

icons. What would it mean for our children to pray before icons? What would it mean for children whose minds are being strangled by the images of beauty pornography and beauty sadomasochism increasingly woven into every site of western media to pray before icons? What would it mean for us to believe that the renewal of our minds must include the use of holy images?

Admittedly, it would be the worst kind of romanticism and theological tourism to believe that those of us who are Protestants can simply start using icons. As with any ecclesial practice we would need to learn what form of church life is necessary for the use of icons. In addition to that requirement, the use of icons today still comes with the same historical pastoral problems. Indeed, as an Eastern Orthodox priest recently told me, it is a constant challenge to teach even those raised with icons that we do not worship them; rather they help facilitate our worship of God. This pastoral problem does not negate the importance of icons; rather it shows that word and image must always go together. The word of God prepares us to see rightly and seeing rightly (aided by icons) helps organize our desires.

The task of rediscovering communion. This first task coexists with the second—the rediscovery of communion, male and female. From the beginning we could not see each other. From the beginning we have wandered in search of oneness. The journey never began rightly, male and female, male with female before God. We are the image of God yet we cannot begin to sense, to feel, to understand that image without active communion with God and full communion with one another. In many ways we have given up. Our imaginations are exhausted in the face of the complexities of gender's performance.

We were created to turn toward each other before the face of God. This turning, constant turning, echoed the divine perichoresis. This turning, constant turning, directed desire through its proper channels—through the creation, through our bodies toward God, from God to the creation through our bodies back to God. Our turning toward the tree disrupted the turning toward one another. But now in Christ we have been turned again toward one another.

Such turning invites us to a mutual subordination in the most crucial and fundamental way—in how we know and see both the world and ourselves. We must resist patterns of life that offer up to men and women forms of self-definition that promote our isolation from one another. We must resist forms of life that have decided what it means to be a man or a woman without the voice of the other. The church is called to be the place where we learn what it means to be the one flesh of male and female. Only together in communion with God can we restore desire to community.

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SPACES FOR AN EVANGELICAL ECCLESIOLOGY

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As if the whole idea of evangelical ecclesiology is not difficult enough by itself, imagine my dilemma: I was asked to consider its "past and future," and in addition to address the implications of the burgeoning non-American church for all of this. This is a bit much even for a theologian of culture! But as I began to reflect on it, I realized that many troubling issues are bound up with this question and that I was glad to spend some time thinking about it, however modest the result promised to be. Here is why I think this is a critical issue.

On the one hand we live in a period of spiritual renewal and experimentation with new ways of being the church. And as we have frequently been reminded, this growth and vitality is not limited to North American churches, but is occurring throughout the world. As the African theologian John Pobee commented last fall in Kenya, churches in Africa are experiencing a spiritual "bubbling up," a loosening of old forms, and a lively search for the new.¹ Beyond this, what is the meaning of the many forms of churchless Christianity emerging in various places—believers in Christ who identify themselves as Hindu in India, or as Muslim in Bangladesh? Closer to home, consider the implications of the "emergent churches" in North America and Britain, congregations led by twentysomethings, who make creative use of art and media while they scour the history of the church for resources. And what do we make of the struggle to find relevant forms of worship that is accompanied by so much controversy but also is characterized by the emergence of new forms of worship as well as the renewal of classical forms (both sometimes taking place in the same congregation)? In one way or another all these forms of renewal,

¹In a personal interview at St. Paul's Theological College, Limuru, Kenya, October 24, 2003.

and others we could mention, have ties to the evangelical movement, and all of them have large implications for any possible ecclesiology.²

Yet on the other hand, all this bubbling up, while wonderfully invigorating to watch, with some notable exceptions, is accompanied by little theological reflection—or at least little reflection on the form this bubbling up should take. Many of these groups are earnestly engaged in the search for some stability of form, for some place to stand, but their theological beliefs do not seem to help them in this search. It is this quest for form that will interest me in this paper. I pick up here on Hannah Arendt's comment that what the institution adds to belief is the public space of appearance.³ This visible representation has always been the challenge for evangelicals, but today this challenge is especially acute.

In a recent book about the church and its mission, George Hunsberger argues the Reformers left us with an unintended consequence, which influences how we understand the church today. That consequence is the understanding of the church as the "place where certain things happen"—preaching, sacraments, discipline, etc.⁴ He obviously means this to be a negative inheritance: this focus on place, what he calls the church's spatial disease, is the hangover of Christendom and it too often impedes the church's sense of mission. However true and important his thesis might be—especially for so-called mainline churches—I would argue that evangelicals have very nearly the opposite problem. The evangelical focus on mission has all but extinguished any reflection on the place the church occupies in its community and its culture. Another way of putting this is to point out that, while much consideration is given to incarnating Christianity in our homes and communities, relatively little thought is given to the incarnation of the church. In reviewing evangelical books on "the church" I am struck by how frequently the exposition was really not about church at all, but about "mission," "evangelism" or even "spirituality": The church is a missional, purpose driven, or world oriented community, and so on. The "church" part of this is whatever shape or trajectory this mission or activity happens to take at a given time—bursts of Christian energy responding, often creatively, to a rapidly changing environment.

Clearly the priority of mission, even the bias for action, represents histori-

²See Eddie Gibbs, *ChurchNext* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), <www.theooze.com>, etc.

³Quoted in Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. Mark I. Wallace, trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), p. 88.

⁴Darrell Guder et al., *The Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 79-80.

cally the strength of the evangelical movement. For Protestant churches generally "what happens" at church is the key to understanding the nature of that church. At the Reformation the church became more of an event than a place. In fact, Gerhard Nebel in an important book on Protestant aesthetics—which he calls interestingly *The Event of the Beautiful*—goes so far as to argue that "event" plays the same role in Reformational ontology that "substance" plays in Thomistic-Aristotelian metaphysics.⁵ For both Luther and Calvin it was the event of the preaching of the Word that constituted the church and called it back to its biblical roots.

For Calvin the performance of the preaching of the Word and its reception was theologically central to his understanding of the church. He saw the act of preaching as a performative utterance that was the locus of God's presence.⁶ In his instructions on preaching in the 1541 *Catechism* he gives perhaps his clearest indication of the location of the true church:

In the preaching of the word, the external minister holds forth the vocal word and it is received by the ears. The internal minister the Holy Spirit truly communicates the thing proclaimed through the word that is Christ to the souls of all who will, so that it is not necessary that Christ or for that matter his word be received through the organs of the body, but the Holy Spirit effects this union by his secret virtue, by creating faith in us by which he makes us living members of Christ.⁷

In the congregational singing, the public prayers, in the words of institution and above all in praise—all that is allied to the preaching of the Word—the body of Christ is constituted. Indeed Belden Lane has put this even more strongly, arguing that for Calvin these performances actually effect what they celebrate and honor. He writes: "The exaltation of God's glory is a performative act, extending and enhancing what it sanctifies. . . . The character of praise, then, is not simply celebrative, or even restorative, but also *constitutive* of the world maintaining its life and well being."⁸

While the focus on the event of worship gave worship a dynamic and living character, it could also give it a vaguely disembodied feel—a weakness that will serve as the subtext of what I want to say. As Calvin's quote above makes

⁵*Das Ereignis des Schönen* (Klett, 1953), p. 17, quoted in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982), p. 56. So he opposes an "analogy of event" to the more static "analogy of being."

⁶See the excellent discussion of this in Belden Lane, "Spirituality as the Performance of Desire: Calvin on the World as a Theatre of God's Glory," *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 1, no. 1 (2001): 1-30, esp. pp. 18 and 19.

⁷*Theological Treatises*, ed. J. K. S. Reid (London: SCM, 1954), p. 157.

⁸"The Performance of Desire," pp. 18-19, emphasis his.

