

Convergence Ecclesiology
ICCEC U.S. Theological Commission
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The Trinity and Ecclesiology

Using a Trinitarian model we hope to enrich our understanding of the nature of the Church from a Convergence Ecclesiological perspective according to the ICCEC.¹ Just as it is difficult for our finite minds to explain the concept of a Triune God, it is equally difficult to define the Church. As with the Trinity, we must rely on images in understanding the Church. The Church is an icon of the Trinity in all the fullness of the Godhead. This reflection of the Trinity leads us to understand the Church in the context of Three Streams Christianity. The Economic Trinity is the relationship between God and His creation, particularly as it is revealed in the plan of salvation, given to us in Holy Scripture. The Immanent Trinity refers to certain realities in the inner life of God wherein God relates to Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Examining the Church in relation to the Trinity facilitates our understanding of unity in diversity, consensus government, collegiality, relationships, and monarchy within the life of the Body of Christ.

Crucial to our Ecclesiology of Convergence is the question, “How is this Trinitarian God truly present among us?” In the ICCEC we are committed to an Ecclesiology that is experiential and transformative in all its dimensions. Each of the three streams of Convergence Theology is rooted in God’s real presence with His people:

- He is truly present in all the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church and especially in the Holy Eucharist.
- He is truly present through the manifestation of the fruit and gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- He is truly present through the life giving and transformative power of the Word of God.

Every part of our Ecclesiology must continually point us to this Triune God who is truly present with us now and who has promised to be with us to the end of the age.

Since the Trinity is the foundation of our Ecclesiology, three Biblical images were identified that themselves exemplify the Trinitarian nature of God: the People of God, the Body of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit.² It should be noted that because these images are directly related to God Himself they are not simply descriptions of the Church but are ontological in nature, that is, they are true and objective statements about the Church’s essential nature.

¹ For example, Q-160 in the ICCEC Catechism asks, “What is the Church?”

A. The Church is a divinely instituted community of believers united by faith in Jesus Christ, and by the love and law of God. The Church is called the body of Christ, the temple of God, the pillar and foundation of truth, the household of God and the bride of Christ. Matthew 16:18. Acts 20:28. Ephesians 1:18-23; 3:21. I Timothy 3:15. Hebrews 12:22- 23. (ICCEC Catechism)

² These are also the three images Simon Chan identifies in *Liturgical Theology*, chapter 1: “The Ontology of the Church”. Cf. Chan (2006) *Liturgical Theology*, p 21-40. Cf. Lesslie Newbigan, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church*.

The Church Is the People of God

There is continuity in the Old and New Testaments concerning the people of God. In the Exodus story, Israel is the chosen people with whom God makes a covenant in fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises and covenant (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-21) and the promises given to the Patriarchs. In Exodus 19:4-6 God says, “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”³

In the Old Testament Israel is called out from the nations to be God’s people, to be holy as He is holy, separated to the Lord, and ultimately commissioned to communicate His offer of salvation to the world. In the New Testament this role now passes on to the Church as a result of the New Covenant established in and through Jesus Christ. In 1 Peter 2:4-12, St Peter shows how, in the New Testament, this role as the People of God continues in to the Christian Church.⁴ Throughout the development of this truth in Scripture, the People of God is seen as a corporate, holy, interacting, sharing, and worshiping community in the world. God’s continuous method of communicating His mind to humanity is through the people of God. “To call the church the people of God is to recognize that it exists in continuity with the ancient covenant people of God, the people of Israel.”⁵

There are a multitude of inter-textual references in 1 Peter 2 revealing how the Church is in continuity with and also a continuation of God’s plan for the people of God.⁶ We will not take time here to unpack the numerous images of the People of God, but these do help us appreciate the many splended dimension of the mystery of the Church. We have become a “race,” a “nation,” and a “people,” specially chosen by God for His own possession, to be holy as He is holy. And this race, nation, and people are also a holy and royal priesthood. All of these images point to a communal corporate reality.

By virtue of our incorporation into Christ, we have attained a truly regal and priestly status not as separate individuals but *as a people*. The Church as an assembly of the People of God derives its character and calling from the One who called the assembly into existence, the Triune God. It is

³ The New King James Version (NKJV) of the Bible is used throughout, unless otherwise noted.

⁴ Especially helpful among the many texts that could be considered from the New Testament is I Pet 2:4-12; “Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, ⁵you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, “Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone”, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame. ⁷Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, “The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone,” ⁸ and “A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.” They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. ⁹But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. ¹¹Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, ¹²having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

⁵ Chan (2006) *Liturgical Theology*, p 24.

⁶ A few of these OT references are: Ex 19:6; Dt 7:6; Ps 118:22; Is 42:6-7, 43:21, 61:6, 66:18-21; and Hos 1:6-10; 2:23; to just name some of the more obvious ones.

God's gathering. He called the assembly and He determines its purpose and function. We, as the Church, are called out and set apart for God's purposes in the world. God's purposes include corporate worship, world mission, personal evangelism, spiritual warfare and service to the poor.⁷ The sacred Assembly of God's people--the *Ecclesia* exists to honor, love and serve God in the world.

The Church Is the Body of Christ

The Church is the Body of Christ. Origen stated, "The Church is Christ manifest in the flesh, as Jesus of Nazareth was God manifest in the flesh."⁸ Thomas Oden says, "The fundamental requisite of the church is the presence of Christ."⁹ The Church as the Body of Christ is ontologically linked to the head of the Church—Jesus Christ, the Son of God. St Paul can say to the Colossians: "And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence" (Col 1:18).

It is fascinating that "the Body of Christ" has multiple meanings in the New Testament. For example it is used to describe the person of Christ in his incarnation, the reality of the Church and also the Holy Eucharist. "The church is the divine-humanity by virtue of its being the body of Christ. The expression *body of Christ* is more than a metaphor for some intimate social dynamic between Christ and his Church. It is an ontological reality, as Christ is ontologically real. This, of course, is one of the most vibrant biblical images for the Church."¹⁰ Chan argues the Body of Christ is much more than just an image.

One of the consequences of affirming the ontological relationship between Christ and the church is the way communion is understood. The church is a communion because members are incorporated into the body of Christ; and the church becomes the one body of Christ by eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ.¹¹

The Church is the living Body of Christ ontologically linked to the head, Jesus Christ. The Church down through the ages is truly the embodied Christ, even as Jesus was God Incarnate, so the Church is the Body of Christ for the life of the world actualizing the truth of Christ through time until it reaches its eschatological fulfillment when he comes again.

The Church Is the Temple of the Holy Spirit

In 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, St Paul writes to the Church at Corinth, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are." It is important to remember that the pronouns of verses 16-17 are plural, St Paul is speaking of the Church here, not the individual Christian. See notes,

The church as God's temple is pregnant imagery—for both the Jewish Paul and the Gentile Corinthians. Paul's word (*ναός*) refers to the actual sanctuary, the place of a

⁷ John 20:21, Lk 4:16-19

⁸ Origen quoted in Oden (1992) *Life in the Spirit*, p 293.

⁹ Oden (1992) *Life in the Spirit*, p 297.

¹⁰ Chan (2006) *Liturgical Theology*, p 27. Cf. e.g. Rom 12:5; I Cor 12:12-30; Eph 4:12, 5:21-33, Col 1:18, 24.

¹¹ Chan (2006) *Liturgical Theology*, p 29.

deity's dwelling, in contrast to *ἱερόν*, which designates the temple precincts as well as the sanctuary. In its first instance, therefore, the imagery picks up the motif of God's presence with his people... For Paul, therefore, the temple imagery first of all echoes this OT motif: God is now present among his people in Corinth by his Spirit.¹²

Even as we noted the continuity in the Old and New Testament regarding the People of God, there is continuity here with St Paul's use of the temple imagery. In Ephesians he refers to the Church as a "holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."¹³ The Temple of the Holy Spirit is the newly constituted People of God who are here also called holy. We will have reason to revisit this theme when we consider the Marks of the Church below.

The Holy Spirit not only abides in the individual believer, but also abides in the assembly of the Church, gathered to offer worship and praise to God, empowered to serve and witness for the life of the world. The People of God and Body of Christ need supernatural power to be the Church God has called us to be and to do the work that He has called us to do.

Therefore, the Father gives us spiritual tools and supernatural weapons to equip the Church to fulfill its mission and ministry. These tools and weapons include the spiritual gifts. These gifts are concrete expressions of grace—*charismata*—which enable and empower the Church to do the words and perform the works of Jesus. It is not enough to believe in spiritual gifts, or even occasionally participate in their practice; we must intensely hunger for their manifestation.¹⁴

The following list highlights some of the aspects of the work of the Spirit that are central to a Convergence Ecclesiology as it relates to the ICCEC:

1. *Relationship*: We emphasize the personal presence and power of the Spirit in the life of the believer and the corporate life of the people of God.¹⁵
2. *Heavenly Worship*: Heavenly worship occurs during the celebration of the ancient liturgy as the people of God are lifted up to heaven with the ascended Christ as they partake of the Lord's Supper—the Holy Eucharist.¹⁶
3. *Signs and Wonders*: The Word explains the reason for the works and the works display and demonstrate the power of the Word.¹⁷
4. *Holiness and the Fruit of the Spirit*: The desire of the Church is to reflect in our lives the attitude and actions of Jesus; this is a participation in the life of the Spirit to become partakers of the Divine nature.¹⁸
5. *Community*: The Spirit anoints all the ministries, activities, and sacraments of the Church.¹⁹
6. *Leadership*: We practice Spirit-directed consensus decision-making.²⁰

¹² Fee (2011) *God's Empowering Presence*, p 114.

¹³ Eph. 2:19-22

¹⁴ 1 Cor 12:31, 14:1, 39; Heb 2:3-4

¹⁵ 2 Cor 6:16-7:1

¹⁶ Rev chs 4-5

¹⁷ Heb 2:4

¹⁸ 2 Peter 1:2-4

¹⁹ Acts 2: 42-47

7. *Priesthood of all Believers*: The ministerial priesthood is called to serve, nourish, sustain, and guide the priesthood of all believers. The believer's priesthood is a call to be Christ in the secular workplaces of the world.²¹

8. *Spiritual Warfare*: The Christian life is standing in Christ and by the Spirit defeating the enemies of the soul: the world, the flesh, sin, and the devil.²²

The Marks of the Church

The Creedal Marks of the Church reflect the Holy Trinity and reinforce our understanding of the Church as the People of God, the Body of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. These four Marks, since the time of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (AD 381), answer the question "By what evidences is the Church recognizable?" In response to this question Oden says,

The *ekklēsia* is one because it shares in a single body, *corpus Christi*, the risen Lord. It is being made holy by participating by faith in the perfect holiness of the Son through the power of the Spirit. It is universal or catholic because it offers the whole counsel of God to the whole world. It is apostolic because it is sent into the world even as the Son was sent. These are reliable marks of the church.²³

It is our position that these Marks are not simply descriptions, but are also ontological attributes of the Church. By necessity the comments here will be kept very brief.²⁴

The Church is One:

Jesus prayed, "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me." (John 17:21) Of course, since the early Church there have been the challenges of oneness.²⁵ Yet, in spite of the historical tensions, the Church's unity has been asserted.

In ascribing unity to the church, we mean that all the members of the church constitute one body, having one head, one origin, one faith, one baptism. They are united by their bond to the one living Lord.²⁶

The word of St Paul to the Ephesians still remains true, "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." (Eph 4:1-6)

²⁰ Acts 13:1-3; 15:28

²¹ 1 Peter 2:9-10

²² Eph 6:10-20

²³ Oden (1992) *Life in the Spirit*, p 297.

²⁴ There are many helpful discussions on these creedal Marks of the Church but since we use Oden's *Theology* in St Michael's Seminary we will limit our references to the use of Oden (1992) *Life in the Spirit*, pp 297-365.

²⁵ E. g. 1 Cor 1:10ff

²⁶ Oden (1992) *Life in the Spirit*, p 304. E.g. 1 Cor 1:10; Gal 1:6-8; Eph 4:2-15; Phil 2:1-11.

The church is “a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Cyprian). The unity of the church “finds its highest exemplar and source in the unity of the Persons of the Trinity”. The unity of the triune God signals and anticipates the unity of the *ekklēsia*.²⁷

We affirm this truth by faith in spite of the historical divisions that have occurred within the life of the Church. There is a spiritual unity and oneness in Christ that transcends earthly divisions.

The Church is Holy:

The Church is Holy because it is related to a Holy God. In giving his life for the life of the world, Christ bestows his holiness upon the Church. This holiness describes our status in Christ which enables the Church to become ethically holy. Again in continuity with Israel, the Church is Holy because of its relation to the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

“Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.’ (Lev 19:2); ‘And you shall be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine.’ (Lev 20:26); Jesus said, “for them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.” (John 17:19) “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30).

In response to the question “What makes the Church Holy?” Oden says, “The church is holy because her Lord is holy (1 Cor. 1:30), and her task is to fashion her members after her Lord. The church is holy because she is sanctified by Christ through his passion, teaching, prayer, and sacraments.”²⁸

The Church is Catholic:

Catholic as a Mark describes the completeness and universality of the Church that professes the whole faith, believed everywhere and always by all. The Church Catholic is not confined to a particular location, but every local church is an expression of the Church universal.

St Paul’s witness to the Church Catholic is reflected in the following passages, noting that the Church holds to the “whole” of the apostolic teaching in every place and at all times:

“To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who *in every place* call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours...(I Cor 1:2); “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to

²⁷ Oden (1992). *Life in the Spirit*, p 304.

²⁸ Oden (1992) *Life in the Spirit*, p 316.

contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” (Jude 1:3); “Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. (2 Tim 1:13-14) “You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” (2 Tim 2:1-2)

The classic definition of the cumulative affirmation of the early witness of the “catholic” Church is defined later in the early Church by Vincent of Lerins:

“Moreover, in the Catholic Church itself, all possible care must be taken, that we hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all. For that is truly and in the strictest sense ‘Catholic’, which, as the name itself and the reason of the thing declare, comprehends all universally. This rule we shall observe if we follow universality, antiquity, consent. We shall follow universality if we confess that one faith to be true, which the whole Church throughout the world confesses; antiquity, if we in no wise depart from those interpretations which it is manifest were notoriously held by our holy ancestors and fathers; consent, in like manner, if in antiquity itself we adhere to the consentient definitions and determinations of all, or at the least of almost all priests and doctors.”²⁹

This Catholic Faith is founded upon the authority of Sacred Scripture that contains all things necessary unto salvation. This message of salvation has been entrusted to the Church Catholic.

The Church is the Apostolic:

The Apostolic nature of the Church is built upon the foundation of the Apostles. Concerning this Mark of the Church St Paul says, “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,” (Eph 2:19-20).

We understand the Apostolic nature of the Church to include at least the following: Apostolic authority, doctrine and anointing.³⁰ 1) Apostolic authority is delegated authority from the chief apostle, Jesus Christ, to his Church. This Apostolic authority was given first to the original apostles and through them to their successors, representing the Church Catholic.³¹ 2) Apostolic Doctrine is the teaching and witness of the apostles, embodied in the sacred scriptures once and for all delivered to the saints.³² 3) Apostolic Anointing is the gift of the empowerment of the

²⁹ Vincent of Lérins, *Comm.* 2.6, *FC* 7, p., 270

³⁰ Cf. Addendum on Convergence Ecclesiology and Apostolic Succession

³¹ John 20:21; Matt 16:18-19

³² Acts 2:42; Jude 3

Holy Spirit promised to the Apostles.³³ This Apostolic Anointing is imparted to the Church Catholic to fulfill the mission and ministry to which it has been called and sent.³⁴

On the foundation of the Apostles Oden notes,

The church is apostolic insofar as it retains, guards, and faithfully transmits its apostolic mission. Those sent by the Son are the apostolate. As Christ was sent by the Father, the apostles were sent, empowered by the Spirit, and the continuing apostolate is still being sent (John 20:21) "...The time of the apostolate begins with the ascension and ends only with the Parousia....The church does not merely *have* but *is* a mission, the historical embodiment of the mission of the Son through the Spirit. The church does not elicit mission, but rather mission elicits, awakens, and empowers the church. *Missio dei* embraces all that the church is and does in its life in the world. This called out community has a key role to play in the history of the emerging reign of God (Mt 13; 2 Tim 1:1–14; Heb 12:22–28).³⁵

Jesus said, "Even as the Father has sent me, so send I you." (Jn 20:21) These words are the Lord's commission to an apostolic Church. The Lord is the one who initiates and inspires mission. The Great Commission is essential to the life of the Church and intrinsic to its apostolic mission to proclaim the Gospel.³⁶ The word comes from *euangelion*, "the good news" and so being an Apostolic Community we must be a Church that experiences the Gospel and also a Church that is an authentic messenger of that same message and experience. At the heart of the Gospel is the message of the Cross. St Paul says "for I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ... my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."³⁷ As a Convergence Communion we are committed to every person having a personal encounter with the Living Lord. We must always seek to be a Church that cultivates the *experience of the Gospel* for ourselves, our children, and the generations that follow.

In summary to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church:

"The church is one, finding its oneness in Christ. The church is holy, set apart from the world to mediate life to the world and bring forth the fruits of the Spirit amid the life of the world. The church is catholic in that it is whole, for all, and embracing all times and places. The church is apostolic in that it is grounded in the testimony of the first witnesses to Jesus' life and resurrection, and depends upon and continues their ministry."³⁸

Conclusion

³³ Acts 1:4, 8

³⁴ Acts 8:14-17

³⁵ Oden (1992) *Life in the Spirit*, p 349-350.

³⁶ Matt 28:18-20

³⁷ 1 Cor 2:2-5

³⁸ Oden (1992). *Life in the Spirit*, p 303.

This Ecclesiology attempts to lay out an initial way forward for the ICCEC. It continues to be our conviction that God has raised up our communion, from its early days in the Pro-Life movement, among prophetic Pentecostal, Evangelical and Sacramental churches. The Sacramental dimension gave Apostolic Authority and vision to that original prophetic vision. God's call and anointing has not changed. We have a role to play in the larger Church but also in the midst of the cultural decline that we see in North America and around the world. Our time has only just begun. May God reveal to the ICCEC the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding and give us grace to embrace that will without reserve in order that we will be fruitful in Jesus for the salvation and life of the world, to the praise and glory of God.