

Metanoia

by John Valk

Unity With a Difference

All next week (Jan. 22-29) something special and unique will occur throughout Christendom. Initiatives will be undertaken, and efforts made, to symbolically and visibly manifest unity among all who identify themselves as Christian. Next week is "The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity." Will there be mention made of this world-wide week of events in the public media?

No doubt the media is concerned with unity, even if its reporting tends to focus on disunity. It is particularly concerned with economic, political and social-cultural unity. Next week's ecclesiastical events focus on such unity, yet it goes far beyond them. But will the media ignore it? Our public institutions generally ignore matters spiritual.

Division rather than unity appears to define us. Our wealth and possessions divide us. Our political divisions threaten our country. Our moral differences impede legislation. Our racial and gender antagonisms create contentious political correctness. So much is our division that elected leaders rarely undertake action unencumbered by lobby initiatives.

Unity of vision, purpose and outlook appears to elude us. Yet, all next week the world of Christendom will leave behind, even if only symbolically and for a short period of time, all differences that produce divisions. Rather than focus internally, Christians will look externally.

What is it that unites all Christians, and why should that warrant anyone's attention? What interest might such display of unity possibly have for non-Christians? Of what significance might that be to a university community?

experiencing for the first time, in a nation founded on Christian principles, the phenomenon of "closet Christianity": hesitation of public disclosure of religious convictions.

Such reticence is reinforced by a secu-

and job-training. In that sense, education is ultimately spiritual. Do we not ask what ultimately gives meaning to our education, our jobs, our lives? Is it the money, status and power derived from them?

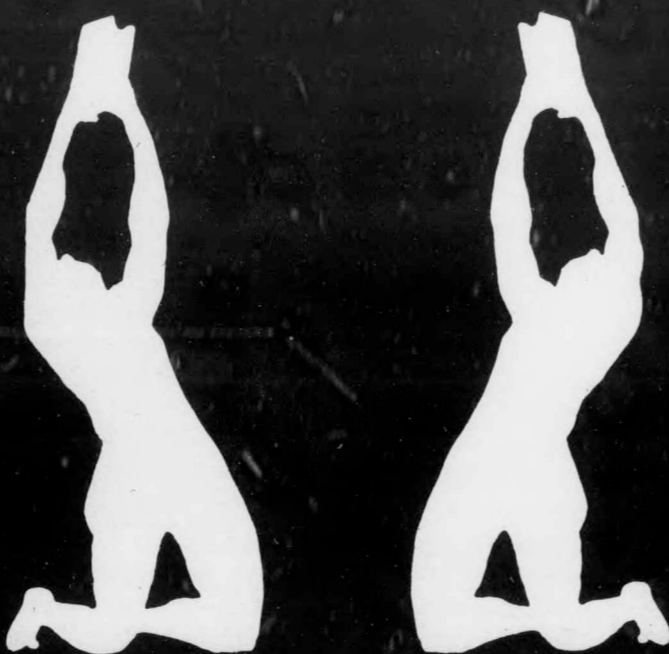
of Jesus Christ, recorded in the Scriptures and attested to by the Church. That is what unites us. Any other way we slice life—professionally, socially, morally, economically—comes up short.

Included in the Christian recognition is a unique view of humanity. It both exalts the human—capable of great deeds and expressions—and is conscious of its short-comings—capable of extraordinary greed, exploitation, self-centeredness and terror. We see, as does God, that we need to remove the latter from our lives. Jesus revealed to us that such removal, or healing in our individual and corporate lives, comes not ultimately by means of increased economic prosperity, unfettered personal opportunities, maximised pleasure, or legislated individual rights. These are too focused on the self.

Healing comes by focusing on the other, giving rather than receiving, contentment rather than craving. It is a recognition that we gain power by giving it away, freedom by giving up our rights, and wealth by giving of our selves and our possessions. All this occurs when we place hope and trust in God's way for the healing of our individual and corporate lives, not in the power of our own understandings, initiatives, and abilities.

Futile are our efforts to comprehend such assertions, especially through the power of our own reasoning. Much of it defies human logic. Even more does it go against the very grain of the "publicly acceptable." Will we hear mention of the "Week of Prayer for Christian Unity" outside our own ecclesiastical

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In our secular society there is a general indifference for things Christian. Perhaps there is even a subtle public disdain. The word so often evokes images of conservatism, even extremism or fanaticism. Does this explain why we are

lar educational system, which encourages the privatisation of religion. Such a system also falsely purports to be religiously neutral, and that is most unfortunate. Education is about meaning and purpose, more so than it is about jobs

How does this touch Christians, even those on campus, particularly during the week of January 22-29? It is the recognition that meaning and purpose in life ultimately comes to us from God, through the life, death and resurrection



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