

How ecumenical partnerships develop

A modern example

I have long taught that any ecumenical advances are dangerous and any unwise partnership leads to damaging the body. Nothing should alter the Biblical principles of the independence of the local congregation and leadership by a team of equal elders pastoring one small local house church.

I have often debated with sincere church leaders who deny this and use pragmatic arguments to support their involvement with this or that ecumenical group. Usually the argument is based upon ideas of enabling better united evangelism, sharing church buildings, sharing leadership with differing strengths, gathering for a united worship time and so forth.

When such partnerships involve church leaders with a rogue theology, there is always immediate spiritual damage to evangelical churches joining them. In time such damage begins to manifest itself. However, even when there is a partnership of like-minded churches, the results never reach expectations because it is an unbiblical strategy.

Today we have seen an example of where unwise associations lead to, according to BBC News.¹

2,500 churches and chapels in Wales originally associated together in the 1970s with the aim of working more closely together. However, the current economical strictures, coupled with diminishing congregations, have led to radical discussions about deeper unity. One purpose is to promote a stronger united political voice, but the key issue is to actually unite into a new single denomination, 'the five Covenanted Churches in Wales'. This would incorporate the Church in Wales, Presbyterians, Methodists and Baptists.

A conference in Aberystwyth is discussing these proposals which would see a new sort of bishop and ordained clergy to be interchangeable between denominations in the group, as well as sharing buildings. The Archbishop of Wales, Dr Barry Morgan, said the conference would see the 'largest ecumenical gathering in Wales for many years'. The Rev Gethin Abraham-Williams, chairman of the Commission of Covenanted Churches, added that he hoped the conference would lead to the creation of a new 'ecclesial (sic) community committed to common mission in the world'.

Previous reports had shown that radical measures were required for the Welsh churches to survive due to lack of numbers and insufficient finances; these had suggested that denominations work together. A study by three leading Anglicans showed very low morale and said the situation was dire. Some chapels had a vicar with no congregation; others had a congregation with no clergy. In addition there were too many churches and many had very large repair bills.

¹ BBC © 2012. Page last updated at 11:12 BST, Saturday, 13 October 2012.

While some observers may dismiss this as parochial to Wales involving non-evangelicals, the situation in England is very similar involving evangelical congregations. For instance there are many Reformed Baptist chapels struggling to survive with high maintenance old buildings housing a congregation of three or four old people.

Note that the original purpose of the association was to work more closely together for spiritual objectives (such as evangelism and worship). In forty years it has led to demands for formal identification as one new denomination with shared ministry, administration, finance and buildings.

This is where all ecumenical processes lead – to a formalised, practical unity. Where the ecumenical process involves a large administrative body (such as Roman Catholicism) then the large body wins out in the end. [Note the weakening of the Anglican Church and the near extinction of Methodism since they got involved with ecumenism in the 60s.] It is also the case that association of evangelical churches with compromised churches leads to the creation of a fully compromised body – note the liberal United Reformed Church which extinguished the bulk of evangelical British Congregational church movement.²]

We must understand the satanic plan for the end and listen to God’s warnings in Scripture. The world is seeking to create a unified, ecumenical, compromised church that is a catch-all for everybody. This will ultimately receive state sanction and protection and all other independent churches will be persecuted. The practical gathering together in regional or national associations to ‘work closely together’ to common advantage, is merely the first stage in the ecumenical process.

Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits’. 1 Cor 15:33

He who walks with wise *men* will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed. Prov 13:20

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² A very small continuing Congregational church carried on, as is often the case.