

What Do We Mean When We Say “Church”?

Theology, Ecclesiology, and Polity

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Polity as a Theological Discipline

Theology is the effort to give language to our faith

The nature and work of God is reflected in the nature and calling of the Church

What we believe about God (*theology*) is the foundation for what we think about the Church (*ecclesiology*)

What we believe about the Church (*ecclesiology*) is expressed in how we govern the church (*polity*)

Four Key Theological Ideas

- ✧ The Doctrine of the Trinity - *Who is God?*
- ✧ The Doctrine of the Incarnation - *How is God engaged with creation?*
- ✧ The Doctrine of Eschatology - *What is the goal of God's engagement with creation?*
- ✧ The Doctrine of Election - *How does God use the Church and God's people?*

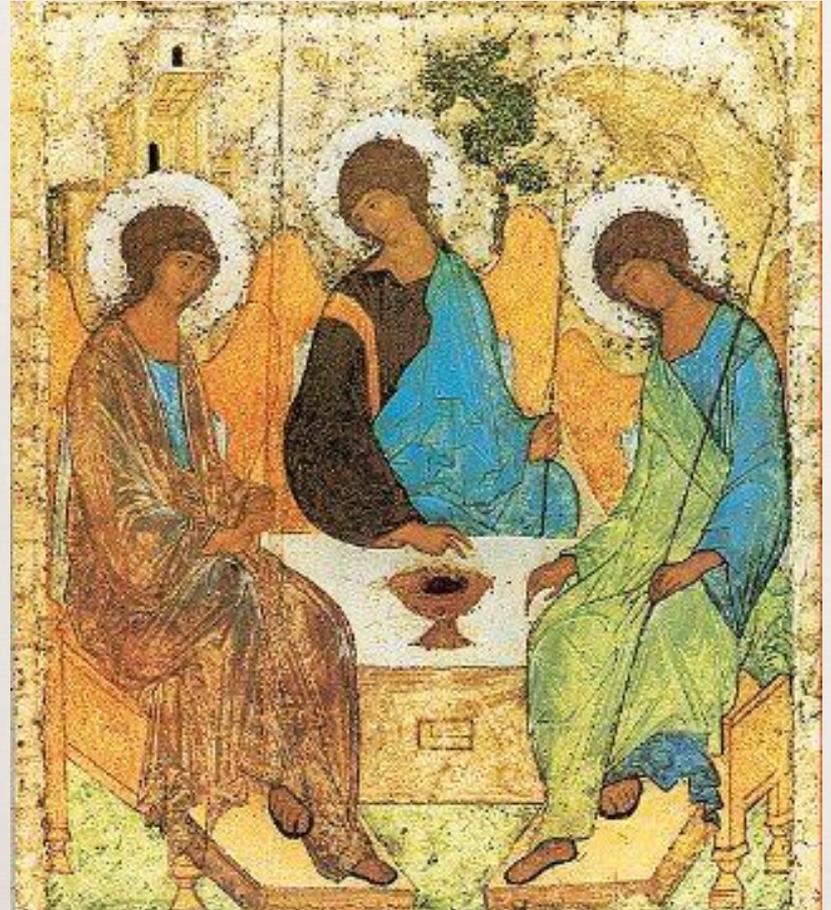
The Doctrine of the Trinity

- ❖ Emphasis on Three Persons - distinct, but inseparable
- ❖ Father, Son, and Spirit are co-equal and interconnected within relationship - *perichoresis*
- ❖ Nature of God is outreaching (*ekstasis*) and communal (*koinonia*)



The Trinitarian Church

- ✧ Communal in nature
- ✧ People of God participate in each other's lives in deep ways
- ✧ Radically open to the inclusion of those outside
- ✧ Gathered around the Sacraments



Church as Community

F-1.0301:The Church is the body of Christ. Christ gives to the Church all the gifts necessary to be his body. The Church strives to demonstrate these gifts in its life as a community in the world (1 Cor. 12:27-28):

The Church is to be

- ◆ A community of faith
- ◆ A community of hope
- ◆ A community of love
- ◆ A community of witness

Participation with Each Other

G-1.0102 The Fellowship of the Congregation

The polity of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) presupposes the fellowship of women, men, and children united in covenant relationship with one another and with God through Jesus Christ. The organization rests on the fellowship and is not designed to work without trust and love.

G-1.0304 The Ministry of Members

A faithful member bears witness to God's love and grace and promises to be involved responsibly in the ministry of Christ's Church. Such involvement includes:

- * taking part in the common life and worship of a congregation,
- * lifting one another up in prayer, mutual concern, and active support,
- * living responsibly in the personal, family, vocational, political, cultural, and social relationships of life,

Radical Openness

F-1.0404 – Openness

As it participates in God's mission, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) seeks:

a new openness in its own membership, becoming in fact as well as in faith a community of women and men of all ages, races, ethnicities, and worldly conditions, made one in Christ by the power of the Spirit, as a visible sign of the new humanity

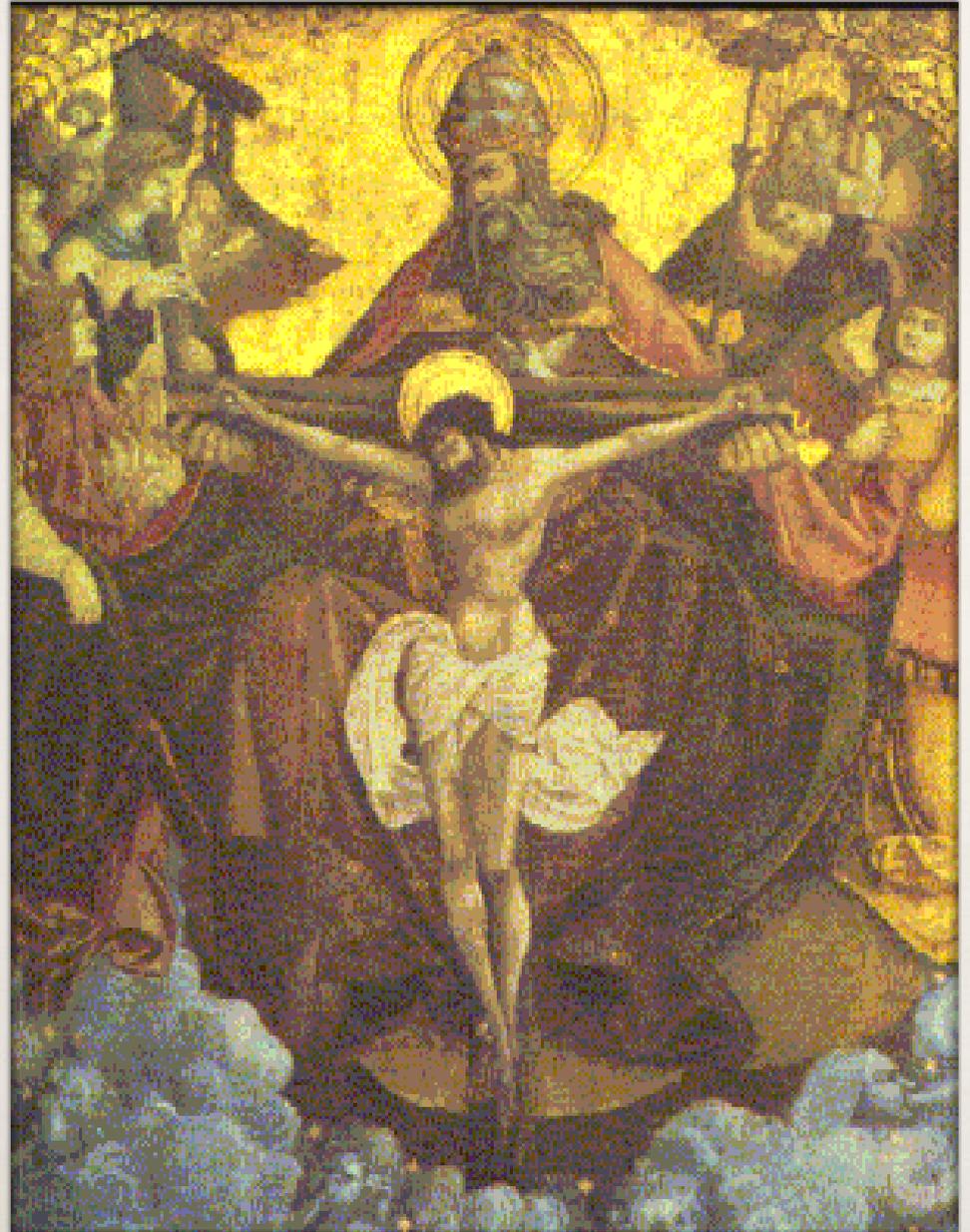
F-1.0304 – Unity in Diversity

The unity of believers in Christ is reflected in the rich diversity of the Church's membership. In Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God unites persons through baptism regardless of race, ethnicity, age, sex, disability, geography, or theological conviction. There is therefore no place in the life of the Church for discrimination against any person. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall guarantee full participation and representation in its worship, governance, and emerging life to all persons or groups within its membership. No member shall be denied participation or representation for any reason other than those stated in this Constitution.

The Doctrine of the Incarnation

God eternally comes to the world in Christ by the power of the Spirit to transform the world according to God's intent.

- ✧ God engages creation in the life of Jesus
- ✧ God redeems creation in the death of Jesus
- ✧ God transforms creation in the resurrection of Jesus



The Incarnational Church

“Mission is not primarily an activity of the Church; it is an attribute of God.”

- *David Bosch*

“It is not the Church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill to the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the father that includes the Church, creating the Church as it goes along its way.”

- *Jürgen Moltmann*



The Incarnational Church

- ✧ The Church is called into being as a community of witness and participation in God's work of transformation
- ✧ It is not the church that sends others in mission; we are ourselves sent by God into the contexts where God places us

Congregations and Mission

G-1.0101 The Mission of the Congregation

The congregation is the church engaged in the mission of God in its particular context. The triune God gives to the congregation all the gifts of the gospel necessary to being the Church. The congregation is the basic form of the church, but it is not of itself a sufficient form of the church. Thus congregations are bound together in communion with one another, united in relationships of accountability and responsibility, contributing their strengths to the benefit of the whole, and are called, collectively, the church.

The Doctrine of Eschatology

What is the goal of God's engagement with creation?

What is the Christian hope?



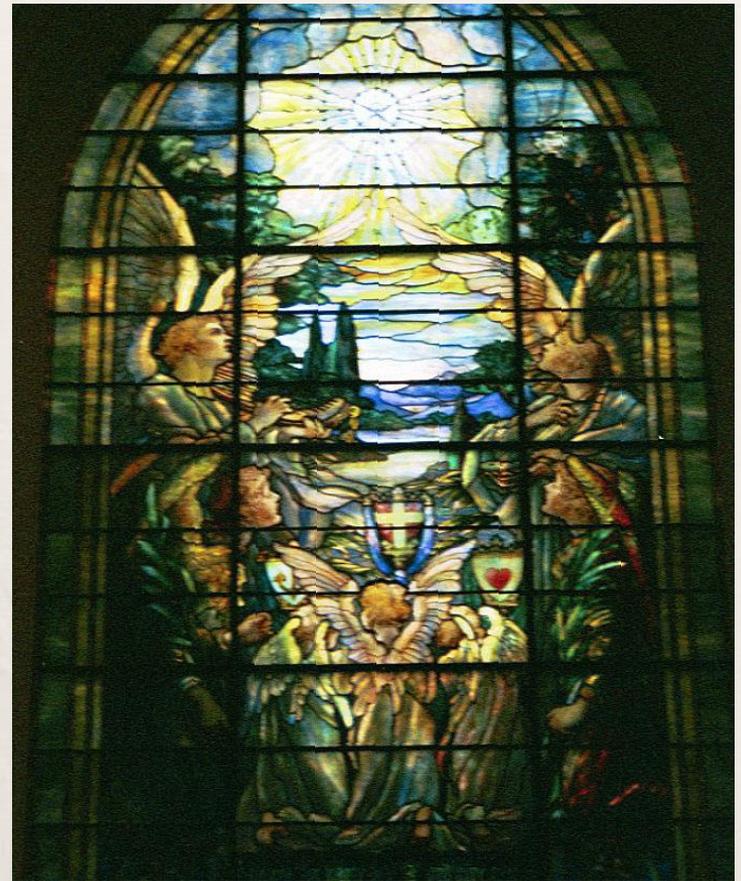
The Eschatological Church

Focus of proclamation is on God's love for people and creation (Jn 3:16)

Church as community of witness to God's ongoing transformation

Life is about participation in God's transformation through engagement with creation, people

Creation as realm of God's transformation - a "new creation"



The Church as a Community of Hope

F-1.0301 The Church Is the Body of Christ

The Church is to be a community of hope, rejoicing in the sure and certain knowledge that, in Christ, God is making a new creation. This new creation is a new beginning for human life and for all things. The Church lives in the present on the strength of that promised new creation.

Election and Baptism

- Every person baptized is called to a ministry of witness to God's grace.
- Since election is the free gift of God's grace, and not based on our merit, there is no hierarchy of grace
- If there is no hierarchy of grace, there is also no hierarchy of ministry; all the baptized stand equally before God.



Ordered Ministry

G-2.0101 Christ's Ministry

The basic form of ministry is the ministry of the whole people of God, from whose midst some are called to ordered ministries, to fulfill particular functions. Members and those in ordered ministries serve together under the mandate of Christ.

G-2.0102 Ordered Ministries

- ★ The Church's ordered ministries described in the New Testament and maintained by this church are deacons and presbyters (teaching elders and ruling elders). Ordered ministries are gifts to the church to order its life so that the ministry of the whole people of God may flourish. The existence of these ordered ministries in no way diminishes the importance of the commitment of all members to the total ministry of the church.
- ★ The government of this church is representative, and the right of God's people to elect presbyters and deacons is inalienable. Therefore, no person can be placed in any ordered ministry in a congregation or council of the church except by election of that body.
- ★ Ordination to the ministry of teaching elder, ruling elder, or deacon is unique to that order of ministry.