

It's Time to End This Divisive Scandal

Today, Oct. 31, is the 501st anniversary date of Martin Luther's nailing of his 95 Theses on the Church door at Wittenberg, Germany.

Martin Luther had hoped that he would be able to reform and purify the church. Instead, the church split into a Catholic branch and a Protestant branch. Then came religious wars, with millions of Catholic and Protestant martyrs. Peace and some level of tolerance finally prevailed, but the division continues.

Nor was it the first such division. The Jewish church was driven out at the Council of Nicea, the Nestorian church at the Council of Ephesus, and the Coptic church at the Council of Chalcedon. The Orthodox East and the Roman Catholic West formally split in 1054. And throughout church history, beginning with Frankish King Clovis, kings were sent to destroy heretical groups. The scandal of division has stalked the church from the beginning.

Today there are thousands of Christian denominations, each with its own unique set of beliefs and practices. All of them know that Christ prayed, "May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me" (see John 17:23), but they do not know how to get past their doctrinal and governmental differences. So the scandal has been allowed to continue, even at the cost of casting doubt on Jesus and the church.

Finally, in the latter 20th century, things began to change when Christians began to take a fresh look at Christ's prayer for unity. Jesus prayed that, just as He was in the Father and the Father was in Him, the believers would be in Christ and

thus be brought to complete unity (John 17:20-23). Our unity is in Christ, not in our doctrines, traditions or church government. The apostle Paul also recognized this, and urged the believers not to look down on their “weaker” brothers who had different practices (Rom. 14:1-23).

Unity is not uniformity. Rather, it is unity in diversity, where the special giftings of other Christian traditions add to the richness of our Christian heritage.

Let no one be judged for their doctrines so long as they are in Christ. Rather let us become friends of God by keeping Christ’s command to love each other (John 15:12-14) and focus on God’s business (John 15:15).

Let us end the scandal of division so the world will know that God sent Christ to save us. {eoa}

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