

nb:
news

IN THIS ISSUE

Feature D. A. Carson: 'Unity in Truth and Love' **World Mission**

A heart for world mission

Stand with us Harvesters needed **Ministry Focus**

www.theologynetwork.org

CU Profile Sheffield

Keeping you in touch with the work of UCCF: The Christian Unions

WINTER 2007



LET US KNOW
WHAT YOU
THINK OF
nb:news
tell@uccf.org.uk

VISIT: www.uccf.org.uk CALL: 0116 255 1700 SURF: www.bethinking.org

uccf:thechristianunions
making disciples of Jesus Christ in the student world

Feature: D. A. Carson

Unity in Truth and Love

If we fail to display the unity that is the fruit of love, the world will not know that we are Jesus' disciples.¹ If we pursue unity at the expense of truth, we are dispensing with apostolic priorities.² How shall we get this matter right—not only as a theological question, but in practice? Taken together, the following ten observations may encourage us to 'make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace'.³



1 As important as it is, unity, unlike holiness, is not an *ultimate* goal. One cannot imagine a biblical writer encouraging us to turn aside from holiness, but many biblical texts warn us against certain kinds of unity. Jehoshaphat was an otherwise excellent king who made hopelessly foolish alliances with wicked rulers.⁴ Every time there is discipline in the church over a moral issue⁵ or division over central doctrinal matters,⁶ unity is threatened — and rightly so: 'For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? What fellowship does light have with darkness?'⁷

This unity sweeps in an incredibly rich array of human beings, and it is grounded in the gospel as the gospel itself is grounded in the relationships within the Godhead.

2 Nevertheless, the unity of believers is designed to reflect the unity of the Father and the Son — in short, the unity of the Godhead.⁸ The love of the Father for the Son,⁹ and the love of the Son for the

Father,¹⁰ is to be the adhesion that holds believers together as one.¹¹ This intra-Trinitarian love of God is more than a model (though it is not less): the love of the Father for the Son fires the divine resolve that all will honour the Son,¹² and the love of the Son for the Father ensures he always does what the Father gives him to do¹³ — and hence Gethsemane and the cross. In other words, this intra-Trinitarian love issues in the cross and resurrection, and thus in the gospel which redeems and transforms broken, guilty people, re-shaping them into a community of the blood-bought, who are called upon to reflect the character of their God and Saviour

3 This unity brings together not only Jews and Gentiles,¹⁴ but men and women everywhere. As all are commanded to repent,¹⁵ so also this gospel saves men and women drawn from every tribe and language and people and nation.¹⁶

I cannot resist an aside. People sometimes ask what language will be spoken in heaven. The usual answers are full of whimsy: Chinese, because there are so many who already know the language; English, because otherwise the Americans won't have anyone else to talk to; and more of the same. But when we speak of many 'tribes' and 'peoples' in heaven, we expect continuity in their distinctiveness. There will be Kikuyus and Bantus in heaven. We do not ask, 'What colour of skin will people have in their resurrection existence?' Rather, we anticipate the full diversity. On the same reasoning, why not also diversity of 'language' too? And if it takes me a million years or so to learn Mandarin, who cares? This unity sweeps in an incredibly rich array of human beings, and it is grounded in the gospel as the gospel itself is grounded in the relationships within the Godhead.

4 Jesus' prayer for unity in John 17 has been more deeply and fruitfully answered than many people think. Very often people appeal for unity with an emotive appeal: 'We must have more unity, for otherwise the prayer of Jesus will not be answered and Jesus himself will be frustrated.' Often they want an *organisational* unity at all costs. But I have found brothers and sisters in Christ, instantly forging surprisingly deep links with them, in Kyrgyzstan and Malaysia, in Brazil and Hong Kong, in Australia and Spain, in the UK and the US, in Papua New Guinea and Kenya, in countless other places, and among a wide diversity of denominations and ethnicities — and my experience, far from being unique, is merely typical. Of course, Jesus' prayer will not be perfectly fulfilled until the consummation, but it is unthinkable to suppose that the Father does not wonderfully answer his dear Son now — and experience confirms this theological conclusion.

5 Vital Christian unity is not based on what mathematicians call the LCD — the lowest common denominator. On such a construal Christians achieve a measure of unity by agreeing not to talk about anything over which they might differ. The result is that the bigger the catchment of 'unified' Christians, the less they have to talk about. By contrast, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and especially Philippians, urge believers to 'think the same thing'. This does not mean putting up with differences: that's called forbearance, and of course forbearance is often needed. But Paul wants something more: he wants the believers to whom he is writing to bring their different opinions to the test of revelation, to the touchstone of the gospel, to submission to the Lordship of King Jesus. That takes time, energy, humility, a willingness to be corrected, gentleness in personal interactions, and sometimes confrontation.¹⁷ But the result can be gloriously rich and fulfilling.

6 This unity is not achieved by cloning, but by celebrating the diversity of gifts which God, by his Spirit, has poured out on the church. The body of Christ is not one big eyeball or nothing but a toenail: it is made up of many parts,¹⁸ and they are to function together in mutually helpful ways, recognising that while there are different gifts (and no one has them all), there is only one universally mandated 'most excellent way' — the way of love.¹⁹

7 What I have written so far has repeatedly sidled up to a point of superlative importance, without quite articulating it. Now I must make it clear. Christian unity is first of all the unity enjoyed by genuine Christians. It flows from the cross, from the gift of the Spirit, from regeneration; we were all baptised in one Spirit into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free, Asian or Caucasian or African, and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.²⁰

8 Inevitably that imposes upon us the test of the gospel itself. If people are *claiming* to be Christians, but are in fact preaching another Jesus and a different gospel,²¹ then they are 'false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ'.²² Our current infatuation with the widespread cultural commitment to refuse to say anyone is wrong makes us uncomfortable with such plain speech. Paul's own assessment is more robust: he says we should not be surprised by false apostles and deceitful workers because Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.²³

Unity in Truth and Love

9 In fact, discernment in this arena demands that we cultivate the ability to hierarchialise our beliefs, and focus most attention on the most central matters. That is what Paul does: he can overlook slights and even questionable motives,²⁴ and he urges Timothy and Titus to learn how to correct gently the false teaching and inconsistent living of some of those who confront them. On the other hand, when it comes to the gospel, he boldly articulates the matters 'of first importance'²⁵ — and that includes a well-formed grasp of Jesus' cross and resurrection. Elsewhere he testifies to his resolution to focus 'on Christ and him crucified'.²⁶ Christians today are unlikely to be snookered by a Richard Dawkins, who dismisses the entire Christian revelation with spectacular scorn. They are far more likely to be taken in by a trusted voice that speaks fluently about diverse 'models' of the atonement while refusing to rejoice over one who was wounded for our transgressions, who bore our sin in his own body on the tree, who became a curse for us, who died the just for the unjust.²⁷

The need for discernment may be clarified a bit by two further reflections. *First*, among those trying unreservedly to submit to the Bible, there are refreshing constraints. Last year, Zondervan published the *African Bible Commentary*, edited by Tokunboh Adeyomo. Much of the advertising hype focused on how this fat volume brings fresh eyes and new interpretations to the task of reading and preaching Scripture. Now that I have read much of it, I was much more impressed by another feature of the book: most of the exposition was the sort of faithful reading of the Bible that could have been undertaken by believers in India or Singapore or Chicago or London.

True, a little more space was devoted to demon-possession than is typical of Western commentaries; there was more emphasis on communitarian interests and a little less on the individual. But faithful reading of Scripture is not so open-ended that it becomes impossible to say that no reading is wrong. *Second*, Scripture itself encourages us to be gentle and encouraging with fledgling believers, whose understanding is still very immature. They are heading in the right direction and need to be taught and encouraged.²⁸ By contrast, teachers in the church who are now heading away from central confessionism are to be exposed²⁹ and in some cases excommunicated.³⁰

10 Finally, many biblical texts tell us how to foster loving unity within the constraints of truth. For instance, Christians are to speak the truth in love,³¹ not in pompous arrogance. While we are to speak truthfully,³² we are never to nurture bitterness, but to refuse to let the sun go down on our wrath.³³ 'Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you'.³⁴ In sum, the gospel is not only to be articulated and defended, but to be lived out in the unity of the church's life. ■

¹ John 13:34–35

² e.g., Gal 2:14–18; 2 Cor 13:1ff.

³ Eph 4:3

⁴ 2 Chron 17–20

⁵ e.g., Acts 5; 1 Cor 5

⁶ e.g., 1 John

⁷ 2 Cor 6:14

⁸ John 17:20–26

⁹ John 3:35; 5:20; 17:24–26

¹⁰ John 14:31

¹¹ John 17

¹² John 5:20–23

¹³ John 14:31

¹⁴ Eph 2

¹⁵ Acts 17:30

¹⁶ Rev 5:9; cf. 7:9

¹⁷ e.g., Gal 2:11–14

¹⁸ 1 Cor 12

¹⁹ 1 Cor 13

²⁰ 1 Cor 12:13

²¹ 2 Cor 11:4 — in this case a gospel of triumphalism, not unlike the 'health, wealth, and prosperity' gospel widely circulated today

²² 2 Cor 11:13

²³ 2 Cor 11:14–15

²⁴ Phil 1

²⁵ 1 Cor 15:3

²⁶ 1 Cor 2:2

²⁷ Isa 53:5; 1 Pet 2:24; Gal 3:13; 1 Pet 3:18

²⁸ e.g., Jude 22–23

²⁹ e.g., 1 John 2:19

³⁰ e.g., 1 Tim 1:18–20

³¹ Eph 4:15

³² Eph 4:25

³³ Eph 4:26

³⁴ Eph 4:31–32



A heart for world mission

Ever since its beginnings UCCF: The Christian Unions has had a heart for world mission. Whilst we strive to see British campuses won for Christ, we have always been aware of the need for the whole world to hear the wonderful news about Jesus Christ...



We have always been aware of the need for the whole world to hear the wonderful news about Jesus Christ, which is why we are so excited about an initiative that took place in the North West in November.

The World Mission Tour took place over six nights in Salford, Manchester, Lancaster, Liverpool and Preston, with students from all over the North West joining together to learn about God's heart for the nations. The aim was: to enthuse students about God's plan for the gospel to be taken to all nations; to encourage them to grow as global Christians; and to call them to prayer and action. At each event the speaker was Dick Dowsett, who has served with OMF for nearly forty years and was a UCCF staff worker prior to that.

NB was delighted to be able to take a trip up North to drop in on the third event, held at The University of Manchester. Dick spoke clearly and passionately about world mission; testimonies about summer mission teams and from international students were shared, and the students prayed together for mission around the world. Afterwards students had plenty of time to talk with representatives from a number of mission agencies, to find out how they could support them and to ask questions about how they might get involved. It was wonderful to see ambassadors for Africa Inland Mission, Friends International, IFES, Interserve, OMF and WEC all encouraging students to pray for and consider the need for mission around the world.

We managed to catch up with Dick at the end of the evening, and he told us why he was passionate about events like these.

'There are two reasons: firstly, it is an integral part of what UCCF is about. The CUs have mobilised many people to share the gospel all over the world, both as full time evangelists and as folk carrying out their professions, and intentionally making disciples at the same time.'

'I think the second reason is that there is a huge opportunity here for students, who may go on to be career cross-cultural disciple-makers, to learn on the job, to catch the vision and to learn to respect Christian internationals in the context of the CUs. It's a wonderful training ground. My first experience of cross-cultural partnership was co-leading a Bible study with a Ghanaian when I was at university; it was very formative for me.'

'I'm not interested in sending somebody abroad who walks past the world on their campus. I'm not going to send somebody to Japan if they can't be bothered with the Japanese that are in their classroom or their halls.'

Do pray with us that in all our CUs God would raise up students who will take the good news to the nations, and who will share the gospel the many international students who come to the UK. ■

RACHEL TURNER, MEDIA PRODUCER

What the Punters said:

'It's great to see the number of people here tonight and it would be amazing to see the impact of an evening like this evening down through the years.' **Scott Thompson, President University of Manchester CU**

'There are people in every CU who feel that God is calling them to be involved in mission, either overseas or here with international students. I like meeting with students because they're searching, asking demanding questions, and they're at that time in their lives where they're exploring what God wants of them.' **Ian Morris, Interserve**

'I'm excited that people have been challenged from God's Word that it's really important to do cross-cultural mission and that we don't have to go abroad to do it but we can do it with international students here at Manchester. I hope to see people really catching that vision and making friends with international students.' **Jo Pan, International Sec University of Manchester CU**