

Notes on Ch. 11: The Doctrine of the Church

A. Preliminary Reminders

1. The whole of this systematic theology is, from beginning to end, a project in *church theology*: presupposing the church as an ongoing social reality in the world.
2. The presupposed **Normative Definition of the Church**
The church is that liberative and redemptive community of persons called into being by the Gospel of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit to witness in word and deed to the living triune God for the benefit of the world to the glory of God.
3. Why call this definition ‘normative’?—it attempts to identify those characteristics essential to the church being the church
4. As a *theological* definition of church, it aims to call into question and to be in contrast to those many *empirical groups* called ‘churches’ by the widespread socio-cultural discourses of the modern/postmodern worlds.
5. Proposing that it is a matter of *ineradicable questioning* whether any of these empirical groups are rightly—*theologically*—called ‘church’.
It is also herein that my emphasis on *confessional theology* is pertinent: as confessional, the church and this theologizing within and about the church is always and irremovably subject to being questioned and reexamined.
An infallible and absolutist church incessantly pretends to place itself beyond critique.
6. Why this emphasis on *witnessing*? I am contending that witnessing to the reality of the living triune God we know in the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the *raison d’etre* of the church and is therefore the most comprehensive context in which to understand the other traits and images of the church.
7. Hence, the mission of the church is defined by God’s mission—*Missio Dei*—to redeem the world and witness to God’s reconciling and redemptive love for the world.
8. It is in the context of the inner dynamic of the mission of witness, that we can place and properly understand the church’s life and being as dependent upon its distinctive *discourses and practices*—hence its witness in *word and deed*.
9. It is essential to the life of the church that it remembers that it is an “earthen vessel”, ever in need of grace, renewal, and reform—hence, the church is reformed and always being reformed—*ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*, the deep conviction of the Reformed tradition.
10. Some arrogant but provisional diagnostic comments about the empirical churches in North America today:
 - a. they seem congregated and maintained by commitments and values that are not distinctively Xn and sometimes deeply antithetical to the Gospel.
 - b. their witness is an attenuated discourse that is either empty of distinctive Xn content or unconnected to distinctive Xn practices.
 - c. seem to suffer a grammatical illiteracy in Scripture and tradition.
 - d. to the world their discourses and practices often seem empty, meaningless, and hypocritical.

B. Images of the Church in the New Testament [pp. 596-602]

[Herein is a grouping of images of the church in the NT, with their Scriptural references. These references and groupings are deeply dependent upon but not completely identical with the work of Paul Sevier Minear, former NT theologian at Yale Divinity School.]

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1. The Church as *Ekklesia*
2. The Community of the Saints and the Sanctified
3. The Community of Disciples, Believers, and the Faithful
4. The Community of Slaves and Servants
5. The Church as the People of God
6. The Church as Kingdom, Priesthood, and Temple
7. The Church as the Household and Family of Faith
8. The Church as Vineyard and Flock
9. The Church as the Body of Christ
10. The Church as the New Humanity
11. The Church as the Community of Witness
12. The Church as *Koinonia*

There is much good material herein for studying the rich discourse of the church's emerging and vibrant self-understanding in the NT.

C. Some Notes from Church History [pp.602ff]

1. Some Constant Convictions about the Church over many centuries of church life, but easily forgotten in current times:
 - a. that it is a community founded in divine revelation, first the revelation of God in the history of Israel and then the decisive revelation of God in Jesus Christ; hence, this conviction requires that there be Scriptures that are normative narratives of these revelations of God.
 - b. that the Lordship of Jesus Christ over the church is confessed and the church is thus the 'body of Christ' in the world.
 - c. that the church is not therefore merely another human group or ethnic group, but a group that lives in and by the Spirit of God.
 - d. that the church is itself a visible social group, with its own distinct structure of relationships.
 - e. that the church lives through its own distinctive discourses and practices.
2. These convictions give rise to:
 - a. concerns of doctrine—how to preserve and defend the church's discourses as founded in divine revelation.
 - b. the formation of a canon of writings—the New Testament—as the founding discourses of God's Word in Jesus Christ and the apostolic church.
 - c. the magisterial offices—authoritative teachers and supervisors—of the church, in particular the episcopacy, as a way of maintaining order in discourses and practices.
 - d. the concept of heresy as that teaching or practice that is contrary to the true doctrines—teachings and practices—of the church.
 - e. the concerns of *practice and structure* for the living of the Christian life in distinction from the social norms and practices of surrounding cultures and their politics and patterns of life and governance.
3. The ***Traditional Marks of the Church***

By the fourth century there was a common conviction that the church was *one, holy, catholic, and apostolic*—often called the 'traditional marks of the church' even into and beyond the Protestant Reformation:

 - a. that the ***church is one*** expresses the conviction that it was inconceivable that the church—as founded by Jesus Christ and as his body in the world—could be any other than *one body*. It should be quite intelligible to us just how important this conviction was and how easily it could fall into controversy as to just what the criteria are for identifying the oneness or unity.

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- b. that the ***church is holy*** expresses the conviction the Holy Spirit indwells the church as expressed in the distinct ways in which it lives in the world in obedience to God’s revelation in Jesus Christ.
Should be intelligible how easily this conviction gives rise to the tensions between the church as a holy spiritual body and the church as an empirical institutional body located somewhere.
- c. that the ***church is catholic*** expresses the profound conviction that the church is for the whole world, without any restrictions of race, ethnicity, nation/political governance, or geographic location—or, to put it precisely, the church is intended for all humans and *has no defining characteristics of locale, race, social status or cultural identity!*
Nota bene: because of my sense for this basic emphasis, I refuse to adopt a common linguistic practice in our time of referring to the Roman tradition of the church as the ‘Catholic’ church—okay, it is sometimes unavoidable, however much it is regrettable.☺
- d. that the ***church is apostolic*** expresses the conviction that the church is historically and normatively dependent on the witness of the apostles of Jesus Christ and is linked to the normativity of the New Testament scriptures.
4. ***The Constantinianization of the Church***
- a. The theme of the Constantinianization of the church has been elaborated in our time by the Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder, with significant exploration by the theologian Stanley Hauerwas.
The thesis has been vigorously challenged by other Christian historians and theologians, and most recently by Peter J. Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 2010. Leithart does contribute to our understanding of the times of Constantine and the life of the church, but I think he does not succeed in undermining Yoder’s basic points, though Yoder might himself have claimed too much here and there.
In identifying this diagnostic theme in the history of the church, it is important to grasp the points I do emphasize and often qualify as well. *Nota bene!*
- b. Before the rise of Constantine as Roman emperor in the fourth century, the following themes had prevailed in Christian self-understanding:
- i) the church was self-consciously a community comprised of persons who were not identified as the social/political elite of the Roman world;
 - ii) Xns were repeatedly persecuted by imperial powers.
 - iii) Xns were largely pacifist on the uses of violence against others and the practice of violence in political law enforcement and warfare. Leithart misses the precise point: **pacifism was the default position among Xns** and therefore exceptions to that default position incurred the profound obligation to defend such relative to Jesus Christ and the nature of the church. That there were from time to time such attempts at qualifications and exemption simply proves the power of the default rule of pacifism among Xns.
 - iv) Xns were acutely aware that they lived in a sociopolitical culture that was pagan and anti-Christian—and it costs socially to be a Xn in the midst of such attitudes and arrangements.
 - v) In making these generalizations, there is no need to deny that here and there from time to time, persons from the socially elite became Xns.
- c. With the conversion of Constantine, imperial co-leader and military commander, in 312 CE, and his further rise in 323 CE to the single emperor of the Roman empire, the frightful persecution of Xns and the church by the empire, especially that in the few years preceding Constantine, did largely cease.
But Constantine did attempt to manage church life and controversies by interfering in the Donatist controversy and by facilitating the calling of the first ‘ecumenical’ council of the church at Nicaea in 325 CE, from which arose the first version of the Nicene Creed.

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However much I judge the Nicaea council and its creed to be largely correct theologically, I do regard the rule of Constantine as launching into church history and the history of the world what Yoder has called the ‘Constantinianization of the Church’.

- d. Constantinianization is the launching of the practice and theory of *collaboration between church and state* that would persist in the west for centuries to come, even subsequent to the Protestant Reformation:
- i) the concerns of the church and the state begin to merge and mutually influence each other.
 - ii) the church largely comes under the protection of the empire/state and the empire tends to enforce rules within the church.
 - iv) as the empire expands and/or conquers outlier societies, persons become Xns by virtue of social location, thus eroding the previous emphasis on persons becoming Xn by virtue of personal decisions spiritually understood—which leads to the distinction between the *visible church* and the *invisible church*, openly acknowledging that many are they who are *in* the visible church by virtue of reasons other than those of faith. [*Nota bene*: this distinction, quite prominent in Augustine, still stalks contemporary church life, openly acknowledging that in the west what now passes socially as *church* is often opaque and elusive theologically and ethically.]
 - v) the collaboration between church and state gives rise to the theological distinction between 1) the *religious*—the priests, monks, nuns—who are nonviolent and given to ‘higher’ and stricter standards of behavior and spiritual obedience; and 2) the *laity*—the ordinary Xns who make the politics and economy of the empire hum—living as worldly citizens—and given the tasks of violent coercion in the name of the state’s justice. Notice: the rise of so-called *just war* theories by Xn theologians arise now in order to specify the legitimizing conditions necessary to justify the state going to war.
 - vi) it is this *collaboration of church and state* that in the 19th century is named *Christendom* by Kierkegaard, and amidst its cultural dissolution, now underway in the west, leads to great confusion in the church as to what it means to be a Xn and what sort of ethics that entails and what sort of discourses and practices it requires.

4. *The Reformation and Beyond*

A few brief notes:

Socially, the Reformation gave rise to ecclesial traditions of discourses and practices that in the next century fell into two different groupings:

- a. those that evolved into *State Churches* among the emerging states of Europe in the decline of the so-called Holy Roman Empire—Constantinian collaboration continuing in even harsher conditions for other emerging church trajectories.
- b. those that evolved into *Nonconformist* or *Free Church* trajectories, largely a repudiation of the Constantinian collaboration of state and church.

5. *The Church and the Ecumenical Movement* [pp. 607-08]

Brief notes on the rise of the modern Ecumenical Movement, which many students and readers of the *Grammar* seem to take for granted but now neglect its perpetuation and forget its deep grounding in a common Trinitarian Theology and an Incarnational Christology.

D. Basic Ecclesial Grammar [pp. 609-617]

This section is a compact elaboration of the definition of the church that has been used throughout this *Grammar*.

It is too long and too compact to be simply repeated or summarized here. **Please read this section carefully in the text itself.**

In the absence of understanding this basic ecclesial grammar, this project of systematic theologizing will appear virtually unintelligible.

E. The Ecclesial Grammar of the Practices of the Body of the Christ [pp. 617-623]

1. The aim herein is to briefly clarify why I regard as the typical Protestant definition of the church as that place or community where the *Word of the Gospel is proclaimed* and *Visible Words of sacrament are celebrated*.
2. In the language I have been developing throughout this *Grammar*, both *proclamation of the Gospel* and *the celebration of the sacraments* are examples of primary and indissoluble interconnections in the church between its *discourses* and its *practices*.
Hence, as I have been arguing throughout, not only are the discourses themselves practices but the practices of worship and church life in itself and into the world are also embedded in discursive language.
3. Hence, regarding the church as the Body of Christ in the world, we can grasp clearly the *practices of witnessing to the reality of God* are the *being-in-acts* of the church's actuality.
It is in these being-in-acts of the church in witness that we can see how the church itself lives and has its most basic reality in the concrete ways of *being-together*, of *being-distinct-from-the-world*, of *being-with-the-world*, and *being-for-the-world*.
4. We are now able grammatically to grasp that there are three foci of the church's practices of witness to the reality of God for the benefit of the world:
 - a. *Nurturing Practices*: those practices that nurture and sustain the church's distinctive life:
 - i) practices of worship
 - ii) practices of education
 - iii) practices of communal care
 - b. *Outreach Practices*: those practices in which the church intends the transformation of the world:
 - i) practices of evangelism
 - ii) practices of prophecy
 - iii) practices of the works of agapic love for justice and peace in the world
 - iv) practices of vocation
 - d. *Administrative Practices*: those practices whereby the church organizes itself for the faithful and effective performances of witness in its nurturing and outreach practices.
 - i) practices of identifying ecclesial spaces and forms
 - ii) practices of identifying offices and selecting officers
 - iii) practices of authority, authorization, and decision-making
5. It is these practices, which are also discursive in character, that the remainder of this chapter will explore, and our notes herein explore only in outline.
6. Note further: the typical Protestant identification the church in terms of *proclamation* and the *celebration of the sacraments* is deemed herein as inadequate because it does not sufficiently identify the *outreach practices* as essential to the church being the church.

F. The Nurturing Practices of the Church as the Body of Christ [pp. 623-27]

1. *The Nurturing Practices of Worship*

Worship is the practice or practices of praising God as Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer of the creation and the whole human world.

Includes:

- a. reading Scripture as the Word of God
- b. listening to Scripture as the Word of God
- c. proclaiming and hearing the Word in Scripture
- d. confessing sin and embracing gladly the forgiving grace of God in Christ
- e. baptizing persons into the body of Christ
- f. celebrating the Lord's Supper as the living presence of Christ in the midst of the church
- g. communicating in prayer with the self-communicating life of God
- h. singing hymns of praise, thanksgiving, and nurture

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- i. observing the Sabbath as rest in the Lord
[will be examined more closely in the next chapter on Proclamation, Sacraments, and Prayer.]

2. *The Nurturing Practices of Education*

As a community founded by Jesus Christ, the church is a community of definite convictions and a definite way of life, and as such requires complex practices for educating itself in the distinctive and binding practices of being the church as the body of Christ in the world.

Hence, all members of the church are inherently called to be involved in the practices of *educating* and *being educated* rooted as they are in that *faith seeking understanding* that is ineradicable from honest Xn life.

Such educating intrinsically involves being educated in the *what of faith*—those basic convictions concerning the reality of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ—and educated as well in the *how of faith*—those practices that are intrinsic to faith as a way of life, a way of acting and living in the world before God.

It has always been an egregious error and temptation of the church and its individual members to think persons can have either the *what* or the *how* in isolation from each other.

Some practices of educating and being educated:

- a. sermons that teach the what and the how of faith
- b. intentional classes of instruction and discussion in the life of faith
- c. intentional groups of sharing and nurturing each other in the life of faith
- d. relationships of mentoring in which the more mature in faith undertake to convey the faith to those needing guidance and building up
- e. reading and studying Scripture and other texts of faith
- f. observing the saintly examples of faithful living by others in the community, both from the past and in the present.

In all the educating practices, *the church must be mindful of God's ineradicable question: whether the church's life of witness is (a) adequate and faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and (b) luminous, truthful and transformative for the world.*

3. *The Nurturing Practices of Communal Care*

These are the multiple ways in which the church *practices agapic love within the koinonia itself*. While the church and the Xn are summoned by the ethics of grace to love the universal neighbor, such love is itself learned and practiced within the church as the *school of mutual love* in which persons learn *how* to love the neighbor, the stranger, and the enemy.

We can also call these practices of communal care the *practices of friendship*.

Some of the practices of communal care are:

- a. care for the sick and dying and the confused and despairing
- b. care for the young and dependent persons
- c. sharing common meals of fellowship and play
- d. forgiving one another and being forgiven
- e. building up one another in faith and love
- f. celebrating the life of the deceased and caring for the bereaved
- g. being hospitable to and praying for one another
- h. sharing financial resources with the whole community and with those in need
- i. playing and recreating together

Nota bene: love within the church cannot be a love that *excludes others* or is a love simply preferential for the church. Yet *how can Xns love the neighbor-in-the-world if they cannot love the neighbor-in-the-church?*

G. *The Outreach Practices of the Church as the Body of Christ*

In its outreach practices the church aims directly at the transformation of the world, as expressed in our definition of the church: *the church witnesses to God for the benefit of the world.*

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The aim of the triune God is the redemption of the world, and the outreach practices of the church are simply those patterns of life in which the church seeks to participate in the ways in which the Spirit of God is working in the world for its *liberation, sanctification, emancipation, and redemption*.

Hence, the outreach practices are simply the *multiple ways in which the church enacts its witness to and for the world in the passions and works of agapic love for the worldly neighbors*.

The Outreach Practices are in four general spheres:

- a. the sphere of evangelism
- b. the sphere of prophecy
- c. the sphere of the emancipating works of agapic love for justice and peace
- d. the sphere of vocation

1. *The Outreach Practices of Evangelism*

The practices of evangelism are all the ways in which the *church conveys to the world the good news of Jesus Christ and invites the world to respond to this news with renewal of life and hope*.

Unfortunately the world beyond the church and the world that might have itself abandoned the church is a world that has often been confronted by a misguided evangelism of arrogance toward and condemnation of the worldly neighbors and the neighbors who might also have powerful other religious commitments.

Unhappily, the more liberal and secular traditions of the church have virtually abandoned any attempt at evangelism; indeed in American life the so-called ‘privatization of religion’ assumes an indifference toward the neighbor and the shape of the neighbor’s life.

Some of the practices of evangelism are:

- a. confessing and professing the Gospel
- b. testifying to the meaning of Christ for one’s own faithful living
- c. showing the bearing of the Gospel on human life
- d. conveying to the neighbor that she is loved by God
- e. teaching persons how to construe their life and world as a gift of God
- f. answering the questions of the world in truthfulness and faithfulness
- g. conversing and dialoguing with the world—remembering that there is not just one world out there that can be easily identified and addressed
- h. persuading the world of the truth and power of the Gospel, but primarily in confessional terms
- i. being hospitable to those who visit the church
- j. in all the above practices, the church best performs its evangelism simply by inviting and welcoming others to be present with the church in its life and to learn how the discourses and practices of the church hang together and form lives.

[It is genuinely astonishing in the American world how many persons superficially think they understand the faith, all the while being desperately ignorant of the decisive contours and contents of the church’s life, as this adventure in *Grammar* has been sketching.]

Cautions: too often in the past the church has been unable to separate its evangelism practices from the practices of promoting a particular racial or class or national or ethnic ethos/economics/politics.

Hence, the practices of evangelism cannot be separated from or practiced in independence from the other outreach practices—prophecy, emancipating works of love, and vocation.

2. *The Outreach Practices of Prophecy*

The church is prophetic in ways similar to and derivative from the work of *Jesus the Prophet of the Kingdom of God*: he told the truth about the sins that enslave human beings and enacted the truth of what God intends human life to be, and proclaimed hope in the unsurpassable power and grace of God.

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In the practices of prophecy *the church intends the identification of those principalities and powers and personal actualities of evil in the world that oppress, subjugate, and destroy human life and well-being.*

In previous discussions we have developed the concept of *force fields of power* that are transpersonal in character and actuality, but derived their power from human complicity and consent.

While these force fields of power are creaturely powers and available for creaturely good, they are repeatedly infected by powers of sin and human selfishness—consider how the inevitable force fields for the production and distribution of goods essential for human life have become infected by selfish and greedy interests that oppress and distress persons.

In the practices of prophecy the church *discerns, names, and thus publicly identifies those* i) force fields of evil; b) social structures of oppression, c) groups of selfish and dominating interests; and d) individual persons and cabals that afflict persons with their evil oppression, subjugation, and destruction—e.g. those large and enveloping force fields of racism, sexism, nationalisms, economic greed, anti-Semitism, heterosexism, and political self-interest accompanied by the full array of the powers of falsehood, lying, self-deception, violence, and sloth.

While prophecy is the public identification of those injustices that corrupt human social worlds, the church practices a prophecy of nonviolence, refuses to perpetuate cycles of violence, revenge, and retaliation.

The practices of prophecy also intend the identification and opening up of possibilities of hope for human cooperation and peace-making.

Prophecy cannot be practiced without the church itself identifying and confessing the ways in which it has itself been complicitous in and collaborative with the powers of evil in the world.

3. *The Outreach Practices of the Emancipating Works of Agapic Love*

In conjunction with our earlier discussion of the church's ethics of grace, we identified *emancipation* as the social freedom from that oppression that perpetuates oppression, fear, poverty, and injustice in the social arrangements of the world.

The church practices the works of emancipation in its outreach to its neighbors in the world, but now they are peaceful practices and repeatedly in collaboration with other peace-making powers in the world.

Such emancipating work has its primary focus works on behalf of the world's powerless and marginal.

The practices of making and promoting peace and freedom from oppression, even in their truncated and broken historical forms, witness to Jesus Christ as the Prince of Peace and the Lord of the 'least of these'!

4. *The Outreach Practices of Vocation*

These are those imperatives of living in which the individual Xn, as a member of the body of Christ, carries with her into the *places/spheres of home and neighborhood, of economic work, of citizenship, and of recreation.*

Every Xn lives somewhere, engages the economic systems somehow, participates in a civil polity, and finds ways of recreating her life in the world

The summons and claim is that the Xn is called to these places by the Gospel and must find ways in these places for witness to the reality of God—called to these places/spheres as places intended by God to be places of human flourishing.

The church is the place where these other places are reconceived and construed as places where the Spirit of God can be and is at work—these are the places, now construed under the imperatives of agapic love, as more than places persons *happen* to occupy.

Some practices of vocation:

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- a. making the home a place of hospitality, encouragement, hope, rather than a place of isolation, escape, hostility, loneliness, and estrangement
- b. practicing gratitude for food one has neither grown nor tended and its responsible use
- c. practicing familial relationships that are upbuilding and contribute to each other's flourishing
- d. practices of making and keeping promises
- e. practicing justice, truth-telling, and nonviolent resistance in the civic polity in which one is located
- f. practicing justice, respect, and honesty in places of work
- g. practicing forms of recreation that refresh the spirit, give flourishing to one's life at no other's expense or detriment.

H. The Administrative Practices of the Body of Christ [634ff]

To perform the practices of witness in nurture and outreach, the church must necessarily have some *communal order of offices, relationships, and procedures*— and hence some *polity* and accompanying *politics* in how it organizes itself for the mission of witness.

The many *ministries* of the church unavoidably require some *administering*.

Properly performed, the administrative practices of the church are profound exercises in theological understanding.

Yet, while there will always be *some order* in the church's witness, the critical theological question is whether it is a *good order* that facilitates the church—as a *social reality in the world*—being the body of Christ in the world.

Propose that there are at least *six theological principles that should govern all proposals for church order*:

- 1) Church order and administrative practices must always be subordinate to the mission of the church to witness to the reality of God; i.e. church order is never an end in itself but always a means to the end of the church's faithful witness.
- 2) The church administrative [*oikonomia*] must conform in large patterns to God's administrative [*oikonomia*] actions in self-communicating Godself for the redemption of the world.
- 3) Church order and administrative practices must never subvert the fundamental Gospel imperative to love God and neighbor and to know oneself as loved by God.
- 4) Within the church as the body of Christ there can be diverse callings and gifts among the members of the church.
- 5) No church order should be adopted that systematically incapacitates some of the members of the body of Christ from enacting their inherent calling to witness to the reality of God—the priesthood of all believers.
- 6) The church must always be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit into new situations requiring the critique of old orders and the envisagement of new possibilities of church order.

There are Three Spheres of Administrative Practices

Practices of Identifying Ecclesial Spaces and Forms

Practices of Identifying Offices and Selecting Officers

Practices of Authority, Authorization, and Decision-Making

1. The Administrative Practices of Identifying Ecclesial Spaces and Forms

Propose that *good order* will require the church to manifest itself in the following spaces and forms:

- a. the church as a *specific community in a local space and form*—always *somewhere*—often called a *congregation*.
- b. the church as a *regional community of congregations* in a space and form beyond the local congregation—sometimes called the synod or conference or diocese or region.

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c. the church as a *general community of congregations and regions* in a space and form beyond the local and regional—sometimes referred to a denominations and/or ecumenical bodies of mutual recognition and cooperation.

Nota Bene: the church catholic—church universal—exists in all these spaces and forms and thus they can be considered *manifestations* of the *one, holy, catholic, apostolic church*.

Hence, the general church is only a *manifestation* of the church catholic; the local church is not a manifestation of the general church but of the church catholic.

Further, there must be some *covenantal order of relationships among these manifestations of the church catholic*.

The previously identified principles of ecclesial order must be considered in determining such *good order* among the manifestations.

2. The Administrative Practices of Identifying Offices and Selecting Officers [638ff]

The words ‘office’ and ‘officer’ are used here in a *functional sense*: hence, an *office* is a communally defined task and duty and an *officer* is a person communally assigned to perform the task and duty.

Basic conviction herein: that the NT is itself quite diverse and unsystematic in its use of terms for offices and officers, in spite of the ways in which subsequent traditions identified, named, and ordered offices and officers.

Hence, I am proposing that *good order* can be more theologically responsible by reconsidering how some *leadership offices* are inescapable but open to various procedures for selecting such offices and officers.

The primary purpose of such leadership offices in the church is “to equip the saints for the work of ministry.” [Eph 4.12]

Some designated tasks of leadership:

- a. offices of leadership in worship
- b. offices of leadership in teaching the faith
- c. offices of leadership in the communal care of the congregation and other forms.
- d. offices of leadership in economic administration
- e. offices of leadership in regional and general spaces and forms

Some proposed theological principles essential to the good order of selecting leadership officers:

- a. prayerful attention to the calling and guiding of the Holy Spirit
- b. attention to the gifts of the person as one educated in faith, mature in theological judgment, and endowed with the desired leadership capacities.
- c. attention to the person’s gifts of sanctified living and indiscriminate agapic love.
- d. attention to the consent and authorization of the ecclesial body
- e. that no criterion of sex, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, or social class should, of itself, prevent one from being selected for any leadership office.

In light of these selection principles, there is no compelling reason why there might not be different configuration of offices and selection processes in various times and places of the church’s life—the church is not fundamentally *constituted as church by its offices and officers!*

In our time, the office of *ordained minister* is widespread and common and is invested with profound leadership practices, see p. 640.

Important theological caveat: there is no sound theological reason to suppose there is an inherent and necessary *ontological hierarchy* between clergy and laity.

Hence, the firm belief in the *priesthood of all believers* thereby comprising a *royal priesthood*.

3. Practices of Authority, Authorization, and Decision Making [641 ff]

Proposed essential theological principles governing the good order of all authority, authorizing, and decision making in the church:

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- a. the triune God is the supreme authority over all of the church's life.
- b. the triune God has revealed Godself in the salvation history of Israel culminating in the definitive self-revelation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ through the Spirit.
- c. the Holy Scriptures are the faithful, primitive testimony to the economy of these self-revealing acts of God: the Bible as canon for the church.
- d. the church seeks continually to understand God's self-revelation and to order its own life by that understanding.
- e. the church also seeks understanding of God's revelation and calling through the witnesses of church traditions, contemporary learning, and past and present human cultures.
- f. the church expects God through the Spirit to continue to reveal Godself and guide the church in its life.
- g. while the church trusts that God will preserve the church itself from everlasting and irremediable error, there are no infallible interpreters of God's revelation in the church.
- h. all exercises of authority, authorization, and decision making should be in conformity with and under the guidance of God's self-communications.
- i. the church can never lay aside God's *ineradicable questioning* of the church's life and witness.

It follows from these principles that the *church is not simply a self-constituting, democratic, voluntary society that sets its own rules and determines its own actions without reference to an authorizing divine Life and founding texts.*

But neither is the church by essence a *humanly hierarchical society ruled by an elite.*

Hence, **authorizing and decision-making practices** in the church should include:

- a. practices which maximize the participation of all the people in the fundamental decisions of the church regarding its life in nurture, outreach, and administration;
- b. practices that build up trust among the people and facilitate the designation of special offices and officers as *representative* of all the people;
- c. practices that prevent the church from being administered simply from the 'top down', from the clergy to the laity;
- d. practices of lively and substantive, open and honest, and mutually accountable conversation within the church concerning its witness in discourses and practices;
- e. practices of being open to the guidance of the Spirit in prayer, scriptural study, and theological reflection;
- f. practices that ensure the church's capacity to witness boldly and directly in the face of destructive and inimical powers both within and beyond the church;
- g. practices of making decisions on theological grounds, rather than personal and contemporary whims;
- h. practices of being able to address and decide issues of orthodoxy and orthopraxis and therefore heresy in word and deed.

A Protestant/Jonesinian conundrum:

I have proposed nonhierarchical ecclesial decision-making and *consensual collegiality* and the need for a *functional magisterium* not reduceable to the ordained clergy and therefore of a *magisterium of the church as a function of both the ordained and the laity.*

And I am frustrated with the Free Church traditions that are inclined to leave substantive matters of faith and practice up to the *individual preferences of the members.*

Hence, I/we are staring at the peril of being a church that is empirically much more formed by the idiosyncratic social principalities and powers that inculcate convictions and determine belief/action patterns than by a theologically literate people fully capable of embracing and critiquing the ongoing theological witness of the church.

Orienting Notes on Reading and Engaging *A Grammar of Christian Faith*
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4. The Ineradicable Questions to Church Administration [644]

- a. Do the administrative structures facilitate the church's mission?
- b. Does the church have practical means to protect and ensure the integrity of its witness?
- c. Does the administrative structure encourage the church to ongoing self-criticism concerning its witness?
- d. Do the practical structures of decision-making and accountability actually facilitate the mission of the church?
- e. Are there alternative administrative structures that might better facilitate mission?

Readers of these notes are invited to read further in the remaining topics on the doctrine of the church, dealing with the following topics:

I. The Ecclesial Grammar of Unity, Diversity, and Boundaries [645ff]

1. The Diversity of Diversities

2. Boundaries

J. The Dialectic between the Church and World [648ff] largely a repetition of previous discussion on pp. 47-53]