



The Church

Identity and Mission



Post-modern values vs. Ecclesiology:

- 1- Relativity / Truth
- 2- Individualism / koinonia
- 3- Ethics / Theology

Εκκλησία

- 1-The tension between the theological definition and the socio-political definition.
 - 2-The contextual definition.
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The Etymology of the Word 'Ecclesia'

1- The preposition (ἐκ) + The verb (καλέω)

(ἐκ) = 'from, out of' might imply the movement out of the place/time/cause

(καλέω) = to call

In this sense, the Ecclesia emphasizes the congregation of who are called to depart from a place/time/cause to another realm. (New Creation)

2- The significance in Ancient Greece

3- The Septuagint:

(הַתְּעָרָה) (συναγωγή) (לְהַתְּעָרָה) (ἐκκλησία)

Εκκλησία

In the New Testament:

Matthew	Acts	Paul's Epistles Epistles	Jacob	John's Epistles	Revelation n
3	23	64	1	3	20

Notes:

- 1- The Gospels did not focus on the ecclesial foundation.
 - 2- The book of Acts sketched the life of the church rather with no emphasis on the theological dimension
 - 3- Paul coined the theological significance of ecclesiology in his hermeneutical process to explain the continuity of the Qahal Yehwa.in the form of ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ.
 - 4- The book of revelation used the word mostly in the letters for the seven churches.
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Ecclesia in Paul's understanding is:

- 1- A local gathering
- 2- More than one gathering in a geographical territory
- 3- The Body of Christ
- 4- The liturgical meeting
- 5- The Bride of Christ
- 6- The people of God
- 7- The temple of God
- 8- The family of God

Historical
reality

Ontological
Reality

Functional
Reality

Relational
Reality

Eschatological
Reality

The identity of the church cannot be understood without proper understanding of both Pneumatology and Christology.

The launching event of the ecclesial reality was the Pentecost to accomplish in the church the salvific act of Christ for the full manifestation of the kingdom of God.

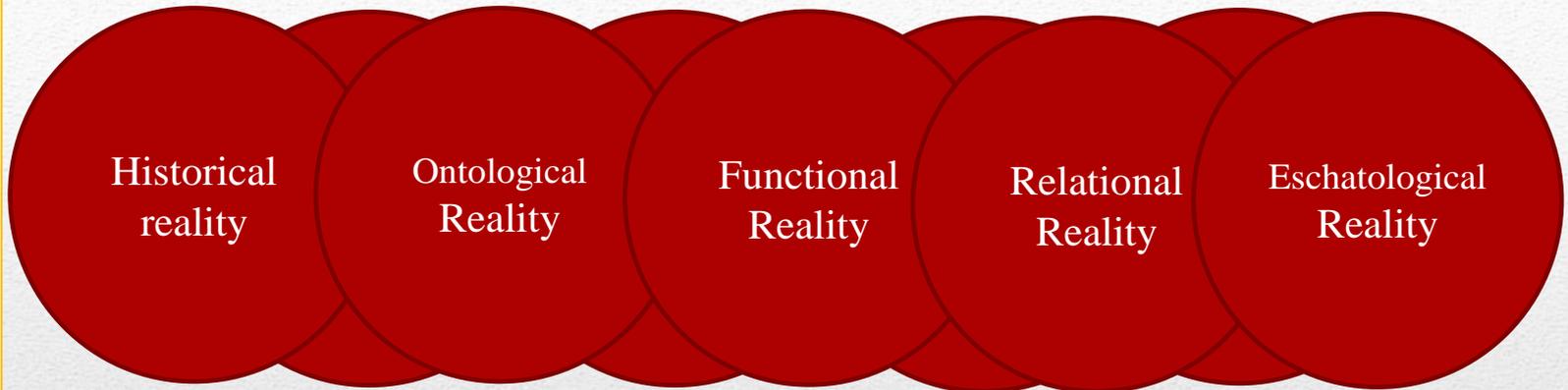
In Baptism and Charisma we became a part of the new reality incorporated in the very body of Christ, and interconnected with the head and with each other through the Holy Spirit

The identity of the Church shapes her mission

The Church's identity is Trinitarian, therefore its mission is to reshape human relations and values upon the Trinitarian model.

Εκκλησία

Christological Foundation



Christology

The Lord Jesus Christ:

- 1- Ontologically: the Son of God
- 2-Historically : incarnated in full humanity
- 3-Functionally: Restoring humanity from corruption to be partakers in the Divine Life. Restoring the corrupted image.
- 4- Relational: the unity with father (although the hypostatic distinctiveness)
- 5- Eschatologically: The full manifestation of victory of Christ.

Eucharist makes the Church

(Act 2:42 NIV)

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship **ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ**, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

(1Co 10:17 NIV)

Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.

(Ignatius to the Ephesians 4:2 APE)

It is therefore profitable that you, being joined together with God in an unblameable unity, should be the followers of the example of Christ, of whom also ye are members



The Mission of the Church

1- To witness to the 'Christ-event' as an 'Eucharistic' community. (The Negation of discrimination)

“How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it... Evangelistic campaigns, distributions of Bibles and Christian literature, conferences, even books such as this one ... all are secondary, and ... have power to accomplish their purpose only as they are rooted in and lead back to a believing community. Jesus ... did not write a book but formed a community.

Leslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*

2- The Church provides the means for the Body of Christ to participate in Biblical Drama as authentic followers of the Lord.

“Ivan Illich (An Austrian Philosopher) was once asked what is the most revolutionary way to change society. Is it violent revolution or is it gradual reform? He gave a careful answer. Neither. If you want to change society, then you must tell an alternative story.” Christians have been given “an alternative story” to tell. Rather than the typical human story of power and coercion, we are to tell—no, we are to live—an alternative story of love, compassion, and peace. Jesus is how you “do” church.

The Christian Church should live and think according to the norms of its own story.

Stanley Hauerwas

3- The Church holds the Interpretive task of the scripture in light of the comprehensive narrative of the life of the church. No dichotomy, between the biblical reality and the post biblical reality.

“But beyond these [Scriptural] sayings, let us look at the very tradition, teaching and faith of the Catholic Church from the beginning, which the Lord gave, the Apostles preached, and the Fathers kept.”

(Athanasius, Four Letters to Serapion of Thmuis, 1:28).

The church alone, with pious affection, is in possession of the truth.

(Ambrose: Commentary of Psalm 118,19)

4- The Church fulfills the liturgical task in the society in specific and the in world at large. It is only possible if it is not subdued to the secularist story that has its own norms, laws and values.

The mission: “The fundamental mission of the church is to overcome the alienations that presently divide a broken humanity.”²

Eugene Bianchi

The liturgical paradigm: “The church’s task in the secular city is to be the *diakonos* of the city, the servant who bends himself to struggle for its wholeness and health.”

Harvey Cox

The risk: there is always a risk in reducing salvation to psychic wholeness and the church to a life support system in the quest for stability and peace in a world disintegrating into spiritual and moral chaos

3- The church Reshapes the culture upon the kenotic model of Christ as preparatory phase in the missional work.

One of the risks of the nation-state model (In England after the Westphalian treaty in Europe) was the coalition between the state coercive power and the church's discourse which created confusion in the ontological meaning of the church; while in the secular model, the risk became the church's legitimization and blessing of the *status quo* of inactive silence. The fear of declaring the truth outside the private sphere seems to dominate. The notion of separating the church from the state is largely utilized to silence the church in favor of the secularist principles.

The End
