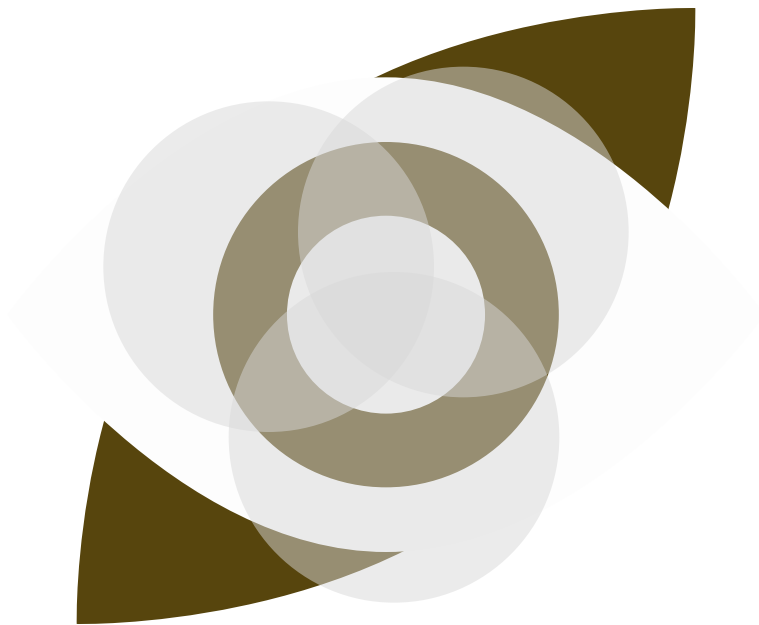


The log in our eye



An attempt at catholic self-reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

'First remove the beam out of your own eye, and then you can see clearly...'

I acknowledge the irony of all this. Here is a judgy article about problems in the church that references Jesus' own words about not judging. Yes but, that is why I say that the log is in "our" eye, and since we are discussing the church, I am referring to the eye of Jesus himself. Who am I to say this? Well, I am a member of his body. Or, so I identify. And as appalling as it is to say, there is a log in the eye of this body. There is even a beam in the eye of Christ. Genuinely, I am not trying to be provocative. I wish to accurately describe our condition. To me, this image should not be any more shocking than the thought that Jesus considers us as his body in the first place. That being said, I think that the idea expressed another way would be agreed upon almost universally: the church has serious problems. Moreover, they are problems which she cannot see in herself.

So then, this piece is an honest attempt to do what Jesus prescribes: not to look at specks in the eyes of others, but to first take the log out of our own eye. At least, I'm saying that we should acknowledge that it is there. I want to talk about a problem in the church. Yes, the scope is impossibly broad: the catholic (whole, global) church. Furthermore, I want to talk about problems that are, as the analogy suggests, virtually invisible to those of us who are a part of this body. But before I begin, I want to recognize that I am as much a part of the problem as anyone. I am a participant in this body like a skin cell in a particular spot. I am just sending out a signal about what

I can sense. Still, it's not lost on me that Jesus' words alluded to above do not refer to a collective exercise but an individual one. And, I cannot pretend for too long that this piece really is genuine, collective self-reflection. I'm just one person, and so are you. You have to decide whether or not these thoughts are relevant for you in your space and time and in your community. Take this signal for exactly what it is worth to you.

II. THE PATIENT

Before attempting to describe this log in our eye, I want to describe this body of ours, the church. Simply put, we are the people who have come to know God through faith in his son, Jesus. Easy enough, right? Well, it is simple in a sense but unfathomably deep in another, of course. Do we really know God? How do we know that we know God? How do we know that we are not deceived?

I think the uncomfortable reality is that none of us know *absolutely*. Even Paul writing to the Philippians says,

“But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.”

So we cannot, in an absolute sense, judge even ourselves to be in or out of God's household, the church. How then should we begin the task of

identifying if others, whole groups of people even, ought to be included? In other words, how do we know who should be considered 'Christian?' Of course, there have been many attempts to describe essential Christianity. We could reference the work of many saints into antiquity and various creeds and catechisms. There is no shortage of modern studies on the subject either. Many of them put forward a set of doctrines that must be known and believed to be saved, to know God. Here is a sort of example: 'You must believe [this] about the Trinity.' Easy, right? We all readily comprehend the Trinity. Another might be, 'You must hold to [this view] about what scripture is and its veracity.' As simple as it sounds, I have seen that thinking too long on this one can lead a person to dive deep into epistemology or simply to deconstruct. Lastly and especially emphasized among protestants, we have, 'you must know that none of your works can save you, only by faith can anyone be saved.'

We can believe these things easily enough. But, to merely believe that these are true is, in some sense, meaningless. James in his epistle says, "Even the demons believe and shudder." The demons, the most lost in all of creation, believe these things, these doctrines. Furthermore, I'm quite sure that demons have better theology than the most perceptive and well-studied theologians among us. It is as Jesus said to the Pharisees, "You diligently study the scriptures thinking that in them you have life... But, you refuse to come to me to have life."

So then, salvation is not about believing in doctrines. It is about believing in a person: Jesus, the Messiah. We place our faith in him and his ability to present us as acceptable to his father. Like the one who was lifted up with

Jesus said, "Remember me when you enter your kingdom." He was met with the Lord's commendation immediately, "Today, you will be with me in paradise." How advanced was that man's soteriology? How firm was his concept of the Trinity? We cannot know. But, we know that as Paul quoting the prophet Habakkuk says, "The righteous shall live by faith." It is only through a real, personal faith in Jesus that we are able to truly live. By faith, we relate to him as his bride and to God as sons and daughters. That is what it means to be Christian.

Broad, isn't it? Maybe deceptively so. By this definition, there are many who could be believing in Jesus. The next question is, even if you are believing, how do you know that you are believing in the true Jesus and not another Christ? Some might say again that doctrine, specifically Christology and an understanding of the attributes of God, will identify the true Jesus and, subsequently, those believing in the true Jesus by virtue of their answering this question correctly. But, I disagree. Surely, the Jesus that I can comprehend at my best isn't the full, real Jesus. And, I'm sure that every Christian has misconceptions about Jesus that could render him a false Jesus.

Many would then instruct us to identify the primary or cardinal truths that simply cannot be denied about Jesus. If these are denied, then you have a false Jesus. But even if you accept that there are cardinal or essential truths about Jesus and superfluous ones, that does not mean that you are now believing in the person you can identify. Consider, again, the demons. The demon-possessed man more easily recognized Jesus than the greatest born of women (and Jesus' own cousin), John the Baptist.

So next, I'll ask: what is the essential condition of having at least encountered the real Christ? I would say that the reality of meeting the actual person of Jesus is not a function of how much you know about him. Like an interaction with any person, it is solely based on them coming to you or you coming to them. And, in the case of Christ, as Jesus himself says to Peter, all such revelation of the Son is from God. And, as Paul says, "We love him because he first loved us." So, Christ comes to you, he calls you, and you respond. An infant relates to his mother but knows very little about her. He does not know her name, her likes or dislikes, or her origin. Instead, he exercises a perfect and natural dependence. He, in full innocence and faith, relies on her for his good. He trusts her. There are things he recognizes about her based on what he feels: her smell, her touch, her voice. But, his knowing these things does not legitimize his knowing her or her knowing him. If he were deaf and did not know her voice, she would not be to him any less his mother.

So it is with our relation to God. And, we did not have to be born for God to know us. As Paul says, God has set apart his people from before the world began. Our relation to God is, in that way, ancient and profound and really quite outside us. However, for the conscious person planted in time, our knowing God and our actual believing in Christ will involve us being acquainted with something about Christ, namely, his gospel.

Can we then ascertain the essential contents of the gospel, and thereby identify who is in the church? I say no. The gospel can be communicated in 50 words. Simultaneously, the gospel cannot be communicated in all of the books ever written. The gospel is not an incantation. I do not believe it can

be formulated into an exact set of words. The Word is Jesus himself, and his gospel is to be distributed as he instructed: in the name of the triune God by discipleship and the washing of baptism. The giving of the gospel is personal, and although Jesus commands his disciples to be taught, that teaching is to be active and comprehensive. Furthermore, we see examples in the New Testament of people who hear the true gospel, believe it, and yet do not receive the Holy Spirit until a later time. In these cases, was communion with God not just a simple matter of hearing the gospel and believing? And, what should we say about the saints of the Old Testament or the repentant Ninevites? What was the nature of their relationship with the Spirit and how deep was their understanding of the 'gospel?'

These things are not so easy to set into a concrete formula. God communes with people according to his own will. We do not summon Him. And so, I will not attempt to draw a line around any concept of the 'essential' gospel. Instead, I will comfortably leave this work here and move on to questions that I think are more accessible to answer and more pertinent to our discussion of the Church and this log in her eye.

Accordingly, when it comes to evaluating whether a person is truly believing in Jesus, I find that the authors of the New Testament consistently direct their hearers to examine their faith not according to their knowledge but by their fruit. James says that the kind of faith that is not accompanied by works is a "dead faith." Jesus himself says, "You will know them by their fruit." The apostles also, in calling out false teachers, repeatedly cite their sensuality and impure motives as evidence of their falseness. I believe we

are to evaluate people in this way: by their fruit. So, how should we make such assessments about the fruit of professing Christians today?

On a personal and even a communal level, it seems doable to put such an understanding into practice by examining our own lives and the lives of those around us. We can test ourselves and evaluate each other, exhort, and admonish one another. To do these things is the plain instruction of the New Testament. But, what are we to do about the global church? How do we make assessments about the genuineness of the faith of syncretistic Christians who practice Santería in the Caribbean or 7th generation Greek Orthodox Christians in Central Europe or the myriad of flavors of Evangelical Christians who pepper the American South and Midwest? Are these even questions that we should attempt to answer? And, do our attempts to answer such questions actually inhibit our ability to make this motion on the local level which is what is instructed, biblical, and achievable?

Those are, of course, leading questions. What I'm really saying is that the task of identifying who is 'in' or 'out' of the global church is not only unproductive but fundamentally un-Christian. As an example from the Protestant perspective, the task of determining whether (capital C) Catholics are 'in' or 'out' of true Christianity is not a Christian motion, but a political one. Moreover, it is a motion that would inhibit a person from acknowledging and loving the Catholic who is his actual neighbor. However, that is not to say that local churches ought to eschew clearly identifying their members. Determining who is in or out of a *local* church is scriptural and necessary. We see repeated instruction about church

discipline and discerning the body in the New Testament, but this discernment is to be done in observation of one's conduct and way of life. To make such determinations about people whose fruit are not visible to you, I say again, is not Christian but necessarily political.

Here, I do not define the political as that which is related to the government or civil affairs, nor do I mean to refer to the specific American concepts of the left and the right. By 'political,' I am referring to the practice of groups and the people who comprise them to accumulate power and exert influence. I am referring also to the structures built to those ends. In name, these structures serve our need for cooperation, but, in reality, they are about the business of control and domination. They exist in and through our institutions, our governments, and our religions. It is a very natural, although terrible, tendency of man to organize himself in this way. It is, by way of allegory, to become Babel or Egypt or Rome. It is the great tragedy of God's project working through national, ethnic Israel that Jerusalem became a Babylon. They did not submit to God's direction but instead did what was right in their own eyes. They struck hands with the impure and the violent to rob widows' houses and oppress the poor. Ultimately, though they were commissioned as a nation of priests to the world, this led Israel to collapse and scatter.

The church today is by no means excluded from being drawn into these kinds of self-destructive, political practices. Furthermore, I say that our widespread way of judging the faith of people we do not know has more to do with the drawing of lines for political territory than it does a true desire to discern the truth about salvation.

Accordingly, I will not attempt to identify who is 'in' or 'out' of the global church. I am thus unable to complete the stated goal of this section: to define clearly who is in this body. Instead, I will briefly describe to whom I make my address. In Ezekiel's prophecy, God commissions his servant to mark everyone in Jerusalem who sighed and groaned at such injustices as those mentioned above. In kind, I am speaking to you only if you are concerned enough to listen. If you are concerned about the state of God's kingdom on earth today, if you sigh and groan at the injustices evident among us, if you feel a gnawing pain in your eye and are agitated enough to identify the cause, then I would like to talk with you.

III. THE DIAGNOSIS

How can we measure our health as a body? If we are indeed ill, what kind of sickness do we have? First, I think it would be good to delineate between the symptoms of our condition and the condition itself. And, I would say that the symptoms are apparent.

A. **Discord**

Queue the obligatory mention of the ridiculous number of protestant denominations. Queue up the history of wars and murders committed over differences of opinion on baptism or justification or saints or anything else. Bring up the modern-day divisions that would have members of one church holding protests outside of other churches. We are divided from our neighbors, even those who profess Christ, by political party, age, race, and class. We also divide according to

commitments to various ideologies and practices such as homeschooling, style of preaching, or cultural preferences like clothing or music. Churches end up describing themselves in what amount to marketing terms that they use to attract congregants and differentiate themselves from other churches. This othering makes competitors of those who, in Christ, should be regarded as brothers. The solution becomes not to understand and to be at peace with each other, but to win arguments against each other and to win more and more to one's side.

This kind of division and hostility are bound up in the heart of man, but this is not how the church has learned Christ. In his high priestly prayer, Jesus asks for us to be one even as he and his father are one. We fall despairingly, comically short of that.

B. Adulteration and isolation

There are many evils and injustices in the world today that are, in a sense, occurring outside of Christ's body. It is the explicit purpose of this article (refer again to the title) to set those aside for now and focus on issues in and of the church. But, in response to evil in the world, there are common life patterns to which certain groups in the church have shown a predisposition.

One of these is retreat. This is the 'Benedict Option:' the isolation of the church from the world. It is destructive in a hidden way but to adapt a proverb, the one who is absent in the Lord's work is like the one who destroys it. After all, it is not an option. It is disobedience. It

is an attempt to be not of the world by not being in the world either, and that is not the condition into which God has placed his church. Meanwhile, the other impulse is to adulterate, to accommodate, or to lose one's own soul in an attempt to gain the world. By this, I do not mean in the external ways of mere appearances, but at the core. Adulteration is to lose everything by letting go of the only thing.

Christ, in his sermon on the mount, warns against both of these tendencies. He directs us not to become like salt that has lost its saltiness and is therefore indistinguishable from the sand on the road, and he warns us not to become like a light that has been hidden so as to become obscured and useless.

Today, as in the past, there are traditions that will drive themselves into such isolation in the name of purity that they will almost completely lose their sense of mission and form cultures that function as insular echo chambers. Often held together by strong, charismatic leaders, these are the acceptable cults of the Christian religion. On the other hand, there are traditions that habitually regress into worldliness and assimilate themselves out of who they are as Christ's bride. These turn into little more than social clubs with Christian decoration. I do not find that these tendencies occur along a 'right' or 'left,' a 'conservative' or 'liberal,' axis or according to any geography. I have seen that these kinds of movements can mix and often occur in response to each other and to the broader forces in the culture by which Christians, acting like everyone else, set their orientation.

C. Abdication of the responsibility coincident with freedom

Our marriage to Christ has afforded every individual direct access to God by his Spirit. Why then are there all of these podcasts and Q&As and blogs in which celebrity pastors tell Christians how to live out every minute of their lives? Can I celebrate Christmas? What songs should we sing in church? Can I go to a gay wedding? I am not saying that we should not receive counsel or teach each other, but Christian, why are you asking a man you do not know these questions? He is not your pastor. Is he even anyone's pastor? Who does he know intimately so as to teach them personally, guide them, and correct them? Maybe no one. Certainly not you.

I say this as someone who has benefitted very much from the words of Piper and Baucham and MacArthur just as I have benefitted from the words of other saints like Luther or Aquinas or Kierkegaard. But, John Piper can't live my life for me. And, it wouldn't be good if he could. We have become so concerned with finding *the* answer to every question that we've forgotten how to wrestle with God and walk by his Spirit for ourselves.

In a related way, Christians have become profoundly complacent on the local level. We have, as a matter of course, yielded our Christian responsibility to an officially sanctioned and groomed, professional, Christian class. They are the preacher, the missionary, the evangelist, and the humanitarian. These are the apparent hands and feet of Jesus.

And so, the job of the 'Christian' in many spheres today is to live exactly like the world. Our marching orders are to make as much money as we can, live comfortably with a clean conscience with the knowledge that for the pure all things are pure, and expect God's blessings given to us in Jesus to feature in our daily lives. We are called to pursue our careers and build up our church communities, and we devote ourselves to raising godly families who will continue this work into the future. We are directed to come to church every Sunday to hear such messages from the preacher about where to fix one's attention and how to give to worthwhile ministries, thereby empowering the parts of the body that will go out to the poor, the ignorant, and the hurting in Christ's name.

Congregants are then left to tend to their own well-being and personal lives. They are to be hospitable to neighbors who are like-minded, foster the relationships that will increase their respectability in the church, and strive for a life that is prosperous and correct at the end of which people will say, 'That was a life well lived.'

What? How did we get to such a place that this is the promoted vision for the Christian life? This is not the kind of life the apostle, Paul, commends to his readers saying,

"You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' If you bite and

devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”

We have each been called in freedom to the law of love. Despite outward appearances, if we find ourselves biting and devouring one another, it is because we have refused to take up this call to freedom in the Spirit.

But, are things really all that bad in the church today? One might say, “Yes, I live comfortably. Yes, I try to earn a good living. Yes, I benefit from the teaching of the good Christian leaders close to me and far away. Yes, I support ministries that I believe in. So, what? I’m doing all of this in God’s will, and I’m not transgressing any commandment. I am, in fact, living this life as an expression of the freedom I have in Christ guided by the Spirit.”

Are we, though? Truly, I’m prompting myself for examination as much as anyone else. Over and over again, we have seen God’s people run with both eyes closed straight into the second commandment: “Do not take my name in vain.” It is so easy to build up a Babel and call it Jerusalem. It is so easy to draw near to God with our lips and our professions, while our hearts are nowhere near him. It is so easy to be lukewarm. Hear Jesus’ words to the young ruler, “Go and sell all that you have and follow me.” This young man did not consider himself in violation of any command, yet he went away without Jesus. I do not mean to speak of money and possessions only. Hear again our Lord, “If you love father or mother, son or daughter more than me, then you are not worthy of me.”

Are these statements not threatening to us and our way of life? Paul said that if there is no resurrection of the dead and all this belief is false, then it is Christians who ought most to be pitied. Are we really living in such a way that if the gospel were a lie, we will be the ones who will have lost the most?

What I mean to say is that I believe that we have deluded ourselves. We have created this system of 'Christianity' by which we intend to alleviate our conscience all the while making every provision we can for the flesh. We make every provision for comfort, for sensuality, for selfishness, for our own prosperity and security, knowing nothing of the true peace and freedom available to those who will have faith in Christ, who will serve God and not Mammon. We cannot serve both, not even a little. It is either love or hate; it is either master or stranger. And, I believe that instead of living our own Spirit-led lives with a good conscience and a sincere faith, we have again become agents of the powers. As long as that power will write the name, 'Jesus' on his forehead and his hand, we find it acceptable, even necessary to bow to him. The consequences of this are the symptoms of our condition. They are also the evidence of our illness. Yes, things in the church are really that bad. In truth, we are devouring each other while carrying on our face the worst kind of false gentleness and grace. We subsidize and justify the murder of the orphan and the foreigner and the poor in our cities and abroad. We teach and preach not to edify, but to file members into our camp and to win percentage points of converts and adherents. We love our own to build our strength and we despise the other while he lay in need on the road.

What then is this illness? I say the illness is idolatry. It is the sickness that was diagnosed of Israel from Sinai to Jerusalem to Babylon and back again. And, it is still with us today. By way of this protracted metaphor of the body, it is Cancer. Instead of each member of the body living and serving in the way God intended, we have rapid and ultimately destructive cell growth. Our cells do not wish to love and relate to each other, but, in pride, elevate themselves to dominate and to conquer. Ears replicate themselves in the spleen and feet push on the heart to converge and conform and they divide and divide and divide and divide. The pernicious character of this condition is such that the disease's progression can actually seem like healthy growth. We can easily confuse our filling the pews, establishing seminaries, and winning elections for activity that builds Christ's kingdom. When we feel our sickness or rather its symptoms, it is easy enough to blame external factors: the other or the enemy, the specks we see outside. And, so we never address or even see the column in our own eye that is killing us.

All of this leads to the following conclusion: **the Christian religion has itself become a meta-institution** which undermines the legitimate practice of Christianity. It is this institution which has become the object of our idolatry. Christianity is not unique in becoming an institution in this respect. Organizational webs that could be similarly described have sprung up from other religions, ideologies, and histories. But, for Christianity to be thus described is, I think, the most ironic and the most tragic. Contrary to the modern concept of the prudish, straight-jacketed, puritanical Christian, true Christianity is a philosophy of radical freedom. Listen to Paul's words to the Philippians, "All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make

clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained.” Paul knows that each person in his address has the Holy Spirit. He does not expect nor want absolute conformity from his readers, but he wants them to each follow God. Elsewhere, Paul asserts his own credibility on the same footing albeit wryly saying, “I think that I too have the Spirit of God.” But, the point is that his credibility is established in the Spirit, the same Spirit at work in us.

What other way of thinking would entrust to its followers such empowerment and freedom? It is the unique, Christian revelation that each of us are called, like Adam, to exercise dominion first over oneself and then over the creation. Trying to exercise dominion over another person dehumanizes them. It deprives them of the task which God assigned to them: to rule. And, we are each to rule not in the pretense of our own authority nor in the authority of any external power but according to the authority that Christ himself announced to his disciples, that authority which he received after the triumph of his resurrection. But, these systems and structures that we have made in the name of Jesus actually inhibit our ability to obey his commission. Their aim is not the humble empowerment of Christlike service, but the proliferation of their favored -ism. Their dominion is in a worldly way, the way of the political, and not in the way of Christ. In truth, they tear us as his body down and separate us from him and each other.

At this point, one might say that this is no revelation and that the institutional church is hardly the invisible ‘log in the eye.’ They might easily acknowledge its harm, but because everyone knows that a big, bad,

institutional church is a problem, they could not consider this a malady to which we are blind. The evidence I have in response: whenever it comes to addressing the issue of the institutional church, all we seem to do is either play musical chairs with the heads of the hydra or branch off and create new wings of the larger meta-institution monster. To say, 'Give up your institution and join mine' is not a serious attempt at deinstitutionalization. The most conspicuous example, the Reformation, as it turns out, did not so much tear down the corrupt structures of the church as it did expand and transmute them. And so, regarding solutions, where does that leave us?

IV. THE CURE

I do not have the cure. That is the whole point. You are to take responsibility for yourself and embrace the freedom you have in Christ, utilize your gifts and discernment empowered by the Spirit in your community, and live according to the knowledge that Jesus is coming back soon at which time he will require an account of you as an individual. You are to love God and neighbor for yourself. You are to grow in wisdom and insight of every kind for yourself. You are to live the life God assigned to you by the power of the Spirit who raised even Jesus from the dead to life everlasting. Our refusal to take up this charge is what has given life to the machine of the institutional church. It has set up itself as the object of our worship and service instead of God, and in order to resist it...

I cannot tell you what to do.

V. WHAT I WANT TO DO

Ok. I realize that might be unsatisfying. But, I meant every word of it. And, what I am about to describe now is not a prescription. It is not even a recommendation. It is just a description. If, in your being led by the Spirit of Christ, you find some of this useful to reference or even adapt into practice, then praise God. But, you won't be able to blame me on judgement day, ok? I'm just telling you my own resolutions. These are largely based on the example of the early church as shown to us in the New Testament, but they are still specific and personal to me. What you do is on you. If you'd like a name for this set of principles, call it, with respect to the practice of Christianity, **Ecumenical Anarchism**. And, please do not mistake this for a position about government. I am speaking only about the practice of the Christian religion which operates completely over and above such things.

- A. I will be uninterested in politics (methods and devices used to control other people)
- B. I will not recognize levels of organization above the local church
- C. I commit to know and love my literal neighbors, especially those who profess Christ
- D. I will advocate for my local church to admit members based on an evaluation of their lives as lived in community and practice church discipline when appropriate
- E. I commit to know and submit to local church leaders
- F. I will not view seminary as required for church leadership
- G. I will advocate for leaders to be made and tested in the local church
- H. I will advocate for local church leaders to embrace their role which is to know and lead their congregants

- I. I will advocate for the appointment of deacons to help in the administration of charity and for the coordination of other tasks
- J. I will advocate for the divestment of my local church's assets.
Property (buildings, money, food) should instead be in the possession of individuals who are then empowered to practice generosity
- K. I will advocate for congregants to directly supply the needs of local church leaders so that they can be free to focus on shepherding
- L. I will advocate for church service and activities to be more visible, public, and grounded in community
- M. I will commit to sacrificial participation in building God's kingdom (giving, serving, hospitality, etc.) and cease offloading these responsibilities to those in professional ministry
- N. I will advocate for leaders, evangelists, and teachers to equip the saints themselves for these things, for the work of the ministry
- O. I will focus on local needs and opportunities. These will primarily be geographically local, but can also include that which is local to the circumstances of the particular church or individual
- P. I will not have a consumer mindset about church; I will resist demographic-based segregation, service and program marketing, and flippant membership. I will advocate for leaders to avoid this consumerism which feeds the church systems themselves rather than the body of Christ
- Q. I will resist ceding the responsibility of this stewardship to the powers whether from governments, from denominations, or from any other kind of external structure. I will not allow distinctions and divisions in these spheres to prevent me from fellowshiping with and loving the people around me, especially the Christians in my community.

VI. OPEN QUESTIONS

Since this is reflection and not prescription, I will be open with the questions that I have as I write this. These could be seeds, I think, of further discussion on the local level.

- A. How does a local church scale if congregants increase (church planting, church growth, etc.)?
- B. How should a local church respond to large-scale or global needs?
- C. What problems are outside of the purview of the local church? What is better left to individuals or other kinds of organizations?
- D. How can church leaders in different communities collaborate, even organize? How can meeting in public facilitate that?

VII. CONCLUSION

Can we let go of our Christian systems for the sake of Christianity? In our marriage to Christ, we have wandered by the very means we intended to stay bound to him. Can we come back now by giving ourselves up to him? We must let God, as a surgeon, excise this log out of our eye. We must let God cut into us to remove the cancer. We must even lie naked and exposed before God. He must dictate the terms of our relation to him and to each other. This requires humility and faith. When Christians in the Corinthian church were divided over which leaders to follow, Paul said that they should learn from them “not to go beyond what is written, that none of

[them] may be puffed up in favor of one against another.” We need humility to avoid elevating any one of us against another, and we need faith to take up God’s directions regarding his church.

And so, this beam in our eye is structural. It is stable and solid. Our dependence on it is natural, but we must surrender it. This beam, in another manner of speaking, is not meant to be carried in the Christian’s eye but on his back. We, therefore, must each carry our own cross, take hold of our own responsibility to walk by the Spirit in faith, and we must each make following Christ our own. We can only be brought back to Christ by surrender in faith. God will do it. It is he who sanctifies us, and with Him all things are possible. His bride can be sanctified, she can be filled with light to see clearly, she can love him and be brought into his presence. And, she will be.

“The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore when your eye is good, your whole body is also full of light; but when it is evil, your body also is full of darkness. Therefore see whether the light that is in you isn’t darkness.

If therefore your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly full of light, as when the lamp with its bright shining gives you light.”