

## *Essentials and Non-Essentials*

*The Tent: A safe place for shepherds to reflect together*

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Righteous Ruts

Posted: Wed Jan 30, 2008 6:13 am  
Post subject: Essentials and Non-essentials  
Posted by: corinthpastorbob

“Ruts” should primarily be related to the faith that is common to believers in Jesus Christ across the years and around the world. Anything else that becomes a rut leads to the danger of permanently establishing my own or my generation's preference or even blind spots.

How do we discern which beliefs or disciplines are rut-worthy? I go back to the wisdom of Petrus Meiderlinus, who either coined or refined (depending on whom you read) the motto, **“In essentials, unity; in non-essentials liberty; in all things, charity.”** According to Philip Schaff, an eighteenth century German historian, Meiderlinus was a Lutheran divine in a Germany torn by the ravages of the Thirty Years War - an inter-Christian war that shredded the church, ravaged the land, and stained the reputation of Jesus' followers. Meiderlinus pleaded for unity in a tract that included the motto above.

But he did more. He defined how one knows what is “essential” - in our terminology, what “ruts” ought to be preserved.

- The “essentials” (necessaria) are
- (1) articles of faith necessary to salvation;
  - (2) articles derived from clear testimonies of the Bible;
  - (3) articles decided by the whole church in a synod or symbol;
  - (4) articles held by all orthodox divines as necessary.

Non-essentials, according to Meiderlinus, are dogmas

- (1) not contained in the Bible;
- (2) not belonging to the common inheritance of faith;
- (3) not unanimously taught by theologians;
- (4) left doubtful by grave divines;
- (5) not tending to piety, charity, and edification.

(Source: Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol. VII, p. 650)

That's a good grid with which to discern the ruts that must be made and preserved.

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Bob Thompson

***“In necessariis unitas, in non-necessariis libertas, in utrisque caritas.”***

Petrus Meiderlinus (1592-1651)  
Lutheran Priest