

# Discerning the Body | The Church

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Being Human - Week Nine  
Christ the King Adult Education  
April 15, 2018

# Being Human

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A Course in Biblical Anthropology, or Christian Ethics as Good News



*Busy Day*, Charles Nkomo (2012, Zimbabwe)

# Being Human

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A Course in Biblical Anthropology, or Christian Ethics as Good News

1. *Mysterium Trinitatis*: The Trinity

- **Covenantal Relationship and Seeking the Face of God**

2. *Ecce Homo*: Incarnation

- **The meaning of embodied existence**

3. *Creatio Ex Nihilo*: The Meaning of Creation

- **Gratitude, Boredom, and Technology**

4. *Homo Adorans*: The Chief End of Man

- **Beauty and Desire**

# Being Human

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A Course in Biblical Anthropology, or Christian Ethics as Good News

5. *Imago Dei* 1: Humanity as *Representative* of God

- **Vocation, Work, and Rest**

6. *Imago Dei* 2: Humanity as *Representational* of God

- **Sex, Marriage, and Friendship**

7. Resurrection

- **Politics, Cultural Engagement, and Loving the City**

8. The Church

- **Service and Authority**

# The Church - Corporate Identity

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- To this point we have largely considered what it means to be human at the level of the individual.
- Have we been ignoring the church?
- Today we'll look at how the doctrine of the church pushes against individualism, even as it safeguards individual human dignity

*La Sainte Chapelle*, Matthew Pillsbury (2008, American)

# The Church - Corporate Identity

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*La Sainte Chapelle*, Matthew Pillsbury (2008, American)

‘Biblical corporateness must be understood first of all as an essential reality of the covenant. God covenants corporately and not simply individually. The concept of the covenant inherently presupposes a people with whom the covenant is established. The communal aspect of the covenant relationship is forever present.’ – O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*

# The Identity of the Church

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- Not our idea or creation
  - Assembled by God (*qahal*)
  - Called by God (*ekklesia*)
  - Relationship to Israel: continuity rather than supercession

# The Identity of the Church

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*Rorate caeli desuper (Drop down ye heavens from above)*, Anselm Kiefer (2016, German)

“In the history of revelation, the Old Testament people of God become the church of the Messiah, formed as the fellowship of the Spirit. ... The coming of the Spirit fulfills the promise to Abraham, and makes the Gentiles Abraham’s seed (Gal. 3:14, 29).” – Edmund Clowney, *The Church*

# The Identity of the Church

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*Nicodemus Visiting Jesus, Study*, Henry Ossawa Tanner (1899, American)

Commissioned by Christ, also constituted by Christ: “The community of those who share in Christ and his benefits is called ‘the church.’” - Herman Bavinck

# The Identity of the Church

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The church is the creature of the Word, not the other way around – the gospel is the story that the church tells, but it is also the story that constitutes the church.



*The Bible: Still Life*, Vincent Van Gogh (Dutch)



# “I confess...”

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- ONE
  - Denominations can be helpful in providing homes for those committed to areas in which God has not given clarity.
  - Unity is sustained in the preaching of the apostolic gospel and celebration of the sacraments (“...one Lord, one faith, one baptism...” – Eph. 4:5).
  - Kindness and deference should mark interchurch relations.

# “I confess...”

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- HOLY
  - Set apart, distinct from the world
  - Although the New Testament does not call the church out of the world, the marks of the church put a visible distinction between it and the world
    - Word
    - Sacrament – baptism and Lord’s Supper
    - Discipline

# “I confess...”

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- HOLY
  - Some easy errors to make:
    - Purity
      - The church is never perfect in this age
  - Visible/invisible
    - Over-identifying the marks of the church with the church itself
    - On the other hand, neglecting the visible church

# “I confess...”

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- HOLY
  - The church as *organism* and as *organization*

God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. – 1 Corinthians 12:18-26

# “I confess...”

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- HOLY
  - The church as *organism* and as *organization*

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God... speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. - Ephesians 4:11-16

# “I confess...”

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- HOLY
  - The church as *organism* and as *organization*

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. - John 15:1-11

# “I confess...”

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- HOLY
  - The church as *organism* and as *organization*
    - Takes institutional form
      - Authority in the church
        - Christ is head of the church
        - Governs mediately, by His Word and Spirit, through officers He has appointed (BCO, Ch. 1)
  - Membership and authority are ultimately tied to the marks of the church: Jesus accompanied his promise to build his church with the gift of the keys of the kingdom.

# “I confess...”

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- HOLY
  - We affirm the distinction between the invisible and visible church, and yet say in our confession that outside the visible church there is no ordinary hope of salvation. (WCF XXV.1-2)
  - Bavinck points out that it's not a matter of equating “visible” with “organization” and “invisible” with “organism” - the visible church is itself organism and organization.

# “I confess...”

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- CATHOLIC
  - Clowney - The church as a whole is more than the local church.
  - Closely connected to unity, but a different idea.
  - Unity across time and space
  - Local, particular communities matter
  - Catholic ≠ Globalized

# “I confess...”

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- APOSTOLIC
  - This was critical for the Reformers as they were accused of being schismatic: they understood apostolic succession to be connected to apostolic preaching rather than to any human institution.
  - The reformers focused on Holy Scripture, the anchor of apostolic thought, as the basis for apostolicity.
  - The five Solas all have ecclesiological implications:

## “I confess...”

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- To sum up - all of this means that the church is not a club for those with similar cultural tastes, political views, ethnic backgrounds, and moral leanings. They do not meet because they share a hobby called ‘spirituality’ or because they have the same vision for transforming culture. Believers gather to be regularly reconstituted as the body of Christ, receiving Christ as their living Head. They do not gather on their own initiative but are gathered by the Spirit through his ordained means of grace.
- How does this vision compare to attempts at “unity” in secular modernity?

# Unity in Diversity

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# Unity in Diversity

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- The “market story” and the “state story”<sup>\*</sup> both assume that conflict is basic and can only be mitigated
- But this is not the logic of:
  - Trinity
  - Incarnation
  - Creation
  - Worship
  - The image of God

<sup>\*</sup>(Both of these phrases are used by William Cavanaugh in his excellent *Theopolitical Imagination*)

# Unity in Diversity

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- For numerous church fathers, this means that division results from the fall, *not* from human nature
  - Maximus the Confessor sees original sin as division - putting enmity where there was friendship
  - Cyril of Alexandria: “Satan has broken us up.”
  - Augustine imagines Adam literally *falling* and shattering into pieces that spread out and fill the whole earth
- For these fathers, salvation *had* to include the restoration of humanity as a *unity* - and of course, this is exactly what they found in Paul

# Unity in Diversity

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- The doctrine of the church as the *body* of Christ, united to him as branches to a vine or as in the “one flesh” union of marriage, informs our understanding of hospitality, service, and authority

“Paul’s image of the body of Christ offers profound insights for nurture: all the members are needed; gifts are for the body as a whole, and isolation is tragic; and diversity of function produces not division, but unity (Eph. 4:11-16). ... The goal of nurture is to grow to maturity in the image of Christ, in whom the divine image in creation is restored.” - Edmund Clowney, *The Church*

# “One another...”

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- Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. - Galatians 6:2
- And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. - Hebrews 10:24-25
- Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. - Colossians 3:12-14

# Hospitality

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*Dinner Party*, Ryan Kapp (2013, American)

- Our understanding of ourselves as members of one body means that we don't only welcome those who are like us or who have something to offer.
- Christine Pohl's study *Making Room* documents the radically difference this generated early Christians relative to their pagan neighbors

# Service

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- But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” - Matthew 20:25-28; cf. also Mark 10:42-45

# Authority

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- Recall from last week the “bidirectionality” of authority (just another way of saying that Jesus is the head of the church and governs *mediately* through officers).
- Authority in the church is inextricably linked to the *nourishment* of the body by those ordinary means that he has appointed (word, sacrament, discipline)

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. - 1 Peter 5:1-7

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# Under-shepherds of the Great Shepherd

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The word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? ... So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered... - Ezekiel 34:1-2, 5

“For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. - Ezekiel 34:11

# Under-shepherds of the Great Shepherd

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I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ... I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. - John 10:11, 14-15

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” - John 21:15

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