

Christ. You can't have a head without a body; you can't have a body without a head. It is essential that this head-and-body metaphor be taken seriously, for one of the more frequent misunderstandings of both Christ and church comes when head and body, Jesus and church, are severed and then studied or discussed in isolation.

From its opening lines, Ephesians has saturated us in the primacy and presence of God in everything. The Christian life is too often treated in our culture as an extra, something we get involved in after we have the basic survival needs established and then realize that things aren't yet quite complete. So we become a Christian. That is all well and good, but there is no B.C. in our lives, no "Before Christ." Neither is there any B.C. in anyone else who is not a confessed Christian. Christ is *always* present, for *all* of us. Just because we have no awareness of the presence and action of God previous to our knowledge of it does not mean that God was absent. We must not naively assume that the Christian life begins with us. As long as we think in those terms, we are apt to judge everything and everyone else by our experience and circumstances. That kind of thinking is understandable in adolescents. But we are called to grow up.

Paul vigorously counters B.C. assumptions: he fills us in on what has been going on "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). The world is immense, and God is at work in it comprehensively. Not only that, but everything that God does, is doing, and will do involves our total lives (1:3–2:10). Growing up in Christ means growing up to a stature adequate to respond heart and soul to the largeness of God.

Ephesians continues to expand and deepen what this Christian life involves by taking up the way we think about church (2:11ff.). The church that is the body of Christ has a long pre-history. The formation of the people of God that began with Abraham came into its own as the church took form at Pentecost. The church is formed in continuity with Israel as an expansion of Israel, the "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16). Just as Israel, in the language of many a prophet (Hos. 1–3; Jer. 3:1–5; Isa. 54:4–7), was the wife of God, so the church is the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:22–33; Rev. 21:2, 9–11). On becoming Christians we are "grafted" into the olive tree that is the people of God (Rom. 11:17–24). We become

conscious participants in holy history, a people whose lives are given their identity in Jesus and his resurrection, the incarnation of the Son who was "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4).

In parallel with the way we wrongly think of "Christian" as an extra tacked on to life, an improvement or a completion of what turned out to be not enough, so "church" in our culture is wrongly considered to be something more or less tacked on to "Christian." Church is not an "add-on," a program or cheerleader, to help us be faithful and better Christians. We think wrongly if we consider church in terms of what it does for us, or (and this is perhaps even worse) in terms of what we can do for it. As long as we think of church in those terms, we will evaluate it in terms of how it meets our self-identified needs, or in terms of how it needs us and how we can help out. In the process we cut ourselves off from our intricate and rich pre-history in Israel.

Paul will have none of that: in his opening foray into church (Eph. 2:11–14), Paul uses the name of Christ four times and pronouns for Christ eight times — twelve times in all — as he lays the groundwork that will show us just how church comes into being and how we fit in. Interestingly, one of the verbs he uses is the great Genesis word "create" ("in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"). Paul here uses it of Christ creating church ("create in himself one new humanity"). It is useful, I think, to let our imaginations gather around that first great creation story so that it can provide perspective to this second great creation story, the creation of church with its long pre-history in people-of-God Israel. Just as creation provides the context for living in God's covenant, church provides the context for the practice of Jesus' resurrection.

But as Paul continues his reordering of the way we think of and experience church, we notice a change of pace (Eph. 3:1–13). There is a shift from the intensity that has marked his writing so far. We detect a slight relaxation in the tension. It is not exactly a digression, for the subject is the same, but Paul lets himself enter into the conversation. The tone is more narrational than doctrinal. The metaphors that are so conspicuous in chapters 1–2 recede to give room for personal witness.

Many things about the church can be defined and described: creeds and leaders, conflicts and persecutions, architecture and politics. But the pieces don't add up to church.

This complex interior heart of church is captured in the phrase "that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known" (Eph. 3:10 RSV). "Manifold" has a picture in it: an intricately embroidered pattern in a tapestry.¹ And wisdom carries the sense of lived knowledge, or the revelation of God as lived. Wisdom is knowledge in action, embodied in the life of the church. Wisdom is the practice of resurrection.

Church is where this wisdom, this embodiment of the knowledge and revelation of God, takes place, where the resurrection is practiced. Church is the workshop for turning knowledge into wisdom, becoming what we know.

* * *

Gerard Manley Hopkins, a Jesuit priest and poet in nineteenth-century Wales and Ireland, coined a term that is useful in grasping what is involved in the "manifold wisdom" made known in the church. The term is "inscape." Inscape is formed on analogy with but in contrast to landscape. Landscape is what we see spread out before us against the horizon. It is relatively stable and can be described and painted and cultivated: groves of trees, fields of mown grass, a meandering river, a range of glacier-carved mountains. Inscape is the intuitive sense that what we see is a living, organic form that strikes through the senses and into the mind with a feeling of novelty and discovery. Inscape is what something uniquely is, that which holds together whatever you are looking at or listening to, gives it distinction — proportions, shades of light, tints of color, shapes, relationships, sounds.

An editor of Hopkins's poems, W. H. Gardner, notes that "this feeling for the intrinsic quality of the unified pattern of essential char-

1. J. A. Robinson, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, 2nd ed. (London: Clark, 1922), p. 80.

acteristics [inscape] is the special mark of the artist."² Painters use oils and canvas to bring into visibility what left to ourselves we might never notice in a human face or a bowl of fruit. Sculptors carve and shape granite and clay and bronze to draw our attention to the way shape and form and texture affect our awareness. Poets arrange metaphors and similes, vowels and consonants, and alert us to meaning and significance in words that we miss in our preoccupation with mere information or getting out the vote. Musicians mix and give rhythm to various sounds — a singing voice, breath pushed through a reed or horn, a taut bow stroked over a gut or metal string — and create participation in and responsiveness to what we do not have words for. Artists make us insiders to the complexity and beauty of what we deal with every day but so often miss. They bring to our attention what is right before our eyes, within reach of our touch, help us hear sounds and combinations of sounds that our noise-deafened ears have never heard.

Often an element of surprise accompanies this experience of inscape: "I never saw that before" . . . "I've never heard anything like that" . . . "I've never been so moved." . . . But in fact nothing that the artist brings to our attention was unheard, unseen, untouched previously. It was all there before us in the tree we walked past every morning on our way to work, in the face that we thought we knew through and through, in the whispers of wind in the willows and the lapping of waves on the beach.

The artist helps us see what we have always seen but never seen, hear what we hear daily but don't hear, feel what we have touched a hundred times but never been touched by, recognize that we are living a story and not just drifting through fragments of journal jottings or disconnected bits of gossip.

Why are artists so necessary? And how do they do this? A great deal of attention has been given to understanding what is involved. The stock answer is that the artist makes us aware of beauty in con-

2. *Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, selected by W. H. Gardner (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1953), p. xx.

trast to the dull or the ugly or the commonplace. But that is obviously an unsatisfactory answer. For much of what the artist brings to our attention, with our grateful appreciation, is not so much beauty as reality — the way things actually are, whether it is the excruciating pain portrayed in a Rouault painting of the crucifixion of Jesus or the unrelenting ordinariness of a red wheelbarrow in a poem by William Carlos Williams, neither of which is “pretty.”

Gerard Manley Hopkins never defined the term he coined. But he used it frequently enough in his journals and notes to give us a feel for what he is reaching for. One day he walked into a barn and was surprised by the way the timbers mingled light and shadow. Later he “thought how sadly beauty of inscape was unknown and buried away from simple people and yet how near at hand it was if they had eyes to see it and could be called out everywhere again.” Another time he looked out of his window and caught the inscape in the random clods and broken heaps of snow made by the cast of a broom. He later remarked, “All the world is full of inscape and chance left free to act falls into an order as well as purpose.”³

Reading and reciting the poems of Hopkins is an immersion in inscape, a thorough and glorious apprenticeship in sensing the invisibles and inaudibles that give cohesion and wholeness to everything that we see and hear and taste, not just its superficial appearance but the inner core of individuality.

* * *

Norman H. MacKenzie, a most perceptive reader of Hopkins, sums it up like this: “Inscape is the distinctive character (almost a personality) given by the Creator to a particular species of rock or tree or animal. Each separate species through its inscape reflects some fractional part of God’s all-inclusive perfection.”⁴ I want to add church to MacKenzie’s

3. Norman H. MacKenzie, *A Reader’s Guide to Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 130.

4. MacKenzie, *A Reader’s Guide*, p. 233.

list of “particular species.” I want to consider the inscape of church, the “manifold wisdom of God” that gives structure to the reality of church.

Many people (most?) look at the church and see only the exterior with no sense of what holds it together, no sense of pattern or proportion, no perception of the inner energy that pulses through it, no feel of being in harmony with the reality of what is there, no imagination adequate for responding to the “manifold wisdom.” It is a building, more often than not undistinguished. It is a gathering of people, more often than not undistinguished. It has a history, much of it an embarrassment.

Inscape means that there is a lot more to church than we can see, hear, or read. It also means that everything we do, see, hear, and read in church is *church*. There is no invisible church that exists apart from what our five physical senses bring to us. Those who want to save themselves the embarrassment and trouble of dealing with the church as God’s “manifold wisdom” by creating out of thin air a “mystical church” are headed up a dead-end street. Markus Barth impatiently names such practice as “sacrilegious nonsense.”⁵

It is true that a superficial survey of church brings up a lot of disconnected and random things, ideas, and people. But dismissing all that offends our spiritual sensibilities by brushing it aside, and creating our own sanitized and idealized church rejects the church God gave us. The task is to see everything in relation and in proportion, see all light and shadow at once, see all the colors and tones working together, recognize all the men, women, and children as thews and sinews in the body that is the church, with Christ as its head.

Another poet, Czeslaw Milosz, one of the great Christian poets of the twentieth century, expressed in other words what Hopkins conveyed by inscape. In writing about growing up in Poland and maintaining his Christian identity in the midst of the warring forces and ideologies of Soviet communism, Nazi fascism, and French secularism, he wrote of his developing realization that “one had to master a skill, like

5. Markus Barth, *The Broken Wall: A Study of the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Chicago: Judson Press, 1959), p. 121.

swimming or running, rather than a body of knowledge capable of being set forth in theories. Reality [Paul's "manifold wisdom"] . . . was a changing, living tissue; it was woven out of countless interdependencies in such a way that even the tiniest detail germinates infinitely; and at the joints that keep its structure mobile, man is able to insert the lever of a conscious act."⁶

* * *

This is what I was getting at earlier using the term "ontology": *the ontological church*. When we have our eyes and ears, our feelings and our memories activated to see all of this working together, there it is, *inscape*. Without a developed sense of inscape we are held captive by ephemeral irritants and enthusiasms: the gossip who always manages to be in the way of our vision during worship; the sixteen-year-old with gushing naiveté who reports on how three weeks of mission work in Mexico building homes for hurricane victims "changed my life"; a free-floating memory of the inquisition and crusades that intrudes on the sermon; the plodding pedestrianism of Christians we meet in the shopping mall slapping their small children into submission; the hallelujahs at Easter; the latest sex or financial scandal of a church celebrity. All of that too, but within and throughout the "manifold wisdom."

Gregory of Nyssa expands on the "manifold wisdom" in a sermon on the Song of Songs. He lists the difficult juxtapositions that make up church: life created by death, the attainment of glory by dishonor, of blessing by curse, of power by weakness, and more.⁷ This is church as God gives it to us. This is *real* church. Are we going to receive what God gives us? Or make up our own? "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

6. Czeslaw Milosz, *Native Realm: A Search for Self-Definition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 267.

7. See Markus Barth, *Ephesians 1-3*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 34 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), p. 356.

Shadow Work

Judith is an artist. Her primary medium is textiles. Most of the time she begins her work with raw cotton or wool. She cards, spins, dyes, and then weaves her fabrics. Her weavings are usually on a small scale — a nest of birds' eggs, a portrait of David's Abigail, three crows — which she frames and gives as gifts to her friends. She makes her living by repairing tapestries in museums.

Judith had an alcoholic husband and a drug-addicted son. She had kept her life and her family together for years by attending twelve-step meetings. One Sunday, she was about forty years old at the time, she entered the church where I was the pastor. She came at the invitation of some friends she knew from her meetings — "You need to come to church. I'll meet you there." She had never been to church before. She knew nothing about church. She was raised in a morally upright home but had no acquaintance with institutional or formal religion. In her family God was not part of their working vocabulary. She was well read in poetry and politics and psychology, and knew a great deal of art and artists. But she had never read the Bible. If she had heard the stories in the Bible she had paid no attention. As far as she could recall she had never been inside a church.

Something, though, caught her attention when she entered this church, and she continued to come. In a few months she became a Christian and I became her pastor. I loved observing and listening to her. Everything was new: Scriptures, worship, prayer, baptism, eucharist — *church!* It was a tonic to me to hear and see through her excited perceptions everything that I had lived with all my life. All her questions were exclamations: "Where have I been all my life! These are incredible stories — why didn't anyone tell me these! How come this has been going on all around me and I never knew it!" We had delightful conversations. We became good friends.

Meanwhile, her primary community was made up of artists — painters and poets and sculptors, mostly, with a few of her twelve-step friends sprinkled in among them.

After four years or so of this, I moved across the continent to take