

1Corinthians 12:1-11

The Heart of the Church: to Serve one Another and to Proclaim Jesus Christ

Nunawading and Waverley, 16-1-22

What is the soul of Australia? This is an interesting question and arose while I was reading Vishal Mangalwadi's book, on how the Bible made Western culture. Just as each person has a spiritual centre, even the unbaptised, so the church has a spiritual centre, which is our life in the Holy Spirit. The nation has a soul, too.

What is Australia's soul? Up to 1950, we would probably say a Christian soul. What about today?

Some people say we are a secular society and heading towards mass atheism. According to Nick Spencer, who wrote an interesting book called "Freedom and Order", we are not secular but pluralistic. There are many different groups in society with a range of world views: those who follow a deep green religion, New Age beliefs, the humanists, atheists, people who speak of being spiritual, and then all the classical faiths, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity etc. It is difficult to identify the soul of Australia but the Christian church is a part of it.

At the heart of our church is the orthodox teaching of Jesus Christ. We cannot compromise his truth in any way, always maintaining his divine and human natures, teaching his justification of us by faith and not by works of the law, speaking clearly about his grace and love towards all, no matter how degraded they may be because his death was an atoning sacrifice. We confess that he has risen from the dead and will one day raise all the dead at the final judgement and give eternal life to all those who have put their trust in him. Now, having ascended to heaven, he is present with his people around the world where they are gathered and comes to them in the word, establishing a baptismal relationship with them and nourishing them with his body and blood, life and salvation in the bread and wine. Therefore, Paul considered it inconceivable that anyone in whom the Holy Spirit dwells would say: "**Jesus be cursed**". Rather,

Christians will proclaim the truth about him by and Holy Spirit, saying: “**Jesus is Lord**” and the many other things implied in that statement that I have mentioned.

That is our church soul. We have to add one other thing and that is our willingness to serve one another through the gospel. Mangalwadi pointed out that one of the reasons the West developed such impressive technology was the desire of Christians to ensure that people didn't work like the beasts in the paddocks and that body-destroying work would be alleviated. Because work, rather than toil, was a humanising gift from God-the-worker and creator, work was considered a calling and a service to God. Rather than finding slaves to do menial tasks, Christians engaged in work and found ways to alleviate the drudgery, such as the water wheel, the mechanical mill, iron tipped ploughs etc. I think a similar impulse is at work in the congregation of believers. We act, we engage in ministry, we share, we live in fellowship, we love one another and serve because we want to see the image of Christ restored in each other. It is true, that to live a godly life is an **act of worship and spiritual sacrifice** as Paul says in the book of Romans but corporately, in the body of Christ, the soul of our church is to use what we have to work, to build each other up, to encourage, to grow faith, to share each other's burdens, to be a true communion as the Lord makes us in his holy Supper.

In the congregation, there is no room for individuality. In a political and social sense, there is and there should be but, in the church, we take our direction from the Holy Spirit, for **he distributes the gifts**. We do not focus on talented people but the Spirit who does the equipping. **There is a distribution of ministries but the same Lord**, meaning Jesus and **there is a distribution of miraculous acts but the same God**, meaning our Father. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the only persons we want to give prominence to and not to any other.

The spiritual gifts work together like an orchestra of different instruments. A flute can sound very nice but after a while, on its

own, we would become bored with it. We want to hear violins, trumpets and drums. Each instrument will play according to its own sound and style but there will only be one melody, the melody of love and praise. That is why the apostle says: **To each one he has given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good; for the common good.** We act in the church not thinking of our own benefits but how we can benefit others. When it comes to church, we are not consumers primarily but contributors. After all, what could fulfilling **the new commandment** to love one another actually mean without service? The soul of the church is not about our individual needs but is about serving one another in love. By using the Spirit's gifts for the sake of others, our deeper needs will be met as well.

We can see how consistent this is: the soul of Christ is love, the soul of the congregation is Christ and, therefore, love as well. When Christ is properly proclaimed, love, service and sacrifice will flourish in the church.