

UNITY IN UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY

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Unity as a triad

It is with an image from music – the triad – that I view the relationship between unity, uniqueness, and diversity:

The *root of the chord* is the basis for everything – the foundation from which all things derive, upon which everything rests, and in which everything is contained.

In this case, the root is unity.

Adding the *third of the chord* results in a more voluminous harmony and expresses diversity – that which goes beyond all else and differs from all that is.

Finally the *fifth of the chord* imparts a unique and distinctive tone quality that makes the chord shine and gives it its own special, vivid sound.

Although each of the three tones can resonate individually, each needs the others to reach the perfection of full harmony. A single tone by itself, without the other two, sounds stale and boring.

Thus, when speaking of unity, we invariably mean a unity that respects and values uniqueness and diversity equally. If it doesn't, unity degenerates into mere uniformity and conformity, becoming lifeless and dull. Unity can only come alive when one is mindful of human relationships and of our interdependence – that we need one another.

Regarding the question as to what each human being's uniqueness means to them and what consequences result from it, my confirmation candidates from back home have offered the astonishing – and I feel very fitting – definition: All people belong together, yet everyone is free to be different.

When we speak of diversity we are referring to a diversity that recognizes itself as variety in individuality, as a plurality that sees its own uniqueness mirrored in others, while at the same time admiring the others' differences. The group and the individual are linked to and exist in relationship with one another. Because there is uniqueness, there is diversity. Conversely, where uniqueness is threatened, diversity perishes.

Thinking of Unity in Terms of the Trinity

We can also express this in terms of the Trinity:

God, the creator and source of all life, is the originator of unity and has granted unity to all of us by creating humankind in relation to Himself, in His image, and in relation to our fellow creatures as equals. Each person has been granted rights and dignity in equal measure, and each is precious and unique.

In **Christ** who gives Himself and His life for us, our uniqueness acquires its special meaning: each one of us is special to Him. In His love He follows us to the farthest reaches of the earth so that no one will be lost. In other words – it is that hundredth sheep (Luke 15:3-7) that is essential for establishing the unity of the Church.

In the **Spirit** that is multifaceted power and overwhelming joy – the colorful splendor and imaginativeness of life that is expressed in so many various forms. The power of God's Spirit has many voices and is unlimited. It gathers together and connects that, which was dispersed, and is inspiring and creative beyond understanding. Every day the Spirit creates new wonders for all to see.

At the same time, our existence in the presence of God's Spirit reassures us that we are held safely and cared for by God, and the Spirit's inner bond keeps us living in permanent relation to others, the Creator, and

Christ. Thus the triad of unity – the interaction of Creator, Redeemer, and Spirit gains stature and space in our lives.

The Austrian lyric poet Erich Fried describes the experience of the opposite of such inseparable unity in his love poem “Without You”. He conveys the perceptions of a person mourning the separation from or saying farewell to a loved one. The person who has been left alone and lonely feels different without his beloved; in particular, there is a feeling of being less than before.

Erich Fried, Without You

*Not nothing
without you
but not the same*

*Not nothing
without you
but perhaps less*

*Not nothing
but less
and less*

*Perhaps not nothing
without you
but not much more*

What is true in the context of a lover’s relationship is also true regarding our togetherness or “non-togetherness” in unity, uniqueness, and diversity. We notice how much we need each other.

Unity in Justice and Holiness

Unity that is perceived, honored, and protected in its uniqueness and diversity is conditional, carrying with it the **requirement and consequence** – which is justice.

Unity without justice cannot be put into practice because unity, in essence, is justice – not only in that unity honors and respects that with which it lives, but also in the sense that being together is consciously shaped, and that unity’s success depends on the preservation and defense of each person’s right to be unique.

At the same time, justice is the result of unity – it is visible, demonstrable, and to be experienced by everyone. The Church of Jesus Christ does not exist for itself alone in “splendid isolation”, but within a world yearning for justice every day, every hour, everywhere (Romans 8.18-22). The Church of Jesus Christ is part of this world, a place in which nobody can claim justice for him or herself alone, because such justice is no justice at all.

The command to promote that which is right and to stand up for justice is connected to the mission of preserving a living and multifaceted unity, “making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”(Eph 4.3) – together, for one another, in this world, now and today: “(You were taught) to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Eph 4.23-24).

When the reformed world family has gathered to make plans for the future under the programmatic declaration to preserve unity, that future will be marked by the continuous search for that which is right and intercession for justice.

The letter to the Ephesians makes it unequivocally clear:

You can’t have one without the other. Life in unity involves engagement for justice, and holiness will be proven in such activity.

The urgent appeal to the Christian community of the past is equally valid today:

Change your minds, change your conduct, renew yourselves for God's sake and live according to your calling as justified by God, and therefore as justified people who are not only asked to do what is right, but who are qualified to do so in a special way!

The ethical principle of the interaction of justification and sanctification particularly emphasized by Reformed theology will therefore be a significant theological aspect and a distinctive mark of the future World Community of Reformed Churches.

Although we do not yet know what this future will look like, we can have some idea of what the just actions look like that will foster it and make it possible. The following further emphasizes the interaction and interweaving of unity and justice:

Social science speaks of justice as *iustitia connectiva* (Jan Assmann). The term describes actions directed toward the relationship, communication, and solidarity of people amongst themselves, and likewise portrays a lively relationship between humankind and God. Acting on behalf of one another, being there for each other, and living together – these things are best expressed by *iustitia connectiva*, which keeps society together. Central to such a “connective justice” are the life options of its subjects, and the concern for or care of the most vulnerable and marginalized people becomes the crucial criterion of justice.

With this definition of justice in mind, I would like to impress upon each of us within the newly reformed world community a sentence from the Beatitudes: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” (Mt. 5.6)

I hear two messages in this passage:

Firstly, the promise of God's protection, redemption and blessing is given to those who are yearning for right and justice in so many different places on earth today, because it has been withheld from them in their economic, social, political and cultural contexts.

Secondly, I hear this Beatitude as Jesus' appeal to all of us as the Church to be engaged in human rights and justice for the earth – as if such engagement, which can sometimes truly be a battle, were a physical need like hunger or thirst. Blessing – and in the end, the fulfillment of body and soul – is promised to those who follow this desire to fight and take responsibility for justice.