

Christian Pluralism and the Person of Christ: Talk Abstract
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Gonzaga Socratic Club, Friday, March 28, 2008

The three Persons of the Holy Trinity are a divine community whose unity is so perfect that they are together just one God. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, Christians are blessed to participate in that transcendent oneness. Thus, Jesus Christ teaches that unity among believers must be of the same quality as the union He shares with the Father (John 17:20-23). In the light of this call to oneness, St. Paul admonishes the Corinthians that among Christians, there may be no factional divisions; all must “speak the same thing,” be “perfectly joined together in the same mind,” and offer the same judgments (1 Corinthians 1:10). The Early Church held this unity to be foundationally definitive of Christian faith. St. Cyprian of Carthage (third century) declares that one who is not doctrinally unified with other Christians “does not hold God’s law, does not hold the faith of the Father and the Son, does not hold life and salvation” (*On the Unity of the Church*, 6).

But the landscape of Christian denominationalism seems to present the antithesis of union. Believers even disagree about the fundamental nature and process of salvation in Christ. Yet it is common for Christians to dismiss this apparently problematic division by an appeal to “the same Jesus”: at some fundamental level, all Christians believe in one Christ. Their doctrinal differences are superficial.

The essential theological/philosophical error here is that to describe Jesus Christ in a manner universal enough to incorporate His various denominational species, the *Person* Jesus Christ must be abandoned. “The same Jesus” can only be an abstract concept.

However, it is not with an abstraction, but with the Persons of the Trinity (and most specifically, with the Incarnate Christ), that the intimate and salvific bond of oneness must be formed. As a person, Jesus is who He is, and is not who He’s not. He is not large enough to embrace various incarnations of Himself. Furthermore, the Person Jesus Christ “does not change” (Malachi 3:6); He admits “no variation” (James 1:17), and is “the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

To live in the fulfillment of God’s ultimate purpose, unity in a universalized “idea” of Christ is not enough. Oneness with the very specific “person” Christ is required. And the Person Jesus Christ can bear only one doctrinal description. Thus, Christian doctrinal division is not excusable. It is a problem that must be faced. The implications for the Faith as a whole, and for individual believers, are weighty.

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