

**Eumenical Service Puy de Serre 19th January 2014**

**Shortened English translation version of the Sermon**

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Chers amis je vous remercie pour l'invitation qui m'est faite.

This meditation will be on the Epistle reading, I Corinthians ch. 1.

Today's question: How to reconcile our denominational identities and the ecumenical movement in order to show the unity of the Church?

Confessional or denominational identity fluctuates. Within a denomination, hardly any two people will have the very same belief. So day we face two understandings of ecumenism, consensus and affirming our differences.

Two positions opposed themselves around WWI period. Roman Catholics believed to be the Church. And national identity was often tied to a religion. French, Spaniards, Austrians, Poles... were Catholics.

In mostly Northern Europe another attitude was developing regarding denominational identities. We were divided and that was a sin, since Christ cannot be divided. So Protestants started working together, missions and social work were often times places of cooperation and union.

Thus prayer meetings for the reunion of Churches were common.

Yet the Church of Christ is rich of its large array of denominations and it is only with this rainbow of churches that we make the universal (truly catholic) Church.

Uniformity in Church life may even be seen as a sin against the Holy Spirit who gives different gifts to his people.

Today we can witness the awakening of religious identities. We seem to go from one historical commemoration to another. And some long forgotten Church practices come back up to the surface. This goes to show that denominational identities are not only based on theological statements. Other questions are added, such as ethics and political positions.

Thus we can witness to the constant changing of our denominations, some more obvious than others.

As an example, in 1930 the French Reformed foundation was shuffled with the addition of many Methodist, Evangelical and Free Churches. And that new group called themselves French Reformed, as it was the oldest denomination. This joining of Churches also generated a group of French reformed evangelical Independent...

In 2013 the Reformed Church joined with the Lutheran, giving birth to the Eglise protestante unie, communion luthérienne et réformée.

Yet today, who would still cling to the double predestination theory so dear to Calvin ?

Churches were impacted by a number of situations, amongst them Pietism, Revivals, contemporary exegesis, 20th Century totalitarianism, Secularism... those movements and others have deeply shaped our denominational identities.

All this to say what you already know ! Denominations are human realities and changes are expected, even if amongst Roman Catholics, changes are much more discreet than in Anglican or Protestant circles.

But your commitment to your Church doesn't make you a Christian.

And that's an essential dimension of my sermon.

Reciting a declaration of faith, being a member are steps in your life but faith is yet another dimension. It is a personal belief in a God as presented by witnesses.

Church leaders seem to hesitate between two attitudes. Calling for a closer relationship between denominations and comforting denominational identity. The pendulum swings back and forth.

Yet establishing communion is nevertheless possible if we practice a mutual recognition and thus open the way to the Eucharist.

On that field, the majority of Protestants have a long practice of an open communion table. Welcoming all who know Jesus-Christ as Savior and Lord.

Having Christ back at the center of the Ecumenical movement is clearly moving forward and going beyond denominational and institutional roles.

The world is here awaiting for the Good News of reconciliation, forgiveness, peace, love. It is our role to make Christ known and to think together at making the message of the Gospel audible to folks around us. Let us serve Christ, our common Savior and Lord. Then the world will know, by the love that we share, that we are disciples.

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