

Purpose Driven Ecumenism

Commentary by Roger Oakland

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Nearly every day we read headlines that indicate the ecumenical movement is sweeping the world. It seems churches and denominations that once took strong biblical positions no longer believe what they once believed. It is common to hear about unity at any cost, however, not at the foot of the cross.

The death of Pope John Paul II was a watershed event with regard to the ecumenical movement. Christian leaders from all over the world demonstrated their willingness to lay down their differences. What would have been deemed impossible a decade ago, with regard to embracing Roman Catholicism is now common-place. Since taking over as the new head of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Benedict XVI has promised to unify Christianity. Based on current events and trends, there is a strong possibility this may well happen.

Bible prophecy reveals the last days will be characterized by a time when a counterfeit bride will be prepared for a counterfeit Christ. Deception will take place in the name of Jesus because the truth of God's Word will be ignored.

This commentary will document a number of trends that appear to be leading towards a unified "Christianity" with a reunion of the separated brethren in Rome. My prayer is that people will read this commentary with an open mind and consider the facts.

Pentecostals for Ecumenism

While very little news from the ecumenical front seems surprising anymore, a headline I read recently from the Christian Post caught my attention. This is what it stated: "Pentecostals Consider Joining Ecumenical Movement."

As a new believer some 25 years ago, my mentors and my teachers were Pentecostals who loved God's Word. I was taught by them that the World Council of Churches was an agent of the devil. They saw the ecumenical movement as an enemy of the gospel.

I found this news that Pentecostals were in the process of considering joining the WCC very difficult to believe. How could a group of Bible believers who were once able to discern spiritual danger, now be so blind?

For some time, I had seen signs something was seriously wrong. Some Pentecostals who I once had fellowship with, changed their views. They were no longer warning about the deception of ecumenism. Instead, they were looking for ways and means to find unity with the Roman

Catholic Church. Rather than warning the sheep about the imminent return of Jesus, they were praying with nuns and priests to evangelize together.

Still, the article that indicated Pentecostals were considering joining the World Council of Churches shocked me. I could not believe what I was reading. For example:

Pentecostal communities can offer “a power beyond ourselves” in the 21st century ecumenical movement, according to a Pentecostal scholar at the World Council of Church’s weeklong mission and evangelism conference.

According to Dr. Kim, this “power beyond” is not “part of a plan” and is not “achieved through a human strategy. It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit.”

The article indicated the possibility Pentecostals would join the WCC was still at a very early stage of development:

According to the World Council of Churches press, the dialogue between Pentecostals and active members of the ecumenical movement is still “in a very early stage of development.” Of the 650 participants at the mission conference, only 15 were Pentecostals.

Further, the article mentioned there were Pentecostals who were not too enthusiastic about the Church of Pentecost considering full membership with the WCC. For example, Dr. Yong-Gi Hong, a Pentecostal scholar and senior mission executive of the Yoida Full Gospel Church in the Republic of Korea, said such an ecumenical move would “institutionalize the church.” Then expounding further he said:

In our tradition – the gifts of the Holy Spirit – are to be found in the local level. If we are to work in ecumenical organizations beyond the local community, we must find the proper way to balance the Spirit and the system.

So, as you can see, there are still major obstacles to be overcome before Pentecostals could join the WCC. In fact it seems totally impossible. How could the WCC’s “social gospel” ever link arms with the “full gospel” that is such an essential part of Pentecostal belief?

Can Unity Be at Any Cost?

There are many different groups, denominations and sects that profess to be “Christian.” Ecumenism, by definition is a human program to bring unity in the name of Christ. However, how realistic is ecumenism in light of the Bible? What if a certain group embraces teachings or beliefs that contradict what Jesus said? Can we join hands in Christian unity then?

Certainly true Christian unity is a good thing – that is if the unity is based on biblical truth. However, the ecumenical movement allows for beliefs and ideas that are not scriptural. A Christianity that is not based on the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ is not biblical Christianity.

Now, in order to look at an example of the direction “Christian unity” is headed, consider an article titled Protestant Leaders Pray for Ecumenism, Holy Spirit to Guide Pope. The article begins this way: “Christian leaders representing millions of Protestants worldwide congratulated Pope Benedict XVI on his election and expressed hopes for renewed dedication to ecumenism and dialogue.”

Now there was a time when an ecumenical announcement of this nature would have raised eyebrows – but not anymore. It is a fact that Roman Catholics and Evangelicals are uniting together. It seems ecumenism is a sign of our times.

This same article contained a prayer for the new pope that may cause some to stop and think. Listen to what Samuel Kobia, Secretary of the World Council of Churches said:

We pray to our common Lord Jesus Christ, asking that your Pontificate become a blessed time of dialogue between churches, a dialogue in truth and love, a dialogue as an exchange of gifts among Christian churches, a dialogue of conversion.

If you are wondering what Kobia meant by “dialogue” and “conversion,” this next statement, (also from the same article) made by the President and the Secretary General of the Lutheran World Federation will help you to understand:

As Lutherans we expect especially that ecumenical progress can be made on the basis of the substantial theological agreements that have been achieved through 40 years of international Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue, particularly with regard to justification, ministry and the sacraments.

Did you understand the significance of these previous two statements? Leaders, including heads of the World Council of Churches and the World Federation of Lutherans are willing to dialogue with Roman Catholics for the sake of conversion. But who is being converted, and what will they be converted to?

The Roman Catholic Church May Join With the WCC

Pope Benedict has promised to bring unity to Christianity. While this seems to be an impossible task, there are signs that “Christian unity” may be attained in the near future.

It can also be documented that a unity based on a common bond in the Holy Spirit appears to be another possible bridge that will draw a large sector of Protestant charismatics into the Roman Catholic Church. (My next commentary will be on this subject).

Further, there may be another bridge in the making. It is called the World Council of Churches and the “social gospel.”

The WCC is made up of more than 300 churches from nearly all Christian traditions, including Protestant and Orthodox. The Roman Catholic Church is not a member of the WCC but has worked cooperatively with the WCC in several areas as a full member of two of the Council's commissions: Faith and Order and World Mission and Evangelism.

However, there appears to be a change underway. The Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches are now dialoging together about further cooperation with regard to ecumenism. An article from Christianity Today titled "Pope Benedict and WCC's Head First Meeting Signals New Phase in Christian Unity" explained what happened in Rome, June, 2005:

The first ever meeting between Pope Benedict XVI and General Secretary of the World Council of Churches Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia since both took up their cultural positions was held on Thursday, June 16th (2005), and was witnessed by a small private audience. The two organizations have both shown their pursuit in unifying all Christians which is seen as an encouraging step in the ecumenical movement worldwide.

In this photo made available by the Vatican newspaper L'Osservatore Romano, Pope Benedict XVI greets Kenyan Rev. Samuel Kobia, the leader of the World Council of Churches, at the Vatican, Thursday, June 16, 2005. (AP Photo/L'Osservatore Romano)

The news about the Roman Catholic Pope and the General Secretary of the WCC getting together to discuss ways to unify the Christian Church is quite exciting in light of Bible prophecy. As a new Christian, my Bible teachers were telling me that this was exactly the direction "Christianity" would be headed in the future. Now that this is happening a quarter of a century later, not many Christians today seem to be paying attention.

Pope Benedict's Role

It is obvious Pope Benedict XVI is serious about unifying Christianity. The Associated Press quoted the pope as saying, "The commitment of the Catholic Church to the search of Christian unity is irreversible." But what does Pope Benedict mean by Christian unity? Does this mean the Roman Catholic Church is willing to change its views so that the "separated brethren" will now be genuine Christians.

There is a simple answer to that question. You see it was (Cardinal Ratzinger), now Pope Benedict XVI, who authored a controversial document titled "Dominus Iesus" from the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, published in 2000. In this document Cardinal Ratzinger said "non-Roman Catholic churches" were "not churches in the proper sense." What did he mean by "not churches in the proper sense"? Has he changed his mind now that he has been promoted from cardinal to pope?

It's my understanding that non-Roman Catholics will always remain "illegitimate Christians" until they accept that Jesus is present in the communion wafer after (and only after) it has been consecrated by a priest. At least that is what I have read in numerous Catholic sources.

Is it possible that Pope Benedict, in his drive to bring “unity” to “Christianity” may try to pull the wool over the eyes of the sheep that have fallen asleep?

The Kingdom of God

The Bible can be a very controversial book. For example, there is the issue of God’s Kingdom being established here on earth – God’s way or man’s way.

There are those who believe that mankind will usher in the Kingdom of God by human effort. This is what the Roman Catholic Church believes.

Then there are those who believe this is completely wrong. They say the Kingdom of God requires the presence of a King – King Jesus. Human effort that promises to set up the Kingdom of God is pure folly, they say.

The WCC of churches has been promoting a “social-gospel-Kingdom-of-God-on-earth” for years. The churches participating in the WCC are much more interested in saving the planet than they are in man’s spiritual destiny.

Already in this commentary, we have documented that Pentecostals and Roman Catholics are dialoguing with the WCC. The invitation for others to join is open as well. For example, consider a statement taken from an article titled “WCC Conference: Inter-faith should move beyond liberals”:

Interreligious dialogue must move beyond the hands of the liberal few and reach the “ordinary people” in local communities, some speakers expressed in an interfaith gathering in Geneva today. “We should move from a dialogue of strangers to a dialogue of neighbors,” suggested Rev. Valson Thampu, (Church of North India) a leader in the social justice movement. “In a globalized world, more and more religions are crowding into my neighborhood. But when you see your neighbors and their needs, you will find God accidentally in the other.”

So what is the significance of this statement? Is the WCC considering joining hands with Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims? Another statement from the article will clarify:

According to the World Council of Churches, sponsor of the Critical Moment in Interreligious Dialogue conference in Geneva, the main criticism made against interreligious dialogue is that it “does not really reach the ordinary people in religious communities, being mostly restricted to the religious leadership and involving many liberal-minded activists.” Therefore, speakers at the event emphasized the need to gather around a table of common values and common justice.

Hopefully by now, the picture is becoming obvious. The WCC has an agenda to promote the social gospel by welcoming all to join - the more religions the merrier it will be. Listen to what Swami Agnivesh, an Indian spiritual leader and social activist said at the “interreligious” WCC sponsored conference:

The world is now poised for a shift to a social spirituality which upholds the core of spiritual values common to all faiths: love, compassion and justice. That is real spirituality.

Purpose Driven Ecumenism

If you have read carefully though this article, I trust that you are seeing a number of paths that facilitate ecumenism. Now, here is the question – do these paths have the potential to lead to Rome?

Now, let's look at another potential ecumenical bridge. What if Protestant evangelicals who have believed in the gospel according to the Scriptures, became sidetracked into promoting a humanistic "social gospel" that has the potential of leading them astray? Could this be another possible path to Rome?

This is the reason why I am concerned about Rick Warren's purpose-driven PEACE plan designed to win the world to Christ. Based on facts that I have read, Rick Warren's ambitious program to reach the world may be well meaning and appear to be biblically-based. However, there are some warning signs that seem to indicate the purpose-driven PEACE plan may be just another path that leads to a much bigger plan that is already in place.

First, to get some background on Warren's program to help build the Kingdom of God here on earth, I want to quote an article written by Mark Kelly from the Biblical Recorder titled "Rick Warren launches global initiative":

Thousands of churches around the world will be setting out to eradicate five "giant problems" that oppress billions of people, Rick Warren told a crowd of 30,000 celebrating Saddleback Community Church's 25th anniversary April 17 at Angel Stadium in Anaheim, California. "Billions of people suffer each day from problems so big no government can solve them," said Warren, Saddleback's pastor. "The only thing big enough to solve the problems of spiritual emptiness, selfish leadership, poverty, disease and ignorance is the network of millions of churches around the world."

Or for an additional perspective, we can quote from Dan Wooding's article titled "Rick Warren Hits Home Run with Announcement of Global Peace Plan to Battle Giants of Our World." Wooding stated:

Rick Warren, author of the best-selling book, *The Purpose Driven Life* and founding pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, hit a home run with a dramatic announcement on Sunday, April 17th, before 30,000 members and attendees at the church 25th anniversary celebration in Angel Stadium, home of the Angels baseball team. Warren unveiled the church's commitment to a new reformation in Christianity and vision for a worldwide spiritual awakening in the 21st Century through the PEACE Plan that he believes will mobilize one billion foot soldiers from the Christian church in missions by the year 2020.

According to Wooding, Rick Warren laid out his plan for a “new reformation” and a “worldwide spiritual awakening” at the Anaheim anniversary meeting. Further, Pastor Warren announced he was joining hands with Chuck Colson to assist him in his goal to establish the Kingdom of God here on earth. According to Mark Kelly, reporting for the Baptist Press News:

Warren also introduced Charles Colson, founder of Prison Fellowship, who announced a new partnership that will introduce Warren's Celebrate Recovery programs into prison ministries in 108 countries. The new agreement, signed April 16, also will mobilize congregations for Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree ministry to the children of prisoners and promote Colson's Worldview Studies Program, which helps believers apply Christian values to a wide range of issues in daily life.

It can be documented that Chuck Colson previously agreed to join hands with the Roman Catholic Church when he signed a document called “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium.” So, if Rick Warren joins hands with Chuck Colson who has already joined hands with Roman Catholicism, what does that mean?

Supporters of Evangelicals and Catholics Together maintain it is not a theological agreement, but instead a statement of unity for the cause of moral and social reform. However, this same document states, “Evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ.” Further, existing divisions that obscure the one Christ and hinder the one mission of the church are confessed as “sins against the unity that Christ intends for all his disciples.”

It can be pointed out that Rick Warren's speech made at the Anaheim meeting encouraged his purpose-driven supporters to partner with him to usher in the Kingdom of God here on earth by human effort. Quoting from his speech:

I stand before you confidently right now and say to you that God is going to use you to change the world. Some will say, “That's impossible,” but I heard that line 25 years ago, and God took seven people and started Saddleback Church. Now we have a new vision and a whole lot more people to start with. The great evangelist Dwight L. Moody said, “The world has yet to see what God can do with a man fully consecrated to him.” I'm looking at a stadium full of people who are telling God they will do whatever it takes to establish God's Kingdom 'on earth as it is in heaven.' What will happen if the followers of Jesus say to Him, “We are yours”? What kind of spiritual awakening will occur?

What does Rick Warren mean by “whatever it takes”? Is it possible that joining together with Roman Catholics for advancing the Kingdom of God may be in Rick Warren's playbook? In an article titled “Man of Faith is Changing Religion - and Politics?” Jane Eisner quoted Warren as saying: “I'm not a politician, I'm a pastor,” ...and then noted that if evangelical Protestants teamed up with American Catholics, “that's called a majority.”

Further, let's look at another piece of factual information - this time a statement written by David Brooks in an article titled "A Natural Alliance." Brooks makes some interesting observations about Rick Warren and the current trend he sees being promoted towards the "social gospel" and the gospel of Rome:

And when I look at the evangelical community, I see a community in the midst of a transformation - branching out beyond the traditional issues of abortion and gay marriage, and getting more involved in programs to help the needy. I see Rick Warren, who through his new PEACE initiative is sending thousands of people to Rwanda and other African nations to fight poverty and disease. I see Chuck Colson deeply involved in Sudan. I see Richard Cizik of the National Association of Evangelicals drawing up a service agenda that goes way beyond the normal turf of Christian conservatives. I see evangelicals who are more and more influenced by Catholic social teaching, with its emphasis on good works. I see the historical rift healing between those who emphasized personal and social morality. Most of all, I see a new sort of evangelical leader emerging.

The article just quoted was written by David Brooks and published May 26, 2005. On July 2, Assist News Agency published an article further clarifying Rick Warren's PEACE Plan. In a phone interview with ANS while he was backstage at the massive Live 8 rock concert in Philadelphia, PA, Warren said, "I personally believe that these problems are not solvable by governments. I believe that only the church can solve them, because only the church has the most distribution channels in the world."

Further the article quoted Warren as stating:

Our goal will be to enlist 'one billion foot soldiers for the Kingdom of God,' who will permanently change the face of international missions to take on these five 'global giants' for which the church can become the ultimate distribution and change agent to overcome Spiritual Emptiness, Self-serving Leadership, Poverty, Disease and ignorance.

Warren further explained that through the PEACE plan, small groups from hundreds of thousands of churches will attack these giants, armed with "five smooth stones" of (P) - Planting Churches, (E) - Equipping Leaders, (A) - Assisting the Poor, (C) - Caring for the Sick and (E) - Educating the Next Generation.

According to Warren, (with the help of Chuck Colson) "one billion foot soldiers who have the promise of the power of God" and "have the Biblical mandate and the command of God" and "the moral authority to do it" - are being called on to establish the PEACE Plan. It looks to me as if the PEACE plan will have to be ecumenical in nature.

Remember the phrase Rick Warren coined: if evangelical Protestants teamed up with American Catholics, "that's called a majority." Time will tell whether or not Warren and his team will be able to mobilize one billion purpose-driven foot soldiers for the cause of PEACE. However, one

thing is certain. In order to recruit that many committed participants, the Roman Catholic Church will definitely have to participate.

At the time this commentary was written, it appears as if the recruitment of Roman Catholics had just begun. I am going to monitor a site that has been set up on the Internet for Warren's PEACE plan that indicates the welcome mat for Roman Catholics to become purpose-driven partners is open.

Purpose Driven Ecumenism with a Reunion in Rome?

Of course it is commendable for Christians to feed the hungry, reach out to prisoners and be promoters of love, compassion and justice. However, a "social gospel" based on a "social spirituality," that does not promote the gospel according to the Scriptures, is another gospel. The only way to spend eternity in heaven is to repent and accept Jesus Christ.

I am not questioning Rick Warren's sincerity and zeal to reach the world for the sake of advancing the Christian faith. My concern is based upon documented facts revealing that the Roman Catholic Church also has a sincere and zealous agenda to establish the Kingdom of God here on earth. Is it possible to separate Warren's PEACE plan from the Roman Catholic peace plan that involves the Eucharistic Reign of the Eucharistic Jesus with the help of "Mary"?

While some may say I am being too critical, sensationalist or speculative, I would ask you to consider the facts. We have been able to demonstrate a current trend that shows churches of all denominations (even the Roman Catholic Church) willing to join hands with the World Council of Churches for the purpose of establishing a "social gospel." Of course, the pope and the Roman Catholic Church have no intentions of losing power and moving headquarters from Rome to Geneva. So where will the headquarters of the final PEACE (peace) plan be located?

I am asking you to think. I know it is not popular these days to be going upstream on the ecumenical river headed towards Rome. However, you might want to consider the consequences if this ecumenical river leads to a Christianity that is not biblical. This matters because the Bible challenges us to contend for the faith. If we are not contending for the faith, we have the potential of falling away from the faith – that's another term for apostasy.

The Bible states there will be a falling away in the last days, and by peace the Antichrist will destroy many. Will you be part of the solution or the problem?

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