

Forgive Us, As We Forgive:
A Reformed Position on the Visible Holiness of the Church

By

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To Kevin, my infinitely patient and generous, beloved husband

and

To Caroline Grace, my first born, beloved daughter

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ABBREVIATIONS

AQUINAS

ST – *Summa Theologica*

Supp. – *Supplement to the Summa Theologica*

AUGUSTINE

bapt. – *De baptismo*

c. ep. Parm. – *Contra Epistolam Parmeniani*

c. litt. Pet – *Contra Litteras Petiliani*

civ. Dei. – *De ciuitate Dei*

en. Ps. – *Enarrationes in Psalmos*

ep. (epp.) – *Epistulae*

ep. Io. tr. – *In epistulam Iohannis ad Parthos tractatus decem*

s. – *Sermones*

s. Dolb. – *Sermones Dolbeau*

s. Guelph. – *Sermones Guelpherbytana*

BARTH

Begriff – “Der Begriff der Kirche, 1927”

CD – *Church Dogmatics*

Chr. Leb. – *Das christliche Leben*

KD – *Die kirchliche Dogmatik*

Kathol/Prot – “Der römische Katholizismus als Frage an die protestantische Kirche, 1928.”

CALVIN

Inst – *Institutes of the Christian Religion*

CYPRIAN

ep./epp. – *Epistulae*

unit. – *De Ecclesiae Catholicae Unitate*

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.) CONSTITUTION

D – The Rules of Discipline in the Book of Order

F – The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity in the Book of Order

G – Form of Government in the Book of Order

W – Directory for Worship in the Book of Order

SCHLEIERMACHER

GL – *Glaubenslehre (Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt)*

TERTULLIAN

de pud. – *de pudicitia*

COLLECTIONS

CCL – *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*

CR – *Corpus Reformatorum*

CSEL – *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*

MA – *Miscellanea Agostiniana*

NPNF – *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*

PL – *Migne, Patrologia Latina*

WSA – *Works of Saint Augustine: a Translation for the 21st Century*

CHAPTER I

SEEKING VISIBLE HOLINESS IN THE WHOLE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation presupposes that a lack of clarity within Reformed ecclesiology about the visible holiness of the church leaves us vulnerable to an unintended and contradictory sacralization of the clerical office. I seek to respond to this problem through the creation of a responsible Reformed position on the visible holiness of the church. I am engaging resources treasured by Reformed Christians, both to gain greater insight into the problem I have identified and to draw forth resources to address it. Out of this engagement, I will forward an argument that the mutual practice of forgiveness among Christians is the means by which sanctification unfolds and the church becomes visibly holy in the world— this is a non-clerically centered understanding of ecclesial holiness intended to help to address ecclesiological confusion that contributes to persistent divisive debates within communions such as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

In this introductory chapter I first wish to establish the plausibility of the presupposition behind this project by examining and analyzing two moments of divisive controversy in the past century in the history of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and by considering one historical precedent significant to both. I am particularly wishing to highlight the ordination fixation/clerical fixation on display and at play in these three moments in American Presbyterian history. I then reflect on the likely difficulty that Reformed Christians have conceptualizing the visible holiness of the church. After more fully introducing and establishing the plausibility of

the guiding presupposition of the project, I introduce a metaphor by which to imagine the project's work. I then offer a brief statement explaining the selection of the major sources considered in this project and conclude with a brief outline of the key claims of each chapter of the dissertation.

EXAMINING A TENDENCY TOWARDS A CLERICAL FOCUS IN REFORMED ECCLESIOLOGY

American Presbyterianism is notorious for its divisive history. In 2012-2013 yet another Presbyterian denomination was formed out of an extended season of controversy in the life of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). There are presently 13 Presbyterian denominations in the United States, all resulting from various moments of division. At many, if not all, of the moments of division, Presbyterians have fought about ordination standards. Ordination appears to be an Achilles heel for this church. I'd like to begin this dissertation by considering just two of the many controversies that have strained the Presbyterian Church in order to begin to demonstrate the problem to which this dissertation seeks to offer a theological response. I will move back and forth between a consideration of the most recent controversy over the ordination of those in same gender sexual relationships and the Fundamentalist/Modernist controversy from the early 20th century. Before this discussion is through, I will briefly consider the Adopting Act of 1729, a historical precedent significant to the focus on ordination practices that was offered as a solution to both the controversies under consideration. Though perhaps it is most typical in historical considerations to begin with the oldest material and move progressively towards the newest, from the outset of this project I choose to move backwards in time. Both in the micro historical explanation of this introduction and in the overall flow of the dissertation I begin with the more recent moments/sources and move progressively to earlier moments. I will speak to this

backwards movement in my discussion of the work of the project later in the chapter, but for now, suffice it to say, that this is a project that seeks to attend to live problems in Reformed ecclesial communions. The choice to begin, in this introduction, by attending to the most recent controversy and division within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) reflects the desire to be faithful to the needs of an actual communion of Christians in the 21st century. The work of this project, then, is deeply rooted in the present moment of its preparation even as it acknowledges that the past is the present and that even ancient sources need to be consulted both to understand the problem identified in Reformed ecclesiology and to identify resources for its resolution.

Brief History of the Late 20th Century Ordination Dispute in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

In 1975 a congregation in the Presbytery of New York City wanted to call, ordain, and install Bill Silver to serve as a minister of Word and Sacrament in their midst.¹ In Presbyterian polity, it is the Presbytery, not the congregation, who ordains and installs ministers of Word and Sacrament.² Thus Bill Silver's candidacy was a question before the Presbytery of New York

¹ He was called to be an assistant pastor at Central Presbyterian Church. (Stuart Lavietes, "William Silver, 59, Early Gay Applicant for Ministry, Is Dead," *New York Times*, June 4, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/04/obituaries/04silver.html?_r=0, (accessed 4.7.2014).

² Presbyteries are regional governing bodies [now called Councils after the major revision of the Form of Government within the Book of Order/Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) which was passed by the 219th General Assembly in 2010 (Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church—part 2—Book of Order 2013-2015*, (Louisville, KY: The Office of the General Assembly, 2013)]. These revisions went into effect in 2012 after a majority of presbyteries ratified the action of the Assembly. For a discussion of the councils of the church see chapter 3 of the Form of Government] composed of ministers/teaching elders and ruling elders from the congregations in their bounds. Ministers/Teaching Elders are not members of the congregations they serve, but are instead members of the Presbytery, giving this body jurisdiction over them. Ruling elders are also ordained officers of the church. However, they remain members of the congregations of which they are a part and are ordained by their local congregation, or, more precisely by the Session (Board of Elders) of their congregations. Local sessions also oversee the ordination of deacons. Presbyterian polity is somewhat distinct in that it involves ordained lay offices. Those ordained at the congregational level are still laity though

City. Silver's candidacy proved challenging because he openly claimed a gay identity when being examined for ordination, shocking his ordination committee in so doing. A member of the committee recalls, "It was like electricity had been sent through members of the committee as they sat upright, and we really didn't know what to do."³ In response to their perplexity, they sent an overture to the General Assembly of the then United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America "seeking definitive guidance on the question of the acceptability of an avowed practicing homosexual as a candidate for ordination to the professional ministry."⁴

The lack of clarity at the presbytery level about what would be appropriate action in Silver's case was echoed at the national level when the Assembly voted to form a task force to study homosexuality and make recommendations for action at a subsequent assembly. The 1976 Assembly did, however, suggest that it would be "injudicious, if not improper" to proceed with ordinations of those acknowledging "homosexual" orientation and practice while the study was underway, while also granting that ordination decisions are always left to the discretion of local governing bodies.⁵ Two reports emerged from that task force— a majority report suggesting that the General Assembly declare homosexuality *not* sinful and *not* a bar to ordination, and a minority report recommending the opposite. In 1978, the minority perspective on the task force

they are laity empowered for the fulfillment of particular functions in the life of the church.

³ Byron Shafer, quoted in Lavietes, "William Silver."

⁴ The history of the initial request (in Silver's case) to the General Assembly is well documented in the records of a case that made its way to the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission— Union Presbyterian Church, et al. v. Presby of Western NY. (11.071, *Minutes: 197th General Assembly, 1985, Part I, Journal*. (NY, NY: Office of the General Assembly, 1985), 118-123. This quote regarding the initial request is on page 120.) Another presbytery, Palisades, made a similar overture to the GA the same year (Ibid).

⁵ United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America General Assembly, "Assembly Committee on Bills and Overtures Report, Tuesday, May 25, 1976, 2:00 P.M.," *Minutes of the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1976, Part I, Journal*, (New York: Office of the General Assembly, 1976), 112. Again, these local governing bodies are presbyteries in the case of ministers/teaching elders; sessions in the case of ruling elders/deacons.

prevailed when the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. passed definitive guidance that “homosexuality was not God’s wish” and not compatible with ordination to any of the church’s offices.⁶

This definitive guidance settled nothing. A divided Task Force, and a minority opinion that became a majority option at the national assembly, suggest that this church was of at least two minds on this issue. And indeed Presbyterians proceeded to fight about the ordination of gays and lesbians for the next several decades. A decade plus of wrangling over the implications of and status of the definitive guidance were followed by another decade of struggles over the church’s constitution itself, after a clause was added to the constitution requiring fidelity in marriage between one man and one woman and chastity in singleness for all ordained officers of the church.⁷

Late in the conflict, in 2001, the General Assembly voted that another task force be appointed. This was to be a Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church. The current moderator and the two preceding moderators of the Assembly were charged with appointing a diverse task force that was sufficiently representative of the denomination.⁸ This task force was charged to consider matters of controversy with which the denomination was struggling, but was not charged to settle these matters.⁹ Rather, the task force was to “lead the

⁶ Ibid. The PC(US), the southern church which later reunited with the northern UPCUSA, took a similar stance in the following year (Ibid.).

⁷ This was then G.6.0106b in the Presbyterian Form of Government in the Book of Order, volume two of the church’s constitution. The form of government was radically revised in 2008 (shifting this clause to a new location) and this clause was removed by action of the General Assembly in 2010 and ratification by a majority of voting presbyteries in 2011.

⁸ I was appointed to this task force my senior year of seminary and served, as the youngest member of the body, alongside 19 other diverse Presbyterians from around the nation.

⁹ This was, at least, the way that we on the task force interpreted our mandate. It appears that many in the denomination hoped that we would indeed settle the controversy. This is suggested by the repeated referral of attempts to amend the constitution (to remove the clause that

Church in spiritual discernment of its Christian identity in and for the 21st century” and to “offer the church a process and an instrument” to facilitate growth towards peace, unity, and purity.¹⁰

This was a distinctly ecclesiological task force. It was not a task force on sexuality, nor on biblical interpretation. It was a *theological* task force on the peace, unity and purity of the *church*. Two things can be noted about the title of this task force- its source and its historical precedent. First, the clear source for the title of the Task Force is the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) ordination vows. All PC(U.S.A.) officers, clergy and lay alike, vow to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church when they are ordained and/or installed to active service in a church office. Some version of this commitment has been a consistent feature of ordination vows throughout American Presbyterian history. Second, the title evokes the memory of a Special Commission appointed in 1925. This was a Special Commission on the Purity, Peace, Unity, and

effectively blocked the ordination of the those living out a same gender sexual orientation) to the task force. e.g. The 216th Assembly opted to respond to all the overtures to clarify or change the denomination’s ordination standards with the following statement “We, the 216th General Assembly (2004), recognizing the church’s commitment to a church wide process of discernment with the leadership of the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church, call upon the church to pray for the task force and to engage faithfully in the processes of discernment as led by the task force” (“Item 05-07,” *Minutes of the 216th General Assembly of the PC(U.S.A.) 2004, Part I, Journal* (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, 2004), 78-79.)

¹⁰ Mandate- “The Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church is directed to lead the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in spiritual discernment of our Christian identity in and for the 21st century, using a process that includes conferring with synods, presbyteries, and congregations seeking the peace, unity, and purity of the church. This discernment shall include but not be limited to issues of Christology, biblical authority and interpretation, ordination standards, and power.

“The task force is to develop a process and an instrument by which congregations and governing bodies throughout our church may reflect on and discern the matters that unite and divide us, praying that the Holy Spirit will promote the purity of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A).” (Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assembly. “Report of the Assembly Committee on Peace, Purity, and Unity of the Church Item I” in *Minutes of the 213th General Assembly 2001, Part I, Journal* (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, 2001), 29).

Progress of the Church¹¹— a commission gathered in the midst of the protracted fundamentalist/modernist controversy.

Brief History of the Fundamentalist/Modernist Controversy

The largest American Presbyterian denomination began and ended the 20th century in protracted controversy. The matters of controversy were not identical, but there are striking resonances between them. The fundamentalist-modernist controversy erupted in 1922 though it had been brewing for some time.¹² Longfield, who has prepared a thorough and lucid account of this controversy, suggests that though Harry Emerson Fosdick’s famous sermon “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” was the first shot in the war that followed, there had been a number of earlier skirmishes between liberals and conservatives in the church. Early fights were over the nature of biblical authority, the theory of evolution, and foreign missions.¹³ In Fosdick’s sermon he advocated for tolerance and Christian liberty, after reviewing a range of doctrinal perspectives

¹¹ This special commission is commonly referred to/remembered as the Swearingen Commission, adopting the name of the moderator of the body. The preliminary report of this commission is found in the *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., Third Series- Volume V- 1926 Part One- Journal and Supplement* (Philadelphia, PA: Office of the General Assembly, 1926), 62-87. Their final report of this body is found in the *Minutes of The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Third Series- Volume VI- 1927 Part One*, (Philadelphia, PA: Office of the General Assembly, 1927), 58-86. Later references to these documents will be labeled *PCUSA Minutes 1926 or 1927 Vol. 1* followed by a page reference.

¹² To speak of this conflict “erupting” borrows language from the title of first chapter of Bradley J. Longfield’s thorough account of this controversy and its background: *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, & Moderates*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). When considering the context of the controversy, Longfield notes the intense intellectual and social changes afoot at the turn of the century all of which had been rapidly unfolding since the conclusion of the civil war in the prior century. These rapid and radical changes, not least among them Darwin’s theory of evolution, raised anxiety. Fears were yet further heightened after the first world war. Many in the early 20th century, in the midst of this change and anxiety, perceived that America was becoming a “profane nation” (Ibid, 17- see 12-17 for commentary on the intellectual, economic, and social changes of the day).

¹³ Ibid, 9.

he found in the church— on the virgin birth, on the nature/character of the Scriptures, and on God’s ways of working in history.¹⁴ He did not, in this sermon, suggest which of the positions he reviewed was his own, but other publications and public debates solidly identified him with the liberal/modernizing party in the church. His call for toleration of liberal interpretations of the doctrines of the virgin birth and of the inspiration of the scriptures was, Longfield suggests, what “many traditionalist Presbyterians could bear no more.”¹⁵

Fosdick appeared to be challenging fundamentals of Christian faith and to be representative of a secularizing force within the Presbyterian Church. The conservative interpretation of the changes afoot at the turn of the century was that “[o]n almost every count the civilization Americans had fought to save was coming apart at the seams.”¹⁶ And they found the church nearly impotent in the face of cultural decay due to the secularizing influence of “liberal ministers, relying on German historical criticism and Darwinian thought.”¹⁷ In response, conservatives organized to try to fight back these forces and, particularly, to keep those who did not subscribe to the five fundamentals of the faith¹⁸ out of Presbyterian pulpits. Of great interest is the fact that the clerical office was targeted as both source and solution to the problems of the day. Thus, battles about ordination standards developed in the midst of this struggle too.

The conflict intensified at the 1925 General Assembly when the judicial commission of

¹⁴ Ibid, 10

¹⁵ Ibid, 11

¹⁶ Ibid, 27

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ The “five fundamentals” were identified by a 1910 action of the General Assembly (and reaffirmed in 1916 and 1923) These fundamentals were, in the minds of those who developed and supported them, distillations of the essential doctrines of the Westminster Confession. They included 1) the inerrancy of the Bible; 2) the virgin birth; 3) substitutionary atonement; 4) Christ’s bodily resurrection; 5) historical authenticity of Christ’s miracles (see George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2006), 117.)

the church ruled that the Presbytery of New York City had acted inappropriately when they licensed two candidates to preach, both of whom could not affirm belief in the virgin birth, and ordered therefore that their action be revisited. This was fiercely protested by known modernists as unconstitutional action. The church seemed to be on the verge of schism.¹⁹ In the face of this, the General Assembly acted to appoint the Special Commission on the Purity, Peace, Unity, and Progress of the Church, a commission that had representatives of varying parties in the church, but is remembered as being dominated by modernizing members.²⁰ This commission was charged “to study the present spiritual condition of our Church and the causes making for unrest, and to report to the next General Assembly, to the end that the purity, peace, unity, and progress of the Church may be assured.”²¹

Persistent Struggles Over Ordination Standards

So both the Theological Task Force (early 21st century) and the Special Commission (early 20th century) were appointed in the midst of highly contentious American Presbyterian seasons and both of these seasons involved pitched battles about ordination— despite different contemporary matters of key controversy. In the Final Report of the Theological Task Force, it is noted that “[t]he most intractable conflicts in the Presbyterian church often result in disputes over ordination.”²² This simple statement is historically documented in the final report of the Swearingen Commission, where they review four divisive controversies in American Presbyterian history, most of which involved struggles over the requirement that all ordained

¹⁹ On the verge of schism *again*. The denomination had divided numerous times before.

²⁰ Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 156

²¹ *Ibid*, 152

²² *A Season of Discernment: The Final Report of the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church to the 217th General Assembly (2006) with Study Guide*, (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), 2006), p. 36, line 1074.

clergy subscribe to the Westminster Standards.²³ Common to these controversies are two parties— one party desiring some form of strict subscription to the Confession and the other with a broader or laxer interpretation of subscription.²⁴

As I have already noted,²⁵ a conflict about subscription was involved in the Fundamentalist/Modernist controversy as well. The strict subscriptionism of the Fundamentalists is reflected in their desire that all ordained clergy subscribe to the five fundamentals adopted and subsequently twice reaffirmed by the General Assembly. The primary concern of strict

²³ The Commission's report suggests that this was a controversy inherited from the denomination's Scottish forbears and thus it surfaces in the earliest days of the denomination. A division among Presbyterians was settled in 1729 with the Adopting Act, which represented a compromise between strict and broad interpretations of subscription. The Adopting Act is discussed further below. The second controversy divided the church into two synods in 1741 and involved a question of which governing body had ultimate authority in ordination decisions— the presbytery or the General Synod (precursor of the General Assembly). The third controversy resulted in the formation of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in 1810. This division was healed in part only after the Confession of Faith itself was revised and a looser understanding of subscription was adopted by the General Assembly nearly a century later. The fourth controversy resulted in the Old School/New School schism of 1837, a schism effected by the Old School Party, a party concerned about doctrinal orthodoxy and focused on ensuring the doctrinal purity of those ordained to clerical office. Though the causal factors in this Schism are manifold and complex, struggles over ordained office played a role. (*PCUSA Minutes 1926 Vol. 1*, 74- 77; The commentary provided on the Old School/New School Schism of 1837 is an elaboration on that which is contained in the Commission's report on the basis of my own research into this controversy.)

²⁴ The Swearingen Commission suggests that some believe “there have always been two types or schools of Presbyterianism, merging together at the center, and in the main body of the Church, but more or less discernibly different at the extreme. There are some who hold that the Westminster Confession shows traces of two types of thought and that the Old and the New Schools are self-perpetuating forms of Presbyterianism” (*PCUSA Minutes 1926 Vol. 1*, 68). The basic division is between those who emphasize the freedom of conscience protected in the Westminster Standards, insisting on freedom and flexibility vs. those who believe they must guard particular teachings within those Standards in order to preserve the authority and integrity of the church (Ibid). The Commission lifted up the principle of toleration that is foundational to the Westminster Standards as the key to the preservation of the unity of the Church. “The Commission ventures to remind the General Assembly that while the Constitution does contain affirmations of doctrine and provisions of order that are both specific and definite, there is also built into its fabric the Christian principle of toleration” (*PCUSA Minutes 1926 Vol. 1*, 74).

²⁵ See the discussion of the fundamentals above, note 18.

subscriptionists in the Fundamentalist/Modernist controversy, as well as in earlier controversies, was over the doctrinal purity of the church's clergy. Errors in belief were understood to be at the root of a whole host of other errors, sullyng the church. Those fulfilling the teaching office of the church were to safeguard the purity of the church, in the minds of strict subscriptionists of every generation, through rigid conformity to a singular confessional standard.

The denominational landscape had changed quite dramatically by 1976, when the ordination controversy that gripped the denomination for the last quarter of the century began. In 1967 the Church adopted a new Confession of faith and decided to move away from the singular standard of the Westminster Confession and towards a diverse body of standards by adopting a Book of Confessions. The Book of Confessions, the first volume of the Presbyterian Constitution, gathers together statements of faith from various times and places in Christian history. Ordained officers vow "to sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do" and "to be instructed and led by those confessions as [they] lead the people of God."²⁶ In a subsequent vow the confessions are referred to as a guide, subordinate to the authority of Christ and Scripture. Relative to the earlier struggles about subscriptionism, this would be interpreted as a very loose confessional standard, as essential tenets are nowhere clearly articulated and the plurality of the Confessional documents offers a range of doctrinal possibilities. Even with this different confessional landscape, an ordination struggle emerged among Presbyterians. And, intriguingly, the fidelity and chastity clause added to the constitution in the midst of this struggle was sometimes treated

²⁶ W-4.4003.c, *PC(U.S.A.) Book of Order*, 122.

as the singular ordination standard to which candidates had to subscribe.²⁷ The strict subscriptionists in this conflict had an ethical rather than a doctrinal standard about which they were primarily concerned, but they demonstrated the same zeal for strict subscription that was on display in the Fundamentalists before them.

What is most intriguing about the recent protracted conflict in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is the fact that the controversy *started* as an argument about ordination, rather than ending there. As we've noted, it started with a request for guidance about whether an openly gay man was an appropriate candidate for professional ministry. The Church didn't have official or clear teachings on same-gender sexuality— it was difficult to know what constituted orthodoxy on this contemporary matter. Though opponents in the struggle quickly drew theological lines in the sand, both sides believing their opponents to be heretics, this didn't start with fears about heresy. This stands in stark contrast to the controversy early in the 20th century, and indeed to

²⁷ A resolution passed by the Presbytery of Los Ranchos is a good example of this: “Moved: That the Presbytery of Los Ranchos adopt the following statement interpreting this presbytery’s understanding of certain behavioral expectations of members. “Affirming that ‘the gospel leads members to extend the fellowship of Christ to all persons.’ (G-1.0302) The Presbytery of Los Ranchos, meeting on September 15, 2011, affirms that the Bible, the Book of Confessions, and the Book of Order (including G-2.0104b and G-2.0105 1 & 2) set forth the scriptural and constitutional standards for ordination and installation. Los Ranchos Presbytery believes the manner of life of ordained ministers should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world, including living either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness and will so notify candidates for ordination/installation and/or membership in the presbytery. In obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture and guided by our confessions, this presbytery will prayerfully and pastorally examine each candidate’s calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of office, including a commitment to fulfill all requirements expressed in the constitutional questions of ordination and installation” (Permanent Judicial Commission of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), “Decision and Order for Remedial Case 221-04: Larson et al. v. Presbytery of Los Ranchos,” 2012, available pcusa.org/media/uploads/oga/pdf/pjc22104.pdf, page 2). This action was ruled out of order by the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission, but it is an example of a presbytery lifting up one behavioral standard over and above a sea of standards. They suggest that candidates are accountable to a range of standards, but they are explicit about only one.

virtually all the preceding controversies, where doctrinal heresy on the part of the church's preachers was the primary presenting concern. When this church started thinking about same-gender sexuality in the late 20th century, the first question asked was a question about ordination. It seems to me that this conflict exposed what has long been a Presbyterian weakness— a perception that the church's identity and integrity inordinately depends on its ordained leadership.

Enhancing Unity in Diversity Through Clarified Ordination Practices

As we've already noted, in both controversies a task force or commission was assembled when the controversy seemed to be reaching a divisive point— bodies called into being to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church. Both the Swearingen Commission in the 1920s and the Theological Task Force in the oughts of the third millennium were composed of diverse Presbyterians and both bodies did something fairly unusual for Presbyterian committees— they produced unanimous reports.

This unanimity, amongst Presbyterians holding widely divergent perspectives on the most controversial issues of the day,²⁸ reinforced the affirmation that both bodies made that the Presbyterian Church is not divided in Confession. The Swearingen Report laid out the Fundamentalist charges about the supposedly Liberal party in the church— that they declare the Bible to be nothing more than literature, Christ a mere human filled with the Spirit of God who

²⁸ This reality or significance of the diversity may have been a matter of question in the 1920's, but no challenges were made as to the diversity of the Theological Task Force. Jack Rogers, one of the three moderators who appointed this task force, stated at the first meeting that he and his fellow moderators braced themselves for simultaneous critiques that the task force was both too liberal and too conservative, but those critiques never came. The only critique they received about the composition of the task force was that it was disproportionately highly educated (I share this from personal recollection of the first Theological Task Force meeting on December of 2001 at the American Airlines Training and Conference Center in Dallas, Texas.)

serves only as an example for human living and who died a normal human death and was not resurrected and will not return. This party, Swearingen declared, did not exist in the Presbyterian Church.²⁹ They granted that there are two parties who interpret things quite differently, but no mass party of those so departed from doctrinal orthodoxy. Nearly a century later the Task Force offered a Final Report that began with a statement of the theological ground on which all in the body stand together and stated clearly: “Over our time together, a common conviction has grown among us: different as we are, God has called us all to be part of the body of Christ as it is manifested in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).”³⁰ The Task Force discerned a foundation for Christian unity, an unbroken confession of faith in the God made known in Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit, in the midst of a community with vastly different interpretations on a whole host of matters. And after reviewing American Presbyterian history determined that this is how American Presbyterianism has always been. The Swearingen Commission came to much the same conclusion.

Because these bodies affirmed the unity of the church’s confession, and yet observed the persistence of disagreement about ordination, both offered procedural suggestions about ordination practices. The Theological Task Force suggested that because our most intractable conflicts result in ordination disputes, wisdom about ordination practices was in order. This task force seemed to be saying, if we’re going to continue to fight about ordination, particularly about who is worthy of ordained office, let’s be clear about what we’re doing, how we do it, and why. Let’s be clear so that even when we disagree about what disqualifies one from office, we can trust that due diligence is being done in our ordination processes.

To this end, the Theological Task Force offered the church an authoritative interpretation

²⁹ *PCUSA Minutes 1926 Vol. 1*, 71

³⁰ *Season of Discernment*, P. 14, lines 386-388

of the constitution that attempted to clarify ordination procedures and restore practices that reflect Presbyterian tradition. The Task Force drew out of the constitution that the national church has the responsibility of setting standards for ordination, and ordaining bodies (Presbyteries/Sessions) have the responsibility of applying those standards to those elected to office. Ordaining bodies must thoroughly and rigorously examine all candidates for ordination according to the standards of the church and where departures from the standards are identified (departures in doctrine, polity, or practice, which candidates themselves have a responsibility to disclose), they must discern whether those departures “constitute a failure to adhere to the essentials of Reformed faith and polity.”³¹

The Task Force suggested that this constitutional wisdom, and clarification of procedures, serves the denomination well regardless of what the standards might be in any given era. In the context of the recent struggle about the status of same-gender sexuality in God’s economy of grace, when the standard plainly prohibited the ordination of those in same-gender sexual relations, should one depart from this and declare one’s departure, one’s ordaining body has to discern whether that departure is a disqualifying departure in essentials. But should, somehow, the constitution be changed to the exact opposite position (with a declaration that access to ordination *cannot* be barred on the basis of sexual orientation,³²) should one depart from this standard because, in good conscience, one could not participate in the ordination of a person who was in a same-gender sexual relationship, this departure from standards would not automatically block access to ordained service in the denomination. The ordaining body must discern whether this, or any, departure is an essential or non-essential departure. In a previous

³¹ Ibid, line 1063

³² In fact the standards on the books after the removal of G-6.0106b are somewhere in between. No clear statement of a sexual standard is on the books any longer.

generation, after the church's stance on the ordination of women changed dramatically, the ordination of a man who declared that he could not, in good conscience, participate in the ordination of a woman was revoked by the judicial commissions of higher councils.³³ In light of this interpretation of the constitution, such an automatic disqualification, without making a case for why this was a departure from a Reformed essential, was inappropriate.

This authoritative interpretation offered by the task force resonated with the constitutional processes lifted up by the Swearingen Commission in the preceding century. The Swearingen Commission focused as well on the concept of “essential and necessary articles,” and argued that the discernment of what is essential and necessary is to be determined in the midst of reflection on each case, and is the responsibility of the ordaining body.³⁴ The five fundamentals adopted and affirmed by multiple General Assemblies could not serve as a list of essential articles to which candidates must subscribe. If the General Assembly were to legitimately create a list of essential doctrines, Swearingen insists, the language would have to be drawn directly from the Confession of the Church itself— nothing supplemental to the Confession, which has been given constitutional status by the action of the whole church acting in its presbyteries, can legitimately exercise influence in ordination processes.

Both the Task Force and the Swearingen Commission, in these constitutional recommendations about ordination procedures, are explicitly indebted to one of the earliest

³³ “Jack Martin Maxwell, Appellee vs. Pittsburg Presbytery, Appellant,” Remedial Case No. 1, *Minutes of the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, May 13-21, 1975 (NY, NY: Office of the General Assembly), 254-259. This is commonly referred to as the Kenyon case as charges were brought against Pittsburgh Presbytery by Maxwell against their decision to ordain Walter Wynn Kenyon. The Synod Permanent Judicial Commission ruled the ordination out of order because Kenyon was not willing to conform to the current constitution of the church. The General Assembly PJC upheld this position.

³⁴ *PCUSA Minutes 1927 Vol. 1*, 77-82

documents from American Presbyterian history—the Adopting Act of 1729. The Adopting Act was a compromise resolution to one of earliest divisive struggles over ordination standards in the denomination and it is the source of the language about essential and necessary articles. It reads:

And do therefore agree that all the ministers of this Synod, or that shall hereafter be admitted into this Synod, shall declare their agreement in and approbation of the Confession of Faith, with the Larger, and Shorter Catechisms of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, as being, in all the essential and necessary articles, good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine, and do also adopt the said Confession and Catechisms as the confession of our faith. And we do also agree, that all the Presbyteries within our bounds shall always take care not to admit any candidate for the ministry into the exercise of the sacred function unless he declares his agreement in opinion with all the essential and necessary articles of said Confession, either by subscribing the said Confession of Faith and Catechisms, or by a verbal declaration of their assent thereto, as such minister or candidate shall think best.

And in case any minister of this Synod, or any candidate for the ministry, shall have any scruple with respect to any article or articles of said Confession or Catechisms, he shall at the time of his making said declaration declare his sentiments to the Presbytery or Synod, who shall, notwithstanding, admit him to the exercise of the ministry within our bounds, and to ministerial communion, if the Synod or Presbytery shall judge his scruple or mistake to be only about articles not essential and necessary in doctrine, worship or government.

But if the Synod or Presbytery shall judge such ministers or candidates erroneous in essential and necessary articles of faith, the Synod or Presbytery shall declare them incapable of communion with them. And the Synod do solemnly agree that none of us will traduce or use any opprobrious term of those that differ from us in these extra-essential and not necessary points of doctrine, but treat them with the same friendship, kindness and brotherly love, as if they had not differed from us in such sentiments.³⁵

Not only, then, in recent American Presbyterian history, but in the earliest years of an American Presbyterian presence, Presbyterians choose to focus on ordination standards and practices to settle divisions among them.

³⁵ Can be found in the preliminary report of the Special Commission- *PCUSA Minutes 1926 Vol. 1*, 75-76.

The Clerical Focus of These Proposed Solutions

Though Presbyterians have three ordained offices, the Adopting Act focuses exclusively on the clerical office. A similar singular focus on the clerical office was on display in the Fundamentalist/Modernist Controversy, not only in the disputes preceding the work of the Swearingen Commission, but also in the report of the Swearingen Commission itself. Their report focuses heavily on ordination questions and repeatedly stresses the unique and sacred character of the clerical office in particular. This emerges in a most pronounced way in language contrasting procedures related to licensed preachers vs. ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament.³⁶ Ordination, Swearingen affirms repeatedly, “confers a unique status.”³⁷ This status involves “special authority derived from Christ directly and not through the medium of the people,”³⁸ the ordained, professional ministry is “in a peculiar sense, a gift to the Church from her Divine Head.”³⁹ This interpretation of the office is supported by an observation of practice wherein only preaching presbyters participate in the ordination of ministers. Repeatedly the commission affirms “no status among men provides a parallel.”⁴⁰ All of this language suggests that one office of the church is markedly elevated above the rest, straining the parity upon which a Reformed theology of ordination insists. The Swearingen Commission, like the Theological Task Force nearly a century later, advocated rigorous procedures of preparation and examination

³⁶ In current PC(U.S.A.) polity, the closest parallel to this now historical distinction between licensed preachers/ministers of word and sacraments is the role of “commissioned ruling elder.” Ruling elders can be commissioned to fulfill pastoral responsibilities for a congregation, after training and approval by their presbyteries. When one’s commission is done, one loses the privilege of presiding at sacraments, regularly preaching, and moderating the congregation’s session. In contrast, when an ordained pastor leaves a called/installed position, presuming they are not censured or otherwise restricted under discipline, they can still fulfill pastoral functions for other congregations. See *PC(U.S.A.) Book of Order*, G. 2.05, G.2.10 (G.2.1002 in particular).

³⁷ Eg. *PCUSA Minutes 1927 Vol. 1*, 66-67

³⁸ *Ibid*, 67

³⁹ *Ibid*.

⁴⁰ e.g. *Ibid*, 68

for ministry, holding candidates for professional ministry accountable to the Westminster Standards, requiring discernment of their conformity to the essentials of these standards prior to ordination. The solution they proposed to the conflict that threatened to divide the church again was one that focused heavily on the clerical office.

Though the Theological Task Force arrived at a similar conclusion (i.e. the need for rigorous examination of candidates for ordination), the language of their recommendation carefully covers all the ordained offices of the church and does not demonstrate the clerical fixation, which was more clearly on display in preceding disputes. While the ordination controversy in the latter 20th/early 21st century began with a query about a candidate for professional ministry, and though there were notable struggles over gay and lesbian candidates for professional ministry in the thirty years that followed,⁴¹ a review of cases that made their way to the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission suggests that efforts were made to keep those in same gender sexual relationships out of every office of the church. There are likely many explanations for this; but perhaps when this church was transparently struggling about ordination from the onset of the controversy, it was necessary to apply the stated theology of ordination and treat all offices equally, whereas, when fights began with concerns about heresy, all attention turned to the teaching office of the church.

⁴¹ Most notable are the recurrent cases that made their way through the church courts regarding the Rev. Jane Spahr, a woman who came to identify as a lesbian after her ordination to the ministry, and Lisa Larges, a lesbian candidate for ordination in the PC(U.S.A.) for 26 years. Larges' ordination was finally approved in 2012, but she then opted not to be ordained. For the initial remedial case against the Presbyterian of Genesee Valley for approving the call of Jane Spahr as the pastor of Downtown Presbyterian Church in Rochester, NY, see "Rem. Case 205.5 Ronald P. Sallade et al v. Presbytery of Genesee Valley," (<http://oga.pcusa.org/media/uploads/oga/pdf/pjc20505.pdf>.) For the initial case against the certification of Lisa Larges as ready to receive a call, see "Remedial Case 205.4- LeTourneau et al v. Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area" (<http://oga.pcusa.org/media/uploads/oga/pdf/pjc20504.pdf>).

Nonetheless, as already noted, both the Task Force and the Commission sought to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church through more faithful ordination processes. Some argue that Presbyterians have failed repeatedly by trying to solve problems of theology with polity.⁴² It does appear that Presbyterians are dealing, in part, with a problem in Reformed Ecclesiology, a problem that fuels recurrent, divisive controversies. This ecclesiological problem involves an ordination fixation, and in many generations a clerical fixation. While it is natural to focus on leadership in one's efforts to strengthen or stabilize a community, I believe this focus exposes a weakness in Reformed Ecclesiology. Though a hallmark of Reformed Ecclesiology is an effort to overcome the significance of a clerical/lay distinction, at the same time, the visible church is identified only by the Word rightly preached and the Sacraments properly administered—functions for which only one office of the church has visible, and primary responsibility. Though Reformed ecclesial communions put their theology of lay and clerical equality into practice by having lay and clerical ordained offices that differ in function rather than status and by insisting on corporate leadership and decision making in which ordained lay elders and clerical elders share governing power, when attention is chiefly focused on the clerical office as the source and solution of all our problems, it appears greater weight is ascribed to this office.

In the preceding discussion, I have considered two moments of controversy from the history of my own denomination, and one historical precedent significant to both. I have done so in order to draw out the persistent ordination fixation, and, indeed, clerical fixation, in this Reformed ecclesial communion, and the attachment of this fixation to moments of division in this history of this denomination. I have also suggested that not only does this fixation seem to

⁴² e.g. Fred W. Beuttler, "Making Theology matter: Power, Polity, and the Theological Debate over Homosexual Ordination in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)" in *The Journal of Presbyterian History: Special Issue: Presbyterians, Polity and Confessional Identity*, Vol. 79-Number 1, Spring 2001 (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian Historical Society), 5-22.

promote division, but it also runs contrary to the stated theology of ordination within Reformed ecclesiology, which presumes the parity of lay and clerical ordained offices. This raises the question from whence does a clerical fixation derive?

Difficulty Conceptualizing the Visibility of the True and Holy Church

The working hypothesis of this dissertation is that this fixation derives, in part, from the difficulty Reformed Christians have grasping the visibility of the true church. It is particularly challenging, perhaps not just for the Reformed, to conceptualize the visibility of the church described in the Nicene Creed with its oneness, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. The visible form of the church in the world often seems the antithesis of these very notes. Given the disappointing appearance of the visible church, Miroslav Volf suggests, and I concur, that Reformed thinkers often simply default to the doctrine of the invisible church when asked to account for these notes of creedal confession.⁴³ As I've already suggested, Reformed Christians often insist on the Augsburg marks of the church alone (Word and Sacrament) for the identification of the church in the world. Indeed, it was the Reformation that raised the problem of identifying the church in the world and this technical understanding of "the marks of the church" emerged out of the 16th century controversies.⁴⁴ The problem with the Protestant marks of Word and Sacrament, as I will attempt to demonstrate throughout this dissertation, is that these marks may direct attention to the church's clerics, to those who proclaim from pulpits and

⁴³ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, ed. Allen G. Padgett, *Sacra Doctrina: Christian Theology for a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 270.

⁴⁴ For a helpful discussion of the history of the "marks of the church" see chapter two of Gordon W. Lathrop and Timothy J. Wengert. *Christian Assembly: Marks of the Church in a Pluralistic Age*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 17-36. This is discussed more fully in chapter six of this dissertation. See pages 281-282.

preside at font and table.

Certainly, prior to the Reformation, it was not uncommon to link the identification of the church in the world to the clerical office. Cyprian, for example, argued that the church's unity and holiness is secured by the unity and purity of the communion of bishops.⁴⁵ Though Cyprian understood this unity to be secured by the whole communion of bishops, in the millennium that followed his teaching, the particular office of the bishop of Rome was increasingly elevated so that by the time Thomas Aquinas was preparing his *Summa Theologiae* he could comfortably declare that the Pope (the bishop of Rome) is the guarantee of the unity of the Christian faith.⁴⁶

The medieval investiture controversy is a good illustration of the way in which the church's identity, and particularly its holiness, was bound to the church's clerics in the middle ages. In the feudal economy of the middle ages, when a man was appointed/consecrated as a bishop he acquired civic as well as ecclesiastical responsibilities. Bishops, then, were both invested with land and civic authority and consecrated with ecclesiastical authority. Typically a lay ruler would invest a bishop with his office, even bestowing upon him the symbols of that office (the ring and crozier), *before* bishops laid on hands in consecration. Because of the social and economic advancement attached to episcopal office, money often changed hands and it appeared that some bishops were buying their way into office. This was understood to be the sin of simony— the buying or selling of ecclesiastical goods or services. Many in the medieval

⁴⁵ Eg. Cyprian, *The Unity of the Catholic Church*, chs. 4 and 5 (*De Lapsis and De Ecclesiae Catholicae Unitate*, tr. and ed. Maurice Bévenot, S.J., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971,) 63-67); *Ep.*, 66.5.1; *Ep.*, 65.2.2, 4.1 (*The Letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage: Vol III*, tr. and ann. G.W. Clarke, (New York: Newman Press, 1986).

⁴⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province. 5 vols. (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1948,) II-II. 1.1.10 (hereafter references to the *Summa* will be indicated by *ST*); for a helpful recent discussion of the Petrine discourse and the development of papal authority see George E. Demacopoulous. *The Invention of Peter: Apostolic Discourse and Papal Authority in late Antiquity*. (Philadelphia: University Of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

church were troubled by this sin and sought to reform the church to overcome it. But among the opponents of simoniacal bishops were different interpretations of the effect of the presence of serious sinners in the communion of bishops. Cardinal Humbert de Silva argued that a bishop who received consecration unlawfully/in sin did not in fact receive it and thus did not possess the power to ordain or consecrate others effectively. This interpretation invalidated the consecrations of the vast majority of bishops in medieval Europe— even those themselves not guilty of simony were tainted by the simony of their consecrators. Humbert’s opponent Peter Damian argued that while simony is a serious sin that needs to be addressed, a sinful bishop can nonetheless effectively participate in the consecrations of others because it is actually Christ and not the bishops themselves who consecrate. That said, Damian did argue that bishops are called holy, regardless of their personal state of holiness, because of their role as agents of Christ. Both Damian and Humbert believed bishops dispense sanctifying power to the church— Humbert believed only personally holy bishops play this role, Damian believed anyone who received the office did so.⁴⁷ Both parties in the dispute then agreed that the church’s holiness depends on the sanctifying power distributed through the church’s clerics. A few centuries later this understanding is reflected in the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas spoke of bishops as the perfectors of the church, an understanding he appears to have derived from the teachings of Pseudo Dionysius. Bishops have active power (to sanctify) whereas the rest of the church has

⁴⁷ For a narrative account of this dispute and collection of excerpts of primary documents in it see Brian Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State (1050-1300)*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 33-44. For a deeper investigation, the writings of Peter Damian are available in English translation. See especially “Letter 40”, also known as the *Liber Gratissimus (Letters of Peter Damian, Vol. 2)*, ed. Owen J. Blum (Washington, D.C.: CUA Press, 1990,) 111-214). Two official Latin manuscripts of Humbert’s parallel document, *Libri tres adversus simoniacos* are available (ed. F. Thaner, MGH Ldl 1 (1891), 95-253; ed. E.G. Robison, *Humberti Cardinalis libri tres adversus simoniacos*, (Ph.D. Diss, Princeton, 1971), but no complete English translation has been prepared.

only passive power (to be sanctified).⁴⁸

But the clerically centered understandings of the church that were so predominant prior to the Reformation were explicitly resisted in the 16th century and have consistently been resisted in Reformed confessions. So, where is one to look to see the church in the world?

I have a distinct interest in the note of holiness because it would seem that if the church were truly holy this would make it stand out in the world— it would mark this fellowship as distinct from its surroundings. Though Reformed Christians inherit a strong doctrine of sanctification from Jean Calvin, this doctrine nonetheless insists on the tenacious, persistent character of sin in every human life and institution. That the visible church is beset with challenges and rife with sin is no surprise for the Reformed. The Swearingen Commission makes note of this with a comment in response to their charge to assess the spiritual condition of the church in their day: “Measured by the standard of the perfect Church of Christ ‘glorious and without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish,’ our Church falls far short, and can only bow in penitence before its Head.”⁴⁹ What can be most readily seen in the church is its sin and its need to bow in penitence.

For the purposes of this study, holiness will be understood along the following lines. The life and work of the triune God is holiness. God alone is holy. And yet, this is an adjective that is ascribed to earthly phenomena. And when things on earth are described as holy this usually speaks to their being set apart from the typical things of this world, designated for a specific purpose that is aligned with the will of God. Religious texts, for example, are often called “holy” to designate their special status and function among all texts. Religious places of worship are similarly also designated as “holy,” to suggest that these places are set apart for a sacred purpose.

⁴⁸ see especially *ST*, II-II.184.5; II-II.185.2; cf. *Supp* 34.2; *Supp.* 34.3

⁴⁹ *PCUSA Minutes 1926* Vol. 1, 64.

If sin suggests a lack of alignment with God’s will, then the greater the evidence of sin in any life of institution, the less evidence of holiness. Because sin persists in every earthly reality, at any given moment it may be virtually impossible to see holiness.

Within Christian theology, we talk about human holiness under the doctrine of sanctification. By the activity of the Holy Spirit in human lives and communities, those lives and communities are made holy. But whatever sanctification may be unfolding within the church is difficult to see. It is certainly not visible as an accomplished reality. And yet people come to the church seeking the holy, seeking an encounter with the holy. And the easiest place to look for holiness is in the pulpit or behind, as well as in or on, the font or table.

A METAPHORICAL ILLUMINATION OF THE WORK OF THE PROJECT

The work of this project can be described by means of a metaphor— a theological understanding of the church as a grand tapestry woven by many hands throughout Christian history. To be clear, this is a metaphor for doctrine about the church, not for the church itself. This suggests an understanding of doctrine as creative craft and historical artifact. New creative work must be undertaken in every generation, but all that work is intrinsically connected to the creative work of prior generations.⁵⁰ Christian theologians in each generation work with many of

⁵⁰ This understanding is informed by Kathryn Tanner’s proposed “new agenda for theology” [*Theories of Culture*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997)]. She understands theology to be a cultural activity, a human production derived from reflection on the practice of Christian communities. Tanner understands culture in light of post-modern anthropological critiques of modern anthropological constructions. She takes culture to be historically produced through processes of material social interactions. Cultures are internally plural and contradictory, sites of constant negotiation and engagement (e.g. 57). She speaks of the basic work of theologians as both creative and tactical. The work of the theology is creative insofar as theologians must work with a range of material already on the ground that don’t dictate how they are to be used. This work is tactical insofar as it involves dealing with already existing interpretations and organizations (92).

the same materials. They draw threads from one another, and, most basically, from the revelation of God in Christ, particularly as that revelation is attested in scripture. But there is also diversity in the contributions, due to different historical circumstances, different commitments, and different levels of skill of those taking up the craft. We are motivated to look carefully at different portions of the tapestry, then, as something may be more clear in one portion than another— and when that which is clear in a given portion is viewed together with that which is clear in another, yet sharper clarity might emerge.

Thus, taking a theological understanding of the church to be a tapestry woven by many, the work of this dissertation involves examining four portions of this tapestry, woven at distinctly different times, by four different theologians— Karl Barth, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Jean Calvin, and Augustine of Hippo. All projects are limited in scope. To consider the whole tapestry would be a life's work. Isolating portions of the tapestry is a project's work. I have identified four theologians who a) have written extensively on the church, and b) have been highly influential within Reformed theology. As we examine the ecclesiological work of each of these thinkers in turn, we will both gain insight into the problem to which this dissertation is a response, and glimpse four different central images of the holiness of the church, which will help inspire the creative work of this project.

The examination will proceed from the most recent of the four contributions (Karl Barth) through each successively older source, concluding with the earliest contribution (Augustine of Hippo). This backwards movement reflects the intention to create a responsible Reformed understanding of visible ecclesial holiness. The project needs to be responsible both to contemporary circumstances and to seminal thinkers whose work has shaped the tradition to which this is an attempted contribution. I begin with two thinkers who have exerted significant

influence in Reformed Theology, particularly as that theology has informed the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), most recently.⁵¹ This helps us to understand where we are, and the creative work to which we must most directly connect in contemporary theological creativity. But our consideration of each thinker will bring issues to our attention or raise questions that will motivate a search for yet greater insight and resources. We work our way back to the sixteenth century and then all the way to the fourth because we can only get there from here— and we are most ready to learn from earlier moments in history after we have considered carefully where we presently stand.

The intention of the project is less the tracing out of the source of the problem to which the dissertation is a response, and more a seeking of insight into and resources for response to that problem. Let me be explicit— I do not intend to offer a genealogical or developmental explanation of Reformed understandings of ecclesial holiness. This is not what I intend with the language of threads. The thread imagery gets at the intention to create a responsible *Reformed* position on visible ecclesial holiness. Just as certain elements (e.g. the person and/or work of Jesus Christ, Scripture) must be present in projects that wish to be identified as Christian, yet

⁵¹ Barth's influence is difficult to dispute. The Book of Confessions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has, among its nine statements of faith from distinct moments that span two millennia of Christian history, one statement (the Barmen Declaration) penned by Barth himself and another (the Confession of 1967) that is so resonant with Barth's teaching at times it reads as if it were penned by him. The number of Barthians on the faculty of Princeton Seminary, the oldest, largest, and best-endowed Presbyterian seminary in the United States, offers yet more evidence of Barth's contemporary influence.

Schleiermacher's recent influence may be harder to detect. The Barthian critique of Schleiermacher dissuaded much direct attention to Schleiermacher for a number of years, but Schleiermacher's approach to theology opened up greater attention to human experience as a source for theological insight and reflection. This has profoundly shaped much modern theological thinking, even where the debt to Schleiermacher is not acknowledged. The teaching of theology at other Presbyterian seminaries, such as McCormick Theological Seminary, reflects this alternate theological strain in the contemporary landscape.

further elements are present in projects that can reasonably be classified as Reformed.⁵² The thread imagery is less about continuity and more about affinity. The different images that come into view in each portion of the tapestry are recognizably related to one another. Each theologian works with threads utilized in earlier generations, particularly relying on threads that are dominant within the creative work of theologians with whom one especially identifies. I identify two crimson threads worked into all four of the central images that surface from each theologian —1) God alone as the source of sanctification and holiness; and 2) the foundational character of forgiveness to ecclesial identity. These crimson threads will be crucial the creative work of this dissertation.

A BRIEF WORD ON THE SELECTION OF SOURCES

It is not unusual for contemporary Reformed theologians to consult the particular thinkers engaged in this project. That this project seeks to work constructively with both Barth and Schleiermacher might, however, distinguish it. In my judgment, Barth and Schleiermacher are the two most substantive modern Reformed thinkers when it comes to the work I'm doing.

⁵² Though Reformed theology has taken different forms in the broad and numerous communions who identify as Reformed (thus leading some to speak of Reformed traditions rather than the Reformed Tradition) and though even among American Presbyterians there has been a consistent refusal to codify any listing of essential Reformed tenets, nonetheless, for generations the constitution of the PC(U.S.A.) and its predecessor denominations has included a broad summary of key Reformed themes. I take this listing as a helpful guide to traits of Reformed thinking. “Central to this tradition is the affirmation of the majesty, holiness, and providence of God who in Christ and by the power of the Spirit creates, sustains, rules, and redeems the world in the freedom of sovereign righteousness and love.” In addition to God’s sovereignty, “other great themes of the Reformed tradition: The election of the people of God for service as well as salvation; Covenant life marked by a disciplined concern that for order in the church according to the Word of God’ A faithful stewardship that shuns ostentation and seeks proper use of the gifts of God’s creation; and The recognition of the human tendency towards idolatry and tyranny, which calls the people of God to work for the transformation of society by seeking justice and living in obedience to the Word of God” (*PC(U.S.A.) Book of Order*, F-2.05).

Though Barth is often criticized for his weakness in ecclesiology, he had plenty to say about the church. And the only thinker who is his equal in that regard is his predecessor, Schleiermacher.

Both of these thinkers are men to whom contemporary Reformed, and particularly Presbyterian, Christians turn when struggling with doctrinal questions. However, most turn to one or the other— not to both. They are set in such stark opposition to one another that often a forced choice is posed between them. For this project, however, it is particularly valuable to attend to both, because, for all their differences, I see the same dynamic at work in both— a common struggle to conceptualize visible holiness. My work with Barth and Schleiermacher will draw out different dimensions of this common problem. If this is a problem in the thought of both Barth and Schleiermacher, and I intend to demonstrate that it is, then surely this is a problem in contemporary Reformed ecclesiology worthy of attention.

The turn to Jean Calvin is a natural and essential choice for a Reformed ecclesiological project. As the 16th century Reformer whose thought birthed and continues to support those ecclesial communions who identify as Reformed, there is no more important thinker to consult.

Perhaps one might be inclined to stop the search in the Reformation era, but for this project I reach back to the patristic era for yet more insight. I work with Augustine of Hippo both because he is the patristic thinker to whom Calvin is most indebted, and also because his understanding of the holiness of the church was shaped in the crucible of the Donatist controversy and schism. This controversy exposes a moment in early church history in which a clerically centered understanding of the church's holiness resulted in church division, making it of interest to the concerns of this dissertation.

BRIEF OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

The second chapter of the dissertation offers a consideration of both early and mature ecclesiological writings from Karl Barth. The claims of the chapter are twofold— first, that Barth, especially in his early ecclesiological writing, offers a clear depiction of the difficulty facing Reformed thinkers seeking to conceptualize the visibility of ecclesial holiness; second, that Barth offers us a picture of humility at the heart of his ecclesiology, which is key to identifying possibility within the problem itself. Barth’s persistent insistence on the infinite qualitative distinction between God and the world constrains meaningful talk about visible holiness. We will not consider whether Barth’s ecclesiology supports or challenges a problematic identification of the church’s holiness in its clerics because in this chapter we are simply seeking to begin to grasp the fundamental difficulty of the matter of visible holiness within Reformed thought. The picture of humility that emerges out of Barth’s insistence on the infinite qualitative distinction between God and the world offers crucial insight for the creative work of this dissertation. In Barth’s humble picture of ecclesial holiness, the first of the two crimson threads we are pulling from the tapestry is most prominently on display— God alone as the source of sanctification and holiness.

Chapter three directs attention to four texts that offer insight into Friedrich Schleiermacher’s ecclesiology. We might expect, if the problem is so clearly on display in Barth, that its solution might be found in his opponent, Schleiermacher. The first claim of chapter three, however, is that Schleiermacher actually exposes another level of the problem of visible ecclesial holiness. With this examination of Schleiermacher, we are invited to begin to reflect on the characteristic Reformed prioritization of the Word and of preaching, which opens up a consequent vulnerability that those fulfilling the office of preacher will be the primary site for

the identification of the church in its holiness. However, the second claim of the chapter is that the picture of the church that stands out in Schleiermacher is a picture of mutual communication. His thoroughly communicative ecclesiology offers an understanding of a process of mutual communication of the Spirit of God unfolding between all believers. Thus, even as Schleiermacher will help us to see the risk of a sacralized clerical office, his picture of mutuality offers key insight into the resistance of this possibility. To humility we add mutuality in our quest for a responsible Reformed position on the visible holiness of the church.

In chapters two and three we certainly see the first crimson thread of God alone as the source of sanctification, but in the remaining two chapters we will see more clearly the second crimson thread—the foundational character of forgiveness to ecclesial identity. Chapter four attends to Calvin’s ecclesiology claiming that the picture of ecclesial holiness that stands out in his thought is a picture of progression. Calvin understands the holiness of the church to be a work in progress, work dependent on the forgiveness of sins. Though surely all our thinkers understand sanctification in a progressive sense, this emphasis on progression is most central in Calvin’s understanding, inviting us to hold progression together with mutuality and humility as we seek to conceptualize visible ecclesial holiness. Yet, the chapter further claims that Calvin too tightly links the forgiveness of sins to the preaching event opening up the possibility of an unintended sacralization of the clergy, thus extending the work begun in chapter three. Crucial to the advancement of this claim will be a reflection on Calvin’s interpretation of the power of the keys.

The body of the dissertation concludes with a reflection on Augustine’s understanding of the holiness of the church as it took shape within the Donatist Controversy. The Donatists appear to have held a clerically-centered understanding of ecclesial holiness, which they traced in part to

the teachings of Cyprian. Thus, the first claim of chapter five is that we see a stark representation of the problem we have been considering in Augustine's Donatist opponents, particularly in their interpretation of Cyprian. The chief claim of this chapter is that Augustine, in response to his Donatist opponents, explicitly resists a clerically-centered understanding of ecclesial holiness forwarding an argument about holiness as the *caritas*—forgiving love— that resides in the whole, earthly body of Christ, in all the saints in the true church on earth. A picture of believers humbly submitting to one another, extending and receiving forgiveness comes into view as we consider Augustine's ecclesiology— a picture that boldly display the crimson thread of the foundational character of forgiveness to the identity and holiness of the church.

In the final chapter, holding these four pictures of humility, mutuality, progression, and forgiving love together, and picking up the two crimson threads that run through all of them, I take up my own weaving. I propose that the practice of forgiveness be understood as the third mark of the church. I argue that the holiness of the church becomes apparent when we humbly confess God alone as the only hope of sanctification and submit ourselves to our fellow Christians in regular, disciplined practice of mutual forgiveness. As the entire membership, clergy and lay alike, stands in need of forgiveness and bears a responsibility to extend forgiveness, this is a non-clerically centered understanding of ecclesial holiness. This third mark of the church opens up further thinking on the first two marks of the church that helps to lessen their potential clerical focus. I argue that we must look to the practice of forgiveness in order to see holiness in the world, and indeed that the cultivation of this practice ought to be central to the life of the church.

CHAPTER II

KARL BARTH: SEEING THE PROBLEM AND SEEING POSSIBILITY IN THE PROBLEM

INTRODUCTION

Before this dissertation is through I intend to weave a responsible, Reformed position on the visible holiness of the church. I hope to add a humble contribution to the grand tapestry of ecclesiological doctrine that many wise theologians have been weaving for two millennia. But if I am to be both responsible and Reformed in my endeavor, I need to examine significant earlier contributions to this tapestry both to account for the need for my present work and to identify images, and crimson threads within them, that can inspire my own weaving.

I begin my examination with the work of Karl Barth because he is unquestionably the most significant and influential Reformed theologian of the previous century. Though some question the degree to which he is a helpful *ecclesiological* resource,⁵³ he had much to say about the church and about the holiness of the church. It would be irresponsible to attempt a Reformed,

⁵³ Buckley notes that though Barth warns in *The Christian Life* against both a “church in excess” and a “church in defect” (pp. 136-140), many of his critics, particularly theological liberals and Roman Catholic critics see in Barth only a church in defect (James Buckley, “Christian community, baptism, and Lord’s Supper,” in *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 195-211; see especially the later moves of this essay.) Yocum particularly finds deficiency in Barth’s mature ecclesiology, in volume IV of the *Dogmatics*, where Barth ceases to have any meaningful account of ecclesial mediation. He acknowledges that Barth improves his account of human action in these later writings, but he loses any sense of the vital relationship between divine and human action (John Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation in Karl Barth*, (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), introduction). Cf. Louis Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan, S.J. And Madeleine Beaumont, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 419-424; 539-542; Nicholas M. Healy, “The Logic of Karl Barth’s Ecclesiology: Analysis, Assessment, and Proposed Modifications” in *Modern Theology* 10:3, July 1994, 253-270.

ecclesiological project in the 21st century without taking Barth into account.

Indeed, our examination of Barth's early and mature ecclesiological weaving, particularly where he weighs in on the holiness of the church, strongly confirms the need for the work of this dissertation. We see in Barth the way in which a strong understanding of the sinful human condition severely constrains one's ability to account for the visible holiness of the church. This is a crucial dimension of the problem facing Reformed Christians to which this dissertation is a response. In the first part of this chapter, I review Barth's contributions to the tapestry in order to help the reader *see* this problem. I demonstrate in part one that Barth's passionate desire to preserve the infinite qualitative distinction between God and the world severely constrains the possibility of identifying genuine holiness within the earthly church, resulting in a tendency to relegate holiness to the sphere of invisibility. Further, I show that while developments in both christology and pneumatology in his mature writings loosen these constraints, they do not remove them, and this is largely because the infinite qualitative distinction remains a controlling theme throughout his work.

However, in part two of the chapter, we will view this portion of the tapestry, which so clearly reveals the problem, from a different angle, and when we do, the image of a humble church comes into view. As we contemplate this humble church, we may begin to detect possibility in the problem itself, and threads which I can pick up for my own weaving. We need not reject Barth's insight into the infinite qualitative distinction between God and the world and allow a sacralization of the worldly in order to make sense of ecclesial holiness. Barth's project demonstrates that the stark contrast he perceived between the divine and the human actually opened up a sphere for genuine human action and partnership with God. Infinite qualitative distinction is not the only word Barth offers about the God-World relationship; covenant is

perhaps an even more controlling theme. Even as Barth acknowledges the persistence of sin in every human life, he understands the Spirit of Christ acting to “place human beings on their feet” and to empower genuine decision, faith, and grateful service. Any Reformed position on the visible holiness of the church will need to be guided by the insight that no part of humanity is, in any sense, God, and every part of humanity stands in need of God’s mercy and forgiveness; when this is recalled a sphere for genuine *human* agency is preserved, in which a proper *human* holiness can visibly emerge. In essence, I’m arguing paradoxically that the problem that plagues Reformed theologians, the acknowledgment of the stubborn persistence of sin in human existence, can itself be a resource for a responsible position on the visible holiness of the church.

DISCURSUS- BARTH’S UNDERSTANDING OF HOLINESS

Some definitional work should enhance the engagement with Barth that will unfold in this chapter. What does Barth mean when he uses the qualifier “holy”? First of all, throughout Barth’s career he would properly only apply the adjective “holy” to the triune God. That said, as holiness is one of the confessed marks of the church, he did have an understanding of how this earthly phenomenon can be called holy as well; but, as will become eminently clear as this chapter unfolds, for the church as an earthly, human phenomenon to be called holy is entirely dependent on its relationship to God the Father through Christ via the Holy Spirit. Most basically, both in his early and mature writings, Barth understood the adjective “holiness,” when applied to the church, to indicate distinction or difference, being set apart from other communities for the fulfillment of God’s purposes in this world.⁵⁴ The church has its own basis

⁵⁴ e.g Karl Barth, “The Concept of the Church” in *Theology and Church*, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith, New York: Harper and Row, 1962, 276-277. (Originally *Der Begriff der Kirche*, 1927.); Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.I, trans. Rev. G.W. Bromiley, eds. Rev. G.W. Bromiley and

and goal (the revelation of God in Christ) that can't be understood or evaluated in light of the basis, goal, and standards of other societies, as well as its own law to which it is solely pledged. For Barth, first and foremost, "holiness" always means difference.⁵⁵

In addition to "difference" two other adjectives attach to Barth's understanding of "holiness" and those are "infallibility" and "permanence." While "difference" can be construed humanly, these characteristics are less typically ascribed to temporal realities. Barth is able to speak of the church's infallibility and permanence only insofar as it functions as a place of God's action of revelation.⁵⁶ Ultimately, as we will see, all three of these understandings of "holiness," are identified as descriptive of the church *only* in light of its relation to the holy God.

PART ONE- SEEING THE PROBLEM- BARTH'S CONSISTENTLY CONSTRAINED CONSTRUAL OF THE HOLINESS OF THE CHURCH

This section unfolds in two moves. First, I demonstrate that Barth's early concern to preserve the infinite qualitative distinction between God and the world severely constrained his construal of the church's holiness. Second, I show that his mature christology loosened but did not remove these constraints, as the radical distinction between creator and creation remained a controlling theme. Ultimately, it will be apparent that it is very difficult for Barth to affirm the visibility of holiness at all.

Rev. Prof. T.F. Torrance, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956,) 685. All references to the Dogmatics, hereafter *CD*, are taken from this standard English translation.

⁵⁵ *CD*, IV.1.62, 685

⁵⁶ Barth, "Concept of Church," 283-284; *CD*, IV.1.62, 685

Early Barth- the Infinite Qualitative Distinction

The questionable character of the church's holiness, and the insistence that any holiness proper to it is actually the holiness of God, comes through in powerful imagery throughout Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*. The decisive insight that exploded from the pages of Barth's commentary on Romans, in opposition to the all too ready identification of God and the World in the trajectory of 19th century German theology in which he had been educated, was the assertion of the infinite, qualitative distinction between God and the world. As this is a controlling insight in Barth's early theology, it significantly colors his understanding of the church, and particularly constrains any understanding of its holiness. In this section, we will first consider his most basic definition of and most elaborated image(s) of the church in his *Epistle to the Romans*. We will then consider several key notions in Barth's early ecclesiology, drawn from numerous writings, noting the way that they reflect his emphasis on the infinite, qualitative distinction and the impact of this on his early construal of the church's holiness.

Word of God as Theme of the Church— Church of Esau, Church of Jacob

Barth's most basic definition of the church in his *Epistle to the Romans* is "The church is the constantly emerging community of *human beings* hearing and proclaiming the Word of God."⁵⁷ We see in this definition both his careful work to identify the church as a worldly, human phenomenon, and his understanding of that which distinguishes this human fellowship

⁵⁷ "...die Kirche ist die immer wieder entstehende Gemeinschaft der Gottes Wort hörenden und aussprechenden Menschen" (Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief*, (Zollikon-Zürich:Evangelischer Verlag, 1922), 325.) Edwyn Hoskyn's translation of the 6th edition of this seminal document renders the same material "The church is the fellowship of men who proclaim the Word of God and hear it" (———, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns, 6th ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 341). I rely on the standard English translations of the Barth documents consulted in what follows, save where *Mensch(en)* is translated *man/men*, as I prefer the more ambiguous translation of this term and therefore alter these translations with the substitution of "(the) human being," "human beings," and "humanity."

from any other: a special relationship to the Word of *God*, the “theme of the church,” via proclamation and hearing. Because God is radically distinct from the world, God can only be known when God makes Godself known via the Word of God in revelation. Barth emphasizes that human beings, as sinful creatures, are inadequate to the task of receiving and proclaiming truth; he suggests truth becomes untruth on human lips, for “however true the theme of the church may be, as the theme of the church it is untrue.”⁵⁸

As such this theme of the church divides the church in two. Barth calls the two churches that result the church of Esau and the church of Jacob. The church of Esau is “where no miracle occurs, and where, consequently, human beings are exposed as liars, precisely when they hear and speak about God,”⁵⁹ and the church of Jacob is “where miracle is, and where, consequently, the Truth appears above the deceit of human beings.”⁶⁰ The church of Esau *is* the visible church with all its corruption, division, contradiction; the church of Jacob is the invisible church, the church where the Word of God is truly spoken and heard, perceptible only in faith. Barth is emphatic that the church of Esau and the church of Jacob, the church visible and invisible, are one and the same church.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Ibid. “*daß also das Thema der Kirche so wahr ist, daß es als Thema der Kirche nie wahr sein kann*” (Römerbrief, 325-326).

⁵⁹ Ibid. “*in der das Wunder nicht geschieht, und in der darum alles Hören und Reden von Gott nur offenbaren kann, daß jeder Mensch ein Lügner ist*” (Römerbrief, 326).

⁶⁰ Ibid, 341-342. “*In der das Wunder geschieht, daß über der Lüge des Menschen die Wahrheit Gottes sichtbar wird*” (Römerbrief, 326).

⁶¹ Absent this insistence, this double identification of the church could open up a dualistic interpretation whereby the visible church is not church and the invisible church is church, but even in these earliest days he resists such dualism. Barth identifies unity in distinction even here. Nicholas Healy argues that Barth’s mature ecclesiology is fatally flawed by a dualism between the *Wirklichkirche* and the *Scheinkirche*, the former, real church being invisible, the latter, visible church being only apparent or phantom (“The Logic of Karl Barth’s Ecclesiology: Analysis, Assessment and Proposed Modifications,” *Modern Theology* 10, no. 3 (1994), 263-265). Emphases like the one Barth offers here about the unity of the church of Esau and the church of Jacob challenge such dualistic interpretations. That said, I’m inclined to agree with

Esau represents the rejection of God, and Jacob represents God's election. Barth understood the whole world ultimately, but the church presently, to stand under the *krisis* of "double predestination." He does not interpret this controversial Reformed doctrine as so many have, whereby some among humanity are rejected by God's eternal decree while others are elected by God's eternal decree; rather he believes *all* of the fallen world is rejected in and of itself, and yet in Christ *all* the world is elect. When the Word of God is truly spoken and heard in the church, by God's grace, those in the church are what they are always said to be- the chosen children of God- but this is a wholly invisible phenomenon. God is the ground both of the church's visible tribulation⁶² and its invisible election. The church ought not try to improve nor perfect its visible reality. When it tries to do so by its own effort, it suffers not just tribulation, but guilt; its tribulation ought to open it to hope in God who lies beyond it. Election, Barth argues, can only be understood as the transformation of rejection. We reach the God of Jacob by bowing before the God of Esau, by continuing to proclaim God as the God who can and will elect even when our whole existence, as church, points to the rejecting power of God. This is how the church is related to the living God.⁶³ The one church is simultaneously Esau and Jacob, rejected and elected, "vessels of wrath" and "vessels of mercy."⁶⁴

Kimlyn Bender, in his reliance on McCormack, and note that an underdeveloped christology at this stage of Barth's development leaves him more vulnerable to such critique (*Karl Barth's Christological Ecclesiology*, Barth Studies (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), see especially pp. 35-36, and fn. 15, p. 65).

⁶² Barth writes, "The disease from which the Church suffers is that God is God, and that he is the God of Jacob..." (*Romans*, 341-342). "*Daß Gott Gott ist, der Gott Jakobs, daran krankt die Kirche*" (*Römerbrief*, 326). . The tribulation of the church is a key notion in Barth's early ecclesiology and will be explored more fully below.

⁶³ Ibid, 352

⁶⁴ "The process of revelation in Christ is decisive. In Time, we are *vessels of wrath*: in Eternity, we are not merely something more, but something utterly different; we are— *vessels of mercy*" (Ibid, 360). "*Denn eben dieser Gang der Offenbarung geschieht ja, eben das, daß wir in der Zeit „Gefäße des Zorns“, in Ewigkeit aber und darum noch viel mehr, noch ganz anders „Gefäße des*

In each of these pairings the first points to reality in time and the second points to reality in eternity; and both are wholly dependent on the decisive revelation of God in Christ.⁶⁵ The church cannot seek to be the church of Jacob; it is given this identity freely by God, it is a pure act of God, unexpected and new.⁶⁶ And this new identity is given via a wholly invisible process.⁶⁷ Because of what God has done in Christ,

...we know rejection is not the final word either for humanity as a whole or for the Church. And we know also that neither the word *reconciliation* nor the phrase *peace with God* is final, for they are altogether beyond our hearing. Beyond our *rejection* there awaits us our *receiving*—the receiving, that is to say, of human impossibility into the possibility of God, the oneness of concrete existence and Primal Origin, the clothing of corruption with incorruption, the passing of time into eternity, —in fact, the new Heaven and the new Earth. This is what the impossibility of the church awaits. Nowhere is the meaning of rejection so unmistakable as it is in the church— and nowhere else is the reception of the human being of this world into union with God so unmistakable.⁶⁸

Thus, in Barth's early understanding, the church is what it is only by the act of God in and through it, and because of the infinite, qualitative distinction between God and the world, what it truly is, is not visible. What is visible is a witness to the rejected status of humankind, a

Erbarment sind," (Römerbrief, 344).

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 366.

⁶⁷ Barth suggests that if the church were devoted wholly and freely towards God and concentrated fully on preaching the cross of Christ, it would be fully living in its identity as the Church of Jacob, but that would not be an observable phenomenon, because the Word of God truly spoken and truly heard is never a visible phenomenon. And because the church suffers not just tribulation, but also guilt, it is *never* so purely focused, but rather seeks to justify itself by works (Ibid, 368).

⁶⁸ Ibid, 406. "*Und nun wissen wir, daß „Wegwerfung" kein letztes Wort ist, wie für den ganzen menschlichen Lebensversuch nicht, so auch nicht für den in der Kirche unternommenen. Wie ja auch die Worte „Versöhnung" und „Friede mit Gott" in ihrer ganzen Unerhörtheit noch keine letzten Worte sind. Jenseits der „Wegwerfung" wartet die „Aufnahme", die Aufnahme der menschlichen Unmöglichkeiten in die Möglichkeit Gottes, die Einheit von Ursprung und Gegebenheit, das Anziehen der Unverweslichkeit durch das Verwesliche, die Verewigung der Zeit, der neue Himmel und die neue Erde. Das alles wartet auch auf die - kirchliche Unmöglichkeit. Und wird es nirgends so deutlich wie gerade an der Kirche, was „Wegwerfung" ist, so kann auch, was es ist um die „Aufnahme" dieses Menschen in dieser Welt in die Einheit mit Gott" (Römerbrief, 391).*

church marked by tribulation, guilt, and impossibility—the church of Esau.

Seven Key Notions in Barth's Early Ecclesiology

In the discussion of the theme of the church and twofold division of the one church into the church of Esau and the church of Jacob above, we began to glimpse several key notions in Barth's early ecclesiology. Each of these notions is reflective of the infinite, qualitative distinction between God and the world. We will now consider seven of these notions in turn: 1) Irreversible Relation; 2) Church as contra-Gospel; 3) Tribulation of the church; 4) Guilt of the church; 5) Vast and Permanent Unholiness; Sanctification in Hope; 6) Obedience; and 7) Church as the Earthly Body of its Heavenly Lord.

1. Irreversible Relation

The infinite, qualitative distinction between God and the world does not deny real relation between God and the world, but it does define that relationship in a particular way. It is, in no sense, a mutual relation. The world in general, humanity in particular, is *not* a partner to God, not even a junior partner.⁶⁹ The relationship between God and the world is asymmetrical and irreversible. If a human is righteous, she is so because of God. If a human is a sinner, she sins against God. If a human is alive, it is because he participates in God. If he dies, it is because of God.⁷⁰ And the church is a part of and identified with the world. Consider Barth's insistence that the theme of the church is the Word of God, and that the church is the church when the Word of God is truly spoken and truly heard. This completely depends on God. The church itself cannot make this happen because the church is on the world side of the God/world distinction, which means it is marked by all the sin and brokenness that is one piece of the world's radical,

⁶⁹ Ibid, 355; as will be discussed in part two of this chapter, Barth does use the language of partnership in his mature writings on the human/divine relationship.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 357.

asymmetrical, irreversible dependence on God. Barth knows, however, that it is tempting for the church to try to rise above the devastated worldly fray, to improve the church of Esau, but in so doing it is denying its own fundamental dependence on the grace of God, and attempting to reverse an irreversible relationship. He writes, “The relation between us and God must not be reversed because of our desire to have a church without degradation or with its degradation covered by a king’s robe...The splendour of the church can consist only in its hearing in poverty the Word of the eternally rich God, and making that Word heard by human beings.”⁷¹

2. Church as Contra Gospel

Barth also emphasizes the church’s impoverished character when he insists repeatedly in the *Epistle to the Romans* that the church stands in contrast to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The church is the last *human* possibility and this is how it should be. The church that stands in opposition to the Gospel is not a debased form of religion, but rather it is the ideal church, as it is the church that effectively points away from itself to the one holy God.⁷² He is clear that he is not suggesting that some churches are contra Gospel while other churches are aligned with the Gospel; the only contrast that interests him is the infinite one between God and humanity.⁷³ Not only is he not interested in setting up one part of the divided church as the true church against others as false, but he also suggests that the very fact of persistent controversy and the reality of the painful enigma of division in the church is evidence of the distinction between the Gospel and church. Barth argues that the church is and should be a “living witness in history that human

⁷¹ “Concept of the Church”, in *Theology and Church*, 282. “*Jenes Verhältnis darf nicht umgekehrt werden dadurch, daß wir eine Kirche ohne Niedrigkeit oder mit einem ihre Niedrigkeit bedeckenden Königsmantel haben wollen. Ihre Herrlichkeit kann gerade nur darin bestehen, daß sie in ihrer ehrlich eingestandenenen Armut das Wort des ewig reichen Gottes [note] hört und zu Gehör bringt*” (*Begriff*, 155).

⁷² *Romans*, 332.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 332-333

beings have exhausted every human possibility;”⁷⁴ it is, and should be “that visibility which forces invisibility upon our notice, that humanity which directs our attention towards God.”⁷⁵

The church as contra Gospel is illustrated by one of the most evocative images to which Barth appeals in description of the church: the church as a burned out crater left behind by the explosion of a shell. With this image plucked from the devastated, blown out landscape of post-World War I Europe, Barth dramatically communicates that we no longer have direct access to the historical life of Jesus in which God vertically intersected with the world; all that remains is a crater that registers the impact.⁷⁶ Deploying a related image, he says that the activity of the community is nothing, emptiness, “no more than a void in which the Gospel reveals itself.”⁷⁷ In the process of negating circumcision and all other sacraments as “no longer fellowship with God”⁷⁸ (as here they are *under* rather than *of* God, just signs of this fellowship), he writes, “For the crater, by which the holy human beings sit and wait, is burnt out. The form of holiness is holy only in its form; and no attempt to spiritualize it can protect such holiness from ever increasing vacuity.”⁷⁹ The holy leaves a mark on earth, but holiness is not directly observable on earth. The activity of the community is not sacred, but points to the sacred. By the church’s status as void, it

⁷⁴ Ibid, 338 “*lebendiger geschichtlicher Beweis der Erschöpfung der übrigen menschlichen Möglichkeiten*” (Römerbrief, 322).

⁷⁵ Ibid, 337 “*daß gerade von dieser Gegebenheit aus der Anblick auf das Nicht-Gegebene, gerade von dieser Menschlichkeit aus der Ausblick auf Gott sich auftut*” (Römerbrief, 321).

⁷⁶ Ibid, 29

⁷⁷ Ibid, 36. “*nur Hohlraum sein will, in dem die Botschaft sich selbst darstellt*” (Römerbrief, 12). He continues, “The people of Christ, His community, know that no sacred word or work or thing exists in its own right: they know only those words and works and things which by their negation are sign-posts to the Holy One.” “*Die Christusgemeinde kennt keine an sich heiligen Worte, Werke und Dinge, sie kennt nur Worte, Werke und Dinge, die als Negationen auf den Heiligen hinweisen*” (Römerbrief, 12).

⁷⁸ Ibid, 74. “*jedes andre Sakrament ist nicht mehr Gemeinschaft mit Gott*” (Römerbrief, 49)

⁷⁹ Ibid. “*Der Krater, um den die Heiligen wartend sitzen, ist ausgebrannt. Die heilige Form ist nur noch als Form heilig und keine Vergeistigungsversuche werden der fortschreitenden Entleerung auch dieser Heiligkeit wehren können*” (Römerbrief, 49).

points to fullness. This image of the church as crater gives shape to this notion of the church as contra Gospel, as visibility that points beyond itself to invisibility.

3. The Tribulation of the Church

This idea of a visibility that forces invisibility on our notice is echoed in Barth's vision of the visible church as teetering on the razor-edge of the abyss.⁸⁰ Nothing in its earthly existence as the church of Esau secures it. It is secured by its invisible goal and promise, its identity as the church of Jacob. This insecure existence, in which the church finds itself always on the edge of a great unknown, fully dependent on a reality it does not possess and cannot control— God making Godself known— this is what Barth identifies as the *tribulation of the church*.⁸¹ The church's identity as contra-Gospel, not-God, last-human-possibility is its necessary tribulation. While many throughout history have cried hypocrisy and have pointed to the opposition of the church and the Gospel in the visible church as grounds for abandoning the church, Barth argues that a true disciple wholeheartedly undertakes the work of the church while fully aware that it is all impossibility. The church's "embarrassment is [the true disciple's], and so too its tribulation. He is one with the solidarity of the church, because it is the lack of the glory of God which creates fellowship and solidarity among human beings."⁸² This focus on the church's tribulation is only one of the ways in which Barth's early ecclesiology focuses heavily on the lack and struggle that characterizes the church's experience. It is necessary that the church's experience be characterized by lack, given the infinite qualitative distinction between God and the world. The church is not and cannot be God, and yet it is a location of longing for union with God; it is that

⁸⁰ Ibid, 360-361.

⁸¹ Ibid, 360-361

⁸² Ibid, 335- sic. "*Ihre Verlegenheit ist also seine Verlegenheit und ihre Not seine Not. Er ist solidarisch mit ihr gerade in dem, was ja überhaupt Solidarität und Gemeinschaft unter Menschen begründet, im Entbehren der Herrlichkeit Gottes*" (Römerbrief, 319).

crater by which people sit and wait.

4. *The Guilt of the Church*

The longing for union with God, as well as the general human tendency to idolatry, leads the church to give to itself, regularly, the glory that is due to God alone. If the church in its best state writhes in tribulation, then the church in its worse state seeks to overcome this tribulation by putting itself in God's place. Therefore, the church is not just afflicted by tribulation, but also by guilt. There is always a temptation in the church to substitute lesser human righteousness (plans, programs, movements, interpretations, tasks) for the true and great divine righteousness; Barth seriously questions whether the church has ever resisted this temptation.⁸³ So the visible church is racked with tribulation and with guilt. Barth firmly establishes that the church is vastly different from God, but the distinction of the church from the world is less evident. It is difficult to imagine, therefore, in what sense the church could be called holy.

5. *Vast and Permanent Unholiness—Sanctification in Hope*

In fact, Barth is clear in these early writings that holiness belongs to God alone, and that “vast and permanent unholiness” belongs to the church.⁸⁴ The church is a gathering of chosen sinners “unified and reconciled by the Word become flesh” who await redemption in history, and it stands under all the shadows that darken every historical reality.⁸⁵ But, he writes, “that is not

⁸³ Ibid, 373

⁸⁴ Ibid, 409 “*Und diese Hoffnung heiligt die Kirche in ihrer ganzen Unheiligkeit und wird sie immer wieder heiligen*” (Römerbrief, 393).

⁸⁵ Karl Barth, “Church and Theology,” in *Theology and Church*, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith, (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 292-293; (original: *Kirche und Theologie*, 1925: “*durch das fleischgewordene Wort geeinigt und versöhnt*” (659).) In the remainder of this section on Barth's early ecclesiology, I will cite from several lectures and essays gathered in this collection. These are all writings from the 1920's composed after the Romans Commentary. Buckley notes that in Barth's earliest Göttingen lectures Barth came to see the church as a locus of authority, no longer only as a locus of judgment. This shift is evident in the material cited from these early, short writings. Though here we note a continuation of the theme of the church as locus of

all which must be said about it. There is the other and the extravagant statement which must be made: this realm even in the midst of the realm of shadows is the kingdom of light, ruled by the heavenly Lord and believed by miserable human beings who yet are his chosen and called—the only, holy universal, apostolic church.”⁸⁶ It is hope, hope in the God who is holy, that sanctifies the church.

“The hope of the church is directed towards the holiness of God who dwelleth in light unapproachable towards a holiness which is utterly transcendent and miraculous. And the holiness of God is, as we have seen (11:13-15), the hope of the church, because in the church suffering and guilty humanity is able to comprehend the question to which the holiness of God is the answer. In its vast and permanent unholiness the church is sanctified by hope.”⁸⁷

So, for Barth, in these early writings, the church is made holy where it knows it is not holy, where it is open and placing its hopeful trust in the God who is. This respects the sinful character of all earthly realities, and demonstrates the paradox in which Reformed Christians find themselves when trying to identify the holiness of the church.

Two images help to give shape to this notion of the church as sanctified in hope: church as “place and instrument of God’s grace” and “light shining in darkness.” The image of the church as place and instrument of grace is a complement to the image of the church as crater. If

judgment, in the material that follows we hear a new, balancing note entering in (“Christian Community, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper,” 200).

⁸⁶ “Church and Theology,” 292-293. *“Aber nicht bloß das ist von ihm zu sagen, sondern nun das andere überschwengliche Wort, daß dies eben mitten im Schattenreich das Reich des Lichtes ist, regiert durch den himmlischen Herrn, geglaubt von den Elenden, seinen Erwählten und Berufenen, die eine, heilige, allgemeine apostolische Kirche”* (Kirche und Theologie, 659-660).

⁸⁷ Romans, 409 *“Die Heiligkeit Gottes in strengster Transzendenz und Wunderbarkeit, die Heiligkeit des Gottes, der in einem Lichte wohnt, da niemand zu kann, ist die Hoffnung der Kirche. Sie ist aber ihre Hoffnung, haben wir eben (11, 13-15) gehört, weil die Größe der Not und Schuld der Menschheit gerade an der Stelle „Kirche“ nur noch als Frage, der diese Antwort entspricht, aufgefaßt werden kann. Und diese Hoffnung heiligt die Kirche in ihrer ganzen Unheiligkeit und wird sie immer wieder heiligen”* (Römerbrief, 393).

the church is not a “place and instrument” of God’s grace, he declares “it is nothing at all.”⁸⁸ Emptiness is not the final, decisive word. Grace made the void; grace fills the void; and grace uses the void— invisibly.⁸⁹

Barth also regularly invokes the image of “light shining in darkness” when describing the church. Where the guilt of the church is proven, there the light of eternity breaks through. All the doing, pursuing, and busyness of the church dissolves when confronted with God. The church, confronted with God, cringes in humiliated horror, but at this very moment its guilt is removed and “light shines in the darkness.”⁹⁰ Only when the church goes through this horrifying process can it finally do the actual work God has for it to do, to bear witness to the light that is the Word of God, its true theme.

Both of these images reinforce the notion that what is vast, permanent, and *visible* in the church is unholiness, which, ideally, opens it, through hope, to the invisible holiness beyond it.

6. Obedience

Barth is explicit about the invisibility of ecclesial holiness: “There is no visible

⁸⁸ “Concept of the Church,” 282. “*die Kirche der Ort und das Mittel der Gnade, oder sie ist es gar nicht*” (154).

⁸⁹ Barth suggests the authority of the church is derived from its function as place and instrument of God’s grace; it is “the medium between Christ and the begraced sinner” (Ibid, 281). “*Die Kirche ist die Mitte zwischen Jesus Christus und dem begnadigten Sünder*” (Begriff, 154); In association with this image of the church as place and instrument of grace or nothing, he writes, “Because of the divine hiddenness, it is necessary that we have the church as we have God and not otherwise. We perceive it, we know it, we experience it; however, we do not possess it, because we perceive, know, and experience it, but because God takes possession of us in what we there perceive, know, and experience. There he deals with us as our Lord because he has chosen us in this way which is suited to us— not because we, even in the finest way, chose him” (Ibid, 282). “*Eben mit dieser Verborgenheit ist dafür gesorgt, daß wir sie so haben müssen, wie wir Gott haben, und nicht anders. Wir nehmen sie wahr, wir erkennen sie, wir erfahren [298] sie, aber nicht damit haben wir sie, daß wir sie wahrnehmen, erkennen, erfahren, sondern damit, daß Gott in dem, was wir da wahrnehmen, erkennen und erfahren, uns hat, als der Herr an uns handelt, daß er in dieser uns angemessenen Weise uns erwählt hat und nicht, auch nicht in der feinsten Weise, wir ihn [vgl. Joh. 15, 16]*” (Begriff, 154-155).

⁹⁰ *Romans*, 377

sanctification of human beings; no sanctification which can be seen, proved or measured; none which does not have to be *believed*... There is no sanctification which is not wholly shrouded in the unsanctified.”⁹¹The sanctified are yet sinners. Nonetheless, he argues that sanctification involves *obedience*, and obedience is visible. This obedience is always “spotted and distorted” because it is the obedience of sinners, but for all its deficiency it is recognizable as obedience in the light of Christ’s resurrection.⁹² The church’s obedience can thus be said to be visible in faith, a qualified form of visibility. The church’s obedience is in no way a manifestation of its own righteousness, but is a proclamation of God’s righteousness, an offering made holy by the holy altar it is laid upon.⁹³ The church participates in the holiness of God by assuming an obedient posture in faith, but this obedience is not holiness; it is obedience to holiness.⁹⁴

7. Church as the Earthly Body of its Heavenly Lord

To what or, better, to whom is the church obedient? To the Word of God, its theme. And who is the Word of God? Jesus Christ— He is the light shining in darkness, the act of God through the church. Barth, in these early writings occasionally identifies the church as the *earthly*

⁹¹ Karl Barth, “Church and Culture”, in *Theology and Church*, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith, (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 345; (originally “Die Kirche und die Kultur,” 1926). “*Es gibt keine in die Erscheinung tretende Heiligung des Menschen, keine Heiligung, die man sehen, feststellen, messen könnte, die man nicht glauben müßte... Es gibt keine Heiligkeit, die nicht gänzlich verhüllt wäre von Unheiligkeit*” (*Kirche und Kultur*, 27).

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Barth identifies the church as “the community of faith and obedience living from the Word of God, the community of the faith and obedience of sinful human beings” (*Ibid.*). Part of the faith and obedience of the sinful people who make up the church is the recognition of their sin even in their faith and obedience. This is an insight that is crucial to the constructive work of this project and will be explored in part two. It is of interest that Barth’s early ecclesiology invokes hope and faith, but neglects to discuss love. This neglect closes a door to one powerful way of speaking of the church’s visible participation in holiness. Barth’s mature writings remedy this neglect. This early insight about the necessity of recognizing sin even in the midst of faith and obedience when complemented with a fuller understanding of the act of love as central to faith and obedience holds great promise for a responsible Reformed position on the visible holiness of the church.

body of its *heavenly* Lord.⁹⁵ In so naming the relation between church and Christ, Barth is preserving the infinite, qualitative distinction: Christ is in heaven and the church is on earth. The church and Christ are necessarily connected, but they are not identical. Barth does not allow for an identification of the church with Christ, but he does believe Christ works through the church.

When Barth speaks of the relationship between Christ and the church, he repeatedly emphasizes the relativity of the church's authority in comparison with the absolute authority of its head, Jesus Christ. For example, in response to Erik Peterson's Roman Catholic perspective on the authority of Christ present in the church he writes, "For Christ's bestowal of his power on his Church cannot be reasonably understood to mean that he had partially relinquished his own power, that in relation to the Church he had ceased to be wholly God."⁹⁶ We see here, once again, Barth's preservation of the radical God/world distinction. Whereas Christ's authority is eternal, absolute, and essential, the church's authority is temporal, relative, and formal and is conditioned by its sin.⁹⁷

While he makes these claims about the relativity of the church's authority in relation to Christ in an argument with a Catholic whom he suspects of absolutizing the church's authority, he accuses liberal Protestants of so relativizing the authority of the church that there is no substance left in the church at all.

Is the final consummation of Protestant truth today to be sought in the certainly incontrovertible truth that God's gracious presence 'cannot be shut up in any sacrament box', but 'in every place, in the shoemaker's shop, in the factory, in the stone-cutter's yard, in the laboratory, everywhere, time flows into eternity'? In the truth that a pastor has no

⁹⁵ e.g. "Concept of Church," 281; when this image surfaces it is often linked to the concept of the church as instrument and place of grace.

⁹⁶ "Church and Theology," 293. "*Denn das kann die Gewaltverleihung an seine Kirche sinnvollerweise nicht bedeuten, daß Christus zu ihren Gunsten sozusagen abgedankt, daß er sich auch nur teilweise in ihre Gewalt begeben, daß er aufgehört hätte, auch ihr gegenüber ganz und gar Gott zu sein*" (*Kirche und Theologie*, 661).

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 299; which is why, Barth argues, it requires the critical work of theologians.

religious authority which every other member of the community could not have? And that, to talk like Luther, the water at baptism is no better than the water ‘the cow drinks’? Are we to accept the total loss of the insight that the problem of Church, Word, and sacrament as earthly-human service of the Word of God really begins on the other side of all these obviously true assertions? Do we not see that such assertions leave untouched the possibility and necessity of a *relative* mediation, of a *relative* service of God, which though relative must be taken seriously?⁹⁸

Note that, once again, his focus is on the *relativity* of the church’s life in relation to Christ. We see though that the church’s obedience is a form of service to the Word of God, that while relative, particularly given its sinful character, it is nonetheless something to be taken seriously. He remarks in the same speech that the Reformers consistently fought against “all direct identifications with God in the visible church,”⁹⁹ but they did not remove God as an actor in the visible church the way that modern liberal Protestantism has. Roman Catholicism’s maintenance

⁹⁸ Karl Barth, “Catholicism: question to Protestant Church,” in *Theology and Church*, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith, (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 319. (Originally *Der römische Katholizismus als Frage an die protestantische Kirche*, 1928). “Sollte heute der protestantischen Wahrheit letzter Schluß in diesem Kapitel etwa wirklich in der gewiß unbestreitbaren Wahrheit zu suchen sein, daß Gottes Gnadengegenwart «in kein Sakramentshäuschen eingeschlossen werden» kann, sondern: «an jedem Ort, in der Schusterwerkstatt, im Fabrikraum, im Bergwerk, im Laboratorium, überall mündet die Zeit in die Ewigkeit» Ich tue es also unter dem Gesichtspunkt: «Wenn das am grünen Holz geschieht ...» [Lk. 23, 31], und gewiß nicht ohne der sonstigen Verdienste des Tübinger Meisters und meines anderweitigen Konsensus mit ihm eingedenk zu sein.? Daß «ein Pfarrer keine religiöse Vollmacht hat, die nicht jedes andere Gemeindeglied auch haben könnte»? Daß, mit Luther zu reden, das Wasser in der Taufe «nichts besser» ist «denn das, so die Kuh trinkt»? Sollte die Einsicht unter uns verloren gegangen sein, daß jenseits aller der-1345|art selbstverständlicher Feststellungen das Problem von Kirche, Wort und Sakrament als irdisch-menschlichem Dienst an Gottes Wort doch erst anfängt, daß solcher Feststellungen unbeschadet die Möglichkeit und Notwendigkeit einer relativen Vermittlung, eines relativen Dienstes als solche durchaus ernst zu nehmen ist” (*Kathol/Prot*, 324-325).

⁹⁹ Ibid, 315 “Und wenn nun die Reformation darin die Wiederherstellung der Kirche war, daß sie jenes «Tu solus!» aufnahm und unterstrich und vor allem konkret werden ließ, wie es in der katholischen Kirche nie konkret wurde noch wird, nämlich durch konsequenten Kampf gegen alle direkten Identifikationen, wenn sie das «Tu solus!» bezog auf Jesus Christus als den Herrn in unaufhebbarer Gegensatz zu allen seinen Knechten, als das Wort in unaufhebbarer Gegensatz zu allem, was wir uns selbst sagen, als den Geist in unaufhebbarer Gegensatz zu allen Dingen, wenn sie die Echtheit dieses «Tu solus!» erneuerte, indem sie es kontrapunktierte durch das «sola fide», in dem sie Gottes Gegenwart in seiner Kirche erkannt und bekannt wissen wollte - so hat sie damit dieses «Tu» nicht kleiner, sondern größer machen, nicht symbolisch verflüchtigen, sondern wirklicher in die Mitte stellen wollen” (*Kathol/Prot*, 320).

of the doctrine of “Christ Present,” despite all the problems with the way it is understood, is a challenge to the Protestant Church to assess to what degree it is still the church.

It would seem that Barth would say to us that if we need to *see* something distinct in the church, we should look for humble obedience to the Word of God, and seeing such obedience, trust in the holiness to which it is referred.

Concluding Comments

I have now argued that Barth’s signature insight into the infinite, qualitative distinction between God and the world significantly shapes his early ecclesiology and constrains his understanding of the church’s holiness making that holiness a purely invisible phenomenon as it properly belongs on the God side of the God/world line. His early ecclesiological work displays a Reformed insistence on the sinful character of every human phenomenon and therefore the radical need for the grace of God. But there is no guarantee that any earthly church *will* be the place of and instrument of God’s grace, that it *will* be a site of even spotted obedience, that it *will* be a place of encounter with Jesus Christ. And all appearances would suggest, as Barth fully acknowledges, that it is nothing but a burnt-out crater. *We can’t see* holiness in the image of the church that surfaces from Barth’s early ecclesiological weaving, which is why it helps us to see so clearly the problem confronting Reformed Christianity. We struggle to understand the visible holiness of the church and yet have a need to understand the church as somehow distinct from the world. This struggle leaves the church vulnerable to unhelpful sacralization of aspects of its visible life. The early Barth would soundly condemn such sacralization as idolatrous, but resources for its prevention are not apparent in these earliest of his ecclesiological writings.

Mature Barth- The Christological Holiness of the Church

Barth's mature ecclesiology, articulated most fully in volume four of the *Dogmatics*, carries forward all of the insights that were so significant in his early construal of the church; that said, these insights all bear the mark of a sharpened christological focus. Barth continues to identify the church with the sinful world and to speak of the church as a site of divine action, though now he emphasizes more strongly the work of the Holy Spirit in and through the church. He develops more fully his understanding of the church as the earthly historical form of Jesus Christ and works out his discussion of the church's obedience through a discussion of its correspondence to and reflection of its head Jesus Christ. His most basic approach is to interpret its holiness as a confession of faith. It is my contention that the increased Christological emphasis loosens, but does not remove the constraints on Barth's construal of the holiness of the church, as the infinite qualitative distinction remains a controlling theme even in his mature work.

Church identified with sinful world

As we have already noted, Barth's early ecclesiological efforts demonstrate work to keep the church on the world side of the God/world distinction. Resonant with the crater imagery in the Romans commentary, *Church Dogmatics* describes the economy of salvation in geometric terms. He suggests that Christology be thought of as a vertical line meeting a horizontal line, the horizontal line being the sin of humanity. Justification is the point where the lines meet. Barth identifies faith and the church as "again the horizontal line, but this time seen as intersected by the vertical."¹⁰⁰ Sinful Humanity and Faithful/churched Humanity are the same line; the only difference is that those with Christian faith, those who are incorporated in the Christian

¹⁰⁰ CD, IV.1.62, 643 "*noch einmal jene Horizontale: nunmehr gesehen als gekreuzt durch die Vertikale*" (KD, IV.1, 718-719).

community, *see* and *know* that their world has been intersected by the reality of God in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Certainly Barth always connected the church's identification with the sinful world to the work of God's revelation in Christ to that world, but in his mature work he more thoroughly works out the church's identification with the sinful world within an explicit depiction of the Christ event.

In fact, "event" is the key word in Barth's work to define the church in IV.1 of his *Dogmatics*. The centrality of this concept to his understanding of the church is on display in the following lengthy definition from IV/1; I have placed portions of this quote in boldface to draw out his emphasis on event:

the Church is a work which takes place among human beings in the form of a human activity. Therefore it not only has a history, but--like humanity (*CD* III, 2 par. 44)-it exists only as a definite history takes place, that is to say, only as it is gathered and lets itself be gathered and gathers itself by the living Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit... Its act is its being, its status its dynamic, its essence its existence. The Church *is* **when it takes place that God lets certain human beings** live as His servants, His friends, His children, the witnesses of the reconciliation of the world with Himself as it has taken place in Jesus Christ, the preachers of the victory which has been won in Him over sin and suffering and death, the heralds of His future revelation in which the glory of the Creator will be declared to all creation as that of His love and faithfulness and mercy. The Church *is* **when it happens to these human beings in common** that they may receive the verdict on the whole world of human beings which has been pronounced in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead... The Church *is* when these human beings **subject themselves** to the law of the Gospel, " the law of the Spirit of life " (Rom 8:2), when they become obedient to it... The Church *is* when **these human beings** as the **first-fruits of all creation can know and have to acknowledge the Lord of the world in His faithfulness as the Lord of the covenant which He has maintained and fulfilled**, and therefore as their Lord. The Church *is* in the **particular relationship of these human beings**, when this is possible and actual under the sovereignty of Jesus Christ in their common hearing and obeying, when they can make a common response with their existence to the work of Jesus Christ received by them as Word.¹⁰¹

What Barth elsewhere expresses in geometric terms, here he captures in an understanding of

¹⁰¹ *CD*, IV.1.62, 650-651, emphasis mine

church as event. The church is human, fully identified with the sinful human world, but what the church *is*, the essence that is its existence (to borrow his language) is an event, something that happens *to* people, something that *God lets* happen. It is the event in which God allows certain people to live in humble, intimate relationship with Godself, or to be witnesses to what God has done on behalf of all the world, in which these certain people as the “first-fruits of all creation” recognize the Lord of the World as their Lord.¹⁰² The church is distinct from other human societies and from the world more generally because of its special relationship with God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ, but without this special relationship that allows for dynamic movement and happening, the church is nothing and has nothing to offer the world. Barth expresses the distinction of the church in and through its unique relationship to the person and work of Jesus Christ in the following powerful statement:

But because He is its Head, the Christian community which is His body is the gathering of those human beings whom already before all others He has made willing and ready for life under the divine verdict executed in His death and revealed in His resurrection from the dead... What distinguishes the human beings united in the community and therefore the community itself is that they acknowledge what has been done from God by Him, the Lord who became a servant, not only for them but for all human beings; that they recognise as such the One who is not only their Lord but the Lord of the whole world; and that they confess Him with their life.¹⁰³

What the church *is*—that event in which God’s justifying grace encounters humanity—is not visible.¹⁰⁴ The church’s true identity cannot be *seen* in any subsection of the church, not any

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 661. “*Die christliche Gemeinde, die sein Leib ist, weil und indem er ihr Haupt ist, ist aber die Versammlung derjenigen Menschen, «die durch ihn allen Anderen zuvor jetzt schon zu einem Leben unter dem in seinem Tod vollzogenen und in seiner Auferweckung von den Toten offenbarten göttlichen Urteil willig und bereit gemacht sind»... Das zeichnet die in der Gemeinde vereinigten Menschen und damit sie selbst aus, daß sie das, was durch ihn, den zum Knecht Gewordenen, nicht nur für sie, sondern für alle Menschen von Gott her geschehen ist, anerkennen, ihn, der nicht nur ihr Herr, sondern der Herr der ganzen Welt ist, als solchen erkennen und mit ihrem Leben sich dazu bekennen dürfen*” (KD, IV.1, 738-739).

¹⁰⁴ It appears Barth is using event language to express the same insights contained in his early

human party or confession, not in any individuals within it. Barth asserts “There is nothing within it which does not continually have to receive again this part, which does not have to be believed in its participation.”¹⁰⁵ What is visible is “always sinful history— just as the individual believer is not only a creature but a sinful human being.”¹⁰⁶ Barth cautions that when we are looking upon the visible church born of the invisible encounter that constitutes it, we have to remember, always, that those gathered in Christian community stand ever in need of the grace of God, “of their invisible Lord and His invisible Spirit, that it is He who controls the church without in any sense being controlled by it.”¹⁰⁷ Barth is clear that the outward degeneration of the church is perennial and this is why the church needs to be *ecclesia semper reformanda* (the church always being reformed), and why the church stands perpetually subject to criticism from its Lord, from the world, and from itself.¹⁰⁸

While throughout the history of Christian doctrine many considerations of the persistence

discussion of the Church of Jacob. Event language is not lacking from Barth’s *Romans* commentary altogether, though it is more fully developed in these mature writings. All of these insights evidence continuity with his early teachings. Though Barth’s emphasis on event was intended to bring a historicizing element into his theology, his emphasis on the invisible character of the event is de-historicizing. This concept, which one would think would increase the ease with which he could speak about visible dimensions of the church’s life, does not do this work for him.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 657 “*nichts, was seinen Anteil daran nicht immer wieder empfangen müßte, was in seinem Anteil daran nicht geglaubt werden müßte*” (KD, IV.1, 734).

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. “*ist sie immer auch sündige Geschichte, wie ja auch der einzelne Glaubende nicht nur Geschöpf, sondern immer auch ein sündiger Mensch ist*” (KD, IV.1, 734); cf. IV.2.67, 617-618.

¹⁰⁷ CD IV.1, 62, 658; “*aber ihres unsichtbaren Herrn und seines unsichtbaren Geistes bedürftig bleibt: daß er über die Kirche verfügt, ohne daß die Kirche auch nur im Geringsten auch über ihn verfügte*” (KD, IV.1, 735).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 689-690; Barth suggests that division in the church is one powerful mark of the perennial degeneration of the church. He labels church division the impossible possibility, which is identical to the language he uses to describe sin. “Certainly there is no trace of this plurality in the New Testament, and in view of the being of the community as the body of Christ it is— ontologically, we can say—quite impossible it is possible only as sin is possible” (Ibid, 677.) “*Sicher ist jene Vielheit, von der im Neuen Testament keine Spur wahrzunehmen ist, vom Sein der Gemeinde als vom Leib Christi her schlicht – man darf auch hier sagen: ontologisch – unmöglich: nur eben so möglich, wie die Sünde möglich ist*” (KD, IV.1, 756).

of sin in the Christian community have turned to doctrines of the mixed body, and though Barth grants the likelihood that there are both true and false members in the gathered community,¹⁰⁹ he is consistent in resisting drawing a dividing line between groups of human beings.¹¹⁰ In fact, Barth's solution to the problem of the mixed body, against a Roman Catholic "*sacramental opus operatum*" or a Liberal Protestant "*moral opus operantis*,"¹¹¹ is the election of Jesus Christ. And given that Barth understands all of humanity to be elect in Jesus Christ, this solution further underscores Barth's identification of the church with sinful humanity, wholly dependent on the saving choice and work of God. If anything, it would seem Barth argues for the mixed character of each individual Christian, and, therefore necessarily, of the church as a whole.¹¹² All Christian action is undertaken by sinful human beings, and as such it is always imperiled.¹¹³ This does not mean that Barth forsakes any hope for a relative faithfulness and holiness within the Christian community, but just as in his early teachings, he understands this possibility to be secondary to and responsive to God's act in Christ by the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ e.g., Ibid, 697-698

¹¹⁰ Ibid. He explicitly resists drawing lines within the church. The universality of the persistence of sin in the community is expressed clearly in his baptismal teachings; "The baptising community and those baptised by it stand together before this [judgment] seat" (CD IV.4, 78-79; cf. 49) "*Vor seinem Richterstuhl «müssen wir Alle offenbar werden» (2. Kor. 5, 10), stehen miteinander die taufende Gemeinde und ihre Täuflinge*" (KD, IV.4, 87).

¹¹¹ CD, IV.1.62, 696

¹¹² e.g. CD, IV.2, 783. This is not at all surprising as Barth has a dialectical understanding of the relationship between the Christian individual and the Christian community. The Christian community lives only by individual lives of faith, but those faithful lives unfold only in the Christian community (see e.g. CD IV.2.68, 615-616.) He writes "We may distinguish but we cannot separate the upbuilding of the community from the sanctification of its members, or vice versa" (Ibid, 779). "*Man mag hier wohl unterscheiden, man darf hier aber Keines vom Anderen trennen: die Erbauung der Gemeinde nicht von der Heiligung ihrer Glieder und diese nicht von jener*" (KD, IV.2, 884).

¹¹³ This comes through repeatedly in Barth's teachings on Baptism, which will be considered more fully below. See especially, CD IV.4, 3; 204.

¹¹⁴ Barth's increased attention to pneumatology serves his ecclesiological discussions well as will be explored in part two of this chapter. They are less a part of the problem, *per se*, and more

In fact, all through this discussion of Barth's insistence on the church's identification with the sinfulness of the world, God's act in and through the church, which takes place by the Holy Spirit, has been central. Barth writes:

...as it is gathered and built up and commissioned by the Holy Spirit it becomes and is this particular part of the creaturely world, acquiring a part in His holiness, although in and of itself it is not holy, it is nothing out of the ordinary, indeed as His community within Adamic humanity it is just as unholy as that humanity, sharing its sin and guilt and standing absolutely in need of its justification.¹¹⁵

Were it not for its gathering and commissioning by the Holy Spirit, were it not for its contact with God's justifying work in Jesus Christ— primarily invisible phenomena- the church would have no share in holiness at all. It is wholly identified with the sinful world, save for the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, in and through it.¹¹⁶

The Church as the Earthly, Historical Form of Jesus Christ

Barth's insistence that the church is identified with the sinful world raises questions about the degree to which it makes sense to identify the church as the body of Christ in the world.¹¹⁷

Barth appears to have wrestled with this as his thought developed. While in his early writings Barth occasionally spoke of the church as the earthly, historical form of its heavenly Lord, in his mature writings he develops this idea more extensively and he frequently substitutes "Jesus

indicative of the possibility in his teaching.

¹¹⁵ CD IV.1.62, 687 "*als seine Gemeinde versammelt, aufbaut und aussendet, wird und ist sie jener besondere Teil der Geschöpfungswelt, bekommt sie, die aus und in sich selbst nicht heilig, nichts Besonderes, ja als seine Gemeinde inmitten der adamitischen Menschheit so unheilig wie diese ist, mit ihr sündigt und sich schuldig macht, mit ihr der Rechtfertigung schlechthin bedürftig ist, Anteil an seiner Heiligkeit*" (KD, IV.1, 767).

¹¹⁶ Clearly, early emphases have not been lost. He is still pointing to the necessary invisibility of the church's holiness, but more consistently working this theme out in the midst of an explicit christological discussion and more consistently referencing the work of the Holy Spirit. The extent to which the work of the Holy Spirit is *visible*, is a matter taken up in part two of the chapter.

¹¹⁷ And yet, as Healy demonstrates, this is Barth's preferred biblical image for the church. (Healy, "The Logic of Karl Barth's Ecclesiology: Analysis, Assessment and Proposed Modifications.")

Christ” for “heavenly Lord.” He often speaks of this relation in terms of Paul’s imagery in 1 Corinthians—Jesus Christ is head of the church, which is his body. We already saw this language and imagery in the quote used to illustrate that which distinguishes the church even as it remains identified with the sinful world.¹¹⁸ In that statement we saw that because Christ is the head of the Christian community, which is his body, those in the body uniquely recognize him as their Lord. Barth offers two important qualifications when discussing the church’s identity as the earthly, historical form of Jesus Christ. First, Christ is the church, but the church is not Christ. Second, another way of saying the first, Christ is the subject of the church. Through these qualifications Barth emphasizes the irreversible relation between God and humanity and denies any incarnational status to the earthly church. We thus see in these qualifications how his mature christology is loosening, but not removing the constraints on his construal of the visible holiness of the church.

Christ is Church, Church is not Christ

Barth speaks of the relation between Christ to church as one of mystery to form. The visible and the invisible church are not two realities, but one. He writes, “The mystery is hidden in the form, but represented and to be sought out in it. The visible lives wholly by the invisible. The invisible is only represented and to be sought out in the visible. Neither can be separated from the other. Both in their unity are the body, the earthly-historical form of existence of the one Living Lord Jesus Christ.”¹¹⁹ Barth is clear that Christ not only lives *above* human history addressing that history from the beyond, but also *within* a special element of this history created by and wholly dependent on him— the Christian community.¹²⁰ Where his early writings stressed

¹¹⁸ See pg. 54, note 103 above.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 669

¹²⁰ Ibid, 660-661

the address from beyond, his mature writings find a way to express Christ's ongoing presence in and through his church as well.¹²¹

In an extended reflection on 1 Corinthians 12, Barth writes, "it is not the community which is called a body, or compared to it, but Christ Himself."¹²² Nothing about the church's earthly existence or organization makes it a body, "It is *soma* because it actually derives from Jesus Christ, because of Him it exists as His body."¹²³ He suggests this statement about the church as the body of Christ is not to be read as a symbol or metaphor. The church *is* Christ's

¹²¹ Though Barth less consistently identifies the church as "the earthly-historical form of its heavenly Lord" in his mature writings, Christ's designation as heavenly head and a location of Christ in heaven is not lost. He argues, for example, that the *ecclesia triumphans* (the church triumphant, those who have died in Christ) are already "with Him, the Head of the body, [taking] part in the glory which is still hidden from the *ecclesia militans*" (the church militant). (CD, IV.1.62, 669) "*mit ihm als dem Haupt seines Leibes an der der ecclesia militans noch verborgenen Herrlichkeit Gottes teilnimmt*" (KD, 747). This would appear to distance Christ from His earthly body, and in this same passage he names Christ the church's heavenly lord, but he is building a case for the nearness of both this heavenly Lord and the church triumphant to the church militant, he suggests that Christ, the Lord of the church, and the church triumphant are both "in the midst" of the church militant. Note that even when speaking of the church triumphant that is with Christ in heaven and witnessing his glory he maintains a distinction between God and humanity, the church triumphant is *with* Christ. It does not become Christ. A similar observation can be made about this statement from IV.2 "For the Jesus Christ who rules the world *ad dexteram Patris omnipotentis* is identical with the King of this people of His which on earth finds itself on this way and in this movement" (622). Jesus Christ is clearly understood to be in heaven, though intimately connected to, yet distinguished from this people on earth. (Cf. CD IV.4, 134 "The command and the promise—we have to say this in respect of the baptising community as well as the candidate—have both come down to them from the inaccessible height, distance and otherness of God." "*das Gebot und die Verheißung, stammen nicht aus ihnen: aus dem zu taufenden Menschen nicht und auch nicht aus der ihn taufenden Gemeinde, geschweige denn aus dem, der sie in dieser Sache vertritt. Gebot und Verheißung miteinander sind – nicht nur im Blick auf den Täufling, sondern auch im Blick auf die taufende Gemeinde wird das nie anders zu sagen sein – aus der ihnen unerreichbaren Höhe, Ferne und Fremde Gottes zu ihnen herabgestiegen*" (KD, IV.4, 147).

¹²² CD, IV.1.62, 663. "*daß da nicht in erster Linie die Gemeinde ein Leib genannt bzw. einem solchen gleichgesetzt, sondern daß zunächst von Christus gesagt wird*" (KD, IV.1, 740).

¹²³ Ibid. "*ein σῶμα genannt werden kann, sondern darum, weil sie faktisch von Jesus Christus her – und nun eben von ihm her als sein Leib existiert*" (KD, 740-741).

ongoing earthly, historical existence, his body, “His body is the community.”¹²⁴

But the community doesn’t become Christ’s body by the Spirit of Pentecost, or by all the gifts given by the Spirit, or the faith awakened by the Spirit, nor by the results of preaching and receiving the Gospel, nor by the “so-called sacraments” of baptism and communion¹²⁵; “It is the body, and its members are members of this body, in Jesus Christ, in His election from all eternity.”¹²⁶ Christians are made members of the body only through the election of Christ, anything that follows from this is a response to election, and is not itself the constituting reality of the church.

As Barth works out his understanding of the church as the body of Christ, as the earthly, historical form of Christ’s existence, he is careful to maintain his emphasis on the irreversible character of the relation between God and World, which was on display in his early ecclesiology. The human dimensions of the church’s life are tremendously significant,¹²⁷ but they are not definitive. God’s act in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit is what makes the church, the church.¹²⁸ Therefore, while Barth can say clearly that Christ is the church, he will never turn this statement around.¹²⁹ His identification of Christ as *subject* of the church further opens up this

¹²⁴ Ibid, 666 “*ist sein Leib seine Gemeinde*” (744).

¹²⁵ Ibid, 667; Barth insists that Christ is the only true sacrament.

¹²⁶ Ibid. “*Sie ist, sie sind das in Jesus Christus, in seiner Erwählung von Ewigkeit her*” (KD, IV.1, 744).

¹²⁷ Thus far the significance of these human dimensions has not been adequately expressed. This will hopefully become more apparent in part two of the chapter.

¹²⁸ And it is what makes Christians, Christian. Commenting on an imagined saint he writes “He would not be a saint if he tried to be so in and for himself apart from this provisional representation of the sanctification which has taken place in Jesus Christ. *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. We shall have good reason to remember this assertion” (CD, IV.2.67, 622). “*Der wäre kein Heiliger, der sich dieser vorläufigen Darstellung der in Jesus Christus geschehenen Heiligung gegenüber abseits stellen und ein Heiliger für sich sein wollte. Extra ecclesiam nulla salus. Wir werden Anlaß haben, uns dieser Feststellung zu erinnern*” (KD, IV.2, 705).

¹²⁹ This is stated clearly in a passage considered extensively in the next section “There can, therefore, be no question of a reversal in which either the community or the individual Christian

insistence on the irreversible character of the relationship.

Christ as Subject of the Church

In working out the relationship of Christ to the church, Barth explicitly rejects any understanding of the church as a continued incarnation. Though when he makes a statement like: “This people, this community, is the form of His body in which Jesus Christ, its one heavenly head, also exists and has therefore His earthly-historical form of existence,”¹³⁰ it is hard to see how ecclesial existence is not continued incarnation. His argument denying incarnational status to the church rests on his assertion of Christ as true subject of the church, on the church’s existence being wholly derivative of His existence.

Not for a single moment or in any respect can it be His body without Him, its head. Indeed, it cannot be at all without Him. It does not exist apart from Him. It exists only as the body which serves Him the Head. For this reason—for otherwise it would have a separate and autonomous existence—it cannot even be His likeness or analogy. We cannot speak, then,

equates himself with Jesus Christ, becoming a subject where He is only the predicate.” (CD, IV.2.64, 59-60)

¹³⁰ CD, IV.2.64, 59. “*Eben dieses Volk, diese Gemeinde, ist die Gestalt seines Leibes, in der Jesus Christus, sein eines himmlisches Haupt auch existiert und also seine irdisch-geschichtliche Existenzform*” (KD, IV.2, 64). It might be hard to see how ecclesial existence is not continued incarnation. Building on Healy’s observation that Barth neglects all but one (“body of Christ”) of the myriad biblical images or metaphors for the church, Yocum argues that this “too exclusive dependence on the notion of the ‘body of Christ’, especially understood as the ‘earthly-historical form’ of Christ’s existence, too easily, contra Barth’s intention, identifies the Church straightforwardly with the being and action of Christ” (*Ecclesial Mediation in Karl Barth* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 121). Farrow concurs with this assessment though he identifies the problem less in overdependence on a particular metaphor and more on Barth’s universalization of the resurrected Christ which functions a denial of Jesus’ real, bodily absence. He writes that “The distance that opens up *between* Jesus and us is really the room makes in himself *for* us, the time in between the times is his own time in the form it takes as he extends it to us.” (Douglas Farrow, *Ascension and Ecclesia* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004), 239.) Nonetheless, this time belongs to Jesus, it is his own, and therefore his absence is apparent rather than actual. Christ’s hidden presence, not just in the church, but in the world as a whole, is what the church is to celebrate. Farrow argues that the eucharist, as central and definitive act of the church, exists in the dialectic between real presence and absence and judges Barth to have lost this tension, privileging presence over absence. In final analysis he argues that despite Barth’s protestations, “the church *is* the incarnation in this secondary form.” (*Ascension and Ecclesia*, 253.)

of a repetition or extension of the incarnation taking place in it... There can, therefore, be no question of a reversal in which either the community or the individual Christian equates himself with Jesus Christ, becoming a subject where He is only the predicate. There can be no question of a divinisation of the church or the individual Christian which Jesus Christ has only to serve as a vehicle or redemptive agency. All this is cut away at the root and made quite impossible by the fact that He Himself is the subject present and active and operative in His community.¹³¹

Jesus Christ has an earthly, historical existence. In the incarnation this existence was the body of Jesus of Nazareth. After the Resurrection this existence has been the church. But this does not

¹³¹ CD, IV.2.64, 59-60. “*Sie kann ohne ihn, ihr Haupt, keinen Moment und in keiner Hinsicht sein Leib, sie kann ohne ihn überhaupt nicht sein. Sie existiert also nicht getrennt von ihm. Sie existiert nur als der ihm als dem Haupte dienende Leib. Eben darum kann sie aber auch nicht – denn dazu müßte sie ja selbständig getrennt von ihm existieren – sein Abbild, sein Analogon sein. Darum kann von einer in ihr stattfindenden Wiederholung oder Fortsetzung der Inkarnation keine Rede sein... So kann und darf sie aber auch nicht mehr als das sein, kann also eine Umkehrung, in der sie oder gar der einzelne Christ sich selbst mit Jesus Christus identifizierte und also Subjekt, er aber bloßes Prädikat würde, kann eine in der Kirche oder im einzelnen Christen stattfindende Vergottung, der Jesus Christus dann als bloßes Vehikel und Heilmittel zu dienen hätte, nicht in Frage kommen. Das Alles ist dadurch in der Wurzel abgeschnitten und unmöglich gemacht, daß er selbst das in seiner Gemeinde gegenwärtige*” (KD, IV.2, 64). Consider also this statement from CD IV.3.72 “*But[the church] is not commanded to represent, introduce, bring into play or even in a sense accomplish again in its being, speech and action either reconciliation, the covenant, the kingdom or the new world reality. It is not commanded even in the earthly historical sphere to take the place of Jesus Christ... It lives as true prophecy by the fact that it remains distinct from his, that it is subject to it, that it does not try to replace it, but that which supreme power and yet with the deepest humility it points to the work of God accomplished in Him and the Word of God spoken in Him, inviting to gratitude for this work and the hearing of this Word, but not pretending to be claimed for more than this indication and invitation, nor to be capable of anything more*” (836). “*Sie ist aber nicht geheißen, die Versöhnung, den Bund, das Reich, die neue Weltwirklichkeit in ihrem Sein, Reden und Tun zu repräsentieren, auf den Plan zu führen, ins Spiel zu bringen, gewissermaßen nachzuvollziehen. Sie ist nicht geheißen, auch nur im irdisch- geschichtlichen Raum an die Stelle Jesu Christi zu treten... Sie lebt als wahre Prophetie davon, daß sie von der seinigen unterschieden bleibt, sich ihr unterordnet, sie also nicht ersetzen will, sondern nur eben in höchster Kraft, aber auch in tiefster Demut auf das in ihm geschehene Werk und gesprochene Wort Gottes hinweist, zur Dankbarkeit für sein Werk und so zum Hören auf sein Wort einladet, mehr als dieser Hinweis und diese Einladung zu sein, mehr als das leisten zu können weder beansprucht noch vorgibt*” (KD, IV.3, 957-958). Statements like these reflect Barth’s rejection, in his later writings, of any notion of ecclesial mediation of grace. Yocum’s project examines and critiques this dimension of Barth’s mature ecclesiology, suggesting that his early writings include some affirmation of ecclesial mediation, but that his later writings eliminate this altogether, to deleterious effect for his entire theological project (*Ecclesial Mediation in Karl Barth*, 2004).

mean the church is a “repetition or extension” of the incarnation. Earlier he asserts that the relation between the eternal Son of God’s first earthly existence in the body of Jesus of Nazareth and his second in his community the church is “not so much comparable as indirectly identical.”¹³² Christ lives through his community, but that community has a life of its own.¹³³ He insists that Jesus Christ carries out his work of sanctification from a remote location (the right hand of God in heaven), but does so by a vehicle of intimate presence, his self-attestation, the Holy Spirit.¹³⁴ If Jesus is remote in heaven, operating as subject from his location on high, this is

¹³² Ibid, 59

¹³³ He makes very similar claims in his discussion of individual Christian disciples. Jesus is the subject of the individual Christian disciple as well as of the community as a whole. He is consistent in understanding individual disciples and Christian community in dialectical relation (CD, IV.4, 14).

¹³⁴ “The power with which He works is not, then, merely a remote operation of Jesus. It is this. Risen from the dead, ascended into heaven, seated at the right hand of God the Father, Jesus is remote from earthly history and the community which exists in it. He is unattainably superior to it. He is separated from it by an abyss which cannot be bridged. He is even hidden from it in God (Col 3:3)- and with Him, of course, the true life of the community. He (and its true life) cannot be violated or controlled by it. If in spite of this He is still at work in earthly history, and in the community as it exists in it, by the quickening power of His Holy Spirit, we can certainly call this His operation at a distance. From the point to which there is no way, from heaven, from the throne, from the right hand of God, from His hiddenness in God, **He overcomes that abyss in the Holy Spirit**, operating here from that exalted status, working in time, in which the *communio sanctorum* is an event and has its history in many events, from the eternity of the life which He has in common with God. **The man Jesus has also that form of existence, so that it is quite true that His action towards His community in the quickening power of the Holy Spirit is a remote operation**” (CD, IV.2.67, 652, emphasis mine). “*So ist die Macht, in der er wirkt, nicht nur eine Fernwirkung Jesu. Sie ist auch seine Fernwirkung. Auferstanden von den Toten, aufgefahren gen Himmel, sitzend zur Rechten Gottes des Vaters ist Jesus ja der irdischen Geschichte und der in ihr existierenden Gemeinde auch ferne, ihr unerreichbar hoch überlegen, durch einen von ihr her nicht zu überschreitenden Abgrund von ihr geschieden, auch ihr gegenüber in Gott verborgen (Kol. 3, 3) – und mit ihm, wohlverstanden, gerade ihr, der Gemeinde eigenes Leben: er also (und mit ihm gerade ihr Leben) ihrem Zugriff, ihrer Verfügung gänzlich entzogen. Ist Jesus nun in der belebenden Macht seines Heiligen Geistes dennoch auch in der irdischen Geschichte, in der in ihr existierenden Gemeinde am Werk, dann kann man das wohl seine Fernwirkung nennen. Von dort, wohin von ihr her kein Weg ist, vom Himmel, vom Thron, von der Rechten Gottes her, aus jener seiner Verborgenheit in Gott heraus überwindet er im Heiligen Geist jenen Abgrund, wirkt er von dorthier nach hier, aus der Ewigkeit seines Lebens, das er mit Gott gemeinsam hat, hinein in die Zeit, in der die communio sanctorum*

why the community cannot be confused with Christ and can never claim to be Christ. There is distance and distinction between them. The community is always predicate, never subject, which means that the community cannot act until it is acted upon or acted through.¹³⁵ Recall the emphasis on the church as the event in which God's act of self-revelation in Jesus Christ encounters sinful humanity. The church exists because of God's action in Christ by the Spirit, in this way Christ is subject, the community predicate. "The community is not Jesus Christ... He does not live because and as it lives. But it lives, and may and can live, only because and as He lives."¹³⁶

Ereignis ist, in vielen Ereignissen ihre Geschichte hat. Der Mensch Jesus hat auch jene Existenzform und so ist es wohl wahr, daß sein Tun an seiner Gemeinde in der belebenden Macht des Heiligen Geistes auch eine Fernwirkung ist" (KD, IV.2, 737-738).

¹³⁵ Dietrich helpfully notes that sometimes Barth speaks of the relationship of Christ and church in these grammatical terms, but sometimes he modifies the metaphor speaking of Christ as primary subject and church as secondary subject. He writes: "Especially when the grammatical model is stressed, this notion of Jesus as acting Subject underlines the length to which Barth is willing to go in insisting that even the historical life of the church is the earthly-historical existence-form of Jesus Christ. The notion of primary and secondary subjects, on the other hand, makes more room for the notion of this history as responsive interaction between Jesus Christ and his community" (Wendell Sanford Dietrich, "Christ and the Church, According to Barth and Some of His Roman Catholic Critics" (Yale University, 1960), 104-05).

¹³⁶ CD, IV.2.67, 655. "*Die Gemeinde ist also nicht Jesus Christus... Er lebt nicht, weil und indem sie lebt. Sie lebt aber, darf leben, kann nicht anders leben, als weil und indem er lebt*" (KD, 741). Perhaps this early articulation from his dialogue with the writing of Erich Peterson will offer further clarity. Responding to Peterson's use of the head/body metaphor for Christ's relation to church he writes: "But for exactness, greater emphasis should be laid on the fact that we are confronted here with an authority of Christ which is (in Peterson's own words) a 'conferred' or, less happily, a 'derivative' authority. The body is here on earth; the Head is in heaven. The body functions in the complete ambiguity of the fleshly human world, awaiting its redemption; the Head abides in the glory of the Father. Therefore the body can claim the presence of the head only in a way which is consistent with the complete majesty and omnipresence of the Head. But that means to claim it only as the Word and through the Spirit of the Father and the Son.... Christ's bestowal of his power on his Church cannot be reasonably understood to mean that he had partially relinquished his own power, that in relation the Church he had ceased to be wholly God" ("Church and Theology," 293) "*Aber nun wird, wenn man genau sein will, größter Nachdruck darauf zu legen sein, daß es sich dabei nach Petersons eigenen Worten um die «verliehene» oder (weniger glücklich) die «abgeleitete» Autorität Christi handelt. Der Leib ist eben auf Erden, das Haupt im Himmel. Der Leib in der ganzen Zweideutigkeit der ihrer*

But Jesus Christ's distance should not be read in strictly spatial terms.

But since God is not limited to be there, since He is not the prisoner of His own height and distance, it certainly means that in the man Jesus who is also the true Son of God, these antitheses, while they remain, are comprehended and controlled; that He has power over them; that He can be here as well as there, in the depth as well as in the height, near as well as remote, and therefore immanent in the *communio sanctorum* on earth as well as transcendent to it. He can have an earthly-historical form of existence as well as a heavenly historical. He can create and sustain and rule the *communio sanctorum* on earth. He can exist in earthly-historical form.¹³⁷

The point is that, as God, Jesus transcends the limits of time and space, and can act and operate in time from beyond time. This is a mature articulation that works to preserve the infinite qualitative distinction between God and humanity. Barth argues that Christ “carries and maintains it in this unity with Himself as the people which not merely belongs to Him but is part of Himself.”¹³⁸ Because the relationship between head and body, between Christ and church, is the relationship between God and humanity, it is necessary that the church be fully human and not pretend to be anything other, that it might play its proper role in this relationship.

Finally, and most significantly, Barth explicitly turns to a discussion of Christ as subject

Erlösung erst harrenden sarkischen Menschenwelt, das Haupt in der Glorie des Vaters, das Haupt dem Leibe nicht anders gegenwärtig und zu eigen als in der ganzen Würde und Machtvollkommenheit des Hauptes, d. h. aber als das Wort und durch den Geist des Vaters und des Sohnes....Denn das kann die Gewaltverleihung an seine Kirche sinn- vollerweise nicht bedeuten, daß Christus zu ihren Gunsten sozusagen abgedankt, daß er sich auch nur teilweise in ihre Gewalt begeben, daß er aufgehört hätte, auch ihr gegenüber ganz und gar Gott zu sein” (Kirche und Theologie, 660-661).

¹³⁷ CD, IV.2.67, 653. “weil Gott nicht darauf beschränkt ist, dort zu sein, weil er nicht der Gefangene seiner eigenen Höhe und Ferne ist: daß diese Gegensätze in dem Menschen Jesus, der auch der wahre Sohn Gottes ist, indem sie bestehen, umfaßt und beherrscht sind, daß er über sie Macht hat, daß er also nicht nur dort, sondern auch hier, nicht nur in der Höhe, sondern auch in der Tiefe, nicht nur in der Ferne, sondern auch in der Nähe und also der *communio sanctorum* auf Erden nicht nur transzendent, sondern auch immanent sein kann. Er kann nicht nur jene himmlische, sondern auch eine irdisch-geschichtliche Existenzform haben. Er kann sich eben die *communio sanctorum* auf Erden erschaffen, erhalten, regieren, kann irdisch-geschichtlich auch in ihr existieren. Wir reden von seiner himmlischen Existenzform” (KD, IV.2, 738-739).

¹³⁸ Ibid.

of the church when he works to construe the holiness of the church. He summed this up well, writing, “In respect of its holiness the community is bound to Him—and He to it—only to the extent that He constantly wills to bind Himself and does in fact bind Himself to it. He is always the Subject, the Lord, the Giver of the holiness of its action. Its action as such can only be a seeking, an asking after holiness, a prayer for it.”¹³⁹ The church cannot render its special activity holy; it can do nothing to sanctify itself. Properly “Christian” activities are those which are “always dependent on the answering witness of the One whom they aim and profess to attest.”¹⁴⁰ The church’s proper holiness then, is Christ’s holiness. We will now consider more closely just how Barth works this out.

Corresponding to/Reflecting the Holiness of Christ

I. Correspondence

Barth uses the language of correspondence repeatedly when he seeks to articulate the relation of human action to divine action. Much of what he means by this is reflected well in this statement from *The Christian Life*:

undertaken in obedience and ventured with humility and resoluteness, it will not just be unlike God’s act but also like it, running parallel to it on our level, a modest but clear analogue to the extent that it is directed against the abomination that has already been defeated and removed in God’s completed act in Jesus Christ and which will be visibly shown before the eyes of all to be a shattered power in the manifestation of Jesus Christ as the goal of our path. It is to this action of resistance against the desecration of God’s name that we are summoned— this action which even in humanity is similar, parallel, and analogous to the act of God himself.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ CD, IV.1.62, 694. “Die Gemeinde ist hinsichtlich ihrer Heiligkeit an ihn gebunden – er an sie nur, sofern er sich ihr immer wieder verbinden will und tatsächlich verbindet. Er ist und bleibt das Subjekt, der Herr, der Geber der Heiligkeit ihres Handelns. Ihr Handeln als solches kann nur ein Suchen und Fragen danach, eine Bitte darum sein” (KD, IV.1, 775).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 693-694

¹⁴¹ Karl Barth, *The Christian Life: Church Dogmatics IV, 4 Lecture Fragments*, trans. Geoffery W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 175. “wird er im Gehorsam unternommen und demütig und entschlossen gewagt, der Tat Gottes

Elsewhere in close proximity to this statement he characterizes the action of human covenant partners to God as that which ‘corresponds and is analogous to [God’s] divine action.’¹⁴² There is thus a close relationship between the concepts of correspondence and analogy. Human action is alike and yet different from divine action. And most significantly, its referent is divine action. As Webster understands it, this leads to “a specific evaluation of the range and significance of human action.”¹⁴³ Hope, in particular, is one of the human actions that appropriately corresponds to divine reality. “Jesus Christ defines our time as the time between his resurrection and his return, and, therefore, as the time of promise. As the time of promise, it is therefore the time in which hope is not only one possible attitude among many other dispositions of humanity, but the human attitude and action which is most in accordance with how things really are in the world. Hope is required of us because hope corresponds to what really *is*.”¹⁴⁴ Hope is a testimony to rather than a realization of the new order of being established in Jesus Christ. It is an action that is thus grounded in, dependent on, and, in a sense, reflective of God’s action in Christ, but is a wholly human action.¹⁴⁵ This concept of correspondence is crucial to Barth’s

insofern immerhin nicht nur ungleich, sondern ähnlich, er geht ihr auf unserer unteren Ebene insofern parallel, er ist insofern ihr bescheidenes, aber deutliches Analogon, als er sich ja gegen denselben Greuel wendet, der in Gottes in Jesus Christus schon geschehener Tat überwunden und beseitigt ist und der, in der Offenbarung Jesu Christi als dem Ziel unseres Weges, als gestürzte Macht allen Augen sichtbar gemacht werden wird. Eben zu diesem, der Tat Gottes selbst in seiner ganzen Menschlichkeit ähnlichen, parallelen, analogen Tun des Widerstandes gegen die Entheiligung seines Namens sind wir aufgerufen, eben zu diesem Zeugendienst sind wir als Christen aufgeboten” (Chr. Leb., 294).

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ John Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 95.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 84

¹⁴⁵ This concept of correspondence fits within his covenantal understanding of the divine/human relationship. McCormack argues that Barth’s understanding of election has implications for divine and human ontology, rendering both divine and human ontology “covenantal”: “To the act of Self-determination in which God chose himself for us there corresponds an act of human self-

understanding of ecclesial holiness. “The community as the body of Jesus Christ is holy because and in the fact that He, the Head, is holy: in its connexion with Him, in its unity with Him, in the light which falls necessarily upon it from Him when it belongs to Him in the work of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁴⁶ Here Barth states clearly that the church’s holiness is Christ’s holiness, but he goes on to speak of a corresponding holiness of the individuals in the community that is due to their relationship with Him and His holiness. The corresponding holiness of Christians and the church is, as in his early writings, faith and obedience in and to its head Jesus Christ. These are fully human works, not divinizing in the slightest, but they are the proper, corresponding form of holiness for a wholly dependent people.

Barth places real limits on the extent to which holiness can be identified in the church. He says that the holiness in the church is not the Holy Spirit, but rather is that which is created by the Holy Spirit and “ascribed to the Church. It is He who marks it off and separates it. It is He who differentiates it and singles it out. It is He who gives it its peculiar being and law of life. It is holy as it receives it from Him to be holy. But though it is holy it is still a part of the creaturely

determination in which Jesus chose himself for God and other humans and then, and on that basis, we too choose ourselves for God and others. True humanity is realized in us where and when we live in the posture of prayer. Where this occurs, that which we ‘are’ corresponds to that which we have been chosen to be. There, true humanity is actualized by faith and in obedience. (Bruce McCormack, “Grace and Being: The Role of God’s Gracious Election in Karl Barth’s Theological Ontology”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 107.) Bender argues that the concept of correspondence is what enabled Barth to overcome an understanding of the relation between the human and the divine in Jesus and between God and the world in purely contradictory terms, which was the tendency of his earlier writings. He notes that this concept preserves distinction while shifting the relationship. (Bender, *Karl Barth’s Christological Ecclesiology*, e.g. 36.)

¹⁴⁶ CD, IV.1.62, 687 “Wenn es wahr ist, daß die Gemeinde als der Leib Jesu Christi darum und darin heilig ist, daß Er, ihr Haupt, es ist: in seiner Beziehung zu ihr, in ihrer Verbindung mit ihm, in dem Licht, das, indem sie im Werk des Heiligen Geistes zu ihm gehört, von ihm her notwendig auch auf sie fällt” (KD, IV.1, 768).

world in which there can be no question of believing as we believe in God.”¹⁴⁷ This translation deploys the concept of *ascription*; one could also render the German (*beigelegte*) such that the holiness that can be seen in faith in the church is created by the Holy Spirit and is said to be *attributed* to the church. Whether rendered in terms of ascription or attribution, this passage raises genuine questions about to what extent a real holiness exists in the church at all, or at least exists visibly in the church.

Barth, in fact, is quite comfortable affirming that the actual holiness of the community, that being the working in it of the grace of Jesus Christ and the gift of His Holy Spirit, is, at best, visible only in faith.¹⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the church, “is continually confronted with His presence as the Holy One, it is continually exposed to His activity, it is continually jolted by Him, it is continually asked whether and to what extent it corresponds in its visible existence to the fact that it is His body, His earthly, historical form of existence.”¹⁴⁹ The holiness of Christ is to be the

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 686. *Die Heiligkeit der Kirche ist, so gewiß sie allen Ernstes wahr und im Glauben erkennbar ist, nicht die des Heiligen Geistes, sondern die von ihm geschaffene und ihr beigelegte Heiligkeit. Er sondert und trennt sie ab. Er unterscheidet sie und zeichnet sie aus. Er gibt ihr jenes eigene Sein und ihr besonderes Lebensgesetz. Sie ist heilig, indem sie es von ihm empfängt, heilig zu sein. Sie ist aber, indem sie heilig ist, ein Teil der Geschöpfungswelt, an den als an Gott oder wie an Gott zu glauben, nicht in Frage kommen kann* (KD, IV.1, 767). The “He” in this quote refers to the Holy Spirit, but it certainly sounds like he’s speaking of Christ. This points to the close relationship between the second and third persons of the Trinity in Barth’s teaching. The Holy Spirit is the attestation of the Risen Christ. It is striking that Augustine who also has a highly christological way of construing the holiness of the church, would not have hesitated to identify the holiness of the church as the Holy Spirit/Charity working in and through it. Barth’s unwillingness to say this marks a significant difference in their approaches that I will want to revisit later in the dissertation.

¹⁴⁸ As was explored above, even in his earliest writings Barth could speak of a qualified form of visibility, visibility in faith. Some realities can only be seen by faith, but they can be seen.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 700-701 “*dauernd mit seiner Gegenwart als dem Heiligen konfrontiert und seiner Aktivität ausgesetzt, dauernd von ihm her alarmiert, dauernd danach gefragt, ob und inwiefern sie in ihrer sichtbaren Existenz dem entsprechen möchte, daß sie ja sein Leib, seine irdisch-geschichtliche Existenzform ist*” (KD, IV.1, 782).

“standard” of the church’s “own human activity.”¹⁵⁰ Human church work, even the best of it, does not make the church holy; as faithful obedience it deserves no praise, it is simply a matter of allowing the church’s life to correspond appropriately to the life of its holy Lord.¹⁵¹ And the corresponding obedience of the church, which is its holiness, is always deficient. “Even as a response to the grace of God it stands always in need of grace.”¹⁵² Barth explains that this time between the times (of resurrection and parousia) is time graciously granted by God to allow a human response to God’s grace in Jesus Christ, to offer a “sphere in which there can be this correspondence,”¹⁵³ as limited and humble as that correspondence necessarily will be. “God does expect its ‘poor praise on earth.’ He is divinely good and gracious in the fact that He will actually receive it.”¹⁵⁴ Finally, God graciously receives the poor praise God’s people can muster, Barth suggests, for the sake of the world– so that by the meager correspondence of the church, the world might have a witness to God’s purposes.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 701 “*Nein, sie wird sich seiner Heiligkeit und damit ihrer eigenen nicht legitim trösten können, ohne sie eben damit als den Imperativ und das Maß ihres eigenen menschlichen Tuns und Lassens zu anerkennen, zu bedenken, zu respektieren, nicht ohne sich von ihm alle Trägheit, aber auch alle Willkür verboten und verleidet sein zu lassen, nicht ohne sich durch seine, des lebendigen Herrn Heiligkeit in ganz bestimmter Weise in Bewegung gesetzt, zu einem ganz bestimmten Warten und Eilen aufgerufen zu finden. Zu einer Art Regenschirm, unter dem sie nach Belieben ruhen oder dahin und dorthin spazieren könnte, wird sie ihr nicht gegeben, sondern wie die Wolken- und Feuersäule den Israeliten in der Wüste zur Bestimmung ihres Weges, als das Geheimnis, nach dem sie sich – indem es Geheimnis ist und bleibt – in ihrem menschlich-kirchlichen Werk zu richten hat. Ob sie das tut oder nicht tut, halb oder ganz tut, das ist die ihr gestellte Gehorsamsfrage*” (KD, IV.1, 783).

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid, 738 “*daß sie als Antwort auf Gottes Gnade seiner Gnade bedürftig bleiben wird*” (KD, IV.1, 825).

¹⁵³ Ibid. “*Sie ist die Stätte, in der es zu dieser Entsprechung kommen soll*” (KD, IV.1, 824).

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 739 “*Auf ihr «armes Lob auf Erden» wartet Gott und ist darin in wahrhaft göttlicher Weise gnädig und barmherzig, daß er tatsächlich darnach begehrt, daß er es tatsächlich entgegennehmen will*” (KD, IV.1, 825).

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.; For other references to corresponding human work cf. CD, IV.2.68, 730, 785-786; CD, IV.3.2.71 641-642, 661; CD, IV.3.2.72, 892. As is evident in some of the citations just offered, Barth’s discussion of Christian love particularly emphasizes this principle of correspondence,

2. Reflection

Much as we noted the limits that Barth was placing on a construal of the holiness of the church with the category of correspondence, the same comes through in the language of reflection. He writes, for example, “What else can the holiness of the Church be but the reflection of the holiness of Jesus Christ as its heavenly head, falling upon it as he enters into and remains in fellowship with it by His Holy Spirit?”¹⁵⁶ Similarly, in two other places he suggests that the holiness of the church is wholly the reflection of the holiness of Jesus Christ, and the gift of His Holy Spirit.¹⁵⁷ All of these references to the church’s holiness as a reflection of Christ’s holiness suggest distinction and yet relation between Christ and the church, relation facilitated by

e.g. “But the work of the Holy Spirit consists in the liberation of the human being for his own act and therefore for the spontaneous human love whose littleness and frailty are his own responsibility and not that of the Holy Spirit. Christian love as a human act corresponds indeed to the love of God but it is also to be distinguished from it. It is an act in which the human being is at work, not as God’s puppet, but with his own heart and soul and strength, as an independent subject who encounters and replies to God and is responsible to Him as His partner” (CD, IV.2.68, 785-786). “*Das Werk des Heiligen Geistes besteht vielmehr in des Menschen Befreiung zu eigener Tat und also zu spontanem menschlichem Lieben, dessen Kleinheit und Brüchigkeit nicht auf seine, sondern auf des Menschen Verantwortung geht. Der Tat der Liebe Gottes entspricht echt, schlecht und recht, von ihr wohl zu unterscheiden, die christliche Liebe als eine menschliche Tat. Sie ist eine Tat, in der der Mensch nicht als Marionette Gottes, sondern Gott gegenüber als ihm begegnendes und antwortendes, sich als sein Partner vor ihm verantwortendes selbständiges Subjekt, aus seinem Herzen heraus, aus seiner Seele, mit seinen Kräften tätig ist*” (KD, IV.2, 891).

Further, Barth’s entire doctrine of baptism is tremendously illuminative of this principle of correspondence. He writes in his preface to the incomplete IV.4 that “At every point... the volume was to deal with Christian (human) work as this corresponds to, and thus has its own place in respect of, the divine work of reconciliation outlined in IV:1-3” (ix). “*Also auf der ganzen Linie: das christliche (menschliche!) Werk in seinem korrespondierenden und also eigenständigen Charakter gegenüber dem IV1-3 umrissenen göttlichen Versöhnungswerk*” (KD, IV.4, ix). For specific articulations of the act of baptism as an act of correspondence see CD, IV.4.4, 27, 33, 42, 50, 142, 162.

¹⁵⁶ CD, IV.1.62, 686. “*Was kann die Heiligkeit der Gemeinde Anderes sein als der Reflex der Heiligkeit Jesu Christi als ihres himmlischen Hauptes, der von ihm her, indem er durch seinen Heiligen Geist in Gemeinschaft mit ihr tritt und bleibt, auf sie als seinen irdischen Leib fällt?*” (KD, IV.1, 767).

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 693-694.

the Holy Spirit. Yet, in somewhat puzzling fashion, Barth elsewhere writes about the reflection of the *Holy Spirit* falling on the church in order to assert the permanence and indestructibility of the church despite its apparent corruption and weakness: “The reflection of what the Holy Spirit was in eternity and will be in eternity does not cease to fall on it” and so because “the authority and power of God are behind it... it will never fail.”¹⁵⁸ To speak of the reflection of the Holy Spirit falling on the church is puzzling as it seems to contrast with understandings of the Spirit as gift to the community, immanent in the community. Here, as in his deployment of the concept of correspondence, he deemphasizes the presence and power of the Spirit in the community, though elsewhere in his oeuvre this deficiency is not evident. In another place, in a discussion of worship as the context in which discipleship is actualized and nurtured, he notes that the event of Jesus’ own life is reflected and repeated in key acts of worship (Baptism, Lord’s Supper, Confession of Faith) so that it can be reflected and *imitated* in the life of the Christian community here and now.¹⁵⁹ The consistent message across these various references is that holiness is not present as a possession of the earthly church. Given his vagueness about the Holy Spirit I even question to what extent its *presence* is affirmed at all, though it is *reflected* in the life of the church.¹⁶⁰ With this language of reflection, as with the language of correspondence, Barth is able to preserve the God/world distinction that is crucial to his project from start to finish, and offer yet another way to understand how it is that the church is the body of Christ.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 691. “*Der Reflex dessen, der der Heilige Gottes war in Ewigkeit und sein wird in Ewigkeit, hört nicht auf, auf sie zu fallen*” (KD, IV.1, 771) “... *aber die Autorität und Macht Gottes steht hinter ihr und ganz umsonst wird sie nie auf dem Plan sein*” (KD, IV.1, 772).

¹⁵⁹ CD, IV.2.67, 703-704.

¹⁶⁰ It is important to note that Barth resists an understanding of the liberation of human beings, that reduces the reality of Christian lives to “simply an appendage, a mere reflection” (CD, IV.4, 19), which would be a form of christomonism that he rejects wholeheartedly. He is just as interested in rejecting anthropomonism, in which the divine act is swallowed completely by human acts.

These concepts of correspondence and reflection evidence the way his sharpened christological focus enriches and improves his characterization of the visible church and its holiness, but also suggest the continued influence of the infinite, qualitative distinction and the persistent constraints on the identification of genuine holiness in the visible church.

Holiness a confession of faith

It may be apparent to the reader by now that Barth's most basic teaching about the holiness of the church, consistent from early ecclesiological writings straight through to his mature writings, is that it is a confession of faith, a reality that is visible only in faith. Barth never hesitated to acknowledge the sinful character of the church, nor to note the many ways it gravely disappoints. However, his professed confidence that it is the community awakened into being by the gift of the Holy Spirit and that it is, indeed, the contemporary earthly-historical form of Jesus Christ are expressions of that which he sees through the eyes of faith.

Of course, the affirmation that the church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic is creedal; it is something affirmed in faith, and much of what we affirm in faith is invisible. Barth argues that all four notes are a matter of faith and they build to a climax. *Una* points to the singularity of the community; *Sancta* points to the particularity underlying that singularity; *Catholica* denotes the essence in which it manifests and maintains itself in this particularity and singularity; and *Apostolica* adds nothing new but functions as the spiritual criterion by which the one, holy, catholic church is recognized.¹⁶¹ None of these realities are apparent to plain sight. The church looks like any other human organization, as rife with the devastating effects of sin as any other assembly of humans, its essence surely invisible. Barth claims that that character or truth of the church's existence in history "is not a matter of a general but a very special visibility... what

¹⁶¹ *CD*, IV.1.62, 711

actually takes place, what this is in truth, is not visible to all; it is visible to Christians only in this particular way or not at all.”¹⁶²

The church’s true identity, though necessarily taking shape in a visible form that does not fully reveal its essence (which is, simply, its existence as event), is wholly dependent on the action of God in and through this body, on its unique relationship to God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ, to the work of the Holy Spirit awakening and enlivening this body. The church is holy only because God is holy; the church’s holiness is the holiness of Jesus Christ.

The body of Jesus Christ may well be sick or wounded. When has it not been? But as the body of this Head it cannot die. The faith of the community may waver, its love may grow cold, its hope may become dreadfully tenuous, but the foundations of its faith and love and hope, and with it itself, are unaffected... It may become a beggar, it may act like a shopkeeper, it may make itself a harlot, as has happened and still does happen, yet it is always the bride of Jesus Christ. Its existence may be a travesty of His, but as His earthly-historical form of existence it can never perish. It can as little lose its being as He can lose His. What saves it and makes it indestructible is not that it does not basically forsake Him—who can say how deeply and basically it has often enough forsaken Him and still does?—nor is this or that good that it may be or do, but the fact that He does not forsake it, any more than Yahweh would forsake His people Israel in all His judgments.¹⁶³

¹⁶² Ibid, 654-655 “*nicht Sache allgemeiner, sondern Sache einer sehr besonderen Sichtbarkeit...was das nun in Wahrheit ist, das ist nicht Allen, das ist auch den Christen als ihren Gliedern nur in ganz besonderer Weise sichtbar, sonst aber unsichtbar*” (KD, IV.1, 731).

¹⁶³ Ibid, 691. “*Der Leib Christi kann wohl krank oder wund sein. Wann und wo wäre er es nicht? Er kann aber als Leib dieses Hauptes nicht sterben. Der Glaube der Gemeinde mag schwanken, ihre Liebe erkalten, ihre Hoffnung erschreckend dünn werden: das Fundament ihres Glaubens, ihrer Liebe und ihrer Hoffnung aber und mit ihm sie selbst bleibt, ist davon unberührt. Der Reflex dessen, der der Heilige Gottes war in Ewigkeit und sein wird in Ewigkeit, hört nicht auf, auf sie zu fallen. Sie befindet sich auf einem Weg, den sie sich nicht gesucht, auf den sie sich nicht gesetzt, den sie aber auch nicht verlassen, auf dem niemand sie aufhalten, auf dem sie auch von sich aus nicht auf die Länge stillstehen kann. Sie kann auf ihm wohl hinken, straucheln, fallen; sie mag auf ihm oft genug daliegen: scheinot wie der unter die Räuber Gefallene auf der Straße von Jerusalem hinab nach Jericho. Sie hat aber den Tod hinter sich und kann ihm, «nicht aus vergänglichem, sondern aus unvergänglichem Samen wiedergeboren durch Gottes lebendiges und bleibendes Wort» (1. Petr. 1, 23), nicht wieder verfallen. Sie ist immer wieder aufgestanden und wird immer wieder aufstehen: von Gott mit Recht und von den Menschen mit Recht oder Unrecht geschlagen und doch nicht aus der Welt geschafft, in dieser Form überaltert, um in einer anderen mit neuer Kraft von vorn anzufangen, an einem Ort fast oder auch ganz ausgelöscht, dafür als junge Kirche anderwärts nur um so freudiger sich bauend. Ihre Autorität, ihre Wirkung, ihr Einfluß, ihre Erfolge mögen klein, ganz klein sein, beinahe oder ganz zu*

Concluding Comments

With this observation of Barth's consistent teaching that the church's holiness is a confession of faith, we see once more that while much develops in Barth's mature ecclesiology, key emphases stay very much the same. The church is identified with the sinful world, standing wholly in need of God's act of self-revelation and salvation. I have argued that Barth's developed christology and pneumatology, and particularly his work on the church as the earthly-historical form of Jesus Christ and the attendant concept of correspondence, help to loosen the constraints in his construal of the visible holiness of the church, but his insistence on the infinite qualitative distinction is on display from his earliest to his latest ecclesiological writings keeping the constraints in place. We thus are beginning to see, through attention to Barth's ecclesiological weaving, both early and late, how difficult it is for Reformed Christians to conceptualize visible holiness. As we consider other parts of the tapestry in later chapters, we'll gain even more insight into the problem to which this dissertation is a response, but we are already well on our way.

verschwinden drohen, aber die Autorität und Macht Gottes steht hinter ihr und ganz umsonst wird sie nie auf dem Plan sein. Sie mag zur Bettlerin werden, sie mag sich als Krämerin gebärden, sie mag sich zur Hure machen – das alles kam und kommt vor – sie ist und bleibt darum doch die Braut Christi. Es mag ihre Existenz die seinige verhöhnen – indem sie seine irdisch-geschichtliche Existenzform ist, kann sie so wenig untergehen, ihr Wesen so wenig verlieren wie er selber. Nicht daß sie im Grunde von ihm nicht läßt, rettet sie, macht sie unzerstörbar – wer weiß denn, in welcher Tiefe und Gründlichkeit sie oft genug von ihm gelassen hat und noch läßt? – und auch nicht dieses und jenes Gute, das sie sonst sein und tun mag, wohl aber dies: daß er nicht von ihr läßt – er so wenig von ihr wie Jahve in allen Gerichten von seinem Volk Israel lassen wollte” (KD, IV.1, 771-772).

PART TWO- SEEING THE POSSIBILITY IN THE PROBLEM

Thus far, I have argued that Barth's insistence on the infinite qualitative distinction between God and humanity permanently constrained his ability to speak meaningfully about the visible holiness of the church. I have suggested that this is a powerful depiction of the problem confronting Reformed Christians. But need Barth's insistence on the infinite qualitative distinction only be a problem? When I view his contribution to the tapestry from another angle, I see that humility is crucial to the image of the church that he weaves—he depicts a humble church. And I am taught by this image of the humble church, to emphasize humility in my own creative, ecclesiological work. The contention of the second movement of this chapter is that any Reformed position on the visible holiness of the church will need to be guided by the insight that no part of humanity is, in any sense, God, and every part of humanity stands in need of God's mercy and forgiveness; when this is recalled, a sphere for genuine *human* agency is preserved, in which a proper *human* holiness can visibly emerge. In essence, I'm arguing paradoxically that the problem that plagues Reformed theologians, the acknowledgement of the stubborn persistence of sin in human existence, can itself be a resource for a responsible position on the visible holiness of the church. We will now reconsider significant elements of Barth's ecclesiological teachings to demonstrate that our problem is actually our possibility.

Resisting Identification of the Human with the Divine

Though many often assess Barth's early teachings on the church as wholly negative, or exclusively critical,¹⁶⁴ and even Barth himself assessed his early doctrine as being necessarily,

¹⁶⁴ O'Grady, for example, in one of the first extensive explorations of Barth's ecclesiology characterizes his early ecclesiology as attack or crisis (Colm M.S.C. O'Grady, *The Church in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Washington: Corpus Books, 1968), 22.). Bender argues that Barth's

but insufficiently one-sided,¹⁶⁵ there's something in the stark contrasts that he sets up in his commentary on Romans that can serve us well today. We are *not* God. His image of the church as a dusty and blown-out crater pulls no punches. And his early insistence that the church is made holy precisely when and where it remembers that it is not holy shows us the way in which this problem is a possibility.

Barth's call to refuse an identification of creator with creation was uttered with great force because he was speaking against the heavy weight of the trajectory of 19th century philosophy and theology which pointed humanity in the opposite direction. Hegel depicted a God who realizes God's existence through historical process. Schleiermacher began his massive theological treatise with attention to the structures of human consciousness; this lends itself to a perception (that I judge unfair) of an identification of the human being with God. These two, though they had their differences, shared with one another and other major 19th century thinkers a confidence in the progressive, developmental nature of human history and a general optimism about human capacities. Such emphases seem friendlier to an affirmation of the visible presence of holiness on earth. Certainly, many 19th century theologians, Schleiermacher included, had a

christology and ecclesiology shared the same flaw at this stage; there is no identity between the church and the kingdom of God just as there is no identity between the revelation of God in Christ and the historical person of Jesus, stark contrast in dialectics at both the subjective and objective poles of salvation. Barth could therefore not account for incarnation nor ongoing revelation in history in any meaningful way in this period. He writes, "For Barth, the visible and historical church could only be seen as sinful, and as such, the church differed from the world only in that it was the site where the revelation event occurred" (Bender, *Karl Barth's Christological Ecclesiology*, 36). Bender notes that Barth offered no account of positive role of the church in history and completely neglects any understanding of the church as new community, people of God, body of Christ, fellowship of the Holy Spirit (Ibid, 35-36.). Bender argues that Barth's ecclesiology shifted after his christology shifted, as the concept of correspondence replaced the concept of contradiction, starting in the transitional period of the *Göttingen Dogmatics* (Ibid, 79.)

¹⁶⁵ This self-critique is most on display in "The Humanity of God" in *The Humanity of God*, trans. John Newton Thomas (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press 1960), 37-68 (Originally *Die Menschlichkeit Gottes*, 1956).

triumphalist understanding of the church. But when Barth saw that the dominant themes of 19th century Protestant Liberalism rendered the church a cheerleader rather than a critic as violent, war-producing, oppression-increasing nationalism led to widespread disaster and the destruction of life, he could not be at peace with an easy identification of God with the world. In the despair of post-World War I Germany, Barth was clear that if we are to have hope at all, it must come from beyond us. Because when we think *we* are all we need, broken glass, schrapnel, and blood pollute the landscape.

Barth then had a powerful motivation for denying any sort of identification between God and humanity, which, as we have seen, constrained his ability to talk about the visible holiness of the church. But do we have any less motivation today? Though few human beings (particularly those who identify as Christians), would explicitly state that they believe they are God or that they have some confusion about where God stops and they begin, many human beings, (perhaps most especially those who identify as Christian), live as though they do believe this. Consider several representative features of contemporary life: anxious individuals who are overwhelmed by their belief that they are ultimately responsible for everything in their lives; oppressive relationships in which one party claims all the power for him/herself; multi-national corporations wielding power that effects the fate of countless people and this very planet; individual nations assuming the role of savior of other nations. From the smallest to the largest units of society, we see human beings who live as though they are God. And when the church too easily identifies its holiness in human works, it reinforces this destructive tendency. This dissertation is especially concerned about tendencies to identify the clergy with God, but this is only one example of confusion between creator and created. So while I seek, in this dissertation, to articulate a responsible Reformed position on the visible holiness of the church, this is a constraint I need to

honor. I must refuse an identification of humanity with God.

Further, it is crucial to insist, with Barth, on the identification of the church with the sinful world. Though Barth believes *all* of humanity to be elect in Jesus Christ, he understands the *church* to be the community gathered by God's Holy Spirit, the community of particular people who *recognize* that we are not God and need God, and provide a witness to the world of this universal human condition and universally available divine gift. The only difference between the church and the sinful world, is that the church knows of the act of God in Jesus Christ by which the sinful world is justified and thus stands responsible to witness to this [presently invisible] reality. An honest admission of persistent struggle with sin, then, is not an indictment of our failures in holiness, but is rather the beginning of the only holiness proper to us as human beings. This, too, is an insight drawn straight from the pages of Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*, where Barth insists that the permanently unholy church is sanctified by open and trusting hope in the God who is holy.¹⁶⁶ Humility, it seems, is the chief mark of proper human holiness and faithfulness.¹⁶⁷ When we admit that we are sinners who stand wholly in need of the grace of God, we remember that we are human and it becomes possible for us to act faithfully and function as witnesses to the God beyond us.

Distinction Preserves a Sphere for Human Action

As we may be beginning to glimpse, an insistence on the infinite qualitative distinction between God and humanity leads us to reflection on human action. Many find in Barth an

¹⁶⁶ *Romans*, 409

¹⁶⁷ "The Church here does not lead, instruct, comfort, nourish in and of itself; that would contradict the very point that Barth is making. The Church, rather, whose life is the life of the children of God, is the life of courage in humility" (Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation in Karl Barth*, 28.)

obliteration of meaningful, visible, human action in relation to God (resulting from his insistence on this distinction and the sovereignty of God in this relation.) Chauvet, a liturgical theologian, levels this charge in consideration of Barth's sacramental teachings. He indicts Barth for allowing his fear of synergy to lead to a vertical subjectivism that erases the true meaning of sacraments.¹⁶⁸ This is particularly on display, Chauvet asserts, when he insists on articulating human and divine action in baptism (in vol. IV.4 of his *Dogmatics*) in either/or terms.¹⁶⁹ Chauvet suggests that this fear of synergism is a deep-seated problem in Barth, tracing it to his christology in which Chauvet finds a "one-sided insistence on divine initiative" that "minimizes the role of humanity even in Christ himself."¹⁷⁰ Both the humanity of Jesus and the visible church are no more than "a *passive* tool" in God's hands.¹⁷¹ Yocum's consideration of Barth's sacramental theology produces a similar critique. Yocum argues that Barth's account of human action in relation to divine action is stronger in the earlier volumes of the *Dogmatics* than in the latter. Yocum suggests that Barth is hesitant to affirm "the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Church" in volume IV because of how strongly he identifies the Holy Spirit with the risen Christ, who "tends to be 'located' at the right hand of God, even if by virtue of his resurrection He is made contemporaneous with all times."¹⁷² In Yocum's judgment appropriate ecclesiology depends on robust christology and robust pneumatology working together.¹⁷³ Because christology trumps pneumatology, in Yocum's reading of Barth's ecclesiology, he suggests this produces "a strong disjunction of divine and human action" and a general failure in his late

¹⁶⁸ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 419- 420.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 422.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 539.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, 541.

¹⁷² *Ecclesial Mediation*, 82

¹⁷³ *Ibid*

sacramental theology.¹⁷⁴ On the reading of these critics, Barth's ecclesiology is fatally flawed by his weak account of human action, particularly in relation to divine action.

Though Barth's emphases, not least among them the infinite qualitative distinction, certainly lend support to such readings, I, with John Webster and others, find Barth's theology hospitable to a different reading. In this alternate reading, Barth's emphases on distinction and divine sovereignty serve to open up a clear sphere for human action. This reading is most fully articulated and supported in Webster's *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought*. In that work, Webster engages a close reading of a much wider range of Barthian texts than are usually engaged when inquiring into his position on human action/ethics in order to correct the misunderstanding that Barth lacks interest in the world of human action given his emphasis on the "majestic sovereignty of God in Jesus Christ which ignores or even abolishes human moral reality."¹⁷⁵ He takes the theme of the *Dogmatics* as a whole to be the encounter between God and humanity and is able to trace Barth's mature position on human action back to his earliest works. Webster argues that Barth's understanding of human/divine relation "is best understood out of three closely aligned themes" which are themselves concepts *and* patterns of argument or general structural principles for his exposition.¹⁷⁶ These three themes are 1) "the enhypostatic existence of humanity in Jesus Christ;" – which Webster asserts is an attempt to state God as the ground of rather than the negation of human agency; human reality and agency

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 87; Farrow, similarly charges Barth with a denial of meaningful human action. He grants that Barth's preservation of Christ's otherness functions to preserve ours and offer us back our time as a genuine possibility, but charges that "Barth has spoken the name of Jesus so loudly that other names cannot even be heard; that the problem of abstraction thus reappears in another form that once again humanity is being swallowed up, if not by God directly then by 'the humanity of God' (Farrow, *Ascension and Ecclesia*, 243).

¹⁷⁵ *Barth's Moral Theology*, 8.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 88.

draw their substance from the human reality of Jesus Christ.¹⁷⁷ This is incomprehensible *if* omnicausality is construed as *sole* causality and the divine/human relation is construed competitively;

2) “covenant as the innermost substance of God’s history with humanity,”¹⁷⁸ and 3)

“correspondence (*Entsprechung*) as a term central to the illumination of the various types of interaction between divine and human agency.”¹⁷⁹

William Stacy Johnson offers an interpretive tool that supports this alternate reading. He notes a persistent triadic pattern throughout the *Dogmatics*. In this pattern there are three moments in view simultaneously, two as horizons, one as present. For example- creation (primordial), redemption (eschatological), reconciliation (present). He writes

Barth’s triad... is open-ended. The present moment remains indeterminate as long as divine and human action remain set against one another. The present moment is one of ethical crisis, a midpoint that is, so to speak, stretched out between a no-longer accessible *archē* and a not yet visible *telos*... once the triadic pattern is fully recognized, it yields a more open-ended understanding of how Barth viewed the Holy Spirit and Christian experience, an area of his theology that Barth left incomplete and that interpreters have often alleged to be fatally flawed. Within Barth’s triadic arrangement of divine-human reconciliation in volume IV of his *Dogmatics*, the divine work of the Spirit and the human witness of Christian vocation form a tensive, intervening moment stretched out between justification as primordial event and sanctification as eschatological goal... On this view, the Christian life can never be considered a ‘given,’ but only a continual ‘task’ on the horizon out in front of us.”¹⁸⁰

If redemption is an unfolding task in which Christians are engaged, and if therefore, as both

Webster and Johnson assert, God’s being and action is the ground for human being and action,

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 89.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 88

¹⁷⁹ (Ibid). Elsewhere Webster advances this argument through his interpretation of Barth’s position on baptism which will be considered below (For his discussions of Barth’s position on baptism see John Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995). Cf. ———, "The Christian in Revolt: Some Reflections on *the Christian Life*," in *Reckoning with Barth: Essays in Commemoration of the Centenary of Karl Barth's Birth*, ed. Nigel Biggar (London: Mowbray, 1988).)

¹⁸⁰ William Stacy Johnson, *The Mystery of God: Karl Barth and the Postmodern Foundations of Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997), 6-7.

then indeed Barth leaves open, rather than obliterates, the meaning and significance of human action.

Barth's repeated emphasis in his *Dogmatics* on the freedom that is proper to human acts, even acts of faith, lends support to these alternate readings.¹⁸¹ The dominant reading of Barth on human action suggests human beings are limp puppets on the strings of the divine puppet master, but Barth explicitly rejects such an image. He is emphatic that a human being is *not* a puppet; "A puppet does not obey. It does not move itself. It dances and gesticulates as it is moved. But to be quickened by the Holy Spirit is to move oneself, and to do so in obedience, listening to the order and command of God."¹⁸² Given that some of Barth's critics, notably Chauvet, trace Barth's failings in his account of the relation between divine and human action to his christology, I find a challenge to such readings in the fact that Barth invokes the image of "puppet" in discussion of Jesus, in parallel fashion to his discussion of believers. "The man Jesus is not a mere puppet moved this way and that by God. He is not a mere reed used by God as the instrument of His Word. The man Jesus prays. He speaks and acts..."¹⁸³ Barth goes on to say that God's self-giving in the person of Jesus "sets the human being up as a subject, awakens him to genuine individuality and autonomy, frees him..."¹⁸⁴ Neither human beings in general, nor the human

¹⁸¹ e.g. *CD*, IV.2.67, 623, 635-636; *CD*, IV.2.68, 727, 743, 778. Yocum draws this conclusion after examining Barth's doctrine of creation "God grants to the creature a realm in which it has a degree of free, intentional action, in which it attains its own independent dignity of action, in distinction from the direct action of the Creator" (90).

¹⁸² *CD*, IV.2.68, 800. "*Eine Marionette gehorcht nicht, sie bewegt sich ja auch nicht selbst: sie tanzt und gestikuliert, indem sie entsprechend bewegt wird. Vom Heiligen Geist belebt sein, heißt im Gegensatz dazu: sich selber, und nun eben – sich selber im Gehorsam, hörend auf Gottes Gebot und Befehl, bewegen*" (*KD*, IV.2, 907).

¹⁸³ *CD*, II.2.33, 178. "*Es ist dieser Mensch Jesus doch nicht etwa eine Puppe, die von Gott so oder so geschoben, nicht etwa ein Sprachrohr, das für Gottes Wort nur das Instrument ist. Eben dieser Mensch Jesus betet doch. Er redet und handelt*" (*KD*, II.2, 196).

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 179. "*daß sie den Menschen, weit entfernt davon, bloß mit ihm zu spielen, ihn bloß zu bewegen und zu brauchen, bloß mit ihm umzugehen als mit einem Objekt, vielmehr zum Subjekt*

Jesus in particular, are puppets manipulated by a divine master. Human beings, when prompted by the Holy Spirit, move themselves. When human beings obey the will of God they move rightly, but humans cannot be forced to obey, nor to disobey. Human beings freely respond to the movement of God's Spirit.

These emphases on human action are more pronounced in Barth's later writings and this can be attributed to the fact that though the insistence on the infinite qualitative distinction persisted as his thought matured, it was increasingly read through the more significant theme of covenant relationship.¹⁸⁵ This emphasis on covenant makes it possible for Barth to speak, in these later writings, of the divine-human relationship as a *partnership* though he explicitly rejected such language in his Romans commentary. He understands God and the human being, God and human community, to be covenant partners, each with a distinctive role to play.¹⁸⁶ Admittedly, God is the leading partner in relationship to human beings individually, and to the church collectively, and this relationship is irreversible, but human beings have a distinct role to

erhebt, ihn erweckt zu echter Eigenheit und Selbständigkeit, ihn frei, ja eben" (KD, II.2, 196).

¹⁸⁵ In the preceding presentation of Webster's reading of Barth on human action, I acknowledged that he takes the theme of the *Dogmatics* to be the encounter between God and humanity. Webster is explicit that this encounter is characterized by covenant, one of the three themes within which he insists the relation between divine and human agency needs to be understood. (eg. *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought*, 80.). Yocum similarly affirms that "the constant theme of Barth's theology is the covenant between God and humanity that occurs in Jesus Christ" (*Ecclesial Mediation in Karl Barth*, 68.) McCormack labels both divine and human ontology as "covenantal ontology" in light of Barth's teachings on election (McCormack, "'Grace and Being'," 99, 107.) Barth's rejection of the possibility that any human being can be "ontologically Godless" (IV.1, 480) is also an illustration of this point, as Krötke reminds us in his discussion of Barth's anthropology. (Wolf Krötke, "The Humanity of the Human Person in Karl Barth's Anthropology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).)

¹⁸⁶ In answer to the question of whether Jesus being in our place (the judge judged in our place, for example) means our annihilation, Dietrich writes "It is 'as sinners' that we have no more future, not 'as creatures,' *human beings* intended as covenant-partners of God" (Dietrich, "Christ and the Church", 36.).

play and that role is characterized by hope and obedience.¹⁸⁷ So, even as we honor the constraint of the infinite qualitative distinction, Barth's mature teachings invite us to look to the human part in this covenant relationship for visible participation in holiness.

Barth found the concept of correspondence (through which he emphasized that human action is both like and unlike divine action) considered above,¹⁸⁸ to be the most helpful way of interpreting this relationship and the action of both parties within the relation and this is a concept that is of value in our search for a position on visible holiness. This concept of correspondence reminds us that human beings are not God, but are beloved creatures of God, a God who has elected to be "for us", for human beings, a God who has freely chosen to be in covenant relationship with human beings. And God's work *in* us by the Holy Spirit enables us to correspond to the Holy God. As was noted above, when Barth is able to speak, in a relative and conditional way, about the holiness of human acts he is able to do so through this category of correspondence. Barth speaks of the Holy Spirit putting human beings on their feet¹⁸⁹ and "appoint[ing them] to do the corresponding work."¹⁹⁰ God acts, by the Holy Spirit, so the human being can act, and, in particular, so the human being can participate in holiness. "But the work of the Holy Spirit consists in the liberation of the human being for his own act and therefore for the spontaneous human love whose littleness and frailty are his own responsibility and not that of the Holy Spirit. Christian love as a human act corresponds indeed to the love of God but is also to be distinguished from it. It is an act in which the human being is at work, not as God's puppet, but with his own heart and soul and strength, as an independent subject who encounters and replies

¹⁸⁷ *CD*, IV.4, 135

¹⁸⁸ See pages 66-70, and note 145, in particular.

¹⁸⁹ e.g. *CD*, IV.4, 28

¹⁹⁰ *CD*, IV.2.67, 642 "*Die Heiligen sind die durch die Macht und das Werk des Heiligen Geistes versammelten und zum Tun des ihm entsprechenden menschlichen Werkes bestimmten Menschen*" (*KD*, IV.2, 726).

to God and is responsible to Him as His partner.”¹⁹¹ The proper holiness of the church is the act of God in Jesus Christ communicated by the Holy Spirit to the world, but human beings quickened by the Holy Spirit have their own corresponding holiness.

The Role of the Holy Spirit in Human/Divine Partnership

A reader may note the frequency of references to the Holy Spirit in the discussion of human/divine partnership and correspondence above. Absent pneumatology, Barth’s contrasting of God and humanity can be read dualistically or oppositionally.¹⁹² But Barth speaks increasingly about the Holy Spirit as his project unfolds, thereby finding a way to speak of unity-in-distinction in the human divine relationship. Indeed, with his increased attention to the Holy Spirit comes a softened relationship to the church. In his mature writings, where his ecclesiology

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 785-786 “*Das Werk des Heiligen Geistes besteht vielmehr in des Menschen Befreiung zu eigener Tat und also zu spontanem menschlichem Lieben, dessen Kleinheit und Brüchigkeit nicht auf seine, sondern auf des Menschen Verantwortung geht. Der Tat der Liebe Gottes entspricht echt, schlecht und recht, von ihr wohl zu unterscheiden, die christliche Liebe als eine menschliche Tat. Sie ist eine Tat, in der der Mensch nicht als Marionette Gottes, sondern Gott gegenüber als ihm belegendes und antwortendes, sich als sein Partner vor ihm verantwortendes selbständiges Subjekt, aus seinem Herzen heraus, aus seiner Seele, mit seinen Kräften tätig ist*” (KD, IV.2, 891).

¹⁹² Chauvet, for example, reads Barth’s construal of the relationship between God and humanity as necessarily competitive or oppositional. “God’s transcendence can be understood only according to the vertical scheme involving distance from and, ultimately, opposition to humanity. This presupposition itself depends on an onto-theological ‘*simple notion*’ of God; despite appearances, Barth thinks in a pre-Trinitarian and trans-Christological modality” (*Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, 543). Such a reading does not attend to God’s willed communion with God’s others, a communion facilitated by God’s Holy Spirit. Molnar argues that Barth’s rejection of dualism is on display in his insistence that the immanent and economic trinity, and the humanity and divinity of Jesus, are not identical, but they are also not separable: “We cannot know the inner divine *esse* without the *oikonomia*. God, however, remains *freely* bound to the *oikonomia*... In his ecclesiology Barth maintained this position by insisting that, although the church, as the body of Christ, is not identical with its head, Christ himself, it cannot be understood without its head or apart from its head” (Paul D. Molnar, *Karl Barth and the Theology of the Lord's Supper: A Systematic Investigation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 11.)

is developed in the midst of his pneumatology, Barth invokes less stark images for the church than he did in his Romans commentary. He speaks, for example, of the church as nothing “other than an *eglise du desert*, [nothing] better than an ‘moving tent’ like the biblical tabernacle.”¹⁹³ He then immediately affirms that it lives by the awakening power of the Holy Spirit. A moving tent in the wilderness does suggest impermanence, frailty, vulnerability, but it is a gentler image than the church as crater. A burned-out hole testifying to all God has done is far harsher than a human creation harboring what God has done. Neither image is glorious or triumphalist, but placing these images side by side suggests that there is movement in Barth’s thinking on the church. While the image of crater helps to remind us of our utter distinction from and dependence on God, the image of tent moving in the wilderness achieves the same ends while leaving open the possibility of speaking more positively of the visible human action so crucial to the church’s existence. And it is a more developed pneumatology that opens up this possibility.

The Holy Spirit is that, in God, which facilitates the miraculous act of faith that unfolds, in part visibly, in the church. Faith is a response to a call from beyond us, a response enabled by the movement of the Holy Spirit within us. Again, the Holy Spirit facilitates the unity-in-distinction that challenges a dualistic reading. Barth expresses this here: “The Christian community, the true church, arises and is only as the Holy Spirit works—the quickening power of the living Lord Jesus Christ. And it continues and is only as He sanctifies human beings and their human work, building up them and their work into the true church. He does this, however, in the time between the resurrection and the return of Jesus Christ and therefore in the time of the community...in the world.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ CD, IV.1.62, 660 “*Etwas Anderes als eine église du désert, etwas Besseres als ein Wanderzelt wie die biblische Stifshütte kann sie in der Welt nicht sein wollen*” (KD, IV.1, 738).

¹⁹⁴ CD, IV.2.67, 617 “*Indem der Heilige Geist wirkt – die belebende Macht des lebendigen Herrn*

The Holy Spirit, in Barth's teaching, is not an independent actor. We can see in the above quote that Barth understands the Holy Spirit to be the "self-attestation" of the risen Christ; the Holy Spirit is the power of the living Christ.¹⁹⁵ So, the Holy Spirit is intimately linked to the person of Jesus Christ, to the Word of God. That said, the Holy Spirit, for Barth, is also intimately linked to humanity. The Holy Spirit works through human works, makes something of human works—builds up a church to be a provisional representation of what God intends for all of humanity.¹⁹⁶ Barth notes that Jesus, by his Spirit, does not act directly in human history anymore, but rather acts *with* and through *this* people, by giving this particular people "the necessary qualities" that they might be freed for service of God.¹⁹⁷ And this service takes visible form. In Barth's mature perspective, it is just as essential for the church to be visible as for it to be invisible. The work of the Holy Spirit is produced concretely and historically. The faith awakened by the Holy Spirit "is a definite human activity and therefore a definite human phenomenon."¹⁹⁸ If the church lives at all, it lives by this awakening power of the Holy Spirit.

Qualifications on Visibility- Visibility in Faith- Visibility in Worship and Baptism

But is the work of the Holy Spirit truly visible? To what extent is the true church, the one,

Jesus Christus – entsteht und ist christliche Gemeinde, die wirkliche Kirche. Sie besteht und ist, indem er Menschen und ihr menschliches Werk heiligt, sie und ihr Werk aufbaut zur wirklichen Kirche. Er tut das aber in der Zeit zwischen der Auferstehung und der Wiederkunft Jesu Christi und also in der «Zeit der Gemeinde» (vgl. dazu KD IV, 1 § 62, 3) in der Welt" (KD, IV.1, 698-699).

¹⁹⁵ For a more full exploration of the Holy Spirit as the "self-attestation" of Jesus Christ see IV.2.67, 651-652; cf. 654; and CD, IV.4, 27, 31.

¹⁹⁶ Barth notes repeatedly that God intends the sanctification of all people, and thus the church is at most a provisional representation of this intention (e.g. CD, IV. 2.67, 617). But it is only even this provisional representation as it is quickened by the Spirit and enabled to be so (see Ibid, 623).

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ CD, IV.1.62, 652 "ein menschliches Werk und als solches ein allgemein wahrnehmbares menschliches Phänomen" (KD, IV.1, 729).

holy, catholic, apostolic church, enlivened by the Holy Spirit, actually visible? Healy argues that within the logic of Karl Barth's ecclesiology, the visible church is never more than an "apparent church" (*Scheinkirche*), and the real church (*Wirklichkirche*) is always invisible. He charges, Barth, thus, with succumbing to the docetism he seeks to resist.¹⁹⁹ Stout helpfully replies that "Healy seems to cut off Barth's dialectic at this point. While the human church is not the basis for its own being, it is neither unnecessary or unreal. Barth clearly states: 'It is not the case...that only to the extent that it is invisible... is it the real Christian Community.' The visible, human form of the church is absolutely essential for Barth and becomes the true church."²⁰⁰ I concur that setting the "apparent church" against the "real church" is a dualistic reading of Barth that misconstrues Barth's intent. Though there are challenges to the visibility of the "real church"—this real church is chiefly to be sought in the "apparent," visible church.

Barth indeed argues that what is visible in the church's order and activities "may be only a religious society..." and even if it is assumed that what is present is the

true Church, it is not self-evident that this will be visible as such in all these things... As it cannot create or confer its reality, the same is true of its visibility. It can only be endowed with it. If it is also visible as a true Church, this means that the victory of the divine operation, the mighty act of the Holy Spirit in face of the sinfulness of human action, finds further expression in a free emergence and outshining of the true Church from the concealment in which it is enveloped by the sinfulness of all human volition (and therefore of ecclesiastical), and in which it must continue to be enveloped apart from this continuation of the operation of the Holy Spirit.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Healy, "The Logic of Karl Barth's Ecclesiology," 259.

²⁰⁰ Tracy Mark Stout, *A Fellowship of Baptism: Karl Barth's Ecclesiology in Light of His Understanding of Baptism*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010), 91.

²⁰¹ CD, IV.2.67, 619 "Wie, wenn das in dem Allem Sichtbare nun doch nur eine – «Religionsgesellschaft» sein sollte? Und nehmen wir an, dem sei nicht nur so, sondern in dem Allem sei tatsächlich auch wirkliche Kirche, so wird es sich doch immer noch nicht von selbst verstehen, daß diese in dem Allem als solche auch sichtbar, daß ihre Wirklichkeit auch sprechende Wahrheit wird. Wie sie sich ihre Wirklichkeit nicht selbst verschaffen und beilegen kann, so auch nicht deren Sichtbarkeit. Ihr kann diese wie jene nur verliehen werden. Wird und ist sie als wirkliche Kirche auch sichtbar, dann heißt das: es setzt sich jetzt der Sieg des

He illustrates this through the metaphor of an electric sign which is nothing but dark letters without the power to communicate unless current is passed through it.²⁰² Because the power of the Holy Spirit is only recognizable in faith, the world cannot be expected to recognize the church as church and can be expected to misunderstand the church on a regular basis. Barth argues that the root of many errors in the church is when the church understands “itself in terms of the world’s misunderstanding” rather than in terms of its own confession.²⁰³ So the true church, enlivened by the Holy Spirit, is not *wholly invisible*, but its visibility, just like its existence, is dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit, which is, in part, invisible. As Bender helpfully notes, however, though the work of the Spirit in calling the church into being is invisible, this work produces a concrete, visible form “just as to confess the resurrection of the body is not to overlook that this event, though divinely actualized, gives rise to a ‘physical reality,’ i.e., the resurrection of a *body*.”²⁰⁴ Bender further argues that for Barth the real church can be sought and found “only within its historical form. Barth emphasizes that the real church is not to be sought apart from, nor even behind, its historical manifestation, but only within its historical form. Only by looking at what is seen, the visible church even in the midst of its imperfection and sin, do we perceive (by faith!) that which cannot be seen, the invisible power of the Church.”²⁰⁵ The true, holy church cannot be easily seen, but it can be seen, in faith. This is a

göttlichen Wirkens, die Machttat des Heiligen Geistes gegenüber der Sündigkeit des menschlichen Wirkens fort in einem freien Hervortreten und Herausleuchten der wirklichen Kirche aus der Verborgenheit, in die sie durch die Sündigkeit alles und so auch des kirchlichen menschlichen Willens gehüllt ist und in der sie ohne diesen Fortgang des Wirkens des Heiligen Geistes verhüllt bleiben müßte” (KD, IV.2, 701).

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid, 687. “*daß sie sich selbst nach Maßgabe des ihr von der Welt her widerfahrenden Mißverständnisses verstanden hat*” (KD, IV.2, 778).

²⁰⁴ *Karl Barth's Christological Ecclesiology*, 171.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*; cf. Dietrich, “Christ and the Church”, 91: “The visible is real only because of the

qualified visibility, to be sure, but it is a form of visibility.

And the true church, by the Holy Spirit, does *become* visible.²⁰⁶ And Barth is emphatic that worship is where the church becomes visible to itself and to the world.²⁰⁷ We see a powerful reflection of the dialectic between visibility and invisibility in the following lengthy reflection on what happens when two or three are gathered for worship:

[they] mutually **recognize** and acknowledge that they are those who are gathered by Him as their one Lord, and regard and receive one another as brothers because they are all brothers of this First begotten... The Christian community is built on the fact that this trust is permitted and commanded : the mutual trust in which one **recognises** and acknowledges the other as a brother belonging to it ; and the trust that each must have concerning himself for glad and confident participation... They **cannot see** the Holy Spirit who has awakened and assembled them, **nor can they see** the knowledge and faith and love and hope to which He has awakened themselves and the others. They **cannot see** one another as brothers. **But they see** that these human beings, and they themselves, are baptised-in the one new name common to them all, in the name of Jesus, and therefore the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. **They see** only that these human beings, and they themselves, are those who have obviously begun to know the salvation of the world enclosed in this name, and therefore their own salvation ; **to know themselves as people who stand in absolute need of it-of the forgiveness of their sins, of justification and sanctification, of conversion...**

invisible, and the invisible only exists within the visible church. The invisible church for Barth is not the elect who are hidden in the vast numbers of the church. The invisible church, the secret of the existence of the church, is the work and presence of the Holy Spirit. The visible and invisible while not identical are inseparable, and the visible in some sense bears the invisible as the earthly-historical form of the existence of Christ himself... It is the invisible church which turns the visible children of God into who they are.”

²⁰⁶ "[Barth] emphasizes, surprisingly strongly, that this 'real church' is *visible*, that in fact it is *essential* that it be visible. It makes sense to assert that the church is something we perceive by faith only—*credo ecclesiam*, I believe in the church-- but that must not obscure the fact that the 'real church' is visible, for it is visible in the specific activity of specific people. Barth takes the statement: the visible church is not automatically the real church but the real church is visible nonetheless, and relates it to the thesis that the visible church is the combat-zone between the real church and the truly visible, all too visible 'phantom church.' The real church is visible in that it *becomes* visible, that is to say, 'it emerges and shines out from its concealment in the visible church" (Busch, "Karl Barth's Understanding of the Church as Witness," 99.).

²⁰⁷ He understands worship to be where “The dimension which embraces individual Christians and Christian groups is now visible to themselves, and in their common action to the world around” (CD, IV.2.67, 698). “*Die die einzelnen Christen und die christlichen Gruppen umfassende Kontur wird jetzt ihnen selbst, wird in ihrem gemeinsamen Tun aber auch der Umwelt bemerkbar*” (KD, IV.2, 790-791).

They see these others and themselves accepted only as those who are baptised, and in the frame of mind in which they came to baptism, as beginners in this knowledge, with this desire and request, as those who make this confession with their lips. But in respect of others and themselves they hold to the fact that they all come from the fact that they are baptised in the name of the Lord. Because they all stand under this sign in the name of the Lord, they accept the sign.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 701-702- emphasis mine *“Wo Zwei oder Drei versammelt sind im Namen Jesu, da werden sie sich gegenseitig als die von ihm als ihrem einen Herrn Zusammengeführten, als Christen also, erkennen und anerkennen, sich als Brüder jenes Erstgeborenen auch untereinander als Brüder ansehen und aufnehmen. Wer gehört zu ihnen? Wer ist, durch die belebende Macht des Heiligen Geistes erweckt, ein Heiliger und als solcher ein Glied der Gemeinschaft der Heiligen, ein Bruder der mit ihm in dieser Gemeinschaft Verbundenen? Sie alle sehen und beurteilen einander ja nur mit menschlichen und nicht mit göttlichen Augen. Sie blicken einander nicht ins Herz. Sie können sich gegenseitig nur Vertrauen schenken. Und welcher von ihnen blickte da auch nur in sein eigenes Herz, wäre darüber anders als eben menschlich zu urteilen imstande, daß er selbst ein vom Heiligen Geist Erweckter, ein Glied der Gemeinschaft der Heiligen wirklich ist und also in diese Versammlung gehört? Er kann auch das und das vor allem nur im Vertrauen wissen. Die christliche Gemeinde erbaut sich aber darauf, daß ihr dieses Vertrauen erlaubt und geboten ist: das gegenseitige Vertrauen, in welchem Einer den Anderen erkennt und anerkennt als Bruder, der zu ihr gehört, und auch das Vertrauen, daß ein Jeder zu sich selbst zu fassen hat, um freudig und getrost dabei zu sein. In diesem ihr erlaubten und gebotenen Vertrauen versammelt sich die Gemeinde zum Gottesdienst. Wie wären ihre Glieder miteinander und mit sich selbst dran, wenn sie es nicht hätten, oder wenn sie es sich, gegründet auf das, was sie übereinander und über sich selbst zu wissen meinen, eigenmächtig genommen hätten? Sie würden dann wohl nur, eben zusammengekommen, wieder auseinandergehen können. Sie haben aber dieses Vertrauen und es ist gerade nicht ein solches, das bloß auf ihr Meinen voneinander und von sich selbst gegründet wäre. Obwohl sie doch nur sehen können, was vor ihren menschlichen Augen ist! Obwohl sie wissen, daß ihr Sehen sie auch betrügen könnte! Was sehen sie? Den Heiligen Geist, der sie erweckt und zusammengeführt hat, können sie nicht sehen und die Erkenntnis, den Glauben, die Liebe, das Hoffen, zu dem er die Anderen und sie selbst erweckt hat, auch nicht. Gerade als Brüder können sie sich nicht sehen. Sie sehen aber, daß diese da und sie selbst getauft sind: auf den einen neuen Namen, der ihnen Allen gemeinsam ist, den Namen Jesu und also den Namen des Vaters, des Sohnes und des Heiligen Geistes. Sie sehen nur, daß diese da und sie selbst solche sind, die offenbar einmal zu wissen begannen um das in diesem Namen beschlossene Heil der Welt und so auch um ihr Heil, zu wissen um sich selbst als um Leute, die seiner, die also der Vergebung ihrer Sünden, der Rechtfertigung und der Heiligung, der Umkehr schlechterdings bedürftig sind. Sie sehen nur, daß diese und sie selbst einmal im Begehren und mit der Bitte um Gottes Heil zur Gemeinde kamen, mit ihrem Munde diesen Namen bekannten, nach der Taufe und also nach ihrer Anerkennung als Glieder des Leibes Jesu Christi und also nach ihrer Aufnahme in die Gemeinde verlangten und daß ihnen diese Anerkennung und Aufnahme, indem sie getauft wurden – nicht im Namen der Gemeinde, sondern im Namen ihres Herrn – gewährt wurde. Sie sehen die Anderen und sich selbst genau genommen nur eben als Getaufte – darüber hinaus ja wirklich nur in derselben Verfassung, in der sie zur Taufe hinzutraten: immer noch als Anfänger in jenem Wissen, immer noch in jenem Begehren und Bitten, immer noch als jene mit ihrem Munde*

What *is seen* is the commitment of baptism which then makes it possible to recognize that *which is not seen*- the work of the Holy Spirit that made the decision of baptism and the consequent life of faithfulness possible. *What is seen* is the need for forgiveness, justification, sanctification, which points to the *unseen* sanctification of the world, which is the effect of God's act in Jesus Christ. This returns us to the point which was so strongly emphasized in Barth's early ecclesiology— the church is most holy where it confesses that it is not holy. Holiness is seen in the admission of unholiness.

It is not surprising that Barth speaks so much about baptism in his commentary on visibility and worship above. The clearest display of Barth's understanding of the place of human action in the divine/human relationship is offered in the final, incomplete volume of his Dogmatics, the baptismal fragment in IV.4. Some argue that it is precisely with these writings Barth travelled too far down the road of the infinite qualitative distinction, effectively isolating the human from the divine, rejecting any sacramental function of the church altogether and severely limiting what can be ascribed to the church.²⁰⁹ However, I see in the fragment a mature

Bekennenden. Aber eben daran halten sie sich für die Person der Anderen und für ihre eigene Person: sie alle kommen und so kommen auch sie selbst davon her, daß sie im Namen des Herrn getauft sind. Weil sie Alle im Namen des Herrn unter dieses Zeichen gestellt sind, lassen sie es gelten" (KD, IV.2, 794-795).

²⁰⁹ e.g. Yocum argues that earlier volumes of the Dogmatics offer resources for an affirmation of the role of the church as mediator of grace, but by the doctrine of reconciliation, volume IV, he offers an overly sharp and novel distinction between actors and acts that is driven by his concern "any view of creaturely mediation in which human action threatens the unique effectiveness of the work of Jesus Christ for salvation; or, any view of the efficacy of the sacraments which might mitigate the demand for a free human response, in the form of public confession and witness on the part of the Christian to the act of God in Christ" (*Ecclesial Mediation in Karl Barth*, 98, cf. 69 for commentary on sharpness and novelty of distinction.), "In effect, then, Barth's doctrine of baptism in Church Dogmatics IV/4 replaces his earlier modest theory of sacramental mediation with an understanding of baptism as consisting of a generative divine act and a responsive human action. On the earlier account, the inferior human action was a

articulation of the principle that drove his entire project from start to finish—the infinite qualitative distinction— *and* a way to speak meaningfully about the visible human work, on the human side of the line, that unfolds in the church.²¹⁰

Barth distinguishes between baptism with the Holy Spirit and baptism with water. The former is God’s act; the latter is a human act. He writes, “As I see it, baptism with the Spirit and fire relates to the commencement of liberation for this Christian and churchly responsibility, and baptism with water relates to the entering of Christians and the community upon its discharge.”²¹¹ Here we see what he has been talking about all along— infinite, qualitative, distinction. But distinction does not mean division. One need not read these teachings as severing the human from the divine. These two sides of baptism are distinguished, but united, much like the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ.²¹² Baptism is not complete without both sides.²¹³

representation of and instrument for the communication of the superior operation of God. Now Barth separates these two operations into distinct spheres of agency, and the prevenient grace of God is not so much effective through creaturely mediation as evocative of a properly human ethical analogy to itself" (Ibid, 132).

²¹⁰ My reading resonates with that of John Webster (Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*; ———, *Barth's Moral Theology*) and fits neatly within Johnson’s interpretative scheme reviewed above (Johnson, *The Mystery of God*). Both detect more consistency than disjuncture in IV.4.

²¹¹ CD, IV.4, “*Um die anhebende Befreiung zu dieser christlichen und kirchlichen Verantwortung handelt es sich nach meiner Einsicht in der Taufe mit Geist und Feuer – und um das Antreten der Christen und der Gemeinde zu ihrem Vollzug in der Taufe mit Wasser*” (NA).

²¹² As reviewed above, Webster suggests that the enhypostatic presence of humanity in Jesus Christ is the first of three themes one must track to rightly understand Barth’s understanding of the relation between human and divine action (*Barth’s Moral Theology*, 89). Similarly, Hunsinger identifies a Chalcedonian pattern as one of three patterns structuring the whole of Barth’s Dogmatics. See George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 85. For a particular discussion of the way this Chalcedonian logic informs Barth’s understanding of the relation between divine and human agency see ch. 7, pp. 185-224. Hunsinger suggests that “there is virtually no discussion of divine and human agency in the *Church Dogmatics* which does not conform to this scheme” (*Ibid*, 187). Bender applies this interpretative tool developed by Hunsinger to the question of Barth’s ecclesiology, discussing it at length in the introduction to his own work (see *Barth’s Christological Ecclesiology*, 3-7).

²¹³ Barth suggests there are “two elements in the foundation of the Christian life, the objective and the subjective, [that] are to be correlated as well as distinguished” (CD, IV.4, 41). “*Die*

Baptism with the Holy Spirit results in radical conversion of the human being, from self-serving to self-giving, and this issues forth naturally in a life of grateful obedience and service, the *first* step of which is the free choice to be baptized with water. Baptism with water is practiced in hopeful expectation of the continued activity of the Holy Spirit in the human life, making possible further steps of faithful obedience and service. Distinction and yet co-relation is on display when Barth writes, “What God does in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit is exclusively His action. Similarly, what the human being can and should do in face of the divine action is wholly his own human action” and yet affirms a “necessary and firm connexion (sic.) between God’s action and ours, between ours and His” for which we ought to be grateful.²¹⁴

Barth’s insistence on this sharp delineation between divine and human acts is reflected in his rejection of sacramental understandings of baptism with water. He absolutely refuses to acknowledge baptism with water as an act of God on humanity. Such understandings, he believes, obliterate the true meaning of the act of water baptism which is “its character as a true and genuine human action which responds to the divine act and word.”²¹⁵ Barth heavily emphasizes baptism as a matter of free decision, undertaken in grateful response to and hope for God’s converting action in one’s life by the power of the Spirit of the risen and living Christ; it is a decision to embody the gratitude that corresponds to grace. Baptism with the Holy Spirit needs to be complemented by baptism with water,²¹⁶ but in no way does the human act of baptism with

beiden Momente der Begründung des christlichen Lebens – das «objektive» und das «subjektive» – sind ebenso genau zusammen zu sehen wie zu unterscheiden” (KD, IV.4, 45).

²¹⁴ Ibid, 72. “Was Gott in Jesus Christus durch den Heiligen Geist tut, das ist und bleibt sein Tun ganz allein. Und so ist und bleibt das, was der Mensch angesichts des Tuns Gottes seinerseits tun darf und soll, ganz und gar sein, des Menschen Tun. Seien wir dankbar, daß es zwischen Gottes und unserm, unserm und seinem Tun eine notwendige und feste Beziehung gibt” (KD, IV. 4, 79-80).

²¹⁵ Ibid, 128.

²¹⁶ “On the one side is the action of God in His address to the human being and on the other,

water guarantee the saving act of God.²¹⁷

That saving act belongs wholly to God and is invisible. But when that act takes place it visibly changes the human being beginning with the highly visible act of baptism with water.²¹⁸ He asserts that prior to baptism with water what is visible in a human being is only a person for whom Christ died, but not a relation to Christ and therefore no relation of belonging to the Christian community, but after Baptism the baptized person is recognized as a fellow member, fully united to the community and to Christ, sharing all the ministry, privileges, and shame of that community as his own.²¹⁹ Beyond that, however, central to Barth's teaching on Baptism is the centrality of conversion, radical change of human lives made possible by God's action through the Spirit of Christ. Because baptism is "the human being's conversion to God" this is why it needs to be a visible act, "visible not only to God but also to His people and all human beings"²²⁰ Further, Barth argues that in the time of the community, the time after the resurrection and ascension of Christ and before the second coming of Christ, the time of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit begun at Pentecost, but renewed continuously "fruits of the Spirit had meantime

made possible and demanded thereby, the action of the human being in his turning towards God" (Ibid, 41) "*Aber eben damit ist gesagt, daß es in dem einen Ereignis der Begründung des christlichen Lebens hier und dort um ein je ganz verschiedenes Handeln zweier unaufhebbar verschiedener Subjekte geht: dort ganz um das Handeln des dem Menschen zugewendeten Gottes – hier, durch jenes ermöglicht und hervorgerufen, ganz um das des Gott zugewendeten Menschen. Dort um Gottes mit seiner Gabe ausgesprochenes Wort und Gebot, hier um den dem Menschen als Empfänger der Gabe Gottes aufgegebenen und von ihm zu leistenden Gehorsam seines Glaubens*" (KD, IV.4, 45).

²¹⁷ "The human decision is not that in and with which, or in virtue of which, the divine change takes place." (Ibid, 32). "*Es ist aber nicht die menschliche Entscheidung, in und mit der, in deren Kraft sich die göttliche Wendung vollzieht*" (KD, IV.4, 35).

²¹⁸ e.g. "Their baptism was the concretely visible commencement of their Christian life" (Ibid, 46). "*Ihre Taufe war der konkret sichtbare Anfang ihres christlichen Lebens*" (KD, IV.4, 51).

²¹⁹ Ibid, 135-136.

²²⁰ Ibid, 144. "*Weil eben das als des Menschen Umkehr zu Gott ganz – weil das nicht nur Gott, sondern auch seinem Volk und allen Menschen sichtbar und so auch menschlich*" (KD, IV.4, 158).

grown and come to light in the acts and conduct of those who had received this baptism.”²²¹: So the first step of one’s radical conversion is marked, visibly, in Baptism, and many other visible steps follow. And Barth is clear that just as the first step of baptism has its proper home in Christian worship, so too are all the fruits of the Spirit nurtured and built up in worship; “It is not only in worship that the community is edified and edifies itself. But it is here first that this continually takes place.”²²² The communion that makes the church the church becomes “palpable and visible” in the concrete, common work of worship, particularly in “the fellowship of the Lord’s Supper.”²²³

The Correspondence and Visibility of Christian Love

The “communion that makes the church the church,” that human act which chiefly manifests the presence and the power of the Spirit in this fellowship, is the act of love. Barth understood “self-giving love” to be the primary mark of Christian discipleship. No amount of human effort can produce the self-giving love that is the chief mark of Christian discipleship; only the gift of the Holy Spirit can make this possible. “By the Holy Spirit the individual becomes free for existence in an active relationship with the other in which he is loved and finds that he may love in return. The one who is most deeply filled with the Spirit is the one who is richest in love, and the one who is devoid of love necessarily betrays the fact that he is empty of

²²¹ Ibid, 76 “*Menschen mit dem Heiligen Geist und mit Feuer zu taufen. Und Früchte des Heiligen Geistes waren inzwischen gewachsen und im Tun und Verhalten der seiner teilhaftig gewordenen Menschen sichtbar geworden*” (KD, IV.4, 84).

²²² CD IV.2.67, 638 “*Nicht nur im Gottesdienst wird sie erbaut und erbaut sie sich selbst; sie tut es aber zuerst immer aufs neue hier, und wenn sie es hier nicht täte, täte sie es gar nicht*” (KD, IV.2, 722).

²²³ Ibid, 704 “*In ihrem Gottesdienst, der auch Kommunion in diesem konkreten Sinn ist, wird das greifbar und sichtbar und eben damit, in dem Geschehen dieser Kommunion das Recht, das ihr, allem von ihr begangenen Unrecht zum Trotz, innewohnt und auch in dieser besonderen Gestalt in allen Gestalten ihres Lebens nach Beachtung ruft*” (KD, IV.2, 797).

the Spirit.”²²⁴ Love, in fact, is the corresponding act for which the Holy Spirit sets us on our feet.

The value of the concept of correspondence to this project is most evident in Barth’s discussions of Christian love. Barth teaches that the correspondence in which proper human holiness resides is chiefly found in the act of Christian love.²²⁵ If correspondence, for Barth, means that human action is both like and unlike the divine action to which it is a response, its likeness results from the fact that it unfolds within God’s prevenient action in Jesus Christ by the Spirit. Its unlikeness is because of the infinite distinction between humanity and divinity, and, more intensely, because of the reality of human sin. Love is the chief act of correspondence because God *is* self-giving love. This is what is revealed in the sending of Jesus Christ into the world; God’s choice to be *for* humanity is manifest in the incarnation. In history, in the person of Jesus the Christ, God gives Godself to the world, for the sake of the world. From this act of revelation in history, Barth discerns that beyond history, in eternity, God is constituted by this self-giving love within God’s own triune existence. God is triune because God has chosen to exist in self-giving.²²⁶

If self-giving love is both who God is and what God does, then human beings converted by the Holy Spirit will embody self-giving love as well.²²⁷ Their acts of love will not be identical to God’s and will require the action of God in order to be activated in their lives,²²⁸ but Barth

²²⁴ *CD* IV.2.68, 818 “*Aber eben durch den Heiligen Geist werden sie frei zu diesem Tun, jeder Einzelne zum Sein in einer tätigen Beziehung zum Anderen, in der er sich wie geliebt, so auch als einen solchen findet, der wieder lieben darf. Eben der Geistreichste wird da immer auch der Liebevollste sein, während der Lieblose sich da notwendig als Geistloser verraten müßte*” (*KD*, IV.2, 928).

²²⁵ See note 155, pp. 70-71 above.

²²⁶ For a brilliant elaboration of this interpretation see McCormack, “‘Grace and Being.’”

²²⁷ Barth is quite clear that God’s eternal election is the basis of human being and action in *CD* IV.2.67, see 642; McCormack draws this out as well in his essay, arguing the human ontology, like divine ontology is covenantal.

²²⁸ “The basis is the love of God whose omnipotently enlightening and impelling action it may

speaks at great length about the centrality of love to Christian discipleship. And he characterizes Christian love as self-giving, in correspondence to the self-giving God. Barth is aware of other manifestations of human love that are more self-serving than self-giving and this mixed character of human love is what marks it as distinct from divine love. We are only able to love Christianly, if we are so able, if we know ourselves to have received the gift of God's self, the Holy Spirit, to be forgiven and embraced by God.²²⁹ But, in fact, this act of self-giving *is* Christian discipleship. And it is the act for which we were created, the act that properly corresponds to our creator. It is in humble acts of love that we are faithful to our identities as covenant partners to God. Further,

follow, as a secondary love following the primary.

“But the more precise delimitation is inescapable that it never can or will precede the divine love. It never can or will begin of and with itself, or continue of itself... The love of God is the basis for that of the human being, but the love of the human being is never a basis for that of God. The love of God always takes precedence. It always has the character of grace, and that of the human being the character of gratitude” (CD IV.2.68, 753). *“die Liebe (worunter wir jetzt verstehen: die Tat des christlichen Liebens) hat einen Grund – einen wahrhaft guten und kräftigen Grund – der sie bestimmt, hervorruft und in Bewegung setzt, von dem sie herkommt, als menschliches Tun immer wieder herkommen darf und wird: die Liebe Gottes, deren allmächtig erleuchtender und bewegender Aktion sie folgen darf – sie als sekundäre, ihr als der primären Liebe.*

Die Präzisierung und Abgrenzung ist unvermeidlich: Sie kann und wird dieser niemals vorangehen. Sie kann und wird niemals aus und mit sich selbst anfangen und durch sich selbst fortgehen und Bestand haben... Es ist also die Liebe Gottes wohl der Grund der menschlichen – es wird aber die menschliche Liebe niemals zum Grund der Liebe Gottes. Es bleibt bei deren Vorrang und Vorgang, bei dem Charakter der göttlichen Liebe als Gnade und bei dem der menschlichen als Dankbarkeit” (KD, IV.2, 855).

²²⁹ “In spite of all that may rightly and necessarily be said against this love, in face of the whole heap of mud and dross and rubble and ashes under which this little love is hidden, in face of the fact that there is nothing praiseworthy or meritorious in this action, it takes place by the quickening power of the Holy Spirit that small and sinful human being may love the great and holy God, responding to the divine self-offering with his own” (Ibid, 791). *“Es bleibt ja doch Allem, was gegen sein Lieben mit Recht und notwendig einzuwenden sein mag, zum Trotz, es bleibt auch angesichts des ganzen Haufens von Asche, Schlacken, Geröll und Schmutz, unter dem sein bißchen Lieben verborgen ist, es bleibt auch angesichts der völligen Ruhm- und Verdienstlosigkeit dieses Tuns dabei: es geschieht durch die belebende Macht des Heiligen Geistes dies, daß der kleine, der sündige Mensch den großen, heiligen Gott lieben, auf Gottes Selbsthingabe mit der seinigen antworten darf” (KD, IV.2, 897).*

if what is holy is God, and self-giving love is who God is, then self-giving love must be central to a definition of holiness. Thus, if we want to look for human holiness, we ought to look for acts of love.

And we can look for such acts because, as Barth insists, Christian love is concrete. We do not love an abstraction (such as “humanity in general”), but we love concrete neighbors. And we love Christianly when we recognize the fellow humanity of our human others and make ourselves responsible for them, offering and giving ourselves to them.²³⁰ Because Christian love is concrete, it involves choice and differentiation. A particular Christian individual loves another actually existing particular person. “Their relationship is not one which exists in any case, but it takes place that they are brought together and directed to one another in fact, either in the form of an event or in consequence of an event.”²³¹ And it takes the form of either one-way or reciprocal self-giving that is out of the ordinary in affairs of human beings. We are commanded to love within the Christian family, but this narrower love should always be reaching out to the wider world.²³² It is by the life-act of love that Christians witness to the kingdom of God and thus it is by love that Christians fulfill the call to faithfulness.²³³

Thus, in the act of love human distinction from and relation to God is most visibly on display. To be filled with the Holy Spirit does not make us God, but it does make it possible for us to be humble partners in life-giving relationship to God. And when we are so empowered by the Holy Spirit to be able to live as counterparts to God, this issues forth in *visible* acts, most

²³⁰ Ibid, 819.

²³¹ Ibid, 803. “*Die Nähe, in der die Tat der christlichen Liebe zwischen Mensch und Mensch geschieht, ist die Nähe eines geschichtlichen Zusammenhanges, in welchem beide, der Liebende und der Geliebte, existieren. Es ist nicht ohne weiteres so, es geschieht aber, daß sie faktisch, ereignishaft oder im Zug eines Ereignisses zusammengedrückt, aufeinander angewiesen werden*” (KD, IV.2, 911).

²³² Ibid, 808.

²³³ Ibid, 832.

basically and powerfully the act of love.

The Task of Witness

Thus, working within the constraint of infinite qualitative distinction, there is much room to speak meaningfully about the visibility of the church, and even about the visible holiness of the church. We can only do so by attending to the concepts of covenant partnership and correspondence and particularly by attending to the work and power of the Holy Spirit within human lives and Christian community. All of this comes together beautifully in Barth's teachings on love, but the true heart of his ecclesiological understanding from his earliest to his latest writings is an understanding of the task of the church as witness. The church's sole purpose is to witness to the saving act of God in Jesus Christ that the world for whom Christ came, and died, and was raised might come to know God. Barth repeatedly asserts that this act of witness involves pointing away from self and towards God. For example, "But the work of humanity which takes place in the true Church as occasioned and fashioned by God is revealed as such only as it points beyond itself and witnesses to the fact that it is occasioned and fashioned in this way, attesting the divine work of sanctification, the upbuilding of the community by the Holy Spirit, by which it is inaugurated and determined and characterised."²³⁴ If the church revels in its own works, it fails to be the true church revealing the work of God.

As Barth understands it, what the church is attesting in its witness is sanctification. The

²³⁴ CD, IV.2.67, 617. "Wo doch das in der wirklichen Kirche geschehende, von Gott veranlaßte und gestaltete Menschenwerk sich selbst gerade nur damit darstellt und sichtbar macht, daß es, über sich selbst hinausweisend, dieses göttliche Veranlassen und Gestalten bezeugt: das Gotteswerk der Heiligung, die Auferbauung der Gemeinde durch den Heiligen Geist, durch die es inauguriert, bestimmt und charakterisiert ist!" (KD, IV.2, 698).

church serves as a witness to holiness.²³⁵ Barth understands all of humanity to be both justified and sanctified in Jesus Christ. What distinguishes the church from the world is that the church knows and is experiencing this justification and sanctification. Barth articulates this distinction in this way: “the congregation or people which knows this elevation and establishment, this sanctification, not merely *de jure* but already *de facto*, and which is therefore a witness to all others, representing the sanctification which has already come upon them too in Jesus Christ. This representation is provisional.”²³⁶ Some raise their eyebrows at this *de jure/de facto* distinction in relation to sanctification, arguing that Barth’s understanding of an objective sanctification accomplished for all of humanity in Christ has no grounding in scripture.²³⁷ But if we can turn our attention to the *de facto* side of the equation Barth is suggesting that the church is a community that is being made holy so that the world might know what has been opened up for all by God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ. The community’s sanctification is a representation to the world, and as representation it is, in some sense, visible. Its visibility is not the point; it is not an end in itself, but it is the vehicle by which people are directed to the invisible.²³⁸

²³⁵ Stout connects the task of witness directly to the question of holiness: “Our failure to make use of our freedom is challenged by the Holy Spirit calling us to be holy as God is holy. In sanctification (*Heiligung*), God claims human life and activity for the fulfillment of his will. In response to the *falsehood* of humanity, we are made a part of the prophetic work of Christ witnessing to God’s work in the world. . . . Justification, sanctification, conversion, and transformation have taken place for all (objectively) in Jesus Christ. Yet, many do not know their new situation or even the truth about their old situation. God has set aside the Christian community in order for the world to know its standing and reality. God is fashioning these people into a holy people who will witness to the fact of the world’s redemption. . . . The world should behold a correspondence and copy of God’s holiness in the existence of this people” (Stout, *A Fellowship of Baptism*, 153-154- cites IV.2, 501).

²³⁶ *Ibid*, 620.

²³⁷ e.g. Anthony H. Hoekma, *Karl Barth’s Doctrine of Sanctification* (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1965).

²³⁸ Several of the early Barthian declarations considered in part one, notably much of the

It is helpful to note the way in which Barth is careful to modify his statements on representation, acknowledging that this representation is always only provisional; these qualifications bring us back to the humility that is so significant in his ecclesiology. The community's task of witness is vitally important, but it is always secondary to God's work of salvation on behalf of all humanity; God's work, not ours, is complete. Once again, the distinction between divinity and humanity is on display. And yet, Barth is finding a way to talk about holiness in which human beings in human community participate. I take from Barth's qualifications, hesitations, and reservations in any discussion of human holiness, a healthy invocation to humility as one of the chief virtues to be nurtured in ecclesial existence. Thus it comes as no surprise that Barth insists that this task of witness, in which our corresponding holiness resides, can only be fulfilled "as we love one another."²³⁹

CONCLUSION

In my review of Barth's ecclesiological contributions, I have argued that, on the one hand, an insistence on infinite qualitative distinction between God and humanity makes it profoundly difficult to articulate a position on the visible holiness of the church, but that, on the other hand, there is room within this distinction for the crafting of such a position. Barth's image of the humble church offers significant insight for the work of this project. We are not God. We are sinful. We are radically dependent on the grace and transforming activity of God. Humility must be integrally woven into a Reformed understanding of ecclesial holiness. Our first words must be an acknowledgment of our sin and our radical dependence on God. We cannot offer an understanding of the holy church that shrinks from an acknowledgement of the persistence of

ecclesiology from the Romans commentary, say precisely this.

²³⁹ *CD* IV.2.68, 812

sin.

Integral to this image of the humble church are two crimson threads which we will find in all the sources we review, those being the strong affirmation that God alone is the source of faith and sanctification, and the foundational character of forgiveness to ecclesial existence. Barth leaves no question that the church lives, if it lives at all, by the forgiveness of God.

That said, Barth appears to have very little to say about the horizontal practice of the forgiveness of sins. Whenever he speaks about forgiveness, he does so in vertical terms. He emphasizes the forgiveness or remission of sins as a divine gift to humanity. In all his discussion of the act of love that is the heart of Christian discipleship in his *Dogmatics*, he never speaks of the practice of forgiveness between human beings in this context. This is, perhaps, not surprising. Who can forgive sins, but God alone? Barth's nervousness about synergy, about the confusion of creator with created, might have led him away from reflection on this practice. But is there a Christian practice that better manifests the humility to which Barth's ecclesiology invites us? For if all remain sinners, perpetually in need of forgiveness, and if forgiveness is the gift given to us by God in Jesus Christ through the Spirit, then is this not the practice by which the church can become visible in the world? Is it impossible to imagine that an imperfect, spotted practice of forgiveness might not be an appropriate, obedient, corresponding action of the church? And is it not a practice that equalizes the community, for all in the community require this gift perpetually and are equally capable of extending it should the Holy Spirit set all on their feet to do so?

We will now turn our attentions to an older contribution to the tapestry. Karl Barth's theological work was undertaken under the influence of and in many cases in reaction against the monumental efforts of his Reformed forebear, Friedrich Schleiermacher. As I suggest above, Barth's insistence on the infinite, qualitative distinction was, in large part, a reaction against the

trajectory of liberal Protestant theology that had its origins in Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher's project, then, is *not* constrained by this distinction, and, in some ways, is more able to speak about visible holiness. The image of the church that Schleiermacher offers us will provide a nice complement to what we have found in Barth. Yet, despite all the difference between the two thinkers, we will note the presence of the two crimson threads we glimpsed in Barth. We will also gain deeper insight into the problem to which this dissertation is a response as my work with Schleiermacher will open up reflection on the characteristic Reformed insistence on the priority of the Word and the related emphasis on the preaching office.

CHAPTER III

FRIEDRICH SCHLEIERMACHER: THE NECESSARILY MUTUAL CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

In Karl Barth's weaving we glimpsed just how hard it can be for Reformed Christians to understand the visibility of ecclesial holiness because of our characteristic insistence on the pervasive and persistent presence of sin *and* the radical distinction between God and humanity. A part of our problem, then, is constraints attached to our theological and anthropological convictions. Some might suggest, however, that these constraints are overstated in the teachings of Karl Barth and that we would be well served to attend to earlier Reformed thinkers for an alternative approach. And so we will.

Friedrich Schleiermacher is among the most significant of 19th century Reformed theologians; he was, unquestionably, a highly influential theological forebear of Karl Barth. Much of Barth's oeuvre was constructed in direct response to Schleiermacher's teachings and the trajectory of 19th century Liberal Protestant Theology that flowed from them. In this chapter, we will examine Schleiermacher's contribution to the ecclesiological tapestry gaining insight into another level of the problem confronting Reformed Christians seeking an understanding of visible ecclesial holiness and will focus on the distinct picture of ecclesial holiness that he offers that can helpfully inform the work of this project.

If we learned from Barth that it is hard to talk about visible ecclesial holiness at all, we begin to perceive in our contemplation of Schleiermacher how easy it is for Reformed Christians, with our characteristic emphasis on the proclamation of the Word, to attach visible holiness to

the church's preachers. Those well acquainted with Schleiermacher's thought will likely chafe at this suggestion because of how strongly he resisted a stark clerical/lay distinction. Indeed, the possibility of a sacralized clerical office ought to be anathema in Reformed thought, as this was a chief point of the protest that birthed Reformed communions. But in practice Reformed communions seem as vulnerable as most other ecclesial fellowships to an elevated and even sacralized clerical office. It is, indeed, surprising to find this tendency in the thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher. Perhaps seeing it here, through the work of this chapter, will help us to see it in the wider Reformed tradition as well. In light of this surprising dimension of the problem, we will likely be highly motivated for a careful consideration of Jean Calvin's weaving when this chapter is through.

I ultimately forward two arguments in this chapter. First, though it is difficult for Reformed Christians to conceptualize the visible holiness of the church, our emphasis on the Word, and related emphasis on preaching—and therefore the preaching office, and too easily preachers—renders the tradition vulnerable to the identification of too much of the church's identity and holiness in the church's clerics. Second, I argue that Schleiermacher, like all conscientious Reformed thinkers, *does not* identify the church in its clerics, but rather in the community that arises from the *mutual communication* of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. In a tradition that places such heavy emphasis on the communication of the Word, it will be essential to understand the mutual character of communication in a Reformed position on the visible holiness of the church.

This chapter unfolds in four major moves. First we seek to grasp Schleiermacher's understanding of the church and its communicative foundation. Second, we consider the visibility and holiness dimensions of Schleiermacher's communicative ecclesiology. Third, we

examine Schleiermacher's understanding of the significance of preaching in the church. Finally, the primary argument of the chapter, about surprising vulnerability and the necessary balancing image of mutuality, unfolds in the conclusion.

The argument of this chapter emerges from reflection on four different texts prepared by Schleiermacher— “Fourth Speech: On the Social Element in Religion; or, On Church and Priesthood” from *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*²⁴⁰, *Christmas Eve*,²⁴¹ *Lectures on Christian Ethics*,²⁴² and *The Christian Faith*.²⁴³ These are four significant ecclesiological texts prepared at different periods in Schleiermacher's career that represent different genres of writing. Though I begin my reflections with a consideration of his earliest ecclesiological writing in Speech 4, I do not intend to advance an argument about the development of his thought, but rather to draw forth key dimensions of his ecclesiological teachings from these representative texts, both in search of resources for a Reformed position on the visible holiness of the church and to further demonstrate the problem that drives the search

²⁴⁰ Friedrich Schleiermacher, “Über das Gesellige in der Religion, oder über Kirche und Priesterthum” in *Über die Religion: redde an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern*, Sechste Auflage, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 125-160; *On Religion*, Intro., Trans., and Notes by Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 162-188.

²⁴¹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Die Weihnachtsfeier: Ein Gespräch*, Zweite Ausgabe (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1826; *Christmas Eve: Dialogue on the Incarnation*, trans. Terrence N. Tice (San Francisco: EM Texts, 1990)

²⁴² Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Die christliche Sitte nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche in zusammenhänge dargestellt*, originally published in *Sämmtliche Werke* div. 1, vol. 12 edited by Ludwig Jonas (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1843) and *Christliche Sittenlehre Einleitung* (Wintersemester 1826/27, (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1983). I worked from the portions of these lectures that are translated in the following volumes: *Selections from Friedrich Schleiermacher's Christian Ethics*, ed. and trans. by James M. Brandt, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011) and *Introduction to Christian Ethics*, trans. John C. Shelley (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989).

²⁴³ *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhänge dargestellt* (2nd edition, 1830/31) ed. Rolf Schäfer, in *Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Hans Joachim Birkner et al. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1981-); *The Christian Faith*, ed. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart, (Bloomsbury: T and T Clark, 1999)

for such a position.

PART ONE- SCHLEIERMACHER’S COMMUNICATIVE ECCLESIOLOGY

In this first part of the chapter I intend to make plain Schleiermacher’s understanding of the church and its communicative foundation. I will do this first by considering the contrast and relation that he articulates between the true church and the common church, particularly attending to the communicative dimensions therein. I will also attend to the necessary mixture that Schleiermacher perceives between church and world.

True Church/Common Church Contrast and Relation

We begin our search for Schleiermacher’s understanding of the church in his earliest ecclesiological weaving, found in *Speech 4* in *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*.²⁴⁴ In those pages, Schleiermacher sets forth a stark contrast between two churches—the true church and the common church. The common church, that being the institutional church that we know and see in the world, is *not* the true church, and, Schleiermacher’s description of the true church lends the impression that it is nearly the opposite of that which we experience in the world as church. Many scholars note that in later ecclesiological writing Schleiermacher demonstrates a greater appreciation for the necessity of and importance of the institutional church and its structures, but, nonetheless, when Schleiermacher revised the *Speeches* in 1821,

²⁴⁴ This apologetic work was prepared at the prompting of Friedrich Schlegel, Henrietta Herz, and Alexander van Dohna, friends of Schleiermacher, who encouraged him, in late 1797, to write a book that would explain his view of religion. These friends were themselves skeptical about official religion and their views conform to the skepticism of the presumed “cultured despisers” to whom the speeches are addressed. The book was planned in 1798, but drafted in a three-month period in 1799 (Crouter, “Introduction” to *On Religion*, 12-14). He did revise the text several times, but Crouter’s translation is of the original, with notes pointing to the revisions.

he let this basic contrast stand, only adding notes to suggest his greater appreciation for the institutional church.²⁴⁵

Schleiermacher wrote the *Speeches* for an “enlightened,” bourgeois audience who had little to no use for private religion and nearly universal scorn for any form of organized religion. He suggests that their problem rests in a basic misunderstanding of what religion is and throughout the *Speeches* engages an apologetic effort to correct their misunderstanding. In *Speech 4*, he argues that religion is necessarily social. Where there is religion, community will form. But this does not mean that the community that is called the church is a truly religious community; he grants that the form that the church has taken in the world is worthy of the critique heaped upon it. He suggests that his audience knows how to rightly assess “what one commonly calls the church at its real value, that is to say, not particularly highly.”²⁴⁶ And the biggest problem with this rightly critiqued body, a criticism that he shares with his readers, is the lack of mutuality among its participants. Nonetheless, Schleiermacher tells his readers that that which they are critiquing is *not* a truly religious society, but rather is a gathering of people *seeking* true religion. With this contrast between the true church and the common church, Schleiermacher has two social units in view— a community of truly religious people and a community of people seeking

²⁴⁵ Sykes notes, “in the explanations added to the text of the speeches *On Religion* in 1821, Schleiermacher acknowledges that his attack on the Church as an institution was one-sided. In particular he admits that he placed too low a value on the organization of the Church into a large institution, as compared with the local congregation springing into being in response to the needs of religions people” (Stephen Sykes, *Friedrich Schleiermacher*, (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1971), 30-31.) Crouter, translator of the *Speeches*, emphasizes that the changes made to the body of *Speech 4* were hardly “extensive or substantive,” suggesting rather “He appears to have found little about which he overtly changed his mind. But in view of the resurgence of religious anti-intellectualism it has become necessary for him to underscore the ways in which he envisages the true church as a publicly identifiable community with an established leadership” (“Introduction” to *On Religion*, 72).

²⁴⁶ *On Religion*, 170.

religion.²⁴⁷

The Contrast

We begin a closer consideration of this ecclesiological contrast with attention to the latter—the common church, that community of seekers of religion. Schleiermacher contrasts the life, spontaneity, and equality/mutuality of the true church with the death, formality, and inequality of that institution which is commonly called the church (hereafter “the common church”).²⁴⁸

The chief mark of the common church is the great and apparently fixed passivity of the masses. He suggests that in the mass religious assemblies of the common church nearly all present expect only to receive, while only one is expected to give; the masses listen, while only one speaks. Though, in the common church, the masses gather in the hopes that they will passively receive, he suggests that, ironically, they are incapable of retaining that which they are offered because there is nothing active and living in them to which it attaches.

It certainly cannot be said of them that they only wish to supplement their religion through that of others, for if what dwells in them were in fact religion, it would demonstrate some type of action upon others, for this is in its nature. They produce no countereffect because they are capable of none, and they can only be incapable of none

²⁴⁷ Rendtdorff highlights the dimension of capacity in the contrast that Schleiermacher lays out in *Speech 4*. He writes, “The distinction between the ‘capable’ and the incapable’ is of major importance for the theory of the church. Although the Great Church is the institution for those who are not—or not yet—capable of grasping the true religion, the church in the real sense is ‘a society of men who have already reached consciousness in their piety, and in whom the religious view of life is dominant,’ and such people ‘must be men of some culture and much power’”(Trutz Rendtdorff, *Church and Theology: The Systematic Function of the Church Concept in Modern Theology*, trans. Reginald H. Fuller, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 123). Crouter characterizes the opposition in this speech as “institutional with standard leadership (coerciveness) vis community (mutuality) and the resolution is a “reconceptualized ideal of religious community” (“Introduction” to *On Religion*, 43).

²⁴⁸ Rendtdorff prefers the label “Great Church,” likely because of Schleiermacher’s emphasis on the size of assemblies therein (see below, page?)(e.g. *Church and theology*, 123). As it seems Schleiermacher is evoking common perceptions of the church, I prefer the adjective “common.”

for the reason that no religion dwells in them.²⁴⁹

Thus, the fact that the vast majority of participants in the common church persist in passivity proves the lack of true and living religiosity in this body. Schleiermacher suggests that progress in religion would transfer them from lifeless passivity, to living, spontaneous activity. “If they progressed, if religion would in this way be spontaneously and vivaciously implanted in them, they would soon leave that religion whose one-sidedness and passivity would thereupon no longer be suited to their condition or could even be tolerable.”²⁵⁰ He further suggests that those who receive the gift of living religion, even if they don’t leave these assemblies, will necessarily supplement them with community with other truly religious people and would likely, eventually, abandon the so-called church for the living community they discover. “Thus, in fact, people become all the more indifferent to the church the more they increase in religion, and the most pious sever themselves from it proudly and coldly. Nothing can in fact be clearer than that seekers of religion are in this association only because they have no religion; they persevere in it only so long as they have none.”²⁵¹

The common church then is a formal institution marked by stark and permanent clerical/lay distinction that gathers together mass assemblies of those seeking religion. The presumption that reigns within the common church that only one (the cleric) will be active while all assembled (the laity) will be passive, indicates a lack of true religiosity in the laity. To possess religion, in Schleiermacher’s understanding, is to be made capable of spontaneous communication of the Spirit of God, both in active and receptive modes.²⁵²

²⁴⁹ Ibid, 170-171

²⁵⁰ Ibid, 172

²⁵¹ Ibid, 172

²⁵² We will consider more about the positive function of the common church when we discuss the relation between the true church and the common below.

Schleiermacher paints a verbal picture of such communication unfolding in the true church early in *Speech Four*, when he expresses a yearning that his readers might glimpse the true church:

I wish I could draw you a picture of the rich, luxuriant life in this city of God when its citizens assemble, all of whom are full of their own power, which wants to stream forth into the open, all full of holy passion to apprehend and appropriate everything the others might offer them. When a person steps forth before others, it is not an office or an appointment that empowers him to do so, not pride or ignorance that fills him with presumption. It is the free stirring of the spirit, the feeling of most cordial unanimity of each with all and of the most perfect equality, a mutual annihilation of every first and last and of all earthly order.²⁵³

This picture of the true church is a picture of shared power, mutual communication of that which has been received by the Spirit. All in the community are filled with their own power and the one who comes forth to speak does so not because of office or pride, but in response to the free stirring of the Spirit. In the true church, he writes:

each person is a priest to the extent that he draws others to himself in the field that he has specially made his own and in which he can present himself as a virtuoso; each is a layperson to the extent that he follows the art and direction of another where he himself is a stranger in religion. There is none of that tyrannical aristocracy that you describe so maliciously; this society is a priestly people, a perfect republic where each alternately leads and is led; each follows in the other the same power that he also feels in himself and with which he rules others.²⁵⁴

In the true church, then, though at times one speaks and many listen, all are equal and it is the Spirit who prompts the activity of anyone at any given time. The living Spirit, not dead structures and roles, motivates communication. There is no place for a sharp clerical/lay distinction in the true church. According to Schleiermacher, the true church is a living, spontaneous fellowship of those who are being sanctified, which is marked by radical mutuality and reciprocal communication of Christ's God-consciousness by the Holy Spirit. The true church has a

²⁵³ *On Religion*, 165.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 166

mutually communicative foundation.²⁵⁵

In *Speech 4*, Schleiermacher challenges his reader's assumption that the best religion is private religion by arguing that there can be no such thing as private religion both due to human nature and the nature of religion. Schleiermacher understands humans to have been created for practical and intellectual reciprocity. He points out that humans naturally want to communicate that which arises from inside themselves. "The more passionately something moves him, and the more intimately it penetrates his being, the stronger is the urge also to glimpse its power outside himself in others, in order to prove to himself that he has encountered nothing other than what is human."²⁵⁶ And because religion, which he will later characterize as the "feeling of absolute

²⁵⁵ Rendtdorff offers this characterization of the free society that is the true church: "Free Society is characterized by the fact that it consists of no more than its members contribute, their own lives, experience, and insight, and the pure impartation of these things" (*Church and Theology*, 128). Sykes notes that that Schleiermacher's consistent standard of evaluation of the church is "in terms of the extent to which it fosters genuine fellowship and communion between its members. The necessity of the Church springs from the necessity of mutual communication between people in the same religious tradition" (*Friedrich Schleiermacher*, 31). Redeker summarizes Schleiermacher's position on the true church both negatively and positively. The true church is not an institution, a structure for salvation, nor a hierarchical institution with sacral/magical authority. Rather it is "community arising from within the religious life as a completely free spiritual communion of pious men (sic.)" (Martin Redeker, *Schleiermacher: Life and Thought*, trans. John Wallhausser, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 51). Redeker is critical of the church concept in *Speech 4*, finding it deficient in its acknowledgement of the Christological center of Christian piety (Ibid, 54). He does not level the same criticism on his more mature ecclesiological offerings in the *Christian Faith*. There, he says, Schleiermacher offers a christological-pneumatological definition of the church (Ibid, 188). We will also explore this more fully below (see pp. 117-123).

²⁵⁶ *On Religion*, 163. This emphasis on the fundamentally communicative character of human nature and the need to communicate religious intuitions also surfaces later in Schleiermacher's career in his *Lectures on Christian Ethics*. There he suggests that the most enduring and sustaining form of church action is presentational action, that action whereby internal states are made external that God-consciousness might be shared within the community and beyond it. He suggests that presentational action within the church is "the continual realization of human nature itself." (*Selections from Christian Ethics*, 148). He elsewhere argues that the Holy Spirit doesn't produce the means of communication, but rather works with what is natural to humankind (Ibid, 152).

It may be of interest to note that on this point Schleiermacher stands with Calvin. Gerrish

dependence,” is among the most powerful of intuitions, humans *need* to communicate it to others. Schleiermacher distinguishes between intuitions/feelings and concepts. The former, he suggests, people are compelled to communicate from childhood on, but the latter bear no such urge to communication.²⁵⁷ Thus, when people are taught doctrines they are not likely to run out and share what they have learned with others, but when they are stirred by true religion, they cannot help speaking about what they are experiencing.²⁵⁸

How should he keep to himself the influences of the universe that appear to him as greatest and most irresistible? How should he wish to retain within himself that

challenges the common presumption that Schleiermacher is more indebted to Luther than to Calvin. He notes that Schleiermacher traces “the religiousness of Christians, like everyone else’s” to their humanity rather than to “their relation to Christ” which instead grounds the Christianness of their religion. He draws a parallel to Calvin’s need “to talk about *homo religiosus* before he could expound faith in Christ” (B. A. Gerrish, “From Calvin to Schleiermacher” in *Continuing the Reformation: Essays on Modern Religious Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 181). Gerrish reminds his readers, “after the famous opening chapter on the two parts of wisdom (knowledge of God and knowledge of self), Calvin actually begins his *Institutes* neither with the idea of God, nor with the authority of Scripture, but with a discussion of religion. Mainly on the basis of common human experience, he offers what we might call a description of the religious consciousness as that which distinguishes humanity from the rest of the animal kingdom” (*Ibid*, 187).

²⁵⁷ *On Religion*, 163-164.

²⁵⁸ Rendtdorff states, “In Schleiermacher the structure of impartation, located in the dimension of humanity, replaces the system of doctrine” (*Church and Theology*, 121). He supports this claim by appealing to Schleiermacher’s description, in “Speech 2” in *On Religion*, of human selves as the “compendium of humanity,” every individual nature “embraces all human nature” (Rendtdorff is citing an earlier translation of the speeches: *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. K. Paul (Trench: Trübner and Company, 1893), 79). Rendtdorff further argues that “The systematic character of religion is encapsulated in his own communicative structure” and thereby critiques “the secondary system of ‘dogmas and doctrines which many consider the essence of religion’ (*Ibid*, 87)” (*Church and Theology*, 121). Redeker notes that Schleiermacher joins together a pietistic distinction between doctrine and life with a similar distinction in transcendental philosophy noting that “Doctrine and reflection, therefore, are not themselves the foundation but that which has been founded” and “Christian faith is therefore never faith in correct doctrine and the dead letter but in the living relation between God and man (sic.)” (*Schleiermacher: Life and Thought*, 40). Redeker points to a living vs. dead distinction that, as I already suggested, comes through in Schleiermacher’s contrast between the true church and the common church. Redeker suggests that this is a decisive insight for *The Christian Faith* that is already present in the *Speeches*.

which most strongly forces him out of himself and which, like nothing else, impresses him with the fact that he cannot know himself in and of himself alone. Rather, his first endeavor, when a religious view has become clear to him or a pious feeling penetrates his soul, is also to direct others to the object and, if possible, to communicate the vibrations of his mind to them. If, therefore, urged by his own nature, religious man necessarily speaks, it is this very nature that also provides hearers for him.²⁵⁹

The impulse to communicate one's religion is not a desire to *make* others like ourselves or give others something we possess and they lack, but part of what is awakened in religious consciousness is an awareness of connection to all other humans, an acknowledgement of shared human nature. The quote above about the desire to prove to oneself that one has encountered "nothing other than what is human" better captures what fuels the communicative impulse.²⁶⁰ He writes that "the most proper object of this desire for communication is unquestionably that where man originally feels himself to be passive, his intuitions and feelings; there he has to ask whether it might not be an alien and unworthy power to which he must submit."²⁶¹ One is testing the spirits, as it were, with this urge to communicate. If one's deepest intuitions find a resonance when they are communicated, one can trust them and they can be thereby strengthened.

Though all intuition, it seems, carries this urge to communicate, religious intuition, according to Schleiermacher, is unlike any other in that only religion confronts humanity with a sense of incapacity to exhaust the object of thought. When one is awakened to religious consciousness and therefore to infinity, one is simultaneously aware of one's tremendous limitations. Anyone who possesses religion "is conscious of encompassing only a small part of religion, and what he cannot attain immediately he wants at least to perceive through another

²⁵⁹ Ibid, 163-16;

²⁶⁰ Crouter suggests that one of the common elements between the *Speeches* and *The Christian Faith* is the insistence of finding one's individuality in community ("Introduction" to *On Religion*, 2).

²⁶¹ *On Religion*, 163

medium. Therefore, every expression of religion interests him, and seeking his complement he listens attentively to every tone that he recognizes as religious. This is how mutual communication organizes itself; thus speaking and hearing are equally indispensable for everyone.”²⁶² Religious intuition is communicated that it might be tested, clarified, and that it might continue to develop. It demands communication, both expression and listening.

Schleiermacher makes essentially the same argument in *The Christian Faith*, and there he links the necessary sociality and communicative foundation of the church with the doctrine of sanctification. As the doctrine of sanctification is a teaching about the process by which the church/Christians is/are made holy, here we glimpse that there is an intimate connection between the holiness of the church and its communicative foundation. He writes in Thesis 121 “*Those who are living in the state of sanctification feel an inward impulse to become more and more one in their common co-operative activity and reciprocal influence, and are conscious of this as the common Spirit of the new corporate life founded by Christ.*” To be in the process of being made holy means to be led to increasingly reciprocal communication in community. Though Schleiermacher acknowledges that sanctification involves being taught by God directly which would suggest that therefore one does not require human teaching, “But as new persons are always arriving, this element in fellowship also runs on; those who were previously receivers now imparting, as givers, to later comers.”²⁶³

The true church is a communion in which sanctification unfolds via the mutual communication of that which has been received by the Spirit. We cannot depart our contemplation of what the true church is, in Schleiermacher’s understanding, without pausing to

²⁶² Ibid, 164.

²⁶³ *Christian Faith*, par. 121, 561; We will consider more closely the link between the communicative foundation of the church and its holiness in the next part of the chapter.

reflect on his understanding of the Holy Spirit. Schleiermacher formally defines the Holy Spirit as “the vital unity of the Christian fellowship as a moral personality,” also known as the “common spirit” of the Christian church.²⁶⁴ Already it is clear that his understanding of the church and his understanding of the Holy Spirit are tightly interrelated. It is the presence of the Holy Spirit that makes the church the church. Because Christ is no longer physically present exerting his influence on individuals, it is necessary that there be some other presence of the divine on earth that Christ’s influence can continue to be experienced. Schleiermacher suggests that the “Being of God” resides in the church “and it is this which continues within the Church the communication of the perfection and blessedness of Christ.”²⁶⁵ This communication is both “the innermost impulse of the individual” and “the common spirit of the whole.”²⁶⁶ So the Holy Spirit is the being of God, dwelling in humanity, allowing the continued communication of the redemption offered by/initiated by/opened by Christ.

Schleiermacher elaborates his understanding of the common spirit animating the community and mediating Christ’s influence through that community through a discussion of love. What believers recognize in one another is “a common love to Christ” and this as the “unifying principle that is uninterruptedly at work.”²⁶⁷ This common spirit is further “the

²⁶⁴ *Christian Faith*, par. 116, 535. With the use of the adjective “common,” he is pointing to that which is common to all Christians, that in which all Christians necessarily share that makes them Christian, incorporates them into the church. He does not here speak to something common to all human beings— though on another level he does affirm a fundamental link/union between all human beings. Ultimately, all of humanity should receive the Holy Spirit so the interconnection for which human beings were created can finally be realized.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid*, See also thesis 123 where Schleiermacher identifies the Holy Spirit as “*the union of the Divine Essence with human nature in the form of the common Spirit animating the life in common of believers.*”

²⁶⁶ *Ibid*.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid*, par. 121, 561-562)

characteristic love found in each for every other.”²⁶⁸ The “every other” is important to note. Schleiermacher believes that the communication of the Holy Spirit is an awakening by Christ to love of all people “as the proper and essential fruit of the appearance of Christ.”²⁶⁹ This consciousness which results in universal love was initiated by the coming of Christ which united human consciousness with God consciousness and is in no sense a “mere natural principle that would have developed of itself out of human nature” without the influence of Christ on human nature. What is perceived, by the activity of the Holy Spirit, is the universal need for redemption and the universal possibility of redemption by being taken up into living fellowship with Christ. This perception of our common need and common potential makes possible universal love. “...the universal love of humanity we know only as one and the same thing with the will for the Kingdom of God in its widest compass. It is only in this sense that for us the common spirit of the Christian Church, and every Christian’s universal love for men as a love alike for those who have already become citizens of the Kingdom of God and for those to whom this experience is yet to come, are the same One Holy Spirit.”²⁷⁰ The Holy Spirit then is the love within the

²⁶⁸ Ibid. In his *Lectures on Ethics*, Schleiermacher suggests that the principle of presentational action, that communicative action which births and sustains community is “brotherly love” (*Selections from Christian Ethics*, 145).

²⁶⁹ *Christian Faith*, par. 121, 564-565; cf. “No one can be conscious of the divine Spirit except insofar as one is conscious at the same time that the whole human race belongs to this Spirit; the distinction among individuals is only temporal, which is to say that some already have the *pneuma agion*, and others do not yet have it.’ And Christian brotherly love is entirely universal: some are included as already partaking of the divine Spirit, and others are included to whom the Spirit is to be communicated. Thus in the one case presentational action addresses itself to those who already have an experience of the divine Spirit, and in the other case to those who have the receptivity that is presupposed... As certainly as the divine Spirit is present in an individual, just as certainly is there also a community between this individual and all other persons, which yet can only be gradually realized over time. This community refers to the same relationship of human nature in all persons to the divine Spirit, and the only thing that is to happen is the coming into appearance of that self-consciousness in which the dominion of the divine Spirit over flesh is established in an absolute way” (*Selections from Christian Ethics*, 145, cf. 148).

²⁷⁰ *Christian Faith*, par. 121, 564-565

community and the love reaching out from the community.

For Schleiermacher the true church is the exclusive location of the Holy Spirit. He is adamant that the Holy Spirit is always and only in believers, in the true Christian community. He believes this to be the right interpretation of New Testament representations of the Holy Spirit. He particularly has the Acts account of the sending of the Spirit in view when he says that “[The Holy Spirit] is promised to the whole community, and where an original communication of Spirit is spoken of, it comes by a single act to a multitude of people, who *eo ipso* become an organic whole, who are urged on to like activity and stand in for each other.”²⁷¹ Though he acknowledges other references to Spirit in scripture, particularly in the Old Testament, he distinguishes between the Holy Spirit who is necessarily connected to the church and these other references to Spirit. He suggests that all the powers attributed to the church in the New Testament, and not merely miraculous powers, are “traced to the Holy Spirit.”²⁷² He suggests three limits to what can be said about these powers and the Holy Spirit’s activity.

- 1) these powers are not to be found outside of the Christian Church, and hence they neither arise from the general constitution of human nature (which would make Christ superfluous) nor from any other divine arrangement.
- 2) this Spirit is not something supernatural and mysterious though not immediately divine, a higher yet created essence putting itself in secret ways into relation with men.
- 3) the Holy Spirit is not something that, although divine, is not united with the human nature, but only somehow influences it from without... There is indeed no way of imagining how the Spirit’s gifts could be within us, and He Himself remain without, or how He is to influence us from without except through human speech and significant action—which just means that He is already within, and influencing, someone else. And the man *on* whom the Holy Spirit works is not thereby made a participatory in the Spirit. Only one *in* whom and *through* whom He works has received the Spirit. Thus in everyone He brings His gifts to pass, and we are not conscious of the gifts as inward, but the power that effects them as outward: what we do is to distinguish him *on* whom the Holy Spirit is still at work, as thus being one in whom no gift is yet produced, from one within the state of sanctification, *in* whom the Holy Spirit is producing gifts.²⁷³

²⁷¹ Ibid, par. 121, 562

²⁷² Ibid, par. 123, 570

²⁷³ Ibid, par. 123, 571.

So clearly he affirms the necessary and exclusive linkage of the Holy Spirit and the church, the full divinity of the Holy Spirit, the union of the Holy Spirit with human nature, the indwelling of that Holy Spirit in at least some human beings. This is what was accomplished in the sending of Christ, the entry of the divine into human nature. Thus, christology, ecclesiology, and pneumatology are tightly intertwined for Schleiermacher and all three doctrines are crucial to his understanding of the true church.²⁷⁴

Though Christ, Spirit, and church are intertwined, they can be distinguished from one another. Schleiermacher does not believe the union of the human and the divine in Christ, nor the union of humanity and divinity by the Holy Spirit in the church collapses the distinction between God and humanity. Rather he believes the coming of Christ made possible restored *relationship*

²⁷⁴ Haight elegantly articulates this interconnection; “Thus [with the sending of the Spirit which transferred disciples to the inner circle making them active communicators of the Spirit] the community becomes a more autonomous and spontaneous agent to preserving Jesus’ God-consciousness, and the Spirit becomes the divine source of continuity and energy and solidarity of the community. The memory of Jesus is translated into imitation of him; this common activity is in each and in all and in each through the community; and this community or common life preserves the personal activity of Jesus Christ in history, and constitutes the common spirit of the Christian church (*Christian Faith*, par 122, 568)... Schleiermacher’s theological understanding of the church can be synthesized in a series of direct propositions that barely contain this sweeping view: humankind is caught in the tentacles of sin which strangle consciousness of, and existence in relation to, God. Jesus Christ is a unique divine communication from outside the sphere of sin. Christ mediates redemption to this situation by communicating his God-consciousness through the church. Membership in the church is defined by being set within the historical sphere of the influence of Jesus Christ. The experience of the Spirit and the influence of Christ mediated to members of the church are one and the same (*Christian Faith*, par 124, 575). Christ and the Spirit form the simultaneous and mutually implicating foundation of the church” (Roger Haight, S.J., *Christian Community in History*, (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005), 320-321). Rendtdorff notes that the supposed 20th century discovery of the unity/identity of christology and ecclesiology had already been developed unpolemically by Schleiermacher a century before (*Church and Theology*, 149). He takes the theme of *Christian Faith* to be the “development of the proposition ‘How the redemption is effected by Christ and comes to consciousness *within* the Christian communion’ (*Christian Faith*, 56, emphasis added)” (*Church and Theology*, 148). He notes that the two pillars of Christianity, according to Schleiermacher in the *Christian Faith* are “the relation to Jesus as redeemer and churchly piety”(Ibid, 150), both of which, I note, depend on the activity of the Spirit.

between humanity and divinity.²⁷⁵ He notes that there are limits to this union in all human beings other than Christ. In Christ this union was “person-forming,” in all other humans this is not the case. There is personality that exceeds the union with the divine; “the person, the continuous unity of self-consciousness, is a mingled separation and union of the divine and the human; and even if someone were actually to reach the point of having the new life diffuse itself over his entire essence, yet the portion this life spent before his regeneration would still form part of his personality.”²⁷⁶ The true church is an extension of the incarnation because God has deigned to dwell on earth through this body, because Christ continues to act through this body. The extension of the incarnation is necessarily a communal phenomenon because no one human being, other than Jesus, is fully united with God in this lifetime and thus the Holy Spirit draws human beings into community that God’s presence might continue to be mediated on earth.²⁷⁷

He argues that it is “*Only after the departure of Christ from earth was it possible for the Holy Spirit, as this common spirit, to be fully communicated and received.*”²⁷⁸ The divine essence was bound up with the person of Christ while he lived on earth, it was liberated for union with all of humanity after his death, resurrection, and ascension. Schleiermacher believed that prior to these events Christ alone formed the inner circle of the true church, but after his ascension others were transferred into this inner circle. Schleiermacher insisted, however, that it

²⁷⁵ See note 332 below

²⁷⁶ *Christian Faith*, par. 123, 573-574

²⁷⁷ “... if to believe in Christ and to have Christ living in one are the same thing, it may be said on the one hand that the Holy Spirit produces faith, and on the other hand that the Holy Spirit comes through faith. For through the activity of those who already have a share in the Spirit, He effects faith in others who are brought by them to recognize what is divine and saving in Christ; in these, thereby, the Holy Spirit becomes the moving principle. And so, since the divine Essence was bound up with the human person of Christ, but is now (His directly personal influence having ceased) no longer personally operative in any individual, but henceforward manifests itself actively in the fellowship of believers as their common spirit, this is just the way in which the work of redemption is continued and extended in the Church” (Ibid, par. 124, 577).

²⁷⁸ Ibid, Thesis 122

is still Christ's action that determines the regeneration of the Christian community.²⁷⁹ Schleiermacher is absolutely clear that the human activity facilitated by the Holy Spirit is a "prolongation of Christ's own activity."²⁸⁰ In the beginning, and still today, redemption is realized "through being taken up into living fellowship with Christ."²⁸¹ Membership in the church does not exclude one from sin, but it does place one "in the sphere of operation of the sole Founder."²⁸² The Spirit then could not have been poured out, in his understanding, until after the full appearance of Christ- complete only in resurrection and ascension.

If we begin with Christ and hold to the proposition that the union of the Divine with His human personality was at the same time an enrichment of human nature as a whole it follows not only in general that even after His departure this union must continue, but also (since this continuation is to proceed from the union itself) that wherever it exists there must be a bond with Christ and vice versa... being drawn by that union into the fellowship of believers, having a share in the Holy Spirit, and being drawn into living fellowship with Christ— must simply mean one and the same thing.²⁸³

Here we have a clear depiction of the interrelation of the Holy Spirit, the church, and Christ. The true church is the community in living fellowship with Christ by means of their share in the Holy Spirit.

The Relation of the True Church and the Common Church

So, with the contrast of the true church and the common, Schleiermacher portrays a living, Spirit-filled community mutually communicating Christ, distinct from a dead institution marked by hard formalism, filled with those who seek but do not possess religion. Though these two bodies are contrasted, they are necessarily connected. We now consider their relation.

In *Speech 4* he suggests that the positive purpose of the common church is to serve as a

²⁷⁹ Ibid, par. 122, 567

²⁸⁰ Ibid, par. 122, 568; cf. 568-569; par. 124, 576, 577; par. 127, 588-589, 589-590

²⁸¹ Ibid, par. 124, 574

²⁸² Ibid, par. 124, 575

²⁸³ Ibid, par. 124, 575

mediating institution for the benefit of novices. "...if the true church will always stand open only to those who already possess religion, then there must be some binding agent between it and those who are still seeking religion."²⁸⁴ He understands the common, visible church to be a school for pupils and novices, for those seeking to know what they do not yet know.²⁸⁵ He notes that as every human affair has institutions to benefit pupils and novices, why then should religion then lack such institutions?²⁸⁶

That said, Schleiermacher wants to affirm the distinction of the church as institution over and against other social institutions designed for the benefit of novices. By virtue of its relation to the true church, this institution "must assume a different appearance."²⁸⁷ Elsewhere in the *Speech*, Schleiermacher identifies the common [visible] church as a necessary "mediating institution through which the true church comes into a certain contact with the profane world with which it has nothing to do directly..."²⁸⁸ The common church thus plays a mediating role, and that which is mediated is no less than the Holy Spirit, the holiness of Christ yet active on

²⁸⁴ *On Religion*, 173;

²⁸⁵ Elsewhere he characterizes those who gather in this assembly as "those who have a certain degree of sense for religion, but who, because religion has not yet burst out or become conscious in them, are not yet capable of being incorporated into the true church, be intentionally shown so much religion that their capacity for it must necessarily be developed" (Ibid, 181). Above I noted Rendtdorff's insight into the dimension of capacity within Schleiermacher's contrast between the true church and the common church. He notes that Schleiermacher shared with other major thinkers of his time the idea that religion opens humanity to awareness of one's "utter incapacity to exhaust it for [one]self alone," (*Church and Theology*, 123) but where others used such an observation to ground their critique of ecclesiastical religion, asserting the universality of religion over against the particularity of the church, Schleiermacher uses the presupposition differently. For Schleiermacher, this presupposition grounds the necessity of the church. It is "the 'church' [that] comes to the assistance of the 'incapacity' of the religious man, and because of this incapacity, it is essential" (Ibid, 124). Rendtdorff cautions "The concept of the true church is not taken in such an exclusive sense that it can be played off against the church and Christianity, where they do not fit it. Schleiermacher builds a bridge that leads to uniform understanding of a reality fraught with inherent contradictions" (Ibid, 126).

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid, 181

earth. This contact with the profane world invites corruption into the common church that obscures its identity with the true church. But it is the visible, institutional church, the common church, that is the forum through which the true church encounters the world, and for Schleiermacher this means that it is the medium through which Christ encounters the world. Thus, the common church is at least an instrument of the holy.

In *The Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher articulates the relationship between the true church and the common church by means of the image of concentric circles. As noted above, he explains that when Jesus lived and taught on earth, he alone constituted the inner circle of sanctification or regeneration. The disciples who gathered around him, who were drawn to what he was expressing were, while he was still living, the outer circle. They were those seeking that God-consciousness that he possessed. Only after his resurrection and ascension, with the sending of the Holy Spirit, was Christ's God-consciousness fully communicated to those first disciples. When they received the Holy Spirit, they began to participate in the sanctification begun in Jesus Christ and they transferred from the outer to the inner circle.²⁸⁹ This transfer was marked by a new ability to be spontaneously expressive of faith and not merely receptive of the expressions of others. They were already in fellowship prior to this transfer and saw no need to dissolve their fellowship once they recognized Christ and had their God-consciousness awakened by the Spirit. "But as [this fellowship] had now gained a relation to Christ which could not but create a mutual influence among them in the sense explained, they came at the same time to exercise a combined influence upon their fellow-members who had not yet attained to the recognition of Christ. These latter thus formed the outer circle, receiving from the first the preparatory operations of grace, in contrast to the inner circle from which these operations proceeded all the more forcibly that they

²⁸⁹ *Christian Faith*, Thesis 115, 532

were exactly adapted to the situation.”²⁹⁰ Schleiermacher is saying here that the influence is far more powerful among those who have already received the Spirit and are mutually participatory, but that, nonetheless, those in the inner circle work together to influence those not yet inside with them. God’s purpose in sending Christ was the regeneration of all people, and so there needs to be continuous interaction between the inner and the outer, that the outer might become inner. Just as the foundation of the true church is communication, the connection between the true church and the common is communication.

The Necessary Admixture of Church and World

All this discussion about inner and outer circles, and two contrasted but connected communities, might lend the impression of two discernibly distinct bodies in the world. But this would not be a right reading of Schleiermacher. In fact, the true church is hard to see. We will consider this carefully in the next section of the chapter, but first we must note that Schleiermacher attributes both the obscuring of the true church, and the failures of the common church to be the true church, primarily to the necessary admixture of church and world. Even with the stark critique in *Speech 4* of the visible church as “not a religious society,” Schleiermacher challenges his readers’ presumption that the shortcomings in the common church can be traced to problems inherent in religion, by suggesting that it is instead the influence of the world, and, in particular, of the state, which has corrupted the church.

Anyone who knows the effect of religion finds it natural that they should all speak, lest they fear that the stones would surpass them. Anyone who knows the effect of a new enthusiasm finds it natural that this living fire vigorously gains ground, consuming some, warming many, and imparting to thousands the false superficial gleam of an inner glow. **Precisely these thousands are the corruption.** The youthful fire of new saints also takes them, too, to be true brethren. ‘What hinders them’ they say all too rashly,

²⁹⁰ Ibid, 533

‘also from receiving the Holy Spirit?’ They take themselves to be true brethren and allow themselves to be introduced into the bosom of the pious society in joyful triumph. But when the intoxication of first enthusiasm has passed, when the glowing surface has burned out, it is clear that the newer saints are not able to endure and share the condition in which the others find themselves; these latter mercifully descend to them and renounce their own higher and more intimate pleasure in order to help them again, and thus everything assumes an imperfect form. In this way, without external causes, **a false and depraved church develops around each fragment of the true church that arises in isolation somewhere in the world, not separated from the true church but in and with it; this occurs through the corruption common to all human things, conforming to the eternal order by which this corruption most quickly seizes precisely the most fervid and active life.** In this way it has happened in all times, among all peoples, and in every particular religion.²⁹¹

Those who receive the Spirit and possess true religion are motivated to speak of that which they have received, to bring their heightened religious consciousness into historical, embodied communication. Though religion itself, the gift of the Spirit, is invisible— as it is something that wells up from inside human consciousness— it is productive of something visible—human communication and community. That said, he also suggests here that the natural character of religious communication generates excitement, which attracts masses, not all of whom will have received the Holy Spirit and had activated a religious consciousness, and yet their early enthusiasm will lead to their inclusion in the body. This is, surely, a modern parable of the Sower. Thus, from its earliest days, there is no church without world. Church and world are intermingled, making it difficult to distinguish by sight that which is true from that which is false.

Though Schleiermacher believes this condition of a mixed body *naturally* arose, he did not believe it should have *naturally* persisted. The natural principle, rather, is that like gravitates to like and so the separation of false from true should naturally occur. Had this happened the members of the true church would have “gathered around them exactly those who understood

²⁹¹ Ibid, 176, emphasis mine.

them best” and the result would have been many small and “less definite societies in which people would, in all sorts of ways and places, have examined themselves regarding religion.”²⁹² But instead he says, what we have are “monstrous assemblies” and the blame for this is placed on state interference.

State interference froze the church in this mangled form. Princely recognition of the church as a society occurs when the true and false church are yet a mixed community because that’s when a religious society is large enough to attract the attention of a ruler. And whenever a church receives princely recognition, this is the beginning of its deterioration.²⁹³ To compound the deterioration, state recognition attracts unsavory characters who otherwise would have had no interest in the church, “the proud, the ambitious, the covetous, and the schemers... feign participation in and knowledge of holy things in order to carry off the worldly reward.”²⁹⁴ He argues fervently that the state, with its ‘ill-considered generosity’ deserves the blame for the deeply mixed character of the common church. Schleiermacher issues a strong appeal for the destruction of all unions between church and state, believing this to be the only hope for the flourishing of the true church in this world.²⁹⁵

²⁹² Ibid, 177

²⁹³ Ibid, 179: “All things not belonging together, which were intertwined for only a moment, are now inseparably chained together; everything accidental, which might easily have been cast off, is now established forever; the garment is of one piece with the body, and every unbecoming fold is fixed for eternity. The larger and inauthentic society can now no longer be separated; it can no longer be divided or dissolved; it can change neither its form nor its articles of faith; its views, its customs, everything is condemned to remain in the condition in which it was just then found.”

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Ibid, 184. State and church were deeply entangled in Schleiermacher’s context. Crouter notes that anxieties about the influence of the French Revolution were running high in Prussia at the time the *Speeches* were prepared. Emperor Frederick William II sought to crack down and suppress the influence of French ideas, particularly in the realm of religion. “The instrument of Frederick William’s notorious religious measures, Johann Christoph Wöllner (1732-1800), was a former pastor, wealthy landowner, Freemason, and leader of the Rosicrucian movement. Upon

Schleiermacher denies that the world has any share in the being of the church, but suggests the church has a share in the being of the world.²⁹⁶ He contrasts the realities of church and world- the latter being formless and confused.²⁹⁷ He offers the thesis that “*The fellowship of believers, animated by the Holy Spirit, remains ever self-identical in its attitude to Christ and to this Spirit, but in its relation to the world it is subject to change and variation.*”²⁹⁸ So what is constant in the true church, the fellowship of believers, is its relationship to Christ. That which is changeable in the church indicates its relation to the world. Schleiermacher is clear that the Holy Spirit works in the world and therefore works with human nature and with cultural realities present in the world. So there is always an interaction with the world. “All this has its ground of determination in the world owing to the law that Christianity must develop as a force in history, and the world as it appears in Christianity is the world as it has been seized upon and permeated by the Holy Spirit.”²⁹⁹

Thus, Schleiermacher affirms that the common church, that church visible in the world, is

becoming minister of spiritual affairs in 1788 Wöllner promulgated his infamous ‘edict concerning the constitution of religion in the Prussian states.’ The edict, which aimed at suppressing ‘rampant freedom’ and combating belief, superstition, and moral decay, required that all acts of worship and religious instruction strictly conform to established church confessions” (“Translator’s Introduction” to *On Religion*, 10).

²⁹⁶ Tice notes that there is a grace note of politics in Schleiermacher’s *Christmas Eve* dialogue. When he prepared the dialogue Napoleon’s armies were threatening Prussia and this threat gets a nod in the dialogue. Tice writes, “He could not let his cosy Christmas Eve gathering leave the world completely outside. Such, as it happens, was also his view of the church. The world was not outside” (Introduction to *Christmas Eve*, 19).

²⁹⁷ Ibid, par. 126, 582

²⁹⁸ Ibid, par. 126

²⁹⁹ Ibid, par. 126, 583; Redeker notes that when Schleiermacher writes about redemption in his 1809 *Christian Ethics* lectures, his understanding of redemption includes not only humankind, but also the world. “The divine idea of redemption that underlies the world order of God the Creator, and the actualization of the kingdom of God is accomplished by forming the world in conformity to this idea into an organ for the divine Spirit. Thus the world as the stage of redemption is the revelation of the supreme Being; the world is not in opposition to God but through redemption is the servant and organ of God and thus good” (*Schleiermacher: Life and Thought*, 170)

a necessarily mixed body. He evaluates this mixture both neutrally and negatively. On the one hand, this mixture is to be expected because, as we noted above, the union of all human beings with God, though made possible by the incarnation of Christ, is not perfectly realized in any human life other than Christ's. It is, as we considered above, not person-forming. So then, even those who have received the Spirit, are progressing in sanctification, moving towards less resistance to the work of the Spirit in their life. In this sense, even the true church is a mixed body, where world is being overcome by Spirit, but world is yet present. But on the other hand, state interference has made intractable this mixed state in the common church. The common church, in his cultural milieu, at least, is "frozen in this mangled form," due to state recognition and interference. It is not able, as a whole body, to progress in sanctification because not all those therein have truly received the Spirit.

Concluding Comments for Part One

By attending to the contrast and relation between the true church and the common, I have stressed the centrality of/emphasis on communication in Schleiermacher's ecclesiology. Mutual communication is at the heart of/the foundation of the true church's existence and communication is the necessary link between the true church and the common. We concluded this section with an initial reflection on the inevitable admixture of the church and world. Throughout this discussion we have periodically noted visibility dimensions to Schleiermacher's ecclesiology—the common church seems to be equated with the visible church in the world; the degree to which the true church is visible is unclear; the necessary mixture of church and world make it hard to *see* the true church in its distinction. This necessary mixture also raises questions about the extent to which holiness could ever been *seen* in the church.

PART TWO- VISIBILITY AND HOLINESS DIMENSIONS OF SCHLEIERMACHER'S COMMUNICATIVE ECCLESIOLOGY

We now turn our attention to these questions about the visibility and holiness dimensions of Schleiermacher's ecclesiology. We will first consider whether Schleiermacher's contrast and relation between the true church and the common church maps neatly onto the doctrine of the invisible and visible church. We will then explore whether the visibility of communication opens up an understanding of the visibility of holiness in Schleiermacher's ecclesiology.

True Church Invisible? Common Church Visible?

By means of the contrast between the true church and the common church, and through acknowledgement of the inevitable admixture of church and world, Schleiermacher establishes quite plainly that what is *seen* and known in the world as church, is not, in fact, the church. And while it is easy to ascribe holiness to the true church, it is not as easy to ascribe visibility to this church. Has Schleiermacher relegated holiness to the sphere of invisibility? On first review, it seems that Schleiermacher has simply offered us a modern articulation of the Reformed doctrine of the invisible and visible church. A closer examination challenges this initial assumption.

Resistance of Dualism

At first glance, it certainly seems that the common church is the visible church, and the

true church the invisible. Some read Schleiermacher in precisely this way.³⁰⁰ But such a reading forces an idealistic dualism onto Schleiermacher that he explicitly resisted. In his construal of human nature, for example, he rejected the duality of human agency proposed by Kant. As Crouter puts it “For him the phenomenal and noumenal selves must be conceived together to consider the person as a moral agent.”³⁰¹ Schleiermacher insisted that knowing and desiring, reason and nature, be understood as united capacities in the human person. In fact, he believed that the whole process of sanctification was one of gradually correcting the relation between flesh and spirit.³⁰²

Schleiermacher’s understanding of human nature certainly demonstrates his challenge to dualism, and we see the same point demonstrated in his understanding of the order of being, broadly construed. Niebuhr suggests that Schleiermacher’s point of departure for the description of the order of being is the polarity of the ideal and the real, a polarity he takes to be the most universal of all. Schleiermacher does not place the ideal and the real in dualistic opposition.

Niebuhr writes that for Schleiermacher these are not

two theoretically separate orders of being, after the fashion of the Aristotelian distinction between form and potentiality. Rather, Schleiermacher intends to point to the fact that all finite being represents less than pure or absolute unity. It represents only a relative unity whose actual existence cannot be derived from its form nor its form from its existence. The polarity of ideal and real is the expression of the fact that all that falls within our

³⁰⁰ e.g. Eric G. Jay, *The Church: Its Changing Image Through Twenty Centuries: Volume 2, 1700 to the present day*, (London: SPCK, 1978), 25-26

³⁰¹ Introduction to *On Religion*, 25.

³⁰² “Schleiermacher emphatically resisted the reductionistic tendencies of both idealism and materialism, insisting the human life consists precisely in the dialectical unity of nature and reason (in Kant’s terms, the phenomenal and the noumenal). Against Kant, Schleiermacher insisted that each pole of this dialectic conditioned, and in turn was conditioned by the other. Thus human life assumes the form of a struggle to bring nature into harmony with reason. But this is neither a Manichean dualism in which nature and reason are eternally at odds, nor a Pelagian naivete that assumes too easily the dominion of reason... Schleiermacher describes the Christian life as a process of gradually bringing the flesh into harmony with the Spirit” (Shelley, “Introduction” to *Introduction to Christian Ethics*, 23-24).

experience is involved in becoming and can consequently never be seized by the intellect or the will and reduced to a single term. Both form without matter and matter without form transcend our experience, and therefore we cannot assign a metaphysical priority to either one or the other.³⁰³

We can even see such resistance of the dualism inherent in Kant in Schleiermacher's christology, particularly in his work with the idea of archetype current in philosophical discourse of his time. For both Kant and Schleiermacher Jesus is interpreted archetypically, but Redeker stresses that Schleiermacher's understanding of archetype was picked up and modified from Plato rather than from Kant. For Kant, Jesus was archetypal in the sense of being "an ideal principle" but for Schleiermacher he was seeking to express that "*the Redeemer is archetype and reality. In Christ myth becomes history.*"³⁰⁴ In neither Plato, nor Kant, does the ideal enter history, but this is one of the founding assumptions of Schleiermacher's theology and it is for this reason that we should not be too quick to relegate the true and ideal church to the sphere of invisibility.

Crouter notes that both Schleiermacher and Kant envision real and true moral community, but Kant is less convinced than Schleiermacher, even the Schleiermacher of the *Speeches*, that one can find true religion in institutional forms. In contrast, Schleiermacher "sees in the actual lived religion ('positive religions') the locus of true faith and contrasts this with its corrupt institutional forms."³⁰⁵ Rendtdorff similarly stresses heavily Schleiermacher's unwillingness to reduce religion "to a merely abstract entity, a principle, etc.," rather he is oriented towards "a

³⁰³ Richard R. Niebuhr. *Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion: A New Introduction*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), 98

³⁰⁴ Redeker, *Schleiermacher: Life and Thought*, 135; Gerrish notes that Schleiermacher's likely favorite verse of scripture was, from John 1, "the Word became flesh" which means, in his view, that "the ideal became historical" ("Friedrich Schleiermacher" in *Continuing the Reformation*, 167).

³⁰⁵ "Introduction" to *On Religion*, 25

religion capable of concrete life.”³⁰⁶

But can we *see* the true church? In the church that we *see*, there is a sharp and clear distinction between the clergy and the laity surely, but this, he insists, can, in no way, be associated with the true church. Where do we *see* such a fellowship of mutuality and spontaneity in this world? As we will soon see, Schleiermacher doesn’t believe the true church to be totally invisible. It is, indeed, obscured, hidden, but nonetheless capable of being seen. We will first further consider the mixture of church and world that renders the true church difficult to see and then we will consider Schleiermacher’s teachings on the invisible and visible church, which do not map neatly onto the contrast already established. We will finally consider Schleiermacher’s teachings on the hiddenness of the holy in worldly reality.

The Obscured View of the True Church Due to the Mixture of Church and World

Schleiermacher is insistent in *Speech 4* that when he is describing the true church to his readers, he is describing the church that really and truly exists; it is, he admits, “almost invisible,”³⁰⁷ but, if “almost” invisible then, in some sense, visible. The common church, that he joins his readers in critiquing, is not the true church, but the true church does exist in the world, and it can be seen, though perhaps not by everyone:

But I assure you that I have been speaking not of what is supposed to be but of what is, unless you wish to deny that that is already real which is only hindered by limitations of space from also appearing to a less refined eye. The true church has in fact always been this way and still is; and if you do not see it, the blame is actually your own and has its basis in a rather obvious misunderstanding. Only consider, I beg you, that I have availed myself of an old but very meaningful expression, not of the church militant, but of the church triumphant, not of the church that still struggles against all the hindrances of religious culture that the age and the condition of humanity place in its way, but of the church that has already overcome everything that was opposed to it and has established

³⁰⁶ Rendtdorff, *Church and Theology*, 116

³⁰⁷ *On Religion*, 187. Crouter’s translation is a straightforward rendering of the German here: “fast unsichtbare.”

itself.³⁰⁸

As we have already seen, in Schleiermacher's earliest ecclesiological writing he lays the blame for the apparently hopeless corruption of the church primarily on the state and finds hope for its healing in the untangling of church and state relations. Because, in Schleiermacher's context such a freedom of the church from the state was utterly unimaginable, for Protestants and Catholics alike, this element of his critique reinforces the perception that the church that can be seen is in no sense the true church.³⁰⁹ Certainly, there is no place within this critique for an affirmation of the visible holiness of *this* church.

***Schleiermacher's Understanding of the Doctrine of the Invisible and Visible Church
Informed by the Necessary Mixture of Church and World***

³⁰⁸ Ibid, 169

³⁰⁹ Jay suggests that "Because of the unfavourable circumstances of the time, Schleiermacher sees this relationship between members of the true Church and the actually existing religious association as yielding only 'scanty fruit'" (Eric G. Jay, *The Church: Its Changing Image Through Twenty Centuries: Volume 2, 1700 to the present day* (London: SPCK, 1978), 26). The intensity of Schleiermacher's critique of the common church could lend the impression that he advocates the destruction of this church altogether. In fact he is careful to clarify in this speech that that is not his intention (see *On Religion*, 173). It appears, nonetheless, that he entertained this possibility in writing that preceded the *Speeches*. Redeker notes that early criticism of the church recorded in a notebook in 1796 included a call for the annihilation of the church in its current form. Redeker cites these words from that notebook "The church is a polyp; if a piece is torn away another complete polyp grows. It is of no use for men to separate themselves into still more churches according to their different opinions. The polyp must not be torn apart; it must be totally annihilated" (*Schleiermacher: Life and Thought*, 27). Redeker cautions, "this critical observation can only be interpreted and understood in relation to the position on the state church that he took only a few years later in the *Speeches*, and also in relation to his positive comments about the nature of the true church" (Ibid.). Rendtdorff helpfully suggests that Schleiermacher's turn to a theory of society to explain the failures of the common church actually opens up hopeful possibility for the future flourishing of the true church on earth. Laying the blame on state interference achieves this progress: "the need for a distinction in principle between those who are capable of religion and the incapacitated, with its consequent division of mankind (sic.) into two classes, is thus eliminated. The fatal hardening of an actual historical contradiction of fact between church and world can be entirely avoided. Instead, the difference is traced back to conditions that can be removed and changed, i.e. something within our reach. Thus in the last resort the difference need not be blamed upon the subjects themselves, viz. the incapacitated, a conclusion that would lead to their abandonment" (*Church and Theology*, 129).

Later in his career, in the *Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher more fully reflects on the *necessary* admixture of church and world, offering this as the most basic reason that holiness cannot be read off the surface of the common church. This reflection on the mixture of church and world arises primarily in his discussion of the doctrine of the Invisible and Visible Church. His explicit discussion of this doctrine evidences that the contrast between the true church and the common church does not map neatly onto the contrast between the invisible and the visible church. Schleiermacher indicates that the doctrine of the invisible and visible church only surfaced because of the fact that people were being baptized and calling themselves Christians who in no way evidence repentance or Christian maturity. It arose then because of the early mixture of church and world.³¹⁰ He notes that the common understanding of the doctrine of the invisible and visible church suggests that all the truly regenerate compose the invisible church while those who have heard the Gospel and are called, and are receiving preparatory gracious influences together with the truly regenerate compose the visible church.³¹¹ This contrast sounds tremendously like the contrast offered by Schleiermacher between the true church and the common church. But, in Schleiermacher's view, that those who are merely called and not already actively participating in the religious life are counted in the church is contrary to Christ's intention. These were to remain outside the church until the Holy Spirit brought them actively inside. However, as our review of *Speech 4* has already indicated, the church that we see in the world is frozen in this unintended form for various reasons. Nonetheless, Schleiermacher does

³¹⁰ Haight offers the following helpful definition of "world" in relation to "church" in Schleiermacher's understanding. It is "in one sense the world outside the church, and it often has a negative sense of resistance to the Spirit. But realistically the church is in the world and the world is inside the church. Church and world are distinct but related as two intertwined spheres" (*Christian Community in History*, vol. 2, 332). This we should expect given his resistance of ancient and modern forms of dualism and his consequent understanding of the unity between the ideal and the real, reason and nature, spirit and flesh.

³¹¹ *Christian Faith*, par. 148, 677-678

not let the worldly circumstances of the church constrain his teachings thereupon.

Schleiermacher explicitly challenges the idea that the fellowship of the regenerate is invisible. “On the contrary, the fellowship or community of those who, just because most firmly settled in the state of sanctification, are most strenuously opposed to the world, cannot but in this sense be the most visible of all. The body, then, which in ordinary usage is known as the invisible Church is for the most part not invisible, and what is known as the visible is for the most part not Church.”³¹² If the Spirit is living in a believer, and is, therefore, prodding communication and producing community, this *will* be visible. In fact, Schleiermacher says, these, because they will be most opposed to the world, will be the *most visible*. So, the true church is not the invisible church, the common church not the visible church; in fact, the common church is, “for the most part not Church.”³¹³

Schleiermacher consequently rejects common articulations of the doctrines of the invisible and visible church and offers his own definitions of these terms “Thus the *invisible* Church is the totality of the effects of the Spirit as a connected whole; but these effects, as connected with those lingering influences of the collective life of universal sinfulness which are never absent from any life that has been taken possession of by the divine Spirit, constitute the

³¹² Ibid. *sondern grade die Gemeinschaft derer, die weil am festesten im Stande der Heiligen, auch am kräftigsten der Welt entgentreten, müßte in diesem Sinn die sichtbarste sein. Was sonach dem gewöhnlichen Sprachgebrauch gemäß die unsichtbare Kirche heißt, davon ist das meiste nicht unsichtbare, und was die sichtbare, davon ist das meiste nicht Kirche*(GL, 429)

³¹³ It is striking that the contrast of Schleiermacher’s earliest ecclesiological writing emerges here in almost identical form. In *Speech 4*, Schleiermacher is quite clear that the common church is *not* church at all. And while, perhaps, he is more strongly asserting the visibility of the true church in *Christian Faith* than he did in *Speech 4*, and leaving open the perception that the common church participates, in some small way, in the true church more so than in *Speech 4*, he did suggest that the true church could be sought and found in this world and did suggest that members of the true church are active in the common church even then.

visible Church.”³¹⁴ What can’t be seen, according to Schleiermacher, is the totality of effects of the Spirit as a connected whole- such wholes always exceed the capacities of human sight. And what can be seen is always a combination of effects of the Spirit with the lingering influence of sin. Indeed what can be seen is a mixture of church and world.³¹⁵

The reason that much of the common, visible church is not church is because of the presence of the world in the church. Schleiermacher is even clear that *if* somehow the visible church were only composed of the truly regenerate, it would still “not be pure from alien admixture” and that “The pure church cannot everywhere be made visible.”³¹⁶ Though the two are mixed, he treats them separately so that it can be understood that one (the invisible) is “the peculiarly active element in the other” (the visible).³¹⁷

³¹⁴ Ibid, par. 148, 677; Haight notes that Schleiermacher’s understanding of the relation of the invisible church to the visible church is analogous to his understanding of the relation of the church and world. “The visible church is the whole church, the actual church as it exists, the invisible church is the totality of the effects of the Spirit within the church as a whole. The two dimensions coexist in every individual, and in the whole community, and mutually interact as antithetical or tensively related existentials, analogous to the antithetical relationship between sin and grace, or between whatever obstacle that may be placed in the way of the operation of the Spirit and the Spirit’s salutary effects” (*Christian Community in History, Vol. 2, 332-333*). Again we see Schleiermacher overcoming dualism.

³¹⁵ Again, this is no surprise when we consider his non-dualistic rendering of reality. Haight characterizes the relationship between church and world as a “dynamic, tensive structure of mutual influence” and notes, “The invisible and visible church distinction is ‘existentialized’ in the sense that it appears as two dimensional fields or spheres in the church interacting with each other. This dynamic framework allows him to combine a series of tensive principles and axioms that combine an ideal theological understanding of what the church should be with a concrete realistic grasp of its limitations, in particular those relative to unity and truth” (*Christian Community in History, Vol. 2, 331-332*). Clearly the basic resistance of dualism that characterizes Schleiermacher’s thought deeply informs his ecclesiology.

³¹⁶ *Christian Faith*, par. 148, 677

³¹⁷ Ibid; In Schleiermacher’s lectures on ethics, his discussion of necessary purifying action among the three forms of church action picks up this theme. Purifying action is that by which both the church as a whole and the individual Christians who compose it are improved, and make progress in faithfulness. This is crucial action by which the church will overcome world in time. Because he understands sanctification to be gradual, “efficacious” and “corrective” behavior is needed to clearly establish the contradiction between the old life and the new that begins with

Because the Holy Spirit seizes and permeates the world, and so brings into existence the church, the two are difficult to separate in perception. In another thesis he articulates “*The fact that the Church cannot form itself out of the midst of the world without the world exercising some influence on the Church, establishes for the Church itself the antithesis between the Visible and Invisible Church.*”³¹⁸ Because Schleiermacher understands regeneration and sanctification to be a gradual process, he acknowledges that the church and the world will always be a connected and cooperative whole that cannot be exhibited in isolation: “wherever there is Church, because there faith and fellowship in faith are to be found, there is world as well, because there exist also sin and fellowship in universal sinfulness. Each visible part of the Church, accordingly, when more closely examined is a mixture of Church and world; and only if we could isolate and collect the effects of the divine Spirit in men, should we have the Church in its purity.”³¹⁹

Schleiermacher attaches the “lingering influences of the collective life of universal

Christian baptism (*Introduction to Christian Ethics*, 108) The presupposition of purifying action is sin. Schleiermacher understands sin to be “the partial negation of the dominion of the Holy Spirit over the flesh” (*Christian Ethics*, 55). It is a relation in which world is granted priority over spirit. In Christ there was no such negation, his “sensorial nature” or “flesh” being always fully dependent on spirit rendered sin impossible for him. The gift of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, to human beings allows gradual progress in righting the relationship between Spirit and flesh, and Christians in particular are dependent on the Spirit that indwells the Christian community as a whole to grant them progress in their struggle against sin (Ibid, 55-56). For Schleiermacher, the reality of sin in individual lives and the possibility of redemption in individual lives are both intimately tied to the individual’s participation in human community. The existence of sin in the individual has its basis in the sinfulness of the whole, so as the community is perfected there is less and less need for purifying action (Ibid, 56). But because the community is not perfect/sinless purifying action is always necessary. The whole needs to undertake purifying action on behalf of individuals, and this takes the form of church discipline, and individuals need to undertake purifying action on behalf of the whole, and this takes the form of church improvement or betterment. And all purification is only made possible by the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit indwelling the body as a whole.

³¹⁸ Ibid, par. 148

³¹⁹ Ibid, par. 148, 676.

sinfulness” to his understanding of what the visible church is.³²⁰ The visible church therefore is divided and subject to error whereas the invisible church is the totality of effects of the Spirit and is therefore an infallible unity.³²¹ Schleiermacher’s proposition of infallibility rests on his understanding of the communication of Christ’ sinless perfection in redemption. He takes this to be the innermost reality of every regenerate life, which is increasingly distorted as it comes to expression. Only gradually, over time, does one become more able to express Spirit. He emphasizes that the invisible and visible are intimately connected, and that individuals participate in both simultaneously- when they are encouraging and strengthening the inner conviction of their fellows, they are participating in the invisible church, but the forms that they use for their expression and the mediated nature of that expression mean that there is an element of world, in their offering. Thus the church, and indeed every Christian, is, in every moment, invisible and visible church together.³²² Though Schleiermacher understands church and world to be intertwined, he believes that church will come to overpower world in time. The goal of the church is the redemption of the whole world and thus it must be the case that the influence of Christ’s redeeming action of the Spirit would increase, while the resistance to this influence

³²⁰ Ibid, 677

³²¹ Ibid; and see also Thesis 149: “*The antithesis between the Visible and the Invisible Church may be comprehended in these two propositions: the former is a divided Church, while the latter is an undivided unity; and the former is always subjected to error, while the latter is infallible.*”

³²² Ibid, Par. 149, 678-679. We are beginning to perceive Schleiermacher’s dialectical understanding of the relationship between individual and community. Niebuhr suggests that much as Schleiermacher operates with a polarity between the ideal and the real, he deploys a similar polarity between the individual and community. Niebuhr highlights this particularly in his *Ethics*, insisting that this is not merely a rhetorical device to limit the “scope and authority of the community” but rather “is a genuine polarity, with the consequence that the inherence of the community in the individual is but one side of the ethical equation that Schleiermacher describes in his doctrine of the highest good. The counterpart is the movement from the individual towards the community. The Christian church, for example, depends upon the reformations wrought in it and upon it by individuals, as Schleiermacher explained in his Christian ethics. The individual functions not only as a symbol of the corporate whole but as the agent who reshapes the life of the whole church” (*Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion*, 119-120)

would decrease. But this happens, Schleiermacher emphasizes, only gradually. "... the Church only gradually attains to be the perfect image of Christ, and the divine ordinance seen in the gradual addition of individual members and the widening compass of the whole can be expressed in the formula that the advance comes about in such a way that not only is the whole, at every particular moment viewed by itself, as complete and inclusive as possible, but also each moment contains within itself a basis for the largest possible integration in the moment succeeding."³²³

So, true to Schleiermacher's resistance of dualism, what is visible is a mixture of church and world, a mixture of holiness and sin. Certainly the lingering effects of sin- the division, the fallibility, etc.— can be seen in the church. But recall that Schleiermacher thinks those who are most participant in sanctification, furthest along the way of being made holy, will be most visible in the world. These will stand out because of their opposition to/contrast to the chaotic, disordered world. So where is this true church? Why is it so hard to see?

Hiddenness, Rather than Invisibility, of the Holy

The true church, it seems, is hidden rather than invisible. Schleiermacher quite consistently teaches that the true church, and holiness, more generally, can be found on earth, but effort is required if it is to be found; deep, personal engagement, empowered by the action of God through the Holy Spirit, is the key to its discovery.

He writes in *The Christian Faith*, for example that what the church is "in its essential nature" is not "an object of outward perception" such that an outside observer could see and know what is at work there; "But the fact is that those who do not share our faith in Christ do not

³²³ *Christian Faith*, par. 125, 581

recognize the Christian fellowship in its antithesis to the world.”³²⁴ This is an interesting tension. That which should make the church most visible, its contrast with the world, is, in fact, precisely that which those outside the true church cannot recognize. But, those in whom the Spirit is working to right the relationship between spirit and flesh can indeed see this.³²⁵ Elsewhere he indicates that “As in individuals, the distinction between what belongs to sin and to grace is drawn, not from the outward aspect of the act open to perception, but from the constitution of the inward motives, so affirmations concerning the Christian Church can be rightly made only by those who know its inner life through personal participation in it.”³²⁶ What is most important to note, however, is that the holy *does* dwell on earth, in the hearts of believers, in true Christian community; it *can* be seen, by some.

This careful work to qualify the visibility of the holiness of the church is even more evocatively expressed in his *Christmas Eve* dialogue, in which we find the recurrent theme of hidden holiness. Terrence Tice, the translator of *Christmas Eve* into English decided to subtitle his English translation— *Dialogue on the Incarnation*. Incarnation is not directly discussed in the dialogue, but the implication comes through that the holiness of God was hidden in the incarnation, just as the presence of holiness is now hidden on earth in the true church. Three moments in the dialogue illustrate this theme.

In the first scene, the reader is invited into a room that the hostess Ernestine has carefully decorated and prepared for Christmas celebrations. Schleiermacher notes that one has to look closely to notice what is different in this beautifully appointed room; “Indeed, familiar things showed up clearly enough, but only by unhurried and close attention could one distinctly

³²⁴ Ibid, par. 113, 527.

³²⁵ e.g. Ibid, par. 126, 583

³²⁶ Ibid, par. 114, 539; cf. par. 148, 677 “At the same time this [the sanctification unfolding in the church] is only grasped by faith and can never be proved by experience.”

tell what was strange or new there.”³²⁷ This statement could be made about incarnation, and certainly could be made about the church. On the surface, Jesus of Nazareth certainly was, and therefore appeared to be, fully human, an ordinary man. Only relationship with Jesus opened up awareness of that which was strange or new, indeed, that which was holy and divine in him. Similarly, the church, on the surface, appears to be a wholly human institution, and only deep, personal engagement, unhurried and close attention, opens up a different awareness—an awareness of the strange and new, the holy and divine. In this beautifully appointed room, where gifts are laid out that will delight their recipients, where much that Schleiermacher will wish to characterize as holy will unfold, that which is special and different will take careful attention to perceive.

From this subtle suggestion of hidden holiness we move to a more blatant representation of this theme. A young child, Sophie, is a particularly significant character in the first scene of the dialogue, and remains significant in the conversations that follow. She is not allowed to give gifts in this gathering because all the gifts are handmade and she has not mastered the crafting skills required to generate such gifts, but she has nonetheless built an elaborate nativity scene depicting the whole of the Christian story, with flames and water as elements which hold the grand scene together. Though most Christmas nativities center on the manger that is the scene of the birth of Christ, in Sophie’s depiction one has to hunt for the birth scene. Schleiermacher describes it in this way:

Now among all these highlighted objects one sought for a long time in vain for the birth scene itself, for she had wisely contrived to conceal the Christmas star. One had to follow after the angels and after the shepherds gathered around a campfire, then open a door in the wall of the structure—the house having been given only a decorative function—and there in an enclosure, which actually lay out-of-doors, one looked upon the holy family. All was dark in the lowly shed, save one beam of light streaming down from some hidden

³²⁷ *Christmas Eve*, 27

source upon the infant's head and casting a reflection on the bowed face of his mother. In contrast to the wild flames on the other side, this mild splendor seemed like heavenly over against an earthly light.³²⁸

Sophie had “wisely contrived to conceal the Christmas star” and so light from above which directs one to the savior is present, but hidden. One finds one's way to the savior through the community below. The holy is on earth, but it takes effort to locate it.

Finally, in the third movement of the dialogue, the women at the gathering share Christmas stories. The hostess Ernestine's story invites us into a childhood experience of the church on Christmas Eve. This is how she describes what she found in the church:

Nothing there to quicken delight! And still less could the quavering tones of the minister entice me to enter in. Quite disappointed, I was about to ask my companion to take me home and was taking one last look around when my eye caught something. It was a lady sitting in an open pew just under a lovely old monument, holding a small child to her bosom. Apparently giving little heed to the preacher, the singing, or anything else about her, she seemed to be sunk deep in her own thoughts, and her eyes were fixed upon the child. Irresistibly was I drawn toward them, and my companion was obliged to follow as I moved closer. There, at that moment, I had suddenly come upon the sanctuary, the holy place, I had been seeking so long in vain... Yet what was communicated through it all was a sense of affable serenity, of loving devotion—radiating gloriously from her dark, downcast eyes, which would have been completely hidden from me had I been any taller. The child also seemed to me uncommonly lovely. It stirred energetically and yet quietly, and seemed absorbed in a half-unconscious dialogue of love and yearning with its mother.³²⁹

Ernestine goes on to recall being moved to offer a gift to the baby, and the mother of the child offering a gift to her as well. The young Ernestine went into a Christian sanctuary, in an hour of worship on Christmas Eve, seeking the holy, but initially she could not find it. She could not find it in the physical space, the music, the proclamation of the minister. But she does find it eventually. She finds “the sanctuary, the holy place [she] had been seeking so long in vain” not in the pulpit, but in a pew, in the wordless dialogue of profound love unfolding between a mother

³²⁸ Ibid, 33

³²⁹ Ibid, 58

and child. The holy then is *in* the church, but it is hidden. It is not where one would expect to find it. And, in fact, Ernestine suggests her short stature is what allowed her to perceive something her adult companion would have otherwise missed. And it was this encounter that moved Ernestine to spontaneous generosity that was reciprocated by the woman she encountered. This encounter transformed Ernestine from a passive seeker to an active participant. A loving relationship between a mother and child reveals the holy, and, it would seem by the child's participation in reciprocal activity, it serves to make her a participant in holiness in a way that the rituals and preaching of the church did not. That said this encounter would not have happened were it not for the institutional church and its formal, ritual assembly. Neither the mother and child nor Ernestine herself would have been there were these structures not in place. Through this narrative we are offered a window into the hidden, yet visible holiness of the church in the world.

This notion of hidden holiness helps to draw out Schleiermacher's unique position on the invisible and the visible church, in particular the interconnected nature of both, the former animating the latter, and through it we begin to glimpse some resources in Schleiermacher for a Reformed position on the visible holiness of the church. Church and world are clearly intermingled making it profoundly difficult to distinguish one from the other. But this does not mean that the true church and its holiness are invisible. It means that they are hidden and difficult to see. Schleiermacher's emphasis on communication, however, lends further input to our queries about visibility, which we shall now consider.

Visibility of Communication = Visibility of Holiness?

Because Schleiermacher insists that what makes the church the church is the reciprocal communication of God-consciousness awakened by the activity of the Spirit, he is identifying a historical, embodied, visible phenomenon as the essence of the church.³³⁰ And further, though Schleiermacher exhibits appropriate caution when discussing human action as compared to divine action, nonetheless, he does believe that the holy is communicated between believers and from believers to seekers. As we have seen, he does not hesitate to suggest that Christ's work is extended through the communicative witness of those who know Christ to be the redeemer. The Holy Spirit dwells in believers and makes this recognition and communication possible. Schleiermacher does not confuse God and humanity, but rather affirms the real and vital relationship between God and humanity that is made concrete in real and vital relationships of love between human beings.³³¹ Throughout Schleiermacher's ecclesiological writings it is

³³⁰ Niebuhr draws the following out of one of the final speeches in the *Christmas Eve* dialogue: "The discovery of Man in the self depends, therefore, on the discovery of Man in the other. The community in which this discovery and acknowledgement occurs is the church. Only through her spirit is rebirth possible. Thus, according to Eduard, this higher life and potentiated self-consciousness is *historically* mediated. The community of self-consciousness is both already the church and always becoming the church, for it rests upon the communication of its being by its members" (*Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion*, 66).

³³¹ Schleiermacher has always had critics who accused him of pantheism, a criticism that particularly peeved him. Gerrish notes that though Schleiermacher's doctrines of creation and providence are "not exactly the traditional Christian doctrines" they cannot properly be called pantheistic; "Given his analysis of the feeling of absolute dependence (in his introduction) and his characterization of divine causality as the world's eternal ground (in part 1), there is simply no way in which God-consciousness and world-consciousness could be logically confused; his annoyance with critics on this point was fully justified" ("Friedrich Schleiermacher" in *Continuing the Reformation*, 162). Gerrish identifies three ways in which Schleiermacher's doctrines of creation and providence were unconventional, though not heretical. 1) The object of providential care is the system as a whole, not the individual, ruling out God performing isolated acts for the benefit of individuals. 2) God and the world are set in antithetical relation, *and* are understood to be co-relative. There is no God without the world or world without God; 3) He resisted attributing personality to divine attributes. God does not have a consciousness like ours (Ibid, 162). Crouter suggests that Schleiermacher attempted to find a middle route between the

evident that he believed holiness to be mediated through the process of communication that undergirds and unfolds in the church, and in his later writing especially he is particularly clear that this is a visible phenomenon.

In *Speech 4*, though he grants that the community cannot “impart its possession” to seekers who gather,³³² it cannot communicate the holy to those for whom religion is entirely foreign, nonetheless, the holy *is* the possession of the community. And this is precisely what circulates in communication among believers. Consider his suggestion, for example, that the one who takes the active role of expression “steps forth to present his own intuition as the object for the rest, to lead them into the region of religion where he is at home and to **implant his holy feelings in them.**”³³³ Schleiermacher speaks of holiness in the response to this sharing,

Kantian dichotomy of spirit and nature and the romantic tendency to collapse these distinctions “into a single mode of poetic awareness [which] ends with too vacuous a line being drawn between spirit and nature” (“Introduction” to *On Religion*, 39). Niebuhr suggests that the Kierkegaardian-Kantian insistence on the infinite abyss between God and humanity, which as we have already seen is so crucial to Barth’s project, is holding court in much of contemporary protestant theology despite being a “virtual metaphysical dualism, so far as Christian theology is concerned” and it is this that leads to overly mystical or pantheistic readings of Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher is vulnerable to such critique because “He begins with the absolute dependence of the creature on the creator, not with the infinite abyss between the two. But any theology that takes creation and divine government as seriously as it takes the doctrine of original sin is bound to appear mystical in the eyes of the existentialists” (*Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion*, 13). Schleiermacher affirms both relation and distinction, as does Barth, it seems though that Schleiermacher emphasizes relation over distinction, and Barth takes the opposite course. See the discussion about the Holy Spirit below (150-151) for an exploration of Schleiermacher’s teachings on love.

³³² *On Religion*, 168.

³³³ *Ibid*, 165, emphasis mine; This statement and the few that immediately follow emerge in a section of *Speech 4* in which Schleiermacher is attempting to draw a picture of the “rich indulgent life in the city of God,” a picture of the life of the true church. Here is the full picture, in Schleiermacher’s original German: *Ich wollte, ich könnte Euch ein Bild machen von dem reichen, schwelgerischen Leben in dieser Stadt Gottes, wenn ihre Bürger zusammenkommen, jeder voll eigner Kraft, welche ausströmen will ins Frei, und voll heiliger Begierde, alles aufzufassen und sich anzueignen, (vertical line) was die andern ihm dar bieten mögen. Wenn einer hervortritt vor den übrigen, ist es nicht ein Amt oder eine Verabredung, die ihn berechtigt, nicht Stolz oder Dünkel, der ihm Anmaßung einflößt: es ist freie Regung des Geistes, Gefühl der*

suggesting that the initial response is “holy silence.”³³⁴ He concludes his imaging of what unfolds in the assembly of believers by suggesting the communication therein climaxes with music that takes over where speech can no longer suffice and “thus the sounds of thought and feeling support one another and alternate until everything is saturated and full of the holy and infinite.”³³⁵ And again at the conclusion of the speech as he depicts the Christian community in a series of images he says quite plainly that what unfolds among believers is revelation of the holy.

Together they are a choir of friends. Each person knows that he is also a part and a creation of the universe, that its divine work and life reveals itself also in him. He thus looks on himself as an object worthy of the intuition of others. With holy reserve but with a ready openness he lays bare everything he perceives in himself of the relations of the universe, all of the elements of humanity that take shape in him in order that everyone may enter and observe. Why should they also hide something from one another? Everything human is holy, for everything is divine.³³⁶

In *Christmas Eve*, Schleiermacher similarly suggests that holiness, and indeed the very

herzlichsten Einigkeit jedes mit allem und der vollkommensten Gleichheit, gemeinschaftliche Vernichtung jedes Zuerst and Zuletzt und aller irdischen Ordnung. Er tritt hervor, um seine eigne Anschauung hinzustellen, als Objekt für die übrigen, sie hinzuführen in die Gegend der Religion, wo er einheimisch ist, und seine heiligen Gefühle ihnen einzupflanzen; er spricht das Universum aus, und im heiligen Schweigen folgt die Gemeinde seiner begeisterten Rede. Es sei nun, daß er ein verborgenes Wunder enthülle, oder in weissagender Zuversicht die Zukunft an die Gegenwart knüpfe; es sei, daß er durch neue Beispiele alte Wahrnehmungen befestige oder daß seine feurige Phantasie in erhabnen Visionen ihn in andere teile der Welt und eine andre Ordnung der Dinge entzücke: der geübte Sinn der Gemeinde begleitet überall den seinigen, und wenn er zurückso ist sein Herz und das eines jeden nur der gemeinschaftliche Schauplatz desselben (vertical line in text) Gefühls. Dann entgegnet ihm das laute Bekenntnis von der Übereinstimmung seiner Ansicht mit dem, was in ihnen ist, und heilige Mysterien, nicht nur bedeutungstungen eines bestimmten Bewusstseins und bestimmter Empfindungen— werden so erfunden und so gefeiert; gleichsam ein höherer Chor, der in einer eignen erhabenen Sprache der auffordernden Stimme antwortet. Aber nicht nur gleichsam: so wie eine solche Rede Musik ist auch ohne Gesang und Ton, so is Worte, zu bestimmtesten, verständlichsten Ausdruck des Innersten. Die Muse der Harmonie, deren vertrautes Verhältnis prächtigsten und vollendetsten Werke ihrer geweihtesten Schüler Chören, denen die Worte der Dichter nur lose und luftig anfassen kann, und so unterstützen sich und wechseln die Töne des Gedankens und der Empfindung, bis alles gesättigt is und voll des Heiligen und Unendlichen (Über die Religion, 129-130).

³³⁴ Ibid

³³⁵ Ibid, 166

³³⁶ Ibid, 188

power of God, indwells believers and is communicated between them. This suggestion comes through most clearly in Agnes' Christmas story about the spontaneous Christmas Baptism of a newborn child. After all those present gave gifts anticipating who the child will become, Ferdinand offers the gift of baptism with these words:

‘You have borne him gifts, gifts which point to a life of which he as yet knows nothing, just as gifts were also brought before Christ which pointed to a glory of which the infant was as yet unaware. Let us, then, appropriate to him the finest gift of all, Christ himself, although in this moment it cannot yet accord him either joy or pleasure. For his sake, **the power of the higher life, which cannot yet exist in himself, dwells not alone in his mother or in me but in us all. And as time goes on, this power must stream out to him from us all so that he may take it unto himself.**’³³⁷

Ferdinand proceeds to explain that when a Christian child is welcomed with love and joy, and when that child remains embraced by the community that so welcomes him this “furnishes a guarantee that the Spirit of God will dwell in him.”³³⁸ After a bit more explanation of the significance of what is about to transpire, all gathered laid their hands on the child, according to “a fine old custom of that area” and Agnes suggests that “it was as if the rays of heavenly love and joy converged upon the head and heart of the child in a new focus, and it was certainly our common feeling that they there kindled a new life and that they would radiate out again in every direction.”³³⁹

This story suggests powerfully that the power of God, of the holy, dwells in the community as a whole, and needs to be communicated to one newly welcomed into that community by the community as a whole. It must “stream out to him from us all so that he may take it unto himself.” Surely the holy is not an exclusive possession of the clergy. That is made plain in this passage, but it is the gift of the whole community, a gift to be continually given to

³³⁷ *Christmas Eve*, 62, emphasis mine

³³⁸ *Ibid*, 62

³³⁹ *Ibid*, 62-63.

those newly arrived.

By the time Schleiermacher prepared *The Christian Faith*, all these early and vague references to the holy power that indwells believers and the Christian Community as a whole are developed more fully under the rubric of pneumatology. We considered the pneumatological dimensions of Schleiermacher's ecclesiology in the discussion of the true church above. We now attend particularly to Schleiermacher's understandings of the visibility of the effects of the Holy Spirit's action.

The Holy Spirit indwells humanity and prompts human activity. The Holy Spirit births and sustains human community. The Holy Spirit awakens love and the activity of love. Though the Holy Spirit, the power of God, is necessarily invisible, because the Spirit works through natural, created beings the Spirit's effects are most certainly visible. Schleiermacher seems to affirm this when he insists that the common spirit of the whole, which we know he understands to be equivalent with the Holy Spirit, must begin "to *show itself* at work in a given person" before that person can be recognized as a true part of the community.³⁴⁰ He grants the Spirit will continue to be communicated to one once one is a part of the community, but one is not understood to be a member of the community absent evidence of the Spirit's activity in his/her life. And because we've already noted that it is universal love that is the characteristic feature of the common Spirit of the Christian community, it would seem that actions which en flesh this love would be that which makes the holiness of the community visible in the world. Recall that Schleiermacher is not content to suggest that the fellowship of the regenerate, the true church, is wholly invisible; this fellowship, is, because participating most fully in sanctification and

³⁴⁰ *Christian Faith*, Par. 121, 563

therefore most opposed to the world, *most visible*.³⁴¹ And it is the activity of the Holy Spirit, indwelling believers that allows people to be participants in sanctification and therefore visible witnesses to holiness.

Concluding Comments to Part Two

I have argued in this second part of the chapter that Schleiermacher's contrast between the true church and the common church does not map neatly onto the doctrine of the invisible and visible church. The true church, in its holiness, is hidden rather than invisible. This church becomes visible only when one is a part of it, deeply involved in it, and it becomes visible through the process of mutual communication that is its foundation. The process of sanctification is extended and the church grows through historically embodied processes of communication. In the final part of this chapter we will consider the most significant and visible instantiation of this communicative process in Schleiermacher's understanding.

PART THREE- THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PREACHING IN SCHLEIERMACHER'S ECCLESIOLOGY

The goal of this section is simple. I intend to demonstrate the significance of preaching in Schleiermacher's ecclesiology. Having already argued the communicative foundation of the church and the significance of communication to the visibility of holiness, with our turn to preaching we now turn to a central moment of communication in church life. For Schleiermacher, as for Reformed thinkers more generally, the significance of preaching cannot be overstated. I will first seek to demonstrate the way in which preaching is the primary mediating tool of the church and then will consider the content and character of preaching

³⁴¹ Ibid, par 147, 677-678.

communication.

Preaching as the Primary Mediating Tool

Schleiermacher writes “If we conceive the incarnation of Christ as the beginning of the regeneration of the whole human race, then the erection of a permanent place for the preaching of the Gospel amongst a people through the instrumentality of the first fruits from its own midst is the beginning of that people’s regeneration.”³⁴² Here is perhaps one of the clearest statements of the necessary and positive purpose of the common church in *The Christian Faith*. Much as he earlier affirmed that there needs to be a binding agent, or a mediating body between the true church and those seeking religion through the common church, Schleiermacher now declares that the guarantee of the point of contact between the inner and outer circles (analogous to the true church and the common church) is “the erection of permanent place for the preaching of the gospel amongst a people.” This permanent place is the visible, institutional church, the common church. And this place plays no small role in the regenerative process- it is the site of “the beginning of that people’s regeneration.” Echoing the great Reformers a few centuries prior, Schleiermacher declares that “...faith only comes by preaching, and preaching always goes back to Christ’s commission and is therefore derived from Him. And as in Christ Himself everything proceeds from the divine within Him, so also does this communication, which becomes in everyone the power of the new life, a power not different in each, but the same in all.”³⁴³

Preaching, it seems, is the primary vehicle by which Christ’s presence, and more particularly, Christ’s God-consciousness, is mediated to those seeking religion. This is even suggested in *Speech 4* when he insists that religious communication is not a matter for “common

³⁴² Ibid, par. 116, 535.

³⁴³ Ibid, par. 121, 564.

conversation.” Though religious people mock the cultured despisers for being willing to talk about anything important except God, Schleiermacher thinks this resistance reflects a correct and proper instinct.

People cannot toss religious views, pious feelings, and serious reflections upon them to each other in small snatches, like the ingredients of a light conversation; if the conversation were about such holy objects, it would be more an outrage than ingenuity to have an answer ready immediately for every question and a response for every address. Divine things do not permit themselves to be treated in the manner of a quick and easy exchange of well-aimed wit. The communication of religion must occur in a grander style, and another type of society, which is especially dedicated to religion, must arise from it. It is proper that the whole fullness and magnificence of human speech be expended on the highest which speech can attain, not as if there were some ornament with which religion could not dispense, but because it would be unholy and thoughtless not to show that everything is summoned to represent religion in appropriate power and dignity.³⁴⁴

He insists, further, that this communication is necessarily verbal and preferably takes the form of sophisticated oration so that assemblies will be moved by it.³⁴⁵ From these reflections, it sounds like Schleiermacher is talking about an organized church that centers on skilled preaching. He believes there should be designated places and forms for religious communication even in this earliest ecclesiological writing, and he maintains and strengthens this position as his thought develops.

Schleiermacher suggests in *The Christian Faith* that there are some in the fellowship “who maintain chiefly the attitude of spontaneity” and “perform by self-communication the Ministry of God’s Word for those who maintain chiefly the attitude of receptivity.”³⁴⁶ Those who exercise spontaneous expression more than reception of such expression are ordinarily the preachers of the community who help to facilitate the transfer of seekers from the outer circle to the inner circle. Ultimately it is God alone who makes this transfer possible, but God uses the

³⁴⁴ *On Religion*, 164-165.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 165

³⁴⁶ *Christian Faith*, portion of thesis 133, 611.

instrumentality of preaching as a tool in this process.

This explication of his thesis about the Ministry of the Word resonates with his discussion of purifying action in his *Christian Ethics*. He suggests therein that there is a further distinction beyond the outer and inner circles of the church, a distinction within the inner circle wherein at any given moment some are receiving further purification and strength and others are spontaneously supplying this purification and strength.³⁴⁷ This purification and strength is supplied and received through the communicative process that is the basis of the church. Once again we see that the process of being sanctified, made holy both initiates the reciprocal communicative process and is extended by it.

Because the Holy Spirit's activity is free, the stark contrast of the clergy and the laity is senseless; that said, societies can only be well-ordered where there is a division of labor that allows the flourishing of all the gifts in the body.³⁴⁸ Schleiermacher suggests that, initially, the preaching ministry of the Apostles was directed to those *outside* the fellowship, but over time there arose a need for preaching *within* the fellowship, as the community, ever needing improvement and purification, requires steady teaching and admonition. He perceives a twofold ordering of ministry (teaching and the serving of tables) to be scriptural, and the third traditional Reformed office of governance to be an arbitrary invention. Schleiermacher particularly resists any conception of church governance whereby some section of the community is understood to represent Christ over and against the rest of the community. For this reason, those who are elected and ordained to church office, particularly to the ministry of the Word need only to demonstrate their qualification to be interpreters and teachers of Scripture and it is the whole

³⁴⁷ Ibid, Par. 133, 612

³⁴⁸ Ibid, Par. 133, 614

body that empowers people for this work.³⁴⁹ The existence of an ordered preaching office, however, does not exclude the possibility of spontaneous communication among those not holding this office. The presumption is that all in the true church are capable of expressing and receiving. The maintenance of a preaching office organizes this communicative process, but does not constrain it.³⁵⁰ That said, in order for there to be continuity in the ministry of the word, an ordered Public Ministry and structured churches are necessary.³⁵¹

In both his *Lectures on Christian Ethics* and *The Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher emphasizes quite heavily the importance of the publicity of Christian faith. In his *Lectures on Christian Ethics*, from a survey of Christian history, he points to an early intention to bring about the public character of Christianity. He suggests that this publicity “constitutes the essential character of the Christian church” and is the only means by which the church’s task can be resolved.³⁵² He further argues that if the work of the whole is to facilitate mutual communication, this requires individuals acting with the greatest possible public character.³⁵³ In *The Christian Faith* he writes, “Hence nothing but an utterly superficial view of Christianity will find it

³⁴⁹ Ibid, Par. 134, 615

³⁵⁰ Ibid, par. 134, 616

³⁵¹ Ibid

³⁵² *Selections from Christian Ethics*, 77; As is typical in these lectures he contrasts the Catholic Church, whom he accuses of forsaking publicity for assimilation, with Protestants who “presuppose that the whole in its oscillation can only continue its progress insofar as there is influence of some individuals on the whole, our task can be fulfilled only with the presupposition of an unlimited public character; we could only affirm that it is right for any individual to escape from a church in which the principle of public character is completely obstructed, for in such a church there would no longer be any means of overcoming a retrogressive movement, and all errors would be permanent” (Ibid, 78.) The task of the church is the extension of the incarnation that the world might be sanctified. If its mission is inwardly rather than outwardly focused, it is not fulfilling its task. Without publicity, I believe, Schleiermacher would suggest that the Word is not being faithfully proclaimed, thus a mark is missing, thus a church is not the church. He points out that the early, vigorous use of “the greatest means of public expression—namely, the printing press” demonstrates the commitment of Protestantism to the public character of Christianity (Ibid).

³⁵³ Ibid

possible to reduce Christian fellowship to the area of domestic life and to silent, private relationships devoid of publicity. On the contrary, public gatherings for common confession and common edification are the principal thing, and the transferrance to certain persons of predominance and leadership in these gatherings is merely a side-issue.”³⁵⁴ Public gatherings where mutually edifying communion unfolds, these are the main events of Christian faith. If public gatherings are the main event of Christian faith, then the act of preaching is the focal moment of that event.

The Content and Character of Preaching Communication

Though all that unfolds in gatherings for worship will hopefully be an occurrence of mutual and reciprocal communication, the preaching moment is the clearest instantiation of this communicative process. Schleiermacher’s emphasis on preaching is typical for Reformed theologians; what he understands to be communicated through preaching, and in all the communicative activity of the church, however, may distinguish him. That which is communicated and received in public gatherings of Christians is the Holy Spirit. Prior to the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, only Jesus could offer such communication.³⁵⁵ Mutual communication of the Spirit could not then unfold on earth, but with the sending of the Spirit on Pentecost, at which time the apostles were transferred from the outer circle to the inner, such holiness took up residence in human community and became the object of communication.³⁵⁶ A community organized around one person is more a multiplicity of

³⁵⁴ Ibid, par. 135, 617

³⁵⁵ Niebuhr notes that Schleiermacher maintained that Jesus’ primary work was the communication of himself and therefore preaching was “the single most important or typical form of his work” (*Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion*, 146).

³⁵⁶ e.g. *Christian Faith*, Thesis 122-“Only after the departure of Christ from earth was it possible

individual lives, like a household or a school, and typically the individuals scatter after the death of the individual around whom they are organized, just as the disciples initially did upon the death of Christ. But the resurrection and ascension of Christ ushered in the era of the sending of the Spirit, which sustained the community that initially gathered around the person of Jesus Christ. The Spirit indwelling believers and the community makes possible the continual influence of Christ through the process of mutual impartation that it facilitates.

For according to our own statements, in the living fellowship of the regenerate with Christ everything derives from Him, which means that, strictly speaking, there is to be found in every Christian only susceptibility, not spontaneous activity. And hence, it may be said, the life in common is no more now than then a common existence; for the spontaneous activity then as now was wholly in Christ, and believers' life together even yet is just the mutual impartation of what each has received from Christ.³⁵⁷

This last quote should be carefully considered. Schleiermacher does not suggest that the Holy Spirit is a possession of the church to be distributed to those who lack it. As we've already considered, Schleiermacher suggests that the Holy Spirit is the *common* spirit of the community, given by God and God alone,³⁵⁸ and that the communicative process that unfolds in the church is

for the Holy Spirit, as this common spirit, to be fully communicated and received." In defense of this thesis Schleiermacher indicates that "the more a common life depends on an individual life the less it is an existence in common" (Ibid, par. 122, 566). Creegan and Creegan note that the transfer to the inner circle still occurs by means of the preaching of the Word and every active communication undertaken by those already in the inner circle and indicate that these are "the means by which piety is transmitted, and the means by which ontological and historical continuity with Christ is maintained" (Nicola Hoggard Creegan and Charles Creegan, "Schleiermacher and Kierkegaard dialogue on Ecclesiology" in *Understanding Schleiermacher: from translation to interpretation; a Festschrift in honor of Terrence Nelson Tice*, ed. Ruth Druscilla Richardson and Edwina Lawler, (Lewiston: E. Mellon Press, 1998), 471).

³⁵⁷ Ibid, par. 122, 567. *Denn unsren eignen Aussagen nach gehe in der Lebensgemeinschaft der Wiedergeborenen mit Christo alles immer von letzterem aus, mithin sei auch jetzt in jedem streng genommen nur Empfänglichkeit und nicht Selbstthätigkeit. Daher sei auch das Gesamtleben jetzt nicht mehr als damals ein Gemeinwesen; denn die Selbstthätigkeit sei auch damals schon wie jetzt vollkommen in Christo gewesen, und das Zusammenleben der Gläubigen sie auch jetzt nur gegenseitige Mittheilung dessen, was Jeder von Christo empfangen hat (GL, 285-286)*

³⁵⁸ Here we glimpse the first of our two crimson threads— God alone as the source of

one of “mutual impartation” of that which has been received. Strictly speaking, all Christians are passive recipients; Christ remains the active agent.³⁵⁹ Only, in a relative sense, can Christians be credited with spontaneous activity. While he grants that Christian faith emerges at the prodding of preaching, he emphasizes that the community is not capable of *giving* what it possesses.

Schleiermacher consistently suggests that Christian faith is given by God and emerges from deep within individual consciousness. The insistence that God alone is the source of faith resonates strongly with the teachings of Karl Barth a century later, and, interestingly, the category of witness, which is so crucial in Barth’s teaching, surfaces in Schleiermacher as well. He writes that scripture

would be a mere lifeless possession if this preservation were not an ever-renewed self-activity of the Church, which reveals itself also in living witness to Christ that either goes back to Scripture or harmonizes with Scripture in meaning and spirit. And this witness alone, taken universally as the duty and calling of every member of the Church— and viewed provisionally apart from definite forms of any kind—is what is understood here by the phrase ‘the Ministry of the Word of God.’³⁶⁰

The communicative process that is the foundation of the Christian Church is grounded in Scripture and is characterized as “a living witness to Christ.”³⁶¹

sanctification

³⁵⁹ Again, Niebuhr helpfully notes “...when Schleiermacher stipulates that Christianity arises out of the preaching of Christ, he means by *preaching* an act more inclusive than discourse about ideas; preaching is the expression of Jesus of Nazareth’s identity before God and the vehicle of his communication of his own life. Therefore, so little is the preaching the constitutes the living essence of Christianity merely externally related to the person of Christ that is in reality the presence of Christ himself in the church, and the presupposition of *The Christian Faith* as a whole is that the church lives in and through the *kerygma* of Christ” (*Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion*, 146-147)

³⁶⁰ Ibid, par. 127, 588

³⁶¹ Redeker suggests that the underlying assumption of Schleiermacher’s own sermons is that “The preacher turns to the church as the community of Jesus Christ which continually lives in communion with the Redeemer. It is not the empirical church but the church of faith and the Spirit which is active in the empirical church. Thus Schleiermacher’s sermon is no orthodox moral sermon. It is no moral rearmament or fortification. It is the confession and witness of the Christian community which enjoys a living relationship with Christ and which, through the

We gain further insight into Schleiermacher's understanding of this communicative act of witness through a consideration of his teachings on presentational action in his *Lectures on Ethics*. The other two forms of Christian action that Schleiermacher identifies (purifying and broadening) are means of proceeding towards blessedness; both rely upon some lack of consciousness that keeps individuals from perfect rest in blessedness.³⁶² In the eschaton, therefore, these forms of action will cease, but he does not believe Christian action will cease altogether. Efficacious action, by which he means intentionally productive action (either purifying or broadening), will cease. But presentational action intends no efficacious change, regardless of its results, and thus it can and will persist. And it is precisely presentational action that facilitates the continuity of the church's existence in the present. The other two forms of action are responsive to opportunities that arise. When the opportunity is satisfied, the corresponding action ceases. Such forms of action then cannot sustain community; presentational action does.³⁶³

Presentational action is the expression of an inner state and it is the foundation of community.³⁶⁴

'Insofar as all presentational action is nothing but the coming into appearance of an inner state, it sprouts into community.' Surely presentational action also proceeds from community; thus it always presupposes community already existing, so that we come to the same circle that we have already construed in another place. However, these two are

preacher, brings this relationship to expression in 'representative communication'" (*Schleiermacher: Life and Thought*, 206). Redeker points to the articulation of the meaning of the sermon in Schleiermacher's *Brief Outline of Theological Study*, par. 280 where he writes, "Edification in Christian worship emphatically rests upon the communication of pious self-consciousness which has developed into thought."

³⁶² *Selections from Christian Ethics*, 141

³⁶³ *Ibid*, 147.

³⁶⁴ Schleiermacher later argues that all presentational action is essentially "worship"- service to God. He defines worship as the "totality of all actions through which we present ourselves as organs of God, by means of the divine Spirit" (*Ibid*, 151) which is distinguished from efficacious action which involves producing something as organs of God.

also easily united again, namely, in the fact that community on the one hand, and presentational action on the other— both are equally original. That is, an individual person could not be a being that exists under the form of time if there were not for that person a becoming outward of what is inner.³⁶⁵

It is striking that Schleiermacher defines presentational action as “the coming into appearance of an inner state”³⁶⁶ and that he explicitly links it to the generation of community. This is the action that renders the church visible in the world.³⁶⁷

Preaching, then, holds the utmost significance in Schleiermacher’s communicative ecclesiology directing our attention to this act in our search for visible holiness.

CONCLUSION- A SURPRISING VULNERABILITY AND A NECESSARY BALANCING IMAGE

I have argued, via attention to the contrast and relation between the true church and the common that Schleiermacher’s understanding of the church is rooted in communication. Schleiermacher offers us a communicative ecclesiology. The sanctification of believers, and ultimately of the world, unfolds in a process of mutual communication. The church and world are necessarily intermixed, which makes it difficult to perceive the true church in its distinction. I have also argued, however, that Schleiermacher does not believe the true church to be the

³⁶⁵ Ibid, 144

³⁶⁶ This is a description of the inner state that is expressed and that comes into appearance “On the other hand, the higher self-consciousness in the form of blessedness, inasmuch as it does not at all stand under the opposition between pleasure and lack of pleasure, is the true and basic feeling of a Christian, a feeling that there is some power of spirit over flesh” (Ibid, 147-8).

³⁶⁷ We can note resonances between this description of presentational action and Schleiermacher’s description, in *Speech 4*, of that which those who truly possess religion ought to expect out of their preachers. He says that what they should want is for “their spokesman of religion [to] communicate the clearest, very individual intuitions and feelings to them” so that their own intuition and feeling of God-consciousness might be stirred (*On Religion*, 172). The fact is, as Schleiermacher understood it, that this is not what is expected in the common church, there instead the speech of their preachers is constrained. Preachers are not expected to express their individuality, but to explicate concepts, opinions, and doctrines. This is one piece of his case against the true ecclesiality of the common church.

invisible church and the common church to be the visible church. Schleiermacher resists dualism and suggests true and common, much like church and world, are intertwined phenomena. The true is hidden in the common. The more one is participant in the mutual communication of the Spirit of Christ, the more one can see the church in the world. Finally, I asserted the great significance of preaching in Schleiermacher's communicative ecclesiology.

Schleiermacher's highly pneumatological development of both Christology and ecclesiology helps to undergird his continual insistence on the radical mutuality of the church and his resistance of a stark clerical/lay divide. As can probably be anticipated, though Schleiermacher ties the Holy Spirit to the true church, he does not tie the Holy Spirit to the church's clerical leadership. The Holy Spirit is the active principle in the community as a whole, and it could never be said that a sub-section of the community possesses the Holy Spirit on behalf of the whole. Even if certain communicative tasks, which are most evidently the product of the Holy Spirit's activity in humanity, are delegated to some for the sake of order, this does not mean the Holy Spirit's activity flows from these delegates alone.³⁶⁸ The community as a whole is the body of Christ and represents Christ to the world.

Thus the picture of the true church in its holiness that emerges from Schleiermachers's ecclesiological weaving is of an equal, mutual fellowship. It would seem that with his emphasis on the mutuality and empowerment of the whole body, Schliermacher could not possibly be vulnerable to interpretation that supports a sacralized understanding of clerics. But, surprisingly, even Schleiermacher is vulnerable to such misinterpretation, largely thanks to the high significance of preaching in his project.

Even in *Speech 4*, where he demonstrates little respect for ordered ministry and

³⁶⁸ Ibid, par. 133, 614

institutional structures, he leaves the door wide open to the perception that the clergy are more likely participants in the true church than are the laity. If there is going to be a connection between the true church and the common church, the communicators in the common church need to be those who truly possess religion. Schleiermacher says this quite plainly in this speech. He argues there that those strong and cultivated individuals who possess true religion need to descend from the holy community to offer the communication needed by those for whom religion is foreign.³⁶⁹ At one point he explicitly says that the leadership of these mass assemblies ought to be taken from the true church.³⁷⁰ With this suggestion, Schleiermacher can be read as saying that what one sees in the church as a whole is not the church, and if one wishes to see some part of the true church, one needs to look to its leaders. Granted, later in the speech he retracts this suggestion anticipating the objections of his readers. He suggests that they will ask how “religious virtuosos” could tolerate “so much that would be contrary to the spirit of religion right where they are to rule, where all listen to their voice, and where they themselves should only hear the voice of religion?”³⁷¹ He further notes that church regulations can be traced to the priests, and if not, then the church is not being governed by whom it is supposed to be governed and its leaders, supposedly the representatives of true religion, have been poor administrators. If they are so religious, why would they allow this? In light of these anticipated challenges, he withdraws his earlier suggestion that the leadership of the common church is derived only from the true church. He stands firmly in the territory Augustine carved out in the Donatist controversy when he asserts that no one would claim that all the leaders of the “great ecclesiastical society” have been “virtuosos of religion or even merely members of the true

³⁶⁹ *On Religion*, 168-169

³⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 173

³⁷¹ *Ibid*, 174-175

church.”³⁷² But in Schleiermacher’s communicative ecclesiology, those empowered as the church’s primary communicators are likely to carry more of the church’s identity on their shoulders. And if it is true that the majority of people who assemble for institutional worship are seekers of a religion that they do not themselves possess, then his basic presumption— that those empowered for the primary role of communication in the common church will ideally be possessors of true religion—stands. How else will those who gather seeking religion have any chance of discovering it? He reveals an appropriate humility about the character of the leaders of the visible church, but in his system it appears that the office of preacher is the primary vehicle for mediating Christ’s God-consciousness to the gathered assembly.

Such vulnerability is not simply present in Schleiermacher’s earliest ecclesiological offerings. He is certainly careful to assert the mutuality of the community and the freedom of the Spirit when discussing the necessity of ordered public ministry in his more mature writing, but in both *The Christian Faith* and his *Lectures on Christian Ethics* he suggests that those performing a primarily active, spontaneously communicative role in the community should be more pure than those in a primarily receptive role. He says it this way in defense of thesis 133 in *The Christian Faith*—“For those who are even momentarily weak and impure only belong to the fellowship in so far as they have a receptive capacity to be purified and strengthened, and the fellowship can retain them only as there are those within it who spontaneously supply to them a purification and strengthening. This must here be considered—apart from the distinction of an outer and an inner circle within the Church— as a distinction even among the regenerate themselves”³⁷³ And in *Ethics*, in a discussion of the purifying action of the church he suggests that “all those who are in need of purifying activity may participate in the activity of worship as

³⁷² Ibid, 175

³⁷³ par. 133, 612

long as they belong to the group of those in whom receptivity dominates, not as they belong to those in whom the activity of the whole is to be expressed.”³⁷⁴ It should be noted that both of these statements are surrounded by affirmations of the freedom of the Spirit to prompt communication outside the bounds of formally appointed times and places. It further should be noted that Schleiermacher guards against an elevation of the clergy by granting the need for purification among the regenerate and the movement of the clergy between modes of spontaneity and receptivity.³⁷⁵ Nonetheless, Schleiermacher’s communicative system so highly elevates the work of preaching, identifying it as the main vehicle God uses for the implanting of the Spirit—the awakening of God-consciousness, that there remains a risk that those empowered for the preaching office will be perceived as the bearers of the holiness of the church. And when he insists that those fulfilling this office will be more pure than those in a primarily receptive mode in the body, this problematically reinforces the clerical/lay distinction that he is attempting to resist. And it makes more likely the perception that the truly holy members of the community are its empowered leaders. Schleiermacher says in his *Ethics* that it is presentational action that allows the continuity of Christian community in this world and says in *The Christian Faith* that definite communicators with their gifts need to be referred to definite circles of the receptive that Christian communication might not be isolated and sporadic.³⁷⁶ He grants that true Christian communication will unfold outside of this ordering, but it *has* to unfold within this ordering if the church is going to be the church in the world. Schleiermacher takes great pains to avoid a sacralization of the clergy, but the very emphasis on communication which makes it possible to conceptualize the visible holiness of the church renders him vulnerable to a sacralization of the

³⁷⁴ *Selections from Christian Ethics*, 73

³⁷⁵ e.g. *Ibid*, 72

³⁷⁶ *Christian Faith*, par. 134, 616

church's primary communicators.

If I have overstated this vulnerability, it is so that we might begin to perceive another dimension of the problem confronting Reformed Christians trying to conceptualize the visible holiness of the church. Our prioritization of the Word and our emphasis on preaching directs our gaze to those with primary responsibility for this vital work. We are quite naturally inclined to look for holiness in the pulpit. If we see in Barth's weaving how hard it is to conceptualize the visible holiness of the church at all, we see in Schleiermacher's how easy it can be to identify too much of the church's identity and holiness in the church's preachers.

But this critique *is* an overstatement. Indeed, Schleiermacher did not err in this way. As we have seen throughout the chapter, he took great pains to emphasize the mutuality of the true church and the capacity of all its members for spontaneous, active communication. Indeed, the receipt of the Spirit of Christ implants a need to communicate, draws one into relationships where one sometimes speaks, and sometimes listens, testing the spirits and thereby growing in holiness. He even understands a certain mutuality in the preaching moment itself. To be a person of Christian faith means to be aware of one's common humanity and to be compelled to live in loving relationships with fellow Christians and indeed with those outside the Christian fellowship.

It is this image of mutuality, so prominent in Schleiermacher's ecclesiological weaving, that must inspire my own work. In a tradition that has so heavily emphasized the communication of the word; we must stress the mutuality of effective communication. And we must place great stress on the way in which effective communication results in the increased communicative capacity of all parties to the interaction.

We have seen in Schleiermacher as well the two crimson threads identified in Barth's

project— God alone as the source of sanctification and the significance of forgiveness to the identity of the church. The Holy Spirit is God Godself acting in and through human beings to extend the work of Christ in the world. And because the world is in the church, there is always a need for purification and forgiveness. As we have seen, for Schleiermacher the sanctification of the church is ultimately to be the sanctification of the world. This process of sanctification unfolds only gradually for all involved.

Having two dimensions of the problem to which this dissertation is a response now in view, and now two images with two crimson threads running through them to inspire its creative work, we are ready to closely examine the ecclesiological weaving of the most significant Reformed thinker, Jean Calvin. We will want to consider the place of preaching in his system and we will think more deeply about the progressive character of sanctification in a church that rests on a foundation of forgiveness provided by God alone.

CHAPTER IV

JEAN CALVIN: PROGRESSION, NOT POSSESSION

INTRODUCTION

Both Barth and Schleiermacher, to different effect, picked up threads from Jean Calvin in their ecclesiological weaving. Any distinctly Reformed contribution to this grand work must do so. We now turn our attentions directly to Jean Calvin's portion of the tapestry. In part one of the chapter, I argue that the image of the holiness of the church that stands out in Calvin's work is of an unfolding *process* centering in the forgiveness of sins. On the foundation of this first argument, I advance a critical argument in part 2 that, in Calvin's understanding, this forgiveness of sins, which is central to the church's holiness, is too tightly linked to the preaching event, which easily slides into an attachment to the church's preachers, thereby leaving open an unintended elevation or sacralization of the clergy.

I advance the argument in part one, by posing and answering a series of questions about Calvin's ecclesiology: Does Calvin have a doctrine of the invisible and visible church, and, if so, does this mean he believes the true church to be invisible? In what sense is it appropriate to call the admittedly mixed, visible church holy? What is the nature of the relationship between church and Christ? In what way is the visible church understood to be the primary site of salvation and sanctification?

I advance the second argument first by attending to Calvin's prioritization of the Word and then by attending to his teaching on the power of the keys in conversation with Cyprian and Augustine's earlier interpretations thereof. I conclude with a consideration of Calvin's efforts to

resist an elevated clerical office through consistent qualification of statements about this office and through the structures of ecclesiastical jurisdiction that he developed. I argue that these efforts, while helpful, are not strong enough to counterbalance the role that he believes the church's clergy play in the church's very identity and purpose, which makes it easy to rest the holiness of the church on the shoulders of these officers.

PART ONE- A CONSIDERATION OF CALVIN'S ECCLESIOLOGY

The True Church- Invisible? Visible?

Miroslav Volf once claimed that the Reformed Tradition has had a tendency to relegate all of the creedal marks of the church to the sphere of invisibility, and has, as a result, managed to avoid all the truly consequential theological questions that circle around the church's existence.³⁷⁷ What sense does it make to speak of *invisible* oneness, catholicity, holiness, apostolicity? This dissertation presumes not only that it doesn't make a great deal of sense, but also that this tendency leaves us vulnerable to other theological and practical problems in ecclesial life. If it is true that we have this tendency, it is theologically rooted in the doctrine of the invisible and visible church, which Calvin is presumed to have offered. Before we can consider Calvin's contributions to an understanding of the visible holiness of the church, we must first ask whether he does in fact have a doctrine of the invisible and visible church, and, if he does, if this means he believes the true church to be invisible. We begin this inquiry by

³⁷⁷ He makes this claim in his discussion of the catholicity of the church. To relegate the church's catholicity to the sphere of invisibility is an avoidance of all that is theologically decisive. For Volf, that which is theologically decisive is the meaningfulness of ascribing a label such as catholic to concrete, visible churches. Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, ed. Allen G. Padgett, *Sacra Doctrina: Christian Theology for a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 270.

attending to the section of the *Institutes* in which Calvin seeks to define the church— both questioning the editorial titling of this section and scrutinizing his definitions in context. We then consider the visibility implications of Calvin’s tight linking of the doctrines of election and ecclesiology. Finally, we will reflect on Calvin’s understanding of the marks of the church and of the faithful.

In the standard English translation of the *Institutes*, the seventh section of the first chapter of book four is entitled “*Invisible and Visible Church*.” This title suggests that Calvin indeed has a doctrine of the invisible and visible church, but Calvin did not title his numbered sections within each chapter; these reflect interpretative decisions of later translators and editors.³⁷⁸ In fact, the express purpose of this section of the chapter is to determine “how we are to judge the church visible,” and it serves as an introduction to sections on the marks of Christian Faith and the marks of the church. In other words, it introduces a section largely focusing on the visibility of the church.

In 4.I.7, Calvin offers the following twofold scriptural definition of the church:

Sometimes by the term “church” it [scripture] means that which is actually in God’s presence, into which no persons are received but those who are children of God by grace of adoption and true members of Christ by sanctification of the Holy Spirit. Then, indeed, the church includes not only the saints presently living on earth, but all the elect from the beginning of the world. Often, however, the name “church” designates the whole multitude of men spread over the earth who profess to worship one God and Christ. By Baptism we are initiated into faith in him; by partaking in the Lord’s Supper we attest our unity in true doctrine and love; in the Word of the Lord we have agreement, and for the preaching of the Word the ministry instituted by Christ is preserved.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁸ John T. McNeill, Editor’s Preface to *Institutes of Christian Religion*, by Jean Calvin, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), xix-xx. All references from the *Institutes* are drawn from this standard English translation and hereafter all citations will be marked by *Inst.* and the Book, chapter, paragraph, and page (in this Battle’s translation).

³⁷⁹ Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, tr. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 4.I.7, 1021. *Interdum quum ecclesiam nominant, eam intelligunt quae re vera est coram Deo, in quam nulli recipiuntur nisi qui et adoptionis*

On first blush, the first scriptural definition of the church offered here (beginning with “Sometimes...” ending with “...the beginning of the world”) seems to speak of a primarily invisible reality. How are we to *see* who is “actually in God’s presence?” And we certainly can never see all the elect “from the beginning of the world”- a community of the living *and* the dead. Indeed, Calvin himself says at the end of this section that the church of this first description is “invisible to us... visible to the eyes of God alone.”³⁸⁰ The second scriptural definition (beginning with the word “Often”), in contrast, plainly speaks of the visible phenomenon of assembling for Christian worship that unfolds regularly throughout the world. This definitional work suggests that Calvin does indeed have a doctrine of the invisible and visible church; the editorial title can thus be understood. A troubling question arises, however, as to whether the true church is invisible, and that which is visible is not true church at all. This could be read off Calvin’s full concluding statement at the end of this section: “Just as we must believe, therefore, that the former church, invisible to us, is visible to the eyes of God alone, so we are commanded to revere and keep communion with the latter, which is called ‘church’ in respect to men.”³⁸¹ Is Calvin suggesting that that which we see in the world is only nominally church because the true church is visible to God alone?

Some do read Calvin in this way because of how tightly he weds together the doctrines of

gratia filii Dei sunt, et spiritus sanctificatione vera Christi membra. Ac tunc quidem non tantum sanctos qui in terra habitant comprehendit, sed electos omnes qui ab origine mundi fuerunt. Saepe autem ecclesiae nomine universam hominum multitudinem in orbe diffusam designat, quae unum se Deum et Christum colere profitetur, baptismo initiatur in eius fidem, coenae participatione unitatem in vera doctrina et caritate testatur, consensionem habet in verbo Domini atque ad eius praedicationem ministerium conservat a Christo institutum (Joannis Calvinii opera selecta, vol. 5, cols. 752-753).

³⁸⁰ Ibid, 1022.

³⁸¹ Ibid *Quaemadmodum ergo nobis invisibilem, solus Dei oculis conspicuam ecclesiam credere necesse est, ita hanc, quae respectu hominum ecclesia dicitur, observare eiusque communionem colere iubemur (Joannis Calvinii opera selecta, vol. 5, col. 753)*

election and ecclesiology, as is reflected in the first definition considered above. All throughout his theological career, Calvin spoke about election and ecclesiology together; he always understood the church, most basically, to be the community of God's elect.³⁸² Because God's election is necessarily hidden, this connection has led some to believe that for Calvin, the true church must be invisible.³⁸³ Those who consider the development of Calvin's thought, however, have observed that his earliest teaching on the church, in which the doctrine of election is most heavily weighted, emphasizes the church's invisibility, but that as his thought matures he places greater weight on the true church's visibility.³⁸⁴ Many challenge the understanding that Calvin believed the true church to be wholly invisible by pointing to Calvin's fervent insistence on the oneness of the church, so whatever understanding of invisibility/visibility he has, he is not

³⁸² John E. Burkhart, *Kingdom, church, and baptism: the significance of the doctrine of the church in the theology of John Calvin* (Los Angeles: Burkhart, 1959). Burkhart argues that the church as elect remnant is the dominant image of the church in Calvin's 1536 *Institutes*. He further argues that though he adds other key images to his ecclesiology as his thought develops (in his language- covenant community, society of Christ), he never releases this first and most basic understanding as is evidenced by his affirmation in the last edition of the *Institutes* that the foundation of the church is God's "secret election" (IV.i.2). As Burkhart states it "The motif of election survives and significantly" (106). Cf. David N. Wiley, "The Church as the Elect in the Theology of Calvin," in *John Calvin and the Church* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Pr, 1990), 96–117.

³⁸³ Consider, for example, Wiley's claim that "...the true church is ultimately invisible, eternal, and invincible because of the sure foundation of divine election" (Wiley, "The Church as the Elect in the Theology of Calvin," 96.) Geddes MacGregor has argued that the greatest flaw in Calvin's ecclesiology is his decision to bring predestination into the definition of the church. By so doing he chose to locate the root of a temporal reality in eternity, with the result that "In the last resort it will be seen, as it may now be seen *sub specie aeternitatis*, that beyond the Church, as beyond the whole process of redemption, there is a principle hidden even from the angels and known only to God" (Geddes MacGregor, *Corpus Christi; the nature of the church according to the Reformed tradition*. (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1958), 49).

³⁸⁴ Consider e.g. Burkhart, *Kingdom, church, and baptism*; Marta García Alonso, "Calvin and the Ecclesiastical Power of Jurisdiction," *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 10, no. 2 (Ag 2008): 137–155. As evidence for this early tendency, many point to Calvin's statement in his epistle dedicatory to King Francis, a very early piece of writing that nonetheless remained attached to every edition of the *Institutes*, that the church is able to exist on earth with no visible form whatsoever (*Inst*, Prefatory Address to King Francis, section 6, page 24).

speaking of two churches, but of only one church, in two dimensions.³⁸⁵ And Neuser, in fact, suggests we should not be so quick to assume that Calvin even has a doctrine of the invisible and visible church.³⁸⁶ He notes that Calvin only speaks of the church as invisible *once* in the entire *Institutes*.³⁸⁷ Further, he draws out the way in which Calvin insists there must be visible manifestations of election, even in his earliest writings; arguing that the wedding of ecclesiology to election does not therefore necessitate an identification of the church as essentially invisible. Neuser commends, rather, a distinction between the ‘hidden’ church and the ‘outer’ church as more faithful to Calvin’s own language and understanding. And he argues further that according to Calvin, “the true church is to be sought in the ‘outer’ rather than the ‘invisible’ church.”³⁸⁸

Neuser even questions the degree to which invisibility/visibility maps onto the definitions of the church offered in 4.I.7, suggesting that a better title for the section would be “*The True*

³⁸⁵ As Niesel states it: “If Calvin makes use of the Augustinian distinction between the visible and invisible church, it is not in order to withdraw the visible church partly or wholly from the rule of Christ and to hand it over to other powers. He does not intend his description ‘visible church’ to be taken as a cloak behind which human weakness and sin, and the deliberate disavowal of the Lordship of Christ, may undisturbedly work themselves out. We do not see the church in its totality for to it belong men who have gone before us and such as will come after us. Again, not all whom we now see to be members of the church belong to it in reality. Much chaff is mixed with the wheat” (Wilhelm Niesel, *The theology of Calvin* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 191.)

³⁸⁶ Wilhelm Neuser, “Calvin’s Teaching on the *Notae Fidelium*: An Unnoticed Part of the *Institutio* 4.1.8,” in *Probing the Reformed Tradition: Historical Studies in Honor of Edward A. Dowey, Jr.*, ed. Elsie Ann McKee, trans. Mark S. Burrows (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 79–95.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 83. That one reference to the *ecclesia invisibilis* is in the concluding passage from 4.I.7 cited above.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*; Though Neuser questions the degree to which the Invisible/Visible distinction is significant in Calvin’s thought at all, Wiley seems to take for granted that Calvin worked with such a distinction in his ecclesiology. He suggests, however, that the Invisible/Visible rubric was not the most effective tool for Calvin’s ecclesiology, that a rubric of General vs. Special Election would have been more helpful, but that the invisible/visible distinction “later made it possible, under the rubric of the mixed church, to justify the woefully slow progress made by some of the evangelical churches. Despite their lack of discipline and holiness, they too were to be counted as true churches of God” (Wiley, “The Church as the Elect in the Theology of Calvin,” 112.)

and Visible Church.”³⁸⁹ He points out that in the first, election centered definition of the church in 4.I.7,³⁹⁰ Calvin includes an affirmation that the true members of Christ are participant in sanctification by the Holy Spirit. Though God’s adoption is hidden or invisible, sanctification, he insists “is visible to human eyes.”³⁹¹ Neuser further highlights that, even in this election centered definition of the church, Calvin speaks of ‘the saints who **live on earth,**’ (emphasis mine) those who are therefore visible in time and space. In light of the fact that the whole thrust of this section of the *Institutes* is the proper identification of the visible church, it makes sense that there are visibility dimensions in both of the ecclesiological definitions offered there in. Neuser’s attention to the visibility dimensions of the first definition is most helpful. Though Calvin follows this definitional work with a reflection on the mixed character of the visible church (noting that hypocrites and immoral people are scattered amongst the gathered elect), this does not mean that the true church is in no sense visible, or that the visible church is not true.

When Calvin turns his attention, in the second definition in subsection 7 (beginning with “Often...” ending with “... is preserved”), to the more common identification of the church as “the whole multitude of men spread over the earth” worshipping “one God and Christ,” participating in the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, subject to the “Word of the Lord” delivered in preaching, we see his affirmation of the teaching of the Augsburg confession that there are but two marks of the true church on earth: the right preaching of the Word and proper administration of the sacraments.³⁹² These marks alone are sufficient grounds to embrace any society possessing them as church and to forbid rejection of any society in possession of

³⁸⁹ Neuser, “Calvin’s Teaching on the *Notae Fidelium*: An Unnoticed Part of the *Institutio* 4.1.8,” 83.

³⁹⁰ See from “Sometimes by the term ‘church’ ... all the elect from the beginning of the world” in previous quote on page 169.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

³⁹² He recurrently embraces this affirmation. See, for example, *Inst.*, 4.I.7, 9-10, 12

these marks, even if that society “swarms with many faults.”³⁹³ Neuser helpfully reminds us that Calvin not only speaks of the marks of the church (*notae ecclesiae*), but also of the marks of Christian faith (*notae fidelium*), or the marks of Christians. Though ultimately God’s election is fully recognizable by God alone, Calvin suggests that God accommodates to us to allow *some* knowledge of those who belong to God.³⁹⁴ “God’s hidden decision regarding predestination determines those who are elected to eternal life and those who are rejected; indeed, God’s providence establishes that the election will become visible through a particular behavior manifested by the elect in the congregation.”³⁹⁵ Calvin’s statement on the *notae fidelium* is as follows: “And since assurance of faith was not necessary, he substituted for it a certain charitable judgment whereby we recognize as members of the church those who, by confession of faith, by example of life, and by partaking of the sacraments, profess the same God and Christ with us.”³⁹⁶ Faith itself is not visible, but a profession of faith is, participation in the sacraments is, and an exemplary life surely is too.³⁹⁷

³⁹³ Ibid, 4.I.12, 1025. Calvin actually modifies Augsburg slightly adding that the Word needs to be not only rightly preached, but also heard. The two works are still “Word and Sacrament” but Calvin offers a fuller account of the Word. Ralston brings this subtle modification to light in his essay “Preaching Makes the Church: Recovering a Missing Ecclesial Mark,” in *John Calvin’s Ecclesiology*, ed. Gerald Mannion and Eduardus van der Borgh (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 124–142.

³⁹⁴ Neuser, “Calvin’s Teaching on the Notae Fidelium: An Unnoticed Part of the Institutio 4.1.8,” 86.

³⁹⁵ Ibid, 87.

³⁹⁶ *Inst*, 4.I.8, 1022-1023; Elsewhere Calvin also teaches that the hearing and taking to heart of the proclamation of the word, progress in justification, and salvation of life are ‘signs of election’ (4.2.4).

³⁹⁷ Calvin is not explicit about the characteristics of an exemplary life, but he is explicit about characteristics of an immoral life. Neuser points out that Calvin is rather specific about those immoral ones, naming four types of immoral persons “the ambitious (*ambiosi*), greedy (*avari*), envious (*invidi*), and revilers or ‘evil speakers’ (*maledici*)” (Neuser, “Calvin’s Teaching on the Notae Fidelium: An Unnoticed Part of the Institutio 4.1.8,” 81.) Though *maledici* is sometimes translated “blasphemers,” Neuser suggests that Calvin rather intends those who “speak against the brethren” and he points to 3.25.3 to support this claim (ibid). Calvin’s commentary on 1 Cor

Contrary to Neuser, I detect at least a minimal doctrine of the invisible and visible church in Calvin, however I concur with Neuser that Calvin consistently attested to the (at least partial) visibility of the true church, even while allowing that God alone sees and recognizes God's full elect community.³⁹⁸ We therefore need not appeal to the category of invisibility in order to locate the creedal marks of the church. It is then appropriate, within the Reformed Tradition, to seek and speak of visible ecclesial holiness.

Calvin's Characterization of the Holiness of the Church

But in what sense is it appropriate to call the visible church, which Calvin acknowledges to be a mixed body, holy? In this section, we will first consider Calvin's criticism of the visible church. We will then consider Calvin's negative and positive understandings of ecclesial holiness.

Calvin, in fact, was highly critical of the visible church. As he assessed the state of the church in his day in his epistle dedicatory to King Francis, he suggested that the true church of Christ "has either been wasted with cruel slaughter or banished into exile, or so overwhelmed by threats and fears that it dare not even open its mouth."³⁹⁹ In the institutions, structures, and leadership of the established church he sees profound corruption that has defiled God's good

5.11 uses two of these same categories of people (*avari* and *maledici*) and Calvin appeals to this passage in his discussion of church discipline. Visible offenses are those which are occasions for church discipline (Ibid, 83; See 4.1.15). Neuser suggests that this listing of immoral behavior is juxtaposed against the marks of true Christians, offering together a complete picture, both negative and positive, of the visible church.

³⁹⁸ Schleiermacher's work with the doctrine of the invisible and visible church is remarkably resonant with this reading of Calvin. He too insisted on signs of election, if you will, on the visible character of sanctification.

³⁹⁹ *Inst*, Prefatory Address, s.2, p.11

gifts and misled the people.⁴⁰⁰ Contrary to the Roman Catholic insistence that “the form of the church is always apparent and observable” in the form of the Catholic Church and its hierarchy, he insists “that the church can exist without any visible appearance.”⁴⁰¹ Elsewhere in a statement initially drafted for the 1st edition of the *Institutes* (and carried through to the final) he argues, “in the place of the church now are displayed to us certain outward appearances which are often far removed from the church and without which the church can stand at her best.”⁴⁰² Later in his career, in his *Treatise on Scandals*, he applies this critique of the visible church not only to the Roman Catholic Church, but indeed to every church in every time and place.⁴⁰³ In this treatise he is seeking to respond to those matters that serve as stumbling blocks for people of faith, threats to growth in faithfulness. One of the greatest of these, he suggests is “The Poor State of the Church.” After discussing things in the individual that serve as hindrances to reception of the Gospel, he writes:

But why am I discussing the private afflictions of the individual, when the situation of the Church Universal contains in itself far greater grounds for offense? In the first place, it never shines with that splendor, which would enable the minds of men to recognize the Kingdom of God. Secondly, if ever it succeeds in rising to some modest position, soon afterwards it is either crushed by the violence of tyrants or collapses of its own accord, so that that situation lasts only for a short time.⁴⁰⁴

Such critiques help undergird claims that Calvin tends to relegate true ecclesiality to invisibility.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid, s.2, p.14

⁴⁰¹ Ibid, s.6, p. 24. Though some highlight this very statement as evidence that Calvin believes the true church to be invisible (see above, note 385), the polemical context of the statement is key to properly understanding the statement. It is, perhaps, hyperbolic— for the sake of establishing a clear contrast with his opponents. As has already been argued in the previous section, Calvin appears to have believed the true church to reside within the visible church, even if, at times hidden therein.

⁴⁰² *Inst*, VI.20, 191.

⁴⁰³ Jean Calvin, *Concerning Scandals*, tr. John W. Fraser, (Edinburgh: St. Andrew’s Press, 1978.) All references are to this translation of this treatise, hereafter *Scandals*.

⁴⁰⁴ *Scandals*, 28.

But Calvin is clear in his treatise on scandals that this miserable condition of the church is, in fact, the ideal condition of the church because only such a church can be a site for the revelation of God's power rather than simply a site for the exaltation of human power.⁴⁰⁵ That the church survives generation after generation in spite of its rampant troubles is a testimony to God's preserving power. The true church is that community whom God is saving. Grasping this insight is crucial to a proper understanding of Calvin's teachings on the holiness of the church, teachings which have both a negative and positive dimension. We must first consider what the church's holiness is not, before we can approach an understanding of what it is.

A. Not Moral Perfection

The holiness of the church is not equivalent to its moral perfection. Calvin makes this argument emphatically in response to Anabaptist Protestants who placed high value on the ecclesial mark of holiness. The Protestant movement in the 16th century was rapidly fragmenting and Calvin noted that some were using a lack of sufficient righteousness of life in the church as an excuse to leave it. "Indeed, because they think no church exists where there are not perfect purity and integrity of life, they depart out of hatred of wickedness from the lawful church, while they fancy themselves turning aside from the faction of the wicked."⁴⁰⁶ Those who depart the church on the grounds that it is not pure enough appeal, for theological justification, to the declaration in Ephesians that the church of Christ is holy. Calvin argues that these are forsaking

⁴⁰⁵ e.g. *Scandals*, 29-30. Calvin speaks in this treatise of the Church as a mirror image of the crucified Christ. Barth's ecclesiological insights in his Commentary on Romans certainly resonate powerfully with this aspect of Calvin's ecclesiology. Milner points to Calvin's commentary on Genesis 15:10 where he argues that God displays God's providential power in raising the church from death to make something out of nothing in and through it as exemplary of Calvin's understanding of creation as a continual act, inclusive of providence, the creation of the church involving continual resurrection from death (Benjamin Charles Milner, *Calvin's doctrine of the church*, Studies in the history of Christian thought, v. 5 (Leiden, Brill, 1970), 46-47.)

⁴⁰⁶ *Inst.* 4.I.13, 1027

the kindness to which we are called as a church and, more significantly, are overlooking the ample scriptural support for an understanding of the church as a necessarily mixed body until the consummation of time.⁴⁰⁷ Calvin scoffs, “if the Lord declares that the church is to labor under this evil—to be weighed down with the mixture of the wicked— until the Day of Judgment, they are vainly seeking a church besmirched with no blemish.”⁴⁰⁸

Calvin also finds creedal support to supplement his scriptural support for the necessarily mixed and imperfect character of the visible church. He suggests that the Apostles Creed itself affirms the necessarily imperfect character of the church of Christ when it places an affirmation of belief in the forgiveness of sins immediately after the affirmation that we believe the church and the communion of saints (the latter of which he takes to be an ideal definition of the former.) Believing the church and believing in the forgiveness of sins belong together. And the fact that forgiveness of sins is repeatedly practiced/proclaimed in the church exposes the absurdity of claims to the moral perfection of the church.⁴⁰⁹

Despite the scriptural and creedal testimony to the necessarily mixed character of the church, and practical evidence of this fact, he does not sit comfortably with the presence of evil, or of the unregenerate, in the fellowship of the church. As we will see, this is why he placed such a great emphasis on the practice of church discipline.⁴¹⁰ But Calvin was aware that we cannot

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid, eg. Parables of the church in Mt. 13- mixed haul of fish in a net bin sorted only when brought to shore, field sown with good seed and bad, the wheat and the chaff. Calvin sometimes calls the Anabaptists “Donatists” (e.g. Ibid, 4.XII.12, 1239-1240) and this critique of his Anabaptist opponents is strongly resonant with Augustine’s critique of his Donatist opponents. Augustine’s chief argument against the ecclesiality of the Donatist fellowship was that their failures in charity demonstrate that they do not possess the Holy Spirit and thus cannot be part of the true church (see chapter 5, pp. 245-246).

⁴⁰⁸ *Inst*, 4.I.13, 1027-1028.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid, 4.I.20, 1033-1034, see n.30 especially.

⁴¹⁰ e.g. Ibid, 4.I.15, 1029; see pp. 191-195 for the discussion of his teachings on church discipline.

trust our judgment as to the status of anyone else in relation to God. He grants that appearances may well be deceiving on the question of participation in holiness. On the one hand, he notes that even a well intentioned concern for righteousness is often born of “pride and arrogance and false opinion of holiness than of true holiness and true zeal for it.”⁴¹¹ On the other hand, many who appear wicked are goaded by their wickedness to a pursuit of righteousness and are among God’s holy ones. Only the elect of God participate in holiness and God alone, as we’ve already noted, can see the full community of the elect. Because Calvin believed strongly in the saving necessity of participation in the visible church (which we will examine more closely in the next section), he thought it extremely unwise for any believer to withdraw from this fellowship due to a lack of moral perfection within it. He taught that believers abandon this fellowship at great risk to their souls. Thus he advises humility, patience, and forbearance.⁴¹²

Thus, for Calvin, the holiness of the church is not moral perfection,⁴¹³ therefore, we should not look for apparent and universal righteousness or purity as its indication.

⁴¹¹Ibid, 4.I.16, 1030, 1543

⁴¹² “Let them ponder that in a great multitude there are many men, truly holy and innocent in the Lord’s sight, who escape their notice. Let them ponder that even among those who seem diseased there are many who in no wise are pleased with, or flatter themselves in, their faults, but aroused again and again by a profound fear of the Lord, aspire to a more upright life. Let them ponder that a man is not to be judged for one deed, inasmuch as the holiest sometimes undergo a most grievous fall. Let them ponder how much more important both the ministry of the Word and participation in the sacred mysteries are for the gathering of the church than the possibility that this whole power may be dissipated through the guilt of certain ungodly men. Finally, let them realize that in estimating the true church divine judgment is of more weight than human” (Ibid, 4.I.16, 1031, 1539).

⁴¹³ Though I suggested at the outset of this section that Calvin crafts his arguments about ecclesial holiness primarily with Anabaptist opponents in view, Burkhart helpfully notes that he advances arguments about persistent ecclesial imperfection against both Roman Catholics and Anabaptists. Against Roman Catholics he argues for the persistent imperfection of the Church as institution. Against Anabaptists he argues for the persistent imperfection of individuals (Burkhart, *Kingdom, church, and baptism*, 97.)

B. The Church on the way to holiness

But the church is indeed holy and Calvin acknowledges “that it is fitting to examine in what holiness it excels lest, if we are not willing to admit a church unless it be perfect in every respect, we leave no church at all.”⁴¹⁴ He notes that the declaration of the church’s holiness in Ephesians emphasizes that Christ “gave himself up for the church that he might sanctify her; he cleansed her by the washing of water in the word of life, that he might present her to himself as his glorious bride, without spot or wrinkle,” etc.”⁴¹⁵ Calvin argues that though it is true that Ephesians presents these as completed actions of Christ, “Yet it is also no less true that the Lord is *daily* at work in smoothing out wrinkles and cleansing spots. They are thus completed, and yet continuous actions, parallel to the eschatological tension of the “already/not yet” character of salvation in Christ. From this it follows that the church’s holiness is not yet complete. The church is holy, then, in the sense that it is daily advancing and is not yet perfect: it makes progress from day to day but has not yet reached its goal of holiness...”⁴¹⁶ So our holiness, or our participation in holiness, rests in our daily striving and progress towards the goal of faith. Striving and progress are the best we can hope to see, from our human vantage point, when looking for the holiness of the church.

Though striving and progress are the best *we* can hope to see, the holiness that God sees in Christ’s church is supplied by God’s kindness.⁴¹⁷ Where holiness is desired and sought, God provides it, and Calvin grounds his confidence in this on God’s covenantal relations with

⁴¹⁴ Ibid, 4.I.17, 1031

⁴¹⁵ Ibid

⁴¹⁶ Ibid

⁴¹⁷ “The prophets prophesy that there will be a holy Jerusalem through which ‘strangers shall never pass’ [Joel 3:17], and a most holy temple wherein the unclean shall not enter [Isa. 35:8; cf. ch. 52:1]. Let us not understand this prophecy as if all the members of the church were without blemish; but because they zealously aspire to holiness and perfect purity, the cleanness that they have not yet fully attained is granted them by God’s kindness” (Ibid, 4.I.17, 1032).

humankind. Calvin's understanding of the progressive and divinely gifted character of ecclesial holiness is summed up well in the Genevan Catechism he authored:

M: In what sense do you call the Church holy?

S: All whom God has chosen he justifies, and forms to holiness and innocence of life, (Rom. viii.30) that his glory may be displayed in them. And this is what Paul means when he says that Christ sanctified the Church which he redeemed, that it might be a glorious Church, free from all blemish. (Eph. v.25).

M: But is this holiness which you attribute to the Church already perfect?

S: Not yet, that is as long as she has her warfare in this world. For she always labours under infirmities, and will never be entirely purged of the remains of vice, until she adheres completely to Christ her head, by whom she is sanctified.⁴¹⁸

Indeed, the holiness that God sees in the church is the holiness of Christ. Perfect holiness demands perfect adherence to Christ her head. Burkhart argues that in Calvin's doctrine of ecclesial holiness (as in his teachings on the church's unity); the church's holiness is derivative of Christ. The church is holy insofar as it fulfills the function assigned to it by Christ, and insofar as its members are daily being transformed into more complete adherence to Christ, a process fulfilled only eschatologically.⁴¹⁹ Niesel also suggests that Calvin's rejection of the demand for a spotless church is christologically rooted "For in church life it is not a question of striving to attain an ideal community but of accepting the life in fellowship which Christ bestows upon us. What is at issue is the living reality of Christ; not the formation of a circle of pious men."⁴²⁰

So what we see when looking for the holiness of the church, is a church on the way, progressing towards a destination that yet lies ahead. What God sees is the perfect holiness of Christ, to whom the elect are joined and progressing towards fuller adherence and union. Calvin

⁴¹⁸ Genevan Catechism, Questions 96 and 97. (Jean Calvin, *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, ed. John Baillie, John T. McNeill, Henry P. Van Dussen, tr. The Rev. J.K.S. Reid, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), 103.) Milner offers an eloquent statement of the progressive character of the church's identity and holiness: "The church is not so much an institution in history in which the restoration of order has been accomplished, as it is itself the history of that restoration" (Milner, *Calvin's doctrine of the church*, 47.)

⁴¹⁹ Burkhart, *Kingdom, church, and baptism*, 155.

⁴²⁰ Niesel, *The theology of Calvin*, 195.

did indeed believe that the elect, through their regular participation in ecclesial life, do make progress in holiness and what needs to be noted is that progress towards holiness is also progress towards greater visibility as church, the elect community, in the world. The church exists that there might be an ongoing witness to God's saving work in Jesus Christ and thus its visibility as church is essential, and its progress in holiness is crucial to its emerging visibility and witness.⁴²¹

The Relationship of the Church and Christ

In Calvin's understanding, human beings are able to improve and make progress towards holiness only when they are participants in Christ by the power of His Spirit.⁴²² I have also suggested that Calvin believed regular participation in ecclesial life to be crucial to the process of sanctification.⁴²³ Salvation is wholly dependent on the activity of the triune God, so to understand Calvin's teachings on the necessity of participation in the visible church we'll need to grasp his understanding of the relationship between the visible church and the triune God, most frequently depicted as the relationship between the church and Christ. We will first consider the christocentrism of Calvin's mature ecclesiology. We will then reflect on the way the ascension shapes Calvin's understanding of the Christ/church relation— focusing particularly on the

⁴²¹ For a similar and eloquent observation see Gottfried Wilhelm Locher, *Sign of the Advent: a study in Protestant ecclesiology*, Ökumenische Beihefte zur Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie, 45 (Fribourg : Academic Press : Paulusverlag, 2004), 85–86.)

⁴²² “For they have been called not only into the same inheritance of eternal life but also to participate in one God and Christ [Eph. 5:30]” (*Inst*, 4.I.2).

⁴²³ “The basis on which we believe the church is that we are fully convinced we are members of it. In this way our salvation rests upon sure and firm supports, so that, even if the whole fabric of the world were overthrown, the church could neither totter nor fall. First, it stands by God's election, and cannot waver or fail any more than his eternal providence can. Secondly, it has in a way been joined to the steadfastness of Christ, who will no more allow his believers to be estranged from him than that his members be rent and torn asunder. Besides, we are certain that, while we remain within the bosom of the church, the truth will always abide with us” (*Ibid*, 4.I.3, 1015).

sacraments and ministry. We will then briefly reflect on Calvin's pneumatological interpretation of Christ's presence. Finally, we will reflect on mystical union with Christ as the goal of salvation. I will thus argue that Calvin understood there to be an inherent and necessary relation between Christ and church, that is characterized by physical absence and spiritual presence, and that the church is ever pressing towards the goal of mystical union with Christ.

Calvin's mature ecclesiology evidences both a significant investment in the structures and practices of the visible church and a strong christocentrism. Burkhart traces the development of Calvin's ecclesiology from 1536-1543 by means of three motifs—the church as elect remnant (1536), the church as covenant community (1539), and the church as society of Christ (1543).⁴²⁴ In his analysis, the second motif, the church as covenant community, opened up greater attention to the structures and practices of the visible church, while the third represented a theological means of organizing his overall ecclesiological teachings. None of the motifs disappear, but Burkhart argues that from 1543 on the christological motif predominates.⁴²⁵ His mature ecclesiology is fairly characterized as christocentric given that, as Burkhart states, "the whole focus of Christ's life and mission is directed towards the Church and its benefit."⁴²⁶ Calvin expresses this with force in the Genevan Catechism when he teaches that it is necessary to mention the church in the creed "if we would not render Christ's death ineffective and reduce to

⁴²⁴ Consider the title Calvin gives to Book Four of the final edition of the *Institutes*, the book holding most of his formal ecclesiological teachings, "The External Means or Aims by Which God Invites Us into the Society of Christ and Holds Us Therein." This is an obvious source for the language Burkhart uses to characterize the predominant motif in Calvin's mature ecclesiology.

⁴²⁵ Burkhart suggests this christological motif developed out of his reflection on the biblical image of the Church as the body of Christ and his extensive engagement with the teachings of Church fathers in the years between 1539 and 1543 (*Kingdom, church, and baptism*, 131).

⁴²⁶ *Ibid*, 94.

nothing all that has hitherto been said. For the one effect of all this is that there be a church."⁴²⁷

Calvin argues that because the church is the intended product of Christ's life and work there is a necessary and inherent relationship between church and Christ.

Calvin's understanding of this inherent relationship is significantly informed by the doctrine of the ascension- it is a relationship in which Christ is bodily absent, and yet spiritually present. We can see this emphasis on Christ's ascension in multiple places in Calvin's ecclesiological teachings; I will offer just two examples. First, it is clearly on display in his eucharistic teachings. In refutation of Roman Catholic teachings on the spatial/bodily presence of Christ in the eucharistic elements, he insists that the Body of Christ is "contained in heaven even to the Last Day."⁴²⁸ In the midst of this teaching, he further recalls Christ's teaching to his disciples that he would not always be in the world with them. Calvin suggests that, in the Eucharist, Christ is not brought down to us, but instead we are lifted up to Christ.⁴²⁹ Second, we can also see the ascension emphasis in his understandings of the church's ministry: "He alone should rule and reign in the church as well as have authority or pre-eminence in it, and this authority should be exercised and administered by his Word alone. Nevertheless, because he does not dwell among us in visible presence [Matthew 26:11], we have said that he uses the ministry of men to declare openly his will to us by mouth, as a sort of delegated work, not by transferring to them his right and honor, but only that through their mouths he may do his own work—just as a workman uses a tool to do his work."⁴³⁰ Thus, though Christ is actually the head of the church, and it is Christ's work that continues in the church, Christ works through other

⁴²⁷ Question 94 (Calvin, *Theological Treatises*, 102.)

⁴²⁸ *Inst*, 4.XVII.26, 1393

⁴²⁹ *Ibid*, 4.XVII.31, 1403

⁴³⁰ *Ibid*, 4.III.1, 1053; We will interrogate the implications of this characterization of the Church's preaching ministers later in the chapter.

bodies, the bodies of ministers, as he no longer has a physical presence on earth. Calvin clearly emphasizes Christ's bodily absence as a reality confronting the church, and yet preserves an understanding of Christ's real spiritual presence on earth, which is suggested both in his understandings of Eucharist and ministry.

As the language of "spiritual presence" suggests, Calvin has a pneumatological interpretation of Christ's presence. This is particularly well expressed in Calvin's biblical commentaries. For example, reflecting on the statement in Ephesians that Christ ascended "that he might fill all things," he writes:

When we hear of the ascension of Christ, it instantly strikes our minds that he is removed to a great distance from us; and so he actually is, with respect to his body and human presence. But Paul reminds us, that, while he is removed from us in bodily presence, he *fills all things* by the power of his Spirit. Wherever the right hand of God, which embraces heaven and earth, is displayed, Christ is spiritually present by his boundless power...⁴³¹

This pneumatological dimension of the mediation of Christ's presence is also made quite explicit in the *Institutes* when he states that the Holy Spirit is the bond by which believers are united to Christ.⁴³² So Christ is absent and yet present by the Holy Spirit in the church.

Indeed, unity with Christ is the goal of the church's existence. The church does not exist just so that Christ's ministry can continue in perpetuity, but rather so that human beings might be drawn into mystical union with Christ. This is expressed well in this statement from book 3 of the *Institutes*: "First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us. Therefore, to share with us what he has received from the Father,

⁴³¹ Jean Calvin, *The epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians*, tr. T.H.L. Parker, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, (Edinburgh, London: Olive and Boyd, 1965), *Eph. Comm.* 4.10.

⁴³² *Inst* 3.I.1

he had to become ours and to dwell within us.”⁴³³ Book 4 is an extended argument about how this union with Christ is achieved in earthly experience, and the bulk of the argument focuses on the church.⁴³⁴ The elect, through their participation in Christ via their participation in the church’s ministry and sacraments, are progressing towards greater unity with Christ— this is the telos of salvation. However, because, as we’ve noted, the visible church is ever a pilgrim on the way to holiness, the church remains perpetually dependent on and distinguished from Christ above and beyond. And yet, Christ has chosen to make himself present by his Spirit through the church, its ministry and sacraments.

With the inherent relation that Calvin identified between church and Christ, a relationship characterized by physical absence and spiritual presence, and distinction progressing towards union, now in view, we prompted to examine more closely the way in which Calvin understands Christ’s spiritual presence, and therefore his saving work, to be mediated through the visible church.

The Visible Church as the Site of Salvation and Unfolding Sanctification

Indeed, because of this inherent relationship with Christ, Calvin believes that the visible church, at war in this world, labouring under infirmities, plagued with vice (to borrow the language of the Genevan Confession) this *is* the site where God’s power is revealed and God’s saving work unfolds. We will first consider the way in which Calvin’s progressive understanding of salvation sets up an argument about the necessity of participation in the visible church. We will then consider the image of the church as mother, which serves to illustrate the saving

⁴³³ Ibid, 3.I.1, 537

⁴³⁴ When we consider statements like these we begin to understand why Leith characterizes “the mystical union with Christ” as the most important fact of Calvin’s ecclesiology. *John Calvin’s doctrine of the Christian life* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 177.

necessity of the visible church. Next we consider the way in which an acknowledgement of the persistence of sin within the ecclesial communion rather than being a challenge to the legitimacy of the visible church is a testimony to its necessity, for this fellowship lives by the forgiveness of sin. Finally, we will note that Calvin understands the forgiveness of sins, which allows progress towards holiness, to be mediated primarily by Word and sacrament, particularly when these are supported by adequate structures of discipline (inclusive of practices of mutual accountability, excommunication, and reconciliation).

We have already noted that the visible church's holiness, in Calvin's understanding, is incomplete; it is in progress, on the way. This is because the salvation of humankind is similarly a work in progress. Calvin believed that though human beings could have been perfected in an instant by an all powerful God, God chose rather to perfect human beings, to make human beings holy, via a slow process of maturation, a process that unfolds only "under the education of the church."⁴³⁵ Though it is God who saves, and God might have, and might yet, save in another way, Calvin stresses that the church exists to offer the ordinary means of grace by which humans are enabled to progress towards union with Christ.

Calvin depicts the necessity of the church for salvation through the image of the church as mother.⁴³⁶

⁴³⁵ *Inst*, 4.I.5, 1017; Bouwsma notes that Calvin viewed the Church as the "crucial arena for the reformation" of society and government, because "only the church, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, could reform the human heart" (William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: a sixteenth-century portrait* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1988], 214).

⁴³⁶ Calvin clearly owes a debt to Cyprian who famously declared that there is no salvation outside the Church, which he too depicted through maternal imagery (e.g. Cyprian, "De Ecclesiae Catholicae Unitate" in *De Lapsis and De Ecclesiae Catholicae Unitate*, Tr. and ed. Maurice Bévenot, S.J., 43-68. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.); *The Letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage: Volume 4, Letters 67-82*, tr. by G. W. Clarke. Ancient Christian Writers 47, (New York: Newman Press, 1989), *Ep.* 74, vii.2). Calvin cites Cyprian frequently in his ecclesiological

I shall start, then, with the church, into whose bosom God is pleased to gather his sons, not only that they may be nourished by her help and ministry as long as they are infants and children, but also that they may be guided by her motherly care until they mature and at last reach the goal of faith... for those to whom he is Father the church may also be Mother.⁴³⁷

Because he understood the slow process of sanctification by which human beings are saved to be wholly dependent on continued connection to Christ by the Spirit, lifelong connection to the church is necessary.⁴³⁸ With this image, he is not speaking of participation in an invisible, ethereal fellowship, but rather in the visible church.

But because it is now our intention to discuss the visible church, let us learn even from the simple title ‘mother’ how useful, indeed how necessary, it is that we should know her. For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels.⁴³⁹

“So powerful is participation in the church,” Calvin also writes, “that it keeps us in the society of God.”⁴⁴⁰

teachings and as we shall consider below there are Cyprianic resonances in his ecclesiological teachings even when he is not citing Cyprian directly.

⁴³⁷ *Inst*, 4.I.1, 1012.

⁴³⁸ Butin eloquently articulates this implication of the image of the Church as mother, which, he says, “aptly communicates Calvin’s growing awareness that the crucial role of the church in the divine-human relationship is as the matrix in which the grace of God is seen in and communicated to human beings. As such, the visible church is the corporeal human context in which the divine-human relationships occurs; the arena in and through which the drama of God’s gracious self-giving is enacted” (Philip Walker Butin, *Reformed Ecclesiology: Trinitarian Grace According to Calvin*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1994), 13–14).

⁴³⁹ *Inst*, 4.I.4, 1016; cf. 4.I.3, 1015- “Only so long as we “remain in the bosom of the church, the truth will always abide with us.” It is only in the Church that the Word is proclaimed and the sacraments are administered ordinarily, and these are the primary means of grace, as we will consider momentarily.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 4.I.3, 1015; Calvin also emphasizes in 4.I.3 that those who participate in Christ gather together in order “that whatever benefits God confers upon them, they should in turn share with one another” (1014). Locher translates that same purpose clause thusly “that all the blessings which God bestows upon them are mutually communicated to each other” (*Sign of the Advent*, 72). The language of “mutual communication” resonates with the key image of the holiness of the church that I draw out of Schleiermacher’s communicative ecclesiology in the preceding

Though it might seem that the persistence of sin threatens to undermine the holiness or validity of the visible church, Calvin is quite clear that it is this very persistence that makes the visible church necessary for salvation. The church lives by the forgiveness of sins. One receives forgiveness upon entering the church and one continues to receive forgiveness on a daily basis as participation in the church is maintained.

Not only does the Lord through forgiveness of sins receive and adopt us once for all into the church, but through the same means he preserves and protects us there... carrying, as we do, the traces of sin around with us throughout life, unless we are sustained by the Lord's constant grace in forgiving our sins, we shall scarcely abide one moment in the church... we must firmly believe that by God's generosity, mediated by Christ's merit, through the sanctification of the Spirit, sins have been and are daily pardoned to us who have been received and engrafted into the body of the church.⁴⁴¹

Lifelong connection to and participation in the visible church is necessary, for it is only in the church that the Word of God is proclaimed in the Gospel, kindling faith that is sustained by ongoing encounters with the proclaimed Gospel and participation in the sacraments. Believers receive the forgiveness of sins, the daily pardon that allows their progress towards holiness, salvation, union with Christ, through faithful hearing of the Word proclaimed and faithful reception of the sacraments administered—through regular and steady participation in the worship life of a congregation.

Calvin speaks of word and sacrament with the language of accommodation. Calvin believed that due to finitude and sin, human beings can not handle an unmediated encounter with God.⁴⁴² The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are God's primary accommodation to

chapter. Calvin grants in this section that there are a diversity of graces and different roles accordingly, but everyone in the true church has a share in the Spirit and gathers in worship that the Spirit might be mutually communicated in the fellowship. The principle of mutuality, then, finds solid roots in this crucial Reformed forebear

⁴⁴¹ *Inst*, 4.I.21, 1035

⁴⁴² "We need outward helps to beget and increase faith within us, and advance it to its goal, God

humanity. Human beings still need to connect with Christ in order to connect with God, but in the bodily absence of Christ, it is chiefly through the proclamation of the word and the administration of the sacraments that believers are enabled to participate in Christ. By Word and sacrament, “God, therefore, in his wonderful providence accommodating himself to our capacity, has prescribed a way for us, though still far off, to draw near to him.”⁴⁴³ So God chooses to accommodate Godself to us through means suited to our humanity- first through the incarnation, then through the ministry of the church.

Thus, as Word and sacrament are the sites where God’s accommodation to humanity in Christ is continued, they are primary sites of the mediation of God’s saving, forgiving work on earth. This understanding of Word and sacrament clearly undergirds the insistence on the right proclamation of the Word and proper administration of the sacraments as the two marks of the visible church. We will later attend more closely to Calvin’s understanding of Word and sacrament, in particular to his prioritization of Word over sacrament and the clerical implications of this. At present, however, we are simply seeking to understand how it is that the visible church is the primary site of divine salvation. It is so because it is in the church that the Word is regularly proclaimed and the sacraments administered, both of which facilitate the receipt of and growth in faith and love and enable believers to progress in holiness. These are God’s chosen means of encountering God’s people and the way in which God’s people can choose to

has also added these aids that he may provide for our weakness” (Ibid, 4.I.1, 1011) These aids are deposited in the Church, chiefly in the pastors and teachers “through whose lips he might teach his own” and through the sacraments which both foster and strengthen faith (Ibid). Because weakness persists, believers cannot graduate from the schooling of the church until death (Ibid, 4.I.4, 1016). Indeed, the best help for believers, Calvin asserted, is “public worship.” which God uses to facilitate the steady growth of God’s children (Ibid, 4.I.5, 1019).

⁴⁴³ Ibid, 4.I.1, 1012.

encounter God.⁴⁴⁴ We hear this in Calvin’s definition of “sacrament”: “an outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of his good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith; and we in turn attest our piety toward him in the presence of the Lord and of his angels and before men.”⁴⁴⁵ Calvin is clear that we *need* sacraments, that they play a vital role in nurturing and sustaining fragile faith. Calvin is also absolutely clear that we *need* the Word first of all, because it is only through the Word that we receive the gift of faith, through which the gift of Godself is given to humanity.⁴⁴⁶

And Word and sacrament are all that is needed for the church to be the church, but Calvin argued fervently throughout his career that, given the visible church’s ongoing struggle with sin and the mixed character of its fellowship, the visible church also requires structures and practices of discipline. Some Reformed communions that followed Calvin even believed that discipline ought to be named a mark of the church.⁴⁴⁷ Calvin, however, did not explicitly elevate discipline

⁴⁴⁴ “There is a divinely ordained institution in this world; namely, the church. The church is the means by which the exalted Christ accomplishes His work among men... The church is the sphere of the self-revelation of God and of the encounter between Christ and ourselves” (Niesel, *The theology of Calvin*, 185).

⁴⁴⁵ *Inst*, 4.XIV.1, 1277

⁴⁴⁶ It is for this very reason that Leith identifies preaching as the chief sacrament in Calvin’s understanding. “Calvin thought of preaching as the primary means by which God’s presence becomes actual to us and by which God’s work is accomplished in individual life and in the community” (John H. Leith, “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Proclamation of the Word and Its Significance for Today,” in *John Calvin and the Church* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Pr, 1990), 206.) Calvin’s amendment of the Augsburg statement on the marks of the visible church do lend some support to Leith’s interpretation— the first mark of the church, according to Calvin, is not just the word rightly proclaimed (per Augsburg), but also the word faithfully heard. There is thus divine accommodation and human attestation of piety in the preaching event, as he understands it— rendering it sacramental.

⁴⁴⁷ E.g. Scots Confession, ch. 18 (Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*; *Part One- Book of Confessions*, (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, 2004), 3.18, 19). ; Belgic Confession, article 29 (<https://www.rca.org/resources/belgic-confession>); I once heard Dawn DeVries suggest in a lecture that Calvin’s amendment of Augsburg, to insist that word must be faithfully heard, might even imply this third mark of discipline.

to this status. As White puts it, whereas Word and sacrament are the foundation and *esse* of the church, discipline, for Calvin, belongs to the form, or *bene esse* of the church.⁴⁴⁸ Word and sacraments make the church the church, discipline protects Word and sacraments. White points us to Calvin's "Short Treatise Against the Anabaptists," for a clear articulation of this distinction: "I readily confess that discipline is part of the substance of the church, in that it is the means of establishing good order. I confess too that, in so far as good government suffers whenever measures like excommunication are not employed, the form of the church is thereby defaced. But this is not to say that it is entirely destroyed or that the edifice does not survive, since it retains the doctrine on which the church must be founded."⁴⁴⁹

Though the church, by God's grace, can and will survive even in the absence of discipline, Calvin shuddered at the thought. He conditioned his return to Geneva upon being granted permission to institute discipline, and fought for years to preserve the right of excommunication to the church alone, removing any possibility of appeal to secular courts for judgment on spiritual matters.⁴⁵⁰ By 1543, in the midst of these struggles with officials in Geneva, Calvin

⁴⁴⁸ Robert White, "Oil and Vinegar : Calvin on Church Discipline," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 38, no. 1 (1985): 25–26.

⁴⁴⁹ Cited in White, *Ibid- Short Treatise against the Anabaptists*, in J. Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia (=CO), ed. Baum, Cunitz and Reuss (Brunswick/Berlin, 1863-1900) 7, 68; John Calvin, *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines*, ed. and trans. Benjamin Wirt Farley (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1982(60). Farley's translation reads: "Now I readily acknowledge the discipline also belongs to the substance of the church— if you want to establish it in good order— and when discipline is absent, as when the ban is not practiced at all, then the true form of the church is to that extent disfigured. But this is not to say that the church is wholly destroyed and the edifice no longer stands, for it retains the teaching on which the church must be founded."

⁴⁵⁰ Johnson offers a helpful summary of the role Calvin's insistence on the establishment of Church Discipline played in his tumultuous relationship with the city of Geneva (Stephen M. Johnson, "'The Sinews of the Body of Christ' : Calvin's Concept of Church Discipline," *Westminster Theological Journal* 59, no. 1 [Spr 1997]: 87–100, 87-88 esp.).

spoke of discipline as the “sinews, through which the members of the body hold together.”⁴⁵¹

Calvin understood the Lord’s table to be where the body came together as one, and thus he focused on excommunication as a necessary component of church discipline, an essential tool of the church. Serious, unrepentant sin separates human beings from one another and from God, it divides the body. Pretending at unity at the table does not heal the wounds in the body.

Excommunication, however, was not the only, nor even the primary tool of church discipline. It was, in fact, a last resort. What is most striking about the Reformed Church in Geneva in Calvin’s time is how thoroughly the community was mobilized to mutual accountability. Pastors met together in the company of pastors, a weekly assembly of area of pastors for the purpose of collective scriptural study and self examination, continuing education, edification, improvement and restoration before matters devolved.⁴⁵² The Consistory, the governing body of lay and clerical leaders, while known for its function as a church court, actually functioned as much as an educational institution and counseling service as it did as a court.⁴⁵³ In educational mode, the Consistory encouraged all members to achieve a basic

⁴⁵¹ *Inst*, 4.XII.1, 1229-1230; Johnson’s lucid review of Calvin’s concept of Church discipline deploys “‘The Sinews of the Body of Christ’” as its main title. He points out that this is one of three key images of discipline in Calvin’s writings, the others being “a bridle to restrain and tame those who rage against the doctrine of Christ,” and “a father’s rod to chastise mildly...those who have more seriously lapsed”, but that this image of the sinews is by far Calvin’s favorite image (Ibid, 87). He cites a letter Calvin wrote in 1554 to Gaspar Lister, pastor at Nürtingen in which he celebrates the tranquility of Lister’s churches, but regrets the lack of “sinews of discipline so necessary to ensure its continuance” (Ibid).

⁴⁵² For some consideration of the Company of Pastors in Geneva see James K. Cameron, “Godly Nurture and Admonition in the Lord : Ecclesiastical Discipline in the Reformed Tradition,” in *Dänische Reformation Vor Ihrem Internationalen Hintergrund* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 264–276(270-271, esp).

⁴⁵³ Robert M. Kingdon, “The Geneva Consistory in the Time of Calvin,” in *Calvinism in Europe, 1540-1620* (Cambridge, Eng: Cambridge Univ Pr, 1994), 26–27. Sunshine demonstrates the debt that Calvin owed to Bucer in his development of the consistory. Bucer understood discipline to involve religious education and, essentially, counseling, the goal being the promotion and preservation of orthodoxy and orthopraxy (“Discipline as the Third Mark of the Church : Three

understanding of the faith and to be able to recite the Apostle's Creed and Lord's Prayer in their native tongue. They urged participation in worship and catechetical offerings for those struggling to articulate basic tenets of Christian faith or struggling to release practices deemed Roman Catholic superstition. And in counseling mode, the Consistory spent a great deal of its time mediating disputes and seeking to resolve bitter conflicts between family members, neighbors, co-workers. Those who were known to be at serious odds with another church member were often encouraged to abstain from the table until the conflict was resolved, and those who refrained from the table of their own free will often cited "hate in [their] heart[s]" as grounds for failure to participate.⁴⁵⁴ The Consistory would sponsor public services of reconciliation after conflicts were resolved, offering a visible witness to the healing that had taken place. The Consistory also did serve as a church court, dealing with open and public sins immediately, but only taking up "secret sin" after the earlier steps outlined in Matthew 18 had been followed—private confrontation and confrontation with witnesses. The Consistory functioned as the "church" to whom an unrepentant sinner was brought if no change in behavior resulted from the first two levels of conversation. Kingdon suggests that normal cases brought before the Consistory ended with admonition or remonstrance, public scolding delivered by a minister in the body, and the most serious cases resulted in the sentence of excommunication.⁴⁵⁵ Typically, sentences of excommunication were meant to be short lived; the hope was that members would be restored to the body. Long before a sentence of excommunication, however, Calvin hoped that parents, neighbors, friends would look out for one another, and lovingly seek to correct one

Views," *Calvin Theological Journal* 33, no. 2 [N 1998]: 470–471).

⁴⁵⁴ Kingdon, "The Geneva Consistory in the Time of Calvin," 27.

⁴⁵⁵ Robert M. Kingdon, "Calvin and Church Discipline," in *John Calvin Rediscovered* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Pr, 2007), 26. As Johnson puts it, "Discipline involves both correction and when necessary excommunication" ("The Sinews of the Body of Christ," 94).

another preventing the need for the church through its Consistory to get involved. The entire community had a responsibility for encouraging progress in the struggle against sin, growth in faith and understanding, and growth in love through strengthened bonds between church members.

Indeed, Calvin understood there to be three ends to church discipline: 1) preservation of the honor of God in Christ by disallowing those who “lead a filthy and infamous life” to continue to be called Christians, 2) protection of the “good” from corruption by the “wicked;” and 3) inspiration of repentance through production of shame.⁴⁵⁶ All of these ends can be characterized as growth in holiness. Though Calvin acknowledged the necessarily mixed character of the church, he did not make an easy peace with this condition. We see this in his declaration: “I confess it a great disgrace if pigs and dogs have a place among the children of God, and a still greater disgrace if the sacred body of Christ be prostituted to them. And indeed, if churches are well ordered, they will not bear the wicked in their bosom. Nor will they indiscriminately admit worthy and unworthy together to that sacred banquet.”⁴⁵⁷ On the heels of this statement, he admits a perfect fellowship will never be achieved, but does not believe this excuses the church from making its best efforts to encourage the faithfulness and growth, and indeed the increased holiness of the body. Given the persistence of sin, the church needs the regular proclamation of the Word and administration of the sacraments, and needs disciplinary structures to ensure the faithfulness of both of these acts. Word, sacraments, and discipline together shape the life of the visible church and make it the primary site of God’s salvific work in this world.

⁴⁵⁶ *Inst*, 4.XII.5

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 4.I.15, 1029

Interim Conclusion

I have thus far argued that the visible church is the product of Christ's life and work and the means by which Christ's saving work goes on. The visibility of the church is essential to its mission and the church becomes ever more visible as church as it makes progress towards holiness. Striving and progress towards holiness is the only holiness that can be seen in the visible church, and this progress is nudged along through hearing the Word proclaimed, receiving the sacraments administered, and submitting to the church's discipline. Through all this discussion, it has been apparent that Calvin understood the foundation of the church to be the forgiveness of sins. This is what is mediated on a daily basis through Word and sacraments and it is what drives the practice of discipline. Church members confront and forgive one another to help the body as a whole grow in faithfulness. The picture of the holiness of the church that stands out in Calvin's teaching is of a community *progressing* towards holiness, ever dependent on the perpetual receipt of forgiveness, mediated by ministry of the church.

PART TWO- CALVIN'S PRIORITIZATION OF THE WORD, TEACHING ON THE POWER OF THE KEYS, AND UNINTENDED ELEVATION OF CLERICAL OFFICE

Holiness as forgiveness points toward the constructive proposal of this dissertation, but Calvin's chief way of understanding the mediation of forgiveness in the visible church leaves open the possibility of disproportionate weight being placed on the clerical office. By digging more deeply into Calvin's teachings on the churchly mediation of forgiveness, we will thus more fully expose some of the roots of a Reformed hyper-focus on the clergy— an aspect of the problem to which this dissertation is a response. I argue here that Calvin understands preaching to be the primary means through which the forgiveness of sins is dispensed, and therefore the holiness of the church advanced, and that this easily slides into too great a focus on preachers

and risks the perception of an elevation of the office that they fill. This will be demonstrated through a consideration of Calvin's prioritization of the Word and his teachings on the power of the keys. Finally, we will consider the ways in which Calvin's work to relativize the work of all human agents and locate jurisdictional power in the church as a whole demonstrate an intention to resist an elevated understanding of the church's clergy and yet will suggest that this is not enough to counterbalance the heavy weight placed on the clerical office, and the preaching performed by those who fill it, to resist a clerical focusing of ecclesial holiness.

Prioritization of the Word

Earlier in the chapter when we were considering the necessity of participation in the visible church for salvation, we noted that God chooses to accommodate Godself to humanity through Word and sacrament, aids that God has "deposited" in the church through which faith might be fostered and strengthened. We also noted above that Calvin emphasizes that these aids are chiefly deposited in the church's preachers and teachers "through whose lips [God] might teach his own."⁴⁵⁸ In this suggestion that the aids to growth in faith and holiness are "deposited" chiefly in the church's leadership, we see evidence of a clerical emphasis in his ecclesiology. Further evidence of this emphasis, surfaces in Calvin's consistent prioritization of Word over sacrament. Word and sacraments, proclamation/hearing and administration/receipt, are not equally weighted in Calvin's teaching. The proclamation of the Word is the primary vehicle for the mediation of forgiveness; sacraments play a supporting role to the leading Word. This prioritization of the Word directs attention to the church's preaching ministry and its preachers, exposing further the potential clericalism of Calvin's ecclesiology. To demonstrate Calvin's

⁴⁵⁸ *Inst.* 4.I.1, 1012

prioritization of the Word, we will first consider the relationship of Word to sacrament in Calvin's understanding and we will then consider the liturgical nomenclature and practices in Calvin's Geneva. We then look more closely at Calvin's understanding of the preaching event and consider the ways it does not necessarily and yet can support an elevated understanding of the clerical office.⁴⁵⁹

DeVries helpfully points out that Word and Sacrament were first joined together and understood equally as means of grace by Augustine.⁴⁶⁰ She further notes that as doctrine developed in medieval Catholicism, the sacraments alone were understood as instruments of grace, the Word as preparation for the receipt of grace in the sacraments. "The preached Word itself, so far from conveying the healing medicine of divine grace, was rather a prescription for the medicine that was available only in the sacraments."⁴⁶¹ DeVries notes that this understanding of the preparatory nature of Word in relation to Sacrament was reaffirmed by Trent in reaction against the teachings of the Reformers.⁴⁶² Luther and Calvin reclaimed the preaching of the Word as Sacrament, and, in fact, understood it to be the primary sacrament. Both of these Reformers placed great weight on Romans 10:17 "Faith comes from hearing." And given that the central doctrine of the Reformation was "justification by faith," the Reformers insisted that faith alone saves. So clearly, if faith comes from hearing, and faith saves, then the proclamation of the Word is instrumental to salvation. The Word is sacrament.⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁹ For a clear argument regarding Calvin's prioritization of Word over sacrament see Joshua Ralston, "Preaching Makes the Church: Recovering a Missing Ecclesial Mark," in *John Calvin's Ecclesiology*, ed. Gerald Mannion and Eduardus van der Borght (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 124–142.

⁴⁶⁰ Dawn DeVries, *Jesus Christ in the Preaching of Calvin and Schleiermacher*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996), 14.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid, 15.

⁴⁶² Ibid, 20.

⁴⁶³ For a lucid discussion of the relationship between Calvin's soteriology and Calvin's emphasis

Where Roman Catholicism had come to weight sacrament over Word, the Reformers reversed the emphasis after coming to understand the Word sacramentally. As Calvin understands it, the preaching of the Word is sufficient to make Christ present to believers and kindle faith. So the Word can be preached without the supplementation of the sacraments, but a sacrament is not a sacrament without the preaching of the Word; after defining “sacrament” in his *Institutes*, Calvin declares, “a sacrament is never without a preceding promise but is joined to it as a sort of appendix, with the purpose of confirming and sealing the promise itself, and of making it more evident to us and in a sense ratifying it.”⁴⁶⁴ Faith in the promise saves—faith that is kindled by hearing and receiving the Word proclaimed.⁴⁶⁵ The proclaimed Word “confirms the truth.” And if humanity were not so weak and fallen, this proclamation would be sufficient, but because of our weakness, God provides tangible, visible support for our faith, the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, to help us to grow in faithfulness.⁴⁶⁶

We see further evidence of the priority of Word over sacrament in the liturgical nomenclature and practices of Reformed Churches in Calvin’s Geneva. Worship services were

on and sacramental understanding of preaching, see Dawn DeVries, “Calvin’s Preaching” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 106-124.

⁴⁶⁴ *Inst*, 4.XIV.2, 1278

⁴⁶⁵ “sacrament requires preaching to beget faith” (Ibid, 4.XIV.4, 1279).

⁴⁶⁶ Calvin rejects any magical or superstitious understanding of the sacraments, and particularly of the words spoken before a sacrament is distributed. The Word preached is intended to make plain what the visible sign means, it is intended to foster understanding (*Ibid*). DeVries suggests that Calvin understands the sacraments to be instruments of God’s grace, “‘exhibitive signs’: that is, sacraments both represent and offer that which they signify.” (“Calvin’s Preaching,” 109). In so doing, he rejects both the Catholic *ex Opera operate* sacramental understanding and other Protestant understandings that took the sacraments to be purely symbolic (*Ibid*). In arguing for Calvin’s sacramental character of the Word, she notes that just as he understood sacraments to be visible words, so too did he understand the Word to be an audible sign (She cites *Inst*. IV.14.26 when making this observation in *Ibid*). Word and sacrament are intimately connected in his understanding.

called “sermons” and there were 20-30 “sermons” in Geneva in a given week.⁴⁶⁷ DeVries notes that Calvin preached over 2,000 sermons in his ministry in Geneva, in his later years asking to be carried to the sanctuary in a chair so that he might continue to preach when he was too weak to get there on foot.⁴⁶⁸ Calvin thus backed up his belief in the importance of preaching with a thoroughgoing preaching practice. Despite his great emphasis on preaching, it was Calvin’s wish that there be at least weekly communion in the Reformed Church of Geneva. He believed that Word and sacrament belonged, properly, together.⁴⁶⁹ Eventually, due to the superstitions that many appeared to attach to the celebration of the sacrament, which he traced to distorted Roman Catholic teachings on the mass, he conceded that it may be wise to celebrate the sacrament less frequently. He recommended quarterly celebration in each of Geneva’s parishes, staggered such that there would be at least one monthly celebration in the city of Geneva.⁴⁷⁰ In practice, even this desire for monthly communion was not realized, the council opting to maintain quarterly communion as the standard for the city. The liturgical nomenclature and practices of Calvin’s Geneva with their relatively greater emphasis on preaching, suggest that though Calvin may have

⁴⁶⁷ Kingdon, “The Geneva Consistory in the Time of Calvin,” 25. The plan for daily services in the city of Geneva was initially mapped out in the *Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances September and October 1541* (*Calvin: Theological Treatises*, 56-72). Calvin had difficulty getting these ordinances passed, but we see Calvin’s liturgical and ecclesiastical intentions in these draft ordinances. He prescribed the following: on Sundays- two early “sermons”, 2 “usual hour sermons”, 2 mid-afternoon sermons; on working days- “two preachings” at every church in the city, plus three additional “sermons” at one of the parishes (Monday, Tuesday, and Friday — an hour before the regular preaching. Calvin called for 5 ministers and 3 coadjutors to fulfill the extensive preaching needs of the Reformed Churches in the city (Ibid, 62). Leith notes that upon Calvin’s return to Geneva in 1541 he himself preached twice on Sundays, and then again on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. He increased this load in 1542 until the city council released him. In 1549 he preached twice on Sundays and every workday every second week (“Calvin’s Doctrine of the Proclamation of the Word and Its Significance for Today,” 206).

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid, 10

⁴⁶⁹ DeVries suggests that he argued with the Council in Geneva on behalf of weekly communion for years (*Jesus Christ in the Preaching of John Calvin and Friedrich Schleiermacher*, 20).

⁴⁷⁰ “Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church and of Worship at Geneva proposed by the Ministers at the Council, Jan 16, 1537” (*Calvin: Theological Treatises*, 49-50)

intended the perpetual union of Word and sacrament, the weight he placed on the primary, saving work of the Word, may have supported practices that downplayed sacraments and elevated preaching.⁴⁷¹

The prioritization of Word over sacrament does not necessarily fund an elevated understanding of clerical office. Surely those traditions that prioritize sacraments over Word have been just as prone to such elevation as the Reformed tradition. Ralston, and others, note that Calvin moderately edits the Augsburg statement on the marks of the church adding the *hearing* of the Word to the proclamation thereof to make one complete mark. The preaching event then, which Ralston argues “makes the church,” in a play on DeLubac’s statement about the Eucharist, is not just the act of the preacher, but of the whole community.⁴⁷² Just as surely, the whole community and not only the one presiding at the table is active in the Eucharist. Or, more faithful to Calvin’s teaching, we should perhaps say that Christ alone is active and preacher/presider and people together are passive recipients.⁴⁷³ Noting Calvin’s emphasis on the corporate character of the preaching event, indeed of all sacramental events, offers a helpful challenge to the perception of hyper-clericalism in Calvin’s teaching.

However, though Calvin emphasized the corporate character of preaching—the Word must be *heard* as well as proclaimed—greater weight is placed on the act of proclamation, the preaching itself, and those who preach it, than on the hearing of that which is proclaimed. As discussed above, Calvin emphasizes the ascension, and consequent bodily absence of Christ, in his articulation of the relationship between church and Christ. The proclamation of the Word is

⁴⁷¹ DeVries notes that after Calvin’s concession on weekly communion, “From that time on, churches in the Reformed tradition tended to elevate preaching to a position of relatively greater importance than that of the sacraments” (Ibid).

⁴⁷² “Preaching Makes the Church: Recovering a Missing Ecclesial Mark,” 134.

⁴⁷³ This is what Calvin’s instrumental sacramentalism teaches.

the primary event that mediates Christ's saving presence to the church—the sacraments play a supporting role. The church's preachers stand in the gap; they are delegated agents of the ascended Christ. The preachers are carrying out work that is Christ's own work, "supply[ing] his absence."⁴⁷⁴ Calvin speaks of their work as "carry[ing] the embassy of eternal salvation, erect[ing] the kingdom of God on earth, rais[ing] men to heaven," but acknowledges this is too great a work for any human being and so Christ's supplies the Spirit that they might be able to carry it out.⁴⁷⁵ It is God in Christ who saves by the sending of the Holy Spirit, but ordinarily the preaching of preachers is the instrument that God uses to carry out this work. The spotlight is on the preacher. And the spotlight remains on the preachers in Calvin's interpretation of the power of the keys.

Power of the Keys

The doctrine of the Power of the Keys opens up reflection on the gift of forgiveness, and the power to forgive, that was given by God through Christ and helped to establish the church. By the sixteenth century, Catholic understandings of this doctrine centered on the church's hierarchy, and, in particular, the papacy.⁴⁷⁶ The Reformers of this century thus targeted this

⁴⁷⁴ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel according to John*, in the AGES Digital Library Commentary, (Albany, OR; AGES Software, 1998), 20.21, 653. Calvin states here that Christ is passing on to his apostles the office that he had fulfilled temporarily, that of teacher, which they and those who follow them are to fulfill into perpetuity. He says Christ "put those persons in his room to supply his absence" and gives them the authority that the Father had given him that they might speak on his behalf. Calvin clarifies that Christ remains the one true teacher, but he does his teaching through the mouths of the Apostles/preachers.

⁴⁷⁵ *Commentary on John*, 20.22, 654

⁴⁷⁶ "According to some medieval theorists, the emperor had an exclusively ministerial role in the Christian community: his main function was to serve the Church and watch over it to see that peace was maintained, this being the only way to ensure the tranquillity of the State. According to this doctrine, the Pope, not the Emperor, held universal power and was the source of all law, in virtue of the position he occupied as the head of all Christianity, being the Vicar of Christ.' Thus,

doctrine for substantial revision. Calvin's interpretation of the power of the keys evidences both a relativization of the significance of any human agents *and* a heavy emphasis on particular human agents— those who are preachers of the Gospel. In this section, I will first present Calvin's teachings on the power of the keys. I will next briefly consider two early articulations of this doctrine, from Cyprian and Augustine.⁴⁷⁷ Finally, by comparison of the approaches of these three men I will draw out my interpretation of the heavy weight Calvin's interpretation places on the preaching office.

At least since Augustine, three scriptural passages have been foundational to the doctrine of the power of the keys. These passages are Matthew 16:18-19, Matthew 18:15-20 (v.18 in particular), and John 20:22-23. Each of these passages speaks of a power to bind and loose sin, or to forgive and retain sin. The Matthew 16 and John 20 passages depict Christ giving this gift/power to his disciples— in Matthew 16 the language of “keys of the kingdom” is used and the keys are particularly said to be given to Peter; in John 20 Jesus gives this power to all the gathered disciples by breathing his Spirit on them. Matthew 18, in outlining procedures for negotiating conflicts and offenses in the church, suggests that the whole church has this power.

Calvin suggests that the power to forgive and retain sins referenced in John 20 is the same power attached to the keys of the kingdom in Matthew 16.⁴⁷⁸ When Calvin turns to a discussion of Mt. 18 he acknowledges that in a general sense this passage is linked to the others, in that both speak of “the same power of binding and loosing (that is, through God's Word), the same

the power to bind and loose (Matt. 16.18-19), which by tradition the popes receive from Christ through Peter, became through the work of canonists and theologians a doctrine of universal papal power that enabled the papacy to make laws, to adjudicate, and to depose emperors” (García Alonso, “Calvin and the Ecclesiastical Power of Jurisdiction,” 137–138).

⁴⁷⁷ Both of these early teachings receive more considered attention in the following chapter. See pp. 232-233, 254-256.

⁴⁷⁸ *Inst*, 4.X1.1, 1212

command, the same promise.”⁴⁷⁹ But whereas Mt. 16/Jn. 20 is “particularly concerned with the preaching which the ministers of the Word execute,” Mt. 18 “applies to the discipline of excommunication which is entrusted to the church.”⁴⁸⁰ He primarily interprets this power as the agency to share the benefit of Christ’s forgiving grace. Calvin is drawing these distinctions in opposition to the Roman Catholic sacrament of penance, which had become the ordinary means for the dispensing of forgiving grace. For Calvin, preaching is the ordinary means of dispensing grace—it is, as suggested above, the primary sacrament.⁴⁸¹

Historically, Peter and the disciples have been interpreted symbolically to establish the location of this Christly power in the church. Sometimes Peter and the disciples are taken to be symbols of the church’s leadership, sometimes of the whole church.⁴⁸² Calvin explicitly states that this gift was given to the *apostles*, granting them the power to act as Christ’s agents of forgiveness. He believes that the power referred to in Matthew 16 and John 20 refers solely to the “ministry of the Word, because when the Lord committed his ministry to the apostles, he also equipped them for the office of binding and loosing.”⁴⁸³ In his commentary on Matthew 16:19, when the keys are given to Peter, he writes, “Here Christ begins now to speak of the public office, that is, of the Apostleship, which he dignifies with a twofold title. First, he says that the ministers of the Gospel are porters, so to speak, of the kingdom of heaven, because they carry its

⁴⁷⁹ *Inst*, 4.XI.2, 1214

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸¹ I am grateful to Dawn DeVries for reminding me of the polemical context of these teachings, and pointing me to her work on preaching as sacrament within the teaching of the Reformers. She writes in conclusion to her chapter on “Calvin on the Word as Sacrament” in *Jesus Christ in the Preaching of John Calvin and Friederich Schleiermacher*, “It can hardly be overemphasized what a paradigm shift this understanding of the Word represented in sixteenth-century theology. Grace was no longer an incrementally infused quality but renewed personal relationship, made possible by God’s initiative in addressing sinners” (20).

⁴⁸² We will see these alternative approaches in Cyprian and Augustine respectively.

⁴⁸³ 4.XI.1, 1212

keys; and, secondly, he adds, that they are invested with a power of binding and loosing, which is ratified in heaven.”⁴⁸⁴ He clearly understands that the power of binding and loosing has been given to ministers of the Gospel, first the apostles and then those who carry on the ministry of proclaiming the Gospel— the preaching ministers of the church. That said, we can see at the very end of this statement that the power to forgive ultimately resides in God/Christ— as the work done on earth is “ratified in heaven.”

This qualification of the power that is resident on earth is even more apparent in his commentary on John 20:23 where he notes, “While Christ enjoins the Apostles to forgive sins, he does not convey to them what is peculiar to himself. It belongs to him to forgive sins. This honor, so far as it belongs peculiarly to himself, he does not surrender to the Apostles, but enjoins them, in his name, to proclaim the forgiveness of sins, that through their agency he may reconcile men to God. In short, properly speaking, it is he alone who forgives sins through his apostles and ministers...”⁴⁸⁵ Christ does the forgiving, but he does the forgiving *through his apostles and ministers*— through the empowered leadership of the church. And Calvin, even with so clear a qualification/relativization of the nature of ecclesiastical power, emphasizes the great weight that Christ himself placed on the ministers he sent out.

We now see the reason why Christ employs such magnificent terms, to commend and adorn that ministry which he bestows and enjoins on the Apostles. It is, that believers may be fully convinced, that what they hear concerning the forgiveness of sins is ratified, and may not less highly value the reconciliation which is offered by the voice of men, than if God himself stretched out his hand from heaven. And the Church daily receives the most abundant benefit from this

⁴⁸⁴ Jean Calvin, *Commentary on Matthew, Mark and Luke*, in the AGES Digital Library Commentary, (Albany, OR: AGES Software, 1997), 217.

⁴⁸⁵ *Commentary on John, 20.23*, 658 *Caeterum ita mandatum Christus iniungit apostolis remittendi peccata, ut minime quod suum est in ipsos transferat. Proprium eius est peccata remittere. Hunc honorem, quatenus in ipsum competit, apostolis non resignat, sed iubet suo nomine remissionem peccatorum testari, ut per eos Deo homines reconciliet. Denique solus ipse proprie loquendo per apostolos suos peccata remittit* (CR, *Calvini Opera* Vol. 47, 440-441)

doctrine, when it perceives that her pastors are divinely ordained to be sureties for eternal salvation, and that it must not go to a distance to seek the forgiveness of sins, which is committed to their trust.⁴⁸⁶

The pastors are “divinely ordained to be sureties for eternal salvation.” Believers have access to daily forgiveness simply by submitting themselves to the preaching ministry of the church.

Christ forgives *through* his agents, the church’s preachers. He clarifies that this is not so much a power to convert the godless, but rather a perpetual office to be discharged among believers.

“Therefore, in the communion of saints, our sins are continually forgiven us by the ministry of the church itself when the presbyters or bishops to whom this office has been committed strengthen godly consciences by the gospel promises in the hope of pardon and forgiveness. This they do both publicly and privately as need requires. For very many, on account of their weakness, need personal consolation.”⁴⁸⁷

Even though, in his interpretation of Matthew 18 as the foundational passage for the exercise of church discipline, Calvin does affirm that the power to bind and loose was given to the whole church, he consistently teaches that this power actually resides in God’s Word and is *regularly* mediated through the proclamation of this Word by the ministers of the Gospel. The gift of forgiveness which the community needs to receive on a daily basis “is dispensed to us through the ministers and pastors of the church, either by the preaching of the gospel or by the administration of the sacraments; and herein chiefly stands out the power of the keys which the

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid *Videmus nunc, cur tam splendido elogio commendet Christus ac ornet ministerium, quod apostolis iniungit, nempe ut tuto sibi persuadeant fideles, ratum esse quod audiunt de remissis peccatis, nec minoris faciant reconciliationem quae voce hominum offertur quam si Deus ipse manum e coelo porrigeret. Ac uberrimum huius doctrinae fructum quotidie percipit ecclesia, dum pastores suos intelligit divinitus ordinatos esse aeternae salutis sponsores, nec peccatorum remissionem, quae apud illos est deposita, procul esse quaerendam* (CR, vol. 47, 441).

⁴⁸⁷ *Inst*, 4.I.22, 1035.

Lord has conferred upon the society of believers.”⁴⁸⁸ Elsewhere he states plainly that in Mt. 16 and Jn 20, “the power of the keys is simply the preaching of the gospel.”⁴⁸⁹ In fact, Calvin suggests that the office of the Ministry of the Word is the parallel permanent office to the temporary office of Apostle.⁴⁹⁰ The Church’s clergy, through their preaching primarily, are the vessels through whom God’s forgiveness and salvific work is delivered. That which makes the church the church is channeled through the preaching office.

I have thus far argued that Calvin’s interpretation of the doctrine of the power of the keys both relativizes and emphasizes the work of particular human agents, placing extraordinary weight on the preaching office in particular. By briefly considering the work of two of Calvin’s theological forbears, Cyprian of Carthage and Augustine of Hippo, we may further detect the particular emphases of Calvin’s approach.

Writing in third century CE North Africa, Cyprian noted and suggested that the same power to bind and loose or condemn and forgive is portrayed in both Matthew 16:18-19 and in John 20:22-23.⁴⁹¹ In Cyprian’s interpretation of these passages, Peter represents a bishop, and the disciples in John are equivalent in his mind to the apostles, who represent the communion of bishops. Cyprian suggested that Jesus first gave the power to the individual Peter to attest to its singularity and preserve its unity, but that he gave it again to all the apostles to show that this

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid, 4.I.22, 1035-1036

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid, 4.XI.1, 1213; cf. Ibid, 3.IV.14, 638-639 where he discusses the nature and value of the power of the keys, and insists, “any right of binding or loosing, which Christ conferred upon his church is bound to the Word. This is especially true in the ministry of the keys, whose entire power rests in the fact that, through those whom the Lord had ordained, the grace of the gospel is publicly and privately sealed in the hearts of the believers. **This can come about only through preaching**” (emphasis mine).

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid, 4.III.6, 1058-1059.

⁴⁹¹ This is most prominently on display in his treatise on Christian Unity, ch. 4 (Cyprian, *Unit*, 61-64).

power is not held by any one individual, but rather resides in the communion of its leaders.⁴⁹² This interpretation undergirded an episcopocentric ecclesiology.⁴⁹³ That gift and power which makes the church the church is the possession of its leaders who exercise that power for the benefit of the community. Cyprian crafted this teaching in a time when many Christians had lapsed into the serious sin of apostasy under the pressure of imperial persecution. Many were asking the question of whether the presence of serious sinners within the church negated the holiness and, indeed, ecclesiality of the church. Surely those who had sinned against God had forsaken the Holy Spirit, but did this mean the Holy Spirit had abandoned her church altogether? Cyprian suggested that no, the Holy Spirit primarily resides in the communion of bishops, and so long as serious sinners were kept out of the episcopacy, the church's holiness and identity would be preserved.⁴⁹⁴

Less than a century later, the church in North Africa split, with one party in the church, the Donatists, alleging that the Catholic bishop of Carthage had been consecrated by a lapsed bishop, thus invalidating his episcopacy. The presence of allegedly lapsed bishops in the communion of bishops, according to Cyprian's ecclesiology, threatens the ecclesiality of the church. Thus the Donatists felt it legitimate to consecrate a rightful bishop and separate from the Catholic communion. The result was the existence of two parallel churches in North Africa, both laying claim to the title of "the one true Church"—the Catholic Church, in which Augustine was

⁴⁹² Ibid, see ch. 5 especially, 64-67

⁴⁹³ This is illustrated well in letter 43, in which Cyprian urges the laity to maintain fellowship with their bishop, resisting the leadership of rebel presbyters. Those presbyters, by rejecting the authority of their bishop, have completely severed their connection to the church and Cyprian does not wish others to perish with them. A church set up against the episcopacy is not church at all. He wrote: "God is one and Christ is one: there is one Church and one chair founded, by the Lord's authority, upon Peter" (Cyprian. *The Letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage: Vol. II, Letters 28-54*, trans. G.W. Clarke. (New York: Newman Press, 1984), 64.)

⁴⁹⁴ See chapter five, pp. 233-234, in particular.

consecrated as bishop, and the Donatist Church, which laid claim to the title on the basis of its allegedly more pure episcopate. The Donatist argument relied heavily on Cyprian's teachings, and Augustine was faced with the challenge of constructing an ecclesiology that made theological sense of the ecclesiality and practices of his own communion.

A significant component of the ecclesiology that he developed was an interpretation of the power of the keys that was grounded in Cyprian's teaching, but radically different from it. Augustine realized that the same power "to bind and to loose" is named in one other Gospel passage, that being Matthew 18:15-20 (v. 18 particularly), and that in that passage Jesus speaks of this power residing in the church as a whole. He uses this observation to argue that Peter (in Mt 16) and the disciples (in Jn 20), must therefore be representative of the church as a whole, *not* of its leadership. Anyone who is truly a member of the church receives the gift of the Holy Spirit, symbolized in Baptism, and the gift of the Holy Spirit is the gift of *caritas*, forgiving love. The power to bind and loose then resides in the true church as a whole. The leaders of the church are authorized to use this power on behalf of the community as a whole, for the benefit of the community, but they do not necessarily possess this power unto themselves. If bishops are members of the true church, they do possess the power, but if not, they draw on the power that resides in the true church in order to carry out functions that the church requires. The true church is the communion of God's elect, and it is not identical with the whole visible, institutional church. God alone knows who is truly a member of the church, but Augustine was certain that a mark of true church membership was exercise of the gift of *caritas*, forgiving love. It is on these grounds that he denies the ecclesiality of the Donatists who betrayed love by breaking fellowship with the Catholics and sought to remove grounds for claims that the presence of sinners in the communion of bishops could invalidate the ecclesial status of the Catholic Church.

On the one hand, Augustine emphasized that believers received the gift of forgiveness through the daily process of living into forgiving relationships with their fellow church members— living according to the teachings of Matthew 18. This is the ordinary practice of the power of the keys, if you will. In this way the power given to Peter and the disciples truly does reside in and is exercised by the whole, true church. On the other hand, he did understand the church’s clerics to be the formal agents of the power of the keys in the case of serious sin— they alone could extend the forgiveness that would restore a serious sinner to the fellowship of the church after excommunication— and this was a rare procedure. It is, if you will, the extraordinary practice of the power of the keys.⁴⁹⁵

Calvin’s ecclesiology certainly evidences dependence on Augustine, particularly given the tight link between the doctrines of election and ecclesiology in his teaching. Calvin also shares with Augustine the understanding that it is Christ who truly forgives through the agency of human beings as is plainly on display in Calvin’s teachings on the power of the keys. But, in another sense, Calvin’s interpretation of the power of the keys is distinct from Augustine’s and is significantly resonant with Cyprian’s teaching.⁴⁹⁶ Calvin, like Augustine, refers to all three passages (Mt. 16, Mt. 18, and John 20) in his discussion of the power of the keys, but unlike Augustine, and much like Cyprian, he tightly links Mt. 16 and John 20 and relies on these passages for his primary assertions about the meaning of the power of the keys. He believes that which is discussed in Matthew 18, while related, needs to be treated separately. So whereas Augustine took Mt. 18 as the key to right interpretation of Mt. 16 and Jn. 20, Calvin pulls these

⁴⁹⁵ But, as suggested above, it became the ordinary practice of the power of keys, through the sacrament of penance as practiced in medieval Catholicism.

⁴⁹⁶ This is yet another moment when we can detect a distinctive Cyprianic character in Calvin’s ecclesiology. Earlier we considered his emphasis on the saving necessity of participation in the Church and his central image of the Church as mother, both ideas that are crucial in Cyprian’s ecclesiology.

apart, allowing a both/and interpretation.

Further, in Calvin's interpretation of Matthew 16 and John 20 he follows Cyprian more closely than Augustine when he takes Peter and the disciples to be representative of apostles, who correspond to present preachers in the church. The church's preaching ministry inspires the faith that opens the door to Christ's forgiveness—the gift that establishes and enables the progress of the church. The ordinary, indeed daily, exercise of the power of the keys is carried out by the church's preachers. This stands in contrast to Augustine's understanding of the doctrine where the ordinary exercise is the work of the whole people in their negotiation of offenses between them.

That Calvin understands preaching to be the primary means through which the forgiveness of sins is mediated is plainly on display in his interpretation of the power of the keys. His understanding of this doctrine evidences the influence of both Cyprian and Augustine. However, by placing his primary focus on Matthew 16 and John 20 he leans towards a Cyprianic interpretation that focuses on the responsibility of the church's clerics to mediate forgiveness through the preaching of the Gospel, rather than locating this responsibility and work in the body as a whole. Though he insists, like Augustine, that Christ alone forgives, Christ's agents appear to be the church's preachers, not all believers engaged in forgiving relationships with one another.

Considering Calvin's Resistance to an Elevated Clerical Office

In the preceding discussions on Calvin's prioritization of the Word and interpretation of the doctrine of the power of the keys, I argued that Calvin heavily emphasizes the preaching office while at the same relativizing all human work. This dual emphasis reflects his sacramental

understanding of preaching. It is first and foremost through the act of preaching that Christ's forgiving grace is mediated to those who hear and believe. The preachers are Christ's chief representatives on earth. But it is always Christ who actually forgives, it is the Word that saves, it is God's work through the Word of Christ that enables humanity to progress towards holiness. In both Word and sacrament, Christ is the "matter" of that which is offered. If Cyprian's ecclesiology can rightly be called clergy-centric, and Augustine's christocentric, Calvin's appears to be both. Ultimately the church is centered on Christ; temporally the church is centered on preaching. To say that the church is centered on preaching does not mean that it is centered on preachers, necessarily. In fact, it is a sacramental error to confuse the instruments of sacraments with the real matter of the sacraments. As we've already noted, Calvin emphasized the corporate character of the preaching event. But one does not get the sense in reading Calvin that *all* are preachers—that all bear the message of Christ's forgiveness, that all proclaim the Gospel for the edification of the body. This is the function of ministers of the Gospel, those who take the place of Apostles; it is the responsibility of duly called, prepared/educated, ordained officers. And even though Calvin is clear that the work of preaching is incomplete when the Word is not heard and believed, the party in the event who proclaims the Word, who is a vessel for Christ's action, is the cleric. The whole body of believers depends on the daily work of these officers among them if it is to continue to progress towards holiness and union with Christ. If the holiness of the church depends ultimately on the Word, it certainly appears to depend temporally on the proclamation of that Word—and it is all too easy to slip into the perception that it depends on those who proclaim it, though, certainly, this slippage is, in Calvin's view, a grave error.

Calvin certainly worked to resist this slippage, as his most basic sacramental understanding of preaching suggests. In this final section of the chapter we will consider three ways Calvin

worked to resist an elevated understanding of the clerical office, first by attending to his habit of qualifying all statements about the clerical office, and then by attending to his construction of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The sufficiency of these measures will be critiqued in the final move of the section.

Calvin often paired exalted statements about the clerical office with immediate qualifications.

This pairing is repeatedly on display in this portion of Calvin's commentary on 1 Cor. 3:7:

...in another passage (II Corinthians 3:6) he calls himself a minister of the Spirit, and not of the letter, for he writes the Word of the Lord in their hearts.

On the other hand he sometimes thinks of the minister as a servant not a master; as an instrument, not the hand; finally, as a man, not God. Accordingly he leaves him nothing but his work, and indeed that is dead and useless, unless the Lord gives effective power to it by His Spirit. The reason for this view is that, when it is simply a question of the ministry, we ought not to pay attention to a man so much, but also to God working in him by the grace of the Spirit. This does not mean that the grace of the Spirit is always tied to the word of man, but that Christ puts forth His own power in the ministry which He instituted, in such a way that it is evident that it was not instituted in vain. In this way Christ does not take away or reduce anything which belongs to Himself in order to transfer it to a man. For He is not separated from the minister, ut rather His power is made known as efficacious in the minister... However, Paul always maintains the fullest sense of proportion, for when he says that 'God gives the increase', he means that the work of men themselves is not without success. We shall see in another passage that the same reasoning also applies to the sacraments.⁴⁹⁷

Clearly Calvin wants to emphasize that clerics are just people, instruments of the divine agent, no holier than anyone else. At the same time, though, Calvin does insist that God does indeed use the work of these agents so that "the efforts of men themselves are not without success." God's power is efficacious in these ministers.⁴⁹⁸ We have seen this pattern of reserving actual saving

⁴⁹⁷ Jean Calvin, *On the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, tr. the Rev. John Pringle, Vol. 1, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Company, 1948), 70.

⁴⁹⁸ I am grateful to J. Patout Burns for pointing out to me that when Calvin states that "God giveth the increase" means "the efforts of men themselves are not without success" he goes a good deal further than Augustine would be willing to go with respect to the efficacy of the human agent or minister. Calvin, like Augustine, insists on the full humanity of ministers, but

power to the Word repeatedly throughout this chapter thus far. Clearly, in Calvin's understanding, God has the power to forgive, the power is in the Word of God, this power flows through those who proclaim it; it does not belong to them.⁴⁹⁹

We also see evidence of Calvin's efforts to resist an elevated understanding of clerics in the structures of jurisdictional power that he set up in the church. Whereas Luther, partly in reaction to clerical abuses of power, stripped the church of all jurisdictional power, Calvin worked to restore this power to the church, and located this power in corporate gatherings of clergy and laity together.⁵⁰⁰ Calvin insisted that matters of church membership and discipline should never be entrusted to individuals because "this cognizance belongs to the church as a

appears to have a higher assessment of the efficacy of their agency.

⁴⁹⁹ He says this repeatedly about the work of preaching, but he makes the same point about the sacraments, as is alluded to at the end of the example quote above. He is clear that the Spirit is the true actor in and power of the sacrament, neither the elements themselves nor the person presiding over the sacrament contains the power to strengthen faith. Only the Spirit's work joined to the sacrament, both its administration and its receipt, can accomplish this purpose. "But the sacraments properly fulfill their office only when the Spirit, that inward teacher, comes to them, by whose power alone hearts are penetrated and affections moved and our souls opened for the sacraments to enter in...I make such a division between Spirit and sacraments that the power to act rests with the former, and the ministry alone is left to the latter— a ministry empty and trifling, apart from the action of the Spirit, but charged with great effect when the Spirit works within and manifests his power" (*Inst*, 4.XIV.9, 1284).

⁵⁰⁰ García Alonso argues that whereas Luther, with his theses had thoroughly challenged the fullness of power granted to the pope and filtered down through the church's hierarchy and tried to replace this with a power that resides in the church as whole, he functionally evacuated pastoral authority and any meaningful jurisdictional authority in the Church, ceding all this to the state. Calvin, she suggests, took up a counter-revolution and managed to balance the critique of papal *plenitudo potestatis* with the demand for some degree of jurisdiction for a church which, in this way, reclaimed its institutional dimension" ("Calvin and the Ecclesiastical Power of Jurisdiction," 138). She points out Calvin, with his work on the Power of the Keys, distinguishes between doctrinal power and jurisdictional power, but in so doing he also restores some jurisdictional power to the teaching office. By claiming full control for the authorization of the Church's doctrine to the teaching office, he takes this back from the state (*Ibid*, 146). And she also claims that he observed in Strasbourg that "his own doctrinal enterprise could be interpreted as an attempt to recover the Church's jurisdictional authority over a person's life" (*ibid*, 144). The Church's jurisdictional power, chiefly exercised through its practices and institutions of discipline, is derivative of its doctrinal power and oriented towards "creating the conditions for the divine Word to be preached correctly and to be heard respectfully" (*ibid*, 149, cf. 148).

whole and cannot be exercised without lawful order...”⁵⁰¹ Though he speaks here of the “church as a whole,” in his most mature thought he emphasizes that the whole church’s judgment should be delegated to representative governing bodies composed of elected clerical and lay elders; in Geneva, this governing body was the consistory. Calvin finds support for the ordering of ministry in this way, in particular for granting jurisdictional power to representative bodies like the consistory, in his interpretation of Matthew 18, that other passage Augustine brought into the discussion of the power of the keys. Calvin states clearly that in this passage Christ gives the keys to *the church*. Though Mt. 16 and Jn. 20 point to the doctrinal authority given to the clergy, Mt. 18 speaks of the jurisdictional authority that is given to the whole church.⁵⁰² As was noted above, even in discussions of Matthew 16 and John 20 Calvin will speak of the power of the keys as a gift given to the whole church, but he nonetheless insists that this power is chiefly exercised in the preaching of the Gospel.⁵⁰³ Nonetheless, in Calvin’s teachings on the jurisdiction of the church he finds a way to affirm a power that was given to and resides in the church as a whole and is exercised chiefly through the discipline of correction and excommunication discussed above.⁵⁰⁴ Certainly, Calvin’s understanding of the jurisdictional power that belongs to the whole church serves to take some emphasis off the church’s clerics, granting a wider cross section of the community a role in supporting the faithful growth of the whole church body.

⁵⁰¹ *Inst*, 4.I.15, 1029-1030.

⁵⁰² “...the jurisdiction of the Sanhedrin is for the future transferred to Christ’s flock” (Ibid, 4.XI.1, 1212). White suggests that the scriptural basis for the ecclesiastical practice of excommunication, which is key to the Church’s jurisdiction is not, in Calvin’s understanding, the power of the keys, but rather the dominical injunction in Matthew 18:17-18 and apostolic precedent in Paul’s teachings in 1 Corinthians 5:5 and 2 Thess 3:14-15 (“Oil and Vinegar,” 27). This observation from White backs up my interpretation of Calvin’s work with the doctrine of the power of the keys relying on Matthew 16 and John 20 alone.

⁵⁰³ *Inst*, 4.I.22, 1036

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid, 4.XI.2, 1214.

Calvin is fervently protective of the sovereignty of God and deeply sensitive to the human tendency to idolatry. He certainly did not want clerics to be perceived as divine, nor as holier than any other part of the body. At the same time, he was profoundly sensitive to the desperate human need for daily grace and encounter with the holy and firmly convinced, by the incarnation of God in Christ, that God accommodates Godself to our finite, limited selves—chiefly through Word and sacrament. God uses particular people and particular earthly elements to meet human beings where we are. If we are confused about the source of the message we receive, the matter of the church's sacraments that is a product of human sin and weakness. Surely, given Calvin's sacramental understanding of preaching, this is how he would respond to my charge that he places too much weight on the church's preachers. Indeed, in a church that operated with robust structures and practices of church discipline in which all church members participate both informally and formally, holding one another accountable, facilitating growth in holiness, all church members, not just the preachers, play a crucial role in the church's visible progress towards holiness. Such was Calvin's intention and, indeed, appears to have been the practice in Geneva, at least for some time. There is much within Calvin's ecclesiology, most especially his understanding of Word as sacrament, that evidences resistance to a clerical location of responsibility for ecclesial holiness.

That said, when we hold together the heavy weight placed on preaching in Calvin's understanding of the mediation of forgiveness and holiness, and the subordination of sacraments and discipline to the proclamation of the Word, and his insistence that Word and sacrament alone visibly mark the church as church in this world (the church can live without discipline), and his clear comfort exclusively locating responsibility for the preaching of the Word in the church's clerics, we are set up for an easy slide into the idolatry he fears. We find support for this slide in

Calvin's articulation, in *The Institutes*, that Paul teaches in Ephesians 4 that the "human ministry which God uses to govern the church is the chief sinew by which believers are held together in one body."⁵⁰⁵ He goes on to suggest that after Christ's ascension in order to fill all things, the fulfillment Christ promised is carried out

through the ministers to whom he has entrusted this office and has conferred the grace to carry it out, he dispenses and distributes his gifts to the church; and he shows himself as though present by manifesting the power of his Spirit in this his institution, that it be not vain or idle...Whoever, therefore, either is trying to abolish this order of which we speak and this kind of government, or discounts it as not necessary, is striving for the unfolding or rather the ruin and destruction of the church. **For neither the light and heat of the sun, nor food and drink, are so necessary to nourish and sustain the present life as the apostolic and pastoral office is necessary to preserve the church on the earth.**⁵⁰⁶

Though Calvin's understanding of church order identifies ministry in several offices, not just the office of teaching elder/minister of the Word, he is quite explicit here that it is the clerical office that is essential to the church retaining its identity as church. Lest we doubt that he is speaking here of the preaching ministry, the very next point in the *Institutes* is entitled "The Prestige of the Preaching Office in Scripture," and in it he declares "God often commended the dignity of the ministry by all possible marks of approval in order that it might be held among us in highest honor and esteem, even as the most excellent of all things."⁵⁰⁷

Calvin, like other Protestant Reformers, did much to unplug the hyper-clericalism of the medieval church, but the churches that follow in his stead often manifest their own versions of

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid, 4.III.2, 1055

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid, emphasis mine. *Haec autem implendi ratio, quod per ministros, quibus officium hoc mandavit et muneris obeundi gratiam contulit, sua dona dispensat ac distribuit ecclesiae, sequae adeo ipsum praesentem quodammodo exhibet, spiritus sui virtutem in sua hac institutione exserendo... Ecclesiae ergo dissipationem, vel ruinam potius et exitium molitur quisquis ordinem hunc de quo disputamus, et hoc genus regiminis vel abolere studet, vel quasi minus necessarium elevat. Neque enim vel solis lumen ac calor, vel cibus ac potus tam sunt praesenti vitae fovendae ac sustinendae necessaria, quam es conservandae in terres ecclesiae apostolicum ac pastorale munus (Joannis Calvini Opera Selecta, Vol. 5, P. 44, Col. 778)*

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid, 4.III.3, 1055

the same.⁵⁰⁸ Calvin's particular take on the role of preaching in the sanctification of the church, particularly when divorced from robust practices of discipline (as is the case in many contemporary Reformed communions) is, in my estimation, a significant part of the problem. The Reformed tradition stands in need of a more substantial account for the way the entire body bears the forgiving Word to one another and to the world and thereby facilitates growth in holiness.

CONCLUSION

We see in Calvin's portion of the tapestry, then, an even sharper depiction of the problem to which we first attended in Schleiermacher's work. The importance of Schleiermacher's emphases on mutuality in communication, the dominant image that surfaced in his ecclesiology, is now more evident. The Reformed tendency to place too much weight on the clerical office, which stems from our vigorous prioritization of the Word and the proclamation thereof, is now

⁵⁰⁸ Troeltsch, in examining the degree to which Protestantism is responsible for the shift to modernity, in which "Church-Civilisation" is replaced with a civilization that is independent of and even resistant to the church, in his work *Protestantism and Progress* (originally published in 1910), argued that the early Reformers kept the Catholic formulation of the problems to be solved, only changing the responses to those problems. "The genuine early Protestantism of Lutheranism and Calvinism is, as an organic whole, in spite of its anti-Catholic doctrine of salvation, entirely a Church civilisation like that of the Middle Ages" (Ernst Troeltsch, *Protestantism and Progress*, trans. W. Montgomery, B.D. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 44-45. Early Protestantism, in his view, "never surrendered the thought of the Church itself as the supernatural organ of salvation, which brings men redemption and orders their life. It rejects only the *jus divinum* of the hierarchy and the subordination of the civil to the hierarchic power. The divinely appointed preaching office and sacrament, and the miraculous power of producing conversion which is inherent in the word, are now the backbone of the institution" (*Ibid*, 65-66). That which Catholics identified in their *ex opere operato* understanding of the sacraments, was simply transferred to the Bible, and to preaching from the Bible by the early Reformers, as Troeltsch views it. When the church is viewed as organ of salvation, and the primary source for the ordering of the world, whether the vehicle of that salvation are the seven sacraments administered by clerics or the the sacramental word proclaimed from pulpits by clerics, it is easy to place exceedingly great weight on the clergy.

more fully on display.

Calvin's awareness of the frailty of those who preach, his insistence that all the real power that clerics exercise resides in the Word alone, his empowerment of the laity through the structures of jurisdiction he developed all demonstrating that though he certainly had an elevated understanding of the work of the church's ordained clerics, he did not intend an elevation of the clerics themselves; he understood the clerics, like water, bread, and wine, to be merely instruments of Christ's presence. Reformed thinkers consistently insist on the functional rather than ontological character of ordination—and on the persistent, struggle with sin in all members of the church's fellowship, regardless of the roles they fulfill. Following Calvin's lead, Reformed communions have ordained, *lay* offices to underscore the sharing of ministry, the unity of the body, and to weaken the significance of the clerical/lay distinction. We learn from Calvin and other early Reformers to call the church's preachers and sacramental administrators, ministers, and not priests, emphasizing the servant character of the office.

And yet the significance of the work of clerics cannot be understated in Calvin's understanding. And particularly for the matter of ecclesial holiness, the work that they do is *the* essential, daily work that facilitates the sanctification of the body. The proclamation of the Word is the primary vehicle Christ uses for the dispensation of forgiveness. If there were more of a sense that the proclamation of the Word takes many forms, and all the members of the church are preachers, when they faithfully exercise their spiritual gifts for the edification of the body, then there would not necessarily be any tendency towards a clerical emphasis that outweighs all efforts to resist clericalism. But this is not what comes through, in Calvin.⁵⁰⁹ Greater weight is

⁵⁰⁹ I concede, with gratitude to Dawn DeVries for pointing it out, that much of the church in Calvin's day was not literate and there was thus a necessary elevation of clerics to keep the interpretation of the Word alive for the whole body. The pulpit is less tightly fenced in Reformed

placed on those who fulfill the preaching office. As Schleiermacher critiqued, too often the clergy fulfill an active role in ministry, where much of the congregation remains passive. And much of our energy is devoted to fighting about and guarding this particular office. Calvin's emphases highlighted in the second part of this chapter help to account for this tension in contemporary, Reformed, ecclesial existence.

But Calvin shared a concern about clerically-centered constructions of ecclesial holiness and the dominant image that stood out in his ecclesiological teaching was of sanctification progressively unfolding in the communion of the church through participation in the visible church. We saw in Calvin's weaving of the church, that its holiness is an unfolding *process*, centering on the forgiveness of sins. And perhaps even more significantly, this sanctification process, unfolds through participation in the *visible* church. We cannot know, in this life, who is counted among the elect, but Calvin insists that the elect are gathered in Christian community around Word and sacrament, and progress towards the full holiness gifted to them by Christ who indwells thus by regular participation in this fellowship. God accommodates Godself to God's elect through humble, earthly, *visible* means. And everyone in the fellowship, whatever his or her function, is on the way to holiness, and remains dependent on the mercy and forgiveness of God. This picture of progression, of an entire people on the way to holiness, must inform the work of this project.

We see clearly in Calvin's picture, the crimson threads of the foundational character of the forgiveness of sins to ecclesial identity and the identification of God alone as the sole source of forgiveness and sanctification. Both of these threads must be given a central place in the weaving I do today.

communions today, the laity often being invited to preach, for example, in the PC(U.S.A.).

It is not novel to suggest that there is value in considering Calvin's teachings on discipline as we seek a Reformed understanding of the visible holiness of the church. Certainly, as we've seen, he understood the church's engagement of discipline to be the means by which believers are assisted in making progress towards holiness. It seems that it was through the church's disciplinary mechanisms that believers were able to practice repentance and receive an assurance of forgiveness, and that conflicts between believers were mediated so that forgiveness might be extended and peace restored. The heart of Reformed discipline is forgiveness. In Calvin's teachings on discipline, which, when fully understood, is the responsibility and activity of the whole church community, through which the whole church submits to the authority of Christ by submitting to one another holds within it great potential for a shift in emphasis within contemporary Reformed communions- away from the mediation of grace flowing down from the ascended Christ through the proclamation of the church's preachers towards the mediation of grace circulating on earth as believers practice forgiveness.

CHAPTER V

AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO: A CHURCH OF FORGIVING LOVE

INTRODUCTION

We have now arrived at an examination of the oldest contributions to our grand ecclesiological tapestry. Our previous reflections on Calvin's work already sent us looking back to the weaving of Augustine and Cyprian, but now we offer our full attention to Augustine particularly, but also to his earlier North African forebears and opponents. This chapter will explore Augustine's understanding of the holiness of the church as it emerged out of his North African context.

The Donatist controversy, which began before Augustine was even born and persisted long after his consecration as Bishop of Hippo, was largely over questions regarding the holiness of the church *and* the role of the clergy in securing this holiness. Augustine's constructive response to the problem of ecclesial holiness was offered over and against the clerically centered solution of his Donatist opponents. In Augustine's opponents, then, we see a particularly stark representation of the problem we've been tracking throughout the entire dissertation thus far. And in Augustine's constructive solution we see an alternative that assiduously avoids the default to a clerically centered solution to the problem. It is further important to attend to Augustine because the doctrine of the visible/invisible church is often traced to him. As this project is seeking resources for an understanding of *visible* holiness, it will be helpful to consider visibility dimensions in Augustine's own understanding of ecclesial holiness.

I have divided this chapter into two parts. In the first part, I will focus on the problem of

ecclesial holiness that the Donatists perceived and the inadequacy of their episcopocentric solution, according to Augustine. I will demonstrate here that the fourth century Donatist controversy was rooted in third century struggles in the African Church over the possession of sanctifying power, paying particular attention to the teachings of Cyprian, a highly influential source for both the Donatists and Augustine. After having established Augustine's critique of the inadequacy of the Donatist solution to the problem of ecclesial holiness, in part two of the chapter I will explore the constructive solution Augustine offered in response to his opponents, in which he identifies a real sanctifying power in the church as a whole, even while accepting that the church is sinful. I will first argue that Augustine located the holiness of the church in the whole body of the communion of saints, in whom Christ maintains his earthly presence. I will then demonstrate that Augustine identified this holiness as *caritas*-- forgiving love. Augustine's engagement with both Cyprian and the Donatists shaped a christocentric ecclesiology that identified ecclesial holiness in the gift of the Holy Spirit to the true church as a whole, manifest as *caritas*— forgiving love.

PART ONE- THIRD- AND FOURTH-CENTURY STRUGGLES OVER THE HOLINESS OF THE CHURCH— THE DONATIST SOLUTION AND AUGUSTINE'S CRITIQUE

For centuries, North African Christians struggled with the problem of the holiness of the church. For the church to be holy, God must forgive and cleanse the church from sin. This, it was believed, was the gift conferred in Baptism, and, perhaps, in rituals of penance and reconciliation in the case of post-Baptismal sin. But could the church confer forgiveness for serious sin? If so, who was the agent of this forgiveness? These were matters of dispute central to the Donatist schism of the 4th century to which Augustine was responding when he constructed his own understanding of ecclesial holiness. I will first consider third-century North African

understandings of and controversies surrounding the question of the holiness of the church because the ideas at play in that time and place substantially inform both the Donatist construal of ecclesial holiness and Augustine's critique thereof. I will particularly attend to the centrality of the matter of the power of forgiveness to these disputes. With these earlier understandings and controversies in view, I will then attend to the Donatist solution to this problem and Augustine's critique thereof.

*Third Century Understandings of and Controversies Surrounding Ecclesial Holiness*⁵¹⁰

As is well known, prior to the conversion of Constantine in the fourth century, the Christian church throughout the Roman Empire was a minority presence, a fringe group alienated from the traditional cultic practices of the empire. It was certainly the case that, in the third century, Christians in North Africa, and indeed throughout the Roman Empire, were distinguished from other citizens of the empire by their renunciation of pagan practices and their participation in an alternate worshipping community.⁵¹¹ Individuals were integrated into this alternative community through the ritual of Baptism, which they understood to bestow forgiveness for their previous sins and new participation in a holy fellowship.

The church had ritual ways of responding to those who fell into sin after their baptisms.

⁵¹⁰ As will be evident from the citations that follow, my understanding of this era in this region, and disputes around ecclesial holiness therein, is profoundly shaped by the teaching and scholarship of J. Patout Burns. For an excellent summary essay on this topic see J. Patout Burns, "The Holiness of the Church in North African Theology," in *Studia Patristica*, ed. J. Baun, A. Cameron, M. Edwards, and M. Vinzent, (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 49:85-100.

⁵¹¹ J. Patout Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*, London: Routledge, 2002, 13. Burns helpfully notes that though in some respects there was a strict boundary drawn between Church and empire, Christians nonetheless participated in and relied on the Roman economy. He suggests that this economic dependence rendered Christians particularly vulnerable to the challenge of persecution. Economic factors also influenced the experience of persecution. Those of higher class were likely to be targeted in persecution, and those of lower class, while more likely overlooked, if caught were subject to harsher coercion (Ibid, 14).

Such people could be assigned to a marginal status in the community, charged with the exercise of penitential practices. Often such penitents would be positioned in the narthex of worshipping assemblies, in sackcloth and ashes, petitioning the gathered faithful to pray for their forgiveness.⁵¹² They would remain in this position— not in (never approaching the eucharistic table, for example), but not out (always proximate to the worshipping community, and the object of their prayers)— until such time as a bishop, authorized by the whole community, laid on hands and extended reconciliation.

Sometimes such reconciliation would be delayed until the moment of death because the church was uncertain whether, and indeed highly doubtful that, serious sins against God could be forgiven by anyone other than God. Indeed, though there is much talk in the literature of the early church about the church acting as an agent of forgiveness, there was great uncertainty about the extent of the power of forgiveness residing in the church. Deathbed reconciliation presumed that salvation required inclusion in the peace of the church, though few, it seems, believed the peace of the church could guarantee the peace of God.⁵¹³

Tertullian was among at least some North African Christians who did not believe even in deathbed reconciliation for those who had committed serious, post-baptismal sin against God. He distinguishes between remissible and irremissible sins in his treatise *On Modesty*, suggesting that scriptural commands to forgive apply only to horizontal sins— Christians must forgive sins against themselves. But sins against God, Tertullian argued, must be left to God alone to forgive.⁵¹⁴ Tertullian argues that the power of forgiveness is the possession of the truly spiritual members of the church (not necessarily the bishops) and these should not use this power

⁵¹² “They pleaded that the community, in its identification with Christ, would intercede before God for their forgiveness” (Ibid, 25).

⁵¹³ Cyprian’s *Ep. 57* speaks about the practice of deathbed reconciliation.

⁵¹⁴ Tertullian, *de pudicitia*, 2

unwisely; they should allow penitents to take their penance to the grave and allow God to judge.⁵¹⁵

Tertullian offered these teachings in response to an episcopal ruling that adultery could be forgiven by a bishop. Later in the century, the serious sin in view was apostasy, a sin for which God threatens denial of those who commit it (Mt. 10:32-33). Cyprian did not believe the church could forgive a sin that even God might not forgive and initially opposed reconciling apostates to the church. He later came to allow reconciliation (without judging the question of forgiveness) because the sinner needed the support of the church to attempt to reverse the apostasy already committed.⁵¹⁶ Cyprian, in collaboration with fellow bishops, eventually allowed reconciliation even earlier than just before death to penitent apostates.⁵¹⁷ Whether reconciled at death, or before, or not, through the ritual of penance, those whose sin appeared to separate them from the holiness of the community were, for a time, physically distanced from the community and urged to visibly demonstrate their regret and repentance. Tertullian affirms that a power of forgiveness resides in the real spiritual church, though he places limits on the use of this power. Cyprian also emphasizes limits on the church's forgiving power; however, we will later see that he locates that power differently.

⁵¹⁵ Tertullian, *de pud.* 21.7: *Sed habet, inquis, potestatem ecclesia delicta donandi. Hoc ego magis et agnosco et dispono, qui ipsum Paracletum in prophetis nouis habeo dicentem: Potest ecclesia donare delictum, sed non faciam, ne et alia delinquant (CCSL 2:1326.27-31) and de pud., 21.17: . . . Et ideo ecclesia quidem delicta donabit, sed ecclesia spiritus per spiritualem hominem, non ecclesia numerus episcoporum. Domini enim, non famuli est ius et arbitrium; Dei ipsius, non sacerdotis. (CCSL 2:1328.76-79);*” But the Church, you say, has power to forgive sins. I know this better than you do and I regulate it better, because I have the Paraclete Himself saying in the person of the new prophets: ‘The Church can forgive sin, but I will not do it lest others also sin... Therefore it is true that the Church will pardon sins, but this is the Church of the Spirit, through a man who has the Spirit; it is not the Church which consists of a number of bishops. For it is the Lord and not the servant who has this sovereign right. It belongs to God Himself, not to a priest’ (ACW 28:120-122).

⁵¹⁶ Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*, 62

⁵¹⁷ This decision was made by the bishops in 253 (Ibid, 61-62).

Because the church was marked as distinct within the empire surrounding it by its shunning of pagan cultic practices and because it had not been in existence long enough to have an established place therein, it was vulnerable to persecution. The mid-third century was an unstable time for the empire and emperors were concerned about the possibility of insurrection, rebellion, or revolution.⁵¹⁸ Thus, any potentially oppositional groups who required their members to forsake traditional practices that demonstrated loyalty to the empire could be subject to imperial pressure to assimilate. The Decian persecution illustrates that this did, in fact, happen.

In the same year that Cyprian was consecrated as bishop of Carthage, a new Emperor claimed the throne of the Empire. When Decius became emperor in 249, he took several immediate steps to attempt to shore up his power and influence against the instability of the empire. In addition to military exploits, he issued an edict demanding universal participation in sacrifice to the gods of Rome.⁵¹⁹ This was an ancient practice intended to secure divine favor for a particular reign; in the immediate context, Decius might have believed that it would be a means of sifting out those who worshipped in new ways thereby demonstrating their disloyalty to the empire and its rites, and their potential for otherwise disobedient or revolutionary activity.⁵²⁰ While Jews were exempted from these rituals, Christians were not and they were notorious for shunning participation in the rituals. Though it seems unlikely that the edict was targeted at Christians in particular, there is no question that early pressure was applied to members of the Christian hierarchy, perhaps in the hopes that they would lead their people to demonstrate loyalty

⁵¹⁸ G.W. Clarke. "Introduction" to *The Letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage*, Vol. 1, letters 1-27, no. 43 in the series *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, eds. Johannes Quasten, Walter J. Burghardt, and Thomas Comerford Lawler, (New York, NY: Newman Press, 1984), 21-22.

⁵¹⁹ We don't know the precise date nor content of this edict. Clarke suggests late 249 or early 250 as Pope Fabian is the first known victim and he was dead by January 20th, 250 (Ibid, 24-25).

⁵²⁰ Ibid, 23-24

to the emperor by sacrificing at the public altars.⁵²¹

To require that all citizens, (or perhaps all inhabitants),⁵²² offer sacrifice, across a far reaching, increasingly fragmented and provincial empire, was a grand gesture of authority and an administrative nightmare. It took months to roll out its implementation across the empire. It was implemented by local prefects who would establish public altars and issue the call for all to come to those altars to “pour libation, make sacrifice, and taste of the sacrificial victims” in honor of the gods of the empire.⁵²³ Typically the sacrificial meat was provided by the officials, though some demonstrated their exceeding loyalty by bringing their own offering; occasionally incense was an acceptable substitute.⁵²⁴ Upon completion of the sacrifice they were issued *libelli*, certificates attesting to their obedience.⁵²⁵

These orders were particularly problematic for Christians because to obey them was to commit idolatry, and thereby to seriously sin against God, but to disobey them put them in danger of bodily harm or even death, as the swift death of Fabian, bishop of Rome, suggested. Wealthy Christians also faced the risk of loss of property should they disobey. Some of these wealthier Christians opted to bribe officials and obtain certificates without actually sacrificing.⁵²⁶ Other Christians, particularly bishops, became refugees or exiles, Cyprian among them. These

⁵²¹ We know this because the bishops of three of the four major cities in the empire were impacted directly — the bishop of Rome, Fabian, was killed for his failure to obey the edict; Cyprian went into hiding; and the very hour that the edict was ordered for implementation in Alexandria, the bishop of that city was pursued (Ibid, 24-25).

⁵²² Clarke notes that while it is hard to determine who was subject to the edict, it is likely that it was all inhabitants rather than all citizens and bases this on “Cyprian’s perception that the effects of the orders were universally experienced” and corroboration of this impression from most other locales in the empire (Ibid, 28).

⁵²³ Ibid; Clarke places these actions between quotation marks and suggests in note 148 that this is the standard formula in the Egyptian *libelli* and says further, “the writings of Cyprian would have allowed us safely to deduce these actions as basic requirements” (135.)

⁵²⁴ Ibid, 31.

⁵²⁵ Ibid.

⁵²⁶ Ibid, 32

exiles were graciously hidden and provided for by generous Christians.⁵²⁷ But many Christians obeyed the order. Burns suggests that “[b]y the time the deadline for compliance with the edict arrived, a major portion of the laity and some of the clergy had obeyed.”⁵²⁸ There were, however, some Christians who resisted the order and suffered various repercussions, if detected by or reported to authorities. Not many were subject to the death penalty, but many were imprisoned and pressured in various ways, including torture. Some people died in prison.⁵²⁹

Thus, in the aftermath of the Decian persecution several of the church’s leaders were in exile, a significant portion of the laity had lapsed, and some Christians were imprisoned and subject to torture and other forms of coercion. A large number of people in the fellowship had opted to sacrifice to the gods of the empire or otherwise capitulate to the demands of the emperor through dishonest means. The serious sin of apostasy was rife throughout the body raising questions about the identity, stability, and holiness of this community.

In Carthage, the established lines of authority to adjudicate such a circumstance were weakened because their bishop remained in exile. There were presbyters ruling the church in Cyprian’s absence and these presbyters received correspondence from their bishop advising penance for the lapsed and the delay of any decision as to their reconciliation until a substantial representation of the communion of bishops could safely assemble and discern an appropriate response.⁵³⁰ But lapsed Christians, anxious about their salvation, appealed to martyrs/confessors

⁵²⁷ Ibid, 34

⁵²⁸ *Cyprian the Bishop*, 2

⁵²⁹ Clarke, “Introduction”, 35-36.

⁵³⁰ Cyprian, *Epp.*, 30 and 36. Clarke, in his Introduction to Volume 2 of Cyprian’s letters, says of *Ep.* 30 and 36 that “The interim decision they convey is clear and precise—to reconcile only the genuinely, repentant lapsed *in extremis*, and otherwise to await peace and the episcopal elections” (G. W. Clarke, “Introduction” to *The Letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage*, Vol. 2, letters 28-54, no. 44 in the series *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, eds. Johannes Quasten, Walter J. Burghardt, and Thomas Comeford Lawler, (New York, NY:

for forgiveness. And some confessors began writing letters to presbyters on behalf of the lapsed, urging their restoration to the community, promising that the martyrs would secure their forgiveness in heaven by interceding with Christ when they were crowned immediately after their successful confession. Some clerics began acting, on the authority of the promises in the letters from these confessors, to reconcile some of the lapsed to communion without requiring their participation in penance.⁵³¹

Both that people were appealing to martyrs for forgiveness and that some clerics were acting on the recommendation of confessors suggest that some in North Africa believed that the martyrs possessed the power to successfully intercede with God for forgiveness and therefore to guarantee it for others. Writing early in the third century, Tertullian argued against this belief in chapter XXII of his treatise *On Modesty*,⁵³² asserting that the martyrs receive forgiveness at great cost to themselves and that they should not therefore turn around and dole it out freely to others. He believed the martyrs should leave the work of forgiveness to God alone, and that offenders should leave martyrs alone. That Tertullian felt he needed to make this argument is evidence of the precedent for martyrial authority in forgiveness in the North African context.⁵³³ That Cyprian urged the presbyters acting in his stead to delay any action of restoration or reconciliation until a

Newman Press, 1984), 6.) Burns suggests Cyprian advocated for a delay of action regarding the lapsed until the end of the persecution because this was an issue that affected all Christians and required therefore general consultation. “Neither the confessors and martyrs, nor even the bishop, he explained, should presume to decide such a momentous and far-reaching question alone” (*Cyprian the Bishop*, 3).

⁵³¹ Cyprian, *ep.*, 43 and 34

⁵³² *de pudicitia*, CCSL 2:1328-1330.

⁵³³ Frend suggests that reverence for and appeal to martyrs was a common North African practice that came under harsh scrutiny by ecclesiastical authorities in the late third and early fourth century. Systematic investigation (by the ecclesiastical hierarchy) of all who laid claim to martyrdom served to undermine martyrial authority (W.H.C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 142.) These investigations began because some lower class Christians appeared to choose a martyr’s death in order to escape financial debts, raising questions about the virtue of their sacrifice (Ibid, 7).

sufficient council of bishops could assemble suggests that there was a competing belief in the North African Church regarding who bears the power of forgiveness.

The Controversy and Cyprian's Solution

Thus, controversy arose in North Africa. Who has the power to pronounce the forgiveness of sins? Do martyrs? Do bishops? Does the church as a whole? And if serious sinners are reconciled without submitting themselves to the discipline of the church, does this mean that the community and leaders, by ignoring serious sin against God, are participating in the sin of those they reconcile? Does such reconciliation threaten the holiness of the whole community? Different parties answered these questions differently, and this led to divisions in the church. Those who granted authority for forgiveness to the martyrs and allowed reconciliation without penance formed a laxist communion and set up their own bishop of Carthage as rival to Cyprian. Meanwhile, a more rigorist fellowship that initially developed in Rome sent their own bishop to Carthage. This rigorist fellowship, the Novatianists, didn't believe such serious sin could be forgiven on earth at all. Therefore, they believed that reconciliation should never be offered to those who sin in this way. At one point in Cyprian's tenure then, there were three bishops of Carthage, heads of three competing fellowships all claiming to constitute the authentic local church, all answering these questions about forgiveness and holiness differently.

Cyprian fought to preserve and restore both the unity and the purity of the church in the midst of these disturbances. An episcopocentric ecclesiology, meaning one that identified the church in the bishop, or more properly in the communion of bishops, emerged out of this

struggle.⁵³⁴ Against the claim that the martyrs had the power to forgive, Cyprian insisted that, in fact, it is the bishops, acting as elected representatives of the whole church, who possess this power.⁵³⁵ Burns argues that Cyprian first shored up the authority of bishops over against that of the martyrs by asserting Christ's institution of the episcopal office of governance and the divine role in the appointment of bishops.⁵³⁶ Because a bishop is a representative of Christ, in office by God's appointment, to submit to one's bishop is an act of loyalty to Christ and a potential reversal of the disloyalty of apostasy.⁵³⁷ For one to suggest that a letter from a confessor/martyr could exempt one from penitential practice, therefore, represented a further failure to confess one's faith in Christ; such a person was not respecting the authority Christ had invested in the church in its bishops.

Cyprian derived the primary scriptural support for this reading of episcopal authority from Matthew 16:18-19 and John 20:22-23. He interpreted the first of these passages as the appointment of Peter as the first bishop and foundation of the church.⁵³⁸ He saw, in that passage, Christ giving a particular power to Peter, the power to bind and to loose sin, the same power which Christ gives to all the gathered apostles in John 20. This power is passed down from the first communion of bishops to all successive communions. Thus, the power to forgive sins resides in particular people on earth—in the bishops, not in the martyrs.⁵³⁹

⁵³⁴ See especially *ep.*, 33.1.1; 43.5.2; 66.8.3 and his treatise *De Ecclesiae Catholicae Unitate*. All references to Cyprian's letters correspond to the numbering in Clark's translation in the *Ancient Christian Writers* series.

⁵³⁵ *ep.*, 33.1.1

⁵³⁶ *eg. ep.*, 55.8.1; *ep.*, 59.2.2; 5.1-3; *ep.*, 66.1.1; *ep.*, 71.3.2

⁵³⁷ Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*, 82.

⁵³⁸ *eg. ep.*, 33.1.1; *unit.* 4; *cf. ep.*, 43.5.2; *ep.*, 71.3.1; *ep.*, 73.7.1

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, 82-83, Burns finds the earliest citation and explanation of this text in *ep.*, 33.1.1. He also notes that he returns to the same text in his last letter from exile (43.5.2-4) drawing out its implications "the bishop, not the martyr, was authorized by Christ to forgive sins; no sinner could find sanctification and salvation through another source" (*Ibid.*). *Cf. unit.*, 4 and 5; *ep.*,

Cyprian believed then, that the church is built not on individual bishops, but rather on the communion of bishops as a whole. He both taught and demonstrated a deep commitment to collegiality, consistently working to build consensus among bishops and to keep open worldwide lines of communication among bishops.⁵⁴⁰ He did not believe that any one bishop had a place above all others, and believed that councils of bishops gathered from a particular region had primary authority in the churches they governed. It appears that he drafted two different versions of *On Unity*, in the first citing only Matthew 16:18-19, but in the second adding a discussion of John 20:22-23. He argued that Jesus gave the power first to Peter, as a symbol of the oneness and unity of the church, but then again to all the apostles to demonstrate that this is a power held in common.⁵⁴¹

In order for this power to be preserved in the church, the communion of bishops needed to be kept free from known sinners. Because it is a power held in common, it needs to be protected in common. The toleration of serious, known sin in the communion of bishops was a problem not just for the sinful bishop, but for the very identity of the church. Such toleration carried the threat that the Spirit might abandon the church.⁵⁴² Essentially, the communion of bishops needed to be the bearers of the holiness of the church. As such, any bishops who lapsed in the persecution were to be removed from office. If such clerics were readmitted to communion

73.7.2; *ep.*, 75.16.1

⁵⁴⁰ G.W. Clarke, "Introduction" to *The Letters of St. Cyprian*, vol. 3, letters 55-66, no. 46 in the series *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, eds. Johannes Quasten, Walter J. Burghardt, and Thomas Comerford Lawler, New York, NY: Newman Press, 1986, 15, 18, 23. Cyprian's insistence on conciliar settlement of the question of the lapsed is another illustration of this commitment.

⁵⁴¹ This is easy to observe in Bévenot's translation of *On Unity*, which places the two versions of chapters four and five of this document side by side (Cyprian, *De Lapsis* and *De Ecclesiae Catholicae Unitate*, text and trans. Maurice Bévenot, S.J. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971) 62-65.) See Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*, pp. 159-162 for commentary on the revision of these chapters.

⁵⁴² See Cyprian, *ep.* 65

after submitting to penance, they could not be restored to office, but must live out their days among the laity.⁵⁴³ Cyprian believed that knowingly tolerating the ministry of sinful bishops added to the sufferings of persecution,⁵⁴⁴ invited the wrath of God upon the bishops themselves, deprived those who are recipient of the ministry of the power of forgiveness,⁵⁴⁵ and risked the pollution and dissolution of discipline in the community as a whole.⁵⁴⁶

With these teachings, Cyprian suggested that only the communion of bishops needs to be kept free of serious sinners, while at the same time commending to all the lapsed vigorous participation in the church's disciplines of penance. By doing so, he sought to preserve the unity and holiness of the church and show due respect to God. In 253, an African council of bishops, fearful of the potential of resumed persecution, voted to restore all those who had been penitents, fasting in sack cloth and ashes, giving alms, begging the church for its prayers from their position in the narthex, for two whole years.⁵⁴⁷ The bishops judged that this submission to the authority of the bishops, instituted by Christ, particularly in light of the fact that there was now a laxist communion with whom they could have affiliated, reversed their earlier failure to confess Christ. And the bishops believed that the restoration of the penitents to communion would strengthen those restored to be able to confess Christ under the pressures of impending

⁵⁴³ Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*, 141

⁵⁴⁴ Cyprian believed that God had shown him in a vision that all the sufferings of the Church were the result of the unfaithfulness of the Church, particularly manifest in the discord in the community, and an opportunity for its purification (*ep.*, 11.3.1 - 4.7)

⁵⁴⁵ He appealed on more than one occasion to John 9.31 "God does not hear sinners." He believed that participation in sin deprives a bishop of the power to forgive and sanctify (Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*, 142); e.g. *ep.*, 65.2.2.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 143. Many of these arguments about the effect of unworthy bishops come out in letters to Stephen when he is opposing Stephen's act to restore the lapsed Bishops Basilides and Martialis to their offices in Spain (See Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*, 143).

⁵⁴⁷ Cyprian, *ep.* 57; cf. Burns, *Cypran the Bishop*, 8

persecution.⁵⁴⁸ Though the bishops did not know if the restoration of these penitents to communion would guarantee their salvation, they did believe it would grant them a hearing before Christ upon their death.⁵⁴⁹

Cyprian was not convinced that the peace of the church guaranteed the peace of God, but he was certain that lacking the peace of the church excluded one from the peace of God. Therefore, those who willfully rejected the peace of the church by setting up opposing altars or worshipping in schism, even when they did so out of legitimate concern about sin within the church, excluded themselves from the peace of God. In the synod of 256 “[t]he bishops asserted that schism caused an uncleanness as disabling and contagious as that of idolatry.”⁵⁵⁰ Schismatic bishops then, if ever they sought to be restored to the communion of the church needed to be deprived of their office, submit to penance, and, if restored, take their place among the laity. Cyprian further argued that those baptized in schism were not rightfully baptized and thus needed to be re-baptized upon their entry to the Catholic Church.⁵⁵¹ This demonstrates that in his understanding, the power to forgive could not reside outside the fellowship of the one true church—the church centered on the communion of bishops who are the successors of the original apostles.

Thus, Cyprian understood the holiness of the church to depend upon the power of forgiveness residing in a pure communion of bishops. He made explicit the necessity of communion with this episcopocentric church for salvation. Neither the martyrs nor the church as a whole could rightly claim the power to forgive, as this power had been given to Peter and the Apostles and passed down to succeeding generations of bishops. His understanding allowed for

⁵⁴⁸ Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*, 39-41

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 40

⁵⁵⁰ Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*, 146.

⁵⁵¹ This was the judgment of a council of African bishops in 256 (See Burns, 115).

the presence of serious sinners in the communion of the church, but required their exclusion from the communion of bishops. In Cyprian's construction, he is seeking to balance a tension between charity and purity—to maintain the unity of the church while ensuring that the Spirit does not abandon it. This tension was at the root of third century ecclesial divisions. If the laxists privileged charity, the rigorists privileged purity. Cyprian's episcopocentric ecclesiology mediated between these two approaches and sought to preserve both.⁵⁵²

The Donatist's Cyprianic Solution to the Problem of Ecclesial Holiness

Early in the fourth century, another round of persecution began (the Diocletian persecution) in which Christians were pressured to present sacred scriptures for burning. In the midst of this struggle, some bishops definitely lapsed, and others were accused, perhaps falsely, of lapsing. After the persecution concluded, it was very difficult to know with certainty who had or had not obeyed imperial orders and thereby become apostate. With Cyprian's ecclesiology being the operative framework for interpreting the state of the church, the possibility that there were apostate bishops in the communion of bishops was profoundly problematic. For if such bishops were being tolerated by their colleagues, then not only they, but all their colleagues were contaminated and the Holy Spirit and the power to confer the forgiveness of sins might well flee the church altogether.

A schism, which we now call the Donatist schism, developed, and later arguments between the Catholics and the Donatists suggest that a disputed episcopal election played a role in the separation of communions. In particular, the election of Caecilian as bishop of Carthage was disputed on the grounds that a lapsed bishop (Felix of Abthungi) had been among his

⁵⁵² Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*, 167.

consecrators, thereby rendering his consecration invalid.⁵⁵³ His consecrator could not give what he did not have to give and Caecilian, and the other participating bishops, were tainted by their toleration of this man's sin. The rival communion, that came to be known as the Donatists, claimed to be the true church on the basis of the claim that they had no apostates in their communion of bishops. They found strong support in Cyprian's teachings for their insistence on the importance of the communion of bishops being free of apostates.⁵⁵⁴

We are able to ascertain what the Donatists believed primarily from the preserved writings of their chief opponents Optatus of Milevis and Augustine of Hippo,⁵⁵⁵ and thus must take into account the possibility of polemical distortion. That said, on the basis of quotes from

⁵⁵³ See doc. 22 in Jean-Louis Maier, *Le Dossier Du Donatisme: Tome I Des Origines À La Mort De Constance II (303-361)*, (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1987), 171-187.

⁵⁵⁴ Frend offers a fuller account of the early fourth century persecution in North Africa that preceded, and perhaps precipitated, the Donatist schism (*The Donatist Church*, 3-15). In addition to Frend, a slightly earlier account of the history of Donatism can be found in Geoffrey Grimshaw Willis, *Saint Augustine and the Donatist Controversy*, (London: SPCK, 1950), 1-25. Cf. T.D. Barnes, "The Beginnings of Donatism," in *The Journal of Theological Studies* 26 (1975): 13-22. This brief and incisive article on the beginnings of Donatism problematizes some of the assumptions with which Frend and other earlier scholars of Donatism have made about the origins of the schism; it is helpful to consult this article when considering questions about the origin of the schism. I do not wish to take a stand in the controversies about the origins as this is not a dissertation on the Donatist schism itself. Maier has collected the documents of the Donatist controversy in two volumes, offering original language and French translations. The first volume gathers documents pertaining to origins, including the edicts of the Diocletian persecution (see immediately previous cite).

⁵⁵⁵ Optatus of Milevis. *S. Optati Milevitani Libri VII*. Ed. Carolus Ziwza. CSEL 26. (Prague and Vienna: Tempsky; Leipzig: Freytag, 1893); Optatus of Milevis. *Optatus, Against the Donatists*. Trans. M.J. Edwards, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997). Augustine's anti-Donatist corpus is gathered in *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Scripta contra Donatistas*. Ed. M. Petschenig. CSEL 51-53. (Vienna: Tempsky; Leipzig: Freytag, 1908-1910.) Among the documents gathered there *Contra Epistolam Parmeniani*, *De Baptismo contra Donatistas*, *Contra Litteras Petilianii* are particularly valuable. A sermon discovered in the late 20th century by François Dolbeau is also a valuable resource, Dolbeau 26 or *Serm. 198*. (Augustin d'Hippone. *Vingt-six Sermons au Peuple d'Afrique*. Retrouvés à Mayence, édités et commentés par François Dolbeau. Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité 147. (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1996), 366-417; *Sermons: Newly Discovered Sermons*, Vol. III/11 in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (WSA), eds. John E. Rotelle & Boniface Ramsey, Translation and notes by Edmund Hill, O.P. (New Rochelle, New York: New City Press, 1993), 180-237.)

Donatists in correspondence directed to them, and from resources Augustine, in particular, gathered to combat them some things can be affirmed with confidence.

First of all, at least some Donatists rebaptized those who had previously been baptized in the Catholic Church. This reveals their belief that the Holy Spirit had fled the Catholic Church, and that this communion had therefore lost its power to serve as agents of forgiveness, rendering their rituals ineffective. This judgment was based on their assessment of the status of the communion of bishops as asserted above. Cyprian, in the preceding century, had argued fervently, with the solid support of most of his African colleagues that anyone coming to the church who had previously been baptized in schism or heresy had to be rebaptized upon their re-entry because a schismatic or heretic could not possess the power to forgive sins. By practicing rebaptism, they reveal that they believed themselves to be the one true church, with an untainted communion of bishops.⁵⁵⁶

Second, it appears that Donatist teachers understood bishops to be mediators between the people and God. They seem to have understood the office in light of levitical teachings on priesthood which required the purity of the priest making offerings on behalf of the people. An impure/unworthy priest could not expect his sacrifices to be accepted by God and thus could not fulfill his appointed work of mediation.⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁶ *bapt.*, 2.X.15; *cf. c. ep. Parm.*, 2.X.22. In *bapt.*, 4.I.1, 4.VII.10, and 5.XXVII.38 Augustine works with the image of the church as enclosed garden with a pool/fountain within. This image is drawn from the Song of Songs 4:12. Because the visible church has evidently non-regenerate members within its bounds, he rejects the idea that the boundaries of the visible church could possibly be equivalent to the boundaries of the enclosed garden (4.VII.10). If there are evil ones inside why, he asks, can Christ's water not flow outside? The Donatist practice of rebaptism and Augustine's repeated appeal to and refutation of the image of church as enclosed garden suggests that the Donatists may well have operated with an understanding of the visible church as enclosed garden with a saving pool within that needs to be protected.

⁵⁵⁷ "Here the very painful thought occurs to me that I should remind you that Parmenian, who was once a bishop of the Donatists, had the audacity to state in one of his letters that the bishop

Third, in assessing the worthiness of bishops, it appears that Donatists were only concerned about the sin of apostasy. They did not expect their bishops to be perfectly pure or holy, but they did expect them not to be idolaters, nor associated with idolaters, and they believed that in every case this sin was sufficiently public to therefore allow appropriate remedial action.⁵⁵⁸

Fourth, it appears that Parmenian at least, a Donatist bishop in the late fourth century, argued that the Donatists were the true church because they alone possessed the six necessary *dotes* (gifts) “These were 1) the *cathedra*, or authority of the Church; 2) the *angelus* (a rightly consecrated bishop or the guardian angels of the churches like those in Revelation); 3) the *Spirit*; 4) the *fountain* (of true Baptism); 5) the *seal* of the fountain; and finally, 6) the *umbilicus*, the nucleus of worship, a properly consecrated altar.”⁵⁵⁹ Tilley suggests that these *dotes* are communal possessions that secure the holiness of the church regardless of the holiness of any of

is the mediator between the people and God” “*unde mihi uenit in mentem cum magno dolore commemorare ausum fuisse Parmenianum, quondam donatistarum episcopum, in quadam epistula sua ponere episcopum esse mediatorem inter populum et deum.*” *s. Dolb.*, 26.52/ *s.* 198.52 (*Vingt Six Sermons*, 407; *WSA* 3/11, 220). cf. *c. ep. Parm.*, 2.VIII.15-16, XIV.32

⁵⁵⁸ *C. ep. Parm.*, X.16; “The traitors, the *traditores*, were at the heart of their mutual hatreds and fears. The universal conviction was that certain detestable men had betrayed God Himself. In handing over His holy words to earthly officials to be destroyed, they deserved their notorious status as agents of the Devil and of the Antichrist. . . . The act of faithlessness was meditated upon and condemned by dissident Christians. They felt that their enemies were not just personal sectarian foes: they were the betrayers of God’s words, traitors to his divine laws. The acts of betrayal were common currency. They became a creative seedbed, causing a new community to come into existence whose members identified themselves as ‘not them,’ not the traitors. In the eyes of dissident Christians in the age of Augustine, their Catholic enemies were genetically descended from the original collaborators” (Brent D. Shaw, *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 67)

⁵⁵⁹ Tilley, “The Ecclesiologies of Parmenian and Tyconius” in *Studia Patristica*, XXXIII, ed. Elizabeth at Livingstone, Leuven: Peeters, 1997, 263. Tilley constructs this list from Optatus of Milevis’ response to Parmenian. She notes that Optatus argues he recognizes only 5 ecclesial *dotes*, though Parmenian speaks of six.

the individuals therein.⁵⁶⁰

Though the Donatists exhibited a lesser concern for the preservation of unity than did Cyprian, their understanding of the holiness of the church is profoundly Cyprianic. They too see the power of forgiveness residing in the communion of bishops, and preserving the purity of this communion as essential to the preservation of holiness of the Church. Even if in their later self-understanding they shifted to an argument about the possession of *dotes*, rather than of pure bishops, there is still a heavily episcopocentric character to the *dotes* they identify. And they certainly seem to ground their claim to exclusive possession of the *dotes* on the basis of the corrupted Catholic communion of bishops.

The main purpose of Augustine's anti-Donatist treatise *On Baptism* is the demonstration that Cyprian's authority harms and undermines the Donatists rather than helping them as they presume.⁵⁶¹ That Augustine devotes an entire, lengthy treatise to an engagement of Cyprian's authority reveals how crucial the latter's theology was for this particular division in the church. The schism, in fact, seems to be straight down the center of the tension that Cyprian was trying to balance in his work- the tension between charity and purity. Donatists and Catholics both built arguments on the heritage of Cyprian, "the one appealing to universal unity and being charged with contamination by idolatry; the other claiming purity and being charged with schism."⁵⁶²

Augustine's Critique of the Donatist Solution

Thus, the Donatists believed their church to be pure and the exclusive mediator of sanctifying, forgiving grace because they believed the Catholic communion of bishops was

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁶¹ *bapt.*, 1.1.1

⁵⁶² Burns, 167

tainted by the serious sin of idolatry which caused this church to lose the *notes* that make the church the church. Further, they appear to have believed that their communion of bishops was free of apostates, thereby securing their identity as true church and their capacity to serve as mediators of forgiveness. The Donatist church persisted in North Africa for over a century. By the time Augustine was consecrated as Catholic bishop of Hippo in the late fourth century it was an established parallel church to the Catholic communion. Augustine balked at the Donatist claim to true ecclesiality over and against his own fellowship and mounted a severe critique of Donatist ecclesiology. His own ecclesiology, and particularly his understanding of the holiness of the church, emerged from this struggle with the Donatists. We will first consider his critique of the Donatists and then, in part two, his constructive work on the holiness of the church.

Three elements of his critique will be considered in this section. First, Augustine rejected the Donatists' narrow focus on the sin of apostasy. Drawing on other passages of scripture and other emphases in Cyprian's teaching, he suggests that division and other sins against charity can also deprive a person of the Spirit. Second, Augustine rejected the notion that the purity of the clergy could ever be a guarantee of the holiness of the church and the power to forgive sin. Third, he argued that unity and the charity it expresses are a more important sign of the holiness of the church than is avoidance of all contact with betrayal. Each of these points of critique will be considered in turn.

First it must be acknowledged that Augustine and the Donatists appear to be operating with fundamentally different understandings of sin. The Donatists focused on flagrant, open participation in idolatrous action. If there were any grounds for suspicion that one had fallen into the sin of apostasy under the pressures of persecution, the Donatists believed it necessary that such suspected parties be removed from positions of power and influence in the church. If, in the

presence of such suspicion, one were not removed from office, then those who failed to remove them and continued to collaborate with them would be tainted by their sin. Perhaps the Donatists believed other sin could escape notice, but they were confident that the disqualifying sin of apostasy would make itself known and that the leadership of the church was accountable to rid itself of the influence of all apostates.

Augustine could not understand the Donatists' narrow definition of moral purity to an avoidance of idolatry and idolaters. He found in Paul catalogues of vices that included far more than idolatry.⁵⁶³ Augustine seemed to grant that one could make a case for sin compromising one's ability to effectively fulfill the duties of priesthood on the basis of a certain reading of Leviticus, but he protested the way in which Donatists would make distinctions between blemishes, when the Levitical account of priesthood says that no one with *any* stain or blemish shall approach the altar.⁵⁶⁴ Augustine further appealed to Cyprian to suggest that sins against charity/failures in unity were capable of depriving a person of the Spirit. He found in Cyprian a concern for failures in charity (schism) that nearly exceeded his concern about failures in belief (idolatry). Augustine suggests that Cyprian tolerated, for the sake of charity, people whom the Donatists did not tolerate.⁵⁶⁵ If such toleration is contaminating, then Cyprian himself was contaminated and therefore they have no more claim to the power to forgive than do the Catholics (because the African church had already failed in Cyprian's time and with his consent).⁵⁶⁶ And the Donatists are worse off than the Catholics because not only can they not be certain about the purity of their origins, but they are living in open violation of charity, a sin

⁵⁶³ *c. ep. Parm.*, 1.X.16

⁵⁶⁴ *c. ep. Parm.*, 2.VII.13

⁵⁶⁵ e.g. *bapt.*, 2.Vi.9

⁵⁶⁶ He makes this argument repeatedly throughout the treatise. See e.g. Book 2.IV.9, VI.9, Book 3.II.3

decried in scripture *and* by their beloved Cyprian. Thus, a chief plank in Augustine’s critique of the Donatists is a broader understanding of what counts as disabling sin, failures in charity being emphasized alongside apostasy.

Augustine insisted that the whole church, leaders and people together, is a mixed fellowship— inclusive of both the elect and the non-elect. He found within the pages of scripture evidence that Christ intends the church to be a mixed body all throughout its earthly sojourn; he most frequently appealed to the parable of the wheat and the chaff to illustrate this understanding.⁵⁶⁷ To the scriptural image of wheat and chaff he adds numerous other scriptural arguments. For example, just as scripture testifies repeatedly to the good and the bad/the elect and the non-elect being born from the same womb, so too does the church as mother⁵⁶⁸ birth diverse offspring.⁵⁶⁹ And lest it be believed that such diversity should only be present in the membership and that the clergy should be entirely representative of the good/elect/wheat, Augustine points to the great diversity of the priests in scripture. “Where Caiaphas and others of such kind were, there was Zacharias, there was Simeon and the other good ones; where Saul, there David; where Jeremiah, where Isaiah, where Daniel, where Ezekial, there were bad priests and bad people. But each one bears his own load.”⁵⁷⁰

The Donatists appear to have been fond of citing Paul in Romans 1:32 to justify their withdrawal not only from those who commit sin, but those who consent to the doing of sin. In contrast, Augustine suggests that simply being in the church with sinners is not to consent to their sin; if it were, then Paul himself was in danger because he stayed in fellowship in order to

⁵⁶⁷ e.g. *c. ep. Parm.*, 1.XIV.21; 2.II.5; 2.X.22; 3.II.11; *bapt.*, 1.IV.5; 1.XVII.26

⁵⁶⁸ a key Cyprianic image

⁵⁶⁹ e.g. *bapt.*, 1.X.14; 1.XVI.25

⁵⁷⁰ “*ubi erat caiphaz et ceteri tales, ibi zacharias, ibi simeon et ceteri boni; ubi saul, ibi dauid; ubi hieremias, ubi esaias, ubi daniel, ubi ezechiel, ibi sacerdotes mali et populi mali; sed sarcinam suam unusquisque portabat*” *c. ep. Parm.* 2.VII.12 (CSEL 51.57:19-22).

issue warnings needed for correction.⁵⁷¹

These arguments about the necessarily mixed character of the church reflect another area of distinction between Augustine and the Donatists in their understandings of sin. Not only was Augustine's understanding of sin broader than that of the Donatists, but Augustine also differed as to the perceptibility of sin. Augustine understood sin to be rooted in intention, operating in human lives in a way that is not always perceptible to others.⁵⁷² He balked at the presumptuousness of Donatist sorting, separating weeds from wheat, on the basis of the idea that weeds clearly reveal themselves to be weeds in this life. Against this presumption, he cites Mt. 13:30 which suggests that Christ wills that weeds and wheat grow together until the harvest.⁵⁷³ Appearances are often deceiving, angels of darkness clothed as angels of light. Because God alone is truth and "every human being is deceitful",⁵⁷⁴ the words of Christ need to be valued over those of any human being and Christ has commanded that the separation of the wheat from the chaff be delayed and left to him.⁵⁷⁵

Augustine diagnosed hidden sin as the chief problem with the Donatist's episcopocentric solution to the problem of the holiness of the church. The Donatists themselves discovered sinners hidden amongst their communion of bishops and expelled them, but only after they had long been serving within their midst. It is probable, Augustine suggests, that there are still sinners hidden amongst them. If the Holy Spirit flees hypocrites and sinners and if these are mixed into the fellowship, and indeed into the leadership, as experience suggests they always are, then the Donatists can never be confident in the efficacy of their rituals and the validity of

⁵⁷¹ *c. ep. Parm.*, 1.II.3.

⁵⁷² *eg. c. litt. Pet.*, 1.3.4

⁵⁷³ *c. ep. Parm.* 1 XIV.21

⁵⁷⁴ "*omnis autem homo mendax* [Rm 3,4]" *c. ep. Parm.*, 2.II.5, (CSEL 51, 48:4-5)

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

their church.⁵⁷⁶ So long as the Donatists continue to insist that human beings are the givers of that which is given in Baptism, Augustine suggests they will have an unstable foundation for the church.⁵⁷⁷ “What man can feel secure about a man...?” he asks the Donatist Petilian.⁵⁷⁸ Basing the validity of baptism solely on the status of its giver renders all Baptism uncertain, and evacuates hope from the sacrament.⁵⁷⁹ We see this concern about the evacuation of hope in the particular offense Augustine takes at the Donatist understanding of bishops as mediators. If all human beings are untrustworthy, as all are engaged in a struggle with sin, then it is problematic to make any human being the mediator between God and humanity.⁵⁸⁰ A pure communion of bishops can never be held up as the guarantee of the holiness of the church and the preservation of the power to forgive sin within the church.

If hidden sin is the primary flaw Augustine identifies in the Donatist episcopocentric solution to the question of ecclesial holiness, he identifies Donatist failures in charity as the sure sign that they are not the true and holy church. Augustine, with Paul, declares that charity is the only gift that matters. Though it appears the Donatists laid claim to a great many *notes*, they evidently lacked the *dos* of charity because they cast judgment on people they had not even met, and broke from the unity of the universal catholic church spread throughout the world. He makes this argument in his treatise on Baptism, echoing the Pauline poetry of 1 Corinthians 13, all the important things the Donatists have are useless to them in the absence of charity. All the faithful acts committed by the Donatists, because they are committed outside the bonds of loving fellowship with other confessing Christians, mean nothing, and cannot bear the fruit of

⁵⁷⁶ *c. ep. Parm.*, 2.X.21; *c. litt. Pet.* 1.2 and 1.2.3; 2.33.78

⁵⁷⁷ *c. ep. Parm.*, 2.XV.33

⁵⁷⁸ “*quis enim homo de homine securus sit,*” *c. litt. Pet.* 2.5.11 (CSEL 52,25/22-23; *NPNF* 1-4,1020).

⁵⁷⁹ *c. litt. Pet.*, 1.4.5

⁵⁸⁰ e.g. *c. ep. Parm.*, 2.VII.13, 2.XIV.32, *S. Dolb.*, 26.49, 52

salvation.⁵⁸¹ The only thing the Donatists lack is charity.⁵⁸² They have Baptism. They have the scriptures. They have many of the disciplines and practices of Christian faith. But they do not have charity and this exposes the falsity of their claims to be church. And it is for this reason that Augustine argues, as we will consider below, that one can be truly baptized by them, but one can only receive the benefits of baptism if one enters by charity into the unity of the one church.⁵⁸³ The preservation of unity is an expression of charity and it is, in Augustine's mind, a more important sign of ecclesial holiness than an avoidance of all contact with betrayal.

Augustine's critique of the Donatists makes plain that an alternate guarantee of ecclesial holiness and the preservation of the gift of the Spirit, other than a communion of bishops that is free of contamination by apostasy, is needed. His work with Cyprian, and his response to the reality of a divided church, led him to focus on charity as that gift which marks the church as holy in this world.

Interim Conclusion

I have thus far argued that in the third and fourth century North African church there were conflicting understandings of that which secures the holiness of the church. In particular, the location of the earthly power of forgiveness was a matter of dispute. Cyprian worked to secure the unity and holiness of the church by the preservation of a certain level of purity in the communion of bishops. He was particularly concerned that apostates not participate in the communion of bishops, but he was equally concerned that schismatics not be included in this communion either. The Donatists picked up Cyprian's insistence on an episcopate free of

⁵⁸¹ *bapt.*, 1.IX.11.

⁵⁸² *bapt.*, 1.XIV.22

⁵⁸³ e.g. *bapt.*, 1.XIII.21; *bapt.*, 5.XVIII.24

apostasy. Augustine focused on Cyprian's insistence on and demonstration of the maintenance of charity and unity. We will turn our attention shortly to Augustine's charity-centric construal of ecclesial holiness, but it will be helpful to keep in mind the key arguments advanced about Augustine's critique of the Donatists. First, he insisted that apostasy is not the only disabling sin, deriving from scripture and Cyprian's teaching and practice that sins against charity are equivalently disabling. Second, Augustine exposes the instability of the making the purity of the clergy the basis for the holiness of the church and the preservation of the power to forgive sin. No human being, nor community of human beings, could guarantee the preservation of these gifts. Finally, Augustine insists that unity, and the charity it expresses, is a better sign of ecclesial holiness than is the avoidance of all contact with betrayal—a highly difficult task given the frequently hidden character of sin. Thus, Augustine argues that a different foundation for ecclesial holiness and the power of forgiveness must be identified. It is thus far evident that he explicitly rejects a clerically based solution to the problem of ecclesial holiness. We turn our attention now to his christocentric (rather than episcopocentric) charity based construction of ecclesial holiness, which emerged directly out of the crucible of these North African controversies and divisions.

PART TWO- AUGUSTINE'S CHRISTOLOGICAL SECURING OF THE HOLINESS OF THE CHURCH

Augustine's constructive position on the holiness of the church emerged from his struggle against the Donatists. With the background of the third and fourth century North African struggles over ecclesial holiness and the power of forgiveness in view, and in particular with the Donatists' clerically-centered solution and Augustine's critique thereof freshly in mind, we are

prepared to consider his thoroughly Christological solution to the problem at hand. We will likely be more able to perceive the ways in which his solution resists clericalism having the Donatist alternative, significantly informed by aspects of Cyprian's ecclesiology, in mind. Augustine secures the holiness of the church not through a holy class of people, some truly sinless humans mediating between God and the people, but through Jesus Christ, present and active in the church via His Holy Spirit, manifest chiefly as the power of forgiveness/the gift of charity. In this second part of the chapter, I will present this constructive position, first demonstrating the ecclesial dimensions of Augustine's christology through an exploration of his understanding of the church as the social body of Christ. I will then demonstrate Augustine's understanding of the power of forgiveness/the gift of charity as the mark of the true church, drawing out some of the implications of this assertion.

Christ's Presence on Earth in His Social Body

For Augustine grew gradually to perceive 'Christ' as a multidimensional reality. The 'person' of Jesus Christ referred not only to the man of Nazareth rendered by the Gospels; being intimately tied to his mission of bringing God's saving love to the world, by definition his 'person' included the community he saved, his body, the Church.⁵⁸⁴

So declares Michael Cameron in his exploration of the development of Augustine's figurative reading of Scripture. Augustine is able to make an unqualified affirmation of the holiness of the church because of the intimate union he perceives between Christ and church. As the body of Christ, surely the church is holy.

Augustine arrived at this understanding of the intimate union between Christ and church

⁵⁸⁴ Michael Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere: Augustine's Early Figurative Exegesis*. Oxford: Oxford University press, 2012, 97

through his careful, simultaneous study of Paul and the Psalms.⁵⁸⁵ Applying the ancient rhetorical tool of *Prosopopeia*, he found multiple voices speaking throughout the Scriptures, and particularly in the Psalter.⁵⁸⁶ While, on the one hand, he acknowledged a human author of the Psalms—the prophet—on the other hand, he understood Christ to be the true speaker in all of Scripture. And the Christ he heard speaking is multidimensional/speaks in multiple voices. He states this interpretive principle plainly in his second exposition of Psalm 30, a sermon on this Psalm:

Christ is speaking here in the prophet; no, I would dare to go further and say simply, Christ is speaking. He is going to say certain things in this psalm that we might think inappropriate to Christ, to the excellent dignity of our Head, and especially to the Word who was God with God in the beginning. Some of the things here may not even seem suitable for him in the form of a servant, that form which he took from the Virgin; and yet it is Christ who is speaking because **in the members of Christ there is Christ**. I want you to understand that **Head and body together are called one Christ**...Let Christ speak, then, because **in Christ the Church speaks**, and **in the Church Christ speaks**, and the body speaks in the head, and the Head in the body.⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸⁵ Cameron suggests that after his ordination to the priesthood, Augustine worked to shift his rhetoric and teaching to be more appropriate to the simpler outlook of his congregation in Hippo (whereas his earlier Christian writings were aimed at those advanced in faith). In order to prepare himself for effective communication of the faith to “the Church’s ‘little ones’... he immersed himself in the Bible’s central texts: Genesis, the Sermon on the Mount, the Psalms, and above all the Letters of Paul” (Ibid, 9; cf. 167). Cameron proposes that this scriptural study resulted in a shift in Augustine’s christology: “It taught Augustine a fresh understanding of redemption accomplished by the ‘one Mediator between God and men, *the man* Christ Jesus” (ibid). One influence in the midst of this process of scriptural study was the exegetical guide prepared by the Donatist Tyconius. Cameron helpfully notes that while Tyconius was one source through which he filtered his reading of scripture, he rarely directly appropriated ideas from any of his sources (see notes in discussion on p. 19). “Tyconius... spoke of the bipartite body of the Lord in order to distinguish the voices of the Lord and his body in Scripture. But Augustine went beyond them all by driving down to the underlying unity of head and body and to the implied reciprocity between them” (Ibid, 207).

⁵⁸⁶ Cameron defines *prospological* exegesis as a “work of literary analysis that identifies the various speaking voices in a poetic text. The speaking person, *prosopon* in Greek (lit. ‘face,’ which Latin writers often translated as *persona*, ‘person’), has to be identified because texts were transcribed without cues, line breaks, punctuation, or even spaces between letters” (Ibid, 171)

⁵⁸⁷ “*Loquitur hic ergo christus in propheta; audeo dicere: christus loquitur. dicturus est quaedam in hoc psalmo, quae quasi christo uideantur non posse congruere, illi excellentiae capitis nostri,*

So when Augustine read the Psalms, sometimes he heard Christ speaking as the Word, sometimes as the incarnate, suffering Jesus, sometimes as his community the church, and sometimes as individual believers. The subject of the Psalms then is the whole Christ, the *totus Christus*.⁵⁸⁸ And the interpreter must listen for all the many layers of Christ's voice in any given Psalm.

Augustine strove to help his congregation understand the fundamental unity of Christ and church, head and body, through Christ's teachings on marriage in the Gospel of Matthew, the becoming of one flesh from two. Paul interpreted these words of Jesus in reference to the relation between Christ and church and Augustine follows suit. Christ is both Bridegroom and bride, two in one flesh, and in one voice.⁵⁸⁹

Augustine also found support for the understanding of the unity of Christ and church in the Acts narrative of Paul's conversion, read in light of the Pauline metaphor of the body of Christ. In his preaching he repeatedly suggests the unity of head and body is evident in the voice Saul hears from heaven, "Saul, Saul why are you persecuting *me*?" Augustine suggests that just as one's tongue cries out "Why are you trampling *me*?" when one's foot is stepped on, so too does the church's head speak for His trampled feet, his persecuted followers, on earth. Christ and church are, Augustine declares, a structural unity.⁵⁹⁰

Augustine boldly declares that "Without him, we are nothing, but in him **we too are**

maxime que illi uerbo quod in principio erat deus apud deum; nec ei in forma serui fortasse uidebuntur quaedam hic uerba congruere, quam formam serui suscepit ex uirgine; et tamen christus loquitur, quia in membris christi christus. et ut noueritis, quia unus dicitur christus caput et corpus suum... loquatur ergo christus, quia in christo loquitur ecclesia, et in ecclesia loquitur christus; et corpus in capite, et caput in corpore." *En. Ps.*, 30/2.1.4 (CCL 38:193/1-9; 21-23; WSA III/15, 324), emphasis mine.

⁵⁸⁸ A phrase that Cameron notes Augustine uses for the first time in his interpretation of Psalm 17 (*Christ Meets Me Everywhere*, 204-205).

⁵⁸⁹ e.g. *en. Ps.*, 30/2.4; 142.3; *ep. Io. tr.*, 1.2; *ep. Io. tr.*, 2.2

⁵⁹⁰ *ep. Io. tr.*, 10.8; cf. *En. Ps.*, 30/2.3; 140.3; 142.3

Christ.⁵⁹¹ But who is the “we”? We already noted above that he challenged the Donatist solution to the problem of the holiness of the church by arguing the necessarily mixed character of the communion of the church. He acknowledged the presence of the unconverted in the communion of the church, participating in sacraments, though not to their benefit. Only the converted in the visible church are one with Christ, and as the gift of the Holy Spirit effects the conversion, and the Holy Spirit resides in the heart one can never be certain about the status of anyone else in the communion of the church. One can only know one’s own heart. And even those who are converted will find sin upon an examination of their own heart. We see this in the first clause of the quote at the start of this paragraph, “Without him, we are nothing.” During the earthly sojourn of the church, the unity between Christ and church is predominately dependent on the work of Christ. Augustine suggests that in the eschaton God will raise up the body to at last be fully united with the head.⁵⁹² In the meantime, the true church is a people on the way, ever dependent on the mercy and grace of God.⁵⁹³

While the mixed character of the fellowship may somewhat challenge an identification of the “We,” Augustine certainly did not believe the “We” identified the church’s leadership; this was apparent in his rejection of the Donatist solution. It comes through especially in his teachings regarding Christ’s work as mediator. In part one, I noted Augustine’s adamant rejection of the notion that he found in Donatist writings of bishops as mediators. Christ is the one true mediator, and, indeed, the one true priest. Christ effected mediation through the descent of incarnation, which facilitates the ascent of humanity. “That one mediator is true, who never

⁵⁹¹ *nam sine illo, nos nihil; in illo autem, ipse christus et nos. en. 2 Ps., 30.2.3 (CCL 38:192/20-21; WSA III/15, 322), emphasis mine*

⁵⁹² e.g. *en. Ps., 29.2.14*

⁵⁹³ A church on the way or in progress is the key image of the church’s holiness that emerged from Calvin’s teaching. This progressive understanding of ecclesial holiness evidently has Augustinian roots.

lies, who even when he is equal to the Father, yet wanted to be the least on account of us, not losing what is equal, but taking up what is least. Now, too, he freed our flesh in his own flesh.”⁵⁹⁴ Christ is the one true priest. Augustine labels him the “sole high priest/*pontifex*” and “the sole priest/*sacerdos*,” prefigured by the ancient priests.⁵⁹⁵ Christ is the anointed one; as kings and priests were anointed of old, he bears the priestly and the kingly in his own flesh.⁵⁹⁶ As the priests of old entered the holy of holies to make sacrifice and pray on behalf of the people, Christ alone has entered the true holy of holies by his perfect sacrifice and now all the bishops with the people stand outside groaning, while Christ intercedes for us in heaven.⁵⁹⁷

Augustine, then, saw bishops and people standing together. All human beings are relativized, in the same position in relation to Christ. Bishops, he argues, are overseers rather than priests; they are called priests only because of their governing function.⁵⁹⁸ The whole church is a priestly people.⁵⁹⁹ To claim to be a mediator between God and the people then is, Augustine declared, to audaciously claim to be a mediator between God and his own body.⁶⁰⁰ “We, however, in the name of Christ, even if not with you we are in charge of the churches, yet with you we are members of the body of Christ: we have one head, not many” and though in the past only the priest and king were anointed, now all true Christians are anointed.”⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁴ “*ille unus mediator uerus est, qui neminem fallit, qui etiam cum sit patri aequalis, etiam minor illo propter nos esse uoluit, non amittendo quod aequale est, sed suscipiendo quod minus est. iam liberauit etiam carnem nostram in carne sua.*” *s. Dolb.*, 26.49 (*Vingt Six Sermons*, 404/195-198)

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*; cf. *c. ep. Parm.*, 2.VIII.16

⁵⁹⁶ *s. Dolb.*, 26.50

⁵⁹⁷ *c. ep. Parm* 2.VII.14; *s. Dolb.*, 26, 53; *c. litt. Pet.*, 2.106.241

⁵⁹⁸ *s. Dolb.*, 26.49, 53

⁵⁹⁹ *s. Dolb.*, 26.49

⁶⁰⁰ *S. Dolb.*, 26.52

⁶⁰¹ “*Nos autem in nomine Christi, etsi non uobiscum sumus praepositi ecclesiarum, uobiscum tamen sumus membra corporis Christi.*” *s. Dolb.*, 26.53 (*Vingt Six Sermons*, 408/1287-1289); cf. par. 51 and 52 as well; the universal anointing is found in the sacrament of Baptism. Similar

The relativization of all humans is particularly clear in his discussion of Baptism, so central to the Donatist controversy. Christ as the true interceding priest and mediator is also the baptizer. This is why the baptism of those baptized in schism or heresy can be recognized as valid. Whenever a baptism is performed in his name, it is he who baptizes.⁶⁰² Augustine suggests that when we correct heretics it is not so that we can recognize in them that which belongs to *them*, but that in them which belongs to *Christ*. Though the Donatists, with Cyprian, suggest that the true church is an enclosed garden with a holy pool of water within, Augustine suggests that the water streams out of the enclosed garden, and though not efficacious outside the true community, is still the water of Christ and can be received as such.⁶⁰³ People do not lose either the mark of their baptism by which they are dedicated to Christ, nor the ability to administer baptism when they depart from the unity of the church, but, Augustine says, “Certainly they have both [baptism and ordination] to their destruction as long as they do not keep charity in unity. Yet however it is one thing not to have it, another to have it for destruction, another to have it for salvation.”⁶⁰⁴ Human agents of baptism are themselves progressively working out their salvation, wholly dependent on the grace of God; they cannot cleanse when they themselves are awaiting

statements are made in *Civ. Dei*. XX.10

⁶⁰² *bapt.*, 3.IV.6

⁶⁰³ *bapt.*, 4.1.1

⁶⁰⁴ “*utrumque quidem ad perniciem suam, quamdiu caritatem non habent unitatis. Sed tamen aliud est non habere, aliud perniciose habere, aliud salubriter habere.*” *c.ep. Parm.*, 2.XIII.28 (CSEL 51:79/26 and 80/1) For a lucid discussion of Augustine’s theology of baptism, see Robin M. Jensen et.al., *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 214-218. As these authors suggest, Augustine draws a distinction “between the ritual and the two realities it confers: dedication to Christ and sanctification of the baptized” (215). If baptized illegitimately, outside the charity of the church, either in schism or in hypocrisy within the church, one is dedicated to Christ, but one can only receive the sanctifying power of Baptism if one is genuinely bound to Christ and Christ’s church in charity. Both those baptized in schism and those baptized hypocritically within the Catholic Church could be restored, without a new baptism, to unity with the Catholic Church because the dedication endures even if the sanctification has not previously taken effect (see p. 216 especially).

full cleansing and healing.⁶⁰⁵ It doesn't matter how bad or good the person who confers baptism is, because Christ is the true baptizer.⁶⁰⁶

All this said, as we've already seen, Augustine understands the **whole, true church** to be the earthly body of Christ—the one priest, mediator, baptizer. I noted above Augustine's emphasis on the universal anointing of true Christians. He sees the church as a priestly body, appealing to 1 Peter in support of this claim.⁶⁰⁷ But in widening the focus from a subsection of the earthly church (its leadership/episcopate) to the whole true fellowship, his work with three other scriptural passages is particularly crucial. These passages are John 20:21-23, Matthew 16:15-19, and Matthew 18:15-18.

Whereas Cyprian read John 20:21-23 as the story of Jesus breathing the Holy Spirit on the gathered *Apostles*, Augustine stressed that the text says Jesus breathed the spirit on all the gathered *disciples*, informing them that if they forgive a person's sins, they are forgiven, and if they hold them, they are held. Augustine suggests that the Donatists appeal to this passage in support of the claim that human beings perform the work of forgiveness.⁶⁰⁸ But Augustine argues that that passage makes it plain that it is the Holy Spirit working through human beings who performs the work of forgiveness. If a minister of the church is truly a member of the church, he will have received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and hence "...the Spirit works his mercy through him and the person is consecrated or evangelized for eternal salvation and their regeneration or edification. But if he is insincere... indeed, the person would be lacking salvation and the Spirit would withdraw from his thoughts which are bereft of understanding. Yet, the Spirit does not

⁶⁰⁵ *c. ep. Parm.*, 2.XV.33

⁶⁰⁶ *bapt.*, 6.II.4

⁶⁰⁷ *Eg. s. Dolb.*, 26.49, *Civ. Dei.*, XVII.5, XX.10

⁶⁰⁸ *c. ep. Parm.*, 2.XI.24

forsake his ministry, by which he works salvation of others through him.”⁶⁰⁹ Augustine grants that the Holy Spirit abandons hypocrites, but the Holy Spirit never abandons the ministry of reconciliation—it is so that the Holy Spirit can work in and through people in whom the Holy Spirit does not abide.

With the reference to John 20, we are reminded that Cyprian combined an appeal to John 20 to an appeal to Matt 16:19 to argue that Peter and the Apostles were the first bishop and communion of bishops, who received the Holy Spirit in order to further Christ’s work on earth. In both Mt. 16 and John 20, mention is made of what came to be known as the power of the keys, the power of binding and loosing. Augustine, however, noted that this same power is mentioned in Matthew 18:15-18 and there it is clear that it is a power that resides in the church as a whole. Therefore, he suggests that Matthew 18 is the interpretive key to the other two passages and interprets Peter as a symbol of the whole church.⁶¹⁰

This identification of Peter as a symbol of the church is a recurrent theme in Augustine’s preaching. One of the clearest demonstrations of it is found in Serm. 295.2. There he suggests that when scripture, in Mt. 16, speaks of Peter being given the keys this represents the universality and unity of the church, for John 20 and Mt. 18 make it clear that the whole church was given the keys.⁶¹¹ He also makes the point that the church is built on Peter’s confession, not on Peter as a person. The whole church joins Peter in making the confession of Jesus as Christ

⁶⁰⁹ “...operetur per eum spiritus et eius mercedem in salutem sempiternam et eorum regenerationem uel aedificationem, qui per eum siue consecrantur siue euangelizantur, si autem fictus est...desit quidem saluti eius et auferat se a cogitationibus eius quae sunt sine intellectu, ministerium tamen eius non deserat, quo per eum salutem operatur aliorum.” *c. ep. Parm.*, 2.XI.24 (CSEL 51:74/10-17)

⁶¹⁰ His reading of John 20 as speaking of all the disciples receiving the Spirit also supports this whole church interpretation over against Cyprian’s episcopocentric interpretation.

⁶¹¹ Cf. *s.*, 149.7; 270.2; 229.1; *en. Ps.*, 93.2; *en. Ps.*, 108.1.

and Lord.⁶¹² “What else was Peter doing but standing for the Church? So when the Lord was questioning Peter, he was questioning us, he was questioning the Church... I make bold to say, we too have these keys. And what am I to say? That it is only we who bind, only we who loose? No, you also bind, you also loose.”⁶¹³

Augustine’s doctrine of the *totus Christus*, which saw church and Christ as a structural unity, opened up a christological solution to the problem of ecclesial holiness. Those in the church, who have truly been converted through the gift of the Holy Spirit, really are the body of Christ, progressively maturing toward perfect unity with their Head. This understanding of the church as the social body of Christ allowed for an acknowledgment of the thoroughly mixed character of the church communion, a relativization of all members of the body, and an acknowledgement of the dependence of the body on the head. That said, Augustine is quite clear that holiness *does* reside on earth in the hearts of those who are truly converted. And this holiness is none other than the power to bind and loose, the power to forgive— a power that is the possession of the whole, true church.

The Power of Forgiveness/The Gift of Caritas as the Mark of the True Church

And, in fact, this power to bind and loose, which Augustine takes to be the power of forgiveness, is the gift of *caritas* (charity), which he identifies as the mark of the true church.

The Holy Spirit who indwells all true Christians is equivalent, in Augustine’s mind, to this gift of

⁶¹² eg. s., 270.2

⁶¹³ “*nam quid aliud ipse Petrus quam figuram gerebat ecclesiae? dominus ergo quando Petrum interrogabat, nos interrogabat, ecclesiam interrogabat... audeo dicere, claves istas habemus et nos. et quid dicam? quia nos ligamus, nos soluimus? ligatis et uos, solutis et uos.*” s., 229N.2/ s. *Guelph 16,2 (MA 1, 493/16-18, 25-27; WSA III/6, 321)*. As Augustine was preaching these words, it seems “We” refers to the clergy, that particular group to which he belonged as bishop; “You” to the people, those gathered to receive the proclamation and sacrament.

charity, this power of forgiveness.⁶¹⁴ It is the bond of charity that links head to body and makes the church one with Christ.⁶¹⁵

Because Augustine believed the struggle with sin to be an ongoing factor, even in lives under grace, charity, which covers a multitude of sins, is the essential gift. For Augustine, the church is holy where it acknowledges its universal need for forgiveness, where it confesses its sin, and particularly where it engages in charitable practices such as the giving of alms and the extension of forgiveness. We see several dimensions of his claim regarding the essential character of charity in this passage from his treatise *Against Parmenian*. He is here chiefly speaking of the presence of sin in the Donatist communion, even in their bishops:

Certainly they have sinners. For if everyone among them who seems to themselves to be great is asked, even they do not deny that they themselves are sinners. And yet they do not fail to beat their breasts or when they do so they are pretending— if that is so, unfortunately, either they would then certainly sin by deceiving their people with their false humility, or they do not say in the Lord’s prayer: ‘forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.’ Which is assuredly not said regarding those sins which are forgiven in the regeneration of baptism, but of those the weakness of human life contracts daily by the most bitter waves of the world, to cure these remedies are provided of alms, fasting and prayer so that what is said in the prayer will be achieved by alms. For to forgive the sins which another commits against you, so that God would forgive you, this is a great act of mercy. But if they do not speak truthfully in this fictitious prayer, thinking of themselves that they do not have anything that God might forgive them, this itself is the sacrilege that cannot be atoned for, this itself is impious and mad pride, that certainly is a huge sin.⁶¹⁶

⁶¹⁴ “This is the sacrament of anointing, its invisible power itself being the invisible anointing that is the Holy Spirit. The unseen anointing is that charity which, in whomever it is, will be like a root to him, and, despite the burning sun, it cannot dry up” “*unctionis sacramentum est; uirtus ipsa inuisibilis, unctio inuisibilis, spiritus sanctus. unctio inuisibilis caritas illa est quae in quocumque fuerit tamquam radix illi erit; quamuis ardente sole arescere non potest.*” *ep. Io. tr.*, 3.12 (PL 35, 2004/12-16); WSA I/14, 62.

⁶¹⁵ *en. Ps.*, 30/2.3; cf. *en. Ps.*, 140.3

⁶¹⁶ “*habent certe peccatores. nam si interrogentur quicumque sibi in ipsis magni uidentur, etiam se ipsos peccatores esse non negant. neque enim non tundunt pectora sua aut cum id faciunt simulate faciunt - quod si ita est, certe uel tunc infeliciter peccant populos suos simulata humilitate fallentes - aut non dicunt in oratione dominica: dimitte nobis debita nostra, sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris [Matt. 6.12]. quod utique non de illis peccatis dicitur quae in baptismi regeneratione dimissa sunt, sed de his quae cotidie de saeculi amarissimis fluctibus*

We see, at the end of this passage, Augustine's assertion that there is nothing more impious than the denial of one's need for forgiveness, which is what he believes is implied in the Donatist interpretation of bishops as mediators. When the Donatists claim that their bishops are mediators they are hindered in their ability to rightly confess and recover from their sin. Either they pretend at humility in their prayer and practice, or they are, like the whole body, sinners in need of forgiveness. And if they pretend at humility they are sinning.⁶¹⁷ We also see here, that, as Jensen/Burns assert, for Augustine "Only impenitence... was an unforgivable sin."⁶¹⁸

It is also important to note Augustine's reference to the forgiveness petition in the Lord's prayer in the quote above. He interprets this as a petition for the forgiveness of ongoing sins which complicate Christian living and suggests that he believes the penitential practices of the church, particularly the giving of alms, to be the necessary, practiced remedies for sin for all Christians.⁶¹⁹ But he derives even more from the forgiveness petition. As he follows his reflection on the remedies for sin with the conclusive statement "Thus to forgive the sin which another person committed against you since God forgives you, this is a great work of mercy" he

humanae uitae infirmitas contrahit, quibus curandis medicamenta praebentur elemosynarum, ieiuniorum et orationum, ut in oratione dicatur quod in elemosynis agitur. nam et peccatum quod in te alter admisit dimittere. ut et tibi dimittat deus, magnum opus misericordiae est. quodsi hoc in oratione fecte, non ueraciter dicunt, putantes se non habere quod eis dimittat deus, id ipsum est inexpiabile sacrilegium, ea ipsa est impia et uesana superbia, quod est certe immane peccatum." c. ep. Parm., 2.X.20 (CSEL 51, 67/18- 68/10).

⁶¹⁷ This emphasis on the virtue of humility is repeatedly on display in Augustine's *Homilies on 1 John*, delivered to his congregation Easter week in the early fifth century. He both commends the Apostle John's humility, in a way that echoes his critiques of the Donatists (*ep. Io. tr.*, 1:8, *WSA I/14*, 29) and repeatedly urges his congregation to the confession of all sins (e.g. *ep. Io. tr.*, 1.6, *WSA I/14*, 26-27; *ep. Io. tr.*, 4.3, *WSA I/14*, 66).

⁶¹⁸ *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 336

⁶¹⁹ The reference to these practices reminds us of the penitential practices that Cyprian insisted upon for those church members who lapsed into serious sin. As Burns highlights, these were concrete actions of faithfulness to counterbalance the concrete actions of unfaithfulness through which they had fallen (*Cyprian the Bishop*, 66),

places especially great weight on the practice of forgiveness among believers. Indeed, he understands this practice to be the essence of the sanctifying process. As Burns argues effectively, Augustine's entire understanding of the rituals of penance and the church's power of forgiveness was organized around "the practice of charity that overcame division and promoted unity within the church community."⁶²⁰ The daily sins picked up on one's earthly journey were forgiven, by both praying and living, daily, the forgiveness petition of the Lord's Prayer.⁶²¹ Augustine taught that believers truly are forgiven *as* they forgive.⁶²²

The Goal of Christian Life—Perfection in Caritas

Though he emphasizes the need for believers to forgive one another, mutually forbear, bear with the sins of brothers and sisters, he also strongly believed in the necessity of progress towards the goal of moral perfection among believers. And, in fact, the perfection towards which Christians are striving is nothing other than perfect love of God and neighbor.⁶²³ Charity then is both the goal of the Christian life and the means to that goal.

Augustine suggests that perfect love consists in the willingness to die for one's neighbor, but that Christians should not despair if they have not yet reached this goal. They participate in the church that this progress might be facilitated. Christians can make progress by achieving a

⁶²⁰ Jensen, et. al, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 351.

⁶²¹ Burns finds this to be a recurrent emphasis in Augustine's sermons, regularly warning believers "that God would hold Christians to the bargain: they would be forgiven only if they in turn forgave whenever their pardon was asked and without limit (It was, he pointed out, the only part of the prayer on which Christ commented after delivering it to his disciples. Thus, he observed that the desire to exercise the right to vengeance was particularly dangerous precisely because it blocked access to the gift of forgiveness of one's own sins. One had a right to vengeance but not to forgiveness." (337-338, see Burns' text for copious documentary support of each of these claims).

⁶²² "Forgiving others was the essential condition, even the necessary means, of receiving forgiveness"(Ibid, 351—again ample documentary evidence provided by Burns).

⁶²³ *bapt.*, 3.XVIII.26

willingness to sacrifice earthly goods to meet the needs of brothers and sisters; a practice nurtured through the church’s encouragement of the giving of alms.⁶²⁴ In his homilies on 1 John, Augustine sometimes deploys the Cyprianic image of the church as mother to speak about the nurturing that believers require in order to grow into perfect love. He suggests that the church is mother and that the two Testaments of scripture are her breasts, filled with the milk of the sacraments; in order for believers to make progress in faith and love, they need to be aware that they are children in need of nurture.⁶²⁵ He later alludes back to this imagery when he declares, “But, because [charity] isn’t perfect in everyone, he in whom it isn’t perfect shouldn’t lose hope, if what has already been born is what must be perfected; and indeed, if it has been born, it must be nursed and must be brought by those who are nursing it to its proper perfection”⁶²⁶

Sometimes the nurture provided by the church is experienced as painful punishment or correction. Here he extends the parental imagery. Just as there is no true love of a child where there is no discipline, there is no true love of a neighbor where there is no correction.

This is why charity is shown by the dove that came upon the Lord. That form of a dove, in which form the Holy Spirit came, whereby charity was poured out upon us: why was this? A dove has no bile, yet it fights for its nest with beak and wings; it is harsh without bitterness. A father is also like that; when he punishes his child, he punishes him for the sake of discipline. As I said, a seducer flatters with bitterness in order *to kidnap*, while a father chastises without bile in order to correct; be like that to everyone.⁶²⁷

⁶²⁴ This is particularly emphasized in his fifth homily on the 1st letter of John. See especially, *ep. Io. tr.*, 5.12

⁶²⁵ *ep. Io. tr.*, 3.1

⁶²⁶ “*sed quia non in omnibus perfecta est - et desperare non debet in quo perfecta non est si iam nata est quae perficiatur; et utique si nata est, nutrienda est et quibusdam suis nutrimentis ad perfectionem propriam perducenda.*” *ep. Io. tr.*, 6.1, (PL 35, 2019/41-45; WSA I/14, 87).

⁶²⁷ “*propterea de columba demonstrata est caritas, quae uenit super dominum - species illa columbae in qua specie uenit spiritus sanctus quo nobis caritas infunderetur. quare hoc? fel columba non habet; tamen rostro et pennis pro nido pugnat, sine amaritudine saeuit. hoc facit et pater quando filium castigat, sed ad disciplinam castigat. sicut dixi, seductor ut uendat cum amaritudine blanditur; pater ut corrigat sine felle castigat. tales estote ad omnes.*” *ep. Io. tr.*, 7.11 (PL 35, 2035/7-16; WSA I/14, 113- the italicized portion of the translation is an alteration to

Christian progress towards holiness is facilitated by practices of forgiving love, sometimes taking the form of apparently harsh discipline, unfolding in Christian community.⁶²⁸

And true Christians are those who persist in love, and demonstrate this persistence through their actions.⁶²⁹ Augustine did appear to believe that charity is demonstrable. Baker suggests that Augustine identifies specific acts of the church as proofs of the love within it:

- 1) leading one's neighbor to God— as Christ brought reconciliation between humanity and God,
- 2) reconciling enemies— as Christ reconciled humans to one another,
- 3) joining Christ in solidarity with those in need.⁶³⁰

In addition to these specific acts, I would add that Augustine also lifts up the mutual prayers of the faithful and mutual forbearance as further proofs of love. When the whole community is gathered outside the sanctuary in which Christ alone is serving as mediating priest, their groans and prayers are chiefly prayers *for one another*- manifestations, then, of the central gift of charity.⁶³¹ Further, members of the true church, those who have received the Holy Spirit, patiently bear with the apparently unconverted among them, seeking to correct brothers and sisters who go astray, but aiming to preserve the unity of the church above all else.⁶³²

Ultimately, Augustine believes the only sins that exclude one from the church's communion are sins against love. Charity indwells all those who are truly born of God and thus violations of charity reveal that one is an outsider. This is how Augustine makes sense of one of

the *WSA translation*).

⁶²⁸ cf. *c. ep. Parm.*, 2, VIII.16; *bapt.* 5.XXIV.45; *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 338-339

⁶²⁹ *bapt.*, 3.XVIII.26

⁶³⁰ Kimberly Baker, "Augustine's *Totus Christus*: Reflecting on the Church as a Sacrament of Unity," in *Horizons*, 37.1, Spring 2010, Villanova, PA: College Theology Society, 19-20.; Baker emphasizes the close relationship between Christ and church, the *totus Christus* by identifying acts all of which have parallels in Christ's own ministry.

⁶³¹ *c. ep. Parm.*, 2.VIII.16; *ep. Io. tr.*, 1.8

⁶³² *c. ep. Parm.*, 2.VIII.16; 2.XI.25; 3.I.1

the apparent paradoxes of 1st John— that regular confession of sin is urged at the same time that it is declared that anyone truly born of God does not sin.

Thus, when he says, *He who has been born from God does not sin*, you should understand a particular sin which a person who has been born from God cannot commit, and it is the sort of sin that, if anyone committed it, would confirm the others, whereas, if someone didn't commit it, it would absolve the others. What is this sin? To act against the commandment. What is the commandment? A new commandment I give you, that you love one another (Jn 13:34). Pay attention. This commandment of Christ is called love. By this love sins are absolved. If this isn't maintained it is both a grave sin and the root of all sins.⁶³³

It is, in fact, the presence of this mutual love and forgiveness, this charity that makes the sacraments of the church effective for salvation. “To receive the saving cup, however, and to invoke the name of the Lord is to be filled with charity, and to be filled with charity in such a way that you not only don't hate your brother, but are prepared to die for your brother.”⁶³⁴ As we noted above, one baptized outside the charity of the church, in schism, is truly baptized, but the benefit of baptism (the forgiveness of sins and the power to forgive) only comes when one is in charitable relationship with Christ's body on earth. Augustine notes that when heretics or schismatics are received into the Catholic Church they receive the laying on of hands, but not a new baptism. This laying on of hands confirms the gift of the Holy Spirit, which he repeatedly identifies as the “charity poured out into our hearts.”⁶³⁵ If one receives baptism hypocritically

⁶³³ “*ut quod ait: qui natus est ex deo non peccat*[1 Io 3,9], *certum quoddam peccatum intellegas quod non potest admittere homo qui ex deo natus est, et tale peccatum est illud ut si quisquam hoc admiserit, confirmet cetera; si quis autem hoc non admiserit, soluat cetera. quod est hoc peccatum? facere contra mandatum. quod est mandatum? mandatum nouum do uobis ut uos inuicem diligatis* [Io 13,34]. *intendite. hoc mandatum christi dilectio uocatur; per hanc dilectionem peccata soluuntur. haec si non teneatur, et graue peccatum est et radix omnium peccatorum.*” *ep. Io. tr.*, 5.2 (PL 35, 2013/ 20-31; WSA I/14, 77; cf. *en. Ps.*, 21.2.19).

⁶³⁴ “*accipere autem calicem salutarem et inuocare nomen domini, hoc est satiari caritate et ita satiari ut non solum non oderis fratrem sed paratus sis mori pro fratre.*” *ep. Io. tr.*, 5.4 (PL 35, 2014/ 30-33; WSA I/14, 78-79).

⁶³⁵ This citation from Romans 5:5 frequently surfaces in Augustine's discussions of the Holy Spirit. For examples in Augustine's anti-Donatist literature see: *bapt.*, III. XVI.21; *ep. Io. tr.*, 6.9-

inside the fellowship of the church, i.e. while harboring hatred in one's heart towards God or neighbor, one will similarly not receive the benefits of baptism, but may later access these benefits through penance.

Love alone, then, distinguishes between the children of God and the children of the devil. All may sign themselves with the sign of Christ's cross; all may respond 'Amen'; all may sing 'Alleluia'; all may be baptized; all may go into the churches; all may construct the walls of basilicas. The children of God aren't distinguished from the children of the devil except by charity.⁶³⁶

Though the Sacraments are chief moments where the church's forgiving power is exercised, truly whenever one Christian forgives another, there is the church.⁶³⁷ And where there is a failure to forgive, as in the case of separation from the body due to the perceived sinfulness of one's fellow church members, there the church most certainly is not.⁶³⁸

So charity is the one gift all humans require and the essential gift that makes the church the church. We turn our attention now to several implications of this claim, particularly the place and significance of human action in ecclesial holiness, the degree to which the church's holiness can be considered visible, and the way in which Augustine's understanding serves to equalize the

10; 8.13; cf. for an allusion to this citation- *ep. Io. tr.*, 7.11.

⁶³⁶ “*dilectio ergo sola discernit inter filios dei et filios diaboli. signent se omnes signo crucis christi; respondeant omnes: amen; cantent omnes: alleluia; baptizentur omnes; intrent ecclesias; farciant parietes basilicarum; non discernuntur filii dei a filiis diaboli nisi caritate.*” *ep. Io. tr.*, 5.7 (PL 35, 2016/ 21-25; WSA I/14, 82).

⁶³⁷ Augustine frequently argues that one can have the sacrament without the church, but receiving the sacrament's effect requires one to be joined to the church by charity. He urges believers to search their hearts and if they find love of their brother there, no matter how much that love yet needs to grow, they can be confident (e.g. *ep. Io. tr.*, 6.10).

⁶³⁸ See, e.g. *bapt.*, 5.XVIII.24.; cf. *ep. Io. tr.*, 6.13; 7.1 (PL 35, 2029/49-55; WSA I/14, 104): “For we have established a contract with our God in the Prayer that, if we want him to forgive our sins, we should also forgive the sins that have been committed against us. But there is no forgiveness apart from charity. Remove charity from the heart and it holds onto hatred and cannot forgive. Let charity be there and it forgives with a sense of security and is not made narrow.” “*quandoquidem pactum fecimus cum deo nostro in oratione ut si uolumus dimittat nobis peccata nostra, dimittamus et nos peccata quae in nos fuerint commissa. non autem dimittit nisi caritas. tolle caritatem de corde, odium tenet; ignoscere non nouit. sit ibi caritas, secunda ignoscit quae non angustatur.*”

church's fellowship.

The stress on the practice of forgiveness should not suggest that the church's holiness is *rooted* in human action. Augustine repeatedly indicts the Donatists for making human righteousness the root, source, and foundation of the church's power and holiness.⁶³⁹ Whenever forgiveness is extended— be it in baptism, at the Lord's Table, in the Sacrament of Reconciliation after the completion of penance, or between two believers overcoming an offense— it is the Holy Spirit who is acting in and through the one extending the forgiveness.⁶⁴⁰ As we have already noted, this is why a Sacrament can be truly administered by a corrupt minister—the Holy Spirit flees deceitful, corrupt people, but never abandons the ministry of reconciliation. Forgiveness can be given *through*, even if not *by* human beings.

But those humans who have received the Spirit of God, who do have charity dwelling in their hearts, *do*, by their own action, forgive by cooperating with this gift within them. And Augustine finds ample support in Scripture for an understanding that human beings are able to forgive, after they have received forgiveness by God in Christ through the Spirit.⁶⁴¹ Divine rather than human action is the basis of the holiness of the church, but it is divine action that transforms and issues forth in human action. Paradoxically, human beings more fully receive the gift of forgiveness of their own failures as they grow in their practice of forgiving. This is hard, human work, impossible on human strength alone, but made possible by the operation of *caritas*.

⁶³⁹ See, e.g. *c. litt. Pet.*, 1.5.6 (*CSEL* 52, 6, 2; *NPNF* 1-4, 1021) where he responds to Petilian's identification of the givers of baptism as the "origin," "root," and "head" of the faith of those whom they baptized by pointing to the fact that here a human is standing in the place where only Christ can stand. "Why do you not allow that Christ is always the origin of the Christian, that the Christian always plants his root in Christ, that Christ is the head of the Christian?" "*cur non sinis ut semper sit christus origo christiani, in christo radicem christianus infigat, christus christiani sit caput?*"

⁶⁴⁰ *c. ep. Parm.*, 2, X.24

⁶⁴¹ e.g. *ep. Io. tr.*, 6.9.

But what of visibility? Augustine in his many cautions on the mixed character of the church sometimes speaks of the charity that constitutes the true church scattered throughout the mixed communion as invisible.⁶⁴² Both sin and the remedy for sin, *caritas*, reside in the realm of invisible conscience. Even forgiveness can be falsely or hypocritically enacted. Thus, as we've already noted, Augustine cautions that the winnowing of the wheat from the chaff needs to be left to God alone. Those who appear good may well be liars. Those who appear evil may well be on the way to salvation. So it is that a doctrine of the invisible and visible church is often traced to Augustine, for he identified the true church as the invisible communion of recipients of the Holy Spirit, representatives of which are always present in the visible church but cannot necessarily be identified. The true church, in its fullness, is never entirely visible/apparent. But, as we've also seen, Augustine has no difficulty arguing that the Donatists are *not* the church, because they are living in an open rejection of fellowship with the world-wide communion of Christians. The one gift they lack is charity, and that is the one necessary gift. Nor does Augustine shrink from a suggestion that charity is visibly demonstrable. Only those visibly working to maintain unity, practicing forgiveness, embodying charity can legitimately make a claim to ecclesiality. And indeed, these are visible practices. That they can be enacted hypocritically or falsely is not in question. That is for God to judge. But the preservation of unity, or its violation, is visible. And it is the practice of forgiving love that reflects what Christ did and does for his disciples. It is what he commanded his disciples to do for one another. And it is what he gave the church the power to do when he gave the Holy Spirit. It appears that charity is the one necessary mark of the church, for Augustine.

Augustine, in his doctrine of the *totus Christus*, understands the whole communion of

⁶⁴² e.g. *bapt.*, 3.XIX.26

saints, no matter their role in the community, to be, together, the body of Christ in the world. The risen and ascended Christ is the head of this body. His work on earth is carried out through the church, the whole church. Though this doctrine did not remove distinction between the clergy and the laity, it did qualify the significance of that distinction. Similarly, his identification of the church's foundation and holiness in forgiveness suggests a fundamental equality of the body, for all both stand in need of and responsible for extending the gift of forgiveness. As we have seen, whereas Cyprian identified the power of forgiveness in the episcopal office, Augustine insisted that this gift and power was given to the whole church. We see this in Augustine's image of the bishop standing in solidarity with his people, outside the inner sanctum, groaning with them for the mercy of God. We see it in his insistence that the whole, true church is the priestly body of Christ, bishops and laity together. Bishops are distinguished in the body only because the church needs earthly leadership, but Augustine emphasized the fundamental equality of believers.⁶⁴³

⁶⁴³ This is most clear in *s. Dolb.* 26, the long New Year's Day sermon discovered late in the 20th century. Consider these statements: "However, we bishops are all called priests for this reason, because we are in charge. The whole body of the church, however, is that of the priest. To the priest pertains/belongs his body. And so the apostle Peter says to the church itself: *You are a holy people, a royal priesthood*" "*nos autem omnes episcopi sacerdotes ideo dicimur, quia praepositi sumus. uniuersa tamen ecclesia corpus est illius sacerdotis. ad sacerdotem pertinet corpus suum. nam et apostolus Petrus ideo dicit ad ipsam ecclesiam: plebs sancta, regale sacerdotium* [1 Pt 2,9]" *s. Dolb.*, 26.49 (*Vingt Six Sermons*, 404/207- 405/210) and "Therefore, one is mediator for us, brothers, who is also our head. We, however, in the name of Christ even if not with you we are in charge of the churches, yet with you we are members of the body of Christ: we have one head, not many; for the body that would have many heads is already a monster. However, we say concerning anointing, that then only the priest and king were anointed, now truly all Christians are anointed. See here, that all belong to the body of the priest with us, that is because you are all (among the) faithful; yet those who are put in charge of the Church are called priests in a special way, however, does not mean that the rest of the body (i.e., the church) is not the body of the priest" "*ergo unus nobis est mediator, fratres, qui etiam caput nostrum est. Nos autem in nomine Christi, etsi non uobiscum sumus praepositi ecclesiarum, uobiscum tamen sumus membra corporis Christi: unum caput habemus, non multa; nam corpus quod multa capita uult habere iam monstrum est. Dicebamus autem de unctione, quia sacerdos tunc solus ungebatur et rex, nunc uero omnes christiani. hinc uidete quia omnes ad corpus sacerdotis nobiscum pertinetis, id est quia fideles estis omnes; praecipue tamen illi appellantur sacerdotes qui sunt praepositi*

Finally, the greatest commandment is indeed charity, but it is articulated dually— love of God and love of neighbor. Augustine’s understanding of the unity of church and Christ results in the unification of this dual command. Augustine notes in his tenth and final homily on 1 John that the author of this letter slides seamlessly from talk about love of the *Son of God* to talk about love of the *sons of God*. This shift makes perfect sense to him because of his understanding of the church as the social body of Christ. “He who shortly before was saying ‘*the Son of God*’ said ‘*the sons of God*’, because the sons of God are the body of the only Son of God, and since he is the head and we are the members, the Son of God is one.”⁶⁴⁴ The dual commandment to love God and neighbor is truly made one. “When you love Christ’s members, then you love Christ; when you love Christ, you love the Son of God; when you love the Son of God, you also love his Father... if you love the head, you also love the members; but if you don’t love the members, neither do you love the head”⁶⁴⁵ He is explicit that one becomes a member of the body only by loving. Though one is dedicated to Christ in baptism, regardless of one’s status in relation to the Christian community, the grace of baptism only sanctifies one when one is joined in charitable relation to the visible church on earth.⁶⁴⁶ He further suggests that a Christian’s love is to reach beyond the body that others might become brothers through these acts of love. “If you love someone who doesn’t yet believe in Christ, or, if he has believed in Christ, believes as the demons do, you are reproaching his vanity. As far as you yourself are concerned, love, and love

ecclesiae, non ideo tamen ceterum corpus non est corpus sacerdotis.” s. Dolb., 26.53 (Vingt Six Sermons, 408/287-295). I am grateful to J. Patout Burns for his assistance with the translation of this significant passage.

⁶⁴⁴ “*filios dei dixit qui filium dei paulo ante dicebat quia filii dei corpus sunt unici filii dei, et cum ille caput, nos membra, unus est filius dei.*” *ep. Io. tr.*, 10. 3 (PL 35, 2055/41-44; WSA I/14, 147)

⁶⁴⁵ “*cum ergo membra Christi diligis, Christum diligis; cum Christum diligis, filium dei diligis; cum filium dei diligis, et patrem diligis... si enim diligis caput, diligis et membra; si autem membra non diligis, nec caput diligis.*” *Ibid.*, (PL 35, 2056/1-4, 14-16; WSA I/14, 148)

⁶⁴⁶ See pg. 253 and note 604 above.

with brotherly love. He isn't yet a brother, but you love him so that he may be a brother. All our brotherly love then, is directed towards Christians, towards all his members."⁶⁴⁷ In this emphasis on outward focused love, Augustine focuses particularly on the love of enemy. Again, it is clear that forgiveness is at the heart of *caritas*, that gift of the Spirit that facilitates human sanctification, that which bridges the gap between the human and the divine, and the many gaps between human beings.

By identifying the church's holiness in the gift of *caritas*, forgiving love, Augustine effectively secures the church through divine action, relativizing the work of human leaders, accounting for the ongoing presence of sin even in those under grace, and equalizing the fellowship, overcoming clericalism. In my final comments on the essential gift of charity, we returned once more to a consideration of Augustine's christological ecclesiology. The unity of church and Christ, accomplished by the gift of charity, is at the root of Augustine's constructive understanding of the holiness of the church.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that third and fourth century North African understandings of and controversies surrounding the question of the holiness of the church centered on disputes regarding the power to forgive sins. Though the landscape changed dramatically over the course of those two centuries, an awareness of the presence of serious sin in the fellowship of the church posed a constant challenge to a meaningful understanding of the church as holy. In the face of serious sin, the power of forgiveness—Who has it? Who gives it? Who receives it? — is of great

⁶⁴⁷ “*sed diligis aliquem qui nondum credidit christo, aut si credidit christo, ut daemones credit; repraesentis uanitatem ipsius. tu dilige et fraterno amore dilige. nondum est frater, sed ideo diligis ut sit frater. ergo tota dilectio nostra fraterna est erga christianos, erga omnia membra eius.*” *ep. Io. tr.*, 10.7 (PL 35, 2059/45-51; WSA I/14, 154)

concern. Different answers to these questions figured prominently in the disputes that eventually divided the North African church.

It appears that all parties were in agreement that, in fact, forgiveness and the power to forgive is the gift that Christ gave that brought the church into being, and even that the use of this power is what makes the church the church even still. Thus, the crimson threads that have run all through our sources— God alone as the source of sanctification and the foundational character of forgiveness to church identity— are boldly present here in all parties to the dispute. But to whom Christ gave this gift and power, and in whom it presently resides, was a matter of dispute. We saw this in clearest form in Cyprian's and Augustine's different interpretations of Matthew 16 and John 20. In both of these passages, Jesus bestows the power to bind and loose— in Matthew, on Peter alone, in John on the whole community of disciples.

Cyprian in his leadership of the church through the Decian persecution and its aftermath, a period in which martyrs-to-be were claiming and exercising the power of forgiveness in a way that directly challenged episcopal authority and the stability of the church as whole, read Peter as the first bishop, and the community of Apostles as the first communion of bishops. This power then, the power to bind and loose, as he argued repeatedly, was given to the church's leadership to be used for the benefit of the church community. Cyprian's interpretation of these passages contributed to his understanding that the church's holiness and identity is secured through its bishops.

Augustine, in contrast, interpreted Peter and the community of disciples as symbols of the church as a whole, not its leaders. Anyone who is truly a part of the church receives the Holy Spirit, which is the power of forgiveness. Augustine granted that the church was a mixed fellowship; hypocrites and unrepentant sinners were hidden throughout it, even among its

leadership. He thus emphasized that Christ is the true leader of the church through whom forgiveness is mediated. Nonetheless, Augustine believed that Christ truly has given this power to the church and that it does dwell on earth; he saw this plainly in Matthew 16 and John 20, particularly as both are read in the light of Matthew 18. Given the persistent presence of sin, it is, in fact, *the* gift from Christ that is essential to the ongoing ministry of the church.

Augustine identified this gift and power as *caritas* and the evident absence of *caritas* in those who sever themselves from the communion of the church, or set up an opposing altar, presuming themselves holier than those from whom they've separated, betrays their false claims to ecclesiality. Sanctification unfolds on earth through practices rooted in forgiving love, through sustained participation in a communion of believers and mutual prayer and forbearance therein. When people received the gift of the Holy Spirit, *caritas*, in baptism, they receive it from Christ's body, of whom the Bishop is an agent, whether or not he himself is a true member thereof. The Bishop uses the power that resides on earth whether or not he himself possesses it.

As Augustine sees it, *caritas*— forgiving love, *is* the holiness of the church. It is the gift and power given that allows the continual progress of the saints on earth, and it is not the possession of any identifiable sub-section of the church— not its virgins, not its martyrs, not its leaders/bishops. Whenever one who is offended, forgives one's offender— there is the church; and there is growth in holiness. *Caritas* is the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ, the power to forgive, and that which joins individuals together into the body of Christ. It is the determinative gift that effectively places an individual inside or outside the communion (regardless of their apparent physical location.) And it is the exercise of this gift on the part of the whole body that extends the reconciling ministry of Christ throughout time. This picture of ecclesial holiness as charity, unfolding love and forgiveness practiced between believers, helps to ground and focus

the constructive work of this project that I take up in the next chapter.

Augustine's understanding of holiness as forgiveness is a distinct product of his time and place. It emerged from his reflections on the teachings and practices of Cyprian and his disputations with the Donatists. It fits within a wider ecclesiological system that includes an acceptance of the saving necessity of ecclesial membership and sacramental participation. It presumes a eucharistically grounded unity of the church. Further, this grounding of the church's holiness and identity in forgiveness relates to an identification of schism as one of the worst sins. So, how are 21st century, Reformed Christians, organized into ecclesial fellowship birthed by schism and often birthing schisms, who may operate with a host of different ecclesiological presuppositions to work meaningfully with this teaching from Augustine? What precisely does this picture of the church's holiness say about these?

I must focus on the centrality of forgiving love, for, indeed, all the Reformed forebears we have considered thus far have focused on it as well. Despite our schismatic tendencies, on paper we have always insisted on the necessity of mutual forbearance, collective accountability, and the foundational character of forgiveness to the life of the church. We see in Augustine's opponents a stark representation of the problem we've been identifying in every source and we see in Augustine's solution the starkest representation of the only possible solution to this problem—the practice of charity among a sinful people claimed by God as Christ's body. I suspect, however, that the problem and solution alike are only so clear in these early North African sources because of the time we have spent with other, later contributions to the tapestry.

As Augustine wove his understanding of the holiness of the church out of the circumstances and with the resources available in his time and place, so must we take up that work today. We have the benefit (and challenge) of review of a large tapestry that has been in the

process of being woven for more than two millennia. I must sit down at the loom, pick up the shuttle and continue the work, emphasizing the crimson threads in every portion of the tapestry reviewed in this dissertation, and inspired by the particular images of charity, progression, mutuality, and humility identified in each of our sources. Augustine is an indispensable resource for this project because he, in fact, informed the Reformed understanding of the pervasive and persistent presence of sin in the communion of the church and the lives of believers, and the progressive character of sanctification, and yet had a powerful constructive understanding of the holiness of the church— an understanding that did not involve a sacralization of the clergy.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRACTICE OF FORGIVENESS: A THIRD MARK OF THE CHURCH

This dissertation opened with reflection on two seasons of conflict and division in the history of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)— the recent, and in some ways still unfolding, controversy over the ordination of those in same gender sexual relationships and the fundamentalist/modernist controversy in the early 20th century. In the midst of both of these controversies, the General Assembly opted to gather together designated groups of Presbyterians to help promote the peace, unity, purity (and progress) of the denomination. I noted in the introduction that both groups, the Swearingen Commission and the Theological Task Force, offered recommendations about ordination procedures as part of their proposed remedies for what ailed the church. The task force suggested that greater clarity about ordination procedures would assist the church in every season of controversy— because whatever Presbyterians fight about, we manage to fight about ordination as well. The historical explorations of this dissertation have attempted to get at one possible problem in Reformed theology that fuels persistent Presbyterian wars about ordination— that being a deficient account of the visible holiness of the church.

There is another striking similarity between the final reports of the Swearingen Commission and the Theological Task Force. After assessing the spiritual condition of the denomination, the Swearingen Commission implores “We must begin on our knees, with confession of our sins and sincere repentance, and must move forward in the spirit of renewed allegiance to the master and of closer fellowship with Him which will conquer our selfishness,

pride and hardness, and will insure in us humility of mind and the purity of heart which yields a vision of God.”⁶⁴⁸ Similarly, the Theological Task Force, in recording the progress of their work together begins with an account of pain and penitence. “First, in the course of our work, we have become increasingly aware of the conflict and pain in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), and we have searched our hearts to determine how each of us may have contributed to the church’s problems... In the course of our work we began to understand that our own actions as much as others’ have offended God, wounded the body of Christ, and caused pain to other Presbyterians.”⁶⁴⁹ The Swearingen Commission insisted, “we must begin on our knees;” the task force affirmed that they were brought to their knees by their journey together.

The task force further says, “The recognition that the travail of the church is our fault as much as it is other’s sobered and saddened our task force but also brought us closer together.”⁶⁵⁰ This last clause is worth attention— “brought us closer together.” The acknowledgement of personal sin overcame divisive fear and suspicion among diverse members of the task force. Perhaps it could be said that recognition of one’s own need for forgiveness opens one to live into forgiveness of one’s neighbor. While calling a church to penitence and indeed practicing penitence suggests the persistent presence of sin in the life of a church, and thus perhaps reinforces the difficulty of conceptualizing visible ecclesial holiness, these very calls and practices are foundational to the holiness into which the church can visibly live. Acts of humility, recognition of the radical distinction between creator and created, this is at the heart of human holiness. We could see this clearly in each of the portions of ecclesiological tapestry that we

⁶⁴⁸ *PCUSA Minutes 1926 Vol. 1*, 73

⁶⁴⁹ *A Season of Discernment: The Final Report of the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church to the 217th General Assembly (2006) with Study Guide*, II.B.1, p. 11 The task force proceeds to confess particular consequences of the sinful attitudes and actions identified through our work together.

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 12

considered.

This final chapter of the dissertation will first briefly review the insights into the problem that were gained from the consideration of Barth, Schleiermacher, Calvin, and Augustine. Then the discussion turns to the central image of the holy church that emerges in each thinker and the crimson threads that run through each of these images that will help point to a creative resolution of the problem of visible ecclesial holiness. The discussion then turns to the constructive proposal of the dissertation about holiness as forgiveness, responds to potential objections and seeks to draw out concrete implications for the life of the church.

INSIGHTS INTO THE PROBLEM AND IMAGES AND THREADS FOR ITS CREATIVE RESOLUTION

Insights into the Problem

The time spent looking at the creative ecclesiological work of Barth, Schleiermacher, Calvin, and Augustine has illumined both how difficult it is for Reformed Christians to conceptualize the visible holiness of the church and how easy it is to slip into clerically-centered conceptions of ecclesial holiness. From Barth we learned that it is hard to talk about the visibility of ecclesial holiness at all when one insists on the radical transcendence of the Holy and the deeply embedded sinfulness of the human— both of which are common emphases in Reformed traditions. Barth, particularly in his earliest ecclesiological writings, almost exaggerates these emphases with his insistence on the infinite qualitative distinction between God and humanity, an insistence that leads him to equate the church with a burned out crater. What is visible is lack, unholiness in need of sanctification. As Barth's christology and pneumatology matured, the constraints on a meaningful conception of visible holiness loosened, but they never fall away

completely. Barth employs the concepts of correspondence and reflection to speak about holiness, and indeed, it becomes more possible so to speak thereby. But even this is strained speech. The church may reflect the holiness of Christ, but it is not in and of itself holy. The church in its obedience corresponds to the holiness of Christ. But the church's obedience is always spotted and distorted. And the church's holiness is properly conceived, in Barth's teaching, as a confession of faith. Something more to be believed, than seen. The church, in its visible existence, is identified with the sinful world, standing perpetually and wholly in need of God's act of self-revelation and salvation. The infinite qualitative distinction thus remains a controlling and constraining theme throughout his oeuvre. Barth's insistences do serve to overcome an identification of the church's holiness with any visible part of the church, especially perhaps its clerical leadership, but something more is needed if one wishes to have an understanding of visible holiness.

It was helpful to begin our historical explorations with Barth as he exposes one dimension of the impact of classical Protestant/Reformed convictions, namely the emphasis on God alone and on persistent human sin, on conceptualization of visible, ecclesial holiness. With the turn to Schleiermacher and the consideration of his communicative ecclesiology, another key Protestant/Reformed emphasis comes into view, that being the centrality of the Word and preaching in ecclesial life. Schleiermacher's communicative ecclesiology certainly offers a creative recasting of this emphasis. That said, we began to perceive through examination of his teachings the way in which the emphasis on the Word and the act of preaching can slide into an emphasis on preachers. I argued that there is such an emphasis on the church's preachers in Schleiermacher's ecclesiology, particularly in his portrayal of the mediation of holiness on earth. Schleiermacher, like Barth, strongly resists any meaningful elevation of one part of the body

over another, suggesting a stark clerical/lay divide to be one of the problems keeping the church from being the church. That there is some evidence of at least the potential for a distorted clerical role in the mediation of holiness even in Schleiermacher helps to expose yet another dimension of the problem in view. Constrained in conceiving the visible holiness of the church, ever reminded that it is God alone, made known to us in God's Word who holy, those who most regularly proclaim that holy Word may well be stand-ins or visible holiness.

Our two modern, Reformed voices demonstrate clear efforts to overcome the significance of a clerical/lay distinction and to focus all understandings of ecclesial holiness first on God, but ultimately on God's work with the whole community. These efforts problematize a conceptualization of visible holiness and reflect a vulnerability to an overemphasis on the church's clerics. Our consideration of the theological forefather of both Schleiermacher and Barth, helps to further expose the two dimensions of the problem at hand. Of course one of the tenets of the Reformation was a rejection of the clericalism of medieval Catholicism. Calvin thus does much to reconceive the church to resist the distortions he perceived in the church of his day. That said, for Calvin, the church's holiness is a work in progress, ever dependent on the ongoing work of Christ in believers through the ministry of the church. The significance of the ministry of word and sacrament to the church's identity and holiness, in Calvin's teaching, cannot be overstated. By the word proclaimed, forgiveness is mediated. Believers need to regularly subject themselves to the preaching of the word and to receive the supplemental aid of the sacraments if they wish to progress in sanctification and faithfulness. Those empowered to preach the Word, though technically only distinguished by the function they fulfill, play an indispensable role in facilitating the church's progress in holiness. In Calvin, as in those who follow him, it is hard to see holiness and a bit too easy to stop one's search with the preachers of the Word.

We might overlook the clerical emphases in Calvin's ecclesiology were we not attending to the thought of Augustine and his Donatist opponents, and the theological forbear of both—Cyprian of Carthage. In the Donatists and Cyprian before them, though the emphasis was more on sacrament than word, nonetheless the office responsible for maintaining the church's sacramental ministry was understood to be the earthly location for the church's holiness. Attending to these early additions to our ecclesial tapestry helps us to see more clearly where tendencies to clerically-centered ecclesial holiness surface in more muted form in later thought. Each of our examinations, then, helped us to understand both that it is hard for Reformed Christians to understand visible holiness and that there are elements within our ecclesiology that can lend support to a location of holiness in our ministers-- or at the least in the ministry they carry out for the community.

Images/Threads for Creative Resolution

But from the very beginning of our examination we have noted that there is possibility even in the problem itself. I have suggested that particular images/emphases stand out in the thought of each thinker, which, when viewed all together, point to a responsible Reformed position on visible ecclesial holiness.

It will not do to discard Reformed anthropology (indebted to Augustine surely) and pretend that persistent and pervasive sin is not at play in Christian communities. Any position on visible holiness that depends on the virtue or goodness of human beings is not an option. Any facile identification of holiness in particular works— be they works of justice or works of purity— is not a viable solution within Reformed thought. Thus, Barth's project is a good place to begin, for he is careful on both these points. In Barth's ecclesiological tapestry, the image of a

humble church emerged. Any statement of regarding the church's holiness must begin with a thorough acknowledgment of the sin in each and every member and in the institution as a whole. Pastor/people, clergy/laity— all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. When one softens the edges of this declaration, deeming the human condition “not that bad” or deeming oneself better off than others, one loses the most crucial resource for understanding the equality of the body and the power of the sanctifying grace of God in Christ by the Spirit. The path to holiness begins with the humility that acknowledges that in myself, I am not holy— in ourselves, we, the church, are not holy.⁶⁵¹

In Schleiermacher, an image of a mutual church stood out. He ultimately believes that the true Christian community is one of *mutual* communication. The Spirit of God living in each prompts an articulation of faith that seeks out a hearer. And when faith meets faith there is an exchange of witness that shapes and deepens the faith of each. This is on display narratively in his Christmas Eve dialogue— all in the community are prompted to speak the faith— children, women, and men alike. As I have repeatedly noted, Schleiermacher was deeply resistant to any construction of the church in which anyone in the community is understood to be purely and absolutely passive or active, despite the fact that some members will exert more active influence than others. The Spirit makes all active and inspires mutual exchange by which the mission of the church is furthered in the world. This image of mutuality is an important complement to the image of humility— for together they suggest that the church is united in both struggle and power.

A church in progress was the most prominent image in Calvin's construal of ecclesial holiness. The quest for visible holiness has solid roots in Calvin's ecclesiology and thus is a

⁶⁵¹ As suggested in the introduction to this chapter, this comes through in both the Swearingen Commission Report and the Theological Task Force Report.

reasonable Reformed project. That said, as Calvin insists, holiness in the human sphere must be conceived in terms of progression. The holiness of the church is a work in progress, an unfolding gift. It is not a possession of the church, but is indeed the progression of the church—and the very reason the church exists. Together those in the church live into holiness by daily receiving the grace and forgiveness of God. Holiness is not a goal to be fully realized in one's earthly sojourn, but it is the point towards which one's journeying is to be ever ordered. Holding this image of progression together with the images of humility and mutuality, we are beginning to see a church, united in struggle and power, on the way, together, to a holy existence.

Finally, in Augustine, we catch sight of a church of forgiving love. The character of the gift given to the Christian community that allows its progress to unfold humbly, and mutually—is the gift of charity— forgiving love. All continue to struggle with sin as they share life together in Christian community, thus ample opportunity presents itself to extend and seek forgiveness from one's fellow believers. When one Christian receives another with compassion and mercy this is itself a communication of the gospel, and it is a moment in which the church becomes visible as church.

When these four images are overlaid, the image of the church that takes shape is one of a humble community, submitting to God by submitting to one another, helping one another to progress on the way to holiness by continually extending forgiveness, bearing with one another, and guiding one another to God through Christ by the Spirit. Two crimson threads run through this image—the insistence that God alone is the source of sanctification and the foundational character of forgiveness to ecclesial life. I seek to pick up both of these threads in my own weaving of a Reformed position on the visible holiness of the church.

HOLINESS AS THE PRACTICE OF FORGIVENESS

A Third Mark of the Church

To help facilitate greater clarity about what it means to call the church holy despite the continuing struggle with sin, in a way that does not involve a betrayal of Reformed theological understandings of ordination, I propose that the practice of forgiveness be understood as the third mark of the church.

Before considering this proposal more thoroughly, it may be helpful to consider briefly the history of the tradition of “marks of the church.” Lathrop and Wengert pursued an answer to the question of the origin of this tradition and found it to be quite the historical puzzle.⁶⁵² Though many contemporary sources suggest the tradition is rooted in the Nicene Creed,⁶⁵³ the four notes or marks of the church listed there (one, holy, catholic, and apostolic) were never called “marks” of the church for the first 1500 years of the church’s existence.⁶⁵⁴ The Protestant Reformation raised the problem of the identification of the true church in the world and brought with it reflection on the marks by which that church can be identified. Lathrop and Wengert note that treatises on the marks were abundant in the 16th century, but notes further that even then, even Roman Catholic commentators did not conform their listing of marks to the Nicene four.⁶⁵⁵ Lathrop and Wengert note as well that though Luther certainly works with the concept of *notae ecclesiae*, he rarely uses the term itself. They argue that “Martin Luther himself developed the

⁶⁵² Gordon W. Lathrop and Timothy J. Wengert, *Christian Assembly: Marks of the Church in a Pluralistic Age*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).

⁶⁵³ Consider, for example, a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) document *Bearing the Marks of the Church*, (Louisville: Office of Theology and Worship, 2006) which organizes its discussion on pages 15-20 around the four Nicene “marks” of unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity.

⁶⁵⁴ Lathrop and Wengert, *Christian Assembly*, 17-18.

⁶⁵⁵ “Robert Bellarmine, the seventeenth-century Roman Catholic defender of the Council of Trent, had enumerated fifteen” (Ibid, 18).

concept and on occasion used the term *notae ecclesiae* to describe it. When someone close to Luther— Philip Melancton (1497-1560)— used and explained the phrase in the 1531 Apology of the Augsburg Confession, it quickly became a technical term and was caught up in the growing ecclesiological debate of the 1530's.⁶⁵⁶ It was not until the nineteenth century that English Tractarians used the four Nicene notes to prove Anglican catholicity- applying the 16th century concept of marks of the church to a fourth century document opening a new reading of creed and indeed of the tradition of marks of the church.⁶⁵⁷ Lathrop and Wengert further argue that this concept “arose in a very specific polemical situation where Luther’s opponents forced him to re-evaluate his ecclesiology along evangelical lines. That is to say, the marks of the church, rightly understood, are part and parcel of Luther’s Reformation breakthrough: that we are justified by faith alone without the works of the law.”⁶⁵⁸

Two marks of the church thus emerged from the controversies of the Protestant Reformation. One can trust that the true church is at hand, despite all the corruption that might disturb it, if the word is rightly preached and heard and the sacraments properly administered. The church is identified by word and sacrament alone. Though humans proclaim and hear the word and administer and receive the sacraments, the primary actor in both word and sacrament is God. It is God’s word that is proclaimed and God’s saving acts that are celebrated at font and table. And indeed, the heart of the word is the grace of forgiveness mediated by/given by Jesus Christ, and that gift of forgiveness is received in the waters of Baptism and renewed at the Lord’s table. Submission to word and sacrament humbles the church and reminds the church that God alone saves and that the church is wholly dependent on the grace of God’s forgiveness— or

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid, 19

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid, 18

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid, 19.

should. It would seem that these marks are, indeed, all that is needed. Both crimson threads run through them.

But as I have tried to demonstrate throughout the dissertation, when one office of the church has primary responsibility for the proclamation of the word and the administration of the sacraments, it is easy to believe that these officers are active agents and the rest of the body are passive recipients. And it is possible, though not necessary, that God's primary agency will be obscured by the apparent agency of the church's clerics. The introduction of a third mark is intended to disrupt this problematic, exclusive identification of the church with its clerics.

Reformed thinkers have often questioned whether there are actually three marks of the church. The third mark identified by some Reformed thinkers is that of church discipline. As we've already noted, Calvin placed great emphasis on the necessity of rigorous church discipline in his development of the church in Geneva. That said, Calvin was content to affirm that the true church could be identified by word and sacrament alone, even in the absence of discipline. Word and Sacrament were foundational, in Calvin's understanding, discipline was structural.⁶⁵⁹ However, early in Reformation history, the Scots confession identified the "notes of the true Kirk" in the "preaching of the Word of God... the right administration of the sacraments of Christ Jesus... and... ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered, as God's Word prescribes, whereby vice is repressed and virtue nourished."⁶⁶⁰ So the number of marks is a longstanding Reformed debate, as is the status of discipline.

⁶⁵⁹ "Discipline, since it has in view a church already ingathered by Word and sacrament, occupies a different sphere in the economy of salvation. It belongs not to the church's esse, but to its bene esse, not to its 'foundation', but to its 'form'" (Robert White. "Oil and Vinegar: Calvin on Church Discipline" in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. 38, pp. 25-26). White offers a quotation from Calvin's Short Treatise against the Anabaptists in support of this interpretation.

⁶⁶⁰ Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): Part 1-Book of Confessions*, (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, 2004), 3.18, 19.

A key tool of church discipline, for many generations, was the practice of excommunication. Any found guilty of serious sin were required to refrain from participating in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper until such time as they demonstrate genuine repentance and readiness to be restored to communion. Though this tool is exclusionary, it is not necessarily, nor even ideally, permanently exclusionary. It appears that the intention of discipline in every generation has been the restoration of members to active and faithful participation in the body; the practice of excommunication was one attempted embodiment of this intention.⁶⁶¹ Discipline, then, is inextricable from the practice of communal forgiveness; in fact, the community's forgiveness is the ground for the practices of discipline.

In more recent years, particularly in mainline American Protestant churches, the practice of excommunication has fallen out of favor and it appears that most often only the church's clergy are subject to their discipline. Limited participation in the church's sacramental life is sometimes the consequence of church discipline for erring clerics, but most often the consequence effects one's ability to proclaim and administer and not one's ability to receive. Clerics who are found guilty of serious sin lose the privilege of proclaiming the word and administering the sacraments for a time or permanently, but typically may fully participate as recipients at Christ's table even when under censure or otherwise engaged in disciplinary proceedings.⁶⁶² If clergy were subject to excommunication by the community, this would communicate and reinforce an identification of the basis of holiness in the entire community, but simply withdrawing clerical privileges reinforces a stratified ecclesiology in which holiness is too easily linked to clerical privilege. Theoretically, each church member is subject to discipline

⁶⁶¹ See chapter 4, pp. 194-195.

⁶⁶² I speak from observation of practice in my home denomination, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

administered by his/her congregation's session, but few sessions exercise this responsibility. Perhaps this is because members of American Presbyterian congregations also have little that binds them to their congregations— nor even to their denomination— whereas clerics have many material bonds to the denomination (salaries, pensions, health insurance). It is therefore much harder for clerics to shift affiliations than it is for members to do so. This likely accounts, in part, for the shift away from excommunication. If one is barred from the table in one's home church, one can easily find another table at which to sup.⁶⁶³

So, the maintenance of discipline to which the whole church is accountable is a difficult matter in the 21st century, at least in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). If, in fact, it is the third mark by which the true church must be identified in the world, we must question whether the church we see is, in fact, the church. But, as I suggest above, one of the chief purposes of discipline has always been restoration. And indeed, at the heart of discipline is forgiveness. This is expressed in the preamble to the Rules of Discipline in the constitution of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. when it is suggested that a right use of the power entrusted to the church is as “a dispensation of mercy and not of wrath so that the great ends of the church may be achieved, that all children of God may be presented faultless in the day of Christ.”⁶⁶⁴ The church is to practice discipline that all believers might be enabled to make progress in sanctification, to live into a manifestation of the fruits of forgiveness extended in Jesus Christ. The point is to mediate mercy, to facilitate restoration, to build up the body.⁶⁶⁵

If word and sacrament are the means by which divine forgiveness is proclaimed and

⁶⁶³ I am grateful to Dr. Ted Smith for helping me realize this dimension of contemporary, American Protestantism.

⁶⁶⁴ Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church: Part Two- Book of Order 2013-2015*, (Louisville, KY: The Office of the General Assembly, 2013), D.10102, 153.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid*, D.10101, 153.

received, discipline rightly conceived is the means by which forgiveness is practiced among human beings. It is where we “forgive as we have been forgiven.” The practice of forgiveness is the necessary complement to the gift of forgiveness proclaimed and celebrated in word and sacraments. It appears that the tendency among Reformed thinkers has been to emphasize the divine side of the equation when seeking true ecclesiality. But when we speak of the church, we speak of a phenomenon that is both divine and human— it is brought into being only by God’s action, but it is a community of human beings gathered by God. I suggest that the human practice of forgiveness is the necessary *complement* to the divine gift of forgiveness. The divine gift must always have priority in our thought, but our thinking must not stop there as we seek to make sense of the holiness of the church. Eberhard Jüngel, in reflecting on the way in which Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection is an atoning sacrifice, indeed a sacrament through which *God acts* to restore a lost wholeness to all of humankind, argues that once one grasps that Jesus *is* “the effective *sacrament* of our salvation,” then one can begin to speak of Jesus’ sacrifice as an exemplary model for human living.⁶⁶⁶ By acting for us in Jesus Christ, God has also laid expectations upon us. This approach to the ordering of the relation between divine and human action informs my understanding of the relation between the three marks. We need to begin with the two marks that emphasize what God has done and is yet doing on behalf of humankind, this is surely foundational, but to speak fully about what the church is and means, to truly identify the church in the world, that which *marks* the church, makes it visible, we must speak about human action as well. And it is my contention that the only action with ultimate significance is the action of forgiveness.

⁶⁶⁶ “The Sacrifice of Jesus Christ as Sacrament and Example,” (*Theological Essays II*, ed. J.B. Webster, trans. Arnold Neufeldt-Fast and J.B. Webster. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 163-190, quote on 180,

Scriptural Foundations

As we have noted throughout the dissertation, the doctrinal foundation for church discipline is typically the power of the keys, and the scriptural foundation for this doctrine is traced to three passages, at least since the time of Augustine: Matthew 16:16-19; John 20:21-23; and, Matthew 18:15-20. In the Matthew 16 passage, in response to Peter's confession of Jesus' Messianic identity, Jesus declares him the rock on which the church will be built and promises to give him the "keys of the kingdom of heaven," which will grant him the power of binding and loosing. Precisely what is meant by this power is unclear in the immediate context of this passage. As early as the third century, Cyprian linked this Matthew 16 passage to the John 20 passage, which presents the risen Christ appearing to frightened disciples in an upper room and breathing the Spirit on them saying to them "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."⁶⁶⁷ The power of binding and loosing is thus linked to the power of the forgiveness or retention of sins.

There are even grounds within Matthew itself for identifying the power of binding and loosing with forgiveness. We find this if we turn to Matthew 18 where the power of binding and loosing is also discussed. When offenses arise within the community, among members, Jesus suggests that one as the offended party has the responsibility of confronting one's offender in private: "And if the member listens to you, you have regained that one."⁶⁶⁸ If the offender resists/fails to listen, Jesus outlines stages of wider church involvement. If the offender continues to resist/fail to listen even to the judgment of the whole church, then they are to be cast out of the community—treated as a gentile or a tax collector. Jesus concludes these guidelines by asserting

⁶⁶⁷ Jn. 20:22-23; All quotations from scripture are drawn from the New Revised Standard Translation.

⁶⁶⁸ Mt. 18:15

(in v. 18) “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you lose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Though in this immediate passage forgiveness is not explicitly mentioned, surely forgiveness is practiced when a relationship is restored after an offense.

Those listening to Jesus appear to have heard a command to forgive in these instructions. This is suggested by Peter’s response to this teaching from Jesus: “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?”⁶⁶⁹ Jesus does not correct Peter’s perception that an obligation to forgive attaches to these instructions about the management of offense. Instead, Jesus’ response reinforces the responsibility of forgiveness by saying it must be practiced far more than seven times in any given relationship.⁶⁷⁰

Placing even greater weight on the responsibility of forgiveness, in Matthew’s narrative, immediately following this conversation with Peter, Jesus is recorded as telling the parable of the unforgiving servant. In this parable a king forgives a slave an oppressive debt, and then that same slave goes out and demands repayment of a much smaller debt from a fellow slave, throwing him into jail until he can pay. When the king learns of how the forgiven slave has behaved, he retracts his forgiveness and sentences him to torture until he can pay the debt. “So,” Jesus concludes “my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”⁶⁷¹ By the end of Matthew 18, the message has been delivered that Jesus’ followers are obligated to forgive.

That said, Matthew 18:15-20, particularly verse 17, have often provided the scriptural foundation for the practice of excommunication, a practice more often interpreted as

⁶⁶⁹ Mt. 18:21

⁶⁷⁰ There are textual variants— Jesus either said “77 times” or “70 times 7 times.”

⁶⁷¹ Mt. 18:35

condemnation than forgiveness. It is clear, however, that the goal of the community is to be the restoration and repair of relationship, regaining members to the body—the goal is to get the offender to listen so (s)he might be regained.⁶⁷² That the goal is restoration is reinforced by the parable that immediately precedes these instructions. In this parable, Jesus suggests that the good shepherd abandons the 99 sheep in the fold in order to find and restore the one that is lost, and that there is more rejoicing over the one restored than over the 99 that were never lost.⁶⁷³

One can even legitimately question how far one is cast out when one is treated “as a gentile and a tax collector.” The Gospel of Luke, and indeed the entire ministry of Paul, offers ample suggestion that gentiles and tax collectors are objects of Christ’s reconciling ministry.⁶⁷⁴ But even in the Gospel of Matthew, which appears to have been written for a Jewish Christian community, Jesus commends a gentile centurion for his faith⁶⁷⁵ and later it is a gentile centurion who affirms Jesus’ identity of Son of God at the moment of his death.⁶⁷⁶ Further, Matthew portrays Jesus calling a tax collector to be his disciple and being criticized for sharing table fellowship with tax collectors to which Jesus responded “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”⁶⁷⁷ Throughout the Gospels, Gentiles and tax collectors, indeed all sinners, are the targets of intentional mission, they are not the

⁶⁷² Mt. 18:15

⁶⁷³ Mt. 18:10-13. This parable, in Luke, is linked to the parable of the forgiving father/prodigal son, suggesting the way in which the restoration of the lost sheep is a metaphor for forgiving and restoring a member of the family/community.

⁶⁷⁴ As for examples of Lukan references to Jesus’ ministry to gentiles: Simeon declares the infant Jesus “a light for revelation to the Gentiles” (Lk 2:32); the healing of the centurion’s servant (Lk 7:1-10). And to tax collectors: The call of Levi (Lk 5:27-32); parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14); Jesus and Zaccheaus (Lk 19:1-10).

⁶⁷⁵ Mt. 8:13

⁶⁷⁶ Mt. 27:54

⁶⁷⁷ Mt. 9:9-11

hopelessly lost. Though the injunction to let one who refuses to listen to the church be “as a Gentile and tax collector” is most frequently read as the basis for shunning and communal avoidance of contact with unrepentant offenders, the immediate and wider context of this verse points me to this different interpretive possibility.

This doctrine of the power of the keys and particularly the first two of its three foundational scriptural passages has often undergirded a robust clericalism. Some derive from Matthew 16 that the power to bind and loose resides in the church’s leadership alone—particularly in its bishops. This was, as we’ve seen, Cyprian’s interpretation, as he took Peter in Matthew 16 to be a symbol of a bishop, and the gathered disciples in John 20 as a symbol of the first communion of bishops. But as Augustine drew out, in Matthew 18, Jesus suggests that it is the whole church that possesses the power to bind and loose— so Peter and the community of disciples can be taken as symbols of the church as a whole rather than of its leadership. Indeed, multiple injunctions throughout the New Testament, not least the material in Matthew 18 that we have just reviewed, suggest that the responsibility of forgiveness is placed on the whole community.

Now, attending to the three passages at the root of the doctrine of the power of the keys, we must also note that the whole community has the power/responsibility to condemn or to bind as well. However, as I have tried to suggest in the discussion above, the weight of Jesus’ teaching appears to be on the responsibility to forgive. Perhaps this is because humans more naturally condemn/bind/judge than forgive. In any case, these scriptural passages, though often deployed to support elevated understandings of the clerical office, need not be read in this way. As I suggested we learn from holding Barth and Schleiermacher’s images of the church together, the whole community, members of the clergy and the laity alike are united in both need and

power. All stand in need of forgiveness and all are empowered to practice it.

The teachings of Matthew 18 seem to be echoed in the prayer that Jesus teaches his followers to pray: “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” I suggested above that the practice of forgiveness is a complement to the gift of forgiveness extended in Word and Sacrament. Indeed it seems that horizontal practices of forgiveness are bound to receipt of and experience of the vertical gift of forgiveness. We are forgiven, as we forgive. The proper holiness of the Christian community is this very process of humble, mutual submission, forgiveness, forbearance, and guidance. God alone forgives sin and sanctifies, but this gift of forgiveness and sanctification is not received in an instant or a flash, but unfolds as we forgive one another. And the church will become visible as church, as holy community, as it lives into these practices of forgiveness.

RESPONSE TO POTENTIAL OBJECTIONS

We will now consider some potential objections, before entertaining possible implications for ecclesial life. First, I anticipate that one might forward an objection rooted in the fear of cheap grace. Two theological voices from the early 20th century resound- Dietrich Bonhoeffer and H.R. Niebuhr. Bonhoeffer famously lays out the concept of “cheap grace” in his work *Discipleship*: “Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession...Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”⁶⁷⁸ H.R. Niebuhr, in *The Kingdom of God*

⁶⁷⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 4, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, tr. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 44.

in America famously characterized a Liberal Protestant rendition of the Gospel in which “A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.”⁶⁷⁹ Is this dissertation’s argument for an emphasis on the practice of forgiveness a 21st century rendition of the cheap grace identified and rightly critiqued in early 20th century liberal American Protestantism?

I argue that it is not. It is highly costly, in fact, to submit oneself to one’s brother or sister, admitting the wounds inflicted by one’s brother or sister yet extending the grace of forgiveness. The disciples who first heard Jesus’ teachings on forgiveness responded with incredulity. This it seemed was among the hardest of his commandments. When I speak of the practice of forgiveness, I have in view something more like Matthew 18 Christianity than an easy letting bygones be bygones, declaring all forgiven, but not practicing forgiveness all. It is not sufficient to say all is forgiven while simultaneously actually growing further and further from one’s fellow church members. The practice of forgiveness acknowledges hurt inflicted and wrong committed; it involves accountability. But, mindful of our common sinful status, our perpetual need for the grace of God, we forgive, because we have been forgiven in Christ, and that we might experience the freedom of forgiveness.

Someone might next object that repentance and forgiveness are linked in scripture and in Jesus’ teachings. They might argue that there cannot be forgiveness where there is no repentance. Even if we confine ourselves to Matthew 18, we can see grounds for this argument. The power, after all, is to bind or to loose— not only to loose. And those who refuse to listen even to the church are to be treated like gentiles or tax collectors. As already noted, typically this has been interpreted as the scriptural foundation for ex-communication. Those who will not repent of their

⁶⁷⁹ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America*, (Chicago: Willet, Clark & Company, 1937,) 193.

sin are to be excluded from the community until such time as they bear evidence of their repentance.

But we've already considered the special care and attention Jesus bestowed on gentiles and tax collectors, according to our Gospel narratives. Indeed, "sinners" of all stripes were received into fellowship with Jesus often before any acknowledgement of or repentance of their sin. This is captured in one of the most oft cited Pauline summaries of the Gospel "But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us."⁶⁸⁰ The Gospels record that Jesus came to the fearful disciples who had abandoned him, betrayed him, denied him— bearing peace— peace extended before any repentance was displayed. Repentance, it seems, is often the fruit of forgiveness extended. Indeed, if one forgiven does not repent they will not live into the gift of forgiveness. And if the state of sin reflects the breaking of relationship with God, neighbor, and self, if it is chiefly a condition of isolation and alienation, then every time we choose to honor relation, to connect, to mutually submit— we are repenting. We are turning away from self-obsessed isolation and towards relation with God through relation with neighbor. We will consider below the need for reimagined and reinvigorated practice of church discipline in the final section of this chapter below. Surely, nurturing repentant lives is crucial to church discipline. Presently, I simply wish to indicate that while absolutely important to discipline and sanctification, repentance can be understood as the *fruit of* rather than the *condition for* the gift of forgiveness.

I continue to speak of forgiveness as power, but another objection might arise that is rooted in the power imbalance between human beings. To emphasize the practice of forgiveness in circumstances where some historically and perpetually have radically more power and

⁶⁸⁰ Romans 5:8

influence than others, particularly when that power has been abused, creating a situation of oppressors and oppressed, could certainly be read as an encouragement that the status quo be maintained and abuses of power go unchecked. Am I suggesting, for example, that a battered wife in the church should forgive her abuser in such a way that he is able to continue to abuse her?

Absolutely not. I am calling for mutual submission. I do believe that oppressed persons will experience freedom when they release resentments, anger, and bitterness towards their oppressors, but genuine freedom from physical oppression is also a necessary goal. Ideally oppressors will be transformed in Christian community, and begin to seek out right relationship with fellow human beings. Even where repentance does not follow forgiveness, forgiveness can be extended. And those practicing forgiveness, with the support of their church communities, can make choices to protect themselves from further harm and abuse.

And what of forgiveness that unfolds outside of the church, among non-Christians? Gandhi, for example, is said to have extended forgiveness to his murderer at the moment of his death. If my argument is that where we see the practice of forgiveness, we see the holy church, does that mean we see the church even outside the community that confesses Christ?

Two responses must be made. First, the church is not only a community of forgiveness, but also the community gathered around Word and Sacrament. But if indeed it is the Holy Spirit, who blows freely, residing in believers, that makes possible the act of forgiveness, I am willing to grant that wherever we see forgiveness, we see the work of the Spirit. I do not wish to colonize other religious traditions nor to incorporate those who have no desire to be incorporated into the being of the church. Nor do I wish to suggest that no other religious traditions form people for the practice of loving forgiveness. I simply want to argue that the church will not be

visible nor will it be doing its part to participate in the extension of God's reign in this world, if it is not cultivating the practice of forgiveness.

The schismatic character of my own ecclesial fellowship undergirds another objection. I drafted this conclusion in Richmond, Virginia in 2013/2014, in a season in which six congregations, many of them the largest in the presbytery of the James, are in the process of disaffiliating from the PC(U.S.A.). My ecclesial fellowship is in schism— again. And indeed, our entire tradition was birthed at a moment of schism. Though there may be times when it is a faithful decision to break fellowship, schism is always a sign of human sinfulness and particularly represents a failure to forgive, forbear, and maintain love. Often those who remain in the fellowship as others leave harbor bitterness and resentment in their hearts towards those who have left. Do these repeated moments of schism in which we fail in forgiveness mean we are not, in fact, the church? If I am arguing that the practice of forgiveness is essential to the identity and holiness of the church, this would seem to be a reasonable assumption.

But as the Swearingen Commission insisted, and the Task Force practiced, “we must begin on our knees.” Honestly acknowledging the wreckage of this ecclesial fellowship and the painful legacy of division that besets it can inspire the humility that is proper to human beings in relationship to God. We need not respond to schisms recent or ancient with the presumption that we, on whatever side of whatever divide we find ourselves, we alone are righteous, and are the one, true, holy church. This is a deadly assumption that forsakes the window of grace that opens in the midst of brokenness. If instead we let this wreckage remind us of our desperate need for forgiveness, we will set pride aside and assume a humble posture. And once in this posture, the Spirit of God can draw us into mutual relationships fueled by forgiveness. Having made so many enemies, we have plenty of opportunity to extend the gift that has been given to us. This process

may be nurtured and guided by those we elect to serve as our teachers and governors and servants, but those we ordain stand with us in need of forgiveness, needing to practice and receive this gift.

CONCRETE IMPLICATIONS FOR ECCLESIAL LIFE

I have already suggested that the constructive proposal of this dissertation— that the practice of forgiveness be understood as a third mark of the church— is tightly linked to church discipline. Church discipline has been the strongest contender for a third mark of the church, among Reformed Christians, for centuries. And the heart of discipline is the mediation of and facilitation of forgiveness. That said, as I further suggested, the scope of church discipline seems dramatically reduced in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), at least insofar as sessions rarely act as disciplinary bodies within congregations, leaving the bulk of the membership untouched by the church's discipline. An uneven application of discipline exacerbates a clerical/lay distinction and is thus part of our problem. The first concrete ecclesial implication, for the PC(U.S.A.) at least, is that a focus on facilitating the practice of forgiveness form the foundation of reimagined practices of church discipline, particularly at the congregational level. Sessions ought to be attending to needs for reconciliation and restoration within their congregations and working to encourage such reconciliation and restoration.

I imagine this might begin within the session, as the session holds one another accountable and forgives offenses that arise in the course of work together. Such practices on the Session could then radiate at out to the wider congregation, with the investment of time and energy in encouraging the offended to forgive. A Session might even hold monthly mediation forums where aggrieved parties can sit down together, with the support of their church's

leadership, seeking the will and ability to forgive. In this reimagined practice of church discipline within the congregation, then, I do not understand the responsibility of the church's leadership to be the identification of sin and the demand for repentance, but rather the identification of broken relationships and the invitation to forgive. Sessions and pastors can also work to support the safety of particularly vulnerable or oppressed people in their congregations, encouraging the practice of forgiveness, but not insisting that direct relationships be maintained where there is no acceptance of responsibility for wrongdoing and evidence of changed behavior.

While, certainly, the challenges to reinvigorating church discipline at the congregational level are manifold in 21st century liberal Protestant churches, greater investment in the facilitation of forgiveness would encourage the humility Barth helped us to see is essential to the church's identity, would cultivate the mutuality that Schleiermacher points to at the heart of the church, and would enable the progression that *is* the holiness in which humans participate in this life. We need not only hear that we are forgiven proclaimed from pulpits, but we must live into this forgiveness, with the brothers and sisters to whom we've been united by Baptism.

If this proposal clearly has implications for a reimagined manifestation of and reinvigoration of church discipline, it holds implications for rethinking the two undisputed marks of the church as well. First, it is unlikely that a tradition that has for so long emphasized preaching will cease to do so. The word proclaimed will remain central to a Reformed understanding of the church. However, an implication of the argument of this dissertation is that we need to broaden our understanding of preaching and consequently our identification of preachers. If the heart of the preaching of the gospel is the extension of forgiveness, then this is the work of all the people, not only those who orally extend forgiveness from pulpits. Those who do step into pulpits have the opportunity and responsibility to inspire, cultivate, and draw forth

the preaching ministry of the congregation. All that unfolds in the community's worship can serve to unleash a spirit of forgiveness that is practiced in mutual relationships within—and even beyond—the community. Practicing forgiveness is part of our witness. What do often speaks louder than what we say.

The church needs to be visible as church in the world if we are going to be effective witnesses to the Gospel. When we practice forgiveness, we become visible as church. In recent years, outside my own communion, there have been striking examples of this— when the Amish community whose children were murdered went and extended forgiveness to the widow and mother of the murderer, the world took notice.⁶⁸¹ When a homeless man shot a priest and then himself, during an Episcopalian liturgy, and the community turned around and performed the funeral for that homeless man days later, the world took notice.⁶⁸² Recently Christians in Egypt have chosen not to retaliate after their churches have been burned and church members have been killed by militant Muslims; Atef Gendy, president of the Evangelical Theological Seminary of Cairo, recently spoke of this, with awe, at a Presbytery meeting in the United States.⁶⁸³ He commented that the many moderate Muslims in his country have noticed this. They comment on it. That cannot believe that the Christians are forgiving. They know this is of God. Indeed the world notices when we squabble and divide as well, when we fail to practice forgiveness, but this is noticed and remarked upon as proof that the church is just like any other human community—

⁶⁸¹ This has been extensively covered in the media. A recent scholarly examination of the events—both the schoolhouse killing and the forgiveness that followed—is found in Donald B. Kraybill and Steven M. Nolt, *Amish Grace*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass, 2007).

⁶⁸² E.g David Dishneau, “Maryland Episcopal Church Leaders Forgive, Offer Funeral Services For Homeless Shooter Of Priest And Assistant,” *The Huffington Post*, May 0, 2012, accessed January 12, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/09/episcopal-leaders-forgive-homeless-shooter_n_1504561.html.

⁶⁸³ Dr. Gendy spoke to the Presbytery of Wabash Valley on Friday, September 12, 2014 at Geneva Center in Rochester, Indiana. I attended this meeting and these comments are taken from my notes on his presentation.

broken, corrupt, and disappointing. Failures to forgive are visible, but they do not make us distinct—they do not show the world the difference that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ makes. Failures in charity are not visible holiness. Growth in charity, growth in the practice of forgiveness, is growth towards visible holiness. And it is a form of preaching.

Finally, this proposal suggests possible implications for the sacramental life of Presbyterian congregations. Already Reformed liturgies emphasize the way in which the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper facilitate encounters with the forgiveness of God in Christ Jesus.⁶⁸⁴ But, particularly in the sacrament of Communion an opportunity is present to live into forgiveness on a horizontal plane as well. In the Matthean account of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is recorded as saying that if you are aware that anyone holds anything against you; go and be reconciled before offering a gift at the altar.⁶⁸⁵ Here the offending party is given responsibility for reconciliation. In Matthew 18 the offended party has the primary responsibility. Just as the practice of church discipline once had direct eucharistic implications, pastors and sessions working to encourage the practice of forgiveness in congregations might hold reconciling forums immediately before eucharistic worship services. Opportunities for visible embodiments of this practice might even be built into the liturgies themselves— where parties who have made peace with one another will testify to this or embrace on their way to the table.

⁶⁸⁴ In standard Eucharistic liturgies both the words of institution which includes the statement “This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins” and the inclusion of the Lord's prayer within the Eucharistic prayers bring forgiveness to the table (see Theology and Ministry Unit for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), *Book of Common Worship*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 73-74.) Early in a standard Presbyterian baptismal liturgy the officiant declares, “In baptism God claims us, and seals us to show that we belong to God. God frees us from sin and death, uniting us with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection” (Ibid, 404). Further, candidates are asked to renounce sin and evil and prayers are offered over the candidate that they might be cleansed of their sin through the waters of baptism (Ibid, 411).

⁶⁸⁵ Mt. 5: 23-24

Though a classical practice of excommunication seems unlikely to facilitate reconciliation in today's American Protestant church; as we've already considered, when dismissed from one table it is easy to find another at which to sup. But if the Eucharist is increasingly stressed as a sacrament of reconciliation at which a reconciled and reconciling people gather together, if the Eucharist itself becomes a practice of forgiveness, perhaps believers struggling to forgive will choose to abstain. Perhaps this can be facilitated by having elders on hand to pray with any who feel unable to receive the sacrament for any reason.

Despite efforts at liturgical renewal in the latter 20th century in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and other Protestant denominations, the sacramental consciousness of many American Presbyterians is thin. I have regularly heard parishioners speak of communion as vacuous ritual with which they have no meaningful connection. For these at least, the sacraments are not functioning as aids to the word as Calvin suggested they should. The preceding discussion would suggest roots for this in an exaggerated clerical/lay distinction in which the laity are primarily passive in their church involvement and in the breakdown of any practice of discipline to which the entire community is accountable. Perhaps, also, the Reformed stress on the priority of God's action, which informs the classical two marks of the church, has served to undercut meaningful reflection on the human action that flows, in gratitude, from all that God has done and is doing by Christ in the Spirit. I believe that by naming a third mark of the church explicitly as the practice of forgiveness we can begin to move towards a balanced understanding of and experience of the church and its holiness. And, indeed, the church will better function as a primary site of the sanctification of the world.

By humbly, mutually living into forgiveness we will make progress towards greater holiness— and greater visibility as church in the world.

This will only unfold at the leading of God’s Word and Spirit, but where it does unfold we know God’s Word and Spirit to be at work.

This moment invites us to repent of our clericalism, to offer a full throated acknowledgement that no part of the church, in and of itself, is holy, to resist the temptation to expect holiness to be embodied in our leaders alone, to broaden our understanding of preaching and preachers, and to rethink discipline for the 21st century as corporate processes for facilitating the practice of forgiveness.

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