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The Secret of God's Plan—Studies in Ephesians—
Study Two

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Book Review

Vol. XLI

March 1970

No. 3

The Secret of God's Plan

Studies in Ephesians — Study Two

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The author is graduate professor of exegesis at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. This essay is one in a series that has behind it the benefit of discussions at various pastoral conferences of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. All four were read at a sequence of professional development seminars held for Air Force chaplains in different parts of the world. In 1968 the St. Louis seminary faculty heard them at its fall retreat.

In our previous study¹ we attempted to depict the content of God's secret plan and the structure of what we chose to call the overture to Ephesians (1:3-14). We noted how the opening verses of this epistle anchored the "mystery of God's will" in Christ as the manifestation of the divine purpose at work in history. We referred to this intent as a "secret," partly because there was a time at which the final purpose of God's activity had not yet been revealed. Now it is an open secret. It was made known first to the apostles and then, by their word, to each generation of Christians, now also to us. Yet a certain hiddenness remains in God's redemptive activity. Its movement and its effects are open only to the eyes of faith. For this reason the author of Ephesians chose the word "mystery" as his term for the plan God has for the universe.

As God's plan of liberation is worked out in history it might be thought of as His divine purpose in the process of un-

folding. Commenting on Rom. 8:30-31, Emil Brunner has described what might be called the parabola of redemption as that "'golden' chain of concepts which links both ends of the path of salvation."² The story begins in eternity with God's decision that He would be served by a redeemed community. The gradient moves down steeply into our existence, where that work goes on which is described by the second and third verbs in the sentence of Rom. 8:30, which reads: "And those whom He predestined He also *called*; and those whom He called He also *justified*; and those whom He justified He also glorified." With the last word of the verse the gradient moves back up into eternity. To be sure, the verb occurs in the past tense. It does so because the apostle can, by revelation, talk about the outcome from a position at the end and even beyond history. From that vantage point he saw something of the glory to be revealed in us as the result of God's calling and justifying us.

In our first study we did not provide a rough outline of Ephesians. It seemed best at the moment to move directly into the opening doxology and so to demonstrate something of the style and spirit of this epistle. Now we need a map, so to speak, in order to appreciate the organization of this epistle.

Normally, of course, it is difficult to out-

¹ Martin H. Scharlemann, "The Secret of God's Plan (Studies in Ephesians)," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XL (September 1969), 532-44.

² Heinrich Emil Brunner, *The Letter to the Romans: A Commentary*, trans. H. A. Kennedy (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), p. 77.

line a letter. Letters are not written to be analyzed. Ephesians, however, is an epistle in form only. In point of fact, it is a theological treatise; its structure is not difficult to determine. The first three chapters deal with doctrine; the remaining three chapters discuss the Christian's response to God's initiative.

The first part of Ephesians opens with a doxology (1:2-14) and closes with one (3:20-21). The opening act of thanksgiving is followed by a prayer for the enlightenment of the readers (1:15—2:10). There follows an exposition on the unity of mankind as mirrored in the life of the church (2:11-22). Then comes a statement on the message and mission of Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles (3:1-13). As the overture is followed by a prayer, so the closing statement of praise is preceded by a petition for the advancement of the readers toward fulfillment (3:14-19). In other words, diagrammatically speaking, we have the following pattern: a, b, c; c, b, a. Here is evidence of literary craftsmanship. The very structure of these first chapters indicates to what extent the apostle observed the laws of creative writing.

The last chapters (4—6) contain four exhortations. These are followed by five verses presenting an appeal for prayers (6:19-20), a commendation for the bearer of the epistle (6:21-22), and a benediction (6:23-24). The four exhortations just referred to are the following: to promote the unity of the church (4:1-16); to have done with pagan ways (4:17 to 15:20); to practice subordination in the Christian household (5:21—6:9); and to put on God's full armor (6:10-18).

With this general outline in mind, we take up the matter of implementing God's

secret plan. Here we shall deal with Christ as the agent of God's good pleasure, the church as His instrument, and the individual as His tool for unity and maturity. The specific passages we shall deal with are 1:20-23 and 4:1-16.

The first of these two pericopes is part of a prayer for the enlightenment of the readers. Here the apostle mentions the fact that in his own prayer life he kept asking God that his readers might be given insight into the power with which, in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God had acted to carry out His design for the universe.

In passing we ought to note the apostle's pastoral concern for his readers. It would make an interesting study to pick up the various references in Paul's epistles to his own prayer life. That would help us discover what such passages imply for Paul's sustained interest in the churches he had founded at various places. We might also observe that, in the present instance, the apostle is quite frank in suggesting that it takes wisdom and revelation to comprehend the purposes of God. As our risen Lord chose to show Himself only to His followers (Acts 1:3), so God's ways are made known only to those who are given enlightenment by God's Spirit. While God's secret plan is at work in the universe, it takes wisdom from on high to understand what God is up to. We have been given the Scriptures, in part, for the purpose of giving us the clue to the mystery of God's will as it moves through history.

With reference to the *exceeding might* (1:19) which God manifested in raising Jesus from the dead we shall do well to quote the text itself:

. . . the power which He exerted in the

Messiah when He raised Him from the dead and set Him on His right hand in the heavenly sphere far above every principality and authority and power and lordship and every title that is being mentioned not only in this age but also in the coming one. He put everything in subjection beneath His feet, and appointed Him as head above everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills the totality of all things in every respect. (1:20-23)

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was God's greatest act of redemptive power. It is the apostle's prayer that his readers be given an insight into this manifestation of strength so that they might know the dimension and the basis of both their hope and their heritage. Both are now secure, since Christ was raised from the dead and is seated at God's right hand. What the apostle here asserts is that Jesus Christ has been entrusted with the running of the universe, no matter what part of it any one may name. Throughout all the countless galaxies of our world, with its billions of suns and planets, Christ is Lord. As this vast *kosmos* moves forward into the future, He has been given the power and authority to have things go His way.

Today we live in the post-Einstein universe, with its concept of openness and movement. This is a rather different outlook from the view of the universe which was held by Biblical writers. After all, they lived in the first century of our era. Their world was much smaller; yet the apostolic observation applies just as surely in our day.

Some years ago J. B. Phillips—whom we know best for his translation of the New Testament—wrote a book entitled

Your God Is Too Small.³ The burden of this book is that our conception of God as He relates to the universe is much too puny. As a consequence we tend to fall into the trap of interpreting what the Scriptures say about God in a way that does not do full justice to His majesty. The apostle wants us to know that, between the ascension and the parousia, our elder Brother, Jesus Christ, has been entrusted with the power and authority to run this world of ours according to God's secret plan.

The language about being seated at God's right hand is an echo of Psalm 110 (verse 1). Most probably this poem was used in ancient Israel as an enthronement psalm for the king. Its language, however, lends itself to broader application. In the days prior to the church and to the New Testament this verse had already been given a Messianic interpretation.⁴ Israel's scribes had come to this conclusion on the recognition that the coming Anointed One would embody those ideals for which David and other kings in Zion served as prototypes. Early Christians took over this understanding of the psalm and applied it to Jesus as their king. It became, in fact, the most quoted psalm verse of the primitive church, as is clear from its use in the New Testament.⁵

The imagery of sitting at a king's right

³ John Bertram Phillips, *Your God Is Too Small* (London: Epworth Press, 1952).

⁴ Walter Grundmann, "dextros," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, II (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 39.

⁵ Matt. 22:44; 26:64. Mark 12:36; 14:62; 16:19. Luke 20:42, 43; 22:69. Acts 2:34. 1 Cor. 15:25. Eph. 1:20. Col. 3:1. Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12-13; 12:2.

hand probably dates from the ancient practice of representing the king as seated next to the tutelary deity of a given city or nation. Occupying a place on the right hand of a god meant that the ruler exercised power in the name of and for his god. It meant that the king held the place of honor and power. Ephesians makes the point that Jesus Christ is seated at the right hand of His Father in order to rule and run the universe.

There was a time when all Christians celebrated the Feast of the Ascension with much enthusiasm.⁶ They observed it as a special occasion for recalling that Jesus Christ had been given full authority to run the universe. In light of 1 Cor. 15:25 we conclude that this arrangement will last throughout history. Only when the last enemy of God has been overcome by being made subject to Jesus Christ will the latter return the rule of the world to His Father "so that God might be all in all," to quote Paul.

To this process of subjection Paul applies words from Psalm 8. Verse six of that psalm was written to honor man as that being which was created in the image of God so that he might exercise dominion over the created order. The first man forfeited his privilege and so Jesus Christ came as the second Adam to embody such rule and authority in His own person and work. He was made to be the agent of God's purpose for the world.

Such language intends to provide the clue to the meaning of what goes on in history. The question of meaning is big

⁶ Edgar S. Brown Jr., "Worship (Seasons)," *The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church*, ed. Julius Bodensieck, III (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1965), 2521.

enough to haunt us all. It would seem that one of the most significant contributions we can make to this issue consists in our commitment to the position that the teaching of prophets and apostles provides the real clue to the enigma we call history. Our Gospel proclaims that we are now, as God's people, engaged in a mopping-up operation between the D-Day of Christ's resurrection and the V-Day of His return.⁷ One enemy of God's after another is being brought into subjection to Jesus Christ, be that enemy some principality, some authority, power, lordship, or some other source of opposition, no matter what name may be applied to it.

Time does not permit us to discuss fully the terms Paul uses to describe the centers of opposition to God's secret plan. Just now it is enough to note that the apostle names the enemies of the Lord and proclaims that they are all being made subject to Him. This imagery of enemies being put under one's feet is taken from the ancient practice of having the faces and figures of a nation's opponents woven or engraved into the footstool of conquering kings.⁸ In the Cairo museum you can view such a piece of furniture from the days of Pharaoh Tutankhamen.

The apostle is not content to speak of the exaltation of our Lord as merely an event outside of ourselves. He notes that this was God's way of appointing Jesus Christ as the head over all things *for the church*. Our Messiah, we are to know, is

⁷ Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, trans. W. L. Jenkins (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), p. 84.

⁸ W. Stewart McCullough, "The Book of Psalms," *Interpreter's Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick, IV (New York: Abingdon Press, 1955), 589.

no distant religious hero, keeping Himself aloof from the affairs of men. The conquest He undertakes and the authority He presently exercises both reflect His interest in that people, which is here called His body.

"Body of Christ" is an extraordinary expression. It is without parallel even in the Old Testament. Seneca, to be sure, was quite ready to refer to the citizens of Rome as a body politic. We are quite familiar with the terms "student *body*" or "church *body*." To speak of church members as a body of Christians creates no particular excitement. However, that is not what the apostle chose to write. He spoke of Christians as the "body of *Christ*." That is to say, in some mysterious sense the church is an extension of the incarnation of our Lord. It does His work. It is His instrument within history to carry on Christ's mission of gathering all things under His lordship.

The church, therefore, is here called "the fullness of Him who fills the totality of things in every respect." Vocabulary of this kind certainly implies that in the implementation of God's grand design the church is a necessary instrument. It is His agency of extension. In some way it complements Christ in His redemptive activity. The Messiah works through His people as they represent the Lord at work among us. Where there are sick to visit, it is we who are asked to reach out in assistance. Where there is suffering to share, the followers of God's Anointed One are invited to become incorporate in His pain and in His agony. Where justice and freedom need to be established and extended, members of that body expend themselves in the service of others.

We need to remind ourselves of this apostolic teaching. We have come through decades, and even centuries, when the church was thought to be rather disincarnate. It was sometimes described as something of a Platonic ideal,⁹ hovering at some point above life and society. The apostle did not think of the church in these terms. For him the Christian community was the body of Christ, created to go about its work where men live — with all their burdens, their tragedies and their frustrations!

Where people are hungry we are asked to feed them. Where they go to prison, we are expected to visit them. That is the point of Matthew's account of the Son of Man's returning. The heavenly King attended by His holy angels will say to those on His right: "I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and you welcomed me; I was naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came to me." (Matt. 25:35-36)

A little more than 14 years ago (1955), when churches were just beginning to identify with the problems of race, the bishops of the Episcopal Church, meeting in Hawaii, sent out a pastoral letter to the members of their church. It was an eloquent document. One paragraph in particular deserves to be quoted. It reads:

When God entered our world redemptively in Christ, He identified Himself with our humanity. He put Himself at our mercy, and when we had done our worst, was raised up in power. He is call-

⁹ *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, VII and VIII, 20, in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 171.

ing us who are His people so to identify ourselves with our brethren that we put ourselves at their mercy, offering our gifts and our services to them without the will to control or take credit. Only through death can we share in the resurrection power.¹⁰

In Colossians (1:24) Paul goes so far as to say that somehow his own sufferings on behalf of other Christians complemented the anguish of Christ. Here in Ephesians, of course, there is no direct reference to the role of completing suffering. Instead, the church itself is spoken of as Christ's fullness. In some sense Christ finds His totality in the sum of all that He brings into union with Himself. Origen once put it like this: "Wherefore Christ is fulfilled in all that come unto Him, whereas He is still lacking in respect to them before they have come."¹¹

What we have been describing as Christ's fullness depends, in part, on translating the participle in the Greek text as active; that is, in the sense of "filling." If the form stood alone, apart from *ta panta*, it would probably be passive. In that case the whole phrase would refer even more directly to the church's complementary relationship to its head. There is a distinct possibility that this verbal construction was intended to be understood as middle. In that case it would again refer to Christ filling all things, and the thought would be parallel to Eph. 4:10, where it is said: "He who descended is He who also ascended far above all the

heavens, that He might fill all things." The use of the middle does not materially change the point of the church's relationship to Jesus Christ. It would still be thought of as His body. What stronger way is there of expressing our identification with Christ?

We proceed to another section in Ephesians. In it the work of the exalted Christ is described in language befitting such a sublime subject. We turn to 4:7-16, where the opening verses read as follows:

Now, to each one of us has grace been given in keeping with the measure of the royal gift of the Messiah. Therefore it says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive and bestowed gifts on men." (4:7-8)

Here the apostle uses a quotation from the great Pentecost psalm of the synagog (68:19); but he gives it in a reading which you will find neither in the Hebrew nor in the Greek text of that psalm. Both the Hebrew and the Greek read "He received gifts from men," and not, "He gave gifts to men." Behind this change of verbs is an interesting story.¹²

Quite possibly, Psalm 68 was originally used to commemorate King David's conquest and his ascent up Mount Zion as Yahweh's king to receive tribute from the tribes and nations whom he had conquered. It was a day for royal celebration. In time, of course, Israel ceased to exist as an independent political entity. During that period this psalm was incorporated into the Pentecost liturgy of the synagog. Since that festival in time commemorated the giving of the Law, the verse under dis-

¹⁰ "The Pastoral Letter of the House of Bishops," *The Living Church*, 131 (Oct. 2, 1955), 21.

¹¹ Cited in J. Armitage Robinson, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Macmillan Co., 1909), p. 45.

¹² Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, III) München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1954), 596.

cussion was made to apply to Moses going up Mount Sinai to *receive* the gift of the Torah for the purpose of *giving* it to God's people. To clarify the matter the verb was changed from *received* to *gave*. One of the Targums on the psalm, for example, has this paraphrase: "You (Moses) ascended on high. . . . You led captivity captive. You learned the words of the Torah to give them to the children of men as gifts. . . ." ¹³

The lines of the psalm are quoted here in that sense. They are applied to Christ as both the Son of David and the new Moses. The ascended Lord's gifts, it should be pointed out, are not here made to consist of the words of the Law. Instead, His royal bounty comprises a set of persons serving within the church to carry out various tasks. We read in verses 11-12:

And He gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, some as pastors and teachers, to equip God's people for work in His service, to the building up of the body of Christ.

Between these verses and the ones we discussed before (7-8), there is a bit of argumentation resembling the method of rabbinic discussions.¹⁴ The apostle contends that ascending implies a descent into the lower regions of the earth. The full significance of Psalm 68, therefore, he held, is to be found only in Christ, who, unlike Moses, descended into the lower parts of the earth to establish His rule also there. Having accomplished this, He ascended far above all the heavens in order to fill all things.

¹³ Ibid., p. 596.

¹⁴ Francis W. Beare, "The Epistle to the Ephesians," *Interpreter's Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick, X (New York: Abingdon Press, 1953), 601.

In His ascension the Lord gave gifts to the church for the task of carrying out His work of filling all things. These endowments consist of persons of the Word and of words. They have the assignment to proclaim the mystery of God's will. They do this in order to equip the saints for the work of service, as the text has it. They are to build up the body of Christ until such time as all its members attain maturity by their being one. These words are a reminder of the fact that the ultimate unity of the *kosmos* is to be realized in nucleus and in anticipation by the church. Its life is to be a microcosm of what all existence was redeemed to be and to become.

The church is a community of the Word. As a matter of fact, it consists of those people who gather around Word and Sacrament. That is where God has chosen to be present to remind His people of His initiative and their destiny.

There have been times when words about the Word have been severed from their base so that they became idle talk. The language of Scripture and of the church is that of proclamation. That is to say, true preaching creates a word-event.¹⁵ Proclamation takes place when the text and words about it interpret the reader and the hearer, reminding him of his relationship to God as Creator and Redeemer on the basis of what the Lord has done. When our words relate to this story and become part of it, then the task of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers goes on to edify the people of God for the work of service. This goes on until

¹⁵ Compare Robert W. Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 47-71.

the church attains oneness and maturity. Here is how the apostle puts it:

Until we all [corporately speaking] attain the oneness of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to the mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we are no longer adolescents, tossed and carried about by every gust of teaching [blown around] by the craftiness of men, by their cunning and deceitful schemes. Rather, as we speak the truth in love, we are to grow into Him in every respect, who is the Head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together throughout every joint, as it provides strength in keeping with the measure bestowed on each part, produces growth in the body for its own edification in love. (4:13-16)

The apostle is here describing the internal growth of the church as the instrument of unity. The language of the text is that of a body growing up toward maturity as each part functions properly, supplying strength to the whole according to its own function and strength. You will notice how Paul uses the singular when he speaks of the mature man. Out of the immaturity of our adolescent individualism we are, according to the mystery of God's will, to grow into the unity of one full-grown man.

It has been said that the apostle borrowed this kind of terminology from Gnostic notions about a cosmic man.¹⁶ But this is not likely. The thought of the second Adam, as the archetype and embodiment of a new humanity, lies much nearer at hand.

What the apostle depicts is full-sized stature. Just how we individually play a

part in this he indicates by a few verses which are found at the beginning of this chapter. There we read:

So then I, prisoner in the Lord, beseech you to live worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all humility and meekness, with long-suffering, putting up with each other in love, striving to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. (1-3)

Here is a description of how we, as members of the church, serve as tools for unity and maturity. We put into practice the virtues mentioned by the apostle. Let us look at each one of them in turn.

The first one to be named is *humility*, a virtue which the ancient Greeks despised.¹⁷ It was degrading, they believed. It marked the temper of the slave. Yet the apostle names it first. It is indeed the prime Christian virtue. One of the earliest hymns of the church celebrated the humility of our Lord, who was willing to take on the form of a servant and to die ignominiously on the cross (Phil. 2:5-11). In that Lord, who had emptied Himself, Paul knew of a life larger than that of the individual. Its principle, as he knew, is that of mutual service. Its first requisite is the spirit of subordination. Humility is the stance of a man who knows that he has no claim on God's favor and accepts grace gladly. It is the mind-set of a person who knows that he stands in need of redemption and is happy to share his liberation with others.

Meekness is listed next. This is the virtue of a man who refuses to exploit others. It is the quality of our Lord, riding

¹⁶ Beare, "The Epistle to the Ephesians," *Interpreter's Bible*, X, 605.

¹⁷ Karl Rahner et al., "Humility," *Sacramentum Mundi*, III (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 80.

meek and lowly into the city of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, anxious to lay claim to His people in terms of service rather than conquest. A meek person is to be thought of as one who is calm and secure in the assurance of pardon and, as a person forgiven, keeps remembering that he has no basis for self-assertion in the sense of wanting to manipulate others.

Longsuffering is the virtue of giving others time to find themselves and so correct a relationship that has gone sour. It is a quality ascribed to God, of whom it is said that He gave Noah's generation a period of 120 years in which to take "the preacher of righteousness" seriously (2 Peter 2:5). It is that quality of life which refuses to give up hope for improvement.

The apostle is a realist. He knows that personal relationships are at times difficult to sustain. He is fully aware that there are individuals whose manners, whose tone of voice, whose very presence irritates others. And so Paul adds, "Put up with each other in *love*." Sometimes it takes an act of the will to do so; and that is exactly what love describes: a determination to keep human relationships going. To preserve the unity created by the spirit, which consists of the bond of peace, requires constant care and determination.

At this point there come to mind a few lines from Bruce Marshall's *Father Malachy's Miracle*.¹⁸ On the opening page of this book Father Malachy is introduced taking his seat in the compartment of an English train. Hardly has he settled down when a fat man enters with "a face so red and pouchy that it looked like a bladder

painted to hit people over the head with an Italian carnival." Shortly thereafter a middle-aged woman climbed into the same part of the train. Father Malachy noticed that she had a "peaky shiny nose with a funny little dent in the middle." At that point he decided to close his eyes. He felt it was easier to love them that way.

Love requires some such act of will. The lack of love in our society has produced the schizoid world which contemporary artists are at pains to depict. It is a culture where radios and television sets only serve to make people more lonely than ever. It is a life where communication between persons is all but destroyed, as in Beckett's play *Krapp's Last Tape*, where people live their lives talking to tape recorders.¹⁹

This inner relationship between love and will is the subject of a recent volume written by Rollo May, the psychotherapist. His book is called *Love and Will*.²⁰ With Leslie Farber the author concludes that in the failure of the will lies the central pathology of the present era. May points out that "hate is not the opposite of love; apathy is."²¹ The connection between love and will he describes as inhering "in the fact that both terms describe a person in the process of reaching out . . . seeking to affect others. . . ." ²² This is precisely the content of the term the apostle uses for "love."

Peace is a way of life that is determined to avoid friction and factions. It serves

¹⁹ Samuel Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape and Other Dramatic Pieces* (New York: Grove Press, 1960).

²⁰ Rollo May, *Love and Will* (New York: W. N. Norton and Co., 1969).

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁸ Bruce Marshall, *Father Malachy's Miracle: A Heavenly Story with an Earthly Meaning* (Garden City: Image Books, 1955), p. 1.

as a bond which holds together the oneness which is given by God's Spirit. Pride, self-assertion, impatience, hostility, indifference — all these create rifts among men. They are manifestations of an individual ego in opposition to others. Unity is created and preserved only where life is organized to give expression to those values which represent the opposite of a self-centered life.

One portion of Britten's *War Requiem* is devoted to a description of the pride which overtakes nations in time of war. To make this point Britten uses the motif of Abraham being asked to offer up Isaac but sacrificing a ram instead. Europe refused to accept the ram of humility and so "killed her sons instead, killed her sons instead, killed her sons instead."²³ The words are repeated to underline the fact that pride is divisive and destructive.

Humility edifies; it creates unity. Into this unity the church has been called. Its members are the tools for its accomplishment as they live worthy of their calling. Reference is made here not to the profession by which men make a living but to that act of God by which you and I are brought into that relationship where the *seven unities* prevail which the apostle now names:

One body and one Spirit, as also ye were called in one hope of your calling: one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one Lord and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (4-6)

This sevenfold formula relates the unity of the church to that which prevails between Christ and His Father. It does so

²³ Benjamin Britten, *War Requiem*, Op. 66 (London and New York: Boesy and Hawkes, 1962).

in a way quite different from that of the better philosophies taught in the Roman Empire during the days of the apostle. St. Paul's teaching does not proceed from a vague conviction about the unity of the *kosmos* to an awareness of the unity of God. On the contrary, it rests firmly on the assurance that God is one and that every other aspect of unity depends on this manifestation of God's will.

The apostle could say, therefore, that the church is one body. It is informed by the one Spirit and offers one hope on the basis of one faith and one baptism into one Lord. He is one with that God who transcends everything, is present everywhere, and dwells in all things. The church to Paul, then, was the embodiment of the divine purpose for the universe.

In summary, we remind ourselves that it is God's secret plan to create oneness throughout the universe. His agent for this work is Jesus Christ, whose instrument is the church, which is at work through and in the life of her members. The church, then, is not just another organization. It has behind it the creative intent of God the Father, and it lives by the Spirit with whom it has been endowed to serve in the unfolding of the mystery of God's will.

Within this community we find meaning for life. Here we are preserved from the depersonalizing demons of our culture and history. Here men and women find sanctuary from the forces which empty existence of direction and deprive life of fullness. From here we go out into the world for service in anticipation of that oneness which God has in mind for His creation.

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