

## ***Totus Christus Prolegomena Explored***

We have already stated our aim to discern an approximate ideal in spirituality and praxis that is adaptable to multiform cultural manifestations of global incarnations and even denominations? In sympathy with the emergent impulse, such an ideal will want to transcend the *moderns* such that it might at times feel modern and other times post-modern, and yet again at times ancient in praxis. Such a transmodern vision is in sympathy with the present pragmatic trends after the “moderns” even if in search for a transcendent theological vision. Our task by way of a theological prolegomena is to explore both a philosophical and theological basis for a

Toward the discovery of a Totus Christus Ecclesiology, we will want to assume a world with windows in to the transcendent and super-natural wisdom and power of God along Caledonian Christology applied to Ecclesiology per the ascension ministry of Christ today. Such then is the purpose of a theological prolegomena. First, the basis for assuming a pre-modern cosmology as related to the perspicuity and power of divine presence on earth as it is in heaven is reviewed. An argument is made for the possibility of discerning divine wisdom in scripture (perspicuity) and divine participation in ecclesiology (power) such as to make room for real, even local, divine presence consistent with a *Totus Christus* spirituality on earth. Second, we will review the theological rationale for a “Christ-centered” approach to spirituality as explored through the ancient Caledon concept of Christology as related then to 5<sup>th</sup> century Augustinian and 19<sup>th</sup> Century “Mystic union” ecclesiology as espoused by John Nevin.

### Prolegomena In Epistemic Perspicuity: What Is Assumed In A Covenantal Orientation In Spirituality

To what extent can we know the “text” concerning God and His will in an objective sense relative to our socio-linguistic context of knowing? Paradigmatic of the modernist answer, Hans-Georg Gadamer once wrote:

In view of the historicity of our being, the rehabilitation of (a text's) original conditions is a futile undertaking. What is rehabilitated from an alien past is not the original. In its continued alienation it has a merely secondary existence.<sup>1</sup>

This statement by Gadamer features a skepticism that Mark Noll has described as the “crisis in historical knowledge” or we could add “objective knowledge” even such as to have huge implications for the construction of Christian spirituality and church practice. It concerns then the skepticism of the *moderns* regarding both the perspicuity of divine revelation and the participation in the effectual presence of divine power. The epistemic crux of the issue involved the Kantian schism between the divine objective and human subjective relative to epistemology and experience whether applied toward subjective individualism or subjective communalism in modern and post-modern epistemologies.

From the pre-modernist orientation such epistemologies represent the construction of a glass ceiling between the objective and the subjective—even the divine and human. It is as a glass ceiling or Kant’s “distant shores” wherein humanity, if but intuitively, discerns that their must be an objective ideal reality or luscious shores, and yet we can’t get there. This is especially picked up in postmodernity in its adoption of the relativistic-oriented mysticism in spirituality as should be distinguished from the mystical element in pre-modern orientation.

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted by E.D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation*, (New Haven: Yale University Press; 1967) p. 247 as taken from his personal translation of Georg Hans Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, or *Truth and Method*. p. 159.)

Mark Noll describes the situation in terms of the pre-modern take on the moderns. He notes how on one hand, "our very existence is defined by the meaning of purportedly historical events." On the other hand, "implicit in affirming these events in the history of salvation is a definite view of historical understanding. These, events, Christians hold, may be known to be factual, and there may be a reasonable degree of certainty as to what these long-past events mean for our lives in the late twentieth century."<sup>2</sup> As related to spirituality especially, Lesslie Newbigin was acutely aware of how this played out in terms of the modernist movement toward spiritual privatization in relation to the universality of Christ in contrast to a sectarian Christ. He argued, for instance

That human beings exist to glorify God and enjoy him forever is not a fact, according to this system... It is an opinion held by some people. It belongs to the private sector, not the public. Those who hold it are free to communicate it to their children in home and church but it has no place in the curriculum of the public schools and universities. And since the publicly accepted definition of a human being excludes any statement of the purpose for which human beings exist, it follows necessarily that in the ordinary meaning of the word fact, no factual statement can be made about what kinds of behavior are good or bad. These can only be private opinions. Pluralism reigns!<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, the modernist dichotomy between ideal "text" and material "context" corresponds to the dichotomy in objective and subjective knowledge. So for instance, Gerhard Maier's observation in his *The End of the Historical-Critical Method* was that the decisive impetus for modernism in Biblical criticism could be traced to subjectivization leading to privatization. This in turn correlates to three interrelated Enlightenment movements. In the case of English deism, "human reason served as a touchstone and yardstick for everything revealed in Scripture...From French skepticism 'transcendence was finished off' as epitomized by the work of Immanuel Kant. ...From the German enlightenment the zeal for "freedom" was trafficked into a "freedom from divine principles of scripture and revelation."<sup>4</sup>

Accordingly, the common denominator of all three is a bias against the perspicuity *and* experience of the supernatural such as to leave us to the vicissitudes of our own subjectivity in spirituality. He notes: "as long as one makes analogous classification (between historical text and subjective context) a precondition for acceptance, much in the word of the Bible remains without foundation."<sup>5</sup> In other words, the subjective takes precedence over an assumed ideal leading to epistemic uncertainty and relativism. For example, E.D. Hirsch explains in his book, *Validity in Interpretation*,

If an interpreter cannot overcome the distorting perspective of his own historicity, no matter how hard he tries, then it follows that one understands differently when one understands at all.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, skepticism regarding objective historical knowledge results not only in surgically removing portions of scripture from the pristine portion of the Word of God as in the case of the historical-critical method, but in a pessimism in the perspicuity of scripture such as to allow for ever changing interpretations which go beyond the author's intent rooted in pragmatism. The historicity or objectivity of the events and reality recorded in the Bible are secondary such as to create ever new and expanding meanings for the present. This is clearly articulated by Gadamer when he states,

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Noll, "Traditional Christianity and the Possibility of Historical Knowledge", *Christian Scholar's Review*, Volume XIX Number 4, 1990, p.388-406 p.392

<sup>3</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, "Can the West Be Converted?" *Princeton Seminary Bulletin*. 6 (1):25-37, 1985 p.25.

<sup>4</sup> Gerhard Maier, *The End of the Historical-Critical Method* Wipf & Stock Publishers (December 2001) p. 13-14.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p.16

<sup>6</sup> Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* p.252.

The meaning of a text goes beyond its author not just sometimes but always. Understanding is not a reproductive but always a productive activity... the winning of the true sense contained in a text or artistic work never comes to an end. It is an infinite process.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, in the demise of objective knowledge is the emergence of radical relativism. Ronald Nash has described radical relativism as "the view that impartial and objective historical knowledge about anything in the past is impossible."<sup>8</sup> Fundamental to this cosmology is the absence of divine presence in epistemology especially. That is, assuming for a moment the "class ceiling" between the divine and human, our subjectivity is without the subjective aid of a transcendent God who is nonetheless imminent God and active in the universe in even an epistemic manner. Christians, of course, call this an ongoing and divine presence by "illumination" related to an otherwise objective and static revelation.

For many evangelicals the "knee-jerk" reaction to radical relativism was to opt for a radical historical objectivism. Nash defines the latter as a "hard objectivism" such that "all subjectivity can in principle be eliminated from history, a fact that if true, would make history a value-free inquiry."<sup>9</sup> This was exactly the trend in modernist facing evangelicalism, for instance, in its *nothingbuttery* rationalistic approach to anti-supernaturalism even. Yet the same assumption is just as well translated into a "hard subjectivism" such as to result in *nothingbuttery* cultural-linguistic orientation even if perhaps under the cloud of mysticism. It all remains open to supernaturalism and divine presence, albeit without the objective "rule of faith and practice" to guide our understanding of it. That is, as Nash pointed out, "hard objectivity" places in jeopardy any optimism toward gaining access to historical Christianity and divine revelation in that "anything less than a complete and impartial account of some event or series of events in the past would be considered bad history."<sup>10</sup>

Against these Enlightenment conceptions of God, Mark Noll notes how the Christian faith affirms that "God is not just the creator and passive sustainer of the world, but also that His energy is the source of the world's energy and His will the foundation of its existence."<sup>11</sup> As further noted by Noll:

Christians like Malebranche, Berkeley and Edwards postulated a deity who filled the universe he had created, who activated the minds he had made in his own image, who brooded over the world with constant love as well as distant power. This is the sort of Christianity that can rescue Historical knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

A stress upon God's benevolent sovereignty suggests a radical dependency upon God for all historical understanding. Not only does God move and sustain history, but he also must give to the human mind His intentions and explanations for the understanding of history itself. Furthermore, a belief in the benevolence of God maintains that it is God's intention to share with humans an understanding of reality as he sustains it. In other words there is a "metaphysical

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted by Hirsch p.249 from Gadamar's *Truth and Method*. p.280, 282)

<sup>8</sup> Ronald Nash, *Christian Faith and Historical Understanding*, (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, Mich.; 1984) p.77

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p.80

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p.78

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p.398.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p.399.

reality" that can be explained by "the activity of God."<sup>13</sup> The pre-modern response to radical relativism will seek to avoid an *either-or*-- radical objectivist or radical subjectivist orientation in epistemology in preference for a "both-and." This is only theoretically possible within a cosmology wherein God is present both "then" with respect to the historicity of revelation (declarative covenant "by divine law") and now with respect to the historicity of illumination (mediated temple by divine participation). IN short, only a reunion of both "covenant" and "temple" can fully preserve a fluid human experience of an otherwise definitive divine presence!

One of the important implications of the covenant-temple reunion in hermeneutics is to suggest both confidence and humility in so far as our discerning the meaning of divine revelation in scripture. So for instance what many traditional conservatives view as equivocation with respect to the issue of scriptures perspicuity by emergents is often just humility to recognize that no matter who is reading the scripture, they are always reading it within a context of their own cultural-linguistic context. A stress on the covenantal orientation will insure that there is objective and absolute truth to be found in divine revelation. And yet the temple orientation will also require that for this truth to be actually known and experience, it must necessarily be translated into a cultural-linguistic vernacular. This translation, like the church herself, is fallible, if not to be confused with absolutely infallible.

Christology Applied To Human-Divine Socialization In and Through the Church:  
What Is Assumed in the Temple Orientation In Spirituality

The concern then for many emergent thinkers is that within a globalized context especially, we ought to be more aware of how fallible any given interpretation is within her own vernacular context such as to beg for a more multi-vernacular and consiliar approach to biblical interpretation. Ironically perhaps, this is to not argue for less confessional creedalism, but more, albeit to be more inclusive of other cultures and contexts. In other words, a case could be made that the emergent concern is less against creedalism itself as it is against the fact that modern creedalism tended to be culturally monolithic! This would mean that the emerging concern is less cynical about biblical perspicuity as cultural hegemony. The movement is arguably no less committed to divine revelation or the possibility of divine illumination as the traditionalist, but less committed to mono-cultural confessionalism as they believe the traditionalist are. If true, this then would suggest that their protest against traditionist interpretation is its perceived cultural naïveté or even lack of cultural humility as distinguished from its stand for epistemic certainty. At the heart then of this issue is the relation between the divine and human in Christology applied then to ecclesiology today. Or stated differently, the relation between doctrine and culture, or again the issue of human-divine socialization vis-à-vis Christ's presence as mediated through the covenant church. Again if briefly, these issues are aptly illustrated historically, theologically and sociologically as follows:

Historical Illustration: Augustine's *Totus Christus* Christology

Theological Illustration: Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*

Sociology of Knowledge Illustration: *Peter Berger's*

Many of the emerging thinkers are familiar with George Lindbeck for instance, and especially his *The*

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<sup>13</sup> Noll. p.398 Quoting from J.O.Urmon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) p.37.

*Nature of Doctrine.* A brief review of Lindbeck's will further illustrates our present point. For instance, Lindbeck wants to describe three predominant types of theories about how the subjective "context" of the cultural-linguistic community of faith engages the object reality or "text" of divine revelation.

The first type says Lindbeck roughly corresponds to the conservative Protestant and Roman Catholic context in so far as it "stressed the ways in which church doctrines function as informative propositions or truth claims about objective realities." He notes, "religions are thus thought of as similar to philosophy or science as they were classically conceived."<sup>14</sup>

The second type roughly corresponds to the Liberal Protestant context as related to an "experiential-expressive" approach wherein the focus is on the subjective albeit individualistically related to interpreting "doctrines as noninformative and nondiscursive symbols of inner feelings, attitudes or existential orientations." This in turn "highlights the resemblances of religions to aesthetic enterprises."<sup>15</sup>

The third type will more or less want to bring the two together "as both religiously significant and valid" and said to be related to a more ecumenically minded Roman Catholic for instance. It then concerns this third type or "the cultural-linguistic" orientation to biblical interpretation that Lindbeck makes his most significant contribution, albeit often misunderstood if not also debated. In the "cultural-linguistic" orientation, "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 expressive symbols or as 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."<sup>16</sup>

Admittedly, this statement could be misunderstood to mean a necessary relativism as bound to "linguistic symbol" in relation to "rule of faith." And yet, by his subsequent qualification he is, I think, vindicated from this misunderstanding. For Lindbeck is careful to distinguish between what he describes as an "intratextual" vs. "extratextual" conception of the cultural-linguistic relation between faith and spirituality. By *extratextual*, he means an approach that "locates religious meaning outside the text either in the objective realities to which it refers or in the experiences it symbolizes." That is, there are no absolute religious ideas that are not inherently relative to a communal narrative. The real subject of theology is not an absolute reality that is knowable by means of divine revelation *and* illumination as united to cultural-linguistic forms. Rather the real subject of theology is the communal narrative itself given to language. And to be clear, again contrary to what some have portrayed Lindbeck and many emergent thinkers as saying, Lindbeck wants nothing of this. Rather, he will want to affirm an *intratextual* understanding of the cultural-linguistic relation in which religious meaning is both objectively textual and propositional, even if the text itself is necessarily contextualized within a communal narrative in terms of how we encounter it.

So for instance, in an attempt to clarify what intratextuality is NOT, he states:

If intratextuality implies relativism and fideism, the cost for most religious traditions is much too high. If there are not universal or foundational structures and standards of judgment by which one can decide between different religious and nonreligious options, the choice of any one of them becomes, it would seem, purely irrational a matter, or arbitrary whim, or blind faith; and while this conclusion may fit much of the modern mood, it is antithetical to what most religion, whether interpreted in liberal, preliberal or postliberal fashion, have affirmed.

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<sup>14</sup> George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), p. 16.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 17-18.

And so it seems for Lindbeck, his reaction to modern rationalist foundationalism is NOT for “no-foundations” as it were. Rather his reaction is to expand the foundations as to include a communal means of accessing divine revelation. IT is a “both-and,” rationalist-communal type of relation between faith and spirituality even as they are necessarily co-dependent upon the other in terms of the human experience.

Antifoundationalism, however is not to be equated with irrationalism. 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?”<sup>17</sup>

In summary, regardless of whether we are getting Lindbeck right on this by way of a theological prolegomena, our point is that objective ideas if e known in human experience must necessarily get socialized. The process of socialization necessarily represents a dialectical relationship between the objective/declared “ideals” and the subjective/mediated socialization relative to cultural-linguistic forms. As for the nature of the dialectical relationship, it is NOT related as to in anyway compromise or change the objective ideal, but it IS related to our understanding of the ideal. The two taken together calls then for are for both confidence in objectivity coupled with humility as related to the “cultural-linguistic orientation to faith formation that needs to be taken into account. The more then our “rule of faith” is both mono-textual with respect to divine revelation and multi-contextual with respect to divine illumination, the greater our success in discerning objective truth from scripture.

By way then of a third illustration, the nature of the reunion of covenantal and temple is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in socialization itself, as per the communal model in hermeneutics, that perfectly anticipates as well our prolegomena of Christology.

According to Peter Berger, Luckmann and others, “socialization” is the sum product of both social ideation (covenantal/propositional side of spirituality) and social materialization (temple/communal side of spirituality). The two forces are said to *never be separate*, albeit if to retain their own *distinct but separate* properties again in dialectical relationship together. 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.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>*Nature of Religion*, quotes taken from P. 16, 17-18, 132, and 130 respectively.

<sup>18</sup> 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

Socialization theory wants to explain how BOTH ideal–proposition and material-social are mutually inter-dependent. It reminds us that there is no possibility of human experience and knowledge without BOTH ideal and material realities coming together if not also distinguished. Perhaps by way of its practical relevance to emerging spirituality, two examples of this working out are illustrative of both very different orientations:

On the one hand, it is naïve to suggest even the possibility of 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.

The question then can't be “to organize” or “not to organize.” Rather the question is whether we “organize” with optimism as to the possibility of uniting with a distinct and personal God albeit experienced within a distinct and personal cultural-linguistic experience. 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. Stated plainly—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 unless we have a covenantal “ideal” as to measure our participation together? But then again, how would we ever really participate in our love with God if not in the flesh-blood vernacular of our given cultural “forms?”

A second orientation would include those who in reaction to postmodernity would then negate the human side of the transaction in so far as the cultural-linguistic realities of socialization. We should note here that this ideal spirituality consisting of both the ideal-divine and cultural-human is something that classical Christianity did take seriously. Whereas we will want to focus more on this later under the heading of Ecclesial Aesthetics, the distinction between “regulated” and “directed” in terms of the way scripture is related to an understanding of faith and practice is predicated on the dialectical relation between “elements” of faith and “forms” of faith in praxis. There is at once the assumption of perspicuity and humility respecting contextualization. For instance, within the more than 350 year tradition of Westminster that I am most familiar with given my own pastoral context:

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.<sup>19</sup>

This is to affirm as well the Caledon “distinct and not separate” principle in Christology as then applied to ecclesiology. Again, if the one is ideal-Word, the other is material or “vernacular” Word. If the one is propositional-message focused, the other is effectual-organic focused, if the

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‘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.”

<sup>19</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1:6

one is declarative focused, the other is *mediatorial* focused, and if the one is static-revelation focused, the other is fluid-illumination focused. Stated differently, one could argue that a “by divine law” *only* orientation without the “by divine participation” orientation is strangely deistic, even if espoused by those most adamantly opposed to deism within the evangelical ranks. And yet, divine participation, albeit individualistic or communalistic, without divine law leads to nihilistic fragmentation.

And again in canonical language, “covenant” is never humanly experienced outside of the “temple” in socialization. From the vantage point of divine revelation and human experience, the essential *elements* of spirituality are by divine law instituted in “covenant.” But the social expression or “forms” that these elements assume represents a union of the ideal and cultural-linguistic material via temple socialization. This of course corresponds to the mystery of Christology in so far as the two orientations are related to preserving the “distinct” otherness of Christ by divine law while preserving the “not separate” communion of Christ by divine participation.

### Prolegomena in Christology

The 5<sup>th</sup> century controversy in Christology was focused on the meaning of Christ’s incarnation in relation to his person. The questions were: To what extent was Christ human? And to what extent was Christ divine? 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*.

It was all charged within the political context surrounding whether to venerate Mary as the “mother of God”(Cyril), or not (Nestorius). As history tells it, the differences in Christology were no doubt accelerated by political expediency. The debate moved between what was most likely competing semantics per vernacular “forms” to competing theological positions per theological “elements.” 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. Each of these theologians can be seen to represent *either* the moderate or the extreme position of his school of thought.”<sup>20</sup>

Eventually by means of a convergence in theologizing and politicizing, and after involving a whole host of subsequent personalities (The Antiochene “school” per Eutyches on the east side and the Alexandrian school per Dioscorus on the west side for instance), the counsel of Ephesus in 431 decided in favor of the Cyril-Alexandrian school and against what was by then a more eccentric expression of the Antiochene position than was previously held by Nestorius himself. Again as noted by Ben Green, “in deciding in Cyril's favor, Ephesus did not, however, fully adopt Cyril's Christology.” Likewise, “Nestorius' overall delivery of the Antiochene Christology was much more orthodox. He was firmly convinced of the union of the divine and human natures in the single Son, Christ: “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>21</sup> Eventually, Ephesus was not able to come to a resolution concerning Christology itself, as it was more a decision concerning the praxis issue of veneration. And even then, Cyril was later deposed as well by the Eastern bishops before the counsel was formerly closed in AD 433.

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20 Ben Green, *Nestorius and Cyril: 5th Century Christological Division and Recent Progress* (Reconciliation Press, 1975) p. 454.

21 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

However much Ephesus settled the issue politically, it took Chalcedon in AD 451 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. To begin, as per a unified confession, Chalcedon first stipulated how “we unanimously teach to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man... the same *one in being* (*homoousios*) with the Father as to the divinity and one in being with us as to the humanity.” That is, in so far as Christ’s being is two *natures* (*ousia*), they are forever being in *union* (*homo*), the divine in perfect union with the human as then to establish Christ’s communal essence. The counsel would further 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.”<sup>22</sup>

Herein the famous “two distinct but not separate” concept is codified. That is, “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 (*prosôpon*) and one hypostasis.” Here again, the distinctly human and *divine* remain fixed in one *static* essence, albeit in an ongoing living communion as one person in communion, “the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the communion.” This then was the Chalcedonian confession of what materialized historically in the incarnation of Christ wherein it was said; “the same was begotten from the Father before the ages as to the divinity and in the latter days for us and our salvation was born as to his humanity from Mary the Virgin Mother of God.”<sup>23</sup>

And so there we have it: ecumenical Christology later confessed by all three of the major branches of Christendom—Eastern Catholic, Western Catholic and generally speaking Protestant. And yet, our present interest is not so much Christology, but Christology *applied*! How would this Christology as especially related to the “two distinct but not separate” in Christ’s divinity and humanity correspond to the ascension ministry of Christ today? In so far as the “distinct” is concerned, there is a “distinct-static” orientation expressed. But in so far as the “but not separate” is concerned, there is an “ongoing-vivifying” orientation that is continued. Stated differently if there is a “once and for all” aspect to Christology, is there as well an “ongoing” aspect to Christology in relation to the union of the two natures albeit in one person Jesus Christ? Our proposal then is to ask the question as related to Christ’s ascension ministry today.

Without espousing what has traditionally been described as “Nestorianism” per se, what exactly is the meaning of his earlier clarification, “I said that God *the Word* was by nature one and the *temple* by nature another, one Son by conjunction.”<sup>24</sup> 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 ecclesiology.

The focus of Augustine’s *Totus Christus* Christology in relation to ecclesiology was concerned to address both the “distinct” (not absolutely present) but “not separate” (not abstractly present only) 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.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Green, p. 455

<sup>23</sup> Green, p. 457

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> St. Augustine, *On the Epistle of John* 1.2.

The meaning of “to that flesh is joined the church” is of particular significance to our thesis per the temple orientation especially. It would appear that Augustine’s point is that the significance of the Eucharist is something more than a simple comparison of Christ’s life to ours by way of a moral example. More than a Eucharist in the position of the Holy Spirit to excite in us the life of holiness and love, Augustine’s point was that the visibly and organically socialized church into a given cultural-linguistic “flesh” BECOMES 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 members. Head and members, what is that? Christ and the Church.<sup>26</sup>

In this manner, Augustine clearly understands Christ ascension presence to be full or “total” in the visible flesh and blood of the church on earth. To further illustrate this point in relation to Augustine’s “we are made Christ” idea, the 16<sup>th</sup> century reformers often applied Augustines *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.<sup>27</sup>

But what about the “distinct” in Christology as then applied to ecclesiology? It seems that for Augustine, as related to the “Head” and “member” distinction, Christology applied to ecclesiology will also want to qualify Christ’s one to one corresponding presence of in/with/through the church by the all important “not immediately, but *mediately*” concerning the sovereign advent of Christ by the Holy Spirit. Contrary to how some have defined it, it is not so much that Christ is both “absent” and “present” per se (though it gets to the same concern), but that Christ’s “presence” in the organized church is *discerning* per the wheat and the tares mystery of his sovereign election. Perhaps then the reformation distinction “visible” and invisible” is more related to “what God sees” and “what we see” respectively. But the point is the same. Christ and the church are not *ordinarily* separate, even if they remain distinct. Again, the all important qualification “ordinarily” is nicely illustrated by Augustine in his comments about the meaning of “I am the bread of life” as applied to the Eucharist. In relation to the Pauline 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].<sup>28</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

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<sup>26</sup> St. Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, In. Io. XXI.8).

<sup>27</sup> Martin Luther, Palm Sunday Sermon from 1524 "On Confession and the Lord's Supper."

<sup>28</sup> Augustine, *Homilies in John*, Tractate 26, Sec. 11.

vague assumption was that the sacraments were outward and visible signs marking the presence of an invisible, but none the less genuine grace." Kelley will go on to explain how according to 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." <sup>29</sup>

Picking up again with the Chalcedon formula, we discern again the Augustinian application in the 19<sup>th</sup> century debate between Charles Hodge and John Nevin over the meaning of "mystical presence" in relation to the Lord's Supper. And yet while the focus was on the meaning of Eucharistic sacrament, they both acknowledged that it was ultimately related to their interpretation of Chalcedon as then to address the relation of the ascended ministry of Christ to the visible church in salvation.

The debate was initiated by John Nevin's publishing of *Mystical Presence* 1846. Whereas it would take Hodge two years to review Nevin's book, it was reviewed earlier in the *Princeton Review* in an article entitled "*The Vindication of the Reformed or Calvinistic Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*. The gist of the article was to demonstrate how Nevin rightly discerned Calvin's doctrine of Christ's mystical presences in and through the Lord's Supper. Perhaps even more interesting given Hodge's contrary theology concerning the Eucharistic presence of Christ, when Charles Hodge later addressed the book in 1848 in his article entitled "Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Lord's Supper" in the *Biblical Repertory*, he would graciously concede the earlier review admitting that Nevin had most likely gotten Calvin right on the subject.

Of course all rhetoric aside, it was clear that the two were generally orthodox even within the small world of "reformed" theology on the topic of Christology. Their differences were more of emphasis than belief. One explanation for this can be traced to the influence of Francis Turretin whose *Institutio Theologicae Elencticae* (1679-1685) replaced Calvin's *Institutes* both at Union and Princeton where Hodge taught during the mid-nineteenth century, but not at Columbia or Mercersburg where Nevin taught. The significance is noted in so far as Turretin sought to develop the 17<sup>th</sup> century principle of "the finite cannot contain the infinite" throughout his more rationalist leaning theology. In contrast according to Brian Nicholson "Calvin achieved clarity in his treatment of the sacrament not by thinking *through* it but by thinking *around* it. Calvin acknowledged that at the heart of the sacrament there is a miracle and a profound mystery. He never sought to reduce the mystery to reason but rather preserved the mysterious element."<sup>30</sup> And so for the sake of theological prolegomena here, we will assume Calvin's approach with Nevin such as to only focus on Nevin in his responses to Hodge and especially in relation to Nestorius' statement, the "Word was by nature one and the temple by nature another, one Son by conjunction."

Picking up mid-way into the debate we hear Nevin consistently express his loyalty to Chalcedon orthodoxy as then applied to salvation. He argued that by nature of the union between Christ and the church, fallen humanity "was exalted again to a new and imperishable divine life" such as to constitute a "real union with the Logos as a permanent source of life" as then by a mutual *communication* (not transubstantiation!) of properties somehow.<sup>31</sup> What properties exactly? He would later explain how justification... "rests on the objective merit of Christ, by whose blood alone propitiation has been made for the sins of the world. " But this justification, to become ours in fact, must insert us into Christ's life...

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<sup>29</sup> J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, (1978)p. 422.

<sup>30</sup> Brian Nicholson, *Calvin's Doctrine*. p. NA.

<sup>31</sup> John Nevin, *The Mystical Presence*. (Philadelphia: S.R Fisher 1867), p. 197.

We must have Christ himself formed in us more and more in a real way in order that “he may be made unto us of God, wisdom and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.”<sup>32</sup>

The question then raised pertained to what sense this is related to Christ’s ascension ministry by means of the visibly organized church. Again, what are the “properties” that are “formed” in union with the church? Nevin explained that “Christ’s life... rests not in his separate person, but passes over to his people; thus constituting the Church, which is his body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.”<sup>33</sup> Again, Nevin will be careful to maintain the “distinct but not separate.” As summarized by Brooks Holifield about Nevin’s view, “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*.” Through the incarnation and now ascension ministry through the church, divinity and humanity were actually “made one in a real, inward and abiding way.”<sup>34</sup>...

Again, not insignificantly throughout the controversy, both Nevin and Hodge agreed that Nevin’s view of union in relation to salvation was consistent with Calvin’s. The following illustration from Calvin’s *Institutes* more than sustains this agreement but also further clarifies the present point.

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 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>35</sup>

As then directly related to Christ’s ascension ministry today, Nevin will explain “our interest in the one sacrifice accomplished on the cross... include(s) a true *participation* in the life of him by whom the sacrifice was made... To partake of the “broken body” and “shed blood” of the Redeemer, if it means a real participation in his person at all, must be to communicate with him as now exalted at the right hand of God.”<sup>36</sup> And to then the point that will drive our thesis here, fellow pastor John Adger, in support of Nevin, further explained,

There is a legal difficulty which justification removes. But does there not remain a difficulty as to the vital connection? Must there not be some *nature tie* of life betwixt the Redeemer and his people?<sup>37</sup>

This distinction between the “legal” and the “vital connection” as related to the temple is exactly the point we are wanting to capitalize on today relative to the emerging interest in the total church! Grace, or “total” grace that is, is as much reliant upon a legal basis in spirituality as a “vital” participation or

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<sup>32</sup> *The Mystical Presence*, p. 170. Interestingly, this idea of the objective and subjective applied to justification is very much what Michael Horton is after in his *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox, 2007). He will however and yet assigned the two aspects relative to “justification” and “participation” to a single orientation of “covenant” rather than what we are here attempted in terms of a more dialectical relationship between “covenant” and “temple” albeit “distinct and never separate.” (247). This will I think later play out as to slightly diminish a “total” church ecclesiology, but is otherwise in perfect sympathy with what we are after here.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* p.169.

<sup>34</sup> Holifield, 246.

<sup>35</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>36</sup> John Nevin, *The Mystical Presence*. (Philadelphia: S.R Fisher 1867), p.170. emphasis mine.

<sup>37</sup> John Adger, *Life and Times* (Richmond, 1889), p. 313-25. Quoted in Holifield, p. 247.

“connection” in so far as our covenantal and temple union with Christ is concerned as will be traced in our next two chapters.

About then this all important “nature tie” as related to Nestorius’ *temple* understanding of the human-divine union in Christ as applied to Christ and church Nevin further explained: “our fellowship is with the Father and with His son Jesus Christ himself through the Holy Spirit... it is a REAL communion with *the Word made flesh*, not simply with the divinity of Christ, but with his humanity also, since both are inseparably joined together in his person and a living union with him in the one view, implies necessarily a living union with the other as well.”

To Hodge’s credit, he again readily admitted that Nevin’s position in this “was clearly Calvin’s idea” and proceeded to quote Calvin in saying:

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.” Again, “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>38</sup>

This then is the answer we are looking for at least within the Calvinistic tradition. There IS a “flesh of Christ” present on earth, even if it is the human and necessarily cultural-linguistic flesh of the Church as the “body of Christ” as then being enlivened by Christ who, again in the words of Calvin, “transfuses the life-giving vigor of his flesh into us.”

To say it plainly, if someone were to ask to “see Jesus” in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, we might have told him, “you may find him on the Emmaus Road” per his bodily presence. Today, if per Augustine’s *Totus Christus* ecclesiology, someone were to ask the same question, we might well say, you may find him at 135 Whitney Avenue albeit with the important qualification “ordinarily about not necessarily.” That is the *ideal-word* in heaven has become the “incarnate- word” on earth by means of a tabernacled presence among us after the same pattern of the 1<sup>st</sup> century except not immediately but mediated as by the Holy Spirit in the visibly organized church! It is again the mystery of Christ who “transfuses the life giving vigor of his flesh” to us as Christology applied to ecclesiology.

The union as such is that Christ’s *humanity* partakes of our *flesh* as to complete the “human” side of Christ “on earth as it is in heaven.” The church becomes *Totus Christus* per Augustine’s ecclesiology even if “not necessarily and not necessarily immediately” since it is a mediated vs. immediate transaction distinct from the first incarnational transaction! And of course this qualification is important as to satisfy the “wheat and tares” point in both the Donatist context and subsequent reformation context concerning the fallibility, if not also authenticity, of divine presence that is descriptive of the socialized church.<sup>39</sup> It is simply to qualify against then an erosion of the “distinct” principle such as to avoid what could be described as an “over realized eschatology.” The “distinct” principle is preserved within the mediated transaction by means of the “covenant” even if the “not separate” principle is preserved within the mediated transacted by means of the “temple” orientation..

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<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Hodge, DR, *Essays*, p. 364.

<sup>39</sup> c.f. Christ’s same qualification per the vivifying actions of the Holy Spirit in John 3:8 as compared to the coming and going of the “wind” for instance)

The implication in all of this relative to our ecclesiology is huge. The church now, as the real, albeit mediated “flesh,” of Christ on earth in organic union with Christ in heaven is not merely the “source” of mission and new life” in the way of “witness,” but is rather the “locus” of mission and new life in the way of real human-divine participation. However much the “covenant” orientation speaks to this reality by way of a regulating (or defining) and objectifying reality, it isn’t human reality until there is the participation with Christ in/through his temple ascension presence. WE will see how the whole of John’s gospel is intended to get us to the place from beginning to end “framing” Christ as “tabernacled among” us BOTH immediately by his incarnation and mediated by during his ascension ministry today.

About the ascension ministry of Christ for instance, Douglas Farrow has noted how “The ascension, thus becomes the climax of Jesus-history and the eschatological event fulfilling all the hopes of Israel.” AS then related to the church especially, “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>40</sup> Likewise, Edmund Clowney will make special notation of the “organic” nature of the church in relation to Christ by saying:

The organic concept of the church that appears in the New Testament... presents a more theological, Christ-centered, spiritual view of the church as defined not by one earthly hierarchical center nor by many earthly congregational centers, but by a heavenly center that requires multiform earthly manifestations. Earthly assemblies do not define but manifest the nature and the center of the church.<sup>41</sup>

Again, the important dialogical tension here is how this idea of the church preserved BOTH a *Totus Christus* conception of the church as to make the church the locus and not just the source of salvation (the *not separate* principle in Christology) and yet also preserves the necessary qualification, “but not infallibility or necessarily *Totus Christus*. So for instance, Michael Horton wants to get at this tension by using the language of “absence and presence” as corresponding to the “distinct” and “not separate.” He explains, “looking away from the absence of Jesus of Nazareth, the church as the body of Christ could easily come to see itself as his visible and earthly replacement.” He also references Douglas Farrow’s concern even as related to an unqualified *Totus Christus* wherein the church becomes a “a mirror of Christ’s heavenly triumph.” He continues, “for Augustine” therefore, the church is now “the ladder of heaven on which God descends to earth and the one (ladder) through whom we ascend to him who descended through her (the church) to us.”<sup>42</sup> And again, we will say “amen” to the ladder in relation to church, if only to qualify it as “mediated” in so far as the *church’s common and unholy humanity* as materialized into a cultural-linguistic flesh IS being vivified by Christ’s presence in the Holy Spirit, but not necessarily or necessarily immediately.

A good illustration (among many) can be discerned in the classic reformed view of efficacy related to the sacraments in relation to the church as the locus versus just witness of salvation. 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.”<sup>43</sup> 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

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<sup>40</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.

<sup>41</sup> Edmund Clowney, *Distinctives of the Presbyterian Polity*

<sup>42</sup> Michael Horton, *People and Place, A Covenant Ecclesiology* (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, 2008) p. 6 quoting Farrow’s *Ascension and Ecclesia*, p. 122 and p. 154.

<sup>43</sup> John Calvin, *Corpus Reformatorum*, 37: 48.

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.<sup>44</sup>

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.*
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.*<sup>45</sup>
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.*<sup>46</sup>

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

Beyond then both the modernist and postmodernist reductionism in spirituality and practice, a pre-modern narrative will advocate for the reunion of epistemic rationalism that is covenantal facing such (*jure divino*) as to emphasize the declarative “witness” of the church by nature *together with* an epistemic communalism that is temple facing (*participatione divina*) as to emphasize the effectual presence of Christ really in, with, and through the church. It is only the pre-modern shattering of the glass ceiling in relation to both perspicuity and power that an ongoing God-humanward and human-Godward, ascending and descending, Christology is possible corresponding then to a holistic spirituality and praxis today under Christ’s ascension ministry through the church.

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<sup>44</sup> 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.

<sup>45</sup> 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?)

<sup>46</sup> C.f. 1Cor.10: 15 and language of “koinonia”. See also John 6: 51, 55-56, 63, etc)

In so far as this represents a reunion of the modern and postmodern polarities, it is perhaps also 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.<sup>47</sup>

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."<sup>48</sup> 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, Hybets 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.<sup>49</sup>

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 well albeit in dialogical tension with "proposition" formation and confession.)<sup>50</sup> 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

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<sup>47</sup> 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

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in "Theological Science" p. 63 taken from Yeung, H.K. *Being and Knowing* London Univ. (United Kingdom). 113

<sup>50</sup> John Zizioulas, *Being As Communion, Studies in Personhood and the Church* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press: Crestwood, NY, 1985). P. 49, 55.

moderate expressions if per chance we really are moving into a post-partisan era where *Totus Christus is the Total Church*.

### Christ First Spirituality and Ecclesiology

Having outlined both a socio-philosophical context for the emergent search together with a theological vision for *Totus Christus* ecclesiology, what remains for us by way of a prolegomena is to define briefly clarify our basis for a Christ-centric hermeneutic as presented in the next two chapters. To be sure, the Christo-centric ambition might seem at first to be obvious to the very name “Christian.” And yet increasingly, it is in subtle ways being diminished in preference for a Trinity-Centered orientation. Here is briefly why in Biblical terms we will want our study to remain inherently a study in Christology Applied.

To begin, a “Christ First” orientation for discerning Christian spirituality and church practice is perhaps nowhere more perfectly expressed than in Colossians 1:13-20. It is especially noteworthy how vs. 13-18a and 19-20 reflect a Christo-centric saturation in indicatives that highlight the “facts” as related to all things Christ. So for instance:

He (the Father) has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

He (the Son) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For he created all things, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead.

In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Based then on these amazing Christological *facts*, and notwithstanding their being related to the Trinity even, what would we expect by way of an apostolic exhortation concerning praxis? Sandwiched between all these indicatives is but one single subjunctive exhortation, that simply reads:

*...in order that Christ might in everything be first!*

More than a mere sentimentalism, the *praxis* of Christ-centeredness will be reflected as our first ambition and our first principle *in everything*, surely to include not just what we believe, but in how we construct belief from scripture and in what we do.

Here again, it's at this very point that someone might object, “but what about the Trinity?” Why not a *Trinitarian* focused methodology? In support of a Trinity-centered (vs. Christ-centered) methodology in spirituality and practice, the Ephesians doxology in chapter 1 is often referenced. And it's true, the three-fold “to the praise of God's glory” is clearly related to the Trinity as per “God and Father” (vs. 3-6), “in Him... the Son” (vs. 7-12) and “marked by the Holy Spirit (vs. 14) respectively. And yet, in each of these three doxologies, the clear and overwhelming focus remains on Christ throughout! We are to “bless” the Father “of our Lord Jesus Christ” (vs. 3), just as the Father chose us “in Christ” (vs. 4), adopted us “through his Son Jesus Christ” (vs. 5), and accomplished his glorious grace for us “in the Beloved one” (vs. 6). Likewise, we are said to be “in Him (Christ) sealed by the Holy Spirit” (vs. 13). In total, Christ is the focus of the Father's redemptive work on our behalf, even if the Father is known through Christ. The Holy Spirit had been and is being sent to us by Christ even if the Spirit executes the words and

actions of Christ on our behalf. And however much the Trinity IS involved in our salvation, it remains true as no less during Christ ascension as during is incarnation that there remains only one mediator between God and humanity. It is all about Christ as distinct, if never separate from his mystical union within the Trinity.

I am at this point reminded of something Lesslie Newbigin once said as relevant today as in 1987 when he spoke it. The context involved Newbigin's involvement in the *World Council of Churches* formally adopting a revised platform at the Uppsala Assembly of 1968 compared to the original platform adopted in 1910 at the "Ecumenical Missionary Conference" in Edinburgh. Newbigin was concerned that it represented a profound "paradigm shift" from "Christo-centric universalism" to the "Trinitarian model." Notwithstanding his general endorsement that a "full Trinitarian theology was needed for an adequate missiology" (c.f. his *Trinitarian Faith for Today's Mission*, 1963). As explained by Michael Goheen, the transition in the World Council of Churches was toward a "new view of mission" that featured a "shift in focus from God's work through Christ in the church to His providential and salvific work by His Spirit in the world. The goal of mission was the humanization or shalom of society through the efforts of the laity in co-operation with other social institutions that aimed at the transformation of oppressive political, social, and economic structures."<sup>51</sup>

Newbigin however wanted nothing of it. He first sought to nuance the Trinitarian model in that "the Trinitarian perspective can be only an enlargement and development of a Christo-centric one, and not an alternative set over against it, for the doctrine of the Trinity is the theological articulation of what it means to say that Jesus is the unique Word of God incarnate in world history."<sup>52</sup> In other words, the "literally crucial matter" concerning the missionary nature of the church according to Newbigin was "the centrality of Jesus and his atoning work on the cross, that work by which he has won lordship over the church and the world."<sup>53</sup> And in this context then, he said what is here assumed:

What I am pleading for is simple, but not, I hope, simplistic. It is simply for a recovery of confidence in the gospel, the truth, sufficiency, finality and universality of that which God has done for the whole human race in Jesus Christ. We cannot accept for him a place merely as one of the world's religious teachers. We are but learners and have to listen not only to our fellow Christians of other cultures, but also to our neighbors of other faiths, who may teach us much that we have not understood. But the crucial question is: Which is the real story? To that question ...there is no neutrality. The answer has to be given... in the way Christ.<sup>54</sup>

I'm reminded of a verse once engraved into an ancient wooden pulpit I once had the privilege to stand in. It was stated in such a way that the preacher couldn't fail to miss it: "Sir, that we would see Jesus" (John 12:21), a prayer at once simple as profound and needing to be expressed in the fullness of Christ-which brings us to our method.

In keeping with a "Christ-first" kind of principle, if there were a perfect hermeneutic for the purpose of discerning *Christology Applied*, it would be according to Christ's method as perfectly illustrated on the Emmaus Road in Luke 24. The story is told how Christ appeared to a couple of travelers about seven miles outside of Jerusalem. The timing of the conversation was during Christ's brief time on earth following his resurrection prior to his ascension. Evidently, the travelers were discussing the events concerning Christ's death and resurrection when "Jesus himself drew near and went with them." They were at first confused and unable to identify him. And so, we are told how "beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." (Luke

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<sup>51</sup> Goheen, p. 350.

<sup>52</sup> Amnesia, p.26.

<sup>53</sup> Amnesia, p. 28.

<sup>54</sup> *Lesslie Newbigin, Witnesses to the World, (Christian (U.K.), no. 1, May/June: 5-8, 1987)*

24:13ff, emphasis mine). The question then is this: What would we discover about Christian Spirituality and Practice according to the Emmaus Road hermeneutic as culminating in Christ? The answer here proposed will be the dialectic relationship of both a *covenantal* and *temple* orientation in Christian Spirituality as reflective of Christology Applied.