

## “Word, Work and Wonder”

### Defining Church in Incarnational Terms

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*NOTE: the structure of this paper is not clearly linear or scholarly, but rather designed in tandem with PowerPoint visuals of a lecture. The views expressed here are those of the author.*

#### SLIDE 9: Defining “Church”

Church defined: Four Points of Departure

When we say, “What is the church?” we might first begin by asking, “In what ways does the church need defining for us to adequately answer this question?” All too often those who set out to do this tend to think in only one category of definition. For instance, defining elements of the church back at the time of the Reformation look activity-oriented – defining the church by what it does (and even THAT limited to what it does within the main weekly service, versus what it is mandated to do beyond its four walls!) This approach, on closer analysis, is faulted if only by our understanding that, with people, what we DO tends to proceed from what we ARE and understand ourselves to BE.

I suggest four different points of departure in defining the church: context, essence or nature, relationships and activities. While we might have a good degree of overlap in these four approaches, looking at them separately can assist us in being as thorough as possible in our defining study.

Context is at once cultural, traditional/structural (?) and historical. What are the features of the church’s contemporary culture (internal and societal) which have a direct impact on how the church will look and respond? What is the surrounding culture asking of the church at this time and place? How is the church reacting to its environment? What are its excesses and lessons of the past? The answers to these questions almost precede the more ‘essential’ questions of the church. Never has context been so complex and dynamic in the church’s history as it is now. And there seem to be strong indications that the things which are defining church today, in terms of methodology, worship, size/growth, self-perception, and many other factors, are more far-reaching and global in impact than at any other time in history. For the first time (?) we have a truly global church, with clearly no theological or practical epicenter: this in itself is a radical departure from the past! And, as with the global economy, while the church becomes more global (larger and more spread out), its look is also being defined more globally and ancient divisions are being muddled by constantly increasing cross-fertilization in all areas of church life. But here, too, we have to deal with the way the church came into existence and experienced its first decades of life in the book of Acts and recorded by early church fathers. (See also above: literature)

Essence or Nature of the church is initially a biblical/theological study. And after 20 centuries of theologizing, there are still many fresh discoveries, it seems, for the church today to make about its

### Defining “Church”

Four differing points of departure on developing a full-orbed definition of ‘church’:

1. Contextual placement of church as prior to any defining exercise, and recognition of this reality throughout history (the other side of ‘text’)
2. Essential, NT metaphorical study of the nature of Church: Body, Bride, Building, Family, Salt/Light, Nation, Priests...
3. Relationships of the church:
  1. Vertically: with each member of the Trinity
  2. Laterally: with the world: in love and antagonism
  3. Internally: all of the communitarian and structural features
  4. Antagonistically: the spiritual warfare and Kingdom motif
4. Functions, roles, tasks of the Church—the most popular approach

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very nature—what it is we ARE, before we can adequately or maturely launch out into activities and tasks. What are the defining features of the “New Testament Church” as overused as the term may be? What are normative and overarching hallmarks of the church Jesus Christ said he would build? What are the common denominators we would expect of every congregation we encounter or establish? What are synonyms for ‘church’ in the language of the New Testament and subsequent church history, which will help round out our view of the requisite nature of the church, to really be the church? Also, given the neglect of the Kingdom by many Evangelicals in the past century and then the equating of Kingdom with church by some (as one flawed solution to this neglect), the relationship of the Church to the Kingdom, whether in this or the next category, is critical to the church’s self-understanding, universally and locally.

Corollary to its essence and nature is the array of relationships which define the church. Simplistically, the church is always relating in four clear directions: God-ward, self-ward (internally, socially), toward the world and toward the enemy. Each of these relationships is radically different from the other and really complex in itself. Different sets of ‘postures’ are adopted in these different spheres of relationship, but without adequate study of the church in relationship we are missing one of the most fundamental defining features—that of the dynamic, personal, corporate, living/ changing nature of the church. The church’s relationship to the trinity is an exciting contemporary and biblical study on its own. The church’s internal relationships as a fellowship of saints gathered/ scattered—the sociology of the church, is also of vital importance in our understanding of the church. (internal, contextual, antagonistic, and vertical)

Defining activities or tasks within the whole range of church life has been attempted most often in this job of defining the church, but actually comes last in order of consideration, informed by these other areas. One recent conservative classic on the church claimed: evangelism and edification are the defining features of the church. It would be obvious that such a summary would have been offered in the 1970s in North America, the church being in the throes of a pastor-teacher revival and such other basic, defining features as worship were either taken for granted or didn’t meet any felt need at the time. But this is simply illustrative of the need for careful reflection on the church’s context, traditional baggage and reactionary postures, biblical non-negotiables (especially in its very nature, while giving serious consideration to biblical models of praxis, leadership, sacraments....) and complexity of relationships.

### **The Church’s Context**

Taking Context, how might we define ‘church?’ What is it about our age that is defining the church? Certainly globalization and all the technological breakthroughs of the information age are reshaping our understandings of the church. As we’ve cited elsewhere, the theology of church is no longer a localized thing; it has various epicenters of definition, informed by the worldviews of Africans, Latin Americans, Asians, Europeans and N. Americans. This potpourri of theological perspectives forces the church to be viewed more openly, more culture-specifically and, on the other hand, more universally than ever before. On the one hand, ecclesiology is moving more toward a too context-specific definition, while enjoying the breadth of global interaction and a boiling down to some intercultural non-negotiables. No one can be a ‘pure Mennonite’ anymore. It’s physically impossible to retain one’s distinctives so closely in an age in which all of our most closely cherished loyalties are daily rubbing up against radically different albeit equally compelling loyalties of other traditions. Contextually then, for starters, the church is defined both more universally as well as more context-specifically/ sensitively. We are all learning at the global classroom level, while realizing that the local context begs for its own forms and structures of church. Generally we can see this as a positive trend in church history.

### **The Church's Essential Nature**

The church IS: the Body, Bride, and Building of Christ. As such, the church has 'personhood,' a dynamic being. It is ALIVE, productive and reproducing, synergistic, energetic, loving, having all the flaws attendant with personhood in a fallen world. We are informed by the language of the writers of epistles to the churches (including Paul, John, Peter, James, [Barnabas?] and Christ Himself in Revelation) of the idealistic view each held of the church – they all loved the church(es), it is clear. No matter what other problems existed there was seldom a church body which first did not receive warm words of commendation and lofty accolades for simply being the church of Jesus Christ in a particular locale. Personhood and community best describe this social essence of the church.

- God's missionary people
- Communion of saints: the historic bonding of all those saved and separated by the Lamb
- Called out ones: "ecclesia" traditional meaning having to do with world-ly uniqueness(?)
- Gathered/scattered: mission of church is mission; mission of mission is the church – health being in the dialectic of gathering for koinonia, didache, diakonia, scattering for kerygma, martyrios, prophetic witness....
- Hermeneutical community: accountable collective of those living together by and under the Word of God
- Universal and Local: ideal and real – are always intertwined
- Bride of Christ: betrothed to the Son; promised to wed; preparing for the wedding, beautified...
- Body of Christ: related to the head and one integrated, cooperative whole – no favorites; growing

One catch with any defining is the tendency to gravitate toward static word pictures and avoid the process or dynamic nature of such ALIVE things as the Church. If the Church is anything at all it is an organism and therefore in process, evolutionary, advancing, changing, moving into God's perfect future. It's interesting that the Kingdom of God is almost always described by Christ and other authors of Scripture in similar ways: alive, moving, growing, dynamic, changing, advancing, becoming. My favorite reference these days is the promise of the coming King/Prince in Is. 6 "Of the increase of his government and his peace there will be no end." What is this bold declaration saying? Whatever we know of the increase of His kingdom/rule/peace/government, we are bound to see much more in the future; in fact, we are never going to see the end of its increase – so get ready!

### **The Church's Four Primary Relationships**

The relationships of the church universal and local are enough to define the entire study and really make up much of the literature on the church these days. For instance, all the talk about spiritual warfare really stems from a growing awareness (or ignorance) of the relationship the church has to its cosmic, angelic surroundings, both good and fallen. The growing body of literature on the social and cultural issues concerning so many Christian leaders and laymen alike is clearly an attempt to clarify the Church's relationship to the world – whether one of winsome friendship or one of stark contrast and enmity. The proliferation of worship literature, music, leadership around the world is indicative of the awakening of the Church's relationship to the Father and the imperative of preparing for an eternal relationship of adoration, dominion and glory. Spiritual gifts in the life of the church are being

promoted and developed at the local level more and more as the Church universal develops a more mature understanding of its communal, internal relationships and the power(s) granted us by the Spirit of God in this age.

### 1. The Triune God:

- Father: Love and worship preeminent; the current praise/worship renewal, return to glory (Piper, Hawthorne)
- Son: Christology and the life of the Church as Jesus Christ Incarnate, incarnational life, centrality of the Christ-event; a charismatic Christology of Luke
- Spirit: Immanence, power encounter/expectation, charisma, exercise of faith, global charismatic church
  - Love: what God is; and what the hallmark of the church is; what God did in Christ
  - Worship: the essence of the Church; the root and fruit of mission; “mission exists because worship does not...” Piper
  - Obedience:
  - Prayer: the great cosmic and historic link, bringing the purposes of God to bear on history and its climax

### 2. The Church: Internal Relationships

- Leadership issues
- Structure issues
- Love/Agape, Koinonia, Diakonia, all of the “one another’s” of the epistles
- Conflict resolution: NT and today
- Nurturing/Discipling relationships and modern-day “Christian Ed.”

### 3. The World: a Love-Hate Relationship: understanding the cosmos

- Love NOT the World: EC-CLESIA; called out ones and the pre-Christendom church
- Being Hated BY the World: the dynamic of prophetic witness and servant suffering
- God so LOVED the World: a lost jewel in the fundamentalist/liberal cleavage
- A Church FOR the World: Prophetic and Priestly, Serving and Winning
- A KINGDOM Theology and hence a fuller ecclesiology
- The nations: the four categories represented around the throne (the descending pillar of categories of humanity developed by Frank Kaleb, Roy, et al.)

### 4. The Enemy: a Battleground

- The current spiritual warfare phenom; founded on authority, dominion, a “revived middle,”
- Corporate Kingdom posture

## **The Church’s Defining Activities**

The activities and tasks of the church:

- Evangelism, Edification, Education, Exaltation, Equipping
- Worship / Adoration: Father / Son / Spirit
- Obedience
- Fellowship / Burden-bearing/sharing
- Service / Servanthood / Feet-washing
- Love / Sacrifice
- Preaching / Evangelism / Growth / Reproduction
- Prophetic and preserving presence: salt/light
- Teaching / WORD
- Discipling
- Life-giving
- Transformation
- Kingdom advance
- Healing
- Deliverance
- Children / Women / Youth / Men /
- Blessing
- Prayer
- Suffering
- Fruit and gifts of the Spirit
- Leadership / Shepherding / Followership
- Prophecy'
- Apostolic mission / world vision / Great Commission (ALL nations, creatures, parts of the earth)

It would be clear from this very broad-stroke-styled presentation that ecclesiology is one of the critical doctrines emerging in the new millennium (along with, I would contend, a renewed, serious examination of eschatology and a pneumatologically based engagement of the Christian faith with the other major non-Christian religions of the world). By way of review, I've developed these four primary points of departure:

1. The Contextual placement (both historically/philosophically and geo-ethnically – in time and place) of the church-in-definition (e.g. the RCC traditional four-marks of Unity/Holiness/Catholicity/Apostolicity; or the radically contrastive self-perceptions of the church in the West and the South today)
2. The Essential or New Testament metaphorical study of the Church: Body, Bride, Building, Family, Holy Nation, Royal Priesthood, Salt, Light, etc (e.g. Kuntz' contemporary study on the metaphors for church in the NT)
3. The Relational definitions of church: relating primarily in four directions ('vertically' toward the Trinity, 'horizontally' in both world-affirming (so-loving) and world-denying (loving-not) postures, 'internally' as the communal and covenantal life of the church within itself proper, and 'antagonistically' as the relating of the church to the enemy (a reviving of a more prominent role of theodicy in the context of ecclesiology).
4. The Functional (and most popular) defining of the church, in relation to its tasks, roles, functions, objectives (e.g. "Evangelism and Edification [*sans exaltation, education, etc. of later definitions*]" in Gene Getz' *Measure of a Church*), or the Reformation's four prime empirical marks: Worship/Word/Sacraments/Government)

These four points of departure offer wildly differing approaches to defining church or developing sound ecclesiology, but I would argue that each category needs exploration if our ecclesiology is going to be both faithful to text and context, faithful to its Author/Finisher and to the hell it's been called to plunder and the world it's been called to disciple.

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***(Now, a message on Incarnational Eccl.)***

**SLIDE 10: Incarnational Ecclesiology**

John 1: notice all the titles of Christ in this chapter: he's everything! Word, Flesh, Man, Son of God, Son of David? Heaven's Gate, many others (c. 30)

Word (vs. voice)...1

God...2

Maker...3

Life...4

The (true) light, which enlightens everyone...4-8

Unrecognized; unaccepted...11

Flesh...14

Coming from father... 14

Full of, bearer of grace & truth...14,17

Successor, Superior, Predecessor...15

Jesus Christ...17

God the One and only...18

Close to the Father's heart...18

God's interpreter/revealer...18

The Lord...23

One among you; not known by you...26

Lamb of God...29 (world's sinbearer)

A man...30

**Incarnational Ecclesiology**

But, what is the Church? Really?

1. John 1 (Heb. 1) titles, word-flesh-glory
2. John 2: glory? And hour
3. John 12: hour, and glory
4. John 14: home-coming
5. John 17: Jesus' glory with the Father, now with us, and prayer for Self, Disciples, World
6. 1 John 4:12 & John 1:18

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Spirit-baptizer...33

Rabbi...38,49

Messiah...20,25,41

Son of God...34,49

King of Israel...49

One written about...45

Jesus of Nazareth...45

Son of Joseph...45

Heaven's gate...51

**Incarnational Ecclesiology**

- John 1 and Hebrews 1 the many and the one way to reveal
  - What was the PERFECT and only ADEQUATE self-revelation?
- Invisible-Insatiable-Incarnational
- Seeing - 16 times in John 1
- John 14: seeing him IS enough
- Attributes?? To make the BODY accessible
- NT Wright's thesis that Jesus' vocation was to wrap up the entire temple system into himself

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**SLIDE 11: Incarnational Ecclesiology, cont.**

John 1: What is John doing? Unveiling God: the one whom everyone is desperate to see and no one can see: Accessible: "Come and you will see -"

What's this chapter about? "Seeing;" this word and its forms appear c. 16 times in the chapter - also other words like "found" "look" "recognize"

A primary thesis of this message juxtaposes the two apparent contradictions of John's Gospel and John's Epistle (the one revealing God Incarnate in Jesus; the other God Incarnate in the church):

No one has seen God at any time: God in flesh unveils him

No one has seen God at any time: Love - between US - brings God into view

Another primary thesis of this message is the idea that Pentecost is the true birthday of the Church in that Jesus sent not only his Spirit to earth, but also his Body - all in one moment.

He left his Spirit: but a body-less spirit is a ghost

He left his Body: but a spirit-less body is a corpse

"We Wanna See Jesus."

Notice how much in recent worship music the idea of “seeing Jesus” is prominent? I think no passage in Scripture better addresses the human and divine project of making the invisible God visible than John 1 – with passages following as further elaboration.

First there are three principles which drive this message:

1. God cannot be seen by human eyes
2. Humanity craves to see God
3. God has provided one primary, alternative means by which to be made visible.

The horrible irony of this is that if God were to reveal his glory directly to us, it would destroy us; But when He does provide an adequate means of fully representing Himself to us – without destroying us, what do we do? We destroy it!

The first principle is stated throughout Scripture: God the invisible, one of his traits. The second principle is best illustrated by the unbelievable idolatry of all humanity throughout all of history. It's not as though contemporary atheism, a relative newcomer in the marketplace of ideas, has somehow shelved the notion of wannabe deities. The terms have changed but certainly not the human propensity to worship at the altar of Cheap Substitutes.

Why does India boast its 330 million gods? Is it really something to be proud of? Not if you read Isaiah's quip in Chapter 44:9-20

The book of Hebrews begins with a similar theme:

*In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.*

Now of course the first casual observer of the first Chapter of Hebrews in reference to my cautious claim will maintain that the writer of Hebrews is speaking of the cosmic Christ, the Son as he IS, not WAS. Yet I would persist with the words of Jesus himself, at possibly the saddest moment of his three-year ministry career, in addressing Philip – right at the end – with the words, “*Have I been so long with you, Philip, and yet have you not KNOWN me. Whoever has SEEN me has SEEN the Father.... How can you say, ‘SHOW us the Father?’*”

Jesus' great disappointment here was that though he had masterfully shrouded his divinity within human flesh, yet his hope had been clearly that the disciples, his closest friends, would have seen precisely what John declares so boldly in John 1 – that we beheld (vs. “behold”) his glory, that of the only begotten of the Father.

When we think of God's glory, we may very well be drawn to those violent self-expressions of God's *shekinah* in the OT, in which mountains smoked, the cosmos trembled and sinners vaporized. I think we need to rethink this, IF in fact Hebrews is correct in its bold assertion that in Jesus, God's final and undisputed perfect self-unveiling, we have the full radiance of the Father's glory. In fact, I think what we have here is a statement of a hierarchy of understanding of God's glory, that in the Old Covenant (as Paul lays out in 2 Cor 3), we have a radiance which destroys, but that in the New Covenant, we have a God whose perfect radiance has been manifest *circumventing* the non-moral attributes of Deity, such as his omniscience, his omnipresence, his omnipotence and deadly unapproachability. Is it possible?



The Jesus of John 1 is both the glorious, many-faceted, self-unfolding of God himself – with almost 30 different titles and self-descriptions for Christ in this chapter alone – AND the at times profoundly underwhelming way in which God chose to reveal himself in flesh.

### **SLIDE 12: Incarnational Ecclesiology: GLORY**

How, then, is the third principle borne out in John 1 and throughout revelation? Begin with Sinai.

In the swirling, numinous experience of Sinai, Yahweh tells the inquisitive Moses that His FACE cannot be seen. “NOW, SHOW ME YOUR GLORY,” Moses cries out. This man is as close to God as sinful humanity has come; and he wants more! God is wonderfully willing to grant his request, but within the limits of Moses’ own survival.

God declares that he will make all of his ‘goodness’ to pass before Moses, and that he would “proclaim [his] name” before him, and that he would ‘have mercy on whom mercy, and compassion on whom compassion.’ I find it most instructive of the glory of God – that which Moses actually asked to see – that the first thing God declares he will show Moses is “all of my goodness.”

Why am I drawn to this curiosity? Because I’ve been led to believe that although there is a sense in which Jesus laid aside his “glory” in order to become God Incarnate, there is possibly a much stronger sense in which the truer glory of God was preserved intact in the incarnation, so that John and others could confidently say that it was precisely within the incarnation that they were able to “behold his glory...FULL of grace and truth.”

Following this profound, long chapter (John 1) on God’s new project of self-disclosure, we are then immediately transported to another utterly routine human experience, a neighborhood wedding; Jesus (and the disciples, likely a last-minute add-on and very possibly part of the reason that the wine ran out early) is a guest, probably by association with his mother. He “thus” shows his glory by turning the water into wine, just in time to save the face of the otherwise embarrassed host and groom. Jesus showed his glory, not so much through the powerful display of his command over nature, but through the dignifying of marriage and the sweet, lavish face-saving means of bringing celebration to one of God’s most enduring institutions, one which Jesus was not to partake of – all the more meaningful thereby.

But why pause here? For one primary reason. Although Jesus did “thus” reveal his glory “and his disciples put their faith in him,” there is another sense in which he precisely did NOT reveal his glory (another Johannine contradiction?), since at the beginning of the incident, he strongly chides his mother that “my hour has not yet come.” To what hour is Jesus referring here? It is indubitably the “hour of glorification” which was to come several years hence.

And to this we now turn, not overlooking the several instances in which Jesus firmly repeated his resolve NOT to abort the Father’s timetable of bringing special glory to himself “at the appointed hour.”

### **Incarnational Ecclesiology: Glory**

- Exodus: “Show me your glory” Moses’ story = his goodness
- Glory in the tabernacle: glory in the temple & Ichabod
- Isaiah: I will not share my glory with another
- Habakkuk 2:14 Knowledge of the glory filling the earth
- John 1: We beheld his glory: full of grace/truth
- Hebrews 1: Jesus: the full radiance of the Father’s glory
- John 2: Began to show his glory (but NOT hour)
- John 12: Hour of glorification
- John 17: have given them my glory
- Ephesians 3 to him be Glory in the church—for the world
- Revelation: give God glory
- Revelation: nations bring their glory into the city of God

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It is finally in John 12 that Jesus utters these awesome and terrible words: *"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be GLORIFIED"* (Jn 12:23) Few people seem concerned about WHY Jesus would make this historic statement at this particular juncture. It was my good Bible teacher at Prairie Bible Institute, during a Sunday morning sermon, who spelled it out in clear English for me back in 1977.

*Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." Jn 12:20-23*

Jesus had made it his objective to disciple the nation of the Jews. He had been called only to the lost tribes of the house of Israel. Even though he strategically ministered in the regions beyond the obvious centers of Jewish religious and political power, the entreaties by other Gentiles to involve him in their interests seemed to have fallen on deaf ears or met with only reluctant response. (and parenthetically, Jesus was both systematic and comprehensive in his mission to Palestine; he literally visited ALL of the towns & villages of Judea....he finished the work)

But here is a group of genuine outsiders, Greeks coming up to Jerusalem during the days of the feast, and asking to "see Jesus." This somehow struck a powerful, painful and prophetic note within the heart of this man. He immediately turns and says, Here comes the REAL GLORY. I must be lifted up from the earth, in order to draw ALL MEN to myself. I must fall into the ground and die first, but I promise to yield a great harvest upon the rising of my seed in the plant of the future.

The world has come knocking on Palestine's door: This man Jesus we want to see; He sounds too good to be a mere Jewish savior; He sounds like a man for us all. But we want to see him; seeing is evidence; we've only heard so far.

Now Jesus himself revealed the very most concerning his 'glory' in the high priestly prayer of John 17—the chapter in which this word appears the most times anywhere in the NT. The most striking thing to me in these references to his glory is that he has done (see vs. 22) that which Isaiah's God had said would never be done—i.e. "given your glory to another." (Is 48:11)

In this same chapter, Jesus refers to the glory "which I had with you before the world began" as being that which he wishes to show and share with his disciples in the *eschaton*(?)

Incidentally, some have drawn attention to the fact that in this chapter Jesus was *NOT* praying for the world, but for his few followers and then those who would believe in him through their word. They overlook John's affection for apparent contradiction, juxtaposition and the like; in which Jesus' prayer moves from the particular to the universal. In fact he begins this high priestly (n.b.) by *not* praying for the world, but for his inner circle of followers among whom he was focusing this cosmic self-disclosure. Later he moves to pray for those who would believe on account of their faithful witness to his glory—WHY?—in order that (and now he moves to) THE WORLD might BELIEVE....

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### **SLIDE 13: Incarnational Ecclesiology, cont.**

Now John also repeated his words "No one has ever seen God" in his first epistle (4:12). Here again is an intended internal contradiction: "But when we love another, God lives in us...." The invisible God becomes visible through the age-old lifestyle mandated by Christ as the only hallmark of his followers and that by which indeed ALL MEN would know we were his disciples.

What a strange and simple formula: God's glory – all his goodness – is manifest in the flesh through his tabernacling – in flesh – among his lost human children in the person of Christ.

Now when Christ ascended to "glory" he said this was necessary for our good; then he promptly

### Incarnational Ecclesiology

- Birth of Church: Spirit AND Body
- Stephen's death: defying the temple system: God doesn't live in church buildings
- Paul's Conversion: twice-- "I am my church!" ecclesiologist got the lesson
- John's letter: God is invisible: people must see: the BODY of Christ LOVING makes the invisible visible

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fulfilled his promise to leave behind the Comforter. But I no longer see Pentecost as the deposit of just one "Holy Spirit." I think the evidence is there that Jesus actually left two things on the earth, beginning on the day of Pentecost.

After all, we call Pentecost the birthday of the Church. So what Jesus left behind at Pentecost was both his Spirit and his Body. What is a spirit-less body? A corpse! What about a body-less spirit? A ghost! We know that Jesus said spirits without bodies travel through arid places looking for a dwelling place. Is not the Holy Spirit just the same. Jesus said "A body you have prepared for me." His Spirit was and is looking for a Body in which to dwell. The Church is just that Body.

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Paul's conversion happens just weeks or months following this Pentecost double-gift. What a day in church history! His first encounter with Christ was by far his most memorable – gives his testimony at least twice more in Acts; but WHAT IS IT JESUS TEACHES PAUL ABOUT HIMSELF IN THIS FIRST, CRUCIAL ENCOUNTER? That he is his church! TWICE Jesus introduces himself as the church – in this very short, conversion conversation. Here is the one Jesus has predestined as the apostle to the Gentiles, the first global missionary/missiologist/ecclesiologist. So hold your breath; what is Paul going to learn about the nature of the church in this encounter? Or the nature of Christ for that matter? "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting ME?" "...Welllll, WHO ARE YOU, LORD?" "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." (I AM THE CHURCH). Now go. Paul's Christology, ecclesiology and missiology are introduced simultaneously in this unforgettable encounter – and they're actually just about merged here.

Not many years later, Paul wrote to those carnal, charismatic Corinthians: NOW you are the Body of Christ. (not some day in the distant future when you get your act together, or in some eschatological fullness of time: NOW) 1 Cor. 12:27

This Body of Christ then is the new dwelling place of God, Jesus Christ Incarnate, THE emissary of the Kingdom, the only gospel most people will ever read, experience, see, or feel.

### **SLIDE 14: Incarnational Ecclesiology: LOVE**

To be Jesus Christ incarnate, the Church must really, ultimately be LOVE incarnate.

*What is it that the God of Israel is abounding in? (Ex 34:6, Num 14:18, Neh 9:17, Ps 86:5,15, Joel 2:13, Jon 4:2)*

*What is it that the God of Israel maintains to thousands? (Ex 34:7; Jer 32:18)*

*What are we to do with the alien – as with ourselves? (Lev 19:34)*

*What is THE reason God sent his only begotten Son? (Jn 3:16)*

What is it that covers a multitude of sins? (Prov 10:12; 1 Pet 4:8)

What must we do to our neighbor? (Lev 19:18; Mt 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mk 12:31,33; Lk 10:27; Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; Jas 2:8)

What does God show to a thousand generations? (Ex 20:6; Deut 5:10; 7:9)

What endures forever? (45 of 51 occurrences in the Bible of "endures forever" is "God's love")

What is to be our attitude toward our enemies? (Mt 5:44; Lk 6:27, 35)

What is the fulfillment and summing up of the whole law? (Rom 13:10; Gal 5:13)

What is it that casts out fear? (1 Jn 4:18)

What is the fruit of the Spirit? (Gal 5:22)

What surpasses knowledge? (Eph 3:19)

What can nothing in heaven and earth or hell separate us from? (Rom 8:39)

What is the greatest of these: faith, hope and love? (1 Cor 13:13)

What is Jesus' one and New Commandment? (Jn 15:17)

What is the 'goal of our instruction?' (1 Tim 1:5)

What is God's great one-word self-definition? (1 Jn 4:8,16)

What makes the invisible God visible to the world? (1 Jn 4:12)

## Incarnational Ecclesiology: Love

What is it that the God of Israel is abounding in? (Ex 34:6; Num 14:18; Neh 9:17; Ps 86:15; Joel 2:13; Jn 4:2)

What is it that the God of Israel maintains to thousands? (Ex 34:7; Jn 3:18)

What are we to do with the alien—as with ourselves? (Lev 19:34)

What is THE reason God sent his only begotten Son? (Jn 3:16)

What is it that covers a multitude of sins? (Prov 10:12; 1 Pet 4:8)

What must we do to our neighbor? (Lev 19:18; Mt 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mk 12:31,33; Lk 10:27; Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; Jas 2:8)

What does God show to a thousand generations? (Ex 20:6; Deut 5:10; 7:9)

What endures forever? (45 of 51 occurrences in the Bible of "endures forever")

What is to be our attitude toward our enemies? (Mt 5:44; Lk 6:27,35)

What is the fulfillment and summing up of the whole law? (Rom 13:10; Gal 5:13)

What is it that casts out fear? (1 Jn 4:18)

What is the fruit of the Spirit? (Gal 5:22)

What surpasses knowledge? (Eph 3:19)

What can nothing in heaven and earth or hell separate us from? (Rom 8:39)

What is the greatest of these: faith, hope and love? (1 Cor 13:13)

What is Jesus' one and New Commandment? (Jn 15:17)

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## SLIDE 15: Tying GLORY to LOVE

How does Jesus tie his glory to love? It is really quite simple. As he reaches the climax of his ministry and the announcement that his hour has come (John 12-13), he reiterates in 13:31, after Judas' hasty exit, "NOW is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him AT ONCE." A minute later: "A NEW COMMAND I give you: LOVE ONE ANOTHER. As I have LOVED you, so you must LOVE one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you LOVE one another."

### Tying Glory to Love

- John 13:1,31-35:
- Glory NOW & NEW command to LOVE
- John 15:15 "Friends reveal everything"
- Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3, that

*YOU, being rooted and grounded in LOVE, may have power to grasp just how wide and long and high and deep God's LOVE really is; and to know this LOVE which surpasses knowing—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God! What is it to be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God? It is to know the unknowable riches of God's LOVE...to HIM BE GLORY IN THE CHURCH!*

So at the very moment of Jesus' fresh announcement of his glorification in the cross, he issues the NEW COMMANDMENT to LOVE. This is an organic connection which spans scripture, from Moses' Sinai experience of "all my goodness" in the request to see his glory, through this hinge of history in Jesus' final hours on earth, to the life of the church expressed by Paul.

I am a dispensationalist of sorts: When Jesus said to the disciples: John 15:15 "I no longer call you servants—I call you friends, because everything I have learned from the Father I have made known to you." This is THE great age-divide! From slavery to friendship—with God Himself.

God the communal, triune Being, is ushering us into the inner circle of his love and most intimate relating/knowing. This is the way Jesus connects glory and love. God, out of perfect love, reveals himself fully – his glory // all his goodness – to those whom he brings into the inner circle of his confidence.

Paul talks about this love in his great treatise on and prayer for the church in Ephesians 3:

His prayer for the saints is that they, *being rooted and grounded in LOVE, may have power to grasp just how wide and long and high and deep God's LOVE really is; and to know this LOVE which surpasses knowing – that they may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God!!* What is it to be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God? It is to know the unknowable riches of God's LOVE...*to HIM BE GLORY IN THE CHURCH and in Jesus Christ throughout all generations forever and ever* (vs. 21ff). Where is glory associated with the church? It is where the unfathomable LOVE of God is understood and lived by a church that is intimately wrapped up in the embrace of Jesus Christ.

If we LOVE, God lives in us. The invisible is made visible, and people see the one they've wanted to see all along: Jesus.

### **SLIDE 16: Incarnational Ecclesiology: Implications for CP**

What has the church done instead?

We've made our hallmark one of knowledge, of deeply cherished beliefs as the indisputable starting ground, the only elements in our 'statements of faith' whereas Christ said THIS LOVE would be the prime feature of his followers. In so doing, we've forgotten the winsome mandate of forgiveness, the universally appealing ministry of reconciliation, the compelling lifestyle of compassion, and the prophetic hope in costly calls for righteousness as justice.

We've moved the faith from the marketplace and oikos to an underutilized, expensive, and professionally maintained edifice, a four-walled enclosure which only the initiated can participate in or observe...a Jesus who is so far-flung from the everyday lives of ordinary sinners that we would generally be embarrassed to invite them into our private meetings, and if we did, they would be too embarrassed to stick around.<sup>i</sup>

We've created artificial barriers (like appearances, performance-orientation, culture-bound customs) which do just the opposite of what he intended when he asked us to disciple the nations.

### **SLIDE 17: Incarnational Ecclesiology: Sir, Are You Jesus?**

There's this simple little story of a girl rushing home with a big bag of groceries in a New York subway. She is suddenly, abruptly bumped by a businessman who is obviously late for an important appointment, but who inadvertently lands her bag of groceries all over the station platform. In an instant he has to decide between making his train on time or helping the girl he accidentally upset. Reluctantly he decides for the latter. After assembling all the lost items and giving her back her bag, he

### Incarnational Ecclesiology

#### Implications for Church Planting:

- Maximum of organism: planting of a Body
- Jesus is accessible—Planting the Presence in every Place—in all his beauty, justice, sacrifice, compassion, truth and prophetic power
- Buildings with walls can be a problem (going TO church?); are we a temple religion? Research for 'addresses.' Or is this what Stephen and Jesus died replacing?
- Church is mobile, tangible, servant, prophetic, a sign of the kingdom—God's up-side-down reign
- People ARE ~~like~~ the Building

16



## Incarnational Ecclesiology

Sir, are you Jesus?

17

looks up to see the most inquisitive look on the girl's face. "Sir," she says, "Are you Jesus?" With this naïve question, she jolts the man back to his original dilemma.

The church is in the world as what? What is the most common metaphor for Church in the NT? The Body of Christ, his re-incarnation. If the church is not readily mistaken for Jesus, then there is something terribly amiss. This must be the church's aim: to be routinely mistaken for the one whose name we bear and whose Body we constitute.

The greatest power in the universe waits to be reborn in the church. Yes, of course there are occasional, brilliant reflections of the Savior's love among us; and truly we

sense, we know that only in this new counterculture, this incendiary fellowship, does God genuinely manifest his Son's love. We've heard thousands of chronicles of unprecedented, life-laying-down, extravagant, wild, lavish, generous, joyful love, in the name and stead of Jesus. These are the chronicles of greatness, of the glory for which this universe was born and from which it has languished in defeat for centuries.

It was, I would insist, the LOVE of God ("all of my goodness") which he passed before Moses and which shown as fire from his countenance when he descended the mount Sinai experience, and that it is still the LOVE of God which mediates his glory to humanity – a humanity which craves unceasingly a view of God, who in turn cannot be visible without reincarnating corporate human flesh, that incendiary fellowship which has within it the Power to turn the world upside-down, inside-out with God's love.

### SLIDE 18: Conclusions

In conclusion, and especially in light of the original concern regarding the dual identify of DAWN – between that of Saturation church planting as a strategic methodology toward completing the great commission, and that of 'discipling a whole nation' which approaches more broadly the literal language of the great commission but which clearly encompasses more than any one methodology...possibly we can summarize some past features and future prospects for the DAWN movement.

## Conclusions

- ❖ We begin and end not with church or evangelism; rather we connect nation-discipling with Kingdom-seeking.
- ❖ Nation-discipling does require integration: WWW
- ❖ We hold to the legitimacy, necessity and convergence of each stream of church, mission and our primary cultures.
- ❖ Saturation church planting is and must continue happening! We have a bias for action and rapid advance. (Filipino 2K transition)
- ❖ We develop at least three dimensions for churches: HHH.
- ❖ An incarnational ecclesiology is a safeguard against over-institutionalization of church *and* mission: PPP=preliminary.
- ❖ We pledge to seed future harvest-CP movements with Holy Spirit health and holism.

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1. We are all in process, and what this presentation seeks to demonstrate is that the whole Body of Christ is blessed by a much more 'integrationist' and "whole Body," "Whole Gospel," "whole world" approach to things in church and mission than we were even a half-generation ago.
2. If we look at the respective fortes of the major streams of both the Body of Christ worldwide and the ministry foci they most urgently bring to the task, we realize that each major foci has a

history, a biblical legitimacy and therefore a necessity to be part of our global and localized ministry ends.

3. The DAWN movement, which is a clarion call to “plant the Presence in every place” has also been blessed by God in the past half-generation with an unusual sphere of influence in the worldwide church/mission enterprise. ‘Saturation church planting’ IS ‘generally accepted’ in most parts, and is increasingly ‘fervently practiced,’ borrowing the language of D.M.’s mission. The DAWN movement has also, due in large measure to its visionary bias-for-action, been located within the more activist, ‘rapid advance’ streams of evangelical mission and has often had little interaction with, much less collaboration with, other vital streams in the outworking of the Great Command and Great Commission of Christ. This latter reality has begun to change, partly due to the Internet-connected and rapidly synergizing, networked world we’re inevitably a part of today.
4. An ‘incarnational ecclesiology’ is a biblical and world-changing safeguard from a reductionist approach to mission which simply boils down everything to one activity. This can still be a mistake with some more programmatically inclined enthusiasts within the movement. Fortunately, beginning with the writings of Jim Montgomery, the DAWN movement, while practically has been about church planting, has always had at its core the much profounder values of a church which incarnates Christ in all his beauty, radical transforming power, *word, work and wonder* – if you will. The detractors of the movement would generally point to times and places where DAWN, like others, has been wrongly reduced to mere activities in the church planting arena or to ‘growth’ at the expense of depth, breadth and impact (RAW).
5. As a movement DAWN fits a critical slot sequentially, an early stage requirement – that the church must be present if the Kingdom through its people is to have effect; if the church itself is to be the primary agent of transformation, it must be present.
6. We hold the promise of a more holistic approach to church planting as others are asking the same questions of the church (regarding the relationship of growth to issues of depth, breadth and impact). We in the DAWN movement have a privileged position from which to seed church planting movements with *a priori* commitments to and a growing understanding of the implications of Kingdom, justice, righteousness, peace and sufficiency for the communities and nations in which our churches are planted. While we see the indispensability of the church planted, we also see the equally indispensable role of these other dimensions within the very fabric of all the churches of the next generation. And this infers a much more intentional and broad, “21-centuries” ecclesiology for all our future activism.
7. Lastly, we are encountering and are committed to greater symbiosis (‘living together’) and synergy (‘working together’) with those Great commission groups (churches and agencies) who complement our forte and bring their unique gifts to the table. We are already experiencing the strong advantage of partnership (co-belligerence if you will) with groups which are very different from ourselves in praxis or strategy but with whom – in tandem – we are able to impact the nations and actually seeing nations disciplined – being brought to obedience to everything Christ commanded, not ‘just’ filled with congregations.
8. Harvest has, admittedly, been the primary concern, then, *prima facie* within our rapidly advancing movements. But Holy Spirit health and holism are indispensable (although certainly not the only) complements to the commitment to see the church present within a society. Just as space/time has multiple dimensions, just as the God we worship is three Persons in One, just as

the church is composed of many parts all interdependent and interconnected, just as the age of post-modernity asks questions of us which lift us out of or beyond the two-dimensional polarities of the past, so we intuitively know that the church which is planted must live out the whole counsel of God and be the prime agent of transformation for there to be integrity of mission and the kind of impact which Jesus himself modeled and brought with the inauguration of the Kingdom.

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<sup>i</sup> Incidentally, the deaths of Jesus and Stephen – in their immediate contexts – both point to the critical nature of the battle between the Old and New schools on the role and expression of the temple in the divine project being revealed. The Jewish hierarchy, which seemed to have the most to lose in the arrival of a pretender to the Messiahship, directed their inquisitions of Jesus and Stephen to a small handful of litmus tests for blasphemy. In Jesus' case, there was clearly the issue of direct claims to Messiahship as well as (differently in the Jewish mind) divinity. But within this huge issue was another which came up increasingly at the end of Jesus public ministry: the temple and its cultus. Was Jesus attacking in any way the sacrosanct establishment of the temple – which had come up multiple times in his often inscrutable private and public declarations. If there was any chance that he had spoken indubitably against either the Law of God or the Temple, this would be enough to condemn him to death for treason. Jesus had said, Destroy this "temple" and in three days I'll raise it up again..." (John 2:19 and alleged by accusers in Mt. 26: 61; Mk 14:53) speaking oh so prophetically about the resurrection event AS WELL AS the establishing of his long-term temple in the newly "built church" (Mt. 16:18). In Stephen's case, the primary contention of his accusers, before the fearsome Sanhedrin, was – mentioned twice – that he spoke against this holy place and against the law (Acts 6:13-14; 'against Moses and God' 6:11). He was quoted as saying that Jesus would destroy 'this place' and change the customs Moses handed down to us. This was enough – true or false – to raise the ire of the Jewish leadership and put him to death if given credence. But they would hear him out first. Apparently, and in true erudition, Stephen did not disappoint. The whole sermon in Acts 7 is in one way a work of art in undermining the entire temple system; but given in another treatise on God's methods of primary self-disclosure:

The forefathers experienced God's appearance/presence before even leaving Mesopotamia for Haran – "Leave your country and your people" ...the beginning of a pilgrim heritage, led by obedient nomads

Abraham was not given any possession within Canaan; only a promise (as Paul puts it: to inherit the earth) of ultimate worship of himself in this land....

The foreign excursions of the Israelites almost hold pride of place in this sermon...Egypt for Joseph, Midian for Moses, Canaan for Abraham, all places where God has sent them, visited, blessed, appeared to and then led his great patriarchs beyond (declaring to them always, "I am the God of .... PEOPLE [not places?]")

In Midian, through the burning bush, God appears to Moses (the birthplace of later Sinai's appearances) and tells him to remove his shoes, for "the PLACE on which you stand is HOLY."

The forefathers completely mistook Moses' vocation (a pattern?), rejected his leadership, and replaced the invisible God with a golden image – as a usurper to the throne/worship of the living, delivering God...a thing they honored as something "their hands had made." (to which God then turned them over to the worship of things HE had made – the stars)

God's ultimate discipline of his people's idolatry was exile – rejection from the land

Mention is made of the tabernacle, God's mobile worship-center, which proved effective as a meeting-place for his people in their wilderness wanderings...BUT it was Solomon who "built the HOUSE for him."

HOWEVER (immediately following) the MOST HIGH does not live in houses made by men, as the prophet says: Heaven is my throne.. What kind of house will you build for me? Says the Lord; "or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?"