

The Ecumenical Unity of Nominal Christians – A Dangerous Path to the End-times One World Church

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Introduction

Today there is a growing confusion among believers about the unity of all Christians. The call for a comprehensive, "ecumenical" (i.e. actually: encompassing the whole world) unity of all Christian churches, congregations and movements is getting louder and louder.

Invoking the statements of the Lord Jesus Christ in John 17, many Christians today claim that the world will only be converted if all who profess Christ become one. According to them it is now time for the unfortunate divisions between Catholic and Protestant, liberal and Bible-believing, charismatic and evangelical to be overcome.

Confusion is also growing among born-again believers; the ideas of comprehensive Christian unity and cooperation are increasingly being spread in "evangelical" circles, for example through "Pro Christ" (a German equivalent to Billy Graham crusades) and the Evangelical Alliance or through the campaign "Together for Europe". More and more often it is said that Christians must overcome everything that divides them in doctrine and work together fraternally in order to finally win the world over to Christ.

What about that? What does the Bible say about such a great ecumenical unity? Is such a unity pleasing to God? Does it honour our Lord Jesus Christ? Does it really serve the purpose of winning people for Jesus Christ? What is "Christianity" in the eyes of God anyway? Is it the same as the church of God, the body of Christ? Which unity is God-willed, and which unity contradicts the Word of God?

Such questions are of great importance to the believing Christian today. This treatise wants to give a concise answer, which is based on the statements of the Holy Scripture. It does not intend to present the network of today's ecumenical movement in more detail, nor does it intend to elaborate on current events. It is not written as a doctrinal treatise and cannot give a thorough interpretation of the Bible passages covered. For the sake of brevity, many Bible passages have been cited only as references and printed in half bold; it is highly recommended to look them up and read them.

The aim of this treatise is to give questioning Christians a biblically based orientation, a spiritual overview, and a perspective on the subject of "ecumenism". As a common thread, I have presented the historical development of the Church of Jesus Christ from the beginnings to our last time.

Much can only be briefly addressed or hinted at in this context. If you are looking for explanations, evidence, and more detailed treatises, you will find some English writings in the bibliography at the end of this treatise.

A. The Origin of the True Church of God as the Fruit of the Atonement of Jesus Christ

Through the action of the Holy Spirit, on the day of Pentecost, the *church of the living God* came into being (cf. **1 Tim 3:15**) ... The spiritual foundation of the church is Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen and glorified Son of God (**1 Cor 3:11**). His perfect atoning sacrifice is the prerequisite for the emergence

of the New Testament people of God, a people of holy priests, a chosen and sanctified special (peculiar) people, a body of repentant men who have received the Spirit of God inwardly.

Coming to Him as to a living stone, which, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (...)

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people, but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. (1Pt 2:4-10)

a) What is the Church and Who Belongs to it?

The church of God consists of former sinners who, by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, were saved from the Jews and Gentiles (peoples who are under the wrath of God) and now belong to Christ and have fellowship with Him, biblically speaking: are *in Christ* (cf. **1 Cor 1:2, 9, 30**). They are born again by the Spirit of God, are children of God who have become partakers of divine nature (**2 Pt 1:4**). They are connected by the Holy Spirit to the glorified Christ in heaven and have constant communion with Him.

The church of God no longer belongs to this world (**Jn 17:14**), because according to Scripture, the "world" is the system of apostate humanity hostile to God. It is called out of the world through Christ. Its home and citizenship are in heaven (**Phil 3:20**); it was resurrected with Christ and already made to sit in the heavenly regions in Christ (**Eph 2:6; Col 3:1-4**). That is why the true church is always hated and persecuted by the world and especially by the religious leaders and groups of this world.

The church (in Greek *ekklesia* = the called out congregation) in the sense of the Bible is thus the Spirit-wrought community of all born-again children of God who have been saved by faith in their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and belong to Him, the glorified head. It is a *spiritual organism*, the *body of Christ* (cf. inter alia: **Eph 1:22-23; Eph 2:14-22; Eph 4:1-16; Col 1:18; 1 Cor 12:12-27**).

Through the Spirit of God, believers were inserted into this organism and connected to each other. The exalted Lord, through His Spirit, also gives certain gifts to the believers to serve in the body (cf. **1 Cor 12**).

All the ministries in the body are therefore carried out by born-again people who are personally called by the exalted Lord and who have been equipped with the spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit; all such services are to be done under the guidance of the Spirit of God and according to the instructions of the Holy Scripture. The Bible knows no human-made "offices," organisational and leadership structures; these are alien to the true church and not recognised by God.

The true church of God is also by its very nature a *spiritual temple*, a spiritual house where the living God dwells (**Eph 2:20-22; 1 Pt 2:4-5; 1 Cor 3:16-17**). The holy God can dwell in the true church only because it consists exclusively of born-again believers sanctified by the blood of Christ and the Spirit of God. Their Spirit-wrought worship is offered to Him, that is, spiritual sacrifices of praise, adoration, priestly ministry, which are pleasing to Him through Christ (**1 Pt 2:5**).

The holy God does not dwell amid man-made mixed constructions, external churches, which consciously tolerate unclean sinners or are led by unbelievers. Such "churches" are unclean idol temples in the eyes of God (cf. **2 Cor 6:14-18**).

b) The Unity of the True Church

No man can enter the true church of God unless he is born again through the Word and Spirit of God. Through the Spirit of God, all true believers are one in Christ, one before God. This Spirit-wrought unity exists before God's eyes, invisible to the human eye, given between all the children of God (cf. **Eph 4:3-**

6). It is real, even if the believers, through their failure, realise and testify to this unity only imperfectly or not at all in their external lives.

According to God's will, this one, invisible church should find its expression in *local churches* where the faithful come together according to the apostolic guidelines of the NT to serve God together. These churches are independent of human control and power hierarchies and are only responsible to Christ, their head, but still connected to each other.

In the time of the *original apostolic church*, this Biblical pattern was essentially realised: in the places where several people had become believers, a church was established in which these believers came together and served the Lord together. The basis of these churches was the *teaching(doctrine) of the Apostles* (Acts 2:42; Eph 2:20).

B. The Prophesied Departure from the Faith and the Emergence of the Nominal Christianity

1. The Warnings about the Imminent Degeneration of the Apostolic Church

The apostles themselves already received the certainty through the Spirit of God that this biblical orientation and unity of the early apostolic church (which was already exposed to some stresses and strains and threatened by heresies at the time of the apostles) would be destroyed soon after their passing. The judgment of the house of God began even then (1 Pt 4:17). The apostle Paul issues the prophetic warning:

"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood! For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves." (Acts 20:28-30)

This statement goes far beyond the local situation in Ephesus; it describes the development that would come over all the apostolic churches after the departure of the apostles. The tools of this degeneration would be both externally invading seducers ("**Wolves in sheep's clothing**" - cf. Mt 7:15!) as well as people from the circle of the churches themselves.

The Apostle Peter warns the believers, along those lines, of the imminent destructive developments:

"But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed." (2 Pt 2:1-2)

The false teachers would thus work covertly and insidiously, spreading their influence to proclaim false and seductive teachings and to gather people to these teachings, and thus to introduce factions (gr. *haireseis* = "sects" or sectarian, false teachings) into the true church.

Numerous other inspired predictions can be found in the NT, which testify in a similar way: the rapidly emerging destructive developments in the early church were foreseen by God, and the true believers were warned several times.

2. The Emergence of the Degenerate Nominal Christianity

As the apostles had predicted, it came to an alarmingly quick, far-reaching degeneration of the church after the end of the apostolic period. This was initially due to the fact that false, unbiblical teachings spread in the churches of the 2nd century. Such teachings had already begun to exert influence in the 1st century, as evidenced by **Galatians**, **Colossians**, **1st and 2nd Timothy** and the three **epistles of John**.

Through the ministry of the apostles, these influences could be held at bay for a long time, but after that the dams broke. Biblical faith, the sound teaching of the apostles recorded in the New Testament, was set aside; the churches were deceived by many pagan, false-religious influences, especially through the influence of Greek philosophy (**Col 2:8**).

The Spiritual Background of Degeneration

A noteworthy word from **1 Timothy 4:1-3** sheds light on the spiritual background of this degeneration, which lies in the work of deceiving spirits:

"Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from food which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth."

Here it is shown that the action of the adversary (the devil) through human devices was responsible for the degeneration of the true church (cf. also **Mt 13:28**). An important indication of the corrosive work of false teachers in the early church, who were in the service of the adversary, is given to us in **2 Corinthians 11:1-4, 13-15**:

"Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me. For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."

But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."

For if he who comes [to you] preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different Spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it! (...)

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works."

The developments mentioned here took place in the 2nd - 4th century where the basics for the degenerate Catholic Church were laid. Thereby the demonic teachings of *Gnosis* (**1 Tim 6:20!**) and philosophy as well as pagan-mystical heresies played an important role, which made asceticism the basis of a falsified piety: abstention from marriage and food (cf. also, **Colossians 2!**).

Associated with this was the formation of the pagan-magical doctrine of the sacraments, according to which the "Church" could impart salvation to people through certain actions (baptism, communion, etc.).

A Different Gospel Is Introduced

Here, in fact, another gospel was introduced into the church, another Jesus and another Spirit, and this leaven of evil doctrine quickly leavened all the dough (**Gal 5:7-9**):

You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump."

The bright light of the biblical gospel was darkened more and more by intermixture with the Mosaic Law and by pagan teachings. From the salvation by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ attested in the Bible (cf. **Rom 3:19-28**) the Roman Church made a fake "salvation" that was not valid before God, which supposedly could only happen with the involvement of "works" and human "mediators". That is another Gospel (**Gal 1:6-9**) and brings this "church" under the curse!

The Unbiblical Understanding of the Sacraments of the Roman Church

Among the pernicious developments that took place in the formation of the Catholic Church, the understanding of the *sacraments and the role of the priesthood* must be emphasised. Biblical doctrine shows that salvation is given fully and completely by Christ himself by grace to him who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ himself imparts all spiritual blessings to the believer, and he personally appropriates them *through faith* in the promises from the Word of God. On the other hand, the heresy arose early on in the Roman Church that the "consecrated" bishops and priests could convey salvation and blessings to men through certain ritualistic acts.

The Roman Catholic conception of the "sacraments" (lat. *sacramentum* = "consecration", i.e. "act of consecration") originates from the pagan, magical cults in which priests, "consecrated" to the idols, performed certain rituals that imparted to the follower of the cult "salvation" and assistance in his relationship with God.

Ultimately, the conception of salvation-imparting sacraments springs from a *pagan-magical thinking*: The action of an "initiated" person, equipped with "higher powers" produces something "spiritual" in the recipient. The Roman Church eventually practiced seven sacraments, which were usually "administered" by its bishops or priests: Baptism and Confirmation (= false mediation of salvation), sacrament of penance (confession) and Eucharist (= false forgiveness of sins), anointing of the sick, marriage, and ordination to the priesthood.

Baptism and the Eucharist as the Central Sacraments of Seduction

A decisive role within the seven "sacraments" of the Roman Church is played by "*baptism*". From the biblical, symbolic baptism of faith (baptism of those who have personally come to the saving faith), the Church made the ritual of sprinkling of babies by an office-bearer ("infant baptism").

Through the heresy of the "baptismal rebirth", the Roman Church has been lulling countless unbelieving, lost pagans into the deceptive perception that they have become "Christians" through the sacrament of baptism and as such are also saved.

The second deceitful main sacrament of the Babylonian Church is the "*Eucharist*" (Greek = "thanksgiving"). The Catholic Church turned the biblical breaking of bread, the commemoration of the perfect atonement of Jesus Christ, into a pagan sacrament, a ritual act of sacrifice that supposedly secures the forgiveness of sins for the participating church member. The basis of the pernicious doctrine of the "Eucharistic" is a *fundamental falsification of the biblical message of salvation* - a fact that many "evangelicals" no longer see today.

From the perfect, once and for all, eternally valid atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross (cf. **Heb 7:23-28; Heb 9:11-15; Heb 10:11-22**), the Roman Church made a constantly repeated sacrifice, in which supposedly Christ in the wafer should be sacrificed again and again by human "priests" before God in order to atone for the sins of the Christians.

The Denial of the High Priestly Work of Jesus Christ

Through these perverted teachings, the perfect high priesthood of Jesus Christ was denied and replaced by a human priesthood, a corrupt mixture of the Jewish priesthood and pagan priestly concepts.

Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. (Heb 7:23-25)

“But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. (Heb 9:11-12)

“And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. (Heb 10:11-14)

The perfect and fully sufficient, forever continuing high-priestly and mediatory ministry of the exalted Lord Jesus Christ in heaven was denied by the Roman Church with its "Eucharistic sacrifice" and falsified into the constantly recurring human "priestly and mediator service" of the Roman priest elite, supplemented by the equally pagan "mediator ministry" of Mary and the "saints".

Thus, step by step, the false gospel of the Roman Church formed, which does not save anyone, but keeps people in darkness and delusion. Mysticism and pagan sorcery spread rapidly (e.g., the belief in miraculous relics).

Scripture also tells us many things about the false teachers who brought about this degeneracy. In **2 Peter 2** and in **The Epistle of Jude**, they are marked as corrupted evildoers; they are compared to Balaam, the false prophet who led the people of Israel into idolatry and spiritual fornication (**2 Pt 2:15**; **Jude 11**). They cause divisions and are *"sensual persons, not having the Spirit"* (Jude 19).

The Development of Clerical Rule Over the Lay People

Parallel to the advance of heresies, there was also the degeneration of the spirit-wrought ministries of the early church (elders/overseers, deacons, shepherds, teachers, evangelists) into a pagan elite of "enlightened" and magical "priests", who were solely entitled to distribute the "sacraments" and thus to administer salvation.

This anti-Christian elite (later called the "clergy") soon developed into a power apparatus and established an anti-biblical one-man rule of "bishops" who ruled first over the local church, then later on also over regions and countries. A warning reference to this can be found in the 3rd Letter of John (Diotrephes).

This reign of false "representatives of Christ" later culminated in the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome over the entire church (papacy). Some commentators see a reference here to the "Nicolaitans" (= "conquerors of the people") in **Revelation 2:6+15**.

Mixing and Degeneracy of the Apostolic Church

Thus, immediately after the early apostolic church of the 1st century, we have a state in which the true and the false were increasingly mixed, with the false quickly gaining the upper hand. There were undoubtedly still many true believers at that time, as well as some separated biblical congregations, but the biblical gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ was very quickly obscured and replaced by another gospel in which both works and sacraments were to contribute to salvation.

In addition to the born-again children of God, there were more and more people in this church who, though they were baptized and professed to Christ, no longer knew real repentance, true faith, and spirit-wrought new birth. They were fake Christians, formal confessors, who were still heathens and sinners inwardly. This completely unnatural state shaped the development of Christianity in the post-Apostolic centuries, in which the "Catholic Church" gained more and more influence.

The Prophetic Statements in Matthew 13

We have already mentioned that the Word of God predicts this degeneracy of Christianity in different places and in different ways. Very significant are here some parables from the kingdom of heaven in **Matthew 13**, in which the Lord Jesus prophetically reveals what would happen to Christianity, which although still outwardly confessing Christ as the king, did not know the internal kingly reign of Christ (that is, the new birth).

Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared.

So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How does it have tares? He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?

But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn."'"

Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches."

Another parable He spoke to them: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened." (Mt 13:24-33)

The parable of the sower (**Mt 13:24-30**) shows the roots of the formation of fake Christians through false, superficial conversions. The parable of the mustard seed (**Mt 13:31-32**) points to an unnatural, not normal growth in Christendom; the "birds of heaven" here are a picture of demonic spirits. The parable of the leaven (**Mt 13:33-35**) reveals the secret work of seduction and heresy, which spreads more and more until the whole thing is corrupted and degenerate.

Characteristics of the Nominal Christianity

This outward nominal Christianity (i.e., a Christianity that bears only the name of Christ and outwardly confesses Him, but neither knows Him nor has Him indwelling) is also shown to us in **2 Timothy 3:1-5**:

"But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!"

The basic mark of the nominal Christians is: they have a form, an appearance of godliness and piety - but they deny its power, the power of the cross, the new birth, the Holy Spirit! They are "Christian" - but they do not belong to Christ! They are "believers" - but they deny the biblical, saving faith in the Lamb of God!

The Statements of the Epistles of John

What is also important for understanding the emerging nominal Christianity and the Catholic Church are the statements of the Epistles of John. In them, above all, the heresy of *Gnosis* is attacked, which had an important, and often subconscious and hidden influence on the degeneracy of the church.

In the **1st Letter of John** it is shown that the false Christians and their teachers, unlike the true believers, love sin and live in it (**1 Jn 1:6+8+10; 2:4; 3:4-10**); that they love the world and are driven by its lust (**2:15-17**); that they hate and want to murder the true believers, the "brothers" (**2:9-11; 3:11-12; 4:20**).

They are marked as false prophets, that is, those who spread false messages and revelations in the name of Christ (4:1-6). Behind them is the *spirit of the Antichrist*, the *spirit of error* (4:3+6). "Antichrists" means those who are enemies of the true Lord Jesus Christ, and who at the same time want to sit "instead of Christ", as the Catholic Church does with its entire system.

The Letters of Revelation

Finally, the prophetic statements in the seven letters of Revelation also play an important role in the spiritual understanding of the nominal Christianity. The seducers in the Catholic Church followed the doctrine of Balaam (Rev 2:14):

"But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality."

They seduced their followers into spiritual fornication by engaging in idolatry and getting entangled in pagan mysteries rooted in Babylon.

The woman Jezebel, whose seduction is along the same lines (Rev 2:20-23), also prophetically refers to the corruption of the Catholic Church. Instead of the chaste bride of Christ, the true church, a fornicating, magical seductress now appears on the scene. The statement the Lord called to Sardis could be applied to the whole of nominal Christianity (and which is often applied to the Protestant churches): ***"I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead."*** (Rev 3:1).

Finally, the statement about Laodicea can also be applied to the apostate nominal Christianity:

"I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—"

I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent!" (Rev 3:15-19)

3. The Dead Nominal Christianity Persecutes the Living Church

The degeneracy of nominal Christianity and the formation of the Catholic Church as a corruption entailing party (pernicious sect - cf. 2Pt 2:1) could never displace or suffocate the true church. The Lord Jesus had promised: ***"the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it"*** (Mt 16:18b).

At first, in part certainly within and later increasingly outside the degenerate Catholic Church, there were at all times true believers who adhered to the Bible and the apostolic doctrine of the church and maintained the witness of the truth in a pseudo-Christian, in truth dark and pagan world.

There has always been an irreconcilable spiritual battle between the true believers and the false leaders and teachers of the Catholic Church. At all times, the power-hungry rulers of the degenerate church sought to disable the true believers or else to persecute them, and to silence their witness, for it exposed the sins and depravities of the harlot church (cf. Jn 15:20; Mt 24,9; Luke 21:12; Jn 16:2-4; 2 Tim 3:12) ...

These genuine Christians were slandered as heretics (although at that time there were certainly really heretical groups outside the church); after the 4th century they were violently persecuted by the powerful universal church. We know of some such movements, especially the Waldensians and their

predecessors; regarding others, their memory is extinguished in human historiography, but God knows who they were and are.

Conversely, the true believers stayed away from the corrupt universal church and went out of it whenever they could. The prophetic churches of Smyrna, Pergamos, and Philadelphia describe the remnant of the true believers who have been violently persecuted throughout many centuries.

In the "*Synagogue of Satan*" (Rev 2:9; 3:9) one can also see an allusion to the Catholic Church, which saw itself as a true successor of the Jews and had borrowed from Judaism with its priesthood.

C. The Harlot Babylon and Her Prophetic Meaning for Understanding End-time Christianity

In Revelation 17 and 18 we find a very detailed description of a religious movement, yes, one can say: a religious power that obviously plays an important role in the anti-God developments of the end times:

"Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication." So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness.

And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement. But the angel said to me, "Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.

The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is. "Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits." (Rev 17:1-9)

1. The Traits of the Harlot Babylon

The prophetic image that amazes John so much is a woman riding on a beast. This beast is an image of the Roman Empire (cf. Rev 13), which at that time was the ruling pagan empire and which must play a decisive role in the end times, as the prophecies of the Book of Daniel show. The woman on the beast is called "the great harlot". She stands in obvious contrast to the chaste bride of the Lamb, who is later mentioned in Revelation 19.

The Spiritual Image of the Harlot for the Apostate Woman

The harlot is the woman who is unfaithful to and apostate from the Lord; this image is already used for the idolatrous Israel. *Here it obviously stands for the nominal Christianity that has fallen away from*

God, which is guilty of idolatry and thus of spiritual fornication. At the same time it is important to refer to the seductress Jezebel, who is also said *"to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality (KJV: fornication) and eat things sacrificed to idols."* (Rev 2:20b).

Of this harlot, a globally influential religious power, it is said that she sits on many waters, i.e. has influence over many peoples and nations (cf. Rev 17:15) and that the kings of the earth have committed religious fornication (harlotry) with her (i.e. probably that they used her religious influence for their power politics) and that the masses have become drunk through her spiritual fornication, that is, religiously seduced and fanaticized by demonic idolatry and sorcery (Rev 18:23). She is dressed in the precious robes that otherwise only kings are entitled to, and which correspond exactly to the robes of the popes and Catholic dignitaries.

Babylon as the Origin of the fornicating False Religion

This harlot has a name written on her forehead that reveals her nature: **Secret** [KJV: Mystery; Greek *mysterion*], **Babylon** [Greek-Chaldean "Gate of the Gods"], **the Great, the Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth**. This name indicates that the roots of the Catholic Church are to be found in the Babylonian system of idolatry and sorcery.

From Babel came the first attempt at a rebellion against the LORD (cf. Gen 11), and the history of religion gives many indications that in Babel pagan idolatry was developed for the first time, which manifested itself, among other things, in the introduction of "mysteries" (secret teachings for the initiated). Among the most important mysteries was the cult of an alleged "Mother of God" and her "divine child" (Semiramis and Tammuz), which spread in various forms across the earth (Ishtar - Astarte - Isis - Artemis) and led to the Catholic Church's unbiblical and cultic worship of Mary.

The Catholic Church, in fact, continues to pursue the abominations of Babylonian idolatry and pagan mystery religions under "Christian" auspices. The elements of these pagan religions included, among other things, salvation-imparting acts (sacraments), ablutions and sprinkling with "holy water", the sacrifice of wafers (round cakes) for the "Queen of Heaven" (cf. Jer 7:18), the use of incense, etc. Many symbols of the Roman Church also have their origins in Babylon (cf. the insightful work of Hislop, *The Two Babylons*).

At the same time, it is shown that the religion of this harlot was associated with earthly power and splendor and great economic influence and wealth. The harlot no longer has anything in common with the true Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who became poor to make us spiritually rich. She also used her power to violently persecute the true believers.

2. The Woman and the Beast: The Initial Stage of the Harlot Babylon

The harlot is clearly assigned in Revelation to the city of Rome, which has been known since ancient times as the city of the seven hills (Rev 17:9).

But the angel said to me, "Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.

The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. (Rev 17:7-9)

The image of the woman riding on the beast (the Roman Empire) points us to a highly significant turning point in the history of the Catholic Church: the so-called "Constantinian shift" (see Dave Hunt's book, *A Woman Rides the Beast*).

The "Constantinian Shift" of the Church to the Harlot Babylon

With the apparent conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine, the Catholic Church was elevated from a persecuted and ostracized outsider religion to the state religion. Their bishops received secular power and in return had to lend themselves to support the power of the emperor and the empire; into the ranks of the church now poured flocks of unconverted pagans, who in this way wanted to gain prestige and offices in the now "Christian" empire. The perversion and degeneration of the church had now reached a whole new level.

From then on, the Roman Church persecuted all dissenters with the means of state power and abused the sword without hesitation to promote the development of its religious power. This was supported by the Church's misleading teaching that she was called to rule over the world instead of Christ and to exercise supremacy over all the kingdoms of the world. From then on, cynical greed for power, corruption, and avarice, combined with all the abominable sins of Babel and Sodom increasingly characterized the Church of Rome.

The Catholic Church since Constantine, in the light of Revelation 17, is the beginning and core of the harlot Babylon. It is very important today to emphasise this clear interpretation of the prophetic statements in the Book of Revelation, which was one of the fundamental insights of the Anabaptists and the Reformers. Many who today call themselves "Evangelical" and refer to the legacy of the Reformation have become blind at this point and no longer see the clear references of Scripture that were, after all, written down for us as a warning.

Forgotten Insights of the Reformers on the Roman Church

In the time of the Reformation, the deeply anti-Christian, pagan-idolatrous character of the Catholic religion was also clearly brought to light. The Reformers, who had relatively little Biblical insight on many issues - especially the biblical doctrine on the church - and who made serious and wrong compromises with the world, at least understood this issue quite clearly.

The leaders and teachers of the Reformation, who themselves knew the Roman Church very well from their own experience, exposed the "Eucharist" as a sacrifice to idols and an abominable perversion of the biblical Atonement of Jesus Christ. They openly said that a false Christ was worshipped in this church. Today, this is denied by many "Protestants" and glossed over.

They were also absolutely right when they considered the Roman popes to be "antichrists." Even if none of these popes was *the Antichrist* in the sense of the biblical end-time prophecy, they were all "anti-christs" by virtue of their office and their doctrine (cf. **1 Jn 2:18**) - instead of Christ, they sat down as *rulers of the earthly Church* (gr. *anti-christos* can mean both "instead-of-Christ" and "opponent-of-Christ"), and as false priests and world rulers they also emerged as a kind of opponent-of-Christ.

3. The Reformation and the Emergence of the Protestant Denominations

We must briefly discuss here a development that had significant consequences but is not easy to judge biblically and produced mixed results: the renewal movement, which emerged as a counter-current to the Catholic Church in the 16th century and generally referred to as the "Reformation".

Throughout the Middle Ages, the Roman Church had suppressed and persecuted the true Gospel, trying its best to keep the Bible's message away from the people in its domain. There had always been resistance to this. Movements such as the Waldensians in Upper Italy had held on to the biblical Gospel and the Scriptures and spread them secretly time and again.

The "Lollards" in England and the "Hussites" in the Czech Republic were also movements in which the Spirit of God worked to spread the gospel and proclaim the truths of Scripture openly. They were vigorously

suppressed and cruelly persecuted by the Roman Church, but the rulers of darkness could not escape the light of Christ.

The Situation at the Time of the Reformation

In the 16th century, there was a special coincidence of various factors that eventually led to the Protestant Reformation ("protestant" from lat. *pro-testari* = "to bear witness, to testify publicly", Reformation from lat. *re-formatio* = "renewal, transformation").

The spiritual efforts to return to the biblical gospel and to the Bible itself were given a new impetus. In various places of the "Christian West", awakened men studied the Scriptures themselves - many of whom were trained as Roman priests or theologians, such as Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli or Martin Bucer. More and more, they discovered the incompatibility of Roman teachings and practices with the biblical truth.

The dissatisfaction of the "lay people" with the corrupt Roman system grew; the people groaned under the burdens that the false shepherds placed on them. More and more the realization grew that the Roman Church was abusing the truth of Jesus Christ. Grievances such as the sale of indulgences were only the symptoms of that which ignited a general dissatisfaction with the Roman Catholic errors.

At the same time, the power of the Roman Church, which was at certain times extraordinarily large due to the alliance with secular authority, was weakened by the politically motivated efforts of a large number of secular princes towards independence. Most of them had no spiritual motives for their rebellion against the Catholic Church. They felt restricted in the expansion of their political power by the papacy's claim to power and stood in opposition to the emperor, who was allied with the popes at that time.

The Spiritual Awakening of the Reformation

Under these circumstances, there was a spiritual awakening, which was used by God to bring the light of the Gospel to many people in Europe. The leading teachers of the Reformation recognised fundamental truths of the Bible and the true Gospel and proclaimed them courageously among the people. Above all, the truth of salvation through Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone in the finished redemptive work of Jesus Christ, was openly proclaimed at that time.

At the same time, the Holy Scripture and its doctrines were spread with previously unimaginable freedom. What the Roman false teachers had obscured came to light more and more. The Reformers rejected the haughty arrogance of the Roman Papacy, which claimed binding authority in all doctrinal questions of Christianity for the Roman Church, its traditions, and its popes. They boldly declared that only the Holy Scripture could be the binding authority for men, and that the Roman Church had bent and corrupted the truths of Scripture.

Through the Bible translations in the folk languages, for the first time the incapacitated "laity" could read the Word of God themselves, and this spreading of the Bible bore many blessed fruits.

Compromises and Half Measures Among the Reformers

At the same time, however, we must see in retrospect that the Reformation was stuck in tragic compromises and half measures. The leading reformers thought and acted in many ways humanly and politically, rather than spiritually. Although they abolished many of the teachings and practices of the Babylonian Roman Church, they did not break out of the Babylonian system in several principal points.

This applies above all to the continuation of the completely unbiblical "state church" with its masses of unbelieving pagans, who were still declared "Christians" by the fraudulent "sacrament" of infant baptism.

The Bible's teaching of the holy church, which can consist solely of born-again believers, was rejected and the mixed character of the Babylonian church system was essentially retained. The essence of another false "sacrament" of the Roman Church was also retained: the Lord's Supper as a "sacrament for the remission of sins".

In this day and age, it is difficult to fathom the reasons for this disastrous aberration. But an essential role was played in Germany by *the unbiblical compromise with the secular princes of the German provinces* who used the Reformers as allies. The secular authorities wanted to use the reformed churches as pillars of state power, which made the usual state church structure necessary. This is also true of the King of England and other rulers of that time.

The Reformers entered into this compromise, because from their point of view it seemed to ensure them protection and an unhindered development of the Reformation work. The alternative at that time would have been a numerically much smaller, persecuted underground church, as the example of the Anabaptists showed. The reformers were not prepared to do this for various reasons.

Thus, the Reformation did not bring the full breakthrough to a biblical renewal but got stuck halfway. The biblical doctrine about the church and also the doctrine of sanctification and walk in Christ as well as other biblical doctrines (e.g. on the end times, the rapture, the relationship of the church to Israel, the millennial kingdom) were still obscured and found no spread or implementation in the newly emerging churches of the Reformation.

The Spiritually Sound "Anabaptists" as Witnesses of Biblical Truth

The biblical understanding of the true church which is separated from the world was not put into practice by the reformers at this time, but by a persecuted and despised side stream, the *Anabaptists*, who were so called because they practiced the truth of the biblical baptism of believers by immersion and did not recognise infant baptism.

The adversary has cleverly attacked this genuine, biblically sound movement of the anabaptists by mixing among them some heretics and enthusiasts inspired by darkness, who in the eyes of many observers then and now discredited the whole movement (Thomas Müntzer among others).

But if one studies the history and writings of the true Anabaptists (e.g., Menno Simon), one sees a revival movement of true believers, wrought by the Spirit of God, who followed the Lord with admirable faithfulness and simplicity and understood and lived out the truth of the Bible to a much greater extent than the reformers.

This faithful, awakened remnant, in contrast to the reformers protected by the princes, had to go through much bloody persecution; one of the terrible blemishes of the Reformation is the fact that the "Protestant" reformers persecuted them almost as cruelly as their Catholic opponents.

But in the despised and persecuted anabaptist movement, the New Testament church teachings were realised to the greatest possible extent, and this spiritual current of the "Mennonites" or "Anabaptists" (although some "Mennonites" have since deviated from the biblical faith) still bears fruit to the glory of the Lord today.

The Wrong Way of the Protestant State Churches

The Protestant state churches that emerged in the Reformation, however, had to experience in their development that the disregard of biblical church doctrine has its price. They always had at the base as well as in the leadership a pernicious mixture of light and darkness, believers and unbelievers.

Soon they increasingly became settled in empty orthodoxy, and in the 18th and 19th centuries the influence of the ideas of enlightenment and rationalism was added, which were ultimately influenced by pagan philosophy and gnosis. In the 20th century, this corrosive influence matured and had the effect of an increasingly outright turning away of the Protestant denominations from the foundations of the Reformation, and an ever-clearer apostasy from the biblical faith in Christ generally.

The fruit of this development is that these present denominations take on a *Babylonian* and harlot character with increasing apparentness. They are openly heading towards religious mixing and anti-Christian paganism. As the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification" has shown, they have long since betrayed and sold their Protestant heritage and are increasingly ready to come back under the umbrella of the Roman universal church. They had never completely left the harlot Babylon's camp, and now, at the end of time, they are consciously returning to it.

Pietist Communities: The Path of the Believers in the State Churches

Nevertheless, since the time of the Reformation, there have been true believers in this mixed church who have found peace and salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ through the preached gospel and access to God's Word. These believers suffered from the often ungodly and sinister conditions in their "parishes", which were not true churches anyway.

From their search for spiritual fellowship and mutual edification ecclesiastic Pietism (from Latin. *pietas* = piety) was born - a spiritual movement that on the one hand showed a pull towards biblical truth and the biblical life of faith, but on the other hand also had to suffer under the lazy compromises and the ultimately unbiblical stance of remaining in the mainstream denominations (cf. **2 Cor 6:14-18!**).

In the pietistic communities that remained within the framework of the mainstream denominations, the true believers could find edification and the strengthening of faith that they did not receive from the often unbelieving pastors. Especially in the 18th/19th century there were many beneficial developments within the framework of the "revival movement", directly in the field of evangelism. On the other hand, in Pietism unsound influences were also present.

On the one hand, the influence of the rationalistic ideas of the Enlightenment led to unclear attitudes to the Holy Scripture; on the other hand, there were also mystical movements that made room for false-spiritual "revelations" and "experiences of God" and promoted seductive teachings (including seductive end-time teachings, universal reconciliation, spiritism). Also, the demarcation from Catholicism was not clear enough everywhere.

In the 20th century it became clear that the time of blessing of inner-church pietism more or less came to an end. The awakening influences gradually dried up; here Wilhelm Busch was probably the last tool used by God with supra-regional effect. At the beginning of the 20th century the seductive invasion of the Pentecostal movement happened; later, the leaven of Bible-criticism and modernism became increasingly noticeable in the Pietistic movement.

Now, at the beginning of the 21st century, one has the impression that the Pietistical communities, together with the free churches and the movement of the Evangelical Alliance (an association of evangelical Christians in Germany), are also being drawn into the great end-time ecumenical-charismatic-liberal stream of seduction without resistance. It is often only individual believers who are vigilant and resist these developments - and who are therefore increasingly treated with hostility and segregated.

4. The Harlot Babylon in the Ripe Stage of the End Times

The prophecy in Revelations 17 and 18 has features that clearly go beyond all the history of the Catholic Church to date, showing the harlot Babylon in a stage of worldwide power that she has not yet reached today. It also mentions the end times when the harlot will have "***corrupted the earth with her fornication***" (Rev 19:2):

"For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her blood of His servants shed by her." all the nations have drunk from the embers of their fornication, and the kings of the earth have driven fornication with it, and the merchants of the earth have become rich of their mighty opulence."

The Coming "World Unity Church"

We see in Revelation the image of a great "unified world-wide church" that has all peoples and nations under its magical influence. According to Bible-believing interpreters, this great religious power includes *an anti-Christian unity of the world religions under the leadership of the Catholic Church.*

What exactly this union of the major world religions will look like, we cannot say from the Bible, but many developments of today are tending in exactly this direction. In addition to the classic "inner-Christian" ecumenism, which is intended to unite all apostate nominal-Christian churches, there are ever stronger efforts for a *worldwide unity of all religions*, which is alleged to be absolutely necessary for world peace and the well-being of nations.

Significantly, such efforts today often come from the United Nations (UN), which has set itself the goal of forming a central world government and creating "peace and security" worldwide. It is clear to the thoughtful Bible-reader that these goals ultimately serve the establishment of the world domination of the Antichrist.

Within the framework of the United Nations, there are many religious movements and organisations that have declared the fusion of all world religions to be their goal and for that purpose claim that at the core all religions believe the same thing. Mysticism and meditation often form an important link that is intended to promote the unity of religions. In any case, it is very clear that any opening to the endeavours of a *nominal-Christian ecumenism* with a sinister spiritual legality is a transition towards the greater *ecumenism of the world religions*.

"In for a penny, in for a pound", as the saying goes, we can already see how today even evangelical ecumenical advocates speak more and more openly of "dialogue with the world religions". "Dialogue" means the open-ended exchange of people supposedly on a par who all have a certain share in the truth. It also means the search for understanding and emphasis on the supposedly common values and goals, and ultimately leads to amalgamation and unification.

Spiritually, dialogue with other religions means the betrayal of biblical revelation's claim to the truth and of the claim of our Lord Jesus Christ to be the one and only Saviour and Lord: "***I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me!***" (Jn 14:6).

The dialogue between the world religions will eventually lead to the fusion of the various pagan religions (and will include nominal Christianity) into a unified religion. This future "united world religion"- already prepared today - will be an instrument of the anti-Christian forces and finally of the Antichrist himself, in order to keep the masses at it and to gain support and loyalty among the people.

For this purpose, the anti-Christian rulers have repeatedly used the Babylonian church organisations (including the protestant and Orthodox churches) throughout history; the 1st World War was a paradigm of this, in which the various churches on both sides of the conflict prayed for the victory of the "weapons of our country". In the crisis developments of the anti-Christian period, the authority will be particularly attentive to such an instrument of religious mass control.

Characteristics of the Babylonian End-time Religion

From the hints in this great prophecy, we can conclude that the matured final stage of the harlot Babylon is characterized by a great influence of the primordial elements of the Babylonian mystery religion: sorcery, mysticism, and abominable sins in the sexual sphere (cf. **Rev 17:4-5; 18:3; 18:23** and the very insightful book by Dave Hunt, *Occult Invasion*).

Sorcery is the achievement of self-serving goals with the help of certain words or actions, whereby the power of evil spiritual beings is invoked and used. Today we see how in Christianity more and more magical-occult influences are spread under pious cloaks, be it through the Charismatic Movement, or through the opening of the mainline denominations to esoteric teachings and practices.

Mysticism is man's attempt to achieve an experience of "union with divinity" with the help of certain techniques. Among other things, "meditation", rituals of "initiation", formulistic prayers ("mantras"), emptying and elimination of consciousness, "visualization" as well as the pursuit of visions, dreams, and other revelations from the spirit world play an important role. In the end times we see how mysticism is gaining in importance in all world religions; under the Christian garb of the "new spirituality" it is also rapidly gaining influence in the Christendom.

After all, consciously practiced *sexual degeneration and fornication* were among the characteristics of the Babylonian religion. It should also allegedly contribute to getting into a "god-like" state. These terrible aberrations are also increasingly evident in the end-time religious development.

D. The Ecumenical Aspirations in End-Time Christianity and the Way of the True Church

1. The Spiritual Background of Today's Ecumenical Aspirations

Only if we correctly evaluate the future powerful position of the harlot Babylon in the last stage of the end times and the biblical prophecy about the last times in general, can we also correctly classify today's ecumenical aspirations, which are working with ever greater power and urgency towards the unity of all Christians.

Protestant Denominations on the Ecumenical Path

It is significant that almost all the churches of the Reformation, which had to some extent escaped from the spell of the Roman harlot but had never completely freed themselves from it, have since many decades been striving with increasing openness for reunification with the Roman Church. The Protestant state churches are still and increasingly associated with the harlot Babylon. They had never abandoned the deceptive, unbiblical nature of nominal Christianity, but had continued to rely on the sacramental doctrine, which is opposed to God, especially infant baptism, and had never embraced the biblical principles of the true church.

These churches were always human structures in which true believers were forged together with unbelievers in the unbiblical, unequal yoke (2 Corinthians 6:14). The leadership of these churches was predominantly - and since the last century almost exclusively - in the hands of unbelievers. No wonder they have no spiritual strength to resist ecumenical engulfment.

Evangelicals Declare Their Support for Ecumenical Unity

But today we must note with horror that many, to some extent leading, "evangelical" Christians, i.e. who profess to be Bible-believing, advocate ecumenism. More and more Christians, formerly known as biblical preachers, are joining the call for the "Great Unity", which should encompass everything that calls itself "Christian"—whether the churches and congregations are truly born again or spiritually dead nominal Christians, regardless of whether the true Lord Jesus Christ and the biblical gospel are proclaimed, or another Jesus and another gospel.

Today we find in the leaders of the Evangelical Alliance and the Pietistic movement as well as in the Free Churches a decisive yes to ecumenism, hardly limited by reservations. Many a Christian is confused by such voices and wonders whether he was perhaps wrong in his rejection of this ecumenical engulfment. How often do you hear opinions such as "The Catholic Church changed after the Second Vatican Council"; "Today we simply can no longer afford the fragmentation of Christianity"; "We become untrustworthy for the world if we don't talk with one voice."

This unprincipled "unity" based on untruth and heresy has always been rejected by all spiritually vigilant, faithful believers. Sacred Scripture clearly tells us that such a "unity" cannot be pleasing to God:

"For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?" (2 Cor 6:14b-16a)

It used to be self-evident that faithful believers warned against ecumenism and distanced themselves decisively from it. Today, a frightening spiritual fog has settled over many Protestant Christians; they no longer see clearly and agree to the ecumenical engulfment.

Mixing as a Method of the Adversary

In the light of the Bible, we see in ecumenism the seductive principle of **mixing** at work that the adversary uses to bring corruption to the church, and which is so clearly marked in the parable of leaven:

"Another parable he spoke to them: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened." (Mt 13:33)

When light and darkness, flour and leaven, sound doctrine and heresy are mixed together, then the evil and the wrong inevitably prevail, because God wants the separation of His holy people and not mixing! (See Gal 5:7-9; 1 Cor 5:6-8; Mt 16:6-12; 2 Mo 2:15; 2 Mo 23:18.)

The mixing of the holy covenant people of God with the idolatrous Gentile peoples was the pitfall with which Satan wanted to catch and corrupt the people of Israel, as shown in the evil counsel of Balaam (cf. Rev 2:14; 2Pt 2:15; Jude 11). Later, too, Israel took this wrong path, and it was its undoing.

"They did not destroy the peoples, concerning whom the LORD had commanded them; But they mingled with the Gentiles And learned their works; They served their idols, which became a snare to them... Thus they were defiled by their own works, ad played the harlot by their own deeds. Therefore the wrath of the LORD was kindled against His people, so that He abhorred His own inheritance." (Ps 106:34-36+39-40)

"Ephraim has mixed himself among the peoples; Ephraim is a cake unturned. Aliens have consumed his strength, but he does not know it; Yes, gray hairs are here and there on him, yet he does not know it." (Hos 7:8)

The Tactics of the Adversary Against the Church

The goal of Satan (who is behind the ecumenical aspirations) is to destroy, or at least paralyze, the true church of God, which as a shining light and clear witness stands in the way of his sinister plans. Through an unbiblical unity and mixing, the truth of God, the glorious message of the Gospel of Grace, is to be stifled and suppressed and replaced by the lie of the ecumenical false gospel.

Satan knows perfectly well that the true church of God retains its power to shine and authority to bear witness to Christ and His truth only as long as it remains in the divinely ordained separation from evil and keeps itself separated as the body of Christ from the unclean, seductive formations of today's nominal Christianity. That is why he tries everything to undermine and dissolve the separation of the biblical church.

Let us make it clear once again: *false ecumenical unity is a cunning strategy of Satan, the deceitful Angel of Light (2 Cor 11:14), the seducer and corrupter from the beginning (cf. Eph 6:10-20)! Such a unity and mixing of light and darkness, of truth and lie, never serves God, but only the adversary.*

Let us remember the warning words of the Apostle Paul:

"For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." (2 Cor 11:2-3).

This is precisely the effect of ecumenical mixing on the faithful who allow themselves to be beguiled by it. Satan wants to lure the pure bride into the abominations and defilements of the harlot.

The Bad Fruits of the Ecumenical Movement

The ecumenical aspirations of the end times, therefore, cause deception and corruption in the church and pose a great spiritual danger to the true believers. They are no doubt decorated and camouflaged with skillful Bible quotations and humanism-influenced, noble declarations of intent, but they can do nothing but destroy. Today's ecumenical aspirations for unity have four actual effects, which are at the same time corrupt fruits according to **Matthew 7:15-20**:

1. The ecumenical movement serves to capture the true church, to mix it with the leaven of the nominal Christianity and to corrupt its divine, sacred nature. The biblical church is to be broken in its power and brought under the domination of Rome. Satan wants to weaken and render ineffective the true church as "*pillars and the foundations of truth*" (1 Timothy 3:15); he wants to desecrate the holy priesthood of God and lead the faithful to spiritual fornication, as stated in the prophetic warning against Jezebel.
2. Compromises "for the sake of unity" are intended to prevent true believers from clearly preaching the biblical gospel and leading Protestant and Catholic nominal Christians to salvation. Under the guise of "unity", the Roman Church strives to prevent all clear preaching of the Gospel as "proselytism". The enemy wants to keep the lost souls in darkness and therefore tries to suffocate the light of the gospel and to undermine the freedom of preaching the gospel through false unity.
3. The ecumenical movement serves to obscure biblical truth and render it ineffective through bad compromises and mixing with heresies. The biblical gospel is to be falsified by the wrong teachings of the unbelieving, apostate nominal Christianity (see "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification"!). The sound biblical teaching, which includes, among other things, the doctrine of the church, the prophetic vision of the end times and other truths, is to be silenced so that Satan can continue his seductions in a murky spiritual fog and is no longer exposed in the sharp light of biblical truth.
4. The ecumenical unification of all nominal Christians under the domination of the Catholic Church serves to strengthen the developments towards the "world unity church" and thus, biblically and prophetically speaking, to lead the harlot Babylon to her end-time power. It aims with inevitable power at the unification of all world religions into an anti-Christian, Babylonian world unity religion. Into this deceptive unity of "all the children of Adam", which is an abomination before God, the true believers are also meant to be drawn in. Already today, many proponents of ecumenism issue the seductive slogan: "God is the Father of all men, all men are his children, and all religions are ways to God".

The Seduction of the Faithful by Evangelical Advocates of Ecumenism

Today we see leaders from the ranks of evangelicals openly promoting ecumenism and practicing cooperation with the Catholic Church and apostate, theologically liberal Protestant state church leaders. This happens increasingly through the Evangelical Alliance, but also through charismatic seducers, through the "Willow Creek" movement, the "Alpha Course", etc.

The participation of leading evangelicals in the campaign "Together for Europe" is a sad sign of how blind many who still profess Christ and the Bible have become. On the conferences of this movement there are "evangelicals" and radical charismatics in familiar communion with the ultra-Catholic "Schoenstatt Movement", which has taken up the cause of worshipping Mary, and also with the Catholic "Focolare" movement, which openly mixes religions.

Participating organisations include for example: Campus Crusade Europe, AGLOW (Charismatic Women's Group), the "Alpha" Course Movement, the charismatic renewal movement in the Catholic Church, the Taizé Community, the YMCA General Association, "Youth with a Mission", several charismatic "Vineyard" congregations as well as a large number of Catholic and Orthodox organisations and fellowships.

The unity driven by great effort and the congresses organised by this movement, which attracted about 9,000 visitors in 2004 (2007: 8,000), are a symptom of how far the ecumenical deception has already progressed. The Catholic Church encourages such ventures and uses them to bring the evangelical participants ever closer to themselves by emphasizing what they have in common. From their point of view, this is only logical.

What must alarm Bible-believing Christians, however, is the compromising course of reputable people who are regarded as "Bible-believing" and profess the biblical Gospel, but who consciously and energetically work towards a deeper cooperation with the liberal Protestant churches and with the Catholic Church. They claim to stand in the biblical faith, and at the same time declare sworn opponents of this biblical faith to be their "brothers and sisters in Christ" and seek unity with them.

This shows a dangerous spiritual delusion, a deceitful fog, which today robs many of clear spiritual vision. More and more "evangelicals" are blurring the clear differences between light and darkness, between biblical truth and heresy, between believers and unbelievers, between good and evil (**Isa 5:20**), Christ and Belial. They seek the very unequal yoke that Scripture warns against in **2 Corinthians 6** and lead all the evangelical Christians who trust them into mixing with Babylon.

This also applies to the advocates of a "confessional ecumenism" who class themselves as conservatives. Even such a political alliance of convenience with supposedly "biblical-conservative" Catholic circles against "liberal softening" and "secularization" is spiritually wrong and misleading.

This delusion is also expressed in the fact that in their own circles leading evangelicals recommend teachings and practices that are completely contrary to the biblical faith and come from the arsenal of the pagan mystery religion.

This includes the movement of the "New Spirituality" (Richard Foster, Brennan Manning, Henri Nouwen, and others), which advocates pagan mysticism and meditation, and carries New Age ideas and religious mixing into evangelical circles. This is recommended and promoted by well-known evangelicals.

2. The Path of the Biblical Church in the Face of the End-time Ecumenical Aspirations

For the true church, ecumenism's seductive aspirations to unity are a serious danger, but are also a challenge to fidelity and the courageous confession of the true Lord Jesus Christ and His truth, which does not unite everyone, but *divides* between real and false Christians, between mere confessors and the born-again children of God.

True believers know about the biblical unity that is given to them and that is the unity they seek to preserve. This unity exists only and exclusively among true children of God. Praying and working for the realization of this authentic unity should be the concern of every believer.

a) We should preserve and strengthen biblical unity among true believers

Biblical unity among true believers has two sides that we must carefully distinguish so that we are not deceived.

1. The Objective Unity in Christ

All born-again believers are - according to their position - one in Christ (**Gal 3:28**). This unity is wrought by God; it is invisible and refers to the position of the church before God. This unity is perfect, as opposed to any form of practical unity among God's children here on earth, which is always imperfect. This objective unity is also indestructible, it cannot be affected by the failure of people.

The Lord Jesus speaks of this perfect unity, not of any earthly aspiration to unity of Christians, in **John 17**. This should be clear to every reader of the Bible when the Lord describes this unity as follows:

"... that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that you sent Me. "And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me." (Jn 17:21-23).

When we realise that our unity among ourselves is described by the Lord as being of the same quality as the mysterious, perfect unity of the Father and the Son, it quickly becomes clear that such a perfect

unity can only be realised in practice when the believers are completely free of the flesh, that is, after their glorification and unification with Christ.

When Christ and His church become manifest on earth in glory, then the world will know Christ and his saints, who today are despised and misunderstood. Today, however, this perfect unity only exists in Spirit and in Christ and is not yet visible on earth.

This objective, perfect spiritual unity of God's children is also described in Scripture as the unity of the body of Christ, to which all born-again believers belong (1 Cor 12:13; Rom 12:5). The body is one through the working of the Spirit of God (which is why the *"unity of the Spirit"* is also spoken of - Eph 4:3), and no one can interfere with this unity of the body, just as no one can "establish" or "heal" it. The Body of Christ does not include the Catholic Church or any of the apostate Protestant churches that want to "unite" in ecumenism.

We would like to emphasise once again: *the perfect unity of the church is only revealed before the world when the glorified church returns to earth with Christ*. Then this previously invisible, Spirit-wrought unity will be perfect, no longer impaired by the works of the flesh. Only then will the world believe - not in the present dispensation, where the world has rejected Christ and only a selection will be saved. Any attempt to establish this perfect unity today, externally and by human means, is delusive, presumptuous, and doomed to failure.

2. The practical unity among true believers

This unity is relative and imperfect and in practice limited by the impact of the flesh. The Spirit of God leads all true believers to a unity of mind, faith, and service based on the truth and teaching of the Word of God.

However, the flesh and the influences of seduction, differences in knowledge, and tradition are sources of disunity that will only be overcome when the church is glorified. Therefore, divisions and partisanship in this day and age cannot be avoided or overcome by human effort; they are permitted by God (1 Cor 11:19), although not wanted by God.

To realise practical unity means to *"preserve the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace"* (Eph 4:2) and to strive for the *"unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God"* (Eph 4:13) - this too can only be approximately achieved here in this world and only among spiritually mature believers.

However, all believers should vigorously strive for it and do everything possible to remove the existing unbiblical divisions between true believers and to promote unanimity and loving fellowship as well as cooperation in the service of the Lord.

Here, it also deals with the unity of mind, as described in the Epistle to the Philippians:

"Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel ... fulfil my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." (Phil 1:27; 2.2)

"I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord." (Phil 4:2)

Furthermore, the unity of a loving, reconciled coexistence among the born-again believers (cf. Eph 4:32-5:2; Col 3:12-15) should be aspired. Such unity can only be sought on the basis of biblical truth. To all who accept and spread false doctrine, the clear biblical commandment of segregation applies (cf. also 1 Tim 6:5; 2 Tim 3:5; Tit 3:10-11):

"Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil." (Rom 16:17-19)

b) We should see through and reject the unbiblical unity of ecumenism

It is especially important for true believers in this day and age to see through and reject the misleading applications of precious statements of the Bible to false ecumenical unity. Today's advocates of the great ecumenical mixing like to invoke the *commandment of love* among the believers, as given to us by our Lord (cf. Jn 13:34; Jn 15:12; 1 Jn 4:7-21).

But let us note that this commandment refers only to the *true children of God born of the Spirit of God* and never to nominal Christians who have never believed the biblical gospel. To "love" these pseudo-Christians that are not born-again by making oneself one with them is a twofold violation of genuine, biblical love:

* On the one hand, it is a lack of love for these pseudo-Christians themselves, who are fooled into thinking that they are saved, while in truth they are lost if they do not repent and accept the true, biblical gospel of Jesus Christ. To love them means to lovingly warn them and to show them the way to true salvation. However, this is precisely what the advocates of ecumenical "unity" want to prevent us from doing!

* On the other hand, such a false "love" would be a violation of the love for our Lord and Saviour, who bought us with His blood. To love Him means to hold on to His Word unflinchingly, to endure steadfastly the shame of segregation and the enmity of the world (including the religious world), and to hate evil. How can we love the Lord if we make ourselves one with those who have rejected Him and despise His truth?

The second great seduction argument of the ecumenists lies in the incorrectly referenced Word of our Lord concerning unity from **John 17**. We have already seen in point a) that this perfect unity of which the Lord speaks already exists invisibly through the working of the Spirit - but only between all true, born-again believers. In this sense, no human being can contribute anything to this unity, promote it or bring it about - it is already wrought by God and is a reality in the spiritual sense.

This Spirit-wrought unity, however, excludes all false teachers and seducers, all false prophets and apostles who, according to the testimony of Scripture, are not born-again, but are instruments of the adversary (cf. inter alia: Mt 7:15-23; 2 Cor 11:13-15; Rom 16:17-18; Gal 5:7-12; Phil 3:18-19; Col 2:16-19; 2 Th 2:9-12; 1 Tim 6:3-5; 2 Tim 3:1-13; Tit 1:10-16; 2 Pt 2:1-22; 1 Jn 2:19-26; 1 Jn 4:1-6; 2 Jn 1:7-10; Jude 1:4-19). Thus, all popes and patriarchs, cardinals, and Catholic - as well as liberal-Protestant - bishops, all modernist theology professors and charismatic false prophets, and thus also all leaders of the ecumenical movement are excluded!

The true, Spirit-wrought unity of believers also excludes all nominal Christians who have never accepted the biblical gospel and have never repentantly turned to the biblical Lord Jesus Christ. It is not the outward avowal to any "Jesus" or "Christ" that counts here - the Bible itself warns us that in the last days there will be many false "Jesus" figures and Christs! - only the true belief in the true Lord Jesus Christ, as He is revealed to us in the Holy Scripture, is necessary. And this includes the standards for true Christians, as given to us by Scripture (cf. inter alia: Rom 8:5-9; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 2 Cor 4:3-6; Gal 3:10; Eph 5:1-14; 1 John 2:3-6; 1 John 3:1-10; 1 John 5:10-13).

When we apply the standards of the Bible, we recognise the ecumenical aspirations to unity as unbiblical and deceitful. We recognise that they basically impair the biblically commanded unity among believers and run counter to the real meaning of the Lord's commandments and prayers. To seek this false unity basically means betraying our Lord and His Word and promoting the apostasy from Him.

Therefore, as believers who truly want to be faithful to the Lord and His Word, we can only resolutely reject any such unbiblical unity and are not allowed have anything to do with ecumenical aspirations.

c) We should resolutely adhere to the Word of Truth

An important principle for the true church to survive in this time is the *unconditional, unflinching, resolute adherence to the Word of God*, to Sacred Scripture and its sound teaching. Only the Word of God can give the true believers clear orientation and guidance in this time of seduction.

Defending, studying, and living out this inerrant, inspired Word in obedience of faith is essential to the end-time church. The exalted Lord praises the church of Philadelphia, which is a prophetic image of the faithful remnant of believers in the end times, precisely for this reason:

"I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth." (Rev 3:8+10)

Especially in the face of increasing seductions in the end times, which will certainly be accompanied by persecution in the future, it is so important that we consciously choose the path of faithfulness and spur each other on to faithfulness and love for our Lord.

We need the *"simplicity that is in Christ"* (2 Cor 11:3) to withstand all the sophisticated arguments of the seducers, who do their utmost to seduce the saints and the elect, with pseudo-scientific "Bible-criticism" to emotional calls for false unity and enraptured visions and ecstasy experiences.

d) We should heed and practice separation from everything opposed to God as a law of life of the true church

What attitude should the true believers have towards ecumenical aspirations? The answer is found in a fundamental statement of the Apostle Paul, which is of great importance to every believer and every biblical church:

"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?

For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them, I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty." (2 Cor 6:14-18)

Here a divine principle, which is the prerequisite for the spiritual survival of the true church of God, is expressed. The true church can only exist spiritually in the end times if it consistently and clearly separates itself from the harlot, from the pagan nominal Christianity, from heresy and falsified Christianity, as it prevails today.

"And I heard another voice from heaven saying, 'Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.'" (Rev 18:4)

Here, the church is in a spiritual life-or-death struggle, waged by the prince of this world with all the weapons of his cunning, and in which we need the whole armour of God to survive. The devil's goal is to corrupt the chaste virgin, the bride, and to draw her into the spiritual fornication of the great harlot Babylon (cf. 2 Cor 11:2-3).

The true church has received a glorious calling and a most important mission from God. This church is the light of the world in the midst of the worst darkness, the pillar and the foundation of truth in this world deluged with floods of lies, the only herald of the true gospel of God's grace in Christ, the holy priesthood that worships and serves the true God in the midst of the multitudes of blind idolaters; the pure bride who awaits her heavenly bridegroom and keeps herself undefiled from the world in the hope of Him.

All this and much more is at stake if the destroyer and seducer succeeds in entangling the church in the heresies and abominations of ecumenism. The true church, respectively the faithful remnant of believers, who still take the calling of the true church seriously, must therefore do everything in their power to clearly and completely separate themselves from the seductive aberrations of these last days.

In addition to ecumenism, this includes above all the falsely prophetic Pentecost and Charismatic Movement as well as criticism of the Bible in every form and variety. All these seductive movements corrupt

the church and draw it into the great stream of Babylonian fornication (cf. my treatise *"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock!" The Importance of the Spiritual Watchman Ministry for the End-Time Church*).

Important leaders of evangelical Christianity have opened the floodgates to precisely these movements in recent years! The true believers who want to follow the Lord consistently cannot remain in such mixed and seduced "evangelical" circles either; the commandment of separation from all the leaven of evil brings them outside the "evangelical" camp together into biblical churches and home assemblies.

3. The Importance of Independent Biblical Churches and Home Assemblies Today

Among the vital principles for the true church in the end times is the gathering of faithful believers in local, biblical churches and home assemblies, independent of any involvement in ecumenism, who clearly hold to and practice the biblical teaching of the NT.

It is increasingly becoming a spiritual danger for faithful believers if they remain in the increasingly worldly and corrupt evangelical churches that are open to ecumenism, charismaticism, and criticism of the Bible. Regarding the engulfment into the whore Babylon, the serious call of God in the book of Revelation applies:

"And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities." (Rev 18:4-5)

In this hour it is necessary to make holy decisions before God and to really walk the path of separation in obedience to the faith. This means going out of all churches and church entities that tolerate or even promote heresy, that give place to charismatic and ecumenical seduction or are even directly involved in ecumenism.

"Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.

Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." (2 Tim 2:19-22).

This applies especially to the true believers who, despite many concerns, still endure in the Protestant state churches, because they have been misled by the leaders of the community movement and others to ignore God's clearly revealed will regarding biblical church and to take upon themselves the unequal yoke of unbelievers, false teachers, and the wicked.

However, it is also increasingly applicable to believers from free churches that used to be clearly Bible-believing, who are often drawing nearer and nearer to the modernist ecumenical-charismatic route of seduction.

The separation from all Babylonian influences must be accompanied by a cooperation that is faithful and willing to make sacrifices in the important work of building and strengthening consistently-biblical independent churches, which do not allow themselves to be entangled in human umbrella organisations and churches, but are committed only to the Lord and His Word according to the apostolic model of the NT.

We urgently need such congregations - and even if they perhaps increasingly only bear the elementary character of smaller house churches, because the number of faithful believers in many places is only small or also because future persecution may make today's church structures no longer practicable.

We need the fellowship and encouragement of such dear children of God who *"call upon the Lord from a pure heart,"* and the faithful Lord also wants to give them to us.

Let us pray much and earnestly for the formation of such churches, especially that the Lord may call and equip many clearly faithful brothers who are willing to make sacrifices as pastors and preachers in such churches! Let us trust the Lord ourselves that He also wants to use us to support such churches, according to the spiritual gift we have received from Him!

*Therefore we also pray always for you,
that our God would count you worthy of this calling,
and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness
and the work of faith with power,
that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you
and you in Him,
according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.
(2 Thess 1:11-12)*

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