not all, that Lutherans hold dear.

Reformed Christianity regards the Church as the servant of God's Word, and like any servant it is under the judgment of its master. The Word of God judges the Church and the Church must

⁵ Quoted from Ruth Rouse and Stephen Neill (eds.), *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*. London: S.P.C.K., 1954, p. 265.

continually reform itself in the light of that judgment. The Church consists of all throughout the world who profess the true religion—it is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God. This Church is found in many separate denominations. To the Church, Christ has given the ministry, commandments and sacraments of God for the gathering and perfecting of the saints. The continuity of the Church is in doctrine, for the Church embraces the deposit of faith transmitted to and by the Apostles. This deposit of faith is found in the Holy Bible—indeed, the Bible *contains* God's Word in the sense that it testifies uniquely to Christ, who is God's living Word. Thus, the Bible affords the chief norm for the Church's teaching, worship and life. The Church is the agency God has established for the promulgation of his Word; and the authority of the Church is to be respected in its interpretation of the Word, which interpretation is, of course, guided by the Holy Spirit.

In the Reformed tradition, the preaching of the Word is regarded as the primary means of God's saving grace. Both Luther and Calvin agreed that the true Church is a congregation of believers "where the Word is rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered." Doubtless, they deliberately put preaching of the Word first and administering the sacraments second—and as a matter of fact, they both tended to interpret the sacraments in much the same fashion as St. Augustine interpreted them, i. e. as *verbum visibile* ("Word made visible"). It should be noted here that Reformed Christianity recognizes only the two sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper as coming from Christ himself; and it testifies to the real (though not corporeal) presence of Christ in the latter.

Whereas Catholicism places its emphasis on the grace of God as something which is objectively given to the believer through the Church, Reformed Christianity lays its emphasis on the grace of God as something subjectively received by the Christian individual by faith. "The just shall live by faith."⁶ Both Catholicism and Reformed Christianity agree that God's saving grace is objectively given and subjectively received—but Catholics have tended to stress the objective *giving* (through the sacerdotal and sacramental systems of the Church) whereas Protestants have tended to stress the subjective *receiving*. This in part accounts for the fact that in practice Catholicism exalts the celebration of the sacraments above the preaching of

⁶ Romans 1:17 (King James Version).

the faith, whereas Protestantism tends to the reverse: it exalts the preaching of the faith (the Word) above the celebration of the sacraments.

Since Reformed Christianity focuses so much attention on the subjective faith of the believer, it is not to be wondered at that the doctrines of repentance, sanctification, justification by faith, etc., have received greater development in Protestantism than in Catholicism. It is not surprising, either, that Reformed Christianity should put as much emphasis on church discipline as does Catholicism. Indeed, John Calvin listed the upright administration of church discipline as one of the marks of the true Church, along with right preaching of the Word and right administration of the sacraments. In this connection, Reformed Christianity has been characterized by what might be called "creedalism". The confessions of faith it has accepted, including those from the ancient Church and those from the Reformation period (with their modern revisions), have been employed as tests of faith and used as instruments of church discipline in matters of doctrine.

In summary, then, we can say that if a united church is to be "truly reformed" it must be, at the very least, a congregation of believers wherein there is to be found the true preaching of the Word of God, the right administration of the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the upright administration of ecclesiastical discipline.

The Evangelical Image of the Church

Once more we must be careful about the use of words. The word "Evangelical" in the Philippines is employed to refer to those denominations which are non-Catholic in their organizational, liturgical and, to some extent, doctrinal heritage. In fact, "Evangelical" is preferred to the word "Protestant" and is frequently used as a substitute for it. Thus, in the Philippines, Christians in the Lutheran and Reformed traditions are included under the label "Evangelical". In its deepest sense the word is a good one—it means "one who is loyal to the *Evangel* (the Gospel)"—and every Christian, Protestant or Catholic, should be eager to be called "Evangelical". In this paper, however, we will employ the term in a specialized sense: we will use it as it is used in discussions centering around the Blake-Pike Proposal—to refer to that heritage of the Christian faith which fits

completely neither the Catholic nor the classical Protestant heritages. It is a view of the Church which is embraced by the so-called "free churches," notably the Congregationalists, Methodists, Baptists, Quakers, and the Disciples of Christ among others—a view which constitutes their deepest bond of kinship. It is a view which affirms that the Church is essentially a divinely called-out fellowship of believers, rather than a divinely established institution. In this view the Church is a Spirit-led fellowship of men and women who have been called out in the midst of the world and drawn together by their common loyalty and obedience to Jesus Christ. The Church is regarded as a covenant community of those who love God as He reveals himself in Jesus Christ. God-in-Christ calls, the repentant and committed believer responds, and bands together with all other like-minded believers to grow in holiness and to witness and to serve in God's name in the world. Thus, God's ministry is regarded as belonging to the whole fellowship *and each member is a minister*, though for practical reasons some are separated and ordained for the special ministry of Word and Sacrament.

The continuity of the Church is primarily the Holy Spirit himself—the same Holy Spirit that led the early Church continues his guidance in the new day with its new problems and challenges.

In Evangelical Christianity, the Word of God is regarded as essential, but there is little or no attempt to bind it to creeds and catechisms. Though creeds (statements of faith) and catechisms are sometimes used as expressions of the present mind of the fellowship, they are never used as tests of faith. The Word of God is found in the Holy Bible, read and interpreted under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Thus, there tends to be a wide latitude of belief and practice among Evangelical Christians, which is not to say, of course, that they are all equally tolerant of one another or regard each other as true Christians.

With the notable exception of the Quakers and the Salvation Army, nearly all the Evangelical denominations celebrate the two sacraments (ordinances) of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism is regarded chiefly as an act of faithful obedience on the part of the believer (or on the part of believing parents for the child) which testifies publicly to the faith he already possesses or to the new life he has already received. The Lord's Supper is regarded as chiefly an act of fellowship in which the congregation of believers witnesses, in the spirit of repentance, humility and reverence, to its own in-

ternal oneness and to its oneness with all Christian believers in Christ. In the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, Jesus Christ is regarded as really present, but in the hearts of the believers rather than in the elements of bread and wine. Here it should be noted that worship in Evangelical denominations, generally speaking, stresses the spontaneity of the Holy Spirit and so tends to be "free," or non-liturgical.

To Evangelical Christians, the Holy Spirit is not only regarded as the Church's continuity, he is regarded as the primary means of grace as well. The really Spirit-led fellowship is already full of grace. So, while preaching of the Word of God is essential and the celebration of the sacraments is useful and helpful, and an ordered ministry might be nice, the main emphasis of Evangelical Christianity is never on these things. It is on the free fellowship of believers who live and labor under Christ and the Spirit.

A church which aims to be "truly evangelical," then, will be one in which the free fellowship of believers will be stressed and in which nothing will be done to block the leading of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers, individually or collectively. A church "truly evangelical" will minimize conformity and uniformity and will include in its life a wide diversity of theologies and a wide variety of worship, both liturgical and non-liturgical. A church "truly evangelical" will give more than lip service to the concept that the whole fellowship, clergy and laity alike, is charged with God's ministry in the world.

A Church Catholic, Reformed and Evangelical

Our problem now is to see whether these varied images of the Church can be reconciled into one image that is truly catholic, truly reformed and truly evangelical. It is possible to have an understanding of the Church that affirms at one and the same time that the Church is the mystical Body of Christ which through the sacramental ministry of the Apostolic priesthood incorporates believers into its life and transmits God's saving grace; *and* that the Church is the agency established by God for the right preaching of his Word and the right celebration of his sacraments and the upright administration of discipline, that all who hear and receive and obey by faith might be saved; *and*, finally, that the Church is a free fellowship of believers who are called out to be God's Church in the world and

who through the continued guidance of the Holy Spirit are led into ever-increasing understanding of truth, ever-widening avenues of service and ever-broadening opportunities for witness?

In asking this question, we must keep in mind that historically Evangelical Christianity rejects the sacramental system of Catholicism and looks on its "Apostolic" hierarchy and priesthood as having no solid foundation either in Scripture or the early history of the Church. At the same time, Evangelical Christians regard classical Protestantism as too creedalistic, too much bound to the traditions of the past and still a bit too clerical and sacramental. Likewise, Reformed Christianity rejects both the sacerdotalism and sacramentalism of Catholic Christianity without rejecting the concept of a divinely appointed (in and through the Church) ministry and sacraments. It looks on Evangelical Christianity as entirely too permissive and chaotic, providing no adequate ecclesiastical structure for the preservation of the essentials of Christian faith and practice. And, of course, Catholics say to Reformed and Evangelical Christians: "A plague on both your houses!" To have little or no regard for the historic episcopate, to treat the sacraments as though they were only of secondary importance or even of no importance at all, and to affirm the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* while denying that the Word of God has been transmitted also through the Sacred Tradition is to play fast and loose with institutions which belong to the *esse* of the Church and which God-in-Christ ordained as his instruments for the salvation of souls and the up-building of his body. Thus, our problem in reconciling the three varied images of the Church is not simply theological, it is very much bound up in historical and pragmatic considerations as well.

We must, then, guard against seeming to arrive at too easy an answer to our problem, because the actual life of the churches has shown that the answer is not easy. Still, one is led to inquire whether the three heritages are entirely disparate. Manifestly not, for each has important elements in common. For one thing, all three images recognize the indwelling presence, inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church. All three acknowledge the importance of the faith of the individual believer as at least a prerequisite for the efficacy of saving grace (though some Christians believe that faith is itself the evidence of saving grace specially bestowed). All three regard the Bible as the record of God's Word and as authoritative in governing the faith and morals of Christians.

Catholic, Reformed and the majority of Evangelical Christians affirm the importance of a ministry of Word and Sacrament and at the same time recognize that such a ministry amounts to naught in the lives of individual persons who interpose the obstacle of unbelief. All three heritages acknowledge that the Church, whether a fellowship or an institution, is not man-made, but is divinely established. And all three confess Jesus Christ as Lord of the Church; and, in one way or another, all three regard the Church as continuing the earthly ministry of Christ. So right from the start we have a high degree of agreement in the three views. They are not completely disparate.

However, certain differences remain which seem to defy reconciliation. Clarence Tucker Craig, in his book *The One Church*, reduced these differences to three main issues: 1) the question of the limits of the Church; 2) the question of the form of the Church; 3) the question of the continuity of the Church.⁷

Christians are not agreed on whether the one, true Church actually exists visibly or whether at present it is but a spiritual reality which constitutes the bond of unity between Christians separated into many denominational bodies. Most Catholics and many strongly sectarian Protestants affirm that they, in their particular denominations, constitute the one, true Church. Most Protestants, however, acknowledge only the invisible, spiritual oneness of the Church which has yet to be visibly manifested.

Christians are not agreed on whether there is one obligatory form of Church order—episcopal, presbyterian or congregational. Catholics affirm that episcopacy belongs to the *esse* of the Church and was instituted by Christ and the Apostles, as the New Testament amply evidences. Most Protestants, however, hold that the New Testament reveals variety in church organization; that no particular form belongs to the *esse* of the Church; and that every form is subject to change under new circumstances.

Christians are not agreed on the nature of the Church's continuity. Catholics are utterly committed to the position that saving grace and authority to teach and govern were imparted by Christ to the Apostles and by them to their successors, the bishops. Catholics affirm that any break in that continuity renders ministerial ordination and the celebration of the sacraments invalid. Reformed Chris-

⁷ New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1951, p. 27.

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tians, as we have seen, stress the continuity which is to be found in the Word of God and the Apostolic faith rather than in the ministry. And Evangelical Christians place greatest stress on the indwelling Holy Spirit who stands in back of and beyond all orders of ministry, all affirmations of faith and even the Bible itself.

The Second World Conference on Faith and Order held at Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1937, was led to a conclusion that the passage of time since then has not been able to erase—"The conclusion that behind all particular statements of the problem of corporate union lie deeply divergent conceptions of the Church".⁸ It is apparent that if ever there is to be a reconciliation of the three deep differences we have just outlined, there will have to be a radical change in the perspective in which those concerned do their thinking. Within the Ecumenical Movement, and more particularly in Faith and Order discussions, the urge for a new perspective is strongly felt. For example, the Faith and Order Section Report at the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Evanston, Illinois, in 1954, went so far to suggest the elements of a new perspective in which the churches might see their differences. Among the elements suggested were: the oneness God has actually given in the World Council of Churches itself, and the theological implications of that ecumenical fact; attention, in the midst of disunity, to the one Lord speaking through the Holy Scriptures; facing honestly the non-theological factors (social and cultural influences) which contribute to division; exploring the implications of the one Baptism for sharing in the one Eucharist; discovering the meaning of the ministry of the laity for Christian unity; and, above all, praying together for unity. "To pray together is to be drawn together."⁹

In summary we are forced to conclude that the three images of the Church springing from the Catholic, Reformed and Evangelical heritages can be, at this time, only partly reconciled and that nothing short of bold and honest thinking in a radically new perspective, along with much earnest prayer, will bring about the reconciliation of deep remaining differences. And surely prayer ought to focus on petition *for the grace to realize the Church God intends us to have* and the courage and obedience to abandon our own image of that Church if it in fact counters God's purpose.

⁸ Quoted from the Edinburgh Report in Horton, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

⁹ *The Evanston Report*. W. A. Visser t'Hooft (ed.). New York: Harper's 1955, pp. 89-91.

But we must not bring this paper to a close without recognizing that, as a matter of fact, denominations representing two, and even all three, of the images we have discussed have united. The United Church of Christ in the Philippines, and similar united churches in Canada, the United States, Japan and elsewhere have seen denominations from the Reformed and Evangelical heritages coming together in one body. And the Church of South India represents the first successful union of denominations from the Reformed, Evangelical and Catholic heritages; and other such unions are contemplated. The marvelous thing is that these denominations have merged without completely reconciling their varied images of the true Church. Nearly all the united churches experience tension within their membership springing from conflicting ideas about the nature and mission of the Church. Yet, despite these tensions they remain together in one body. Actually such tensions are not a phenomenon of united churches alone. The Anglican Communion has long experienced the contest between those who would emphasize the Protestant and those who would emphasize the Catholic heritage of their church. Some of the Evangelical denominations, such as the Methodists, Baptists and Congregationalists, have come more and more to take on the attitudinal and institutional characteristics of the Reformed Protestant denominations as they have grown larger and more world-wide—and, thus, they have come to experience tension between those who would stress the old purity and power of the local fellowship of believers, and those who would stress the importance and mission of the new institutions. Yet, for the most part, these Christians in tension respecting their idea of the Church, remain together.

What we are implying here is simply that it is possible to have within one church body varied concepts of the nature of the Church which are not completely reconciled. The recent history of uniting denominations shows that Christians need not wait for a total reconciliation of their doctrines of the Church before coming together in one household of faith. Indeed, some of the united churches are discovering that as a result of their corporate life there emerges an entirely new image of the Church that supersedes the separate images originally carried into the union. Life is a great reconciler of irreconcilables! This might be a good thing for the American churchmen discussing the Blake-Pike Proposal to keep in mind, and a good thing for churchmen in the Philippines to ponder as well.

In an article published recently in *The Christian Century* reporting the meeting of the Consultation on Church Union held at Oberlin, Ohio, March 19-21, 1963, Kyle Haselden made the following comment, speaking truly and (we hope) prophetically:

But a proposed union which waits for theoretical resolution of all differences never occurs. Many of the theological and ecclesiastical issues which divide the churches can be removed only in and by the uniting process. In the actual encounter, in the genuine search for union, agreements theoretically impossible emerge.¹⁰

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¹⁰ Kyle Haselden, "Fusion at Oberlin," *The Christian Century*, LXXX, No. 14 (April 3, 1963), 422.