

Total Christ Ecclesiology

Introduction: After Modernity, What?

Brian McLaren:

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?"¹

Thomas Oden:

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.²

- *Post-Modern Yawn:*
 - *From modern reductionism (either-or small minded) to post-modern nothingism (anything minded) back to pre-modern? (both-ands?)*
- The cliché of a "re" prefix: Doug Pagitt's *Church Re-imagined...*, Driscoll's "*Reformation...*," Chester and Timms "*Reshaping...*" etc
 - As much a protest as it is a search that dares to imagine spirituality and church practice no longer western facing and modernist
- Neo-Denominational Unsettledness

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 privatisation 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... One of the encouraging features of church life in England today is the growing number of "local ecumenical projects that bring together the denominationally separated churches in one place in order to create a more coherent and credible Christian witness to the whole human community in that place. These are scattered, fragile, and vulnerable enterprises, but they indicate the direction in which the church must go.

Total Christ Thesis:

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:

¹ Brian McLaren: *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), p. 16.

² Thomas Oden, *After Modernity, What?*

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—Christ!

Total Christ Method—Christology *Applied!*

A. Incarnational Christology

About the nature and person of Christ, John in his gospel introduces Christ:

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— John 1:14

Throughout then his gospel, John goes to great extremes frame Christ in temple fulfillment:

- In just 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 carefully construct 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). Here is John’s Christology in a nutshell even as it loomed large in the debates leading up to the Christology of Chalcedon...

Later during the 5th century church deliberation in Christology, John’s gospel and especially John 1:14 loomed large.

The 5th century controversy in Christology involved the relation of the divine and human within [Jesus Christ](#). The questions were: To what extent was Christ human? And to what extent was Christ divine even as to relate to Christ the divine logos (Word) and human flesh (temple) respectively.

The protagonists involved [Bishop Nestorius of Constantinople](#) and [Bishop Cyril of Alexandria](#) representing the East and West respectively. Cyril emphasized the unity of the two in one Person, while Nestorius so emphasized their distinctness that he seemed to be splitting Christ into two Persons acting in concert. 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*.³

It was all charged within the political context surrounding whether to venerate Mary as the “mother of God” (Cyril), or not (Nestorius). Accordingly, historian Ben Green makes the observation how “the challenge for understanding the debate between Nestorius and Cyril is to distinguish the moderate from the extreme.

Two Councils:

1) The Council(s) at [Ephesus](#) in 431 and 433:

- a) Armed with a commission to represent Pope Celestine I as well as himself, Cyril convened the council and condemned Nestorius. He had not waited, however, for the arrival of certain bishops from the East, particularly from the see of Antioch, where Nestorius had lived before he became bishop of Constantinople. When they did reach [Ephesus](#), they reconvened the council and condemned Cyril.

³ The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, *Last Updated 4-23-2013*

Papal recognition of Cyril's council was eventually obtained, however, and Nestorius was banished as a heretic. Even so, the dispute continued with a whole host of politicking and subsequently more personalities who held to the more radicalized positions on both sides-- The Antiochene "school" per Eutyches on the east side and the Alexandrian school per Dioscorus on the west side

b) Council at Ephesus in 433: And yet peace in the church was finally restored in 433, when Cyril accepted a statement, representing a compromise with Antioch, that emphasized the distinctness of the two natures within the one Person of Christ.

His statement was to invoke 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."⁴

2) Chalcedon in AD 451: It took Chalcedon to finally clarify the Christological doctrine itself as would eventually become widely accepted in the Greek, Roman and Protestant traditions. The Chalcedon creed reflected more of a "win-win" compromise between the original Nestorian and Cyril positions and codified the language: "*Distinct but never separate*"

The counsel would eventually clarify,

"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."⁵

"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."

NOTE: "the character proper to each person— a reference to Nestorius commentary on John 1:14 and the Word/Temple nature of Christ.

B. Christology Applied To Ascension

More than a reference to Christ's nature, John's reference to "Word" and "Temple" is of course 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. In other words, it is the nature of Christ applied to the praxis of salvation that is most relevant to Christ's ascension ministry (as much so now post-incarnation as in pre-incarnation). These two-fold word-covenant and flesh-temple trajectory of redemptive history is the Christo-centric basis of a biblical spirituality or, as some say, "philosophy of ministry. Sadly, while the church has tended to take a biblically defined Christology very seriously, it has often lost the connection of Christology to spirituality. That such a connection between Christology applied to Spirituality is intended by Christ's is again illustrated by John's gospel.

In its 1st 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 were wanting 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."

⁴ 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)*, 2nd revised edition, trans. John Bowden (Atlanta: John Knox

⁵ Green, p. 455

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 becoming the temple sacrifice of atonement for our sins! That is, the “Word” is fulfilled by Christ’s carnation and is the basis for our Justification and Assurance with God as received by faith alone. It becomes the basis of a *Gospel-Centered Spirituality*

- **The 2nd** 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 and the “greater things Christ envisioned for his ascension ministry.

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.’”

That is, as 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 away 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).*

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. Therefore,

- 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.*⁶

Augustine’s Total Christ Christology (Incarnational Christology Applied to Ascension):

Returning then to the Christological counsels, the question is raised as to what exactly is the meaning of Nestorius’ earlier clarification, “ I said that God *the Word* was by nature one and the *temple* by nature another, one Son by conjunction.”⁷ Was Nestorius distinguishing a “once and for all” ideal-objectifying-*word* or “covenantal” paradigm in heaven and an ongoing material-subjectifying–communal or “temple” paradigm as mediated on earth?” Enter Augustine’s *Totus Christus* idea concerning Christology as applied to missional ecclesiology.

The focus of Augustine’s *Totus Christus* Christology in relation to ecclesiology was concerned to address both the “distinct” but “not separate” aspects of Christ’s ascension ministry. For instance Augustine wrote:

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. ⁸

E.g Augustine relates John 1:14 incarnation description to Paul’s ascension description by use of Eph 1:22-23.

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.*

Interestingly, if John 1:14 incarnation ministry is focused upon covenant fulfillment, John’s 14ff focus on ascension ministry is focused on missional ecclesiology—the exact “once.... but now” pattern repeated twice by Paul in Ephesians pertaining to salvation by grace through faith alone based Christ’s substitutionary covenant keeping and salvation by participation in Christ’s mediated presence through the household of God or “temple-church” respectively. (Eph 2:1-10 and 11ff respectively)

The meaning of “to that flesh is joined the church” is of particular significance. . It would appear that Augustine’s point is that the significance of the church is something more than a witness. Rather, it is also a mediated presence wherein the very flesh of the people, albeit in many cultural forms, is mystically joined to Christ by the Holy Spirit to be the mediatorial body of Christ on earth in union with Christ ascension presence in haven, really, if also fallibly. 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 (not necessarily, not necessarily immediately) the mediated presence of Christ in the midst of us today. Augustine writes for instance:

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

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ St. Augustine, *On the Epistle of John* 1.2.

members. Head and members, what is that? Christ and the Church.⁹

To further illustrate this point in relation to Augustine's "we are made Christ" idea, the Martin Luther in the 16th century often applied Augustine's *Totus Christus* to Christ's presence acting through "one anothering" or the classic "communion of the saints" idea. One sample of this application could be Luther's application of Christology to ecclesial communion in mercy:

That even as we have eaten and drunk the body and blood of Christ the Lord, we in turn permit ourselves to be eaten and drunk, and say the same words to our neighbor, Take, eat and drink; and this by no means in jest, but in all seriousness, meaning to offer yourself with all your life, even as Christ did with all that he had, in the sacramental words.¹⁰

In this sense, Christ is "not separate" from the church. But what about the "distinct" side of Christology applied to ascension ecclesiology? Augustine carefully qualifies as illustrated in his comments about 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:

"Why? 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."

He further explains:

Consequently, he that dwelleth not in Christ, and in whom Christ dwelleth not, doubtless neither eateth His flesh [spiritually] nor drinketh His blood [although he may press the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ carnally and visibly with his teeth].¹¹

Accordingly, J. N.D. Kelley will conclude how "in the 4th and 5th 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 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."¹²

This seems perfectly aligned with the confessional statement regarding churches sacramental power and efficacy.

According to the Westminster tradition for instance, it is said that there is, "*a spiritual relation . . . between the thing signified and the sign.*" That is, more than a mere "witness," the church by her sacramental nature is a source. According to Calvin, "*no extent of space interferes with the boundless energy of the Spirit, which transfuses life into us from the flesh of Christ.*"¹³ That is, there is a real and life giving, albeit spiritual, relation between the sign and the things signified relative to the sacraments and consequently relative to the meaning of "church" to salvation. And so notice again how this is expressed in the later Westminster tradition per my own pastoral context with respect to the sacraments specifically.¹⁴

As a "holy Sign" (As a Witness):

1. What is signified in Christian Baptism? WCF 28.1 *is his engrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life.*

⁹ St. Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, In. lo. XXI.8).

¹⁰ Martin Luther, Palm Sunday Sermon from 1524 "On Confession and the Lord's Supper."

¹¹ Augustine, *Homilies in John*, Tractate 26, Sec. 11.

¹² J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, (1978)p. 422.

¹³ John Calvin, *Corpus Reformatorum*, 37: 48.

¹⁴ It is as well reflected in every other reformation tradition except those associated with the exclusively memorialist viewpoint of the Baptist tradition. My reference is merely an expression of my own traditional context.

2. What is signified in the Lord's Supper? WCF 29.1 *is His body and blood, called the Lord's Supper, to be observed in His Church, unto the end of the world, for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of Himself in His death;*

As means of grace (As Effectual Presence):

1. What is accomplished in Baptism: *by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in His appointed time.*¹⁵
2. What is accomplished in the Eucharist: *Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements, in this sacrament, do then also, inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally but spiritually, receive, and feed upon, Christ crucified, and all benefits of His death: the body and blood of Christ being then, not corporally or carnally, in, with, or under the bread and wine; yet, as really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses.*¹⁶

And finally, notice again by way of illustration how the effectual power that is being transacted through the sacraments is qualified as "according to the counsel of God's will, in His appointed time." This then will be related to Baptism as follows:

1. It is not necessarily a means of grace: *"yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated, or saved, without it: or, that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated."* WCF 28.5
2. And it is not necessarily an immediate means of grace: *"the efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered."* WCF 28.6

Summary: Thomas Torrance, Royal Priesthood, about the ascension presence of Christ

Two Thoughtful Metaphors

A. Sociology of Knowledge--

B. The Nature of Confessional Theology--

Total Christ In Redemptive History

A commitment to Total Christ devotion also recognizes that to fully experience Christ we must engaged with the fullness, or "totalness," of Christ as he is revealed in Scripture

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."

Heb. 1:1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, **2** but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

¹⁵ C.f. Mt.28: 19, Titus 3:5, 1 Peter 3:21, Gal.3: 27, 1Cor.12: 13, Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38, Rom.6: 3-4 and ask, does it not seem to "affect" salvation in some sense?)

¹⁶ C.f. 1Cor.10: 15 and language of "koinonia". See also John 6: 51, 55-56, 63, etc)

Rom. 3:21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—

Such a christo-centric and redemptive-historical reading of scripture will expose the fullness of Christ as both the fulfillment and embodiment of God's covenant-word and temple-presence. This dual trajectory through redemptive history begins in Genesis and nicely summarized by Meredith Kline wherein the holy garden is described as both a "Kingdom Prologue" and a "Glory-Temple" relative to covenant and temple respectively. The one establishes a legal-declarative paradigm that in Christ is the basis for gospel centered spirituality, even if the other establishes an effectual-participationist power in divine presence that in Christ is the basis for a missional ecclesiology. Together, Eden is portrayed as what we are here describing as the "total church" as it were. Here is the way Kline described the "Kingdom sanctuary" for instance:

As the overshadowing Glory was present at the beginning of the first creation, so it was again present at epochal beginnings in the history of re-creation in both old and new covenants – at Sinai, at the incarnation, baptism, and transfiguration of the Son of God, and at Pentecost. And because the Spirit's presence in redemptive re-creation is once more both as power and as paradigm, the consummation of redemptive history witnesses the appearing of the eternal cosmic-human temple of God.¹⁷

Therefore, by means of a redemptive historical survey, the "total church" will be defined by two orientations—covenant and temple.

A. High gospel spirituality consistent with a covenantal orientation in redemptive history.

Thesis: The covenantal orientation or "salvation by divine law" views salvation most essentially as a "legal or forensic" transaction satisfied on our behalf by Christ such as to preserve the grace centeredness of our sacred romance between God and humanity. This in turn will emphasize a declarative praxis in spirituality. The covenant orientation is shown to regulate our romance such as to preserve the gracious nature of our union with Christ by means of the objective basis of redemption that is executed by a covenant forming the basis of our safety and acceptance with God. In other words, without the objectifying grace of covenant, it will be shown how redemption itself cannot be gracious in so far as we are left to our subjective experience and performance as a basis for human flourishing and hope.

There was never a time in all of Redemption history when salvation was transacted apart from the forensic oriented covenant transaction such as to satisfy God's Divine Law.... "The Logos"

OT:

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. As related then to a covenant renewal event in worship, it is said how the, "book of the covenant" was first read and then explained in the hearing of the people wherein it was reported how they said, "all that the LORD has spoken we will do" wherein the Hebrew word "do" conjoins both the idea of "believing" and "acting on that belief."

That the covenant orientation in spirituality is universally inherent to redemptive history is evidenced by its transcending trajectory both through the Old and New Testament narrative as culminating in Christ—thus the words "old" and "new" as assigned to "covenant" that is consistent throughout. So for instance, 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).

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¹⁷ Meredith Kline, *Kingdom Prologue, Genesis Foundations For A Covenantal Worldview*. Meredith Kline/Two Age Press, 1989/2000.

Matthew most especially applied the fulfillment motif relative to the Old Covenant expectations as Christ fulfilling the law-covenant. For instance, it narrates Christ's saying, "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) Here again, Christ is shown throughout his ministry to fulfill the law-covenant in relation to the "law" of love. Our point is how we often don't see the two together in praxis contra redemptive history (Dt. 6:5, 13:3 and Matt. 22:29-32).

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). But like in the Old Covenant context and the gospel, beyond even the explicit references to "covenant" in the New Testament, we discern as well the use of "law" (nomos) as again synonymous with "covenant" throughout. Likewise, the "book of the law," as often used by the prophets in reference to the "book of the covenant" (Josh 24:26, Neh. 8:8, 18, etc) is perfectly aligned with Paul's use of the same in reference to the old covenant (Rom. 7:22, 25, 1Cor.9: 21).

What kind of Covenant?

The genius of the Bible is its narrative. The Bible is less a systematic theology or a collection of wisdom sayings than the story of redemptive history beginning at creation and culminating with the consummation of the new heavens and new earth. And to be sure, one way to tell the story is to focus on the history of covenant between God and humanity as beginning with creation and culminating with Christ.

More specifically, The story we want to follow is one of a sacred romance. It will begin in Genesis 2, but will not get fully consummated until Revelations 21. This way of telling the story will pay special attention to the "legal" and "justifying" images such as the bride being clothed in a great wedding gown "made white with the blood of the Lamb. (Rev. 7:14)" What a curious if not grotesque image, one that can be understood by reading Genesis 2 first. For what does it mean that the beauty of the bride in Revelations is somehow related to her ' own sacrifice? In what sense is the marriage success being guaranteed by her husband such as to bless her with an irrevocable and secure standing within the marriage itself. Indeed, this way of telling the story will want to focus on the divine-human romance made secure by divine law" as through "the word of the covenant" (Rev.12:11). And in direct ways, this is related to the transition from an eternal typifying "law-covenant" in Adam's marriage to the real deal in relation to Christ and the Church wherein the dogma IS the drama per an amazing and objectifying grace relative to an ultimate marriage. (c.f. Romans 7:1ff, Eph. 5, Rev. 20, etc)

Not by serendipitous chance, the first recorded covenant "oath" is located in the marriage of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2:23ff. That is, when Adam made his solemn affirmation, "this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh," it was more than some inane observation as if God needed to be informed concerning Eve's origins. It's true that according to the Genesis narrative "she was taken out of man" (vs.23) even as this was referenced by Paul to establish the principle of solidarity in Ephesians 5:28 ("He who loves his wife loves himself.") And yet there is more to it .

These words constituted a solemn oath of covenant faithfulness based upon the union of covenant solidarity-- an abbreviated way of saying something like, "may this woman be to me as my own body so that I will assume the burden of 'one flesh' as with the sanctioned bones and flesh being wrenched out of my body upon covenant infidelity." The sense of its meaning related to a standard covenantal oath in the ancient near eastern context is demonstrated by the use of the exact same phrase "bone of my bones" in other oath taking ceremonies such as in Genesis 29:14. (See also the use of this formula in Judges 9:2, 2 Samuel 19:12-13). And we have already noted how Adam's marriage with Eve is explicitly related to the human-divine "marriage covenant" evidenced by Paul's use of Genesis 2:23 in Eph. 5:31 saying *this is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church* (vs. 32).

Now the crucial thing here is to observe *who* exactly assumes the oath and therefore the burden of the covenant. For we notice the conspicuous absence of an oath taken by Eve! In and of itself, we would probably not want to make a big deal about it. And yet set within the context of redemptive history, it becomes a very big deal in so far as Adam's covenant "headship" is expressed in successive generations of covenant making as related to God's covenant headship in the divine-human marriage culminating in Christ. Now by "headship" here, I am merely referencing the one who assumes ultimate responsibility for the covenant or the guarantor of the covenant. The one who assumes the oath is the one who assumes the responsibility of fulfilling the covenant. Again, why is it that Adam is only remembered as assuming the oath of the first marriage covenant? The answer is reflected in the ancient covenant treaty that is here being assumed in marriage.

Entering then the New Covenant context, the grace transaction as typified by Adam and fulfilled by the "seed of a woman" is again perfectly illustrated in Paul's application of all that we just reviewed in terms of it being a "type" or "picture" of Christ and the church. For instance, it is not by coincidence that Paul specifically quotes the first marriage ceremony and then relates it directly to Christ and the church in Ephesians 5. He even compares the intended sacrificial nature of a husband's love for his wife per Adam's "oath consigned" as fulfilled as "Christ loved the church and gave himself for her" (Eph. 5:25). And the restoration of the "naked and not ashamed" nature of the covenant oath is again explicitly related to the "bone of my bones" idea as fulfilled in Christ's substitutionary atonement "having cleansed her (the church-bride) by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:26-27). This is of course the language of covenantal justification in the forensic sense, even as it refers to a radical and objectifying grace as a basis for Christ's sacred marriage to the church (vs. 32).

Paul will as well relate the story of Adam and Even to Christ and the Church, albeit less overtly. To begin, notice that in Romans 7 Paul wants to talk about marriage in relation to "the law." He says:

Or do you not know... speaking to those who know the law... that a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage... Likewise, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may be married to another.

Clearly, Paul's point here is that we are bound to covenant fidelity to a spouse as long as he/she is alive, but if he/she dies, the law itself then annuls the first covenant such as to make room for another—that is, to be married to another spouse! Now, this would make sense if it were not for Romans 5. Within the context of Romans, the whole argument rests on what Paul means in Romans 1: 16 that the "righteousness of God is revealed unto salvation." What exactly does this mean? 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.

That is, the gospel! By a legal transaction framed in the context of a marriage covenant, Christ becomes what Adam wasn't as the first husband of humanity so to speak, and fulfilled the oath of Adam in a way to insure the romance between God and humanity. Such a notion of covenant is what preserves the gospel and is the basis of a gospel centered spirituality.

In summary of a gospel centered spirituality, John Calvin says:

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. c.f. 2nd article of Apostles Creed)

B. High church spirituality consistent with a temple orientation in redemptive history.

Thesis: The *temple orientation* or “salvation by divine participation” views salvation as a transaction by God’s effectual presence that is distinct, but never separated from the culturally incarnate church on earth that is united to the church of heaven. The emphasis is upon a *participationist* praxis in spirituality (four movements of worship, liturgy and sacred rituals, communal one-anothering... all wherein by the Holy Spirit mediate God’s saving presence). It will be shown therefore how there was never a time in all of redemptive history (biblically expressed) wherein the benediction of salvation was not by means of divine presence being mediate into culturally accessible encounters on earth in continuity with heaven. This presence, if not immediate, is shown to be mediated as through a covenant-regulated temple wherein it could be said with confidence that “God is in the midst of us” (Ps 90). Here again, the temple orientation is less a legal or forensic and therefore objectifying expression of grace and more an effectual or materially present and therefore mediatorial expression of grace. It is to participate in the power of Christ’s flesh and blood in mystic union with the flesh and blood of the body of Christ on earth, the visibly organized church of Christ.

Redemptive Historical Trajectory:

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—The Word fleshed out as to be the Word/logos “templed”

OT:

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) GOD IN THE MIDST OF US (Ps 49), was the single most coveted reality, even as “excommunication” was the most feared curse (Gen.3)

NT:

in the New Covenant under the ascended ministry of Christ, Salvation is ALSO Transacted by God’s Mediatorial (Temple) Presence by the Holy Spirit acting in/with/through the “body of Christ” the Church.

The Gospel according to Paul is not a transition from temple presence to “no temple presence.” Rather Christ is introduced as God “tabernacled” with us, even as Christ’s ascension ministry is defined by Christ “filling all in all” vis-à-vis that temple built upon the apostolic foundation with Christ as the cornerstone (Eph. 2:11ff). Likewise, Paul’s described salvation with the promise I will dwell with them” (2 Cor. 6:16) just as under the Old Covenant. 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 Gods 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.” (c.f. Eph. 2:18-22, Rev. 21:3)

Implication:

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.”¹⁸

They therefore are insane who, neglecting this means, hope to be perfect in Christ, as is the case with fanatics, who pretend to secret revelations of the Spirit; and the proud who content themselves with the private reading of the Scripture, and imagine they do not need the ministry of the church. 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... 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]

C. The Theological and Sociological Dimensions of The Relation of Covenant and Temple:

A. The Theological Dimension: George Linbeck’s in *The Nature of Doctrine*.

Three ways the subjective “context” of the cultural-linguistic community of faith engages the object reality or “text” of divine revelation

- 1) Linguistic-- “Church doctrines function as informative propositions or truth claims about objective realities... Religions are thus thought of as similar to philosophy or science as they were classically conceived.”
- 2) Experiential-expressive- “Doctrines [viewed]as noninformative and nondiscursive symbols of inner feelings, attitudes or existential orientations... [and]“highlights the resemblances of religions to aesthetic enterprises.”¹⁹
- 3) Cultural-Linguistic BOTH—“both religiously significant and valid... the emphasis is placed on those respects in which religions resemble languages together with their correlative forms of life and are thus similar to cultures. The function of church doctrines that becomes most prominent in this perspective is their use, not as [subjective] expressive symbols or as [abstract] truth claims, but as communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude and action-- that is, as a *rule of faith* or a communal “confession of faith.”²⁰

In other words, while there IS access to objective truth-content distinct (transcendent) from cultural or subjective expression, such content is never separate from socio-cultural access in so far as it is accessed by the socio-cultural flesh of human receptors. As Lindbeck seeks to apply this to the every changing cultural contexts of Christian witness and mission, he explains:

The issue is not whether there are universal norms of reasonableness, but whether these can be formulated in some neutral, framework-independent language ... [it] need not imply relativism or fideism, the question remains of how to exhibit the intelligibility and possible truth of the religious message to those who no longer understand the traditional words. How, as modern Christians often put it, does one preach the gospel in a dechristinized world?”²¹

Lindbeck’s analysis illustrates the covenant (objective ELEMENTS) of salvation that is always distinct, if never separate, from the temple (cultural FORMS) wherein those elements may be received and participated in.

B. The Sociological Dimension

¹⁸ John Calvin, *Corpus Reformatorum*, 37: 48.

¹⁹ Nature of Religion.

²⁰ Nature of Religion. p. 17-18.

²¹ *Nature of Religion*, P. 16, 17-18, 132, and 130 respectively

In Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, the distinct but never separate aspects of religion are explained in terms of the objective-ideal and the subjective/cultural material realities of socialization. Here again, the two correspond to the covenantal-propositional-objective and the temple-cultural-subjective aspects of salvation. Applied to religion, Peter Berger says it this way:

It is possible to show in concrete instances how religious ideas, even very abstruse ones, led to empirically available changes in social structure.

And yet again:

It is possible to show how empirically available structural changes had effects on the level of religious consciousness and ideation.

Therefore,

Only a dialectical understanding of these relationships avoids the distortions of the one-sidedly "idealist" and "materialist" interpretations.²²

Berger's Sociology of Knowledge illustrates the impossibility of full union with God apart from socialization, even as socialization itself requires both an ideal and material reality as to both preserve the identities of both parties (God and human) albeit in a way that maintains a union of the two parties or "co-union." Apart from covenant-ideation, there is nothing to preserve the distinct identities of the two parties. But apart from temple-organization, there is no communion in participation with respect to the two parties. That is, those who would argue against the "organized" church, socialization theory would render even the notion as, well, absurdly naïve. There is no human experience of anything "real" apart from their vernacular experience as then expressed through social organization. Without incarnation, there is no salvation, in the absence of immediate divine-human incarnation both prior to and after Jesus Christ, there was therefore the mediation of incarnation via the temple presence, even if the temple was necessarily regulated and choreographed by the covenant word.

We need therefore the regulative aspects of the covenant to insure that the distinct identity of one God not get lost in the transaction, just as we need the distinct identity of the one culture among many cultures lest the distinct identity of one cultural-linguistic person not get lost in the transaction. That is how will we know that our union is not with a false god or idol, or that our divine-human marriage is not with a false lover-god unless we have a covenantal "ideal" that defines and regulates our union together? But then again, how would we ever really participate in our love with God if not in the socio-cultural flesh that necessarily embodied within a cultural "form?"

Interestingly, the two dimensions of covenant (Word) and temple (Become Flesh) and their inter-dependence in redemption is perfectly illustrated in so far as distinguished the covenant "elements" of our faith and practice from the temple "forms" in the Westminster Confession, Chapter 1.6.

On the covenant-regulative side:

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.

On the temple-embodied side:

²² Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, , p. 128. Berger explains, "Such a dialectical understanding will insist upon the rootage of all consciousness, religious or other, in the world of everyday praxis, but it will be very careful not to conceive of this rootage in terms of mechanistic causality. A quite different matter is the potency of religion to 'act back' upon its infrastructure in specific historical situations. On this it is possible to say that such potency varies greatly in different situations. Thus religion might appear as a formative force in one situation and as a dependent formation in the situation following historically."

Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word: and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.²³

Together, the covenantal and temple mediation of Christ is nothing short of Total Christ vis-à-vis history, albeit being mediated on earth as it is in heaven. After the human-divine pattern of classical Christology, the two orientations operate within an ongoing dialectical relationship that is today being mediated in Christ's ascension ministry by the Holy Spirit in the church.

D. Covenantal and Temple, although distinct, are never separate. They must be maintained in an mutually inter-dependent manner

This fullness of Total Christ spirituality is wonderfully illustrated and applied by 17th 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"²⁴

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.²⁵

Further Analysis:

Just as in Christology, Christology applied means that the Covenant and Temple—though distinct, are never separated... even inter-dependent upon the other

- *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...*

²³ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1:6

²⁴ 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

²⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits* ("Works" Vol 2, Banner, p. 13)

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

1) Gospel-Centered(Covenant Grace)

We believe that the Gospel is not only the ABC's but the A to Z's of the Christian life in at least two ways. First, it is not only our ticket to heaven based on grace through faith, it is the way God sets us free to live the more transformed life. Second, the Gospel is not just about the “inward” person concerning our spiritual needs, but also the “outward” person concerned with our emotional, physical, vocational, etc. needs. The Gospel therefore is a holistic commitment to empowerment aimed at spiritual conversion and discipleship in reliance upon Christ together with micro-enterprise ventures and family/personal Christian counseling. ([Rom.1:17](#), [Eph 2:1-10](#))!

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.

2) Being Missional: (Temple Presence)

More than a source of mission, the carefully designed, apostolically-organized, church is the locus of mission and the very life giving and mediated presence of Christ. Just the church being the church with the whole world present is God's missionary strategy to the world ([John 1:14](#), [20:21](#))! This makes our approach to evangelism and discipleship participatory and not simply declarative.

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.

Christ's Redemptive Historical Vocations by Covenant and Temple Realized:

Christ's real, if mediated, presence in the local church is experienced in the presence of Christ acting in three vocational roles or services in relation to being our prophet (declaration through teaching and preaching), Priest (sacramental participation through worship) and king (communal formation through mercy giving and shepherding). All to together, the Christ's gospel centered and missional presence in the church is mediated by the Holy Spirit such as to be a community that doesn't only talk about the gospel, or bring people to the gospel, but that DOES the gospel. In the local church, the transformative power and presence of a holistic gospel is accomplished through Christ bearing our outward and inward burdens in the context of the church's one another in love!

3) Prophet: United in Belief:

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”. Our consensus is reflected in the Westminster Confession of Faith which is consistent with other familiar creeds such as the Apostles' and Nicene creeds. We strive to apply our beliefs to all of life and in so doing relate to Dorothy Sayers' famous saying “the dogma is the drama!”

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.

4) Priest: Participating in Sacramental Worship:

We desire an emphasis on sacramental spirituality wherein Christ our Priest is “fleshed out” in a carefully designed four movement worship service that follows the four movements of the gospel and culminates every week in a participation in eucharistic communion with Christ as “fleshed out” in cultural styles specific to each local community ([1 Cor. 10:14-17](#), [Heb. 12:22-24](#), Rev. 4-5)!

What to look for:

An awareness of divine presence and a temple spirituality in worship.

Worship that is characterized by the full range of emotions fitting an encounter with the living God (yearning, wonder, joyfulness, sadness, resoluteness, humbleness, etc.).

An assurance of divine presence that results in a culture of anticipation and expectancy in worship and life.

The sacramental mystery of local presence that transforms the meaning of menial, local, social-cultural mannerisms by Christ’s mediated presence.

A church that can distinguish the word based elements in worship from the socio-cultural based forms that the elements must assume in order to transact God’s living presence.

A church that practices a [four-movement, temple-style worship service](#) that does the gospel in Christ’s presence vs. the revival style service that gets a person to Christ and the gospel.

5) King: United in Community:

We want to emphasize a local-oriented ministry where community really matters. This community formation occurs where Christ our King is fleshed out through 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](#))!

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.

Conclusion: After Modernity, what?

- A reevaluation of denomination

The denominational barriers that seemed so resistant to change when H. Richard Niebuhr wrote his now classic “Social Sources of Denominationalism” now show signs of significant weakening. In increasing numbers, Americans are switching denominations and/or re-imagining denominations as to transcend modern denominational lines of demarcation

- Not “no-denominational” but “neo-denominational”

- Option 1: Spiritual imperialism—Roman Catholic
- Option 2: Spiritual Reductionism/compromise—WCC
- Option 3: Spiritual Pragmatism—Evangelical (para-church church)
- Option 4: Culture War Spirituality—Robert Wuthnow’s sad conclusion.
- Option 5- Neo-Confessional Denominationalism—wherein accepting that no church/creed is infallible, wanting to be united in beliefs that span the whole counsel of God’s word...distinguishing the confessional ‘elements (global) from the temple forms (Local) , etc.

- Reunions?

- Rid of confusing socio-cultural ‘Forms’ from confessional “elements”—reunion of reformational churches via use of multi-forms of unity.

- Reevaluation of East vs West (without the polarizing extremes as a result of politicization of theology???)
- Distinguishing the spirituality of the church in cultural engagement from cultural wars... a post socio-political "conservative vs. liberal" to a orthodox conservative and liberal?

Illustration: East and West?

If the East might benefit from a more "high-gospel" spirituality that derives from legal-covenant theology that leads to substitutionary atonement and salvation by objective grace through faith alone, might the west benefit by a more "high-church" spirituality that derives from a presence-temple theology that leads to a participational full experience of Christ as mediated through the covenant defined church.

Concerning the latter:

Representative of a reunion of eastern and western Christian spirituality, at least in general terms. Myk Habets, for instance, has noted how Tomas Torrance in *Theological Science* argues:

To know this God, who both condescends to share all that we are and makes us share in all that he is in Jesus Christ, is to be lifted upon his Spirit to share in God's own self-knowing and self-loving until we are enabled to apprehend him in some real measure in himself beyond anything that we are capable of in ourselves. It is to be lifted out of ourselves as it were into God until we know him and love him and enjoy him in his eternal Reality as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in such a way that the Trinity enters into the fundamental fabric of our thinking of him and constitutes the basic grammar of our worship and knowledge of the One God.²⁶

Habets then explains, "in the person of Jesus Christ, we see true humanity partaking of true divinity by nature, in such a way that by union, communion and *theosis* with Christ by the Spirit we too, by grace, can participate in the divine nature."²⁷ Now, by nature here it is not meant substantive nature or essence in the western sense. It is meant communal and effectual nature in the eastern since *theosis* itself seeks to preserve the Chalcedon "distinct but not separate" in all of this. Again, Habets quotes Eastern orthodox H.K. Yeung's *Being and Knowing* as explaining:

When God became man He was no less God, for He was not diminished by the development of the Godly, but rather "deified" the body and rendered it immortal. 'Deification' did not mean any change of human essence, but that without being less human we are by grace made to participate in divine Sonship.²⁸

In other words, and as Ken Wilber from an Eastern Orthodox context explains, "the way to know God is neither through philosophy or through experimental science (what he perceives a western leaning modernity) but through spiritual practice that can open us up to the grace of the Holy Spirit. Only then can we taste the divine, a firsthand knowledge of the Creator." We will of course want to challenge the "nothing-but" assumption in this per the history of east-west partisanship itself. But it further explains something of what we are after in the "temple" orientation as expressed throughout redemptive history, albeit in dialogical relationship to the covenantal. "Theosis" as such is the participation not in the nature or substance of God (a western way of thinking), but in his personal existence or communion. It involves an 'epistemology of presence' contrasted with an epistemology of reason.

Accordingly, John Zizioulas has noted about theosis that it is less "hypostasis of individual existence as a hypostasis of ecclesial (communal) existence." It is accordingly less "constituted by man's biological conception" as it is "constituted by the new birth through baptism into the communion of God as participated in through the church." Notwithstanding perhaps his understanding of the western position, he will apply this in much the same way we will as to emphasize ecclesial "praxis" in terms of its epistemic value (what we would want to emphasize as

²⁶ Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 155 quoted in Myke Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance: Not Yet in the Now*, p. 62

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Quoted in "*Theological Science*" p. 63 taken from Yeung, H.K. *Being and Knowing* London Univ. (United Kingdom). 113

well albeit in dialogical tension with “proposition” formation and confession.)²⁹ According to John Zizioulas therefore, the great differences between the history of the eastern and western spirituality is “the west trends toward an ontology of *logos*, or “being in ideology” wherein the east trends toward an ontology of *koinonia* or “being in community.” Again, our point is to advocate for their respective reunions, at least in their more moderate expressions if per chance we really are moving into a post-partisan era where *Totus Christus is the Total Church*.

²⁹ John Zizioulas, *Being As Communion, Studies in Personhood and the Church* (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press: Crestwood, NY, 1985). P. 49, 55.