

## A Primer in Total Christ Vision Of Christian Spirituality

### Introduction: After Modernist Christendom, What?

*(This portion is in the form of annotated lecture notes)*

#### *Modern Foundationalism In Search of "Pure Reason"*

The date was April 6, 1966. And the ominous red and black cover-page of *Time Magazine* boldly inquired, "Is God Dead?"

Fueled by the Cartesian premise of epistemic *foundationalism*, "metaphysics," according to Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, was limited to the "bounds of experience" as to redefine the limits of "pure reason." As noted by Carl Henry, "modern theology shared one decisive and controlling premise, that man does not and cannot have *cognitive* knowledge of God."<sup>1</sup> Kant waxed poetic about the whole thing:

*This domain (within the bounds of experience) is an island, enclosed by nature itself within unalterable limits. It is the land of truth—enchanted name!—surrounded by a wide and stormy ocean, the native home of illusion, where many a fog bank and many a swiftly melting iceberg give the deceptive appearance of farther shores, deluding the adventurous seafarer ever anew with empty hopes, and engaging him in enterprises which he can never abandon and yet is unable to carry to completion.<sup>2</sup>*

#### *The Rise of Modern Christendom and Christendom Oriented Denominationalism*

- By Christendom it is meant the synthesis between the Gospel and the culture." (church and state)
- And this Christendom was the background of all the Reformation theologies and the state informed denominations that emerged... wherein one form of the Church was being defining by their positions over against another within the context of the *corpus Christianum*.

Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*;

*It is the common observation of sociologists of religion that denominationalism is the religious aspect of secularization. It is the form that religion takes in a culture controlled by the ideology of the Enlightenment. It is the social form in which the privatization of religion is expressed. As Thomas Luckman says, "Once religion is defined as a private affair the individual may choose from the assortment of ultimate meanings as he sees fit."*

*It follows that neither a denomination separately nor all the denominations linked together in some kind of federal unity or "reconciled diversity" can be the agents of a missionary confrontation with our culture, for the simple reason that they are themselves the outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual surrender to the ideology of our culture...'*

*A study of the beginnings of the modern missionary movement shows how strongly this movement was still controlled by the old Christendom idea. Missions were conceived of as the extension of the frontiers of Christendom and the conveyance of the blessings of Christian civilization informed by one or another nation-state spirituality (colonization).*

#### An Important Qualification:

I take Newbigin to be referencing any one or another modernist informed denomination (within context of secularism), not "denominationalism" itself as related to that church that is defined by its common confessional denominator. We allow for other "denominations" who are true churches within the one holy

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Henry, *Brink*, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan and Co., 1929), p. 326-327.

catholic church as an act of both humility, realistic expectations this side of heaven, and Christian charity (Rom 14 for instance).

Denominationalism is a concession to eschatology wherein the one holy catholic church is not (yet) glorified and perfected (infallible). As such, denominationalism avoids an absolute imperialism of one denomination over another.. There is an admission of the wheat and the tares and when final judgment is to be made-- thus the importance of defining what ARE the marks of a true apostolic church of Jesus Christ.

Modern Christendom Related = to Modern Western Evangelicalism:

*The resultant culprit acids of modern secularism that re-shaped the church in Western Christendom are:*

- Market place pragmatism and supply-demand capitalism = “church growth movement”;
- The rising prestige of the natural sciences with its corresponding empiricist based sage of modern rationalism = Rationalist oriented (vs. participational oriented) apologetics (“Campus “Debates, Worldview conferences, etc)
- Democratically informed populism and modern subjective individualism = Bellah’s “Habits of the Heart” style Christian Spirituality
- And a desensitized spirituality formed out of an increasingly bureaucratized and techno-urban socialization that shielded us from the agrarian forces that at once made God more believable, if not more useful = The Christendom oriented “Executive/CEO Sr. Pastor led corporate church and power-point oriented sermon
- Anti-Intellectual Subjectivism and Intellectual Rationalism ,*at the same time*

Sociologist James Hunter:

“evangelical orientation toward the Bible” was a “trend at one level that involves an accommodation of varying degrees to modern epistemology—philosophical rationalism, even shades of positivism” on the one hand and yet simultaneously “de-objectified wherein in different terms, there is a shift from a concern with “what the Bible states” to a more subjectivist “what God is telling me.”<sup>3</sup>

e.g.

Rationalistic:

- R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner and Arthur Lindsey, *A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith* by.
- Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands A Verdict*

Populist Oriented

- Historian Nathan Hatch

*In America the principal mediator of God's voice has not been state, church, council, confession, ethnic group, university college or seminary; it has been quite simply, the people... the impulse to rework Christianity into forms that were unmistakably popular... and democratic in at least three respects: it was audience centered, intellectually open to all, and organizationally pluralistic and innovative... (about Alexis de Tocqueville's observation in 19<sup>th</sup> century America), expecting to find priests, he found politicians.<sup>4</sup>*

Mark Noll: “evangelical interpretation assigned first place to popular approval...

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<sup>3</sup> James Hunter, *The Coming Generation*, p. 46-47

<sup>4</sup> Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*

### Representative Trends:

- In the 80's it was the discipleship movement and seeker friendly services.
- The 90's were all about the restoration of men to God and family, men keeping promises and reaching Gen X.
- In the early 2000's we focused on non-corporate worship, prayer of Jabez and social justice. "

But that was *THEN* in relation to the red and black cover of the 1966 *Time Magazine!* And however ominous the *Times'* "Death of God" threat might have appeared, the concurrent modernist issues seem antiquarian *now*. (Not withstanding significant vestiges of modernity past that remain.).

And yet we are again presented with an ominous cover in read on black. This time, it is the April 5, 2009 *Newsweek Magazine*. And it boldly proclaims "*The Decline and Fall of Christian American.*"

### The Demise of Christendom Oriented Modernism:

Robert Weber has suggested that the high point of modern era evangelicalism was 1947-1980 and that the '80's through 2000" represented "the last gasp of evangelicalism in the modern world" (*Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*).

He further notes that during this time, Christian spirituality became "increasingly pragmatic, corporate, entertainment oriented and need driven as per the therapeutic faith of modernity" wherein "the divide between theology and practice was complete."<sup>5</sup>

And if modernity was at once rational and cognitive, reductionist and fundamentalist, individualistic and subjective; then modern evangelicalism tended to be the same albeit targeting the anti-supernaturalist modern secularism along the way.

### The Question:

So what does it look like to conceive of a Christianity in another way that's not modern? "Can you imagine what happens to the church, the whole Christian enterprise, when it has so thoroughly accommodated to modernity – so much so that it has no idea of any way Christianity could exist other than a modern way?"<sup>6</sup>

*And*

Where did we get the twisted notion that orthodoxy is essentially a set of ideas rather than a living tradition of social experience? Our stereotype of orthodoxy is that of frozen dogma, rather than a warm continuity of human experience--of grandmothers teaching granddaughters, of feasts and stories, of rites and dancing. Orthodoxies are never best judged merely by their doctrinal ideas, but more so by their social products, the quality of their communities... They await being studied sociologically, not just theologically.<sup>7</sup>

### *The Less than Compelling Answers Thus Far:*

- A Return to Ancient Pagan-Jewish Syncretism and the Anti-Organized or the "under every leafy tree and every hill" kind of spirituality that was prominent in OT Jewish syncretism and ancient paganism (c.f. Ezekiel 20:27-39 compared to Dt. 12:1-10, 13; Dt. 28)

David Brooks:

"if the challenge for a *modern* evangelicals within a modern secular context was to defend the supernatural of God, the pre-modern amidst a post-propositional context, observes David Brooks,

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<sup>5</sup> *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, gen. ed. Robert Webber, contributors, Driscoll, Burke, Kimball, Pagitt, Ward (Grand Rapids, Mich. : Zondervan, 2007)p. 18

<sup>6</sup> Brian McLaren: *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Oden, *After Modernity, What?*

is “to defend the idea of a *personal* God, and explain why specific theologies are true guides for behavior day to day.” In other words, “the real challenge is going to come from people who feel the existence of the sacred, but who think that particular religions are just cultural artifacts built on top of universal human traits. It’s going to come from scientists whose beliefs overlap a bit with Buddhism.”<sup>8</sup>

- E.g. “I consider myself a spiritual person, but not religious.”

Jesus according to William Young’s *The Shack*

“I don’t create institution—never have, never will... that’s an occupation for those who want to play God. So no, I’m not too big on religion,” ... and not very found of politics or economics either... they are the man made trinity of errors.”<sup>9</sup>

- George Barna’s *Revolution*
  - Herbert Hoefler’s *Churchless Christianity*
  - Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity*
  - Lenard Sweet, *The Gospel according to Starbucks*,
  - Brian Sanders, *Life After Church*,
  - Jim Palmer, *Divine Nobodies*,
  - Sara Cunningham, *Dear Church: Letters from a Disillusioned Generation*
  - Julia Dunn, *Quitting Church*
  - Jake Olson, *So You Don’t Want to Go to Church Anymore*
  - David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian*
  - Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus But Not the Church*
- The church based “re” clichés of emergent spirituality that is *already* becoming passé:  
Doug Pagitt’s *Church Re-imagined...*, Driscoll’s “*Reformation...*,” Chester and Timms “*Reshaping...*,” *Return to ??*, *Retrieval of ??...* ALL absent a real “re-formation” that beginning with a Biblical theology transformed into a holistic Theological vision in favor of new or old forms less elements.  
Tim Keller in *Our New Global Culture: Ministry in Urban Centers* summarizes the trends as represented in modernity and now post-modernity:  

If *moderns* are rational and cognitive; *postmoderns* are more experiential and intuitive. If moderns are secular and anti-spiritual; postmoderns are more open to the spiritual and mystical. If moderns are more hard-line liberal or conservative; postmoderns are less ideologically rigid. If moderns are individualistic; postmoderns are more oriented to community and friendship.
- The new emergent “Band Church” and “Band Leader Pastor” movement
    - The *New York Times* “Hip New Churches” that “pray to a different drummer.”  
“These non-denominational churches are unlike anything before experienced in recent history according to the article—neither “traditional” nor “contemporary” the revival is marked by medieval liturgies and practices borrowed from Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox rituals that predate the enlightenment” coupled with progressive techniques and sounds.”<sup>10</sup>
    - ABC News, “Not Your Granddad’s Church: Hillsong Church Mixes Sermons With Rock Concerts”  
Every Sunday, thousands of people gather in New York City to get in line for a church service that is full of hand-raising, heart-thumping, hipster-style Christianity.

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<sup>8</sup> DAVID BROOKS, *The Neural Buddhists* Published: May 13, 2008. [www.nytimes.com/2008/05/13/opinion/13brooks.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/13/opinion/13brooks.html)

<sup>9</sup> William P. Young, *The Shack*, (Newbury Park, CA: Windblown Media, 2007), p. 177-179.

<sup>10</sup> NYT, February 18, 2004

Charlie Rose on ABC Good Morning America:

“Are they band leaders who pastor, or pastor’s who are band leaders?”

- Racial-Reconciliation/ Multi-Cultural Catholicity
  - 1) Multi-Racial Church Plants vs. Mono-Racial Church Plants—e.g our general rule of thumb is that local church plants should reflect the racial-cultural demographic— as racially diverse as local context. How intentional then should we be to target multi-racial demographics, vs. contexts that are predominantly mono-racial for the advancement of racial reconciliation.. thus racial reconciliation “in-house” issues/ opportunities relative to single congregations, etc.
  - 2) Notwithstanding the positives of planting multi-racial congregations, how far can a single congregation go in terms of “blending” worship styles, leadership cultures, etc such that all cultures are genuinely reflected/respected vs. one culture absorbing another (majoritarianism within a congregation) n The issue of cultural hegemony in church and the “oppression” of any one culture by another dominant culture albeit within a church?? Should there be a strategy of planting mono-racial congregations, as to be more “pure” culturally in its worship, styles of leadership, etc (the historic reformed “vernacular” principles”) albeit within a strategy to plant multiple congregations to create an organically united multi-congregational church movement within a local context?? What are the issues of racial reconciliation congregation to congregation within a single organizational context? Sharing Budgets, government, Creed, albeit different “socio-cultural forms” etc.
  - 3) And then there is the context like BOH in New Haven consisting of different denominations that reflect different racial constituencies. how then to pursue racial reconciliation in local contexts between denominations and her peoples and the challenges/opportunities— basically— the BOH experiment.
- Paleo-Denominationalism by either *Return* or *Retrieval* Spirituality

a. *Return* Spirituality in protest to modernist denominationalism:

The new exodus of Protestants, most evangelicals, streaming to Rome” and especially among the so called “Gen X” and “millennial” generations

To Rome:.

- Brad Wilcox, *A River Runs to It: A New Exodus of Protestants Streams to Rome* (May, 1999)
- Peter Kreeft, Richard John Neuhaus, Deal Hudson, and Scott Hahn, Tom Howard, Steve Wood, Gerry Matatics, the Duchess of Kent, Bishop Graham Leonard,
- Three part series *Surprised by Truth* by Patrick Madrid where converts from Protestant contexts give so called “biblical and historical reasons for becoming Catholic” (Basilica Press).

To Constantinople

- American Peter Gillquist in "Becoming Orthodox" (Conciliar Press, 1990) and "Coming Home" (1992),
- British Michael Harper, "A Faith Fulfilled" (Conciliar Press, 1999).

b. *Retrieval* Spirituality in protest to modernist denominationalism.

In Reformed Catholicity, Michael Allen and Scott Swain make note of no less than thirteen movements in search of catholicity by means of retrieval in spirituality.<sup>11</sup> The assumption is that the further back in history, the closer one gets to apostolic faith in unity. A few examples:

- Thomas Oden’s “Paleo-Orthodoxy”—*argues that what underlies seemingly divergent denominational traditions stems from the roots of patristic theology, exegesis, and, ultimately, worship.*

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<sup>11</sup> Allen, Michael; Swain, Scott R. (2015-01-13). Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation. Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition. All italic portions of the following descriptions are quotations.

- Robert Webber's Ancient-Future Christianity—*an attempt to rediscover Common roots” and the need for evangelicals to draw from the Christian past, again drawing upon the patristic heritage of the church for the sake of engaging postmodern culture in a profound way.*
- Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson's Evangelical Catholicism-- *calling the church into conversation with recent debates to focusing the church on the classical resources of the ecumenical tradition. They launched the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology, began a new journal Pro Ecclesia.*
- Theological Interpretation of Scripture-- *A major focus of this movement is retrieval of pre-modern modes of scriptural reasoning, suggesting that figural and spiritual hermeneutics as well as the creedally disciplined approach of the early church fathers has something to teach us today.*
- Radical Orthodoxy—*seeks to explain the decline of the church and to provide a counter-narrative by drawing on the heritage of Christian Platonism (which involved readings of Augustine, Aquinas, and others).*
- The Emerging or Emergent Church(es)-- *an intentional effort to minister to people in a purportedly new postmodern era... with a focus being the retrieval of various practices, texts, and ideas from the Christian past. it is noted how they fell prey to charges of picking and choosing as they wished and (at least in the more emboldened versions) a tendency tended toward revisionism.*

NOTE: At its best (from a “Reformation” Perspective”) retrieval is in search of “another way” than modernist oriented Christendom:

Question?

Is reactions to modernity a sufficient framework for the discovery of a holistic and healthy spirituality and ecclesiology?

Allen, Michael; Swain, Scott R. Reformed Catholicity

*Many critiques of Protestantism suggest that if one desires a churchly, sacramental, ancient faith, then one must turn from the Reformation toward Rome or the East. And many have taken to those paths, fleeing what they may perceive to be thin theologies of ministry and of the Christian life in the Reformational world. Others celebrate the Reformed church as decidedly un-catholic and seek to minimize any connection to the ancient shape of the Christian faith... But there is another Way!*

*What's right about this?*

*... that the principles of classical Reformed orthodox prolegomena, as well as the principles of classical Reformed ecclesiology, provide a salutary framework within which a Reformed dogmatics of retrieval might be developed.*

*What's missing?*

**But does this go far enough?**

**What's missing?**

E.g. Can we envision a “reformation consistent, way that isn't necessarily “Reformed” (of one or another “Reformed Denomination”) that is *semper reformanda* (“always reforming”)?)

A Good question stated differently (as will be qualified) by perhaps the surprising voice within emergent spirituality itself!

e.g. Brian McLaren's, in his *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix*, search for the “new” church (“new” relative to the emergent “renewed” and poleo retrievals of “restored” churches)

“The *renewed* church is an old church that, after having lost touch with its people, goes

through a process of change in order to relate to them and better meet their needs again. This is good. But renewal tends to be a temporary, or stopgap, measure... changes in style! “

“The *restored* church looks at problems in their churches today and says, “Aha! We’ve lost our way! We must go back to the New Testament to rediscover our original vibrancy. This is an intelligent realization. Unfortunately, what tends to happen next is that we latch onto some peripheral matter of early church life [forms] and prescribe it as the missing feature... the church of the “last detail”... the “magic pattern.”

“The *new church* can be of any age, any denomination. It goes through a process of peripheral change similar to the renewed and restored churches, a process of radical self-assessment, of going back to the roots, sources, and first things. ...”<sup>12</sup>

“if we have a new world, we will need a new church.. not a new religion per se, but a new framework for our theology. Not a new Spirit, but a new spirituality. Not a new Christ, but a new Christian. Not a new denomination, but a new kind of church in every denomination.”<sup>13</sup>

MA’s response—Yes and No!

- In search of a “new” Christian spirituality and church practice that can transcend western facing and modernist spirituality as the elemental level—Yes!
- In search of a “New” Christian spirituality and church practice that transcends a Christo-centric Biblical Theology and the “divine law” of Apostolic Spirituality—No!

## I. The “Total Christ” Program: A Christo-Centric Reformation In Missional Ecclesiology

### 1) *Total Christ Devotion:*

Total Christ spirituality wants first to remind us that Christ alone is sufficient and the proper object of our faith and love. We should aspire to keep Christ first place in everything, not just sentimentally, but in method, his person and work, the focus of the gospel, our method of reading the Bible, the choreography of our ministry and our missional purpose, *everything!*” The apostle Paul once said it this way:

*In Christ... we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins... the image of the invisible God ... all things created through him and for him... all the fullness of God... And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning... in order that that in everything he might be preeminent. (Col. 1:13ff)*

So from beginning to end, what should Christian devotion look like? It begins and ends with Christ! Christ Centered Theology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, Eschatology—ALL!

*As summarized by John Calvin:*

We see that our whole salvation and all its parts are comprehended in Christ. We should therefore take care not to derive the least portion of it from anywhere else. If we seek salvation, we are taught by the very name of Jesus that it is “of him.” If we seek any other gifts of the Spirit, they will be found in his anointing. If we seek strength, it lies in his dominion; if purity, in his conception; if gentleness, it appears in his birth. For by his birth he was made like us in all respects that he might learn to feel our pain. If we seek redemption, it lies in his passion; if acquittal, in his condemnation; if remission of the curse, in his cross; if satisfaction, in his sacrifice; if purification, in his blood; if reconciliation, in his descent into hell; if mortification of the flesh, in his tomb; if newness of life, in his resurrection; if immortality, in the same; if inheritance of all blessings, in his Kingdom; if untroubled expectation of judgment, in the power given to him to judge. In short, since rich store of every kind of good abounds in him, let us drink our fill from this fountain, and from no other. (*Institutes* 2.16.19.)

<sup>12</sup> Brian McLaren *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix*, (2006)., pp. 26-27, 27-28, 28.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p. 18 and 14.

## 2) Total Christ Methodology:

The entire “Total Christ” project is informed by a theological vision derived from a Christ-centered Biblical theology. *Only a redemptive-historical interpretation of scripture can transcend the pre-modern/modern/post-modern, East/West and either-or philosophies of ministry sorts of dichotomies as to offer a holistic and Christ-centered vision for spirituality and church practice.*

Such a “biblical theology” approach seeks to craft a theological vision for the church and spirituality that is informed by the redemptive-historical trajectories from Genesis to Revelations that are linked to Christ. It is in essence the method of interpreting Scripture illustrated by Christ on the Emmaus Road!

**Luke 24:27** *And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself....* **44** *Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”*

***In summary, a redemptive-historical review of the Old and New Covenant trajectories reveals that there was never a time in all of redemption history when salvation was transacted apart from the transaction of divine covenant (Logos) corresponding to a high gospel spirituality and divine presence (temple) corresponding to a high church spirituality. The two in redemptive history are distinct if never separate and both fulfilled by Christ during his incarnation and mediated by the Holy Spirit through the Church during Christ’s ascension ministry.***

### *The Covenant Trajectory:*

Relative then to the old covenant context, the Hebrew word for “covenant” (berith) is used at least 289 times. So for instance, the Hebrew word covenant is explicitly used to summarize the whole of the Genesis history in Exodus 2:24 and the Old Covenant “Bible” itself was called the “book of the covenant” in Exodus 24:7.

The covenant orientation in spirituality is universally inherent to redemptive history as evidenced by its transcending trajectory both through the Old and New Testament narrative culminating in Christ. We see how the words “old” and “new” are therefore assigned to “covenant” throughout the whole Bible. The prophet Jeremiah in the old covenant context anticipates the coming of a “new covenant” (Jer.31: 31. c.f Malachi 3:1) even as Paul in the new covenant context references the “veil” of the old covenant that was lifted by Christ in the new covenant (c.f. 2Cor 3:14).

Matthew most especially applied the fulfillment motif as Christ fulfilling the law-covenant. Thus Christ’s introduction to his ministry: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” (Matthew 5:17-18)

The covenant orientation is likewise prominent in the epistles. Paul, for instance, will speak of the “veil” that remained “unlifted” in “the old covenant” until Christ was able to take it away (2Cor.3:14). Christ is later described as the “mediator of the new covenant” (Heb 9:15, 12:15) even by his own atoning “blood of the new covenant” that is then specifically related to the meaning and practice of the Eucharistic meal in the new covenant church (Luke 22:20, 1Cor.11:25).

Like in the Old Covenant context there is an explicit references to “covenant” in the New Testament, we discern as well the use of “law” (*nomos*) synonymous with “covenant” such as in the Old Testament wherein the “book of the law,” is often used by the prophets in reference to the “book of the covenant” (Josh 24:26, Neh. 8:8, 18 and Rom. 7:22, 25, 1Cor.9: 21).

It is Christ’s fulfillment of the covenant (divine law) as declared in the power of the Holy Spirit that is the forensic basis of a grace-based salvation received by faith alone in Romans 3:22-26.

*But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the works of the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe... and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom*



*God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith... It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

#### *The Temple Trajectory:*

*It can be said that there was never a time in all of redemptive history when salvation was not transacted apart from divine presence as mediated in/with/through the temple presence of God—The Word fleshed out as the mediatorial presence of God in the midst of us!*

In the Old Covenant for instance, salvation history in the Old Testament was accomplished with such words as dwelling place and tabernacle, even as covenants were initiated and sealed through rites whereby God manifested his saving, albeit mediated, *presence* to his people. (Cf. Gen. 15; 26:24; Exod. 29:42; Deut. 12:5; Lev. 22:3; Ps.76.2; Num. 35:34). The description, *God in the midst of us* (Ps 49), was the single most coveted reality, even as “excommunication” was the most feared curse (Gen.3)

In the New Covenant, the gospel is not presented as a transition from temple presence to “no temple presence,” rather temple presence fulfilled in Christ and then mediated by the Holy Spirit acting in the church during Christ’s ascension ministry. For instance,

John in his gospel goes to great extremes frame Christ in temple fulfillment: Christ is introduced by John as *the Word became flesh and temped among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (Jn 1:14).*

In the second chapter, we hear Jesus say “*destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.* (John 2:19-20 speaking of His resurrection). John then carefully constructs his narrative in a way that draws attention to Christ self-revelation within the context of the great temple feasts. For instance, while celebrating the Passover, Jesus is proclaimed to be the true bread from heaven (6:35ff). While celebrating the feast of the tabernacles, Jesus is proclaimed to be the true light of the world (8:12ff). During the feast of temple dedication that celebrated the reconstruction of the temple in 164BC, Jesus is proclaimed as the consecrated one (10:36ff).

*More than a reference to Christ’s incarnational nature however, John’s reference to “Word” and “Temple” is also a reference to God’s appointed means of grace throughout history in mediating Christ’s presence unto salvation both before and after Christ’s incarnation. It pertains to the nature of Christ applied to the praxis of salvation that is most relevant to Christ’s ascension ministry (as much now post-incarnation as was true in pre-incarnation).*

That such a connection between Christology applied to ecclesiology during Christ’s ascension ministry is intended in scripture is again illustrated by John’s gospel.

In its 1<sup>st</sup> person, active indicative use, the Greek word “anabaino” is used only twice in the NT-- both times in John’s Gospel, and both times referencing Christ ascension.. But interesting:

**The first** use of “anabaino” is stated in the negative “I am not ascending” and is a rebuke to those whose expectations wanted him to skip over his incarnation ministry of humiliation and eventual death as to go directly to exaltation/ascension...

- **John 7:8** I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come.”

That is, the first installment of “Word became flesh and temped among us” relates to Christ’s incarnational ministry and his once and for all accomplishment of our salvation by satisfying the covenant by atonement sacrifice for our sins! That is, the “Word” is fulfilled by Christ our “covenant executor” vis-à-vis his incarnation and is the basis for our justification and assurance with God as received by faith alone-- the basis of a *Gospel-Centered Spirituality!*

The 2<sup>nd</sup> use of “anabaino” is in a post-resurrection conversation with Mary. This time it is used in the positive “I am ascending” albeit a gentle rebuke of Mary clinging to his incarnational presence rather than anticipating the “greater things that Christ envisioned for his ascension ministry. (c.f. Jn 14ff)

**John 20:17** “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending.’”

As then carefully told by John throughout his gospel, Christ envisioned yet a second installment of “Word became flesh and temped among us!” Almost a third of John’s gospel (starting in John 14) focuses on Christ preparing the disciples for his ascension ministry as related to Christ’s temple advent today! For instance:

- “As far back as the first chapter of John at the occasion of Christ’s baptism, there is the promise that Christ will baptize with the Holy Spirit (vs. 33).

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*

In the context of John’s overall narrative, this clearly anticipates Christ’s teachings in John 14-17... To begin, John recounts Jesus’ teaching about why he must go to a place where the disciples could not follow (heaven)

- About his ascension ministry, Christ explains to his disciples that they could expect to see “greater things even... because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12). As by subsequent teaching, the “greater things” anticipates John’s version of the great commission with respect to Christ’s ascension temple presences throughout the world in myriads of socio-geographical contexts and at the same time! He explains:

*“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live (in you). On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you” (Jn. 14:18-20).*

Notice! He is not here talking about Christ’s final, incarnational, return, but his mediated return by the Holy Spirit in the “house” (temple) of God’s mediated presence by the Holy Spirit. For instance,

- Immediately after promising to make his “home with us” (vs. 14:23). He says,  
*“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you (vs. 25-26).”*
- This all leads to the so called “priestly (temple)” prayer in John 17... wherein he concludes:

***21** that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. **22** The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, **23** I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.*

This is extraordinary language that speaks to the mystery of Christology applied to Christ’s present ministry on earth by the Holy Spirit even as he is with the Father in heaven! And it makes sense of Christ’s earlier correction to Mary concerning a desire to cling to Christ’s single-formed incarnational presence in light of the “greater” multi-formed presence planned for Christ’s ascension ministry. *This all sets up John’s amazing rendition of the “great commission.” In vs. 21ff as carefully within the context of a CONTINUED temple of Christ’s presence!* The commission goes like this:

**Temple Benediction:** Peace be with you.”

**Temple Commission:** As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” (c.f. 1:14)

**Temple Power:** **22** And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. (c.f. 1:33)

**Temple Absolution 23** If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” (c.f. Mt 16)

Mary Coloe about John’s message concerning Christ ascension ministry.

*The temple is not a peripheral image. It is used consistently throughout the text and moves beyond the life of Jesus into the life of the community, giving the community a clear sense of identity and a way of sustaining faith in the absence of Jesus.<sup>14</sup>*

Consistent with the Messianic expectations of the Old Covenant and the Gospels, Paul’s description of salvation with the promise “I will dwell with them” (2 Cor. 6:16). And lest this “dwelling” be confused with a private experience, Paul, in 1Cor 3, dares to assert “Do you not know that *you* (plural) are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in *you* (plural)? Therefore, throughout the New Covenant, words like “temple” and “tabernacle” and “dwelling place” describe God’s saving presence as pertaining to the “household of God” or “the church of the living God” no less than it did under the Old Covenant context (c.f. Eph. 2:18-22, Rev. 21:3)—which brings us to Christology applied to Ascension and Ecclesiology!

### 3) Total Christ Christology Applied to Ecclesiology:

The term “Total Christ” originates from 5th century pastor-theologian Augustine of Hippo about the relationship of Christ’s incarnational ministry (past) to his ongoing ascension ministry (present) in and through the apostolic church. Relating John 1:14 to Ephesians 1:21-23 and 2:19ff Augustine concludes:

*The Word was made flesh, and dwelled among us; to that flesh is joined the church, and there is made total Christ, both head and body.*

St. Augustine, Homilies on the Gospel of John

Augustine was informed by the earlier church counsels in Christology that addressed the relation of Christ’s divinity with Christ’s humanity and then applied to Christ ascension ministry. Specifically, the biblical concept related divine “Word” logos” to human flesh such as in the giving of the Holy Spirit to the flesh of the church, God’s temple is mediated on earth as it is in heaven.

The protagonists involved Bishop Nestorius of Constantinople and Bishop Cyril of Alexandria representing the East and West respectively. The former stressed two natures to preserve Christ’s humanity. The later stressed one nature to preserve Christ’s divinity. And yet both conceded the absolute necessity of preserving a *dialectical understanding of the relationship of the human and divine in Christology.*<sup>15</sup>

The decisive reconciling moment came during the Ephesus Counsel in AD 433, when Cyril accepted a statement, by Nestorius that emphasized the distinctness of the two natures within the one Person of Christ. Relative to Augustine’s subsequent use applied to Christ’s ascension ministry, it is significant how Nestorius phrased his clarification:

In a statement that invoked the language of John’s gospel (1:14) and say:

*“I did not say that the Son was one (person) and God the Word another; I said that God the Word was by nature one and the temple by nature another, one Son by conjunction.”<sup>16</sup>*

The counsel of Chalcedon in AD 451 brought further clarity such as become widely accepted in the Greek, Roman and Protestant traditions. The Chalcedon creed reflected more of a synthesis of the original Nestorian and Cyril positions and codified the language the oftused language “*Distinct but never separate.*” More exactly, the counsel concluded:

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<sup>15</sup> The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, Last Updated 4-23-2013

<sup>16</sup> Green.. Quote taken from a sermon Nestorius preached in 430 as quoted by Aloys Grillmeier, S.J., *Christ in Christian Tradition*, Vol. 1: *From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition, trans. John Bowden (Atlanta: John Knox

“that one and the same Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son, must be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion or change, without division or separation.”

And again,

“the distinction between the natures was never abolished by their union but rather the character proper to each of the two natures was preserved as they came together in one person.”<sup>17</sup>

Enter Augustine’s *Totus Christus* idea concerning Christology as applied to missional ecclesiology.

The focus of Augustine’s ascension Christology was to address both the “distinct” but “not separate” aspects as applied to the church. Here again:

The Word was made flesh, and dwelled among us; to that flesh is joined the church, and there is made the *total Christ*, head and body.<sup>18</sup>

**John 1:14** *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

**Eph. 1:22** *And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

The meaning of “to that flesh is joined the church”??

- More than witness but also reference to Christ’s mediated presence wherein the very flesh of the people, albeit in many cultural forms, is mystically joined to Christ by the Holy Spirit or “the mediatorial body of Christ” on earth in union with Christ ascension presence in heaven.
- Augustine’s point is that the visibly and organically socialized church into a given cultural-linguistic “flesh” as carefully patterned after the apostolic foundation with Christ as the cornerstone IS (note below qualifications) the mediated presence of Christ in the midst of us today.

*Then let us rejoice and give thanks that we are made not only Christians, but Christ. Do you understand, brothers, and apprehend the grace of God upon us? Marvel, be glad, we are made Christ. For if he is the head, we are the members: the whole man is he and we... The fullness of Christ, then, is head and members. Head and members, what is that? Christ and the Church.*<sup>19</sup>

- Qualified! Augustine carefully qualified the union of Christ to Church by reference to the meaning of Paul’s warning that “some have died” concerning a wrongful participation in the Lord’s Supper. Augustine raised the question “why then are there some that have not died who have eaten the bread improperly?” His answer:

*“Because they understood the visible food spiritually, hungered spiritually, tasted spiritually, that they might be filled spiritually. For even we at this day receive visible food: but the sacrament is one thing, the virtue of the sacrament another.”*

*Consequently, he that dwells not in Christ, and in whom Christ dwells not, doubtless neither eats His flesh [spiritually] nor drinks His blood [although he may press the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ carnally and visibly with his teeth].*<sup>20</sup>

Accordingly, J. N.D. Kelley will conclude how “in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century... the universal, if somewhat vague assumption was that the sacraments were outward and visible signs marking the presence of an invisible, but none the less genuine grace.” Kelley further explains that in Augustine’s view of baptismal efficacy, “the sacrament itself is one thing and the power of the

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<sup>17</sup> Green, p. 455

<sup>18</sup> St. Augustine, *On the Epistle of John* 1.2.

<sup>19</sup> St. Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, In. Io. XXI.8).

<sup>20</sup> Augustine, *Homilies in John*, Tractice 26, Sec. 11.

sacrament is another... in baptism the water serves as the sacrament of the grace imported, but the grace itself is invisibly operated by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>21</sup>

Qualification notwithstanding, this view of the church as the very life giving presence of Christ during his ascension ministry is recognized both before and after Augustine such as by Cyprian and John Calvin respectively.

Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage (AD 250)

*She is one mother, plentiful in the results of fruitfulness: from her womb we are born, by her milk we are nourished, by her spirit we are animated . . . Whoever is separated from the Church . . . is separated from the promises to the Church; nor can he who forsakes the Church of Christ attain to the rewards of Christ . . . He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother. If any one could escape who was outside the ark of Noah, then he also may escape who shall be outside of the Church.[1]*

John Calvin

*“no extent of space interferes with the boundless energy of the Spirit, which transfuses life into us from the flesh of Christ.”<sup>22</sup>*

*From her (church) womb we are born, by her milk we are nourished, by her spirit we are animated... Whoever is separated from the Church is separated from the promises to the Church. Nor can he who forsakes the Church of Christ attain to the rewards of Christ... Beyond the pale of the Church, no forgiveness of sins, no salvation, can be hoped for ... the paternal favor of God and the special evidence of spiritual life are confined to his peculiar people, and hence the abandonment of the Church is always fatal?[2]*

### Calvin:

*We acknowledge without any circumlocution that the flesh of Christ, is life-giving, not only because once in it our salvation was obtained; but because now we being united to him in sacred union, it breathes life into us... because being by the power of the Spirit engrafted into the body of Christ, we have a common life with him; fore from the hidden fountain of divinity life is, in a wonderful way, infused into the flesh of Christ and thence flows out to us...” Christ is absent from us as to the body; by his Spirit, however dwelling in us, he so lifts us to himself in heaven, that he transfuses the life-giving vigor of his flesh into us, as we grow by vital heat of the sun.”<sup>23</sup>*

Notice especially “without any circumlocution.” That is, without attempting to talk through the mystery, Calvin was comfortable by faith talking around it. Historian Brooks Holifield notes how for Nevin and Calvin,

*“salvation required more than forensic atonement, but also a living union with Christ in order to attain a new order of existence... Christ, by overcoming the chasm between the human and divine, manifested his life in the mundane.”*

This efficacious union that Calvin envisioned is again sufficiently illustrated by Calvin in his *Institutes* wherein he confirms:

*We expect salvation from him — not because he stands aloof from us, but because engrafting us into his body he not only makes us partakers of all his benefits, but also of himself... you become a member of him, and hence one with him... It will never do to separate Christ from neither us, nor us from him; but we must, with both hands, keep firm hold of that alliance by which he has*

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<sup>21</sup> J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, (1978)p. 422.

<sup>22</sup> John Calvin, *Corpus Reformatorum*, 37: 48.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Hodge, DR, *Essays*, p. 364.

*riveted us to himself. ... That Christ is not external to us, but dwells in us; and not only unites us to himself by an undivided bond of fellowship, but by a wondrous communion brings us daily into closer connection, until he becomes altogether one with us.*<sup>24</sup>

Hodge and Nevin compared—from Wallace: (HISTORY AND SACRAMENT: JOHN WILLIAMSON NEVIN AND CHARLES HODGE ON THE LORD'S SUPPER by Peter J. Wallace (MJT 11 (2000) 171-201)

Wallace-- In order to show the essential difference between Hodge's understanding of the Reformed doctrine and his own, Nevin presented Hodge's summary statement, filled in with his own supplements. As this is the simplest presentation of their doctrines, it is worth reproducing the whole paragraph (plain text is Hodge, italics are Nevin's additions):

"Christ is really present to his people, in this ordinance, not bodily, but by his Spirit," *as the medium of a higher mode of existence*; "not in the sense of local nearness, but of efficacious operation," *nullifying miraculously (mystically, miraculously) the bar of distance and bringing the very substance of his body into union with their life* "They receive him not with the mouth, but by faith," *as the organ by which only the soul is qualified to admit the divine action now noticed*; "they receive his flesh, not as flesh, not as material particles," *but dynamically in the inward power of its life, (so that the clause "nor its human life," is not correct)*; "his body as broken and his blood as shed," *the value of that sacrifice carried in the vivific virtue of the same body now gloriously exalted in heaven*. "The union thus signified and effected between him and them, is not a corporeal union, nor a mixture of substances," *in the Roman or Lutheran sense, "but spiritual and mystical;" not merely mental, but including the real presence of Christ's whole life under an objective character, and reaching on our side also through the soul into the body*; "arising from the indwelling of the Spirit," *not as the proxy only of an absent Christ, but as the supernatural bond of a true life connection, by which his very flesh is joined to ours, more intimately far than the trunk to the branches, or the head to the members, in the natural world*. "The efficacy of this sacrament, as a means of grace, is not in the signs," *separately taken, "nor in the service," outwardly considered "nor in the minister, nor in the word, but solely in the attending influence of the holy Ghost," as the necessary complement or inward side of the divine mystery itself of whose pledge, and whose mirific action can never fail to take effect objectively where the subject is in a state to admit it by faith*. "This we believe," *so filled out with positive contents, "to be a fair statement of the doctrine of the Reformed church."*

## II. Ascension Christology Applied: *The Five Marks of a Total Christ Spirituality and Ecclesiology:*

Douglas Farrow, *Ascension and Ecclesia* has noted that "the kind of ecclesiology we, wish to do is quite impossible, then, without careful attention to the ascension... the church is marked off from the world... by its mysterious union."<sup>25</sup>

From a praxis point of view, this mysterious union not only speaks to Christ as the fulfillment of Christ as God's divine Word (covenant head) and Temple (efficacious presence), but to the manner in which we practice Christ's

<sup>24</sup> Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1559*, ed. J. T. McNeill and F.L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), III.2.24. C.f. Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament*, (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1953)

<sup>25</sup> Douglas Farrow, *Ascension and Ecclesia: On The Significance Of The Doctrine Of The Ascension For Ecclesiology And Christian Cosmology*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1999). p. 11, 17 respectively.

ascension ministry today. The Covenant and Temple aspects of ecclesiology, although distinct, are never separate. They must be maintained in a mutually inter-dependent manner

This is perfectly illustrated by Paul in Ephesians.

Chapter 1: (notice the benefits “accomplished”... applied/ experienced pattern)

- High Gospel: 3-15
- High Church: 16-23

Chapter 2: (notice the twice repeated “once, but now” patterns as to describe the two aspects of salvation

- High Gospel; 1-10
- High Church: 11-22

This fullness of the two orientations in Total Christ spirituality lifewise illustrated and by 17<sup>th</sup> century theologian-pastor Jonathan Edwards using the analogy of light and heat. Two such examples are located in his *Religious Affections* and the other from his *Charity and It's Fruits* as follows:

As, on the one hand, there must be light in the understanding as well as an affected fervent heart; where there is heat without light, there can be nothing divine or heavenly in that heart, a head stored with notions and speculations, with a cold and unaffected heart, there can be nothing divine in that light; that knowledge is no true spiritual knowledge of divine things. If the great things of religion are rightly understood, they will affect the heart<sup>26</sup>

A truly practical or saving faith, is light and heat together, or rather light and love, while that which is only a speculative faith, is only light without heat; and, in that it wants spiritual heat or divine love, is in vain, and good for nothing. A speculative faith consists only in the assent of the understanding; but in a saving faith which is only of the former kind, is no better than the faith of devils for they have faith so far as it can exist without love, believing while they tremble.<sup>27</sup>

The inter-dependence of *Covenant* (High Gospel) and *Temple* (High Church) as to inform Christ's ascension ministry through the church can be further illustrated as follows:

- *If the covenant constitutes and regulates the temple*
- *The temple executed and participated in the covenant*
  
- *If “Covenant” is divine law unto salvation*
- *Temple is divine presence unto salvation*
  
- *If covenant is the basis of assurance by grace through faith alone in Christ our covenant executor*
- *The temple is the means by which that grace is mediated or “fleshed out” into the common vernacular of the socio-cultural flesh of the nations...*
  
- *If Covenant is objectifying/personal grace—the basis of our assurance*
- *Temple is subjectifying/communal grace—the basis for our participation in that assurance...*
  
- *Neither “save” us—but are the means through which GOD saves us, as to bring his salvation into our existence on earth as it is in heaven the power of the Holy Spirit.*

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<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Edwards, A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* [Works], ed. by John E. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), Vol. 2:120

<sup>27</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits* (“Works” Vol 2, Banner, p. 13)

- *It could be said that the covenant justifies us*
- *It could be said that the temple converts us...*

Relevant to Christ's ascension ministry today, we seek to experience and practice the many implications that accompany Christ's ministry as BOTH *justifier* (covenant head) and *missional power* (temple presence- High Church) through a ministry that is both "high gospel" and "high church." (Sadly, to pit one emphasis against the other has contributed to schisms throughout church history-- west vs. east, and the many "either-or" pendulum swings represented in intra-mural debates denominationally).

Total Christ is dedicated to a spirituality that reunites high gospel with high church so as to rediscover Christ as by his messianic vocations of Prophet, Priest AND King. Without rehearsing here the full redemptive-historical trajectory of each, suffice it to illustrate in the NC context:

That Christ is the fulfillment of the OT vocations:

King: "Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet" (1 Cor. 15:24–25).

Prophet "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His son, whom He has *appointed heir of all things*, through whom also He made the worlds" (Heb. 1:1–2).

Priest "And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting *till His enemies are made His footstool*. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us, for after He had said before, 'This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,' then He adds, 'Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.' Now where there is remission of these, there is no more.' Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin" (Heb. 10:11–18).

That the threefold office of Christ as mediated through the visible church is further indicated when one considers what the Bible teaches about the church's ministry:

The Prophetic Role of the Church—*Apostolic Succession of Word*

"But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?" (Romans 10:14ff).

"I left you behind in Crete for this reason so that you should put in order what remained to be done by appointing elders in every town....He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it" (Titus 1:5, 9).

The Priestly Role of the Church—*Apostolic Succession of Sacramental Worship*

"And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16).

"The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a *sharing* in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a *sharing* in the body of Christ....You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons....For to begin with when you come together as a church..., For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you preach the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 10:16ff).

The Kingly Role of the Church—*Apostolic Succession Community and Shepherding Love*

"Shepherd the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising oversight...and when the chief shepherd appears" (1 Peter 5:2ff).



“Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to warn everyone with tears” (Acts 20:28–31).

In summary, Paul speaks about the “pattern of sound words” related to his instructions to his young protégé, Timothy “in order that” he might “know how *one ought* to conduct oneself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:14-15). And would it surprise us that Paul’s “instructions” to Timothy covered such topics as instructions on kingly “rule” as by ordination of under-shepherds (1 Tim 3), priestly worship (1Tim 2) and prophetic doctrine (1Tim 1)? These then are the aspects of spirituality that are “being joined together” (Eph 4) such as to mediate the ascended Christ on earth as prophet, priest and king:

**In sum, the five marks of a Total Christ Church are:**

### Paradigms in Spirituality

<p><b>Liberal Spirituality</b></p> <p><b>Communal Oriented</b></p> <p><b>Low Church/Low Gospel</b></p>	<p><b>Modern Evangelical Spirituality</b></p> <p><b>Confessional Oriented</b></p> <p><b>Low Church/High Gospel</b></p>
<p><b>Sacerdotal Spirituality</b></p> <p><b>Sacramental Oriented</b></p> <p><b>High Church/Low Gospel</b></p>	<p><b>Classical-Evangelical Spirituality</b></p> <p><b>Sacramental</b></p> <p><b>Communal</b></p> <p><b>Confessional</b></p> <p><b>High Church/High Gospel</b></p>

**Gospel Centered (A Covenantal, “High Gospel” Spirituality)**— The gospel, “good news”, IS grace—amazing, free, unlimited grace—such that where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more, and received through faith alone! It has as much to do with the A’s of the Christian life (new birth) as the Z’s of the Christian life (growing in Christian maturity). The gospel is at once the message and power of holistic salvation. Every MA church seeks to live a gospel centered spirituality that effects everything—how we suffer, how we feel about ourselves, how we relate to others, everything (Rom 1:16, Rom. 5:6-11, 20, Eph 2:1-10)!

*“Cheer up! You're a worse sinner than you ever dared imagine, and you're more loved than you ever dared hope.”*  
*Jack Miller*

What to look for:

- The experience of Christian assurance of God’s favor based on God’s grace in Christ.
- People who are identity oriented as adopted sons/daughters vs. performance oriented as slaves/workers.
- Transparency in willingness to confess *real* sins.
- A different approach to suffering and trials as related to God’s training vs. God’s punishment.
- A new motivation for service that is internal and gratitude based vs. external and duty based.

- More and more set free from self-promotion, self-defending, self-justifying, blame-shifting approach to life.
- Law loving as it is the basis for personal and communal flourishing now that we are no longer law relying as the basis of being accepted by God.
- Sabbath enjoying in trustful contentment upon God's gracious provisions in Christ.

**Missional Presence (A Temple, "High Church" Spirituality)**– More than a source of mission, the carefully designed, apostolically-organized, church is the *locus* of mission-- ordinarily the very life-giving and mediatorial presence of Christ. Christ's ascended human body is distinct, but never separate, from the body of Christ, the church on earth as being engrafted into Christ by the Holy Spirit. And this changes everything about the way we think of "church." We believe that local, Christ-centered and apostolically designed churches are the very epicenter of Christ's saving presence on earth "against which even the gates of hell cannot prevail"! And just the church being the church with the whole world present is God's missionary strategy to the world (Mt. 16:18, John 1:14, 20:21 with Eph 1:22-23, 2:18ff)!

*Just as we insist that a Church which has ceased to be a mission has lost the essential character of a Church, so must we also say that a mission which is not at the same time truly a Church is not a true expression of the divine apostolate. An unchurchly mission is as much a monstrosity as an unmissionary church.*

Leslie Newbigin

What to look for:

- And emphasis upon participational apologetics vs. just declarative apologetics.
- Non-Christians participating in the life of the church and worship.
- Worship that both, and at the same time, is a participation in the mystery of Christ's transcendent otherness yet is accessed through the incarnate presence of Christ with local mannerisms.
- A willingness to suffer all things for the sake of the "elect" – both unchurched and churched – no false dichotomies.
- A confidence in the outward means of grace as a missionary strategy to our world (preaching, sacraments, community, prayers).
- A church that assumes a missionary mentality both locally and globally.

**Confessional (Christ Our Prophet)**-- We aspire to hear God's voice in a robust appreciation and experience of Biblical theology and expositional preaching. Whereas the Scripture is our only rule of faith and practice, we want to read and interpret the scripture with the consensus of the church that is passed down from every age and place through the use of Confessions of Faith. Our consensus is reflected in the Westminster Confession of Faith, which is consistent with other creeds used by other denominations that MA is associated with. We strive to apply our beliefs to all of life. (Luke 24:13ff, Acts 20:27, 2 Tim. 3:16, Titus 2:1,7)

"The dogma is the drama!" Dorothy Sayers

What to look for:

- A culture of humble submission to scripture revealed in a willingness to biblically regulated worship and practice.
- A high regard for the Christian scriptures as the only rule of faith and practice wherein the church, acting corporately, is careful to declare nothing save the whole counsel of God's Word (not more, not

less) as discerned by good and necessary inference.

- A high regard for the scriptures in preaching that is expositional and Christ-centered, careful to discern the original intent by preaching right doctrines/practices from right texts.
- A humble regard for the church vs. the individual as “the pillar and bulwark of the truth” such as to read the Bible communally vs. individualistically including the use of historic creeds and confessions.
- A church that is careful to consistently teach and apply biblical theology as the friend of Christian renewal and sanctification.
- A culture of humble submission to scripture that is less prone to be blown about by every wind of faddish doctrine and philosophy of ministry.

**Sacramental (Christ Our Priest)**—We desire an emphasis on sacramental spirituality wherein Christ our Priest is “fleshed out” in a carefully designed, four movement, worship service. More than getting people to the gospel, worship after the pattern of temple participation invites us to do the gospel. We invite the world to worship with us as an evangelistic strategy in “doxological evangelism.” Sacramental spirituality is expressed both in doing sacraments weekly and being sacramental throughout the week. By participating in the local cultural manners specific to a socio-cultural neighborhood of each congregation, Christ’s flesh is joined in mystic union to the flesh of the church, the “body of Christ.” (1 Cor. 10:14-17, Heb. 12:22-24, Rev. 4-5)!

*No extent of space interferes with the boundless energy of the Spirit which transfuses life into us from the flesh of Christ... and therefore we expect salvation from him — not because he stands aloof from us, but because grafting us into his body he not only makes us partakers of all his benefits, but also of himself.*

John Calvin

What to look for:

- And emphasis upon participation apologetics vs. just declarative apologetics.
- Non-Christians participating in the life of the church and worship.
- Worship that both, and at the same time, is a participation in the mystery of Christ’s transcendent otherness yet is accessed through the incarnate presence of Christ with local mannerisms.
- A willingness to suffer all things for the sake of the “elect” – both unchurched and churched – no false dichotomies.
- A confidence in the outward means of grace as a missionary strategy to our world (preaching, sacraments, community, prayers).
- A church that assumes a missionary mentality both locally and globally.

**Communal (Christ Our King)**—It’s not that modernist churches are too organized, but not organized enough! We seek a more intentional, studied and worked out strategy of community formation that is carefully built upon the apostolic foundation with Christ as the cornerstone! We emphasize a local-oriented ministry where community in the sacramental flesh of the neighborhood really matters. This community formation is manifest by an emphasis on life on life “one anothering” and holistic empowerment under the shepherding care of Christ’s under-shepherds and servant leaders. (Jn 13:34, Gal. 6:2, 1 Peter 5:1-5)!

*Christ the Lord is always himself present with his church... truly and actually... for the Lord is never absent from his*

*church, but is always personally present... through the ministry of his word which he does outwardly and tangibly through his ministers and shepherds.*

*Martin Bucer*

It is our duty to let the benefit and fruit of the Lord's Supper become manifest, and we ought to show that we have received it with profit. ... that even as we have eaten and drunk the body and blood of Christ the Lord...these we must take, and repeat them to our neighbor, not by the mouth alone, but by our actions.

Martin Luther

What to look for:

- A communal, rather than individual, approach to everything – such as to change the way we think about our possessions, time, decisions, ethics – everything in relation to one-anothering!
- A community that shares its burdens with one another.
- A community that values the Christian village in child raising.
- A communal consciousness that feels the relation of the part to the whole, both in flourishing as each member flourishes and in suffering as one member suffers.
- A missional method that focuses less on the individual evangelist and more on the communal evangelist as a strategy for reaching those not yet Christians.
- Intentional shepherding and life on life (vs. just curriculum on life) discipleship.

## **A Few Applications:**

### **1) Church Planting As the Ultimate Missional Strategy:**

The Example of: Acts 2 (43-47)

As far back as the Acts of the Apostles, history has shown that the best way to reach new generations, new residents and new people groups for the Gospel of Jesus Christ is quite simple to get people to the person of Christ himself! At Mission Anabaino, we believe that during Christ's ascension ministry today, Christ has an address at every place where there is an apostolic, Christ-centered church. T. F. Torrance in *Royal Priesthood* explained it like this:

*The Spirit operates by creating out of the word a body, which St. Paul calls the Body of Christ.... As such this body becomes matched to Christ as His vis-à-vis in history and as the instrument of His saving purpose in the Gospel. It is the sphere where through the presence of the Spirit the salvation-events of the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension are operative here and now in history, the sphere where within the old creation the new creation has broken in with power.*

Mission Anabaino (MA) is mission "I am ascending" (Grk. "anabaino" c.f. John 20:17). It seeks to fulfill the "greater things" of Christ's great expectations regarding his ascension ministry today (John 14:12) through both Church planting and a collaborative movement in missional ecclesiology.

### **2) Ecclesial Evangelism and Conversion**

- **Evangelism:**

*The Congregation as Evangelism* ‘

*Just as we insist that a Church which has ceased to be a mission has lost the essential character of a Church, so must we also say that a mission which is not at the same time truly a Church is not a true expression of the divine apostolate. An unchurchly mission is as much a monstrosity as an unmissionary*

church.”<sup>28</sup>

Leslie Newbigin

*Evangelism means incorporation into the church, the body of Christ. And here we encounter one of the very worrying features of so much televangelism... yet evangelism in the New Testament is shamelessly corporate... It has been said that a Christianity that does not begin with the individual does not begin, but a Christianity that ends with the individual ends. Michael Green*

The Congregation as Hermeneutic to the Gospel “, Gospel in a Pluralistic Society)

*The church is not the source of witness, it is the locus of witness.... The presence of a new reality, the presence in the shared life of the church of the spirit who is the arrobom of the kingdom, has become possible because of what Jesus has done, because of his incarnation, his ministry as the obedient child of his father, his suffering and death, his resurrection, AND his ascension into heaven and his session at the right hand of God... It's visible embodiment will be a community that lives by this story, a community whose existence is visibly defined in the regular rehearsing and reenactment of the story which has given it birth, the story of the self-emptying of God in the ministry of life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Its visible center as a continuing social entity is that weekly repeated event in which believers share bread and wine as Jesus commanded, as his pledge to them and their pledge to him that they are one with him in his passion and one with him in his victory...<sup>29</sup>*

- **Conversion**

**Mt. 28: 16-20**, go therefore, make disciples of all nations, by baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit and by teaching them to obey/believe all that I have commanded you.

**Acts 2:38-39**, Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven and you will receive the gift of the Holy spirit. For this promise is for you, for your children after you. and for all that are afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call unto himself

Note Also Early Church Revisited

*Pagan converts to the [Christian] mainstream did not, for the most part, first understand the faith and then decide to become Christians; rather, the process was reversed: they first decided and then they understood. More precisely, they were first attracted by the Christian community and form of life... they submitted themselves to prolonged catechetical instruction in which they practiced new modes of behavior and learned the stories of Israel and their fulfillment in Christ. Only after they had acquired proficiency in the alien Christian language and form of life were they deemed able intelligently and responsibly to profess the faith, to be baptized.<sup>30</sup>*

• Augustine's Confessions revisited

*We were baptized, and all anxiety as to our past life fled away.<sup>31</sup>*

### 3) Church Membership and participation in the full presence of Christ!

- **The Importance of Church Membership For Total Christ Presence—not about buying in, but being/partaking in Christ's full presence (head AND body Eph 1:22-23)**

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God. (Eph. 2:19-22)

Notice all the privileges that would be meaningless without:

**Examples:**

**The meaningful involvement of under-shepherds “allotted to their charge.”**

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<sup>28</sup> Household of God, P. 147.

<sup>29</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society, Ch. 10, p. 120

<sup>30</sup> George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 132c.f. c.f. Above redemptive historical survey and especially the story of the early church in Act 2:1-47, note especially vs. 44-47, and then a more theological discourse about the relation of faith to participation in the life of God in, with and through the “temple” of the New Testament church in Ephesians 2:1- 22.

<sup>31</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf/Random House, 2001), 9.6.

1 Peter 5:1-3, I exhort the elders among you to *tend the flock of god that is in your charge*, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it...

**Bearing one another's burdens in real ways:**

1Tim. 5:8 But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household...

3) A Paradigm for Catholicity

**Paradigms in Ecumenism**

Low Church, Low Gospel <i>Compromise</i> (WCC)  Mono-Traditional/Blended Ecumenical	Low Church, High Gospel <i>Pragmatic</i> (Modern Evangelical)  Non-Traditional/Non-Ecumenical Cooperatives/Networks
High Church, Low Gospel <i>Imperial</i> (RC)  Mono-Traditional/Schismatic	High Church, High Gospel <i>Classical Evangelical</i> (Newbigin)  Multi-Traditional/Missional

*For the perfecting of the life of the whole body, the Church of South India needs the heritage of each of the uniting Churches, and each of those Churches will, it is hoped, not lose the continuity of its own life, but preserve that life enriched by the union with itself of the other two Churches. The Church of South India is thus formed by a combination of different elements each bringing its contribution to the whole, and not by the absorption of any one by any other. It is, therefore, also a comprehensive Church; and its members, while firmly holding the fundamentals of the faith and order of the Church Universal, are allowed wide freedom of opinion in all other matters, and wide freedom of action in such differences of practice as are consistent with the general framework of the Church as one organized body.*

Lesslie Newbigin *The Unity that We Seek*

- o Organic/Councilar (Communal) vs. Invisible
- o Multi-Traditional (Confessional) vs. compromise
- o Sacramental Jurisdiction (Sacramental) vs. pragmatic
- o Missional /Gospel vs. socio-political gospel

Reunions?

- Rid of confusing socio-cultural 'Forms' from confessional "elements"—reunion of reformation churches via use of multi-forms of unity.
- Reevaluation of East vs West (without the polarizing extremes as a result of politicized theology???)
- Distinguishing the spirituality of the church in cultural engagement from cultural wars... a post socio-political "conservative vs. liberal" church to a orthodox church?