

Spatio-Temporal-Eschatological

- The church is spatio-temporal-eschatological (here and not-here; already, but not yet), or assembled as a historical reality (located in space and time) and possessing a certain hope and clear destiny while it lives the strangeness of its existence in the here-and-now.
 - We have one foot in this world, and one in heaven. We are citizens of heaven, and the world. We are in-between these two realities. It is a strange existence. We belong and are rooted, but do not belong and are not rooted.
- Spatial characteristic: “church” = building (common notion today).
 - Is there any truth to this idea? Kind of.
 - Hunsberger: the church is the “place where certain things happen”
 - Bonhoeffer: “The Body of Christ takes up physical space here on earth.”



Spatial

- Spatial Characteristic: the church is not ethereal.
 - Specific churches were established in specific places with concrete addresses (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:2).
 - “God called the churches *there* for his purposes—and the *there* was not inconsequential, seeing God’s providential ordering of peoples, times, and places (Acts 17:26).”
 - There is no mistake that our church is where it is at, in space and time gathered there.
 - Rev 2:5: The church is a lampstand here. We can lose our space-time reality if He removes it.



Spatial

- Even though location matters (because the church is spatial), it is not essential.
- (John 4:1-42): the issue is about the identity of worshippers, not the location of worship.
 - Jesus does not mean that genuine worshippers engage in genuine worship *no where*; it does not have to be on Mt. Gerizim, nor does it have to take place in (the temple of) Jerusalem, but worship must take place *some where*: “The church is not geographically bound to one place...but it is not geographically agnostic, in that it lives, moves, and has its being in some spatiotemporal reality. It can be anywhere, but always is ‘somewherealso.’”
 - This counters the notion of the virtual church, where we become Jesus followers, but don’t go to a real place to worship, but instead go online and send avatars into something. The church is and must be a spatio-temporal gathering.



Spatial

- Since the church is the people, a *building* is not an essential matter for the church, particularly a building owned by the church.
 - But when there is a church building, the spatio-temporal realities of the church prompt theological reflection on its design, structure, aesthetics, upkeep, etc.
 - We need to think of the spatio-reality of the church when thinking about the building. Does the building enhance or obstruct what the church is seeking to do?
 - Does the space in which the members gather together for the weekly service(s) enhance or hinder the worship of God?
 - We are embodied beings and space affects us. Older buildings were designed to enhance thoughts of transcendence. That is good design. Using a gym might make people daydream about sports.
 - Does the space in which the congregants come together stimulate or encumber genuine fellowship?
 - You might need a larger foyer. Otherwise, your building might say, “Fellowship is not here.” Remember, we are embodied people and we take up space, and the building does affect us.
- It is important we care for the building He gives us.

Temporal

- Temporal characteristic:
 - The heritage that comes before the current manifestation of gathered people exerts an influence on the church's present reality, an influence either for blessing or for curse.
 - A future that goes beyond the current manifestation of gathered people demands that the church work diligently to establish and maintain a good reputation in the community
- Why do churches have such rotten reputations in their communities? Shouldn't we be known as joyful and happy people who serve the community?
 - If we were just to disappear, would that neighborhood miss us? Free oil changes for single moms, clothes, food, and letting the Farmers Market to use the parking lot, would it change things?



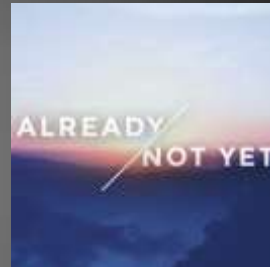
Eschatological

- Eschatological characteristic:
 - as “here” yet also “not here,” the church lives in a “boundary epoch” between the two advents of Jesus Christ; hence, the church is composed of “sojourners and exiles” (1 Pet. 2:11).
- Our current reality:
 - The church has experienced the decisive intervention of the age to come, bringing salvation (in part), the knowledge of God (in part), deliverance from sin (in part), the power of the Holy Spirit (in part), purity and unity (in part), eternal life (in part).
- Our reality after Christ returns:
 - when Christ returns in glory, then the “not yet” will be fully realized: the church will be presented to Christ “in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing...holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:27), experiencing salvation (in full), the knowledge of God (in full), deliverance from sin (in full), the power of the Holy Spirit (in full), purity and unity (in full), eternal life (in full).



Eschatological

- This “already-not yet” reality means that the church must develop realistic expectations of itself.
 - The “already” aspect encourages the church to have high expectations for its worship, obedience, faithfulness, unity, holiness, consecration to the Lord’s will, spiritual fervor, fruitfulness, purity, good decision-making, etc.
 - The “not yet” aspect cautions the church not to overreach with its expectations; indeed, it warns the church to expect the continual presence of idolatry, disobedience, faithlessness, division, sin, worldliness, lukewarmness, stagnation, immorality, wrong decisions, etc.
- It shouldn’t be this way, but the not yet aspect is why it is.



Eschatological

- The “already-not yet” characteristic explains why the church always champions grace and counts on it to overcome entrenched sinfulness, yet at times appropriately exercises church discipline.
- This attribute also explains why the church should hold its members to the high standards established for them by Scripture, yet bear with their mistakes and failures and forgive them when they sin (Eph. 4:32).
- This is the reality. Kill the phantom notion of the church that will not exist until Christ returns.



Historical Views of the Church

- Historically and traditionally, the church was looked at by theologians as being distinct from the world and standing over and against it, with the intention of transforming it.
- The Roman Catholic view fits this model well.
 - To the Roman Catholic theologians, the Catholic Church is a repository of grace, and grace can only be received through the Church who keeps the grace.
 - Grace is unattainable from the person unconnected from the Church, but can only be administered under this view through the sacraments. Sacraments are real life rituals that bestow upon the recipient actual real grace.
 - The only way a person can come in contact with the sacraments is if they are administered by a person who has Apostolic Succession.
- It must be noted that the Catholic Church has lightened up a bit concerning their view of grace, sacraments, salvation, and the Church. What was written here is the traditional position of Rome.
 - Now they believe God works His grace through people who are not even Christians.



Historical Views of the Church

- In the Protestant view of the church, the church also is distinct from the world and stands over and against it, with the goal of transforming it.
 - In terms of these general statements, Protestantism agrees with Catholicism.
- The main difference comes in the means. The Protestant view contrasts with RCC by placing emphasis on the gospel.
 - The church possesses the gospel, and it is the gospel that is able to save and transform the world by it being preached so people could hear it.
- Only from hearing the gospel can people then be united with Christ by believing and thus be justified and sanctified.



Historical Views of the Church

- Theological liberals reject both the traditional Catholic and Protestant views.
- There were two basic views of the church that by design repudiate the traditional views, but at the same time move the church in a progressive direction.
- These two ways were the dynamic lens and the existential lens.
- The two were combined into a single approach that has dominated modern liberal theology.
 - The approach is called the Empirical Approach, which cares not of what the church actually is or ought to be (ontology), but instead focuses on what the church concretely is or is dynamically becoming.
 - This is rooted in existentialism as it shifts away from metaphysics and ontology and leans towards relativity. The consequence of this thinking is the church is now often studied as a subset of sociology rather than theology.



Historical Views of the Church

- Theological liberalism continued.
- There is no definition for the church under the Empirical Approach.
 - Instead, this position claims the church as a living organism "is" not any one thing, but is constantly in the state of "becoming" something.
 - It is from this perspective that many churches are able to debate whether or not to accept certain lifestyles that we traditionalists would say is sinful.
 - If the church is defined as nothing more than an artifact of the culture of the community, then it is easy to blur sin and accept sinful lifestyles.
- In evaluating the Empirical Approach, it is clearly not defined, refined, justified, or established in Scripture. It is man centered theology that was a byproduct of the Enlightenment and Progressivism.
- As such, the approach loses continuity with the historic church and its Biblical norms.
- A better approach would see the church as a theological and Biblical reality established by Christ, and yet at the same time it is indeed a people movement. In other words, it is what we already defined over the last several weeks.