

Is Christ Divided? Locating the Possibility of the True Church

by Ephraim Radner

Some time ago, at the beginning of my ordained ministry, I worked for several years in the African nation of Burundi, with the Anglican Church there. I have frequently spoken, quite genuinely, of the enormous gifts that time provided me through God's grace: learning the absolutely crucial character of the gospel in people's lives; being drawn into the depths of the Scriptures in the sheer power and authority as God's Word; perceiving, in an immediate fashion, the fruits of holiness. I could say much more. On the other hand, I tend not to speak very often about another aspect of my time in Burundi: the terrible burden it placed upon my faith in the Church of Christ. This was a country of enormous political turmoil over the years, one filled with violence and deception of the deepest, cruelest, and most imbedded kind. And, alas, I found churches — not just Anglican, but all of them, across the board, from the Roman Catholics to the Free Methodists — horribly complicit in this history. Indeed, between evangelical and catholic, between clergy and lay, the church was peopled with liars, cheats, hypocrites, and in some cases, perhaps many, with murderers. And dealing with this realization over my four years simply drained me.

When, in early 1985, I was arrested, interrogated, and deported in the course of a few hours, on fabricated charges of political subversion, the instigators included, as I later discovered, one of my own seminary students and the diocesan treasurer. Oh well. But I confess to something: as the plane that took me away swooped up and over the country, I looked below, breathed a sigh of relief, and said, "thank God I am out of here!" The church will do that to you sometimes. Indeed, I know many people today, in the midst of our Anglican struggles, who have felt the same relief, emerging from the same burden of anger and disappointment, as they have flown away, as it were, from the ecclesial scenes of intolerable compromise.

But that is hardly the whole story, is it? Because even as I watched the country of Burundi disappear beneath me, and as my anger was lifted by my relief at escape, another voice began to emerge within me: "you are not free of them; you should not want to free of them; you will never be free of them...." It's that voice I want to consider now.

i. Division as the face of Unity

If you hadn't noticed, division is more interesting than unity to most of us; like any good debate, when the sparks fly, and the blood boils, and rapiers are unsheathed, the *frisson* of excitement ripples through the room. This is one of the few reasons why some organizations survive at all, like the SBL or AAR or parliaments and the UN, or perhaps even the synods of our churches. If I sound flip, and seem to ignore what I have just said a moment ago — the division can also be the face of complicit murder, which is hardly enjoyable, it is because, like it or not, even murder is exciting to the murderers. Or so it seems. By contrast, no one even seems to know what unity is; and its profile rises only when we can have a good argument about it. But what if they are, division and unity, in a sense the same thing, only lived in different ways? Maybe unity would be more interesting then; who knows?

The relation, at any rate, of division and unity in the light of Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior, and to whom we are joined by baptism and confession, is a strange one. On the one hand, Jesus tells his disciples — his disciples, not the world at large — "Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division; for henceforth in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against her mother" and so on (Luke 12:51f.). Well, we say, this is the world of which he is speaking, not the Church. Although, whom do we really recognize here, if not our own image in a mirror? And "who is my mother and my brother and my

sister?” (Mt. 12:48). In any case, here comes the Lord to do this work of division, yet he prays, as we do not cease pointing out, “that they all may be one, even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee ... so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17:21) — I would unify the very the world I divide, that they may see the oneness I bring. When Paul asks, “Is Christ divided?”

(1 Cor. 1:13), we might assume the answer is already given: No!, we shout. But, is there not a part of us, after a pause, who say, “well ... yes *and* no”?

In any case, we know that “a kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls” (*cf.* Lk. 11:17*f.*), and a “great falling” it will be, he tells us (Mt. 8:27). But it is a falling, literally, such as Jesus himself performs upon the ground at Gethsemane (Mk. 14:35); such as Jesus himself embodies by “falling and dying” like a grain of wheat (Jn. 12:24); such as do all those in the presence of the falling and dying one, worshiping him in dazzled and blinded awe, like Saul on the road to Damascus (Lk. 17:16; Acts 9:4). Division brings a fall with it; yet the fall is that of the Savior’s epiphany. Is Christ divided? Yes and no ...

The point is that division is bound to the Lord of life himself — bound to his very coming and presence. “Behold,” says aged Simeon to Mary, “this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel” (Lk. 2:34). When he speaks clearly of his own death, he brings division, and many “draw back and no longer go with him” (Jn. 6:66); Or when he declares that “I lay down [my life] of my own accord, and I have power to take it up again,” we are told that “there was again a division among the Jews because of these words” (Jn. 10:18). Life and death, death and life: the division between the two strikes at the root of human existence before God.

It lies, indeed, at the very root of creating love itself. We all know that sin marks a “separation” from God, and hence Israel is told to separate from that which is sinful, including from a profane people (*cf.* Neh. 9:2; 13:3; Is. 59:2; Lev. 10:10; Ezek. 22:27). To be with God, as Nehemiah tells us, Israel must “separate” herself from those of “foreign descent.” But this separation lies at the center of creation: — God separates, or literally “divides” light and darkness, waters and earth (firmament); day and night (stars) (Gen. 1:4, 6, 14), and through this division he creates what is “good.” The word, *badal*, speaks of the same act that represents the distinctive integrity of divine holiness: to live before God is to be divided one from another, and turned, alone, towards the one who creates. It is among my favorite sayings from Bérulle: “love separates,” that is, love is that which gives life to something outside itself; it moves away, it allows for distance and even death. And so love creates the cascade of division that finally embraces death itself.

What then is unity? It is not something that can cleanse itself of division, since if it is a unity of love, it is born of division and bound to division. But a unity that can defeat death itself is one therefore, and only one, that turns and faces its own genesis, as it were; it stoops, and assumes its contours. So Paul writes in Ephesians, in the great declaration of Christian unity: “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near *in the blood* of Christ ... He is our peace [and] he has broken down the dividing wall of hostility... in his flesh” (Eph. 2:13*ff.*). The “one new man,” as Paul writes, *hes kainos anthropos*, “in one body through the cross.” His blood, his flesh, his cross — one.

We cannot escape the paradox that links the division of death and life to the unity of reconciliation! Indeed, except as we are one with Jesus, the Law of Separations in every respect remains as stated in the Torah — the separation between clean and unclean, holy and profane, chosen and unchosen, Jew and Gentile, light and dark. This is the great Levitical claim: these divisions are the stuff of creation, the basis upon which life exists and God’s love is extended. There is truth in the modern (but also ancient) sense that “diversity” is bound to life — that is, created life — and thus mortality as well. Hence, death is evaded only as the division is borne by the one new man, God himself in the flesh, who “*en heautou duo*,” in his own literally agonized self gathers two together (Eph. 2:15).

We might wish to escape this paradox; indeed, there is an entire history of ecclesiological action and reflection that is founded on such a will to escape, a history that now reflects a major part of our tradition. But escape we cannot, because this paradox constitutes the spiritual reality of judgment and the Day of the Lord itself — that is, the goal of history — when “brother gives up brother,” and even the mountains cannot hide us; and all that remains is love and endurance, of the kind that Jesus himself presents. To love and endure is to live. (Lk. 23:30: mountains; *cf.* Hos. 10:8; Rev. 6:12-16; Mk. 13:12; Mt. 24:12-13).

ii. The social inevitability of this paradox

There is a lot here upon which to build some substantive, I think, theological reflection upon the Church herself. And I will come back to this. But let me first speak to the very real historical location in which some of these Scriptural elements may reflect themselves, ones that impinge upon us. At the beginning of the 21st century, certainly in the more developed nations of the West, but also in many emerging nations, the question of, indeed the contrast between running from division or enduring it, as somehow evaluated in the light of the form of Jesus, has some renewed interest. For in a major way, a new social reality is now in place that has actually pressed this contrast upon us, driving the Nehemiah model back onto the One Man model despite ourselves. That is, for reasons of simple social arrangement, the cultural distance that either geography or the privatism of social atomism permitted for the model of escape is no longer a vital option. Not only have we all been thrown together physically more and more, unable to find the space of separation; but our societies themselves have demanded of us a kind of engagement in interdependent responsibility that cannot be evaded because it is now increasingly obligatory in a legal sense. It is a law of civil life, for example, that we pay taxes to support those whom we may hate. Indeed, we stand in line with them at the ballot box.

Sectarianism, then, has become more and more impossible, geographically, but also culturally; at the same time, the notion that individuals can simply find their own true commitments on the basis of personal choice, and the aggregations of personal choice, while still very much pursued, has become more and more difficult to sustain as a form of maintained integrity: lowest common denominator commitments emerge instead as the means of providing context for choices to be made, for movement among choices.

It is interesting to see this developed and still developing dynamic at work in its early stages even at the time of the Reformation. I want to commend a recently published book by Benjamin Kaplan, *Divided By Faith* (Harvard, 2007), that, for the first time, lays out in one place some of the forms in which Protestant and Catholic, or Protestant and Protestant or even Christian and Jew, began to live with one another even at the very *origins* of their separating projects. Toleration, as Kaplan writes, was not something that was, for a long time, happily embraced. It was, he says, “an embarrassment” and “from a confessional standpoint, [...] even a sin, though perhaps, as some figured, a lesser sin than the bloody alternatives” (p.143). As many expressed it, permitted division was to be merely “provisional,” until such time as “through God’s grace, agreement is reached over religion,” in the words of the Peace of Westphalia treaty in 1648 (although even then, the possibility of such agreement without “God ... [allowing] a miracle to occur” was deemed unlikely). All the same, people very quickly, and through profound channels, found ways to live together that, in a sense, predated legal toleration and offered alternatives to religious conflict and even division. These included fictive “private spaces” — like well-known if discretely modeled chapels — where prohibited religions were given tacit and even often explicit room to operate within an otherwise off-limits civil sphere; it also included the most subversive of boundary-destroying practices, that is, mixed marriages, the bane today of Catholic and Jewish identity-protection. It is still the case that Romeo and Juliet can often topple Inquisition and Sanhedrin both.

But let me note two particular practices that Kaplan analyzes, because each moves in two very different directions with respect to Christian unity, although in an odd way. The first is the so-called *auslauf*, or egress. The peculiar political arrangements in the Empire during the 16th and 17th centuries, bound to a patchwork of jurisdictions and treaties, meant that Protestant and Catholic worship was variously protected, sometimes in the same place, but more often in adjoining areas. In Vienna, for instance, Protestantism was finally forbidden within the city limits, but not outside in the countryside. The result was that every Sunday, Viennese Protestants by the thousands would take a walk into outlying areas, like Hernals, to worship in legitimate Lutheran churches. The occasion became a traditional outing, or *auslauf*, originally somewhat confrontative, but finally somewhat festive. All throughout the Empire, or in Switzerland, this kind of official arrangement took place. The fiction of religious unity within a given area was retained — in Vienna, we are all Catholics! — but so was the possibility of different religious commitments co-existing: as long as they didn't actually worship in the same place.

The second practice I want to note is that of the *simultaneum*. These were cities or villages where Catholic and Protestant were *unable* to find separate worship spaces, due to geography and poverty, and where the civil authorities insisted that they live together. The result: a shared church building. There are examples of these churches in Alsace and southern Germany in particular, and the architecture and ornament reflect this strange arrangement: the nave is plain and unadorned — this is for the Protestants — while the chancel is extravagantly decorated with images of Mary and so on — this, for the Catholics. They would hold their services, obviously, at different hours on Sunday, and often use different doors to enter and exit the building. Yet the space — the dedicated, even consecrated space — was in fact shared. Now, we are talking about the 16th century here, not some avant-garde ecumenical endeavor of the late 20th century, somewhat frowned upon by the Vatican.

The long-term outcomes to the *auslauf*, on the one hand, and of the *simultaneum*, on the other go in different directions. Keeping the integrity of confessional boundaries intact, even while agreeing to live together in theory, finally led to the disappearance of one or the other group. In the end, it was not viable to commute long distances on foot every Sunday. Vienna lost all her Protestants, even to this day. She has also lost many of her Catholics in the secularizing culture of the day, but that is another story. On the other hand, the areas where the *simultanea* were enforced, Catholic and Protestant put down their roots over the long-term. Indeed, toleration flourished.

But that, finally, is not the end of the story either. For with toleration came a merging of understandings, and a final cultural disappearance itself. Where, for instance, the Mennonites in Holland were finally embraced as a legally tolerated religious body, after years of *de facto* integration, they found their own commitments gradually blunted and finally worn away within the peaceful coexistence that had turned into a religious melting-pot. Thieleman van Braght, who wrote a Mennonite martyrology in the mid-1600's, lamented the loss of "ardor" within the accepting Dutch society, where now intermarriage had ruined his co-religionists' confessional integrity; indeed, as Kaplan writes, "Van Braght regarded toleration as a greater threat to the soul than persecution" (p. 264).

So the challenge comes to this: as separate lives become impossible, as society demands integration and in fact receives it willingly, for it comes bearing the gifts of peace and prosperity, how live upon the persecuting blade that has always cut and sculpted the figure of Christian testimony? The edge of witness seems to lie in a certain kind of proximity! Not close enough to merge, but so close as to be "girded by another and carried where you do not wish to go," as the Risen Jesus says of Peter (Jn 21:19). We are called to be one; but our life depends upon the sharp edge of division! Give me peace, through your sword, O Lord!

iii. Redefining ecumenical tropes

What is this proximity of pain, as it were? I stress this uncomfortable character, because the notion of being “one” but not “submerged” is a common ideal for ecumenical life, indeed for the Church as a whole. Much of the ecumenical movement’s evolution within the 20th century has been shaped by the increasing insistence that “unity” cannot mean “uniformity”; it is rather a unity-in-diversity that somehow maintains the integrity of individual and local realities, even political wills, as it were. We see this insistence on the part of official ecumenical spokespeople like Konrad Raiser (*cf. Ecumenism in Search of a New Vision*, III [1992], in Kinnamon and Cope, p. 74). The rise of Trinitarian conceptions and justifications for such a unity track this growing concern to protect local political will, that itself arises from at least two sources: first the very rise of liberalism itself, through 19th and 20th centuries, as an increasingly accepted and even divinely sanctioned mechanism for ordering civil society; second, the desire, on the part especially of Eastern Orthodox and some Protestant churches in their engagement with Roman Catholicism, to emphasize an alternative to papal centralism. In many ways, the popularity of Trinitarian communion-ecclesiology is bound to this *political* set of concerns, and its deployment by free-church apologists like Miroslav Volf as well as by Catholic reformers like Catherine LaCugna, not to mention radical, and in some ways revisionist theologians like Eugene Rogers shows how the search for some kind of religious buttress to at least a certain kind of autonomous movement can at least find a home within traditional and even fundamental theological categories. But it seems to me, nonetheless, that the virtue of “unity-in-diversity” hardly says what needs to be said about ecclesial unity, even when it is buttressed by substantive Trinitarian claims, as is now common.

In the first place, the notion itself is a theological abstraction that has little bearing on the actual account of Jesus’ relation to the Father, and/or Spirit, and therefore even in its Trinitarian symbology is inadequate to, as it were, “the facts.” For the “facts” are that the Son only does what he is told — “not my will, but thine”; and that, despite worries in the past over monotheism — the claim that there is only “one will” in the Incarnate Son, a divine one — all talk of “diversity” of wills makes sense only if that diversity is a subjected one, a submitted and abandoned one. Indeed, the perichoretic interests of the present, with their balletic analogies — the “dance of the Trinity” — are almost blasphemous in their obscuring of the cry of abandonment upon the Cross that marks that actual Trinitarian “giving up” of the Son by the Father, and the Spirit’s driving complicity within this act, “offered up” in “blood” by him (Heb. 9:14).

If we are to speak of a Trinitarian “communion” in such a context — and such language is not actually ever applied Scripturally — we must note that the movement of unity lunges in an almost annihilating direction with respect to diversity, something 17th century Catholic theologians disturbingly noted as they picked up the sacrificial nature of the “holocaust” imagery of the New Testament (*e.g.* Eph. 5:2): the Son is “consumed,” and his unity with the Father, through the Spirit, is one in which the Trinity as a whole is ordered in a particular way, not in a balance of wills, but in a disequilibrium of shattering proportions. If, then, we speak of the Trinitarian basis for unity, it is, as it were, squeezed out in form that is unique — the Jesus-form, we might say, that takes its contours from the coordinated will of God, but that defines coordination in just this way. And this Jesus-form cannot be given in the choreography of a concrete diversity, in the way that ecumenists have tended more recently to urge; an urging, after all, that in large measure derives from a political need to protect existing specific wills in the present, when it is in fact the present that needs to be unprotected, exposed, and torn down, just as the Son of Man has exposed himself to the smiters, so bearing all things (Is. 53; 1 Pet. 2:24; Mt. 8:17).

It is this Jesus-form, then, that must order the notion of the Church’s own unity, not only in its contours but also in its timeliness and chronology. Just as much ecumenical discussion has tracked with the apprehension of political engagements across differences, so it has also tracked with the basic and immovable reality of historical incompleteness, of hopes not being fulfilled, of desires thwarted or

set aside. And the modern articulations of historical consciousness itself marks an adaptation to such immovable obstacles to religious claims, just as enlightenment and then Marxist constructions of historical process marked successive reactions to perceived Christian social shipwreck. The progressive sense of present-tense ecumenical engagement works well with this: we are “already” one somehow, but not yet wholly so, or fully or deeply; unity is a matter, then, “of degrees,” that takes place over time and that works *with* the tools and perceptions of given social arrangements, cultures, and commitments. Obviously, this kind of assertion, however made, is also a way of protecting the present, while still claiming some openness to an undetailed future. And the notion of present-tense progressive unity is not wrong, but *only if* it is bound to the Jesus-form of time itself. Here, for instance, the Gospel narratives are indeed critical, especially those of Matthew and Luke. We have notations of Jesus’ “growth” in wisdom and grace and stature. But they are only marks in an otherwise uncharted silence, that moves emblematically from an initiation of misread glory bound up with “Rachel’s weeping” and desperate exile, and long years of what the tradition has understood as a demanded and still demanding “hiddenness” in Nazareth. If time marks a movement and a direction, where is body located at any given time, how is it handled, and where is the body heading?

The earliest statements of the ecumenical movement, still young and hopeful, curiously and nonetheless, insisted on speaking of “death” and “new life” in this way — the death of forms and even church forms, as New Delhi (3.) put it — “nothing less costly can finally suffice” — and a new life that was carried through somehow from this past and through and upon which and even in which unity, the oneness of the Church, is given. Hence, form and time were joined in this peculiar process. “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn. 12:24). The one who is alone must die so that multiplicity flourishes. And this is the “way” — the time and form — this, as Jesus goes on to say, “serving me and following me, so that where I am, there shall my servant be also.”

One of the more fraught terms used, only more recently, in the theological debate over Christian unity is that of “solidarity” (about which I spoke earlier today at the theology luncheon). The word, borrowed by the Roman Catholic Church from the political secular vocabulary of late 19th century social-welfare liberalism, and merged with its more radical meanings in 20th century socialist jargon, came to the fore as a key concept in liberation theology’s reconstitution of the Church’s identity in terms of its commitment to and with the poor. *Solidus* — a world with same root as *salus* or wholeness and health — bound to, obligated to, in its legal sense. Whatever one makes of the ideological implications of the term, I think it fair to say generally but also technically that “solidarity” as the political shape of the Church: solidarity marks the Church’s common form and practice: “where I am, there shall my servant be also”; there, where is the body, and what is done to the body, there you will find the fullness and oneness of the Church. Or, as Jesus says in Luke 17:37, “where [literally] the body is, there the vultures will gather.” Come see the body of our Lord, and what he has done with it, to whom he has *joined* it in solidarity, and there see the Church as one.

Cf. Jeremiah 26: This is the prophet of judgment against the people. In a real way, he is “set against them,” at least in terms of God’s word — but not in his flesh. “But as for me, I am in your hands” (26:14). Do with me what you will. In this, Jeremiah stands in contrast to Uriah the prophet, whose words are just, but who flees to Egypt, like all the other rebels at the end of the book. And like them, he dies, while Jeremiah, in his own way, sets the stage for the solidarity of Christ Jesus, that is, the one, the Son of Man, who is most fully “delivered into the hands of men” (Mark 9:31), utterly willingly.

This is not, in itself, a strange thought for the Christian (*cf.* Paul in Acts 28:17!); and yet it seems completely impossible for the Church to say, who has always sought to be “holy, blameless and irreproachable” (Col. 1:22)! It is, further, something that Catholic and Protestant and Orthodox together have had trouble grasping: as God the Father gives His Son, through the Spirit to and for the godless, so the Jesus-form is that of life given to the godless And therefore, the Church is in

the odd position of seeking her unity, or finding it rather in the Lord, as the godless, the Christian sinners, give *themselves*, with Him, to the godless. The godless to the godless, the divided to the divided, and thus in Christ: one.

iv. The character of the Church's unity

What then shall we conclude? Where shall we find the one true Church, a question that has haunted Christians from early years, and in a special way since the 16th century?

1. We must follow the suggestion, made by, among others, Rowan Williams, that the creedal marks of the Church are spoken truly of Jesus first, and of the Church only as she lives in and through Him. Williams writes, "The simple thing I want to say is that all four marks of the church are about Jesus Christ. The church is one because Jesus Christ is one; the church is holy because Jesus Christ is holy; the church is catholic because Jesus Christ is the saviour of all; the church is apostolic because, as the Father has sent Jesus, so Jesus sends us. In other words, if we are to understand the nature of the church at all, we are to understand who Jesus Christ is and what he does." And furthermore, *where* Jesus is doing what he does as he is, "Our oneness is our common rootedness [...] in Jesus Christ, *being where Jesus is*" (*Church's Hope Only in Christ*, 2005).

The one true Church is where Jesus is. But "where" is Jesus? Indeed, it is because of the paradox of division and unity — that they represent the burden of the body Jesus bears — that we can truly and not just metaphorically say of the Church that she is one, for Jesus has come *to* the Church first, and thereby *carries* the Church, wholly, *in soliditate*, as one by the Lord who is one with her. So that we can say, "impossible" for the Church. "Peter declared to [Jesus], 'Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away'" (Mt. 26:33). And he said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death" (Lk. 22:33). Indeed, he says further, "Lord, why cannot I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you" (Jn. 13:37). And none of this is, in the first instance, true at all. But of Jesus, we can say that he loved them "to the end" (Jn. 13:1). This is the solidarity of God with the godless.

So, when we speak of "communion" with respect to the Church, it is not a communion with one another first, but with Jesus as He is bound to and one with the godless. Hence, *koinonia* in the NT is never used of the Church in the first instance (nor for that matter, is it used of the persons and nature of God). *Koinonia* or communion is a fellowship first *with* Christ in his sufferings, and with the Holy Spirit who gives the Son away (1 Cor. 1:9; Phil. 2:10; 3:1; Eph. 3:9). Even the notion of a *koinonia* among the churches instanced by the contribution of money, in 2 Corinthians, is based on the one who, "though he was rich, he became poor for us" (2 Cor. 8:9; 8:4; 9:13; *cf.* Rom. 15:26). The *koinonia* of Acts 2:42, is precisely the apostles' "breaking of the bread," that is, the *koinonia* in the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16). So the Church is one only but fully as she is bound to Jesus and this form in time.

2. Second, and light of this, our unity is the place, therefore, where the church is *taken* by Jesus as Jesus himself goes somewhere. It is indeed a historical form, with a time and a progression, though understood not so much as ameliorative as simply where Jesus ends up in time. And so the Church's claims — about anything to do with *her*, with her declarations, her works, her strategies, her own ameliorative projects, will "end up" in a place where they are laid bare as dross, like Peter. "You will be bound where you do not want to go" (Jn. 21:18). And who shall carry you? Jesus himself. And where? Wheresoever he goes: "So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go forth to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured" (Heb. 13:12*f.*).

So Rowan Williams appends a story from the Desert Fathers, about a monk, Makarios the Great, who, at the monastic gathering where another monk is being quite properly disciplined, rises up and leaves with him. Makarios, with the others, condemns rightly — the monk in question has truly sinned; but Markarios must also *follow*, for who accompanies the condemned and expelled sinner?

“That too is a challenge of unity,” Williams notes. For that is “where Jesus is and has gone,” and thus where also the Church is being borne.

3. This must be experienced as a kind of bearing a contradiction. There will be — and now I come to something most difficult, that is really moving to the actual and concrete point of what I want to say, but that I can only point to in but an outline, because it is something forced upon us, not strategized and constructed: Blasphemy is at the center of our unity. Outside the camp, there is cursing, and the bearing of a curse, by the one who became a “curse” for us (Gal. 3:13). This is more than a figure of speech: Jesus — something I have tried to describe in my discussion of Leviticus 24:10^{ff} — dies as a divine *mamzer* or illegitimate offspring, who is a blasphemer (so he is accused repeatedly of being), and in this way, carries upon him the blasphemy of those, like the bastard son of Shelomith, who cannot find a place within Israel apart from blasphemy. There are things that the unity of Jesus’ own movement through time must carry even in their offense against our better judgments.

I am reminded here of the great Catholic novelist of Japan, Shusaku Endo’s, novel *Silence*, where the 17th century Jesuit missionary Fr. Rodrigues is faced with the unspeakable suffering being visited upon hundreds of his flock by the persecuting authorities — torture of the most unimaginable kind. But if a Christian steps on an image of Jesus or Mary — a *fumie*, as it was called — they are released. And now the magistrate comes to the missionary: step upon the image of Christ, he is told, and his entire flock will be spared. He resists, he struggles. Perhaps you know the story: “The priest raises his foot. In it he feels a dull, heavy pain. This is no mere formality [as he had been told]. He will now trample on what he has considered the most beautiful thing in his life, on what he has believed most pure, on what is filled with the ideals and the dreams of man. How his foot aches! And then the Christ in bronze speaks to the priest: ‘Trample! Trample! I more than anyone know of the pain in your foot. Trample! It was to be trampled on my men that I was born into the world.’” The priest placed his foot on the *fumie*. Dawn broke. And far in the distance the cock crew” (trans. William Johnston, New York: Taplinger Publ. Co, 1969; p. 171).

If you rebel against such an example, well you should. It is something only Jesus can do — this invitation. Are we not called to hold on to and uphold our Eucharist, bishops, good doctrine, whatever marks the “essentials” of our Gospel? So we are; but not for the sake of unity, nor even for the sake of holiness and truth. These demand nothing of our acts to maintain their integrity. Rather, we hold on to these things insofar as we accept their repudiation as painful. Indeed, where would our oneness be in Christ and through Christ and thus with one another, if it were not given in the teeth of our rebellions?

I have said this before, and with much concern by others in response: seeking agreement, seeking commonality, seeking concord over doctrine and discipline is a good thing; but the “one mind,” the “same mind,” the “same love,” the “full accord” of which Paul speaks in Philippians is received through having the “mind of Christ,” which is that of the one who give up the form of God for that of a slave and emptied himself into death (Phil. 2:1-11). That is what Paul says. That is not a denial of God, but a suffering of the contradiction of obedience in unity with the world. And it gives rise to the exalted life of God’s redemption.

I, an Anglican — or a Catholic or a Methodist or Lutheran — can be a Pentecostal; I, a catholic Anglican can be an evangelical Anglican; I, a member of TEC can be a member of another province within Anglicanism, and vice-versa; I, an Anglican, can be a Methodist; I, a catholic can be a Protestant. I can, not because my standards of truth have been cast away, but because the standards can be suffered, in their very contradiction by the place where I will go with Jesus. But only our faith makes this possible — not just to perceive it, but to apprehend it in its full sense of reception. Unity is by faith in this sense, just as is all righteousness, as Peter says of Jesus himself, who “trusted in him who judges justly” (1 Pet. 2:23; cf. 4:19), and therefore neither “reviled” nor “threatened,” as well he might be expected to have done, but instead only received. And because unity is always beyond our

own grasp, this is precisely why we can give ourselves to it without fear or compromise or limit, such that the blasphemies intrinsic in such self-giving to the godless will always be transfigured by the power of God. Always.

4. And in this sense, all unity within the Church is literally “unilateral,” it is one-sided in its motive force. This is probably the most controversial aspect of what I am suggesting in the face of the standard conception of unity as a demanding “reciprocity” and “mutuality” and so on: we are one because one Person, the New Man, has joined himself to us, utterly and without remainder and despite the contradictions to his nature and his Name or dominion that our own place constitutes. And so the oneness of the Church is given in this uni-directional offering, this lonely solidarity, this unreciprocal act and history. It is only in this way, but wholly because of this way, that we can speak of “unity” within the Church of Christ, not just the Anglican Communion or whatever other ecclesial aggregation we identify. And this is not an abstraction or a future-oriented or eschatological orientation, the initial thrust awaiting its fulfillment; this is the visible unity of the Church itself. It is possible to see it — not in the structures of this or that church or this or that convention nor this or that document; but in this or that *peripatesis* with the Lord from one place to another.

The church looks like Jesus. That is the most important thing a Christian can understand about ecclesiology, about commitment and discipleship; about truth. It is, in other words, time to get back on the plane and fly over the oceans once again, in return. Like Philip, taken up by the Spirit of our Lord.