



Preacher's Pen *by Gene McCoy*

It is understandable why people are confused by the religious picture in our culture. Attempts by denominational leaders to resolve the confusion have not been successful. But the answer has been contained in their various explanations all along. The question is whether or not the religious community has the boldness and courage to take action that is consistent with their rhetoric. Consider the implications of the denominational rationale and the reasonable applications it suggests.

Denominational leaders have tried to clear up the confusion by downplaying the significance of doctrine. They have insisted that doctrine should not present an obstacle to unity. In fact, they celebrate their magnanimity that is displayed by their cooperation in various initiatives, despite conflicting and contradictory teachings. Further, they give the distinct impression that doctrinal differences are not only to be expected, but that they are actually good. We might even conclude from what some say that the ability of men to overlook doctrinal differences somehow accentuates the power and grace of God that transcends contradictory doctrines. And we are to believe this somehow glorifies the One Who revealed what we must practice and teach.

In connection with this they also insist that the “name above the door” is not important. It doesn’t matter what you call yourself or your group, they say, so long as your intention is to glorify God and to serve His Son. Portraying unity despite human designations that communicate division is their goal.

Furthermore, we have a responsibility, they say, to present to the watching world a singular goal of glorifying God by relegating to a secondary status doctrinal distinctions among us. The main thing, according to them, is to present a united front — or at least the appearance of unity — pretending that the spiritually uninitiated cannot see through their sanctified smoke.

The best intentions of the denominational leaders aside, their attempts to gloss over the obvious has not persuaded the world. Something more and different must be done to convince the world that this is nothing more than religious rhetoric. This could be

effectively and easily accomplished if the denominational bodies actually practiced what they have been preaching.

I like the emphasis upon unity. And I appreciate the sentiment that we should all just consider ourselves to be Christians. But sentiment is all it is, apparently, since the denominational groups persist in distinguishing themselves with designations unknown and unrecognized by Jesus — at least if the Bible is the authoritative source of knowledge.

If the denominations are sincere and serious, as we are eager to acknowledge, there is a very simple and straightforward way to practice what they preach. Assuming they really mean it when they say the “name above the door” is not important, that doctrine should not be allowed to divide God’s people and that we should relegate all such indicators of division to a secondary status in favor of so-called unity, there is only one logical and honest thing to do. It is the only initiative that will prove the credibility of those whose rhetoric we have summarized.

In the interest of producing clarity and removing confusion, all the denominational groups should actually come together under one banner, one name and one organization that demonstrates the veracity of their claims. Dispense with the designations that divide them (Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Lutheran, etc.) and agree upon one designation by which all can be known. This will produce some credibility to their ecumenical mirage. But even that would constitute merely a consortium and not the church. Not until they also dispense with their creedal statements in favor of the Bible alone can they have the opportunity to be known as “Christian,” by which the church in the Bible was designated.

This is our plea, specifically that all God-honoring and Bible believing people would unite upon the authority of the Word and the deity of Jesus, forsaking their denominational loyalties and creedal statements to accept the Bible as the only authority in matters pertaining to faith and practice and to adopt the name of the Savior to the exclusion of human leaders and systems. Then we could present to the watching world the true unity for which Jesus prayed (John 17).

