

# BASIC CHRISTIANITY

## Lecture Number 10

### THE CHURCH

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#### THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

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We are going to begin with an exercise in imagination: so please everybody pick a spot in the middle of the floor and look at it. As you look, what you see is a beautiful collie dog lying there. Its lovely brown coat is long and silky. Its tail is wagging happily, and every now and then it thumps the floor.

But while we are staring at the dog, an incredible thing happens: we suddenly realize that it is not a collie after all, but a boxer.

Now one of the differences between collies and boxers is that while they are pups, boxers get their tails cut off. But even though the boxer's tail has been cut off, he still goes on living. However, the tail of the boxer at once ceases to be alive with dog-life, even though there may still be bacterial life and enzyme life going on within it.

Collies and boxers are organisms. In the New Testament, when the Church is being referred to, frequently it is in the imagery of some kind of organism: the mustard seed, the fig tree, the vine and the branches, the Body of Christ, or the Bride of Christ.

The Church is an organism. And, like all organisms, like the collie and the boxer, it is a living unity of diverse parts.

And like the collie, the Church exists in time and has continuity. That continuity transcends, goes beyond, the life of its parts.

For example: Dogs can have their hair trimmed, their claws clipped, and even their tails cut off, and yet their lives go on. And they keep their identities. Also, the cells of our own bodies constantly are being sloughed off and replaced. Every seven years or so they are completely replaced. And yet our lives go on, and we keep our identities.

In an organism, the members, the parts, cooperate for the sake of the whole organism. They find their meaning and purpose in their relationship with the whole. And in a biological organism, the members have no purpose of their own apart from that of the organism. They exist only for the sake of the organism.

However, in the case of the Church, not only does each member exist for the sake of the whole organism, but, in a sense, the entire organism exists for the sake of each member, who has his own purpose. This is possible because both the Church and each of its members have the same purpose. And we will talk about that in a few minutes.

There is another difference between *biological* organisms and the Church: In a biological organism, the members cooperate involuntarily, without choosing to do so. But in the Church, the members are free to choose to cooperate or not. And because it is a matter of choice, the Church is a *moral* organism.

That collie dog, and every organism in fact, has four characteristics: It has *unity*; it has *life*; its life is *in all its members*; and it has *continuity in time*.

And the Church, because she is an organism, also has those four characteristics or *notes*. In her case, using the language of the creeds, those four notes are called: unity; holiness; catholicity; and apostolicity. That is to say, the Church is ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC, and APOSTOLIC.

We are now going to discuss these four “notes” of the Church one at a time.

## I THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

The Church is *One*. There never has been but one Church, and there never will be! And that is because of the nature of the Church, because of its definition:

*The Church is the Body of which Jesus Christ is the Head and of which all baptized persons are members.* (1928 BCP, p.290; 1979 BCP, p.854)

The Church is one, because each member is *sacramentally* one with the Head, Jesus Christ, through Baptism. And since each member is united to Christ through Baptism, each member has unity with all other members, all of whom have the same unity with Christ. They all are “one in Christ”.

Now let us consider the unity of the Church in a little more detail:

- A. St. Paul says, “Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.” (Epistle to the Ephesians 4:15,16)

The bond of the Church’s unity is love, charity. God gives his love to the Church’s members. This enables them, if they choose, to love each other. That love can overcome a multitude of sins which, otherwise, causes dissension and thus obscures the unity of the Church.

- B. In fact, the unity of the Church is obscured. It does not appear to be one because of the sin of *schism*. Usually, the occasion or pretext for schism is heresy, either real or imagined. But the cause is the failure of charity, of love, in the members of the Church.

Schism is a sin, because it is a lie.

- C. The Unity of the Church, when it is complete, exists on three levels:

There should be unity in organization and obedience. It is this aspect of unity which is

broken by the present schisms.

There should be unity in doctrine. This aspect of the Church's unity has not been shattered *completely*. But it is strained and weakened by the loss of organizational unity, which is the result of the failure of charity.

However, at its deepest level (or, if you like, its highest), the Church is one through its unity with Christ, the Head of the Body. And this is what gives it its common life.

This common life is sacramental in nature. And it still belongs to those sections of the Church which have maintained the Apostolic Ministry. However, where the Apostolic Ministry has been abandoned, those individual persons who have been baptized still belong to the Church, but their organizations are not organic parts (i.e. communions). And the Church's sacramental life is not available to them, because the sacraments depend upon the Apostolic Ministry which gets its authority from Christ.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that God may not give them his grace mystically, apart from sacraments, as He sees fit and as they will let him.

Because the Church is one, it has a common purpose. When that common purpose is lost sight of, the result is stress which leads finally to disunity.

However, unity is not the same thing as uniformity. Given common purpose, life is enriched by diversity, variety, and complexity. For example, a mockingbird is more glorious than a cabbage. The degree to which complexity is achieved *within unity* is one of the tests of great art.

## II THE HOLINESS OF THE CHURCH

The Church is *Holy*. That is to say, it is alive. The unity of any organism depends upon its life. And when the life departs, the unity of the organism begins to disappear.

There are three parts to this notion of Holiness:

First, God *owns* the holy thing. It is set apart from the other things of its class for God to use as he sees fit.

The first word for the Church was a Greek one which expressed the notion of being set apart. It was *ekklesia* [*ek kaleo*], "those who are *called out*, or *apart*."

We get our own word *church* from another Greek word which expressed the idea of God's ownership. It was *kyriakos*, "belonging to the Lord". It became *kyrk* for short, in German *kirche*, and in English *church*.

Second, God is *inside* the holy thing. The Church is full of the Holy Spirit, which is its life, and which was given to the Church by the Father at Pentecost.

Holiness is usually transmitted by physical contact, sort of like static electricity. And so blessings, ordinations, and the consecration of the bread and wine in the Eucharist all involve

the laying on of the hands of the Apostolic Minister.

Third, God is *revealed* by the Holy thing. In some way, the holy thing reflects God's nature.

The body of a human being is the instrument which his spirit uses to manifest itself in the physical world. Likewise, Christ's Body, the Church, is the instrument he uses to manifest himself in time and space and in the affairs of humanity.

Now, if a world-champion billiards player develops a tic in his shoulder, he will be thwarted in his attempt to win a tournament.

In the same way, if a member of the Church becomes rebellious and acts autonomously, as if he were a law unto himself, the purpose of the indwelling Spirit will be thwarted.

Well, the members of the Church on earth are sinners. And so the Church is not fully responsive to God's will. But, in a great mystery, God takes sinners into the Church and redeems them, sanctifies them, while, at the same time using them in the process of sanctifying other sinners.

In the Church, we practice love on each other, and, in the process, we get loved. We practice forgiveness on each other, and, in the process, get forgiven. This is a powerful demonstration of the abundance of life which is within the Church.

### III THE CATHOLICITY OF THE CHURCH

The Church is *Catholic*. The word catholic comes from the Greek *kata-holos*, which means "according to the whole". The life of the Church is in *all of its members*.

The whole organism is responsible to and for the members, and vice-versa. No one person, except Jesus himself, can be catholic by himself.

My limitations and my biases must be balanced by the perspectives of the other members of the Church. Only together can we be fully catholic. The judgment of any one member must always be subject to correction by the judgment of the whole Body.

There are three ways in which the word catholic is used:

Most correctly, it is used to refer to that kind of Christianity which was normal or standard throughout the world before the Reformation of the 16th century, when the reformers made the Church officially puritan wherever they got control.

The Anglican Communion is catholic in this sense, because she refused the attempt to move the anchor out of the middle of the stream. (See Lecture #1, REALITY AND RELIGION)

Sometimes the word catholic is used to refer to the Roman Catholic Church for short. In this connection it is interesting to notice that in Japan the official name of the Anglican Church is "The Holy Catholic Church" while the name of the Roman Catholic Church is "The Roman Mission".

The word catholic is sometimes used to mean “universal”, with various interpretations such as simply “all Christians.” It is common for non-catholic Protestants to use the word in this way. It does mean “universal” in the sense of “having the whole faith for all people for all time”.

Non-catholic reformation churches have displayed a strong tendency to keep splitting up into more and more new groups. What is the explanation for that?

To answer this question, let us go back to the metaphor of the biological organism represented by the boxer dog.

As the Jews used to say, “the life is in the blood.” So when any part of an organism gets separated from the circulation system which is connected to the heart, it is cut off from the life of the organism. And unless it gets reconnected, that part begins to die.

In the case of the boxer pup, when the tail was cut off, the pup remained alive, but the severed tail died. It degenerated into an organization. On lower levels, there is still life in the tail, that is to say, enzyme activity, but there is no longer *dog*-life. And without dog-life it proceeds to decay.

In this analogy, some Christian “churches” (really organizations) are something like that tip of the pup’s tail.

Now, at the time of the Reformation (16th century), various groups abandoned certain aspects of Catholic doctrine. And they deliberately separated themselves from the bishops of the Church, although Martin Luther himself at first wanted to continue having bishops. But when none of the existing bishops would cooperate, the decision was made to get along without them.

They decided that the Eucharist was not really our Lord’s Body and Blood. And the Eucharist generally ceased to be what they did each week when they assembled to worship.

So because they changed their doctrine, and because they gave up the Apostolic Ministry, they found themselves cut off from the sacramental life of the Church.

As a result of the loss of the sacramental life, those church organizations – more properly called denominations – which sprang from the Reformation have had a strong tendency to disintegrate further. And so today there are hundreds, if not thousands, of “Protestant churches”.

Remember, this does not mean that individual baptized members of such denominations are not members of Christ. They are! But they are missing out on the full sacramental life of the Catholic Church, and that is a great misfortune for everyone.

And furthermore, almighty God, “who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ”, is perfectly able to breathe new life into the fragments of his Church and restore its unity.

#### IV THE APOSTOLICITY OF THE CHURCH

The Church is *Apostolic*. It has identity with itself down through the ages, from the time of the Apostles until now.

St. Ignatius of Antioch, writing about 115 AD, 85 years after the Resurrection, says, “Do nothing without the bishop and the presbyters...Let that be accounted a valid Eucharist which is celebrated by the bishop or one he appoints...” (Magn. 7, Trall. 3)

It is not lawful either to baptize or to hold an ‘agape’ apart from the bishop. St. Ignatius says “...As many as belong to God and Jesus Christ, these are with the bishop.” (Smyrna 8, Philad. 3, quoted by Moss in *The Christian Faith*, p. 384.)

That was the teaching, only 85 years after the Resurrection, by the bishop of Antioch - the city where the followers of Jesus were first called “Christians” and also the city which St. Paul used as the headquarters for his missionary journeys.

When a man is consecrated bishop, he receives from the Church, through the bishops who consecrate him, the authority of a *shaliach*, an *apostle*, with the authority of our Lord himself in certain matters, for example, the sacraments.

At the time of the Reformation, the radical reformers were quite ignorant about the history of the Church in apostolic times. They did have copies of the writings of St. Ignatius, but, unfortunately, they thought they were forgeries. So they ignored what they teach. However, since that time, so many editions of Ignatius have turned up in ancient libraries all over the world, that there is now no question about their authenticity.

At any rate, the reformers allowed their strong feelings about certain abuses in the Church of their experience to carry them away. And they made radical changes in the Church’s ministry and doctrine.

For example: The bishops with whom they were acquainted were frequently scandalously unworthy. And so they decided that there ought not to be bishops. Thus they threw the baby out with the bath water.

An important principle was involved. And they lost sight of it. When my opinion runs counter to the mind of the Church in every age and in every place, then the odds are that the Church is right and I am wrong. To believe otherwise is disastrously arrogant.

It would have been more reasonable and much better for everybody concerned, if the reformers had remained within Catholic Christianity and worked to convince the whole Church of their point of view. In the meantime, the rest of the Church would have had a chance to convince them.

The reformers in the Church of England did choose that course. The Church of England declared that it intended to remain in communion with the rest of the Church Catholic, even while resisting the Pope. It was the Pope who decided otherwise.

In 1976, the disastrous mistake of the 16th century reformers was repeated by the leaders of the Episcopal Church in the U.S.A. The General Convention voted by a bare majority to permit the ordination of women as priests and bishops.

This was another example of one segment of a small part of the Church Catholic undertaking to tamper with the ministry of the Church on the grounds that it knew it was right.

How much better it would have been if they had been willing to try to convince the whole Church that they were right. That would have given the Holy Spirit the opportunity to lead us all to consensus on what is a radically fundamental matter.

## THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength...Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thy self.” [Mark 12:29-31]

The purpose of the Church is threefold:

First: The primary, over-arching, all-inclusive purpose of the Church is to worship God. Because that is the primary purpose both of mankind and of each human being.

Jesus said, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind, and all thy strength; this is the first and great commandment.”

The writer O. Henry said, “Man is enough of an egoist that he is also an egotist, and if he love, his beloved shall know about it.” Genuine love necessarily expresses itself in some sort of love-making.

The person who says he is a Christian but doesn't go to church is like a young woman who says she really loves a certain man, but every time he asks her for a date she turns him down. Sooner or later, he will come to doubt that she loves him.

Worship is the Church gathered to make love to God — to express to him her love.

Therefore, *God*, not the congregation, is the audience. We go to Church to do something active, not to be passive, not to be preached at, sung to, or prayed over.

Furthermore, when you love someone, you want to give things to your beloved. And you want to give the best that you possibly can. So you want your worship to be the best that it possibly can be, without any taint of hypocrisy. And so we want to be saints in order that our worship will be perfect, because we are giving our selves to God.

That is the proper love of ourselves, our own sanctification. And until our own sanctification is complete, total, our worship will be less than perfect.

Therefore the second purpose of the Church is to make saints of its members.

Third: It is also the Church's purpose to convert sinners – to bring them into the Church's life in order to make saints out of them in order to offer them to God along with our selves. This is the love of our neighbors as ourselves.

Unless we are loving our neighbors as ourselves, we are not really able to give God ourselves,

because our *neighbors* are part of ourselves.

So evangelism is an essential aspect of worship. It is not optional! How can we appear before God empty handed? Are we prepared to hear him say to us what he said to Cain, “Where is Abel thy brother?”

## THE WHOLE CHURCH

The Church exists in time and space. But she also exists in eternity. She is the Body of Christ, which he has united to himself and taken with him into eternity.

The Church on earth is called *The Church Militant*.

She is concerned above all with the worship of God. But she is also concerned with the conversion of the heathen and the sanctification of her members.

The Church in Paradise — or Purgatory — is called *The Church Expectant*.

She is concerned with the Worship of God and the perfecting of — the completion of the sanctification of — the members. The Church Expectant is the “finishing school” — “advanced training” — for saints.

In Paradise, there is no one to be converted, only sanctified.

The Church in Heaven is called *The Church Triumphant*.

She is totally preoccupied with the worship of God.

## WORSHIP

Worship is a totally useless activity. It is not done for the sake of anything else. Everything else is for the sake of worship.

Saying, “I don’t go to church, because I don’t get anything out of it” is like saying, “I don’t kiss girls, because I don’t get anything out of it.”

Once upon a time the Ballet Folklorico de Mexico performed in Dallas. At the conclusion of the performance, the audience was delirious. And the applause lasted for forty three minutes!

Worship is like that applause. But what is it we are applauding?

We are applauding God for this magnificent universe in which we live and of which we are a part. It is infinitely more magnificent than the Ballet Folklorico de Mexico.

But we also applaud him for something else:

In the face of this magnificent creation, we have sinned. We have introduced disorder into God’s

glorious creation. And God has kept on loving us anyway.

He has come into this world and let us do our worst to him. Yet He has kept on loving us, wooing us, not content until he has won us back into the fullness of fellowship with him.

That also is what we applaud him for. And so in the General Thanksgiving in Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer, we say:

“We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life: but above all for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.” (1928 BCP pp. 19, 33; 1979 BCP pp. 58, 71)

Our worship is the joining together of people who love each other because they have shared the common experience not only of God’s bounty but also of his mercy. And the purpose for which they join together is to applaud him — to shout, “Bravo!”

The Eucharist, which is the focus and heart of our worship, is an art form. It is abstract drama in which we act out before God the thing for which we want to thank him.

And since it is an art form, it should be done as well as we can do it. But since, as G. K. Chesterton said, if a thing is worth doing it is worth doing *poorly*, we do it in spite of the fact that we do not do it justice.

In a way, our worship ought to be done by professionals. But as Chesterton also said, there are some things one ought to do for himself, such as writing his own love letters.

So we do our worship as well as we can.

## THE SERMON

Once upon a time there was a family which took a trip to one of our national parks. One night while they were camping, they had an adventure: a big black bear stole into the camp. And for years afterwards, the family would reminisce about the time the big black bear came into the camp — and it was usually around the supper table.

It has been said that the sermon in the Eucharist should be that sort of thing: “Remember the time Jesus walked on the water...Remember the time Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead... Remember the time Jesus turned water into wine...Remember the time when Jesus rose from the dead....”

The function of the sermon is to call to mind vividly what it is we have to thank God for, in order that we may be more thankful, in order that our self-giving, our worship, may be more complete.

The sermon is certainly not the time to bawl out the congregation or to solve the practical problems of the world.

The Eucharist is the wedding banquet of Christ and his bride the Church. It is the nuptial union

between them in which the two become one flesh. That, incidentally, is why we sing songs out of a book called a hymnal (literally, *hymenal*). Hymns are wedding songs.

And the last thing a husband should do when he and his wife are engaged in sexual intercourse is to criticize her cooking or anything else she does. Nor should she raise the question at that moment about what the city council is going to do about the garbage collection.

## PERFECT WORSHIP

The more our earthly worship becomes what it should be the more we will feel, when we come to the end of a celebration of the Eucharist, that we have been in heaven — because we will have!

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Are you now within the Body of Christ, or are you outside of it for any reason including sin of which you have not repented?

If so, do you want to be inside the Body of Christ?

What are you prepared to do to get back inside?

Are you prepared to worship God with all that you are and all that you have?

If not, why not?

What activity, if any, do you treat as more important than the worship of God?

Are you satisfied with that?

What is involved in your own authentic worship of God?

CEREMONIES AND VESTMENTS USED IN WORSHIP DEMONSTRATED  
[Demonstrated on available DVD: “The Floorshow”]

The Sign of the Cross

What it means

How to do it

When to do it

Genuflecting

How it got started [King St. Louis]

How to do it

When to do it

Receiving Communion

Signing the Cross

Receiving on the hands

Receiving Communion [*contd*]

Receiving on the tongue

The Vestments demonstrated

Amice

Alb

Cincture/girdle [girding the loins]

Stole [kissed]

Chasuble