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THE CHRISTIAN, ECUMENISM AND THE BIBLE

(An article Written by Rev Ivan Foster in the late 1980s while he was minister of Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church. Its message is valid still despite the passage of time!!)

The word Ecumenism is derived from a Greek word, EIKOUMENE, which means 'the inhabited earth'.

We find this word in the following verses. "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed," Luke 2:1. "Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken," Luke 21:26.

The word Ecumenism is used today to designate that movement, the aim and objective of which is a united world-wide religious body, ever enlarging to include many religions and not merely those that profess allegiance to Jesus Christ.

Since 1910, when the modern church unity movement began to take its present form, the goal of the movement has become increasingly clear. For the ecumenist it is ONE UNITED CHURCH. The Bible makes plain, however, that the final destiny of the unity movement is the HARLOT CHURCH of Revelation 17. None of those involved with the efforts toward unity is acquainted with the final destination. Christ's comments on the religious leaders of His day are applicable to today's ecumenical leaders. "If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch," Matthew 15:14. The spiritually sightless pilgrims had not planned to end up in the ditch but they did! Paul referred to the religious developments of these last days in II Timothy 3:13. "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived." The false prophets are blind to the error into which they lead the gullible. No doubt, they are aware that it is incumbent upon them to depart from the doctrines formerly taught in their respective churches in order to be actively involved in the ecumenical movement. But I do not believe they can have any conception of the final error to which they are travelling.

Dr. S. G. Poyntz, Bishop of Connor, in a booklet entitled 'Journey Towards Union', said, 'Ecumenism can be defined as the process of discussing and recovering by the enabling of the Holy Spirit, the wholeness of the body of Christ. In that sense it is a unity movement,' page 10. He goes on to say, 'True spiritual unity must be expressed in history through the Church's institutional life and the ultimate aim of the Tripartite Conversations is that they will lead to organic unity of our three Churches in God's good time and in our time as well,' page 14. He asks the question: 'Are you prepared for a death to your own Church which will permit the resurrection of a much greater church?' page 25.

The tripartite talks to which he referred, involve the Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist churches in Ireland. Bishop Poyntz would have Protestants to be ready for a dying to their church in order to see the dream of a great united church brought about. He is but echoing the sentiments of many within the Protestant churches involved in ecumenism. Going back as far as 1954, an ecumenist, Stephen Neill, wrote in his History of the Ecumenical Movement: 'The final and terrible difficulty is that Churches cannot unite, unless they are willing to die. In a truly united church, there would be no more Anglicans or Lutherans or Presbyterians or Methodists. This spirit of ecclesiastical suicide must be encouraged by ecumenists if church unity is to progress.' But it must be noted who they are who are expected to commit suicide. They are the Protestants! Popery does not plan to die!

Roman Catholic involvement

While not planning to jump off any cliff, Rome is, nevertheless, involved in church unity, although it has to be said that Rome's position in the unity process is different from that of Protestants. Her view of the matter



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is: you must rejoin us in order to enjoy the unity that was broken at the Reformation. The Roman Catholic Church, at the time of the Second Vatican Council, issued a Decree on Ecumenism. It sets forth the official view of Rome on all matters pertaining to ecumenical affairs. Whatever sentiments may be expressed by priests and bishops, following various ecumenical meetings and events, they must be interpreted in the light of this Decree. Rome does not tolerate ecclesiastical entrepreneurs! The official line is the only one that will be sanctioned. I say this because many Protestants, and indeed, some believers are inclined to take at face value some of the apparently reformist views that may be expressed by Roman Catholic clerics from time to time. These expressions must ever be weighed in the light of Rome's official teaching. If there is a deviating from the official line then you may assume one of two things.

1. The cleric is being deliberately deceitful and does not mean what he says. He is merely seeking further to beguile Protestants involved with him in some ecumenical ventures.

2. The cleric may indeed be convinced that there is a need for change in his church and is identifying an area where he feels change should take place. He does not speak for the church of Rome, however, and it will soon become clear that this is so by his early removal from any position of authority. The case of the priest, Pat Buckley, now resident at Larne, in County Antrim, illustrates what I say. He has expressed revolutionary ideas about a number of issues including priests marrying. He will quote the Holy Scriptures to show that Peter was married. However, he is not inspired by the zeal that filled Martin Luther and the other Reformers. No! He is merely a liberal Roman Catholic desiring change but not conformity with the Word of God. If anything, his form of popery is worse, embracing as it does all the filth and immorality of Liberation Theology, the theology that may be summed up in the words of Judges 17:6: "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes." Buckley has, of course, been ostracised by Cardinal Daly.

Rome's official line

Rome's Decree on Ecumenism makes very clear what it is she wishes to achieve through the ecumenical meetings and gatherings in which she becomes involved. The Roman Catholic has a simple goal. The Protestant enters ecumenical talks and discussions with, what he terms, an open mind. He claims that he is willing to be led by the Holy Spirit. The Romanist has a clear target. As far as he is concerned he knows where the Holy Spirit is leading him. He is working to a plan. The so-called Protestant is not. The Romanist is under guidance, the guidance of the Decree on Ecumenism. The Protestant has no map, no rudder, no star, no compass. He threw all those overboard when he renounced the Holy Scriptures as the only rule of faith and practice and also rejected the Creeds and Confessions of the Reformation. Had he not renounced the Scriptures, he could not have engaged in dialogue with Rome in the first place, since such would be in contravention of the Bible's teaching.

The decree

What does the Decree on Ecumenism say? It says that the Ecumenical movement is fostered by the grace of the Holy Spirit. The Decree is a setting before all Catholics guidelines, helps and methods, by which they too can respond to the grace of this divine call. It teaches Roman Catholics that they must ever remember that Protestants are a lesser form of Christian! 'Our separated brethren, whether considered as individuals or as Communities and Churches, are not blessed with that unity which Jesus Christ wished to bestow on all those to whom He has given new birth into one body, and whom He has quickened to newness of life — that unity which the Holy Scriptures and the ancient Tradition of the Church proclaim. For it is through Christ's Catholic Church alone, which is the all-embracing means of salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained. It was to the apostolic college alone, of which Peter is the head, that we believe that our Lord entrusted all the blessings of the New Covenant, in order to establish on earth the one Body of Christ into which all those should be fully incorporated who belong in any way to the people of God, chapter 1, paragraph 3. This is clearly saying that in Rome alone may the fullness of salvation be obtained and, furthermore, to her alone have been entrusted the blessings of the New Covenant by which unity in Christ may be established.'



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'Little by little'

The Decree goes on to explain how that 'efforts are being made today to obtain that unity. Today, in many parts of the world, under the inspiring grace of the Holy Spirit, many efforts are being made in prayer, word and action to attain that fullness of unity which Jesus Christ desires. The sacred Council exhorts, therefore, all Catholic faithful to recognise the signs of the times and to take an active and intelligent part in the work of ecumenism,' chapter 1, paragraph 4. That paragraph continues: 'Such actions, when they are carried out by the Catholic faithful with prudent patience and under the attentive guidance of their bishops, promote justice and truth, concord and collaboration, as well as the spirit of brotherly love and unity. The result will be that, little by little, as the obstacles to perfect ecclesiastical communion are overcome, all Christians will be gathered, in a common celebration of the Eucharist, into the unity of the one and only Church, which Christ bestowed on His Church from the beginning. This unity, we believe, subsists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose, and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time.'

Unity, for the Roman Catholic, already exists as something which his church can never lose and, therefore, for other Christians to enjoy it they must simply return to the one and only Church, the Roman Catholic Church! Under ecumenism, the Romanist is to work for the little by little return of the Protestant separated brethren. While Protestant ecumenists (excuse the contradiction, please) urge their people to be ready for the death of their church, Rome urges her people to look for and strive toward the return of the separated brethren to the true fold. This is the reason why Protestants are prepared to accept compromise after compromise, sellout after sellout within the unity movement. They have been taught that such a course is the will of God. A document from the fifth assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1975 urged delegates to work for unity by quoting the following words from Lukas Vischer in *What Kind of Unity?* 'Our preparation for unity must therefore include reflection about true identity. The churches must be so permeated by prayer for unity that surrender and rediscovery of this true identity becomes part of the rhythm of their life (emphasis ours).'

Here in Ulster, surrender has become a daily routine. It is seen in the political and religious realm. At every level there has been a retreating from the views and ideals and standards that sprang from the rediscovery of God's Word at the Reformation. Surrender has become acceptable to those whose slogan was — NO SURRENDER! This Culture of Surrender has its roots in ecumenism. It is watered and fed daily by the propaganda machine of ecumenical christendom.

Anglicans and Rome

For some two decades now, Anglicans and Roman Catholics have been conducting discussions on unity under the auspices of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission. The Church of Ireland has been closely involved in the procedures. It has even had one of its bishops, H. R. McAdoo, hold the position of co-chairman. During this time of discussions, the First Commission met to discuss the matter of the 39 Articles (the doctrinal basis of Anglicanism) and the Eucharist, Ministry and Authority. The Second Commission dealt with the matter of Justification. They have reached agreement upon a number of important issues. These include agreement upon the pope becoming head of a reunited church. In 1987, in the first agreed statement of the Second Commission, it was stated clearly what the aim of the talks was. 'The purpose of our dialogue is the restoration of full ecclesial communion between us.'

The route toward restored communion that is being followed is the one mapped out by the Second Vatican Council. I will refer to only one of the agreements worked out by these talks, the one dealing with that most central of all doctrines, the death of Christ and how a sinner avails himself of its blessings. Rome teaches that it is through participation in the Eucharist. The person eating the bread and drinking the wine, after the priest has pronounced the words of consecration, is actually eating Christ's flesh and drinking His blood. Thus he partakes of eternal life. This teaching was utterly rejected by the Reformers as 'a blasphemous fable and a dangerous deceit' (Articles 28 and 31 of the Church of England and the Church of Ireland). Anglican theologians have changed their views according to the agreements they entered into through the International Commission. They now agree that: 'Through the prayer of thanksgiving, a word of faith addressed to



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the Father, the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ by the action of the Holy Spirit, so that in communion we eat the flesh of Christ and drink his blood,' The Final Report, page 16. Thus, that which was once 'repugnant to the plain words of Scripture,' Article 28, becomes an agreed doctrine. That which was once 'a blasphemous fable and a dangerous deceit,' Article 31, has become the Truth of God in the new ecumenical church.

Here then is the dying that ecumenists speak of and here is the little by little process that Rome speaks of! It is a dying of the candle of truth in the United Kingdom and it is a return, little by little, to the slavery and degradation of black popery from which God, in mercy, delivered our forefathers. Here in Ulster, we have seen death at work. The Gospel light has almost died out in the Methodist Church. It has likewise almost died out in the Presbyterian Church. In the Church of Ireland, you would find it very difficult to uncover a dozen ministers who really know the Lord. There is spiritual death in the land.

Spiritual death has spawned terrorism. It is a direct consequence of the rejecting of God and His Word by an ecumenically led generation. "And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye break my covenant: I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror," Leviticus 26:15-16.

If the Reformation was of God, and it was, then this unity movement is of the devil. If light and liberty were the fruits of the Reformation, and they were, then darkness and bondage can but result from ecumenism. If holiness and enlightenment of mind and soul were the blessings of the Reformation, and they were, then impurity and corruption, the hallmarks of Rome, will flood our land again.

What have we to say to those Christians who are in membership of churches involved in the ecumenical movement? It is a simple message — GET OUT!

We say this because:—

I. GOD'S WORD TELLS US TO GET OUT

God's people are a separated people: "For thou didst separate them from among all the people of the earth," I Kings 8:53. They ought not to be involved in that which is contrary to God's Word.

We were set apart in the decree of election. God's people have never been anything other than a separated people. From all eternity He has loved them and purposed to redeem them unto Himself. To Him they have ever been a separated people. "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love," Ephesians 1:4.

We were set apart at our conversion — "Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called," Jude 1. We were sanctified or set apart. How dare we then allow ourselves to become involved with that which is so contrary to God's Word? To be yoked with the ungodly is to deny our election and calling in Christ and to oppose the purpose of God to redeem a people.

We are under an obligation to maintain this separation. "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them," Romans 16:17. "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them," Ephesians 5:11. "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us," II Thessalonians 3:6. "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself," I Timothy 6:3-5. "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents,



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unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away," II Timothy 3:1-5.

We are to resist the attempts by the ungodly to destroy our separation by infiltrating the Church. "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ," Jude 3. There can be no mistaking the clear injunction given in these Scriptures. God's people can have no part nor lot in the evil ecumenical movement.

II. WE MUST GET OUT IN ORDER TO SAFEGUARD OUR OWN SPIRITUAL HEALTH

Separation is the very essence of Christ's religion. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world," James 1:27.

As an unhealthy environment causes disease in the body, so an evil environment will result in unhealthiness of the soul. "Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye are passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan; then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places: and ye shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land, and dwell therein: But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell. Moreover it shall come to pass, that I shall do unto you, as I thought to do unto them," Numbers 33:51-56. You forfeit God's blessing when you maintain links with those of whose ways and practices He disapproves.

If we would be holy, then we must strive to be separated from that which is sinful. "For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens," Hebrews 7:26. Conformity to Christ is the highest goal of the believer. That cannot be achieved if we walk with the devil's crowd. "Be not deceived: evil communications (company) corrupt good manners (morals)," 1 Cor. 15:33.

If we would be effective Christians, with the fragrance of Christ in our lives, we must be separated from the world. "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard, spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices: a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon. Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits," Song of Solomon 4:12-16. "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God," Romans 12:2. When we walk with those who are in dispute with God and His Word, as the ecumenists are, we indicate that we are in agreement with them. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Amos 3:3. If we share in the transgressions of evil-doers, then God says we shall share in their judgment. "And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues," Revelation 18:4. How many lives are befouled, besmirched with the stench and stains of ecumenism! As there went up from Sodom an evil stink to the nostrils of God, so there goes up from the activities and associations of ecumenism, an odour that cries out for God's judgment. Christian, separate yourself from this defilement, wash and be clean from this wickedness. It ought to be remembered by all Christians that contamination is caused, not only by embracing evil, but also by the merest TOUCH. "Be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing," 2 Corinthians 6:17.



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III. WE MUST GET OUT IN ORDER TO PRESERVE THE GOSPEL FOR OUR CHILDREN AND FUTURE GENERATIONS

If we raise our children in churches tainted with the lie of the devil can we be surprised if they imbibe those lies? Jehoshaphat, the Old Testament king of Judah, foolishly linked himself to the house of Ahab, the king of Israel. He even went as far, on one occasion, as saying, "I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses," I Kings 22:4. Ahab was an evil man, as was his son Ahaziah. Jehoshaphat's fellowship with them resulted in his son, Jehoram, marrying Ahab's daughter and learning the ways of Ahab. "Now when Jehoram was risen up to the kingdom of his father, he strengthened himself, and slew all his brethren with the sword, and divers also of the princes of Israel. Jehoram was thirty and two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, like as did the house of Ahab: for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife: and he wrought that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD," II Chronicles 21:4-6. The sad and tragic consequences of Jehoshaphat's folly had been prophesied: "And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD," 2 Chronicles 19:2.

The difficulties that many Christian parents encounter in their children, stem, for the most part, from a failure to observe God's rule of separation from sin within the home. This is true, not just of those Christians who refuse to separate from ecumenical denominations but also of those Christians who have left the ecumenical denomination but brought many of its worldly practices with them. They obeyed God regarding their denominational links but went no further. They had an outward separation but no separation of heart and soul. Consequently, their children show all the attitudes and notions of the world. It is frequently seen in Christian homes and families that the children disregard the parents' views and go their own way to the shame of their parents. Lot's family laughed at him when he relayed God's warning message to them. "And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons in law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law," Genesis 19:14. How many children treat as a laugh the message of the gospel when it is presented to them by their parents? Is this not because, as it was in the home of Lot, such a message had never before been seriously presented. The standards of God had little place in Lot's home. His children thought it funny, therefore, when their father suddenly became alarmed.

How different it is when God's Word rules the home. "Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel, Psalm 128.

Now

There is a great need for Christians, in obedience to God's Word; for the sake of their own spiritual wellbeing and for the salvation of their children, to separate TODAY from all that is contrary to God's Word. Each day that passes makes that action more difficult. Like Lot in Sodom, the family roots run deeper and deeper into the soil of the society to which their ecumenical church connections introduce them. If a person is truly converted there will come a point when they must, whatever the cost, own the Saviour and break with all that dishonours Him. But by that time the family of the disobedient believer will neither heed his exhortations nor regard his pleas. Leaving the apostasy will mean leaving his family, careless and indifferent, in the arms of unbelief facing certain damnation. This is the dreadful price paid for disobedience.

Who is on the Lord's side?
Who will serve the King?
Who will be His helpers



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Other lives to bring?
Who will leave the world's side?
Who will face the foe?
Who is on the Lord's side?
Who for Him will go?

By Thy call of mercy,
By Thy grace divine,
We are on the Lord's side;
Saviour, we are Thine.

Jesus, Thou hast bought us,
Not with gold or gem,
But with Thine own life-blood,
For Thy diadem.

With Thy blessing filling
Each who comes to Thee,
Thou hast made us willing,
Thou hast made us free.
By Thy great redemption,
By Thy grace divine,
We are on the Lord's side;
Saviour, we are Thine.

Fierce may be the conflict,
Strong may be the foe;
But the King's own army
None can overthrow.
Round His standard ranging,
Victory is secure;
For His truth unchanging
Makes the triumph sure.
Joyfully enlisting,
By Thy grace divine,
We are on the Lord's side;
Saviour, we are Thine.