

PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY

The holy, catholic church of the Lord Jesus Christ is God's new humanity re-created in Christ to bring God's loving, wise order to the world. Each particular church exists as a local expression of this one church.

Humanity in Creation and Redemption

God's intention in creation was to have for himself a people who bore his image. This is obvious from the statements of God himself concerning the creation of man: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...'" (Gen 1:26). To be in God's image is to reflect God as a created being. It is not to be God because we are *created* in God's *image*. But it is to be *like* God because we are created in his *image*.

This image-bearing concerns who we are, how we relate to others and all that we do as humans. There is nothing in life that is untouched by what it means to bear God's image. God's image defines our entire existence as humans individually and collectively. This is so because of the God in whose image we are made. Our God is trinity: three distinct persons yet one God. In the Godhead there is both individuality and community, each being inexorably bound to the other. This relationship is reflected in man (Heb. '*adam*, either individual man or mankind). God declares this when he creates man in his own image: "So God created *man* in his own image, in the image of God he created *him*; *male and female he created them*" (Gen 1:27). Each person, then, has individual personality but is bound together in a larger community that we commonly call *humanity* but which God simply calls *man*. From the most fundamental human relationship of marriage between the first man and woman would come more relationships that would develop into a more complex society. Nevertheless, all humans would be organically and covenantally joined because they were all created in God's image.

Bearing God's image is not merely being a snap-shot of God. Image-bearing is a **vocation**, a mission to reflect God's character and will in every relationship in creation. This begins with man understanding his proper relationship with God. Man is created as the image of God in order to image God within creation. But man from the beginning is a creature and, therefore, always changing. Man was created as a righteous being. But being righteous did not mean that there was no room for growth. As a creature man would change. God intended him to reflect his image to a greater degree as he progressed through time. In order to be more and more conformed to the image of God, man must receive his life from God. Man's life is received from God in worship. In the beginning the Tree of Life was the place of the Divine service. This would be the place of worship in which God would communicate his life to man. Man as part and representative of creation would worship and be transformed himself/themselves and would then be equipped to go and transform the creation, a task which is given to man as an image-bearing responsibility (cf. Gen 1:26). Image-bearing begins by coming face-to-face with the One in whose image we are created.

As all of mankind worshiped God, interpersonal relationships would reflect the self-giving love of the Trinity itself. To image God truly is to love one's neighbor as oneself. Man was to live in loving community which would be characterized by mutual service, peace, wise order, justice and joy. Springing from the fertile soil of these loving relationships would be various fruits that would be enjoyed by God and man. Within the fundamental relationship of husband and wife children would be born, the fruit of loving intimacy. As relationships expanded from the family, new communities would be established throughout the whole earth until the entire world became, as it were, the Garden of God. Man was to go through the world and create (as a creature) the way in which God created the world. He was to form and fill a

formless and unfilled world until it became a great city-kingdom that would fill the earth with the glory of God. Cultures were to be formed where there were no cultures. Structures were to be built where there were no structures. As man properly reflected God's image into the creation, he would work, bringing God's wise order to his creation. Image-bearing was his mission.

This mission could only be accomplished by faith. That is, man had to look to God and submit to his word at every point if life was to be brought to the world the way God intended it. Worship, then, would have to be the place from which all of life flowed. It would be there that man would be transformed and so be able to bring that transformation to the world around him. But man rebelled against his place in God's order. Instead of seeking life from his God, the only source of life, man turned to the creature. He listened to the word of the creature over the word of the Creator. So instead of imaging God into the world, man began to image creation back to itself. Creation, since it was not God and had no life in itself, was always transitory, always subject to change. Now because of man, God's vice-regent and representative of creation, turning from his proper place, death now consumed the world (Rom 5:12). But God in his grace came to the man and the woman and promised to redeem them from the death which they brought into the world. He promised that the world given over to Satan would be given back to the "seed of the woman," the *man* who would come. And in this God promises to create for himself a new humanity, a whole new *man*. This humanity, this man, would properly reflect God's image into the world and would therefore bring God's creation to its intended purpose.

This re-creation would not come without a fight. It would take the defeat of the serpent and his seed in a war to bring about the promise. God established the war when he declared that there would be enmity between the woman and the serpent, between the serpent's seed and the seed of the woman (Gen 3:15). Through the bruising of the heel of the seed of the woman the serpent's head would be bruised. This promise has been realized in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He has won the victory promised by God. He has done so, as Paul says, as the last *adam*, the last man (1Cor 15:45). As the last Adam Jesus Christ has become the head of the new humanity (Rom 5:12-21). This new humanity is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ who is being built up into a mature man (i.e., mankind; Eph 4:1-16; and also 2:14-16). Jesus Christ is the new husband joined to his new bride, the church (cf. Eph 5:22-33). Together we are the new Adam and Eve by which the world will be brought to its intended purpose. As the wife of Christ we are also made in his image (cf. 1Cor 11:7). He is the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15), and we are being conformed into his image (Rom 8:29). Our mandate is essentially the same as the mandate of the first man and first woman: we are to bear God's true image in this world. Now we understand that image in terms of Jesus Christ and his being the true man, the image of God.

As the new humanity re-created in Christ Jesus, we are a *community*. We are not simply a bunch of individuals who have a common cause. We are "one flesh" because we have been joined with Christ, our husband, as his wife (cf. Eph 5:25ff.). Although we have our individual personalities, our whole existence is defined by being a part of this new humanity. Because of this we cannot understand our "personal relationships with God" apart from the church. It is as the church that we are the bride of Christ. It is the church for whom Christ died. We are then in covenant with Christ as we are a part of his bride, the church. We can only know that we are a "brother for whom Christ died" (Rom 14:15) if we are a part of this family in which we are called "brother" (or "sister").

The only means by which this new creation (which necessarily includes a new humanity) can be brought about is the death of the old one and resurrection into the new. Because of sin and the death that came through sin, God's just wrath must be satisfied and sin must be removed before life can come to the world. Jesus, as the image of the self-giving God, takes upon himself this curse of sin and death, defeats it, is raised to new life and is now a life-giving Spirit (1Cor

15:45). Jesus is doing what God originally intended for man to do: bring his life to the world. In order for this to happen Jesus must first give his life in death as the representative of the old creation under the first Adam. Jesus did just that. Now, each person who enters this new creation must die to the old one and be raised into the new. So, in baptism we are buried with Christ unto death, and we are raised to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4). This entrance into God's new creation is also a call to walk by faith, submitting to God's word, being true worshipers of God. As such a new world is established over against the old one.

The war that began in Genesis 3 continues on today as God's new creation in Christ Jesus has dawned upon the darkness of the old creation in Adam. There is no neutral ground in this war. Either you are in the new creation or you are in the old creation. The church of Jesus Christ is not an extension of the culture of the world. We are not the religious part of the world that is divided between secular and sacred. We *are* the new world of light that is at war with the existing world of darkness. We are citizens of heaven called to colonize the earth (cf. Phil 3:20). When we pray as our Lord taught us "thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," we are praying that the new world created in Christ Jesus will progress throughout every aspect of human existence all over the created order. Because of this we understand ourselves to be a counter-culture, not a sub-culture. We have a new language, new music, our own courts, our own rituals, etc. But because the earth is the LORD'S and the fulness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein (Psa 24:1), created and redeemed by him, we are called to bring this culture to all the world so that the kingdoms of this world visibly become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ. In short, we are called as the church of Jesus Christ to transform the world through discipling the nations (Matt 28:18-20).

Being joined to Christ means that we are drawn into the divine community, the Trinity itself (John 17:9ff.). We are a part of that community and are to reflect the image of the members of that community. This is what it means to live as the new humanity, re-created in the image of God (Eph 4:17ff.). Being a part of the divine family means that we are to be imitators of our heavenly Father (Eph 5:1). And so, as a part of this family who is joined to the divine community we are to reflect the love of the divine community within the church itself. This is how the world will know that we are disciples of Christ (John 13:35). This love means that we help one another when we are in need (1John 3:16-18), we act in humility toward one another showing deference to our brothers (Phil 2:1-4), we forgive one another as God for Christ's sake has forgiven us (Eph 4:32), we pray with and for one another (cf. e.g., Col 1:9ff) and we encourage one another to persevere in the faith (Heb 3:13ff.; 10:24-25) among a myriad of other expressions of love. We give ourselves to one another seeking to bear the divine image in our relationships in the community of God's people.

Though the church is to be careful to maintain proper relationships within herself, we are not like the Dead Sea which only receives but never gives. This is not the nature of the divine community. The love that is expressed between the members of the Godhead sacrificially overflows to others who are, by nature, outside of the community. Jesus' self-giving sacrifice to reconcile us to God is the preeminent expression of just what divine love, and thus divine image-bearing, looks like. Jesus came to give his life for the life of the world (John 6:48-51). We, as members of him, are to give ourselves for the life of the world. The mission of the new humanity is to express the self-sacrificial love of God for the life of the world.

The Divine Service and the New Humanity

The worship of God's people is the primary place where the reciprocal self-giving love finds its source and deepest expressions. It is on God's holy mountain, the new Mt. Zion, where we are gathered with the angels, the whole assembly of God's people on earth, the souls of just

men made perfect and our God himself that God gives himself to us and we give ourselves to him (Heb 12:18-24). Reflecting this reciprocal self-giving relationship is the traditional, ambiguous title *The Divine Service*. God serves us and we, in response to his grace, serve him. In the assembly of God's people gathered together for worship as participants in the divine community, we are being transformed from glory to glory (2Cor 3:18). We are being conformed to the image of Christ. The structure of the Divine Service is *covenant renewal*.

The covenant is not something bolted on to our relationship with God as an added extra. The covenant is the context in which we relate to God. The covenant is that bond of union and communion in which promises are made, responsibilities are given and consequences of faithfulness (or lack thereof) are stipulated. God has graciously condescended to us and sovereignly brought us into this union with himself, this covenant. Every week he calls us to gather together as his people to renew this covenant with us. In worship God renews his pledge of redemption to us and strengthens our faith. He affirms his promise to us to be our God. In response to God's promise we look to him in faith, clinging to those promises and having our lives transformed by and conformed to God's covenant word. Worship shapes our lives.

The nature of this worship is, and has always been, *sacrificial*. When speaking about God giving himself to us and our giving ourselves to God, we are speaking about sacrifice. Sacrificial worship finds its ultimate expression in the unrepeatable sacrifice of Christ on the cross. But this does not mean that our worship is no longer sacrificial. In fact, it only intensifies the sacrificial nature of our worship since we are joined to the death and resurrection of Christ by virtue of our union with him. Being joined to Christ in his death and resurrection means taking up the death of the cross daily (Mt 16:24; Mk 8:34; 10:21; Lk 9:23). Paul says that we are to present ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God. This is our spiritual worship (Rom 12:1). Inextricably linked to this is the negative exhortation not to be conformed to this world—don't let the world press you into its mold—but to be transformed by the renewing of your minds (Rom 12:2). Peter says that it is our responsibility to present sacrifices in the power of the Spirit because we are the temple of the God, a holy priesthood (1Pet 2:5). The fruit of lips that praise God's name is a sacrifice that is to be continually offered up to God (Heb 13:15). God gives himself to and for us and we respond by giving ourselves to and for him.

Worship as sacrifice, therefore, is *holistic*. We are not simply bringing things to God—whether money, songs, prayers, etc. We are bringing our entire selves to God, presenting ourselves to him to be transformed by him in every aspect of our lives. Our *bodies* are to be presented to God as sacrifices (Rom 12:1). The members of our bodies are to be presented to God for sacrificial service also (Rom 6:12-13). Therefore, our physical bodies are involved in the liturgy. We kneel or stand to pray. We lift our hands in prayer, whether spoken or sung. We go through particular bodily motions in worship because our bodies are being presented to God in worship.

Even though worship involves ritual, worship cannot be reduced to *ritualism*. That is, God is not pleased with people “going through the motions” but living differently outside of this presentation before God. God has always been angry when his people acted in such a way (cf. e.g., Isa 1:10-20). All that goes on in our worship from the stand point of the worshiper is a sacrificial gift of our total selves. Because of this our entire lives must be lived sacrificially for God and others all the time for our sacrifice to be accepted when we come to worship God in the assembly of his people.

Worship as sacrifice is not holistic from the worshipers' perspective only, but also from the One who gives to us every good and perfect gift. Our God gives himself to us in this covenant renewal. He cleanses us of our sins by applying his own sacrifice to us (1John 1:7-9). He gives himself to us in his word that consecrates us, assures us of his love for us and leads us

to life that is found in him. And he gives himself to us in the Lord's Supper in which we commune with the body and blood of Christ, the Tree of Life (1Cor 10:16).

Worship takes on a particular structure throughout the Scriptures which provides for us the pattern for this covenant renewal. First, God *calls* us into his heavenly sanctuary, summoning us to gather for worship, drawing us away from the world. Then, in response to that call, recognizing our own sinfulness, we humbly *confess* our sins to God. God has promised to forgive us all of our sins. So, as God's appointed representative, the pastor authoritatively pronounces the promise of *cleansing*, the absolution from sin. Having cleansed us from our sins, God brings us up his holy mountain to give us his word which *consecrates* us from the world but prepares us to be sent back to the world to bring his life to those who abide in death. We are then graciously fed by God the body and blood of our Lord in the bread and the wine we receive in *communion*. Throughout the service but especially at the Table we are formed anew into God's renewed image-bearing people. Now as God's renewed people we are prepared to bear God's image in the world. So, we are *commissioned*, sent out, to bring God's wise and loving order to the world through self-giving love. As God's people worship him being transformed by him, the world is then transformed.

The Mission and God's New Humanity

Flowing from God's holy mountain in Eden (Gen 2:10ff.), Ezekiel's temple (Ez 47) and the New Jerusalem (Rev 22) is the river of life that flows to the world. God's throne, the place of worship, is the source of life. That life flows from the Divine Service into the rest of the world in mission. Biblical worship moves us irresistibly to take the life of God to the world. As God's new humanity bearing the divine image in Christ, the church with her husband form and fill a world with new life that has been decimated by sin. Our mission, then, is to see humanity restored and conformed to the image of God and the world being brought to its intended goal through God's image-bearing creatures: a world that reflects the glory of God in every nook and cranny of the created order. This is nothing less than what Christ came to do when he reconciled all things—whether in heaven or on earth—to himself by the blood of his cross (cf. Col 1:15-20). At this present time the church is called to carry out what Christ has accomplished and begun while he rules heaven and earth at the right hand of the Father. When this work is complete, when all enemies are placed under his feet, Christ will come again to conquer the last enemy, death, through our resurrection from the dead (1Cor 15:20-28). We have been given the promise by our Lord that the gates of hell will not be able to stand up to the assault of the church (Mt 16:18). As we bring God's light and life to the world, the darkness will not be able to overcome it (John 1:5).

Seeing people restored and conformed to the image of God means that our mission to make worshipers of God is ***holistic***. The church is not seeking to add religion to the plethora of other activities and experiences people have in other parts of their lives. Being the instruments of the restoration of God's image means that we are seeking the renewal of the whole person (*man*) and society (*mankind*). In order for this to be accomplished all people everywhere must bow their knee to King Jesus. Only as we are united and in submission to him who is the image of the invisible God will we ourselves be conformed to the divine image. And being conformed to the divine image means that each part (i.e., the individual) as well as the whole (i.e., societies, cultures, humanity) is to reflect truly the image of God.

In order for the whole community to bear the divine image properly, each individual must himself be conformed to that image. Therefore, every individual in whom the divine image has been deformed by sin (which is everyone who has ever lived, save our Lord himself) must be

completely renovated, transformed by the power of God. Once a man is put back into proper relationship with God, becoming a true worshiper, then he is put back into proper relation with everything around him. That is, he is relating to things as he should.

The mission of the church in demonstrating the love of Christ to each individual is shaped by the goal of the complete renovation of the individual. The church's mission concerning the individual is accomplished through ministries of word and deed. Through the ministry of the word, we proclaim the good news that Jesus Christ is Lord of the world and is setting things right. The call to the individual is the call to faith and repentance. He is to believe God's word in Christ, submit to the Lordship of Christ and turn from all other gods (cf. 1 Thess 1:9). He is to be brought to the Source of life in order that his life, which has been deformed by sin, might be transformed into the image of God. This is not a one-time experience in which everything is "cured" instantaneously. The gospel commission demands that we bring people into the church through baptism and teach them everything that our Lord has commanded (Mt 28:19-20). This is *discipleship*. This is seeing people conformed to the image of God.

The church's mission is not complete if the ministry of the word is all that is done. If we simply "speak" to the individual without giving him what he needs physically, our so-called faith is useless (cf. Jam 2:14ff.). God is concerned about the whole person, not just what he thinks (although that is a part of the whole person). He is concerned that the hungry be fed, the naked be clothed and the homeless be housed. In a world that has been twisted by sin, these problems exist and will continue to exist until the resurrection of the dead. Christ came to redeem the world from sin and its devastating affects. We are called to give ourselves in ministries of mercy (as they are so called) to reflect that redemption in the world. These deed ministries are to be continually joined to the word so that people are not simply receiving hand-outs. Rather, they are to learn how to work, doing something useful with their hands so that they may have something to share with those in need (Eph 4:28). Again, this is nothing more and nothing less than seeing a person conformed to the image of God who creates in order that he may give for the good of others.

Because our mission is shaped in every way by bearing God's image, the church's mission seeks the restoration of peace, God's *shalom*, in all relationships. Communities (i.e., groups of people covenanted together) large and small are to reflect the image of our Triune God. As the new humanity created in Christ Jesus, the church is not only the missionary but the model of what the new humanity is supposed to be. The church united to the Trinity in Christ is to reflect the peace and purity of the divine community. Our missionary effort and success is dependent upon the church being the community that God has called us to be. We are the means through which the world sees what love is to look like ... for good or for ill. We are God's representatives in the world. Therefore, there is no division between good relationships in the church and our mission to the world. We are the light of the world, but our light dims greatly when we conform to the darkness of the world. Because of this, it is incumbent upon us as a missionary church to serve one another in humility, to continue to learn more about our God and how we can be better conformed to his image, to grow in our personal lives as well as our relationships with one another and to give ourselves, especially in the areas in which God has gifted each one of us, for the building up of the body of Christ.

One way in which the church takes the shape that it should is through the building of strong families. In the restoration of that which was distorted by sin, God set things back right in the family so that his purpose for the world would be accomplished (cf. Gen 3:16ff.). The family will continue to be a vital instrument of building God's kingdom in the world until the resurrection. For this reason, each family must reflect the divine image. The husband must exercise loving headship over his wife, the wife must exhibit loving submission to her husband

and children must honor and obey their parents (Eph 5:22–6:4). Paul makes it clear that these relationships—especially the relationship of husband and wife—reflects the relationship of Christ and his church. Not to line up with God’s order in the home is to bring reproach to the name of Christ. So, the mission of the church to the family is one of restoration. This restoration begins at the font and continues through the rest of life. We teach each member of the family their various responsibilities and hold them accountable to fulfill those responsibilities as members of God’s larger covenant family. We do this so that the name of Christ is not blasphemed among the pagans, thus having all other missionary efforts obstructed.

One aspect of reflecting the divine image in the world is the fulfilling of the command to be fruitful and multiply, filling the earth with other image-bearing creatures. Fruitfulness is the blessing of the Lord and is a creaturely reflection of the creative activity of God himself. But bringing children into the world is not the end of our responsibility. Our children are to mature so that they grow up to reflect God’s image correctly. This means that we must rear our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We are to teach them the doctrines of our holy religion. But this instruction is not confined to what our modern world calls “religious instruction.” Consistent with God’s creation and redemption of the world, the instruction of our children involves education in a complete world-and-life view. In short, Christian parents have the responsibility to insure that their children are educated with a Christian worldview. Though the parents (and particularly the father) are responsible for the Christian education of their children, this does not mean that they must be the sole educators of their children. As the body of Christ has many members with various gifts, we aid one another within the community to accomplish this task. We function as a society, a counter culture to the world. The education of our children is part and parcel to the life of this new humanity. Therefore, it is good, right, and proper that the Church be engaged in and have oversight of the education of our children.

In order to complete our mission in the world, we send out people from the church to go and establish new colonies of heaven in other places. At home and around the world faithful Christians are establishing and building communities for Christ. We participate in that through giving, praying and going. Not all of us are sent to do this particular task. This is the task of the church as a whole and those gifted in these areas to do these things. But we all participate in these missionary efforts as we are continuing members of the body of Christ. As these colonies of heaven are established throughout the world, the kingdoms of this world are visibly becoming the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ (Rev 11:15).

The church’s missionary effort also involves seeing every institution of man brought under the submission of King Jesus. The whole community of humans is to be transformed and bear the image of God. Therefore government institutions are called upon by the church to make and enforce righteous laws. While we understand that the civil government is not the primary means through which the world will be changed, we also understand that it has the God-given responsibility to restrain evil and praise good (cf. e.g., Rom 13:1-7). As servants of God government officials must be informed as to what is evil and what is good. Since the church is God’s representative in the world, we must not hesitate to call governments everywhere to promote righteousness and punish evil. This is why prayer for our government officials is incorporated into the liturgy. This is also why we do not hesitate to contact our representatives and seek to change unrighteous laws.

The holy, catholic church of the Lord Jesus Christ is God’s new humanity re-created in Christ to bring God’s loving, wise order to the world. Each particular church exists as a local expression of this one church. May God help us to fulfill our part of the divine mission to bear his image in this world.