

# The Bluffer's Guide to the Christian Church

(A cheap and cheerful Ecclesiology)

## Lecture 1 – Who and What is the Church For?

### The New Testament

A structural relationship to start off with: a Rabbi and his Disciples.  
The Content of the Rabbi's Teaching: The Kingdom of God.

Kingdom → The Lordship of God → The Lordship of Christ

The Church and the calling of Israel

The Greek word translated 'Church' is the word "ἐκκλησία" / "ekklesia" (from 'ek-kaleo', to call-forth or call-out, a congregation or gathering of the people). In the Greek Old Testament (the *Septuagint*) the word was used to denote the Congregation of Israel.

Called out of what? Called forth for what?

God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1: 20-23)

I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:24-27)

So for the later St Paul, at least, the Church is very important in God's plans for the universe!

### New Testament Metaphors for the Church

A Temple – 1 Cor 3:16,17; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2: 21; 1 Peter 2:4

The People of God – Hebrews 4:9; Hebrews 11:25

Priesthood – 1 Peter 2:5-9

Agency of reconciliation (through the gospel) – 2 Cor 5:18-20; Eph 2:16; Col 1:20-22

The Body of Christ - Rom 12:4-8; 1Cor 12:12-31; Eph 4:7-13

What about the relationship between the Kingdom of God (as preached about by Jesus) and the Church (as features more strongly in the apostolic literature)?

## Special Language and Concepts in Ecclesiology

### The 'Four Marks' of the Church (Nicene Creed)

'I believe in One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church...'

One –

Holy –

Catholic –

Apostolic –

### The issue of the Visible and the Invisible Church

ie. The Church can be seen, simultaneously, as the sacred communion of the saints, the martyrs and God's faithful people, and *at the same time* as a dubious bunch of idiots, hypocrites, bigots and fatheads. This becomes especially problematic after the conversion of the Emperor.

Ways of coming to terms with this ...

- a) *The City of God* (Augustine)
- b) *The Two Kingdoms* (Luther)
- c) *The Church Militant – The Church Triumphant*

## The Church and its Sacraments

The sacraments (physical sacred rites) of the Church are generally regarded as one of the defining marks of the Church: particularly Baptism and Holy Communion.

## Ecclesiology and Context

The language we use for the Church functions differently in different historical and cultural contexts. For example, does the word 'Church' itself conjure up for you a picture of a spiritual entity, a social entity, or an architectural entity?