

Samuel Moreno MANRIQUE

Harmony in Diversity

- That is Unity

When I was a child I used to wonder every time I learned about a new Christian denomination. Why? Why if it is the same faith and the same founder, must there be so many different names? Why if it is love, forgiveness, reconciliation, life, salvation and many more similar things that are preached, are there so many that criticize the rest? Why do some claim that they are the only ones who carry the Truth? What truth? And why can't we dream of a day when we could have a single Church – institutionally and structurally speaking – where all traditions and dogmas would come together to form the Only Church?

HARMONY IN CREATION

All these questions and many more were with me for a long time. I think that these very same questions and the desire to find an answer to them were the ones that led me to join the ecumenical world, and more specifically, to join the Student Christian Movement (SCM) of my country.

Of course the answering process was not fast at all. It was slow. But it was also deep – and it continues. Time and experience brought me conclusions that are rooted, conclusions that deepen everyday. Some of these experiences were learnt from simple observation of Creation (Nature), while others came from the Bible.

We can learn from everything – from animals and from a river too. We also learn from our fellow men and women. When I first experienced this, I realized that if I incorporated it into my way of thinking, it would mean a huge change of much of my criteria and points of view. If I really wanted to learn from nature, then the first thing I would realize is that everything around is different from everything else.

Nevertheless, despite the huge diversity, everything interacts in a harmonic way. In other words, the Creation of God we preach of is a diverse but harmonic one. So if the God we speak about chose diversity rather than uniformity, why are we trying to conform every single thing we make when we have been sealed under diversity? This was one of the first lessons I learned that led me to rethink the questions I wondered when I was a child.

COLORS ARE MADE FOR TASTES

Eventually I began to wonder more about *what* than *why*. What can this or that denomination contribute to my widening of faith and spiritual life? What can I do to create a better dialogue and understanding between denominations? And to what extent would it be healthy and wise to speak and dream of a Unified Church, rather than to speak or dream of The Church – understood as harmonic and diverse in unity?

Thanks to these lessons I learnt that indeed “colors are made for tastes”. This is why some people prefer a denomination where praise is energetic and excited and others prefer one where clapping is not even done. Some people like meetings in small and simple places

and others find comfort in large, elaborate meetings. Certain people like an authoritarian pastor and others prefer one that is more flexible. All these things makes us feel pleasant, part of a specific community, and in that way live a spirituality full of God's presence—life and joy in company of real brothers and sisters.

MEMBERS OF ONE BODY

The apostle Paul draws a parallel between the Church and the body. The text traditionally has been interpreted – and indeed quite literally it reads – that it is the diversity of the Church's functions that allow it to function. But I wonder, why can't it be read also as if the body was the Church and as if the organs were the different denominations?

We have four Gospels, but none are identical. The four Gospels tell the same story, describe the life and ministry of the same person, but do so differently. Besides being written by different authors – who each had different interest, culture, ideas, and feelings – each of the Gospels was written with a specific addressee in mind. Nevertheless the four stories are complementary, one of another.

Furthermore, Jesus did not choose twelve disciples of identical backgrounds. None of them had the same interest in following him. But all of them, except “the one that had to be lost”, united after Jesus' ascension to carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Wasn't this harmonic, even in spite of the varied criteria, methods, and characters?

THE PRAYER OF JESUS

I shall share one last example. In John 17, Jesus prays to his Father for his disciples. In verse 11 he says, “Holy Father keep through Your own name those whom You have given me that they may be one as we are.” Jesus says, “they be one as we are.” We know that “we” means God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Aren't they three different persons but at the same time only one? So our God is the only God, and also a plural one. He is a diverse but harmonic God. And I think that this is what Jesus' prayer illustrates: that we all, not despite of, but through and thanks to our diversity are like God – Father, Son and Holy Ghost – one diversity. That is His nature... and ours too.

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