# The Biblical Theology of the Church (1/4)

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Do Christians need to think again about the doctrine of the church? Many would answer, 'No!' Mention the church and they begin to smell the musty odour of churchianity. It rises from the crypts of institutional religion, and permeates the seat-cushions of formal traditions. Martin Luther thanked God that even a child of seven knows what the church is. 'Let the church focus on the gospel, preach Christ and him crucified, and the church will become part of the answer instead of the problem'. That is the way Luther's point is often made today.

Others would add that Luther's child of seven has had plenty of help in the last few years. If the teaching of the Bible about the church has been neglected in past centuries, that neglect has certainly been more than remedied. Few cathedrals have been constructed in the last half century, but theologians have launched a building boom of their own. The publishing skyline is full of books about the church. [1]

Not all of those books are theological, to be sure. Some writers assume that we cannot expect Scripture to answer the problems of the computer age. The Apostle Paul did not have to face Marxism nor deal with the problems of colonial exploitation and its aftermath. He was not troubled with the internecine warfare of rival denominations and non-­denominational agencies. Nor did he have to plant churches in a tribal cultural setting. He worked within his own culture and could ordain as leaders, even in the Gentile churches, men who had been instructed in the Scriptures as adherents of the Jewish synagogues. With such considerations the contemporary ecclesiastical pundit eases the Apostle to the Gentiles into his place back in the Hellenistic age. He is then free to display his own grasp of sociometrics, group dynamics, structuralist anthropology, and political hermeneutics. [2]

It would be foolish, of course, to suggest that the behaviou­ral sciences should be set over against Biblical understand­ing. In applying the teaching of God's Word, we must surely understand as fully as we can the circumstances to which it is applied. Yet even in that understanding, we seek to manifest the mind of Christ. Certainly we cannot begin our understanding of the church with sociological analysis. We must begin with the teaching of the Bible, and return to the Bible again and again to deepen and renew our understand­ing. Theology is reflective; we do understand God's revel­ation better as the context of our own experience widens and varies our perspective. But the church rests upon the foundation of apostolic teaching. The authoritative words of the inspired witnesses chosen and endued of the Spirit communicate to us the full and final revelation of Jesus Christ (Acts 10:39-42; Heb. 2:2-4; Rev. 22:18, 19).

The doctrine of the church is not the most fundamental doctrine of Scripture. J.C. Hoekendijk may be right in saying, 'In history a keen ecclesiological interest has, almost without exception, been a sign of spiritual decadence...' [3] At the Third World Conference on Faith and Order held in Lund in 1952 the conferees acknowledged: 'In our work we have been led to the conviction that it is of decisive importance for the advance of ecumenical work that the doctrine of the church be treated in close relation both to the doctrine of Christ and to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit'. [4]

Indeed, the doctrine of the church is not only closely related to the doctrine of the Trinity, it flows from it. The promise of God's covenant is, 'I will... be your God, and you will be my people' (Lev. 26:12; 2 Cor. 6:16). God's people are his own possession, those whom he has formed for himself that they might set forth his praise (Is. 43:21). The focus of Scripture is on the living God, of whom, through whom, and unto whom are all things, not least the people he has redeemed and claimed as his own.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Biblical doctrine of the church is directly related to God's revelation of himself. As we trace the history of redemption recorded in the Word of God, we find that the church comes into view as the people of God, the disciples of Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Yet these views of the redee­med do not simply succeed one another; far less do they exclude one another. The Apostle Peter, writing to Gentile Christians in Asia Minor, calls them 'a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God' (1 Pet. 2:9). To be sure, they were once 'not a people', but now they are 'the people of God' (v. 10). The language that described the calling of Israel in the Old Testament Peter applies to the New Testament people of God. On the other hand, Christ is central for the Old Testament as well as for the New, and Paul, reflecting on the experience of Israel in the wilderness, affirms that 'the Rock that followed them was Christ' (1 Cor. 10:4). That same leading of Israel through the desert is ascribed by the prophet Isaiah to the Holy Spirit (Is. 63:9-14).

To gain the richness of biblical revelation, we do well to trace the unfolding of the theme of the church through the history of God's saving work. In doing so we are instructed by the transformations of that theme as well as by the underlying unity of the purpose and work of God. To focus our consideration, we may reflect on the calling of the church. The church is called to God, called to be his people. By that relation to God the being of the church is defined. The church is also called, by that very relation, to a bond of life together. It ministers not only to God, but also to those who make up its company. The church is also called in the midst of the world. Its ministry is therefore threefold: it ministers to God in worship, to the saints in nurture, and to the world in witness.

In systematic theology the doctrine of the church is often presented under the rubrics of the Nicene Creed: the church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. Yet these attributes of the church flow from the more fundamental teaching of the Bible regarding the nature of the church as it is related to the Lord himself. Ecclesiology is part of theology. We gain the clearest light on the issues that the church now faces when we reflect on the calling of the church by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This trinitarian approach to the doctrine of the church may then be structured in relation to its calling to minister in worship, nurture, and witness.

## I. THE CHURCH AS THE PEOPLE OF GOD

## A. God's Worshipping Assembly

Matthew's Gospel reports the words of blessing that Jesus spoke to Simon Peter in response to Peter's apostolic con­fession. Jesus then said, 'And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it' (Mt. 16:18). Matthew uses the common term for 'church' in the New Testament, the term ekklesia. It was once the habit of critics to question the authenticity of Matthew's report. Jesus spoke of the king­dom, and knew nothing of the church, they said. [5] Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls there has been a belated acceptance of the genuineness of the saying. The scrolls are full of the concept of the community, understood as the congregation of the saints awaiting the coming of the Lord. Further, the thought of the congregation being established upon the confession of the truth is also prominent in the Dead Sea writings. [6] So is the figure of the rock, and of the building established upon it. [7] The parallels between the language of the Dead Sea sectaries and the words of Jesus do not, however, indicate that Jesus was dependent upon the Essenes. The background to both is the Old Testament.

## 1. The People of God Constituted as God's Assembly

The concept of the people of God as assembly has its Old Testament roots in the gathering of Israel before the Lord at Mount Sinai. God had demanded of Pharaoh, 'Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the desert' (Ex. 7:16b). That service was to be a specific gathering for worship ('a feast unto me', Ex. 5:1). Of course there were further implications of that demand. Pharaoh regarded the Israelites as his slaves, subject to his own divine claims. His lordship was directly challenged by God's claim. The worship, the service of the Lord on the part of Israel, would mark them as his people, his sons (Ex. 4:22, 23). It would be a covenant-making ceremony in which the claim of God upon his people and the claim of the people upon God would be ratified in worship.

The term ekklesia describes an actual assembly, a gather­ing of people together. The same is true of the Old Testa­ment term qahal that is translated by ekklesia in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament. [8] The words themselves do not have the restricted meaning of our word, 'church'. Yet, when Jesus said, 'I will build my church' (whether he spoke Greek, or used in Aramaic a word that could be so translated), he was not simply saying, 'I will bring together a gathering of people'. Rather, he was using a well-known term that described the people of God. The 'assembly in the desert' (Acts 7:38) was the definitive assembly for Israel, the covenant-making assembly when God claimed his redee­med people as his own. In Deuteronomy it is spoken of as 'the day of the assembly' (Dt. 4:10 LXX; 9:10; 10:4, 18:16).

The key to the meaning of 'assembly' is found in God's command to Moses: 'Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children' (Dt. 4:10). The assembly is a gathering to meet with God. God declares, 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself' (Ex. 19:4). God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt is indeed an act of liberation. God strikes off their yoke and enables them to go upright (Lv. 26:13). But liber­ation from slavery in Egypt is not the final purpose of God's saving work. God brings them out that he might bring them in, in to his assembly, to the great company of those who stand before his face. The Lord who assembles the people to himself is the Lord of hosts. His heavenly assembly is composed of the mighty ones (’elohim), the holy ones (qedoshim), the sons of God (benei ha’elohim) over whom he reigns as King (Jb. 1:6; Ps. 82:1; 1 Ki. 22:19; Dn. 7:10). When the Lord descends at Sinai, the tens of thousands of the heavenly holy ones are assembled with the congregation that is gathered at his feet (Dt. 33:2; Ps. 68:17). The earthly assembly, too, is composed of the saints of the Lord (the same term can describe saints or angels). The Dead Sea community had a vivid awareness of this Old Testament panorama. Those who were added to the community became members of God's eternal assembly. They gained a place with the holy angels (1QS 2:25; 11:7-9; lQH 3:21; 11:11, 12).

God's assembly at Sinai is therefore the immediate goal of the exodus. God brings his people into his presence that they might hear his voice and worship him. 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me' (Ex. 20:2, 3). Standing in the assembly of the Lord, hearing his voice, the people gain their identity from the self-identification of the Lord.

## Later Assemblies

The assembly at Sinai could not remain forever in session, however. It was succeeded by other covenant-making assemblies. Deuteronomy, the second giving of the law, provides the account of the renewing of the covenant in another great assembly before the death of Moses. When Joshua brought the people into the land, he convened a great assembly between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, and read the blessings and curses of the covenant from the law (Jos. 8:34, 35). David convoked an assembly to secure the succession of Solomon (1 Ch. 28:2, 8; 29:10, 20). Jeho­shaphat, Joash, and Hezekiah summoned assemblies of covenant renewal (2 Ch. 20:5, 14; 23:3; 29:23-32; 30:2-25).

After the exile, the great assembly under Ezra and Nehem­iah was gathered to hear the Word of God (Ne. 8). This assembly was regarded in later times as the prototype of the synagogue. The reading of the law in the synagogues and the prayers that were offered found their precedent in this post-exilic assembly.

In addition to these assemblies of renewal on historic occasions, there were other assemblies of Israel. The law required that the people gather three times a year at the appointed place of worship (Lv. 23). These were festival assemblies: the Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Taber­nacles. At this last feast every seventh year the law was to be read and the covenant renewed (Dt. 31:9-13).

To be a member of the people of God was to have the privilege of standing in the great assembly before his face. To be sure, worshipping Israelites could rejoice in fellowship with one another as they assembled together. They could sing, 'How good and pleasant it is when brothers live toge­ther in unity!' (Ps. 133:1). But even that joy is a blessing that flows down from above, like the dew of Hermon, or the ointment running down the beard of the high priest (Ps. 133:2, 3). Israel is bound together as a kingdom of priests, a holy nation (Ex. 19:6). Israelites are a nation formed for worship, called to assemble in the courts of the Lord, and to praise together the name of the Most High.

## The Future Festival Promised

Israel failed woefully in this priestly calling. The unity of worship was broken when Jeroboam set up the image of a calf at Bethel to bar the pilgrimage of the northern tribes to worship at Jerusalem. In the temple at Jerusalem, the whole purpose of the assembly was shattered by idolatry. And so in judgment God scattered the people in exile; yet he did not forget his calling to a priestly nation. The prophets proclaimed a new assembly of the people of God. It would come in the glorious future when God would again manifest his presence. Isaiah pictures a great feast, spread on the mount of God, to which not only the remnant of Israel but also the remnant of the nations would be gathered in (Is. 2:2-4; 25:6-8; 49:22; 66:18-21; cf. Jer. 48:47; 49:6, 39). Zechariah sees a new Jerusalem, transformed into a holy city by the presence of the Lord (Zc. 12:7-9; 13:1, 9; 14:7, 8, 16-21).

## Pentecost Fulfilment

Jesus promised that he would build his assembly by his death and resurrection. After he rose from the dead, he commanded his disciples to remain together in Jerusalem until they received the promise of the Father, the gift of the Holy Spirit. That gift was poured out as they were assembled together. It was at Pentecost, and the theme of the feast of Pentecost was fulfilled. Pentecost was the time of the first-fruits, the beginning of the great harvest of redemption. Peter preached the fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel. The Spirit had been poured out, the worship of the new age had been ushered in. The church, the assembly for worship, was praising God. The great eschatological feast had begun. Jesus in his parables had spoken of the feast prepared, and of his mission as the Servant of the Lord to call to heaven's feast the host of poor and. broken sinners who filled the byways of the earth (Lk. 14:15-24). Now the ingathering had begun.

The gospel call is a call to worship, to turn from sin and call upon the name of the Lord. It is no accident that the New Testament church is formed by the coming of God the Spirit in the midst of an assembly gathered in praise. The church in any city is composed of those who 'call upon the name of the Lord' in that place (Acts 9:14; 1 Cor. 1:2). Peter writes that the church is the people for God's own possession, 'that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light' (1 Pet. 2:9).

## The Assembly on Mount Zion

The picture of the church as a worshipping assembly is nowhere more powerfully presented than by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews (ch. 12:18-29). He contrasts the worship of God at Mount Sinai with the worship of the New Covenant. The worship at Sinai was an overwhelming experience. Even Moses said, 'I am trembling with fear' (v.21). Yet the fear of Moses was inspired by merely physical phenomena - a fire that could be touched (v.18). In con­trast, the church of the New Covenant comes to the full reality: 'our God is a consuming fire'. If Moses feared the earthly manifestation of God's presence, how much more should we be filled with reverence and awe? We do not come to Mount Sinai in our worship, but to Mount Zion. That Zion is not the earthly, but the heavenly Zion, the sanctuary of the eternal city of God. For the author of Hebrews, this is not a figurative way of speaking. The heavenly Jerusalem is not a Platonic abstraction. It is as real as the living God, as real as the risen body of Jesus Christ. In our worship in Christ's church we approach the throne of God the Judge of all. We enter the festival assembly of the saints and the angels. We gather in spirit with the spirits of just men made perfect. We enter the assembly of glory through Christ our Mediator, and the blood of his atoning death. For that reason we must hear and heed the word of the Lord, and 'worship God acceptably with reverence and awe' (v.28).

Just as the great assembly at Sinai defined the covenant people of the Old Testament, so does the heavenly assembly define the church of the New Covenant. The principle is the same, the saving purpose of God is the same. Moses and the other heroes of faith described in Hebrews 11 are among the 'spirits of righteous men made perfect' who gather with us in the heavenly assembly. Yet they without us could not be made perfect (Heb. 11:40). We now enjoy with them the worship for which they longed by faith.

Does the tremendous reality of that heavenly worship make our earthly behaviour irrelevant? Can we think, 'Since nothing can stop the heavenly hallelujahs, our feeble little gatherings on earth are of no consequence'? That argument has often been advanced. 'Since the church invisible is one, earthly divisions are not too serious.' 'Since the heavenly church is holy, we need not worry much about either per­sonal holiness or church discipline.'

The author of Hebrews draws the opposite conclusion. Precisely because we do approach the heavenly assembly in worship, we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Heb. 10:25). Precisely because we have the faithful promise of the city of God, we are to provoke one another to love and good works (Heb. 10:24).

Reverent corporate worship, then, is not optional for the church of God. It is not a form of group behavior to be accepted just because of its long tradition or its acceptability in many cultures. Rather, it brings to expression the very being of the church. It manifests on earth the reality of the heavenly assembly. The glory of God is that to which and for which the church is called.

## The Word in Worship

We may not lose sight, either, of the importance of God's Word in the assembly of worship. The description of the heavenly assembly in Hebrews 12 comes to a focus in the admonition to hear him who speaks. God spoke from Sinai; the worship of the people responded to the Word of the Lord. In the assemblies of the new covenant, the Word of God is no less central. God is not only present in the midst of his people. He speaks. The ministry of the Word of God in worship partakes of the solemnity of the occasion. Solemnity does not mean joylessness, for the Word calls to praise. Yet the authority of the Word of the Lord remains central for Christian worship. This is the Word of him who speaks from heaven (Heb. 12:25). God spoke in many different ways to the fathers through the prophets, but now he has spoken finally and conclusively through his own Son. It is that word of the Lord that 'was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will' (Heb. 2:3, 4).

## Multi-level Assembling

Another consequence of the definition of the church as a worshipping assembly is the extreme flexibility that the New Testament shows with respect to its use of the term 'church'. On the one hand, the term is applied to the church universal. This is the church which is the people of God and the body of Christ without qualification (Mt. 16:18; 1 Pt. 2:9; Eph. 1:22,23). It is the church as God alone can see it, the whole company of those who have been, are now, or ever will be gathered to God in Christ. Some who perceive this New Testament concept have gone on to deny that any local gathering can be called in a full and proper sense the church. Such a gathering may form a congregation of the church, no doubt, but the church by definition must be the church universal. On the other hand, there are those who isolate what the New Testament teaches about the local church. Paul does speak of the church at Corinth as the church of Christ. In the book of Revelation, Jesus addresses letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor. Congregational theo­logians have therefore limited the church by definition to the local assembly. Anything beyond the local assembly, they say, should not be spoken of as the church, but as an association of churches. [9]

In the New Testament, the question is further compli­cated by the fact that local churches are spoken of in more than one sense. At least, local churches come in surprisingly different sizes. The church in Laodicea is a city church, but apparently there was also in Laodicea a house church, meeting in the house of Nymphas (Col. 4:15). So, too, Paul can in one breath speak of the churches of Asia and of the church in the house of Aquila and Prisca (1 Cor. 16:19). The Westminster Divines noted the house churches that existed along with city churches in the New Testament and argued from this evidence for a presbyterian system of government. [10] The city church corresponded to the presby­tery, and the house church to the local congregation. This line of reasoning recognized smaller and larger gatherings of the church, and further recognized that one could exist within another. The presbytery, however, was a gathering of the ministers and elders, not of the whole membership of the city church. Another difference emerged from the development of congregational structure in the cities. Village churches were swallowed up in growing metropolitan areas. They became parish churches - gatherings of a size that was larger than the house church, surely, but perhaps smaller than some of the city churches of the New Testament.

We may ask, however, if the full flexibility of the New Testament view of the church is adequately recognized today. Because the church is defined by the heavenly assembly for worship, there is no one size of assembly on earth that is ideal or normative. Those who call upon the name of the Lord together may do so in larger or smaller assemblies. Such a recognition does not mean that smaller assemblies may be disorderly, or that assemblies at any level exist apart from the exercise of gifts of teaching, ruling, and diaconal service. But it does suggest the possibility of fuller expressions of the worshipping assembly in large city gather­ings, as well as the recognition of the important place of the house church, not as a rival form of organization, but as an expression, in a more immediate setting, of the fellowship of those who call upon the name of the Lord in one particular place.

## 2. The Church as God's Dwelling

The picture at Sinai of the people of God as a worshipping assembly is heightened by God's provision of the tabernacle. God not only met with the people as they were assembled before him. He also came to dwell among them. In the wilderness where they lived in tents, God's house would be a tent, too. When they entered the land and had fixed dwellings, God would put his name in a place, and sanctify the temple of Solomon as his dwelling. The figure of the tabernacle made the presence of God more immediate and permanent.

The immanence of God's presence with his people is a continuing theme in the Pentateuch. The Lord who walked in the garden of Eden to talk with Adam and Eve continues to address the patriarchs in the land to which he called them. The altars that they built witnessed to the presence of the Lord. This is particularly dramatic in the case of Jacob at Bethel, where God descends the stairway of Jacob's dream to repeat the sure promises of the covenant to the exiled patriarch. (Genesis 28:13 should be translated, 'And, behold, the LORD stood over him...' See Genesis 35:13, where the same preposition is used, 'Then God went up from him at the place where he had talked with him'.) In the morning Jacob marvels at the presence of God: 'Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.... How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven' (Gn. 28:16, 17).

How important for the people of God is the dwelling of God among them? Moses gives an eloquent answer in a time of crisis before the tabernacle was built in the wilderness. While he was in the heights of Mount Sinai receiving the law of God and the plans for the tabernacle, Israel at the foot of the mountain committed idolatry before the golden calf. When Moses came down from the mountain and was confronted with the sin of the people, God proposed another plan for his relation to Israel (Ex. 33:1-3). God was too holy and the people too sinful for God to dwell among them. His presence was too great a threat. Surely, as the Holy One, he must consume them in a moment to remove their iniquity from his presence. God proposed, therefore, that the taber­nacle not be built. God would not dwell in the midst. He would go before Israel in the angel of his presence, drive out the Canaanites from the land, and give them the inherit­ance he had promised. But instead of living among them, he would meet with Moses in a tent set up outside the camp (Ex. 33:7-11). The elaborate plans for the tabernacle would not be necessary, since God would not have his dwelling among the people.

The reaction of Moses to that alternate plan shows how crucial the dwelling of God in the midst of Israel really is. Moses was distraught with grief. He mourned, and Israel mourned with him. Moses cried, 'If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here!' (Ex. 33:15). God's presence among the people was the whole point of the exodus deliverance and of the inheritance of the land. Significantly, Moses prayed for God to reveal his glory. What Moses asked was the very blessing that the alternate plan would have removed: the immediate presence of the living God and the vision of his glory. God did appear to Moses, and proclaimed his covenantal Name (Ex. 33:17-34:7). Although Moses was permitted to see only God's back, he did see the glory of the Lord. His request was granted. God did make his dwelling among Israel, and Moses could pray that God's presence in the midst would bring not swift judgment, but the forgiveness of sins. He could pray, too, that God would not simply give the people their inheritance in Canaan, but that he would take the people as his inheritance, claiming them as his own (Ex. 34:9).

Moses' prayer was answered and the tabernacle was built. It symbolized both the threat of God's dwelling in the midst of Israel and the grace by which God's immediate presence was possible. The tabernacle was a dwelling in which the presence of God was both screened off and revealed. The curtains of the holy of holies, of the holy place, and of the tabernacle enclosure screened off the Holy One from the camp of sinful Israel. The curtains insulated, as it were, the holy presence of God. But the plan of the tabernacle also symbolized a way into the holiest place, an avenue to the throne of God. After the blood of atonement had been shed at the sacrificial altar, the priest could wash at the laver, enter the holy place, and present the prayers of the people. Once each year, on the day of atonement, the high priest could enter even the holy of holies to sprinkle the ark of the covenant with blood.

## Christ the True Temple

The New Testament presents the fulfilment of this symbol­ism in Jesus Christ. He is Priest, Sacrifice, and Temple. 'Destroy this temple', he said, 'and in three days I will raise it up' (Jn. 2:19). The temple that he spoke of was his own body. 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth' (Jn. 1:14). The outward picture of God's dwelling among his people becomes a reality in the incarnation. [11] Further, since God is present in Christ, and Christ is present among his people, they, too, become a dwelling for God. Christ, who promises to prepare a dwelling place for his disciples, prom­ises also that both he and the Father will come and take up their dwelling with the disciple that loves him (Jn. 14:2,23). Both the individual believer and the church are spoken of as the temple of God because of the presence of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Cor. 5:1; Eph. 2:13-22; 1 Cor. 3:16-­17; 1 Pet. 2:5; 2 Cor. 6:16).

The coming of the Holy Spirit fulfils the promise of the Father and makes actual the presence of God. The spiritual relationship portrayed by the temple figure includes perma­nence as well as intense immediacy. The epiphany of Pente­cost was not a passing phenomenon, but the advent of the Spirit, no less central for the understanding of the church than the advent of the Son. Through the finished work of Christ the hour came when neither Mount Gerizim nor Jerusalem were holy places any longer (Jn. 4:21). In his words to the Samaritan woman, Jesus does not deny the legitimacy of the temple at Jerusalem. Salvation, he says, is of the Jews. Nor does Jesus simply state that because God is a Spirit, he cannot be worshipped at a holy place. Jesus cleansed the temple, called it his Father's house, and violen­tly affirmed its sanctity. What changed everything was the fulfilment of the temple symbolism in Jesus himself. Wor­ship in truth could begin. It would be 'true' worship in the sense of being real, unobscured by the shadows of symbolism, as the Jerusalem temple worship had been. The coming hour of which Jesus spoke was the hour of his death, resurrec­tion, and return to the Father. True worship is not temple­-less: it is worship at the true Temple, the One raised up on the third day. Because the reality has come, the symbols are fulfilled. Worship is now spiritual - in the Holy Spirit (the living water promised by Jesus). Worship is now true - in Jesus Christ the Truth (Jn. 14:6).

## B. God’s Chosen People

## 1. The Election of Israel

The church, then, is both the assembly of God and the dwelling of God. God leads his people from the convocation at Sinai to the land of their inheritance, where God will dwell in the midst of them. In addition to these great figures, God speaks directly about the people as his own. The covenantal affirmation 'I will be your God, and you shall be my people' makes explicit this relation. The prayer of Moses, 'Take us for your inheritance', is inspired by the Lord who claims Israel for himself. 'The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession' (Dt. 7:6). God purposes to make his people 'in praise, fame and honour high above all the nations he has made' (Dt. 26:19).

God's election of Israel follows upon his election of the patriarchs. It is God who calls Abram out of Ur of the Chaldees; it is God who chooses Isaac, not Ishmael, and Jacob, not Esau (cf. Rom. 9:11-13). Yet God's choosing was not only an expression of his purpose of blessing toward his elect. God promised not only to bless Abraham, but to make him a blessing. In him all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gn. 12:3). The table of the nations in Genesis 10 prepares for the call of Abraham in Genesis 12. So, too, Israel is called to be a light to the nations: 'May God be gracious to us and bless us... that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations' (Ps. 67:1, 2).

It would be a serious mistake, however, to deny the status of Israel in order to affirm the mission of Israel. Israel is called first to fellowship with God, to be his treasure people; and only as that people does Israel witness to the nations, that they, too, might be drawn into the worship of the true and living God. God does not choose Israel just in order to use Israel. Certainly Israel is not chosen for its utility. 'The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers...' (Dt. 7:7, 8).

## Election in Love

Here is the language of love: 'The LORD set his love upon you, because... the LORD loves you'! The Lord pours out his love for his people in rich language. Israel is God's son (Ex. 4:23; Ho. 1:10; 11:1-3; Is. 45:9-11), God's bride (Ho. 1-3; Is. 50:1; Ezk. 23). God's consummation joy over Israel will be like the joy of a husband over a bride (Zp. 3:17). Israel is God's vineyard (Je. 12:7-9), the apple of his eye (Dt. 32:10). They are a people near to him (Ps. 148:14), borne on his shoulders (Dt. 33:12), engraved on the palms of his hands (Is. 49:16).

Yet God's delight in Israel is of his sovereign good pleas­ure, the 'favour of him who dwelt in the burning bush' (Dt. 33:16). God's people are chosen, not choice (bachir, not bachur).

Sadly, the chosen people prove themselves unworthy of God's favour. God's judgment is immeasurably more severe because of the privilege that Israel despised and forfeited. The adulterous wife will be stoned (Ezk. 16:40); the rebel­lious son will be cast out (Ho. 11:1, 8; 12:14; 13:1); the pleasant vineyard will be laid waste (Is. 5:5, 6); the planted vine will be uprooted and burned (Ezk. 19:10-14; Ps. 80:12­-16). Redemptive history in the Old Testament is full of the realization of these dire predictions. The temple itself, where Israel had worshiped idols, is destroyed by the armies of Babylon. The people are carried into exile. Ezekiel sees the hopelessness of the exiled nation in his vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezk. 37).

## Grace in Judgment

Yet that same vision is the Lord's message of hope. 'Son of man, can these bones live'? Well does the prophet answer, 'O Lord Jehovah, you know'. God's promises will not be void, his purposes will not be frustrated.

Two great principles are given to the prophets: first, the destruction is not total. God has preserved for himself a remnant. Even if the remnant is as hopeless as dry bones in a valley, or as the scraps remaining from a lion's kill (Am. 3:12), a remnant nevertheless it is. The second principle is that of renewal. To the dry bones life will be given. If the glory of Israel is like a cedar that has been felled by the axe of Gentile powers, nevertheless a stump is left in the ground. God promises that the stump will send forth a shoot; that shoot will be an ensign to which the nations will be gathered (Is. 10:33-11:5).

The remnant will be the faithful people of God, the true Israel. By God's renewing grace, their hearts will be circumcised. They will know the Lord. God will make with them a new covenant (Je. 31:31-34). Paul explains this theology of the prophets. As the doctrine of the remnant shows, there is an election within the election of Israel. 'For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel' (Rom. 9:6). The true and spiritual seed are the heirs of the promise. Further, the new Shoot that grows from the felled cedar is the Messiah. He is God's servant Israel, in whom God will be glorified (Is. 49:3). In him the mission of Israel will be fulfilled and the status of Israel will be established in a way that surpasses all imagining. Not only will he restore the remnant of Israel, he will also be a light to the Gentiles, 'that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth' (Is. 49:6). The prophets describe the ingathering of the preserved of the nations along with the remnant of Israel (Je. 48:47; 49:6,39; Is. 66:19-21). Paul explains how Christ fulfils the ministry of the circumcision: 'For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy...' (Rom. 15:8).

Jesus Christ indeed comes to gather the remnant, the 'little flock' of God's good pleasure who are given the kingdom (Lk. 12:32). But Jesus is more than the Sent of the Father. He is the Son of the Father. He is the Vine as well as the Shepherd, and he brings salvation in himself. The people of God are claimed at last by God himself, coming in the person of his Son. He claims them by joining them to himself as their Lord and their life. Both the status and the mission of the people of God are therefore now defined in Christ. In his Sonship they are made sons of God; as the Father has sent him into the world, so Christ has sent them into the world (Jn. 17:18).

肆、护教士与教会神学的发源

一、护教士的职责

　　因为外界的与内在的压力，使教会不得不开始清楚地阐明真道，为真理辩护；这是神学的起源。所以早期为真理辩护的教父们，被称为护教士。这些教父中最著名的有犹斯丁（Ｊustin）、他提安（Ｔatian）、阿他那哥拉（Ａthenagoras） 以及安提阿的提阿非罗（Ｔheophilus of Ａntioch）。他们护教的文字，一方面是向官府而发，一方面乃是对知识阶级而发。他们的目的乃是要减轻掌权者的忿怒，以及一般人民对基督教的误解。他们为基督教辩护而著作的文字乃是要将基督教真理的特性指出来，以致于能辩正那些对于基督徒所发的攻击。他们急切地盼望能够指出基督教最合乎常理，以致于能使那些受到教育的大众来接纳基督教。乃是出于这个心意，他们把基督教称为最高最正确的哲学，他们也特别重视自然神学的真理：例如他们所讨论的基督教的神、美德、永生等；同时也认为基督教乃是犹太教与希腊各教的真理的最高成就。

　　他们的职责有三样：辩护、驳斥、建设。他们为基督教辩护说：那些攻击的人都毫无根据；那些批评基督徒为行为不端的看法，并不是圣经所教导的标准，从那些相信基督福音之人的生活与行为，以及他们高尚的道德品行上可以看出。

　　他们觉得单是辩护有所不足，所以他们也驳斥对方的谬误。他们驳斥犹太人的律法主义，认为犹太教派完全误解律法的真义，将暂时的律法视为永久不变的律；他们也都象瞎子那样没有看到基督就是旧约先知所预言的弥赛亚，耶稣基督也已完成了律法。教父们驳斥异邦宗教时，特别指出异教中的荒唐不道德的行为，完全不值得我们相信；异教的各神也并不是真神；惟有基督教的神是独一的真神，他也治理宇宙万物，赏罚公正；也只有他能赐我们永生。他提安指出希腊的哲学完全无效；然而犹斯丁虽认为希腊哲学有些真理，但他觉得这个真理是从神的道而来。这些护教的教父在他们的著述中都同时将特殊启示与普通启示放在一起讨论。

　　最后，他们都觉得自己有责任要建立基督教的特性，乃是神亲自向人的启示。他们要证明神的启示时，都是靠着旧约先知的预言，但有时以神的神迹为依据。他们以两件事实证明基督教是真实的宗教；一方面可以从基督教发展迅捷的事上看出，人们虽然反对，基督教仍是大大广传；另一方面也可从信徒的生命与品格之改变的事上看出基督教是真的宗教。

二、他们所建立的真理

**他们对哲学与启示的见解**

　　当护教士们叙述教义的内容时，他们并不分辨何为特殊启示，何为普通启示；他们也不太分辨何为出于人思考的教训，何为出于神超然启示的教训。主要的理由，乃是因为他们认为基督教是一种哲学，虽然他们称基督教为惟一的、超然的哲学，是基于神的启示。哈纳克说：“基督教是哲学与启示，这是所有护教学者的主题。”他们认为基督教是哲学，因为包括了一切最合理的要素，也回答各哲学家对基督教所加的攻击；但也认为是哲学的对偶，因为完全出于超然的启示，不单是人的观念或意见。

**他们的神观与道观**

　　他们所讨论的神是自存的、不变的、永恒的；他也是宇宙万物首要的因；但因为他是超越的、完全的，所以在描写他的本性时，应当以消极方面来衬托出他的特性。他们描写神的存有时，称他为完全无属性的存在。当他们论到“子”的时候，他们喜欢称他为“道”，无疑地，他们如此描写“子”，是因为当日一般有教育的人，以及他们的哲学名词中，常用到“道”这个字。从另一方面看来，当时的教会特别注意到神性荣耀的基督，对于耶稣的人性却不太注意。护教学者对于“道”的观念近于斐罗的哲学，更甚于圣经上所指示的道的观念。他们认为道虽然是与神同存，与神同永；但不过是一种神性的理念，并无任何位格（或人格）存在。论到神的创造时，神从他自己的存有中产生出“道”，如此，道就有了位格。在原则上讲来道是与神同等，道就是神；但是论到道的起源时，道若成为有位格的存有，就变为受造者了。关于基督，他们认为是神的理念，在神的里面存在；但因神给基督有独立的存有时，基督就能将神启示出来。史伯格说：“因为他是神的理念，所以在旧约的创造中他也参与；同时在外邦人的智慧人的著作上他也赐以智慧。”我们在此必须注意一件事，护教学者虽用外邦人的“道”的观念，但他们的“道”与外邦哲学家的道略有不同。因为护教学者的道是有独立的位格的。

**他们对基督与救恩的看法**

　　道成为人，乃是取得了一个真人的身与魂。然而他并不是一个普通的人，却是“神人”，虽然在人的眼中，看不到他的神性。因之，他被钉在十字架上时，不单是一个肉体的人，却是神的儿子在上钉死。护教学者也特别指出，他是人类的师傅，因为在他道成肉身之前，就是人类的师傅。他们论到基督作师傅教导人的道理如下：神只有一位，所赐的新律法乃是要叫我们过一个贞洁的生活；他也指示我们永生的道路，尤其是身体复活；将来善人得奖赏，恶人受刑罚。因为神所造的人是有自由的，所以他们有责任遵守神的诫命。所谓恩惠，乃是将教义与律法启示出来。他们并不觉得基督受苦是必须的，不过是要应验旧约的预言而已。然而护教学者们也认为基督受苦是重要的，因为他受苦而使人的罪孽得赦，也能拯救我们脱离撒但的权势。

**他们对于重生、教会与未来的见解**

　　当护教学者们论到如何得着新生命时，似乎有二元论的看法。有的时候他们认为完全是出于人自己自由的选择，但有时又认为是出于神白白的恩惠。洗礼与新生有密切的关系；由于洗礼，人才获得了新生命。教会是由神的子民所组成，他们乃是真以色列人，是神尊君的祭司，他们有高尚的品格并好的行为，有神圣的爱；并甘愿为神受苦。所有的护教士都相信死人复活，但是论到灵魂不朽的事时，却有不同的看法。他提安与提阿非罗认为灵魂不朽对于义人是赏赐，但对于恶人却是刑罚，犹斯丁似乎也持有同样的看法。护教学者们，尤其是犹斯丁，认为善人在将来千禧年国中要蒙神的祝福。

三、护教士对于教理历史的重要性

**哈纳克论护教者**

　　哈纳克与鲁夫斯认为这些护教学者们完全没有了解基督的福音。他们说这些早期的教父们盼望以唯理主义来解释基督教，只重视启示中客观的事实，如道成肉身与身体复活等，并以此来证明自然启示的真理；教父将信仰变为教义，将“道”的教训来解释基督教；以知识来代替信仰，因之这些教父们将基督教希腊化了。教父们的教训有其真理，但他们的教训只是片面的，没有将全部真理阐明出来。

**他们看神学发展的重要性**

　　我们并不否认这些早期的教父们曾着重理性，并以理性的思考为真理。但我们必须注意几件事：（a）他们乃是写护教的书藉而非教义的文章，且凡是护教的著作都要看反对方面的论点是什么，然后加以辩证；（b）他们所讨论的真理，确是基督教系统教义中重要的部份；（c）他们的著作中，也有许多基督教的重要真理，并不是完全出于理性的产物。

　　我们也不否认他们通常总是以哲学的观点来讨论基督教，对于他们，神学与哲学也没有什么分别；他们所讨论的启示真理，确是受到了希腊哲学思想上“道”的观念所影响，但他们的心意乃是要将启示的真理表达出来，虽然他们所用的方法，并不太成功。事实上，他们以理性来解释基督教并不能被视为完全错误，因为他们并不象黎秋学派（Ｒitschlians）那样只来寻求宗教的经验，他们也必用理智来解释基督教，使听的人可以明白。从他们的著作中可以看到，他们与使徒时期的教父一样，受着某一种限制，就是特别重视“道”的教义，认为道德主义就是救恩的途径。同时，他们的著作虽然必须以希腊哲学的结构来写作，但从他们开始，已经对于基督教的神学有了新的发轫。

# 千禧一代向教会教授神学的6个办法

BY[汤姆·雷纳(THOM S. RAINER)](http://chinese.christianpost.com/author/%E6%B1%A4%E5%A7%86-%E9%9B%B7%E7%BA%B3-thom-s-rainer/) | 基督邮报客座专栏作家

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过去几十年里，“迎合慕道者需要”运动，以及之前的教会成长运动向我们展示了共同语境在教会内的重要价值。

这些运动的优点在于对福音百折不挠的关注、愿意去质疑现有的方法论和一些圣经之外的传统。另一方面，他们的弱点也暴露无遗。其中一个倾向就是有些人低估了圣经真理和神学教育的重要性。实践的做法让神学理论蒙上阴影。

然而最近这些年里，我注意到一个显著也受到欢迎现象，就是青年领袖向信仰的基本教义和基础神学教育回归，在教义方面向深处扎根生长。

最近我好好研究了一下这些趋势，发现千禧一代的教会领袖们所运用的六个办法，使地方教会神学教育的重要性和有效性得到显著增强。

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**1，强调圣经的全局视角。**千禧一代的领袖们明白，基督徒需要接受一些基础的训练以理解圣经的宏大叙事，他们使用的资源包括按着特定时间顺序阅读圣经的计划和在神学上相当深刻的儿童圣经等。用圣经故事来教导基础教义的课程——福音工程(Gospel Project，视频详见后文)取得了无以伦比的成功，这表明今天的教会领袖看到了神学教育的需求，并顺应需求采取行动。

**2，给孩子类似教义问答手册的材料。**在上一点里，我提到了利用神学深刻的儿童圣经，但不应止步于此。千禧一代的父母也利用其他材料——甚至是智能手机软件在家里就能把相关的概念和课程教授给孩子们。尽管那些东西并不是典型意义上正式的教义问答手册，但它们为圣经相关问题的解答提供了一个坚实、正确的基础。福音工程中儿童课程里的大图景问与答部分(The Big Picture question and answer section)就是这种做法的一个例子。

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* [[Thom Rainer博士](http://chinese.christianpost.com/news/%E7%89%A7%E5%B8%88%E5%92%8C%E6%95%99%E4%BC%9A%E5%90%8C%E5%B7%A5%E6%B1%82%E8%81%8C%E6%88%90%E5%8A%9F%E7%9A%847%E6%96%B9%E6%B3%95-18964/)**牧师和教会同工求职成功的7方法**](http://chinese.christianpost.com/news/%E7%89%A7%E5%B8%88%E5%92%8C%E6%95%99%E4%BC%9A%E5%90%8C%E5%B7%A5%E6%B1%82%E8%81%8C%E6%88%90%E5%8A%9F%E7%9A%847%E6%96%B9%E6%B3%95-18964/)

**3，通过学习小组来系统地学习神学。**我知道有些教会每周开办学习基础性系统神学的学习小组。这可不仅仅是提供甜甜圈和奉献那么简单。这些小组会很深入地研习圣经与神学，在很多情况下，神学教育与传播福音的热忱将获得显著成长。

**4，回到神学赞美诗和颂歌。**我们在播客上有凯特·戈蒂(Keith Getty)讨论礼拜中赞美诗和潮流的节目，但还要重申一下，不能在这里止步不前。许多千禧一代的父母正利用在车子里和孩子们在一起的时间，通过歌曲来强调圣经真理。有一些音乐家已经开始响应这样的潮流，他们所创作专辑里，所有歌曲的歌词完全来自圣经。

**5，在教会网站上列出推荐书目。**许多教会在自己的堂点内不再拥有正式的图书馆，但教会领袖们依然在推荐书籍。许多教会网站都包含有一个“推荐阅读”的部分，关注于一些灵修经典文章、神学书籍以及对牧师和成员们极有帮助的材料。

**6，教会的入会课程。**对于经常阅读本博客的读者来说，这应该不是什么意料之外的内容。正如我在博客、播客上说了好几次那样，教会入门课程上主要交流两个内容：信息和盼望。这两个内容都必须牢固地建立在符合圣经的好神学基础之上。

（翻译：尤里）

**中國教會需要神學**

《永活上帝生命主——献给中国的教会神学》第一章

摘要﹕在當今中國國際化的環境底下，中國教會急需神學建設作為基督信仰的理論平台，除了促使個人信仰的提昇，更是對應教會內部問題及不斷改變中的社會議題，這樣才能確保中國教會今後的穩健發展。神學的真理性是建立在以聖經啟示為根據的理論建構，朝著真理本體而不斷修正，整合真理成為能針對當前問題的理論體系，對於教會、社會及個人提供生活的方向與生命提昇的門徑。

**關鍵詞﹕邊緣化、理論建構、方法循環**

1.1中國教會需要神學建設

今日中國教會需要什麼？需要中國神學建設！當中國走向國際化的同時，教會應如何與時俱進，迎向迅速變遷的社會並面對中國的挑戰？中國自2001年底加入WTO一年內，已經成功申辦2008年在北京舉行奧運會、2010年在上海舉辦世界博覽會。「中國走向世界，世界走向中國」不再是口號，中國在國際舞台上扮演越來越吃重的角色。許多海內外的華人都為著中國的「出頭天」而歡呼，這是可以理解的，因為翻開中國的近代史，她在幾乎一敗塗地的艱困中尋找定位，而今終於揚眉吐氣得到世界的認可。中國近年來物質文明的成就歸功於堅持「四個現代化」路線，雖然內陸地區仍然有待發展，但起碼在上海、北京等地足以媲美世界先進城市，不過中國政府也很清楚中國人需要的不只有物質文明，還要有精神文明的建設，才能遏止貪腐作風日漸浸蝕好不容易得到的榮景，建立穩定發展的社會基礎。

中國嘗試從傳統文化提煉可以運用的道德資源，用以建設精神文明，盼望藉著推廣儒家倫理價值，帶動中國人的道德生活，落實「以德治國」的目標，然而提倡的精神文明建設至今成效不彰。耶和華卻有不同的心意，要通過耶穌基督的教會把恩惠的福音給中國廣大人民，因為只有受苦復活的基督才是醫治中國的能手，中國教會必須回應今日社會的議題，進行回應時代的神學建設，使中國人從生命的根基開始改變。中國宣教與中國神學建設息息相關，教會因神跡奇事得以迅速開拓、因培訓事工得以堅固，但教會要穩健發展並能進入社會則必須有神學建設，中國教會過去在諸般壓力下成長，但是其未來必須突破被社會邊緣化的格局。神學建設是初代教會發展的歷程，也將是今日中國教會要走的路。

「神學」對於不同背景的人會產生不同的聯想，對於生長於農村社會的基督徒也許會認為這是人的知識，對於屬靈生命的成長沒有什麼幫助；對於學界的知識分子可能覺得是西方文化有趣的討論項目，是值得探討的領域；對於其他宗教人士會看為基督宗教的理論，是諸多宗教論述的一種。「神學」到底是什麼？顧名思義，「神學」（theo-logy）是有關於上帝並與祂相關的學問。神學不是神學家的專利品，也不是學術圈裡無關宏旨的清談，更不應該是用來包裝宗教統戰的工具，神學是基督信仰回應時代的「理論平台」，是屬靈爭戰中的航空母艦！中國神學建設不單要處理教會內的信仰問題，更要作為先知回應時代的呼聲，以基督信仰的價值為根基，提出建議、反駁及有效的思想引導甚至實際的替代方案。神學必須立定自己的根基，擺脫被同化或被邊緣化的趨勢，每時代都必須重新定向（re-orientation），神學真理背後有抗衡世俗傾向的屬靈生命力，有聖靈的引導與提醒。神學是教會的神學，在時代中負有歷史責任！

1.2系統神學的定義

「神學」在此特別指「系統神學」而言，就是通過結構性的分析與整理後，把信仰真理內容以重要的主題分類呈現。系統神學不單以「三一神」作為認識與研究的對象，更加廣義的涵蓋所有與上帝相關的課題，比如我們所處的世界作為上帝所創造的世界，人現存的狀況因著罪與上帝疏離、隔絕，又世界歷史的走向與末世的關係等，都是系統神學關心的事情。「系統神學」是二十世紀的用詞，過去自十七世紀中葉以來，[[1]](http://www.gongfa.com/html/gongfazhuanti/zhonghuashenxuezhuant/2012/0917/2013.html" \l "_edn1" \o ")都稱之為「教義學」或「教義神學」，英文的dogmatics從拉丁文的docere（教導）演變出來，意思是指所講的內容為教會所傳承下來有關信仰的教導，作為教會所傳承的內容當然就隱含了一種「大公性」（catholicity），表達了其內容皆為過去教會眾多信徒及先賢所認定，成為了該教會（教派）的共同遺產，不能隨便更改。「系統神學」與「教義學」之間反映了時代的改變，雖然在主題上與教義學一致，但是「系統神學」這用詞卻反映了神學家的個人色彩，以及系統神學的多元性，不同的神學家可以建構不同的神學內容，而讀者也不一定需要執著唯有某一本系統神學才被認定為「正統」，百花齊放、百鳥爭鳴是這個時代的特色，因此每一本系統神學都可以作為「參考」用。這多元化的發展是好是壞很難一言定奪，一方面是鼓勵了對於既有課題重新的探討，但另方面又減弱了教會間信仰內容的統一性，甚至於在某些觀點上產生誤導，需要更多依賴讀者本人的判斷能力，教會牧長的把關，或有識人士的推介。一般而言，好的神學除了建立在聖經為基礎外，都應該以歷代主要的教會領袖觀點為重要參考，尤其是初代教會的教父如阿他拿修、奧古斯丁等並宗教改革家如馬丁路德、加爾文。

到底神學是不是「真理」？或者問「神學」和「真理」有什麼關係？嚴格來說，神學是「真理的理論建構」（theoretical construct），因此不是真理的本體，但是其內容卻應該反映（reflect）及代表（represent）了真理。所謂「理論建構」是指以人類語言（包括如數學等的符號語言）可以表達的方式，最貼切的呈現所要研究的實際，如果要做個類比，就如一張北京地圖之於北京市的關係，「理論建構」有指示性的作用，指示並顯明真理本體的內涵與結構的功能。從這個角度來看，神學作為真理的理論實在與物理學作為探求物理界的理論有類似的意義。不過神學與物理學對真理探索的過程有基本的不同，一方面是被研究的核心對象上帝與物理是不同層次的實際，是主體性與非主體性之分別；另方面是研究者在認識所探索的對象後所引發的不同回應，對於物理的新發現可能帶來對宇宙奇妙的驚喜，但對於上帝的更深入認識會使我們驚嘆以致敬畏祂。但是就因神學的探索是屬靈的行為，當人在黑暗中不願意面對自己，讓真理的光照明自我的本相時，人就沒有辦法真正認識上帝。當使徒約翰提到耶穌基督為真光的時候，講明「光照在黑暗裡，黑暗卻不接受光」（約１﹕5）。因此，學「神學」的第一部是願意把心靈開放，讓真光照亮自我的內心世界。

如果神學是關於上帝真理的理論建構，那神學就不是虛構的神話，不是思辨的討論，更不是世俗哲學的奴僕。第二世紀的教會面對當時社會流行的各樣宗教神話，神學在談論上帝的時候到底是否只是講另一個神話而已？亞歷山大的革利免把神學定位為學習關於「真神」的「真理」，表明其客觀性並非人憑著自己的想像力虛構出來關於某神明的故事。又十二、十三世紀的歐洲崇尚經院哲學式的思辨，神學成為了當時大學裡的高級課程，使得神學變成屬於象牙塔的產物，肯培（Thomas à Kempis）於是寫了《效法基督》一書，提出基督徒的屬靈生命才是最為重要的，試圖糾正當時的神學走向，免得掉進理智主義的圈套。在近代神學的發展中，十八世紀興起的啟蒙運動影響深遠，使世俗主義成為正統信仰的威脅，尤有甚者神學體系脫離了聖經的基礎，反以啟蒙思潮作為前設，把神學服膺於哲學之下，故讀「經典自由派」神學不難看到康德的影子。[[2]](http://www.gongfa.com/html/gongfazhuanti/zhonghuashenxuezhuant/2012/0917/2013.html" \l "_edn2" \o ")今日中國教會同樣面對世俗主義的挑戰，長期在物質主義與唯物思想的燻陶下，使人容易接受「無神」的觀念，甚至在一些基督宗教的書籍中也可能滲入世俗主義的成分。[[3]](http://www.gongfa.com/html/gongfazhuanti/zhonghuashenxuezhuant/2012/0917/2013.html" \l "_edn3" \o ")

1.3系統神學的定位與分部

「系統神學」在神學科系中的定位又是什麼？從大體分，神學科系可分為聖經科、歷史科、系統科、實踐科四大範圍。聖經科有舊約、新約、聖經神學及釋經學；歷史科有教會歷史、歷史神學、教義史（編年史陳述）及基督教歷代思想（斷代史研究）；系統科包括系統神學（教義神學）、倫理學、護教學（可能涉及宗教哲學）；實踐科則有講道學、協談輔導學、宣教學、基督教教育、聖樂、崇拜學、教會行政。其實釋經學作為探討解釋聖經的理論可以同時屬於系統神學的科目，另外教義史作為教義發展的研究也同屬系統科，宣教學作為教會對大使命的落實可以與倫理學相關聯。值得一提的是現在的靈修神學本來應該是與系統神學結合，但是由於理智主義對後者的影響，使得靈修神學脫離系統神學而成為了一種提醒，甚至抗議的聲音。總而言之，系統神學成為整合聖經科及歷史科的一個園地，然後應用在實踐及靈命追求上，但是在實踐與生活中又對系統神學提出修正的參考。

「系統神學」的主題包括﹕導論、啟示論、聖經論、神論、創造論（並天使論）、人論、罪論、基督論、救贖論、聖靈論、教會論、末世論。在西方的教學傳統（起碼是我曾經受教的經歷）大致可以歸納為八個項目，涵蓋在四門課中，第一門為導論、啟示與聖經論，目的在於先處理神學方法及神學內容的來源等問題，如此的開始可以隱約看到背後的動機是以解決理性問題為出發；第二門是神論與創造論，並人論與罪論，解決了神學建構方法與內容來源問題後，最優先的題目就是神學的核心「神」本身與祂的創造，這兩個相關的主題可以從《使徒信經》看到﹕「我信上帝，全能的父，創造天地的主」，另外把人論置放於神論之後的用意反映了神學的核心其實並非「單極性」的，而是「不對等的雙極性」的（asymmetrical bipolarity），表明了上帝與人之間的互動原則。罪論與人論放在一塊是考慮到人存在的實然狀況，是已經墮落的罪人，等待上帝為人所預備通過耶穌基督成就的救贖。因此，順理成章第三門課就是基督論與救贖論，如此的安排把基督定位為救恩的成就者，按照父神的旨意打通了人類得救的管道；救贖論除了處理人如何從罪中得釋放的問題，也應該包括成聖論的部分，討論人得救後如何落實新生命帶來的改變。在此出現一個難題，到底應該把聖靈論放在什麼地方？一般而言是放在最後一門課與教會論並列，理由是教會論必須討論聖靈恩賜的運用，但是從救贖的角度看，聖靈的角色在人的重生與成聖的過程中更為基本。最後，末世論是第四門課的第二部分，作為「系統神學」的結尾，呈現了整體結構的直線發展觀念（view of linear development），跟先頭的神論與創造形成「始」與「終」的對比，然而這「終」只是地上歷史的終點，卻是我們能夠完全地參與無限永恆的盼望的新階段。

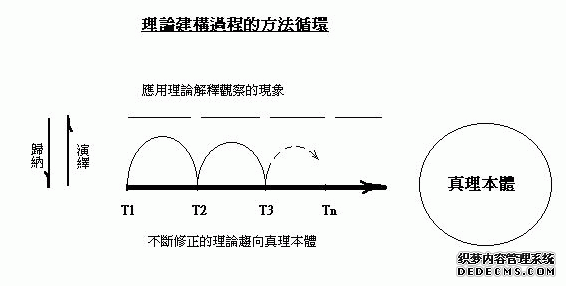
以上的主題安排只是其中較普遍的情形，比如罪論就可以考慮放在救贖論之前，說明人需要救贖的原因。在「系統神學」的主題中，天使論要算是非常困難的題目，因為聖經中討論的資料很少，一般附加在創造論裡面，相關的魔鬼論其實是滿重要的課題，我們需要認識仇敵，所謂知己知彼，可以放在天使論部分處理，或者成為罪論的一個課題，兩種的處理會有不同的重點，前者看重鬼魔與天使同樣為靈界的活物的本質，後者則是考慮其墮落與邪惡的狀態。最後，讓我們回到神論與啟示論的優先順序問題上。到底如果我們要重新安排神學的課題，應該把那一個放在前面？是先有啟示，我們才得以認識上帝；但也是先有上帝才可能有啟示。一個是從知識論（epistemology）出發，另一個是從本體論（ontology）說起，不過聖經卻是以宣告開始﹕「上帝起初…」，從創世的敘述中，聖經告訴我們上帝做了什麼，又跟我們有什麼關係，好像是向我們發出一個邀請﹕「來！認識我是誰。」雖然啟示論與神論彼此有辯證關係，但是首先從神論開始認識上帝是誰（the “WHO” question）應該是比較合乎聖經的精神，因此也是我們要採用的順序，把啟示論置放在三一神論之後。

1.5系統神學的真理性

掌握整合性觀念﹕既然有聖經，為何還需要系統神學？聖經是上帝用以啟示真理的管道，但是如果只有對於某些聖經章節內容的理解，那樣對於真理掌握有欠全面性。其實，當我們對聖經真理要求更全面性的理解的時候，都會自然進入系統化過程，而問題是在於沒有計劃或一致方法所產生的「系統性」知識可能會有偏差。因此，最終的問題還不是要不要系統神學，乃是要怎樣的系統神學，是全面的、平衡的、有條理的，還是隨意的，或應急的？

針對當前處境﹕另外，系統神學超過了聖經研究是因為神學必須對應時代處境。從文本內容的角度看，聖經是歷史文獻，有當時候的需求及表達方式，不一定能夠完全切合針對今天所產生的問題。如果不經反省，甚至可能會引起誤用聖經的情況。比如，安息日會堅持守星期六來記念主就是一個典型的例子。還有，如果我們沒有辦法有效的針對當前問題作出回應，或提出有效解決的方案，我們的信仰將會被邊緣化，成為與世界隔絕的「封閉型」信仰。在今天中國進入國際化之後，這情況會越來越突顯。

理論與本體﹕上文曾經提到神學是關於真理的理論建構，而非真理的本體。在基督信仰中，我們相信上帝通過舊約的先知、新約的使徒，並耶穌基督自己和其言行把祂的旨意，本性及相關的真理表明出來，真理本身屬於第一序（first order）的事情，而神學是對於這些內容的反省與整理、陳述，屬於第二序（second order）的事情。作為真理的理論，神學是一個指向真理本身的指標，而有其實然的限制﹕包括其內容因人的認知的有限而來的「不完整性」（partial knowledge）、在建構過程中因表達能力有限的「約化性」（approximation），因而產生在陳述絕對真理時內涵的「相對性」空間，使得理論必然是有「開放性」的，可以允許被修正的可能，但是修正卻是有既定的方向，以真理本體為最終目標；在有既定方向的開放性（directed openness）前提下，其相對性空間的大小是取決於該理論離開真理本體之差距，這就得看該理論有多精準。總而言之，神學作為理論是不斷朝向真理的目標進發（theory strains toward the truth as the final goal），這建構過程稱之為「方法循環」（methodological circle），[[4]](http://www.gongfa.com/html/gongfazhuanti/zhonghuashenxuezhuant/2012/0917/2013.html" \l "_edn4" \o ")可以與解釋學（包括釋經學）中所提的「解釋循環」（hermeneutical circle）作一對照。在「解釋循環」過程中，我們從解釋者的地步為出發點，循序循環越發往文本的內容推進，直到解釋者能夠進入文本的世界；同樣，在「方法循環」過程中，我們從建構者的地步出發，通過逐步對該建構的修正，一直往真理本體的方向推進，以求達到最高目標，能夠完全解釋真理本體。不過這最高目標在一般科學理論中既然只是一個理想，在神學領域則更是如此，人無法完全測透上帝的奧秘，這是我們應該有的認知。

[](http://www.gongfa.com/uploads/120917/1_145125_1.gif)  
图片1

图片1

理論與實際﹕神學雖然是真理的理論建構，但是價值不應該只停留在「學術清談」的層次，其具體意義在於應用到生活的內容，這才是他的存在目的。在應用中人能夠體驗真理的實在，信仰的生命，上帝以祂的恩典如何拯救、看顧與保守。今天中國國內流行的基督教文化交流雖然有其學術性意義，但是從信仰的角度評價，除非能最終把真理落實到人的信仰生活中，其實際價值會大打折扣。（在諸多的基督教文化出版品中是否能夠忠實地詮釋真理也是值得關心的事情。）我們相信真理理論的驗證非常重要，生活的體驗不應成為建立神學的基礎，但是卻應該成為驗證神學的歷程。

1.5系統神學的價值

「系統神學」既然不是單純的學術科目，我們說神學是教會的神學，它的使命包括教會、社會、個人三大範圍﹕就是造就教會、維護生命及敬愛上主。[[5]](http://www.gongfa.com/html/gongfazhuanti/zhonghuashenxuezhuant/2012/0917/2013.html" \l "_edn5" \o ")

造就教會﹕雖然從個人的角度，神學能夠造就自己，然而其更重要的目的是造就建立教會的整體，「為要成全聖徒，各盡其職，建立基督的身體」（弗4﹕12），當信徒瞭解自己的定位，教會的使命，並如何共同生活的道理的時候，教會作為基督的身體就得以長大成熟，達到豐滿的地步（13節）。神學在此扮演了生活指導的功用，讓個人及教會都有據可依、有理可循。保羅跟著提出了兩個具體造就教會的方式﹕抵擋侵害（14節）、建立信徒（15節）。正如他在另一處說﹕「我們要傳揚他，是用諸般的智慧，勸戒各人〔指抵擋侵害〕，教導各人〔指建立信徒〕，要把各人在基督裡完完全全地引導到上帝面前」（西1﹕28）。抵擋侵害包括﹕1）批判並抵擋世俗主義對教會的滲透與攻擊，2）抵擋異端邪說在教會內滋生或從外攻擊滲透，3）陳明所信仰的立場與內容，免被「他人」扣上帽子。建立信徒包括﹕1）對信徒進行系統培訓讓其有完整的真理基礎，2）為信徒提供看世界事物的準則或世界觀（假設了真理基礎），3）訓練信徒對事情及環境的判斷能力（假設了真理基礎及基督徒世界觀）。

維護生命﹕今日在我們周圍的環境中，對於生命沒有多大的尊重，是因為人不認識那賜予生命的上帝。「心中無神、目中無人」，人不懼怕在上的上帝的時候，就是「和尚打傘，無法無天」，因此康德雖然說不能證明上帝的存在與否，但是起碼在維持社會秩序上，人們相信上帝的存在對此是有幫助的。[[6]](http://www.gongfa.com/html/gongfazhuanti/zhonghuashenxuezhuant/2012/0917/2013.html" \l "_edn6" \o ")這當然是從功利作用為出發，不過也說明人墮落後的本性從根本上是不會自動自發地尊重別人的，雖然傳統儒家思想通過文化教育希望能夠發揮人內心的善，不過從中國的專政歷史告訴我們，這是非常沒有保險的事，人落在權力的誘惑底下就「自然」顯出其腐敗的本質。

當然，不是否認中國的儒家倫理經典還是有維護社會平順運作的功能，但是只有從啟示而來的真理才告訴我們如何更深入、更真誠的去愛。儒家思想可能提出了一種人類的理想，也希望通過修養之道去達成「內聖外王」的目的，但是卻缺少必須的動力。傳統的教導是「己所不慾，勿施於人」，但耶穌更積極的教訓是「當愛人如己」，「你要人怎樣待你，就怎樣待人」。人愛需要有真實的典範與動力﹕「我們愛，因為上帝先愛我們」（約一4﹕19-21）。上帝先為主動者表明當如何愛，又賜予我們動力去以愛回應祂的愛，這愛包括了愛上帝，並一切屬於祂的人、事、物。舊約中最能夠表達「榮神、益人」的道理的是《十誡》中守安息日的要求，當人按照吩咐守安息日，記念上帝的恩典時，不單自己，更是活在他下面的兒女、僕人、牲畜，還有在城裡寄居的外人都得以享受休息、更新的機會。從一個角度看，安息日所引伸的安息年甚至使所耕作的「地」也得享安息，滿有環保意識！

耶穌統合了舊約律法的總綱為「愛神」與「愛人」兩條，當人敬畏上帝時，就有從此而來長壽的福氣（申6﹕2）。怪不得我們今天社會很多人的壽命都因各樣疾病或災難減短，實在反映了遠離了創造主的事實。反過來，我們看到西方社會在過去普遍以基督信仰為生活原則和價值的時代，雖然不是每一個人都是信徒，但卻在當時文化上突顯了偉大的創作和成就，西方的經典音樂至今仍然是能夠打動我們心弦的，西方的法律制度也是基於聖經摩西律法的原則，內涵道德價值的公平性，就是科學的發展也跟基督信仰相關，[[7]](http://www.gongfa.com/html/gongfazhuanti/zhonghuashenxuezhuant/2012/0917/2013.html" \l "_edn7" \o ")如果沒有創造世界的觀念是不會產生世界背後有「理」的假設，也不會有「求真」的態度。基督信仰的價值不單是保存在文化的產品中，更加是存在於基督徒的身上，是信仰真理的「載體」，我們不能要求社會中所有人都成為基督徒，但是基督徒作為世界上的光、鹽卻使得世界不致於完全掉進黑暗裡，在普遍性的社會腐敗中能夠產生提醒與批判的作用，作為真理的見證（太5﹕13-14）。基督徒有責任為所處的生活環境中的眾人代禱，尤其是為在上掌權者禱告（提前2﹕1-2）。

敬愛上主﹕ 雖然有人會因著系統神學給人有深不可測，而不是提昇靈性的一種學問的印象而予以拒絕，但是當我們要落實「愛神、愛人」的時候，當如何做，至終還是得回到遵守上帝的「道」上來（申11﹕1）。耶穌基督也說﹕「你若愛我，就必遵守我的命令」（約14﹕15）。「遵守上帝的道」在基督信仰裡有著特別重要的位置，耶和華上帝也告訴以色列要把祂的律例、誡命教導孩子，以致他們曉得如何愛祂，就是遵守祂的命令（申6﹕4-9）。從愛的順從中就產生讚美，基督教導門徒《主禱文》的開始便是「願人都尊你的名為聖」（太6﹕9），因著認識上帝偉大的作為，創造之工（詩8﹕1-9）與救贖之工（詩66﹕3-4；72﹕18-19）我們發出稱謝。然而，對上帝的愛不是由於我們自己勉強逼出來的，而是從上帝來的禮物，因著聖靈澆灌在我們心中的愛（羅5﹕5），因此，我們當從禱告開始，求上帝給予我們從祂而來的真愛。不是浪漫的感覺，不是一時的衝動，乃是恆久忍耐，經過抉擇的委身。上帝愛我們甚至將獨生子賜給我們；基督愛父願意取了奴僕的形象死在十字架上；我們若愛基督願作為門徒需要計算代價，順從祂旨意走「十字架道路」的代價。

**問題討論**

1. 為什麼中國教會迫切的需要神學建設？

2. 甚麼是（和不是）神學的本質？

3. 如何對別人（包括教會內）解釋神學作為「理論建構」的意思？

4. 如果你需要教導兩門基礎神學課程，將如何安排其內容？

5. 歷史神學（包括宗派神學）與系統神學應保持甚麼關聯性？

6. 在你的教會處境中，可以如何使神學與生活關聯？

7. 「不對等的雙極性」會影響你對系統神學課題中那些觀點？

8. 比較「方法循環」與「解釋循環」的異同，需參考解釋學的書籍。

9. 觀察中國近五年的社會發展，提出神學需要回應的議題。

10.    讀一本市面上的「基督宗教研究」的書籍後，給予中肯的評論（2000字）。

[[1]](http://www.gongfa.com/html/gongfazhuanti/zhonghuashenxuezhuant/2012/0917/2013.html" \l "_ednref1" \o ") 很可能是L. Reinhardt在1659年首次使用。參F.H. Klooster, “Dogmatics,” in Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, ed. W.A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 328-329.

[[2]](http://www.gongfa.com/html/gongfazhuanti/zhonghuashenxuezhuant/2012/0917/2013.html" \l "_ednref2" \o ") 康德討論宗教的專著是《單純理性限度內的宗教》李秋零 譯（香港﹕漢語基督教文化研究所，1997）。

[[3]](http://www.gongfa.com/html/gongfazhuanti/zhonghuashenxuezhuant/2012/0917/2013.html" \l "_ednref3" \o ") 參拙文李錦綸〈中國教會面對的神學挑戰〉《中國與福音季刊》第一卷，第二期（2001.4-6）頁145-156。

[[4]](http://www.gongfa.com/html/gongfazhuanti/zhonghuashenxuezhuant/2012/0917/2013.html" \l "_ednref4" \o ") 可以參考物理理論建構的方法循環，參拙文Kam-lun Edwin Lee, “The Correspondence Between Human Intelligibility and Physical Intelligibility: The View of Jean Lardrière,” Zygon, vol. 32 (Mar. 1997): 74-75.

[[5]](http://www.gongfa.com/html/gongfazhuanti/zhonghuashenxuezhuant/2012/0917/2013.html" \l "_ednref5" \o ") 這觀點為當代信義宗神學家Klaus Bockmuehl所提出。

[[6]](http://www.gongfa.com/html/gongfazhuanti/zhonghuashenxuezhuant/2012/0917/2013.html" \l "_ednref6" \o ") Immanuel Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, trans. L.W. Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Education Publishing, 1956), pp. 128-136.

[[7]](http://www.gongfa.com/html/gongfazhuanti/zhonghuashenxuezhuant/2012/0917/2013.html" \l "_ednref7" \o ") 楊慶球〈基督教的創造論對近代科學哲學的意義〉《宗教》（復印報刊資料）1996年第5期，頁76-80。

本文链接：[李锦纶：中國教會需要神學](http://www.gongfa.com/html/gongfazhuanti/zhonghuashenxuezhuant/2012/0917/2013.html),转载请注明出处。