

Survey of Theology 7.

The Doctrine of the Church

Outline

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Introduction

The doctrine of the church = ecclesiology
(Greek *ekklesia*, “church”)

What is the church? How can we recognize it? What is its purpose? Who are its members?

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Early Developments

Early centuries of the church:

- ecclesiology not a major theological focus
- church was politically barely tolerated; at times persecuted
- general consensus on the church:
 - a spiritual society which replaced Israel as the People of God
 - the repository of true teachings
 - purpose: enable believers to grow in faith and holiness
 - members are all one in Christ

Early Developments

Constantine's Conversion caused leaders to compare the Roman Empire and the Church

- *Hippolytus of Rome*: the Empire a satanic imitation of the church
- *Eusebius*: Empire also a divinely ordained institution

Early Developments

Early centers of Christianity, often rivals:

- Alexandria in Egypt
- Antioch in Syria
- Constantinople (“New Rome”)
- Jerusalem
- Rome

Seventh and Eighth Centuries: armies of Islam conquered Antioch, Jerusalem, and Alexandria. They ceased to be important Christian centers

Early Developments

- End of the fourth century: Rome had acquired a position of special esteem
- “pope” (Latin *papa*, “father”)
 - initially used for any bishop
 - gradually used only for Bishop of Rome
 - After 1073: used exclusively for Bishop of Rome
 - Debate: was Pope’s esteem based on Rome as capital of the empire, or on the “primacy of Peter,” (Matt 16:18) martyred at Rome?

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Donatist Controversy

Roman emperor Diocletian (284-313) issued

Edict of February 303:

- Christian books ordered to be burned
- Christian churches to be demolished

Persecution ended with conversion of

Emperor Constantine and Edict of Milan
313

Church leaders who turned over books to be
burned known as *traditores* “those who
handed over” [their books]

Donatist Controversy

Felix of Aptunga was a *traditor* who later consecrated Caecilian as Bishop of Carthage, North Africa in 311

Donatists in North Africa (leader was African Donatus) argued:

- consecration invalid
- sacramental system of Catholic church thereby corrupted. All baptisms, ordinations by Caecilian and his priests tainted and invalid
- church leaders must be pure and cannot include *traditores*, even if they repent

Donatist Controversy

Donatists formed a separate church.

Sociological issues complicated the theology:

- most Donatists: native Africans
- most Catholics: Roman colonists

By 388, when Augustine returned to North Africa from Rome, the Donatist Church was larger than the Catholic Church

Donatist Controversy

“Augustinian” View of the Church:

- church not a society of saints, but a “mixed body” of saints and sinners. He based this view on:
 - Parable of the Net which catches many fish,
 - and Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Matt 13:24-31).
 - separation of good and evil will be at the end of time
 - no human being can make that separation

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Calvin's View of the Church

1541: Colloquy of Ratisbon failed

- last attempt to find a compromise between Catholics and Protestants
- split from Catholic Church no longer a “holding pattern”
- Protestant ecclesiology becomes necessary

Reformation

Calvin's View of the Church

Visible versus the Invisible Church

- **Visible Church:** the visible community of Christian believers. Includes elect and the reprobate
- **Invisible Church:** the fellowship of saints and the company of the elect
 - known only to God
 - will become the only Church at the end of time

Believers should honor the Visible Church on account of the Invisible Church within it

Reformation

Calvin's View of the Church

Which of the various Visible Churches contains the Invisible Church?

- where the gospel is *rightly* preached
- where the sacraments are *rightly* administered

Why is there any need for a Church?

- God redeemed human beings through the historical event of the incarnation
- God sanctifies human beings through the institution of the church

Reformation

Calvin's View of the Church

“You cannot have God as your father unless you have the church for your mother.”

- Cyprian of Carthage

“For those to whom God is Father, the church shall also be their mother.”

“There is no other way to life, unless this mother conceives us in her womb, nourishes us at her breast, and keeps us under her care and guidance.”

- Calvin

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Radical Reformers: Anabaptists

Apostolic church compromised by its links to the state since Constantine

- Sebastian Franck: “I am thus quite certain that for fourteen hundred years now there has existed no gathered Church nor any sacrament.”
- Present church on earth was institutional parody

Church “an assembly of the righteous” (Menno Simons), not Augustine’s mixed society

- must be separate from society, in conflict with the world
- discipline needed to maintain purity of members of the church

Reformation

Radical Reformers: Anabaptists

Schleitheim Confession, 1527:

“The ban shall be used in the case of all those who have given themselves to the Lord. . . yet who lapse on occasion, and inadvertently fall into error and sin. Such people shall be admonished twice in secret, and on the third occasion, they shall be disciplined publicly, or banned according to the command of Christ (Matthew 18).”

In practice, “the ban” often used harshly,
leading to “shunning”

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**Presence of Christ in the
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Models and Images of the Church

The "Notes" or "Marks" of the Church

Presence of Christ in the Church

“wherever Christ is, there is also the catholic church”

- Ignatius Antioch

How is Christ present in the church?

1. sacramentally
2. through the word
3. through the Holy Spirit

Presence of Christ in the Church

Christ is present sacramentally

sacrament: the material world can be a “door” to the sacred and transcendent

Vatican II *Lumen Gentium* (“A Light to the Gentiles”)

- **“the church, in Christ, is a kind of sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all human beings.”**

Presence of Christ in the Church

Christ is present sacramentally

Church is the “primordial sacrament,” God’s use of the material world to reveal the spiritual world

Church is the *elongetur Christi* --
prolongation of Christ in space and time
(Hans Urs von Balthasar)

Church makes Christ present in historical, visible, and embodied form (Karl Rahner)

Institutional structures not of defining importance: church must be free to use new structures to achieve its sacramental mission

Presence of Christ in the Church

Christ is present in the word

Christ is present in the proclamation of the world

Church is kerygmatic community (Greek *kerygma* = “herald”) Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann

- church is an “event” that comes into beings when the word is proclaimed and heard

Presence of Christ in the Church

Christ is present in the Spirit

Gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was the beginning of the church

Christ is Lord over the church, and exercises his sovereignty by the presence of the Holy Spirit

Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas: Jesus Christ *instituted* the church; the Holy Spirit *constitutes* the church

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Models and Images of the Church

Church is *like a Sacrament* (Sacramental Model)

Church is *where the Word of God is proclaimed* (“Kerygmatic” or “Heraldic” Model)

Church is a *Communion or Fellowship* (Community Model)

Church is the *People of God*

Church is *God’s Servant to the World* (Diaconal or Servant Model)

Models and Images of the Church

Communion or Fellowship

Church is a communion or fellowship
involving the sharing of a common life

- *vertical*: between God and believers
- *horizontal*: between individual believers

Models and Images of the Church People of God

Church is the new people of God,
continuous with Israel

“The idea of the people of God is the oldest and most fundamental concept underlying the self-interpretation of the ekklesia. Images such as those of the body of Christ, the temple and so on, are secondary by comparison.”

- Hans Küng

Models and Images of the Church People of God

“ . . . emphasis is on walking by faith and not by sight, going out in answer to a call and not knowing where it will lead, sojourning in the land of promise, living in tents, being strangers and exiles in the earth, pressing on only in light of the promise of God, and looking to Jesus as the pioneer.”

- Thomas & Wondra,
Introduction to Theology, 3rd
Ed, Morehouse, 2002

Models and Images of the Church

God's Servant to the World

Church exists to be God's instrument in divine mission to the world

- Church is a servant to the world
- Church exists for the sake of the world
- Church thus has a responsibility to the world, a responsibility to help the world to be as God intended it
- "The church does not have a mission; it is mission"

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**The “Notes” or “Marks” of the
Church**

The “Notes” or “Marks” of the Church

“I believe in:

- one
- holy
- catholic
- apostolic

church”

The “Notes” or “Marks” of the Church One

Cyprian of Carthage 251: church is the
“seamless robe of Christ” which should
not be divided

How can we today speak of “one” church,
when it is so divided institutionally?

The “Notes” or “Marks” of the Church One

Approaches:

1. *Imperialist or Sectarian* approach: there is only one true church; rest are fraudulent
2. *Platonic* approach: there is an empirical historical church (divided) and an “ideal church” (unified)
3. *Eschatological* approach: disunity will be abolished on the last day
4. *Biological* approach: church development like the branches of a tree. Like a tree, still retains an organic unity
5. *Theological*: unity is the belief in the saving work of Christ. Diversity results in adapting this message to the world’s diversity

The “Notes” or “Marks” of the Church

One

“The gospel in Anglicanism is, then, one facet in a vast mosaic. In its essentials, it corresponds to the gospel as it has been proclaimed and believed all over the world. Yet it is also characterized by its particularity as an experience of God’s saving work in particular cultures, and is shaped by in insights and limitations of persons who were themselves seeking to live the gospel within a particular context.”

- Louis Weil

The “Notes” or “Marks” of the Church One

“The unity of the church is a spiritual unity. It is one and the same God who gathers the scattered from all places and all ages and makes them into one people of God. It is one and same Christ who through his word and Spirit unites all together in the same bond of fellowship of the same body of Christ. . . the Church is one, and therefore *should be one*”

- Hans Küng

The “Notes” or “Marks” of the Church Holy

History has clearly documented the
sinfulness of the church and its members
How is the church then “holy”? Approaches:

1. *Sectarian*. Donatist and Anabaptism.
Church must exclude unholy members
2. *Church holy, members sinful*. (But what is
the meaning of church disembodied of its
members?)
3. *Eschatological*: church as sinful as its
members, but will be purified on the last
day

The “Notes” or “Marks” of the Church Holy

“Whenever I have described the church as being without spot or wrinkle, I have not intended to imply that it was like this already, but that it should prepare itself to be like this, at the time when it too will appear in glory”

- Augustine

“That the church will be. . . without spot or wrinkle. . . will only be true in our eternal home, not on the way there. We would deceive ourselves if we were to say that we have no sin, as 1 John 1:8 reminds us.”

- Thomas Aquinas

The “Notes” or “Marks” of the Church Holy

4. *Holy as being “set apart for God”*

- Old Testament idea of holiness: something or someone set aside for God
- People holy when
 - dedicated to God
 - distinguished from the world on the basis of their calling
- Holiness of the church theological (“set apart”) rather than moral

The “Notes” or “Marks” of the Church Catholic

catholic

- Greek phrase *kath' holou* (“referring to the whole”)
- Latin word *catholicus* “universal or general”)

The “Notes” or “Marks” of the Church Catholic

Aquinas: church is universal and general:

- *geographically*: encompasses the whole world
- *anthropologically*: for all people. No one is rejected, whether master or slave, male or female
- *chronologically*: church will last to the end of time

The “Notes” or “Marks” of the Church Apostolic

“apostolic:” originating with the apostles, or
having a direct link to the apostles

Three aspects of the “apostolic” (H. B.
Swete, Cambridge Regius Professor of
Divinity, 1890-1915):

1. planted in the world by the apostles
2. adheres to the teaching of the apostles
3. carries on the succession of apostolic
ministry

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