

BAPTIST ALTERNATIVES TO CONTEMPORARY ECCLESIOLOGY

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CONVENTIONAL EVANGELICAL ECCLESIOLOGY

Introduction

1. Difficult but very important subject.
2. Paul in most of his writings emphasizes the **practical**, but the **practical** is reinforced by the **theological**. This type of approach makes **theology pertinent and relevant**. Paul, therefore, never gives a complete discussion of ecclesiology per se; it is always discussed in a practical setting (e.g., Rom 6).
3. Ecclesiology includes the definition, worship, government, and ministry of the church.
4. Many questions will remain unanswered and cannot be absolute. Consider the title of this series: "Baptist Alternatives to Contemporary Ecclesiology" – this will be different from what one normally encounters, but it is not unique in its approach.

I. Significance of Ecclesiology

1. Roman Catholicism – very important, for it is intertwined closely with soteriology.
2. Protestantism, both traditional and dispensational. – declining importance.
3. Evangelical – Europe and Mexico (Protestant), in U.S. usually signifies belief in salvation by grace through faith (although Church of Christ ministers are in the Evangelical Theological Society).
4. Baptists – (1) Ecclesiology is crucial to Baptist theology; it is what makes Baptists unique among other Christian groups, including Evangelicals. (2) Ecclesiology includes (a) the nature and work of the Church and (b) the ordinances: baptism and the Lord's supper.

II. Different Views of the Nature of the Church

| Group | Universal/Local | Visible/Invis. | OT/NT | Salvation |
|--------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Roman Catholic | Universal | Visible | NT ? | Visible Church = Salv. |
| Evangelical Protestant | Universal/local | visible/ Invisible | | |
| a. Ev. & Mainline Prot.* | Universal/local | visible/ Invisible | OT/NT | Invis. Church = Salv. |
| b. Dispen.** | Universal/local | visible/ Invisible | NT – since Pentecost | Invis. Church = Salv. |

| | | | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Assoc. Baptists | Local | Visible | NT – personal ministry of Jesus | Salv.& Ch Not equal -- Family of God = Salv. |
| Some Baptists | universal/ Local | Visible /invisible | * OT & NT, ** NT | Body of Christ Invis. Ch = Salv. |

III. Crucial Concepts of the Nature of the Church

1. R.C. – Universal (Catholic) and Visible (being saved = being in the church).
2. Evangelical Prot. – Universal (invisible) and Local (visible) (being saved = being in the church) – All of saved people or – All of saved of this dispensation (i.e., since Pentecost)(dispensational view) – church founded at Pentecost.
3. Baptist -- Local (visible) – Salvation and church membership are different – church established during personal ministry of Jesus.
4. Some Baptists also see the church as universal, invisible, being synonymous with Body of Christ – Anabaptists, Particular Baptists, "Baptist Faith and Message." – Historically, Baptists have **always emphasized** the local, visible concept especially as it relates to polity, discipline, baptism, and the Lord's Supper.

IV. Several Problems

1. The term "The Church" – recognition of the generic, institutional use of the term – cf. "The husband," "the wife," "the family," "the Pine Tree grows in East Texas" is absent. E.g., "The local church" – Where is it? What is it? "The Jew," "The Greek." None of these examples is used to refer to a universal group of people/things lumped together physically and ontologically – but only mentally.
2. Difference between Western and Eastern thinking and misinterpreting metaphors and other figures of speech.
3. Concepts of Platonism and Nominalism -- Relationship between "L" & "U"; "V" & "I"?
4. R.C. and Evang. Prot. Mistakenly make salvation and church membership synonymous.
5. R.C. – violates biblical principle of salvation by grace through faith.
6. Evan. Prot. – puts OT people in the church, even though it was established after their deaths – or Disp. Prot. has two different kinds of salvation and baptism – Belief in two different kinds of church and/or baptism is only a logical inference – nowhere does the Bible state such. *It requires a Scofield Reference Bible to know which kind is being mentioned in Scripture!*
7. Evangelical Protestantism usually has a weak ecclesiology, especially as it relates to the ordinances and church government.
 - a. Recognition of validity of believer's baptism but tradition of pedo-baptism contradicts their teachings on salvation.
 - b. Recognition of validity of immersion for baptism but leaves it up to the individual.
 - c. **Either** sees Lord's Supper as having some type of quasi-sacramental outcome **or** sees it as a universal church (i.e., Christian) ordinance and not local.
 - d. Denial or minimizing of congregational type of church government.
 - e. Ignores church authority and accountability.

- f. Proliferation of parachurch groups and movements.
- g. Trend toward minimizing denominational identification with either being "independent" or dropping the denomination from the name of the church or denominational agency.

Conclusion – Ecclesiology and related doctrines are very important!

1. Ephe 3:21 (KJS) "Unto him [be] glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." – a prayer and blessing – not declarative.
2. It is "His body" and "the fulness" -- a concept showing the important relationship to Christ -- the "complement" or "completer" -- "full development, plenitude" -- of Christ – Ephe 1:22 (GNT) καὶ πάντα ὑπέταξεν ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸν ἔδωκεν κεφαλὴν ὑπὲρ πάντα **τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ** ["**the church**"] 23 ἥτις ἐστὶν **τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ**, **τὸ πλήρωμα** τοῦ τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν πληρουμένου – "His body, the fullness."
3. The whole issue of ecclesiology is related to the question of "the body of Christ."