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Reformation
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1. To encourage *reformation* in local Christian churches worldwide.
2. To promote the cause of *revival* and spiritual awakening through prayer and the provision of resources to aid Christian leaders.

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The views expressed in this publication should be considered as the personal opinions of the authors and are not to be taken as an official editorial perspective.

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Editor-in-Chief:

John H. Armstrong

Associate Editors:

Ardel Caneday

T. M. Moore

P. Andrew Sandlin

Thomas N. Smith

Managing Editor:

Anita Armstrong

Design and Production:

Ragont Design

Subscriptions Manager

Stacy Kifer

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INTRODUCTION



John H. Armstrong

No one who considers the teaching of Jesus seriously for two minutes will doubt that the Savior's will is that all his people live together in unity. It is the Savior who prays that those "who will believe in me through their word . . . may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:20b-21).

The unity of the one people of God, *especially* in their life together in congregations, is also at the heart of Paul's regular appeals to first-century congregations (1 Corinthians 11:12-14; Ephesians 2:14-18; 4:3, 13; Colossians 3:15, et al). We must confess and work out the reality that God does not have *two* churches, *two* bodies, or *two* (or more) parties within each congregation of Christ. The Bible word is clear here: "one."

Church history, at least since the fourth century, sadly reveals that we have often missed this reality. The "one" church is *not* Roman Catholic, or Orthodox, or Protestant. It is Christian! All who are in Jesus Christ, by a vital union created by the Holy Spirit, are in this one body. This is not a Baptist body or a Methodist body. It is not a Lutheran body or an Anglican one. Nor is it Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox. It is *Christ's* body. The best our labels can do is express some of the particular doctrinal emphases that exist across the

whole Church in human history. But we dare not become complacent with things as they are. Pursuing the unity of the body of Christ is not an option.

Over the past century a major effort was undertaken to bring together various Christian denominations. Much of this effort failed. One of the primary reasons it failed can be traced to an attitude of indifference toward doctrinal orthodoxy. This we cannot do if we are to remain faithful to Christ. But the alternative is not acceptable either, namely an attitude of indifference to Christian unity.

What is called for is found in mystery. What we need is a bold orthodoxy that will restore classical Christianity to its rightful place. This means the ancient creeds of the Church must again have a *central* place in our life together. We also need a generous ecumenism that will face our differences honestly and find new ways to honor one another in the same Christian family while we allow differences to be discussed and resolved.

The old ecumenism of the twentieth century failed for many reasons. One was that it moved its focus from confessing Christ in the truth to political engagement with the present world order. But this failure can open the door to something better, something new, and something that honors Christ.

Members of the same family do not always agree. This is the nature of all community life. But we can disagree *and* embrace what C. S. Lewis called "mere Christianity." I, for one, pray for a new ecumenism, an ecumenism unlike the old because it will have a bold commitment to essential orthodoxy. At the same time I pray that those who love orthodoxy, and believe that without it there is no real Christianity, will pursue the unity of the Church with all their heart. When these two truths are held in prayerful tension then we can begin to talk honestly about our unity and what we can do to restore it.