Richard Turnbull, in a recent book entitled *Anglican and Evangelical?* presents a concise analysis of what he sees as the historic Anglican and Evangelical traditions of the English Church. In the third chapter he lays out what he sees as the essential tenets of Evangelical Anglicanism and where he sees the historic tensions in those who would identify themselves as Anglican but not Evangelical. Turnbull reports that in 1987 the then archbishop of Canterbury Robert Runcie spoke to the National Congress of Anglican Evangelicals and faulted them for having an inadequate ecclesiology. “He called upon Evangelicals to integrate more fully and view the Church of England as more than a convenient ship. He was given a standing ovation.” (Turnbull 117) Presumably, he was being applauded by Evangelicals who were also Anglican as he was speaking to the Evangelical National Congress. The “liberal” wing of the American Anglican Church and the “evangelical” wing also share a common tragic weakness when it comes to ecclesiology.

I am in no position to comment on the English scene, but I believe it is fair to assert that these later two at least, share a very American pragmatic conviction that the Church exists fundamentally to accomplish something. American liberals and evangelicals together affirm an understanding of the Church as “missionary.” Liberals and evangelicals differ violently about the content of that “mission,” but they appear to be equally willing to do whatever is necessary to the organization itself in order to bring that mission forward. To be blunt, it seems that both are seeking to restructure and “downsize,” or in classic religious terms, to “purify for themselves” a Church which is essentially a more perfect platform and delivery system for their particular “gospel.”

The Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, Katharine Jefferts Schori, opines the following understanding of the Church.

> We are a body, an organic, living thing. Christians are the body of baptized folk called into service to the dream of God, where the poor hear good news, the captives are set free, the sick are healed, all are fed, housed, clothed, and people live together in peace. All are free to bless God and each other in creative and productive relationship. Communion may exist most effectively and incarnationally in partnerships that effect that dream, rather than in structures designed to control and contain untidy ecclesiastical politics. In other words, I don’t think Jesus is as interested in instruments of unity as he is in whether or not we’re serving his brothers and sisters or feeding the hungry. The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion are going to survive if we manage to work together at healing the world. (KJS *Religion & Ethics* interview June 20, 2006.)

In this interview, Bishop Jefferts Schori clearly articulates an understanding of the Church as what John Stott would call a “secular mission.” The Church exists to serve and to bring justice, transformation and healing to the world. The “dream of God” is seen as an ideal which we are
invited to join and serve together with all who share its goals. She asserts that Jesus is primarily interested in our “serving our brothers and sisters or feeding the hungry” and is less interested in what or who we are as a body. The Church exists for mission. That “mission” appears to be embodied in the mind of the General Convention of The Episcopal Church in the UN Millennium Development Goals. Although the content of “mission” differs, evangelical Anglicans have a very similar understanding of the church. For Evangelicals the content of the church’s mission has classically been evangelism. The Church exists to proclaim God’s word. The overriding purpose of the Church for Evangelicals is generally understood to be to restore “biblical preaching and teaching” to the Church and to make disciples.

It is increasingly clear to many of us that the theological content of the liberal vision has become discontinuous with the evangelical faith once delivered. Hence given the raw and recent inflammation of our division, even the shared task of missional collaboration has become impossible. I do not personally believe that a renewed common understanding of the Church can be forged between these two entities; the theological divide is simply too great. Liberals and evangelicals remind me of the two mothers before Solomon with the one baby. Both insisting that the baby is theirs and (at least initially) willing to divide the child between them.

I seek in this paper to address those of us who find ourselves part of a new and inexplicable convergence of evangelicals, charismatics and catholics in the Anglican tradition. We share a common theological framework, but we are not united in our ecclesiology. I believe we are in a God-given moment of reform and renewal. I have a radical proposal for mission-minded evangelicals. Before we rush to “mission,” might we fruitfully ask a different question? What is this “Church” that is being pushed up in our midst? Given our recent history and our shared complicity in the wreckage of the Episcopal Church, my prayer is that we evangelicals in particular, might find ourselves in a “teachable moment.” I will propose in this paper that central to the reformation underway in our global church is to revisit our understanding of the Church as the Body and Bride of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Rather than jumping to ask “What is the purpose of the Church?” we need to stop to ask what I believe is a far more fundamental question, namely, “What is the Church? And why does it appear to be so cherished by God?”

John Stott observes that “One of the tragedies of the contemporary Church is its tendency to atomize this holistic vision of Christ, and to select one or other of his concerns to the exclusion of the rest” (Stott 268). My prayer is that we who uphold a common commitment to the evangelical faith once delivered, and who have stood apart in this terrible moment to defend it in spite of the cost and upheaval, will address ourselves to the ongoing work of theological reformation. The theological task presented to us has to do with ecclesiology and communion. Our task is to address ourselves to the challenge presented by “our unhappy divisions” as those who share a common faith. What does it mean for us to be one church across catholic, charismatic and evangelical traditions? What does it mean for us to be made into the Body of Christ across many nations, traditions and languages? What does it mean for us to be the Bride of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit on earth? I believe the time has come for a deeper grappling with the fresh challenges presented to us in this global post-post-modern age.
I have been much encouraged and edified by the thought of Singaporean theologian Simon Chan. Dr. Chan comes from the Pentecostal tradition and is increasingly disenchanted with the lack of cohesion and vitality of present day Evangelicalism. He makes a persuasive evangelical argument for a vigorous *ontological* understanding of the Church, constituted by the Holy Spirit for the mission of God. Chan draws generously on the thought of Evangelical, Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic thinkers which makes him a particularly congenial companion for us as orthodox Anglicans. I would like to suggest that Dr. Chan’s prescription for Evangelicals in general is particularly timely for orthodox American Anglicans in this moment. Chan suggests that what we need is an adequate (which means for him a fully pneumatological) ecclesiology if we are to discover the resources to deal with the future establishing of a vital, renewed, reformed, and truly missional evangelicalism. Chan concludes that one of the hallmarks of this ecclesiology will be a return to historic catholic worship. Given our shared Anglican commitment to common prayer, perhaps we Anglicans might have a modest advantage in this process. Indeed we might begin to hope that Chan’s vision might be especially applicable to a renewed and reformed orthodox Anglicanism. The heart of Chan’s argument is that the Church is an ontological reality. It is not a service mechanism but a living organism and hence the image of Body, Bride and living Temple are central. In this moment if Chan’s vision is indicative of what God is doing, it appears we have never needed to be evangelical, catholic and especially charismatically Anglican together more!

I believe the recovery of a robust and theological ecclesiology by orthodox American Anglicans will accomplish two things: 1) a unifying vision for orthodox and global Anglicans with evangelical, catholic and charismatic traditions and 2) will clarify the nature and scope of the mission into which we are called. Chan contends that we need a theological, pneumatological and ontological ecclesiology, not merely a sociological one. We need to understand the Church as the goal of creation itself rather than simply a pragmatic by-product.

The church precedes creation in that it is what God has in view from all eternity and creation is the means by which God fulfills his eternal purpose in time. The church does not exist in order to fix a broken creation; rather, creation exists to realize the church. (Chan 23)

We need to understand how the Church finds her identity and purpose in the ongoing triune life of communion with God. When the Church is thus rooted, she becomes first and foremost a worshipping community. Indeed, as Simon Chan writes, “It is through worship that the Church is decisively shaped as the ecclesial community. That is to say, the church that is the creation of the triune God is also formed by its action of corporate worship” (Chan 15). She then becomes herself the mission and movement of God.

Laudable as the MDG’s certainly are, they are in fact desperately humanitarian, and therefore tragically inadequate to the real task either of social reform or the mission of God. Important as the making of individual disciples is to the work of God on earth, fundamentally, disciples do not exist in a vacuum. Disciples are incorporated into the Body of Christ and thus made a new corporate creation. We might even say that they do not even theologically exist as individuals! The church’s primary mission is neither social reform nor even the making of converts. Her primary mission is to live a life of perpetual worship and communion in God. Her mission is to
embody on earth the triune life of God, to be in fact the incarnation of that life in the midst of a world gone deaf and blind, so that the world might know, indeed that the “powers and principalities” might know the “mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known” (Eph.3:9-10). Simon Chan argues that “mission is primarily an act of worship,” it is “ultimately theocentric rather than anthropocentric” (Chan 45).

In my attempt to get a handle on some of the larger questions about the nature of the Church, I want to place Chan in conversation with some of the writing of Karl Barth who shares his concern for an ontological and visible ecclesiology. Both would ground the church in the mission of God to call a people unto himself. They appear to differ in their understanding of how the triune God is at work in constituting the Church. Chan has a compelling perspective on the pre-existence of the Church which I am simply unequipped to assess in light of Barth.

In his introduction, Chan agrees with evangelical theologian Stanley Grentz, who, like Barth, critiques as “docetic” the evangelical stress on the real Church as the “invisible” Church, namely that which is comprised of “the fellowship of all genuine believers.” According to Chan, this stance renders the visible Church “soteriologically irrelevant” (Chan 14). In my limited reading of his Church Dogmatics, (Book IV/1 chapter 2), Barth underscores this same danger. The Church can no more be separated from its particular visible incarnation than the body of Christ can be separated from its particular historic reality.

For the work of the Holy Spirit as the awakening power of Jesus Christ would not take place at all if the invisible did not become visible, if the Christian community did not take on and have an earthly-historical form. (Barth 653)

Chan observes that the classic evangelical “free-church” ecclesiology which enshrines this “invisible” emphasis inevitably leads to further and further division within the Church on earth. This is an understanding of the Church as a group of people who share belief. He argues, in essence, that this emphasis on “correct” individual belief is an expression of an anthropocentric rather than theocentric conviction about the nature of the Church and threatens to reduce the essence of community to intellectual assent to agreed-upon belief or practice. Barth is at pains (more than Chan) to tease out the dialectic between both the visibility and the invisibility of the Church. He observes that the Church “confesses faith in the invisible aspect which is the secret of the visible” (Barth CD IV/2 654) Nonetheless, Barth concludes, as does Chan, that the visible Church is the Church with which we must concern ourselves presently. The church is not simply about ideas and theory, but exists in time and place. It therefore has being.

Faith in His community has this in common with faith in Him, that it too, relates to a reality in time and space, and therefore to something which is at bottom generally visible. If, then, we believe in Him, we cannot refuse, however hesitantly or anxiously or contentiously, to believe in His community in its spatio-temporal existence, and therefore to be a member of it and personally a Christian. (CD IV/2 654)
One question raised as we look at Chan and Barth is: if the Church has being, then how is it made? Barth and Chan appear to differ on this point. Who constitutes this new thing? Although Barth speaks of the Church as the Christian community which is “created and continually renewed by the awakening power of the Holy Spirit” (661) he continues to stress that it is Jesus who has called and constitutes the Church. Because Jesus is its Head,

The Christian community… is the gathering of those… whom already before all others He has made willing and ready for life under the divine verdict executed in His death and revealed in His resurrection from the dead. This is the creation of the body by its Head, of the body with which He co-exists as the Head and which co-exists with Him as its Head. (Barth 661)

I confess I find Barth confusing on this point. Barth certainly recognizes the Holy Spirit as having some kind of equipping function, but he seems to go to great length to make Jesus both the object and the subject in constituting the Church of which he is clearly the Head. This argument presents us with some logical challenges. How can Jesus create his own body or be his own bride? Chan, the Pentecostal, has no such difficulty. Having rooted his argument in the triune act of God, he speaks clearly of the constituting work of the Holy Spirit in the ontology of the Church. Barth speaks of the Holy Spirit as somehow contributing to the “third dimension” of the Church’s existence. But for Barth, it is unequivocally Jesus Christ who constitutes the Church.

Apart from Jesus Christ there is no other principle or telos to constitute and organize and guarantee this body. Even the kerygma, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, the faith and love and hope of Christians, the work and word of the apostle, cannot have this function. It is the function of Jesus Christ alone. As the Head He is Himself and primarily the body, and He constitutes and organizes and guarantees the community as His body. (CD IV/2 663)

For Chan, the new creation of the ontological Church, rooted in the triune life of God, requires a vigorous and personal understanding of the Spirit, and this is where Chan has a unique contribution to make to our current circumstance.

What is often not recognized is that the coming of the Spirit into the church introduces something new that is not just an extension of Christ’s mission on earth. Jenson notes the distinctive Eastern contribution to the discussion on this point: “Pentecost is an intervention of the Holy Trinity” that is “new” over against the Resurrection and “issues from the third Person of the Trinity in his own identity.” Pentecost is the birth of the church not as the people of God but as the Body of Christ and temple of the Spirit. The church, in Peter Brunner’s words, becomes the “epiphany of the crucified body of Christ on earth.” The church as the body of Christ could not have existed while Jesus was still bodily present on earth. It is as the believers are filled with the Spirit that they are constituted as the body of Christ and replace the earthly Christ, giving to the “body of Jesus”
the pneumatic derestiction, the pneumatic presence, through which He reaches out to the individual and integrates him into Himself in a pneumatic and yet concretely historical event. (Chan 34)

Chan continues:

The coming of the Spirit, ...constitutes the church by uniting the body to the Head. In the very act, as (Robert) Jenson puts it, the “Spirit frees an actual human community from merely historical determinisms, to be apt to be united with the Son and thus to be the gateway of creation’s translation into God” (Jenson, *Works of God*, 179) The story of the church, therefore, could be said to be the story of the Spirit in the church. In this sense, the church could be called “the public of the Spirit”…Without telling the story of the church, which is the story of the Spirit in the church, we have an incomplete gospel. (Chan 35)

Chan argues that the Church is constituted by the Spirit to be the Body of Christ, the living incarnation in history of the resurrected Christ in the real and present world. Christ is the head of this body, but it is the Spirit who makes of many and divided “parts” a living, concrete unity. Simon Chan speaks of the church as a “‘divine-humanity,’ chosen in Christ before the creation of the world” (Chan 26). Chan sees the ongoing story of God’s action in the world being completed through the Church. However, this story is not simply a human endeavor to remember the story and retell it, but is rather an active, dynamic and ontological embodiment of the triune God through the Person of the Spirit.

If Christ is the way, the truth and the life objectively considered, the Spirit is the subjective embodiment of the way the truth and the life in the church which is the embodied Christ. (Chan 35)

The conceiving and birthing of the resurrected body of Christ on earth in the Church, is effected through the work of the Holy Spirit, even as the incarnation of the Logos was effected through the work of the Spirit.14

The main weakness in Protestant and evangelical theology (is that) it terminates the gospel story at the resurrection and ascension, so that the church is seen solely as the agent to retell or restate a story that ended with Christ’s resurrection. Protestantism has no sense of the continuation of the gospel into ecclesiology and pneumatology. When it comes to understanding the church, sociology takes over. As for the Spirit, he is seen as essentially One who helps the church to carry out some extrinsic task, even if it is conceived as a divine task, such as evangelism. If the Spirit is linked to the church in any way, it is to the invisible church, such as in the Spirit’s bringing spiritual rebirth to individuals. The visible church is largely defined sociologically, while the ‘real’ church cannot be identified with anything visible. Such an ecclesiology could only be described as docetic. (Chan 36)
In Chan’s presentation, the church remains distinct from Christ insofar as she remains unperfected until the perfection of the Eschaton, but Chan wants to emphasize the identification of the Church with Christ. She is after all, his body.

This is where I would turn to the second ontological image of the Church as the Bride of Christ. She is ontologically made one flesh with Christ. Yet at the same time, the church remains distinct from Christ. The question of her being ontologically one with Christ has a concrete and visible pattern in our ecclesial life together in the extraordinarily ‘ordinary’ pattern of marriage. We proclaim in the marriage ceremony that the Holy Spirit effects a change, making of two separate persons one body. We make a very strong ontological statement about what happens to persons in this sacrament. We are clear that it is the Holy Spirit who effects this one-ing. And yet we do not seem to be able to take the next step in applying this insight to our life together in the Church.

Evangelicalism has a strong ontology of the person but not an ontology of the church. Without an ontology of the church, the relationship between Spirit and church cannot be understood ontologically either. The real work of the Spirit is assumed to occur only in the individual and not in the church. As a result, the transformation of individuals will have only marginal impact on the whole communal life. Individuals with their particular temperaments and limited perspectives will not be able to maintain the eschatological tension. It is as members of the body of Christ, “members of one another,” that each discovers his or her part in relation to the whole church. The church is more than the sum of its parts and transcends the parts. In the Eucharist it becomes that whole, and as church—the totus Christus—it is able to uphold the tension through both anamnesis and prolepsis in the power of the Spirit. (Chan 38)

I will close with the final ontological image of the Church as the living Temple of the Holy Spirit. The title of Chan’s book Liturgical Theology makes it clear that worship is this theologian’s theme. He argues that it is in worship, and specifically eucharistic worship, that the Church is actually constituted by the Holy Spirit as Church. Worship is where we continue to meet and enter into communion with the triune God. In our corporate worship, the “fact” of the Body of Christ constituted is expressed visibly and ontologically on earth. This is the defining characteristic of the Church. That we are remade in worship, our divided and confused members are knit together into a new and living whole. We become what we were not, the one Body of Christ on earth. All other actions flow out of that one defining reality. The mission of the church flows directly out of the identity of the Church as the community in communion with the living God. Those who have become what they were not. Hence all activities are pervaded by a spirit of worship (1Cor. 10:31) and specifically our proclamation of the gospel and our service to those in need. (Heb. 13: 15-16) Alexander Schmemann speaks of the human being as “homo adorans,” (Schmemann 15) – humans are made for worship. Similarly the Church is made for worship. As Church we are made a worshipping Body, the Bride of Christ, and a living Temple of worship. We become most truly who we have been called to be from before creation. The Church as the Temple of the Holy Spirit is the place where God worships God and we enter into that divine communion which is the life of the Trinity itself.
I finish this paper on the day that Archbishop Rowan Williams departs the House of Bishops meeting in New Orleans. Our dear friend The Right Reverend Mouneer Anis has spoken to the gathered body of TEC bishops with angelic eloquence of the need to be clear and radically honest about what we actually believe and to hold our theological positions with both integrity and humility. There can be no genuine “dialogue” without such honesty. He invites the “progressives” to have the courage of what they believe to be their prophetic convictions and to therefore walk apart boldly. I pray they will heed his call. Only then might it be possible to continue to actually walk beside each other even though we are apart. On the other hand, I believe that American orthodox Anglicans have come to a crucial moment to at last decide to walk radically together. We, ourselves, have walked for too long heedless of the divine tragedy of our unhappy division into factions, both liturgical and political. Our sin is ever before us, and it belies the very Gospel we seek in this moment to proclaim to the world.

Evangelicals, in particular, need to address themselves to the task of discovering and upholding a robust and theological understanding of the importance and centrality of the Church itself as the Body and Bride of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. We must begin to cherish her above our separate “missions” and programs. This will not be an easy task for us. It is new ground for us theologically and we are feeling embattled already and in need of re-establishing our historic identity. But we have been given a poignant opportunity to step into the ongoing reformation of the Church on earth alongside our brothers and sisters of both catholic and charismatic traditions. Our task is not simply to codify what we have believed in the past, but to step into the new work we have been presented with in this age of monumental realignment in the Anglican Communion. I will close by restating my initial thesis:

I believe the recovery of a robust and theological ecclesiology by orthodox American Anglicans will accomplish two things: 1) a unifying vision for orthodox and global Anglicans with evangelical, catholic and charismatic traditions and 2) will clarify the nature and scope of the mission into which we are called.

Simon Chan has contributed a bracing call to embrace a theological, pneumatological and ontological ecclesiology grounded in the worship of the catholic Church. He has given us a good start as we move into the councils ahead of us.

End Notes

1Thanks to Dr. Justyn Terry for generously sharing this reference with me!
2I understand from a footnote in Simon Chan’s introduction that according to Robert Webber, there are three different “movements” of evangelicalism: “pragmatic,” “traditional” and “younger.” I am in over my depth here and beg my reader to understand I am speaking broadly here of those who have a high regard for Scripture and the proclamation of the gospel with a high value given to personal conversion.
3This same tragic pragmatism leads us to view human beings as only as good as the ‘work’ they produce, and we are at great pastoral pains to convince ourselves and others that this is not a biblical vision!
I have tried to make a distinction between capitalizing Evangelical when I am speaking of a formal group and not capitalizing when the term is adjectival. So I am using it adjectivally when linked with Anglicans as I will use “liberal,” “anglo-catholic” and “charismatic.”

John Stott sees two “false images” predominating today 1) the religious club and 2) the secular mission (242).

I note the shift in terminology from “reign of God” to “dream of God” which certainly softens the sense that God has a vision which may diverge from our own!

There are certainly “religious club” dimensions to both Evangelical & Liberal self image.

The formation of the alternative Network Anglican Development fund is a concrete example of this.

Indeed we have chosen to use his fine book Liturgical Theology as a primary textbook in the Sacramental Theology class here at Trinity this year.

(Acc to Grentz) what evangelicals need is a ‘theological ecclesiology” that sees ecclesial life as existing in perichoretic union with the triune God through the Spirit. This gives the church its true mark as the Church of Jesus Christ. It is by living within the Trinitarian life that the church discovers its ‘primary identity’” (Chan 14; Grentz Revisioning Evangelical Theology 187).

The PB’s vision of the Church has a number of problems, but chief among them is the tragic inevitability of failure. We simply do not have the capacity, however well intentioned, to “to transform the world around us” nor to “to work together at healing the world.” No amount of cooperation and political will can effect transformation or real healing. It may well ameliorate a few local crises, it may have a passing effect on our feeling of helplessness, but the “problems” of a broken world are well beyond human solving.

Considering the history of this mini conversation, another thesis in itself!

I understand that Barth is fully aware of the perichoresis, but it appears that in his desire to lift up the work of Christ, he leaves the Holy Spirit in a supporting “invisible” role which Chan expressly rejects.

This understanding of the church is parallel to the way in which Jesus Christ the Incarnate Son could be said to preexist from eternity with the Father. Robert W. Jenson speaks of ‘the movement to incarnation, as itself a pattern of God’s triune life’ (The Works of God, vol.2…141). Such a view is based on the idea that ‘God is the act of his decision…The Incarnation happens in eternity as the foundation of its happening in time, in eternity as the act of decision that God is, and in time as the carrying-out of what God decides (Jenson 140)” (Chan 169 Chapter 1, footnote 6).

Simon Chan opines (ftnote 170) that “Colin Gunton’s ecclesiology does not sufficiently stress the identity between the church and the Trinity, whereas the ecclesiology of Jenson, drawing from the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, recognizes both identity and distinction” (Chan 170).

Here, as elsewhere, the author is extrapolating from Chan in an attempt to integrate his thinking. The good doctor should not be accused of being so rash. I have sought to be faithful in representing Chan in my quotes, any weakness of argument or application is entirely my own!

Yes, I understand that some will argue that marriage is not a ‘sacrament’. This would need to be the subject of yet another paper!

I find it significant that in the Eastern tradition the newly married couple is celebrated as a new “church.” Talk about a different “spin” on church planting!
Works Consulted

Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics*. Book IV.


