



‘IN NECESSARIIS UNITATEM...’

THE OFT-QUOTED SAYING—‘IN ESSENTIALS, UNITY; IN NON-ESSENTIALS, LIBERTY; IN ALL THINGS, CHARITY’—HAS BEEN ATTRIBUTED WRONGLY TO VARIOUS WELL-KNOWN HISTORICAL FIGURES, INCLUDING ST AUGUSTINE AND MELANCHTHON, LUTHER’S COLLEAGUE, AND JOHN WESLEY.

Last week I wrote about the *Together for Europe* event in Stuttgart which admirably reflected the spirit of this saying. How thankful we can be for the ecumenism of the heart that seems to be growing in Europe today!

This slogan has earned itself a special name among German theologians: the *‘Friedensspruch’*, or *‘Peace Saying’*. However, it emerged from a period that was anything but peaceful: the tumult of the Thirty Years War. In that protracted conflict, Protestants and Catholics fought each other tooth and nail for territorial dominance in Europe.

The Thirty Years War brought death and devastation across much of Central and Western Europe in the 17th century. Tolerance and openness to other traditions was considered treason. It took a brave soul to propose that what the warring factions had in common was actually greater than what separated them.

Peter Meiderlin was such a brave soul. A little-known Lutheran pastor from Augsburg, he produced a tract in 1627 in which he described a dream.

Christ appears to a devout Christian theologian in this dream, and warns him of danger, urges vigilance and disappears.

Next the Devil appears as an angel of light, claiming to be on a mission from God. In this final age, he says, God's elect have to keep pure the doctrinal truths they inherited. The devil then invites our theologian to join a new order of the doctrinally pure elect, for his own eternal welfare.

When the theologian prays about what he has heard, the devil immediately vanishes. Christ reappears and encourages him to remain loyal only to the Word of God in simplicity and humility of heart.

Meiderlin concludes: *‘Si nos servaremus In necessariis Unitatem, In non-necessariis Libertatem, In utrisque Charitatem, optimo certe loco essent res nostrae.’* [‘We would be in the best shape if we kept in essentials, Unity; in non-essentials, Liberty; and in both Charity.’]

LUGGAGE

Although I have had this saying hanging on my office wall for over twenty-five years, I only recently discovered its origin. I first came across reference to Meiderlin in a footnote of a book I have been reading in preparation for our YWAM Ancient Churches Consultation in Herrnhut next week.

‘As Pilgrims Progress’ has the intriguing subtitle, *‘Learning how Christians can walk hand in hand when they don’t see eye to eye.’*

This book is the combined effort of **Stephen March** and **David Bjork**. David, an evangelical, will address our ‘Ancient Churches Consultation’ and brings with him 25 years of experience of engaging with Catholics and the Catholic Church in France.

Their book stresses that the pilgrimage ‘on the Way’ itself is more importance than how we actually got on the Way. ‘The Way’ was of course the first name given to the Christian

movement. It suggests the image of a journey, a pilgrimage. The authors explore the kinds of baggage we take on our spiritual journeys, some more helpful than others.

Chapter headings like ‘Handling the Other Person’s Luggage and Carrying our Own’, ‘Opening Suitcases’, ‘Feeling “at Home” with our Suitcases’ hint at the very practical advice the authors give as we seek fellowship with fellow pilgrims from other traditions.

Here’s one of several handy lists of guidelines in the book, suggestions for handling the religious baggage carried by the other pilgrims we encounter on the Way to the Father:

1. Abandon or correct our misleading stereotypes of the other person’s Christian religious experience;
2. Be open to being surprised by the authenticity of the Christian faith and religious practice of other kinds of Christians;
3. Recognise the resources for spiritual nourishment and Christian discipleship that the other person finds in their religious tradition;
4. Find ways of removing suspicion, fear and resentment, and to supporting one another spiritually by prayer, advice and friendship;
5. Develop respect for the other person’s religious conviction and integrity;
6. Pursue a relationship of mutual enrichment, learning to give and receive truth and conviction from one another without compromise;
7. Rejoice in common Scripture, common prayer, and the common hope of eternal life that already unites us;
8. Engage in joint witness to Christ and social action in areas where joint convictions are shared;
9. Be open to growing in peace and patience;
10. Pray to Christ that we may learn to move toward the Father in greater unity.

PROPHETIC

Although today’s spiritual climate is thankfully much more tolerant than in Peter Meiderlin’s day, we still have much progress to make as pilgrims on The Way together. And in my opinion, March and Bjork’s book is one of the most practical guidebooks I know for this journey. That’s why I have asked David to bring copies for all participants in our consultation.

It is also highly appropriate that our consultation can be held in the vicinity of Herrnhut, where Meiderlin’s saying was constantly quoted. Count Zinzendorf, leader of the Herrnhut community, was called by Karl Barth ‘the original ecumenist’. Martin Niemöller called the Moravian Church an ‘ecumenical microcosm’. And the wall-hanging in my office was hand-stitched from a Moravian pattern by Jo Fahringer, a fellow YWAMer with a Moravian background.

Till next week,

Jeff Fountain