PhD Thesis Extract

“A Biblical Examination of an Ontological Reading of Theology in Trinity, in the Believer and in Church”

Description

This thesis examines an ontological reading of theology based on biblical exegesis and comparison with traditional theological thought. The purpose of analysis is to discover the theological and practical implications of an ontological understanding of how God in the three spheres is comprehended and experienced. This question is important to uncovering the dimensions of ‘being.’ The rationale is to formulate the unique contribution that ontological thinking brings to understanding God in Trinity: in substance, in relationship and in function; the consequences for the believer through redefined relationship with the Trinity in the Person of Christ; and the rediscovery of ontological principles to be restored, in renewal of the Church of Jesus Christ. This proposal advocates that recovery of ontological truths in a cohesive theology may redefine aspects of historical Christianity on the grounds of the interrelationship and interaction of Trinity. The significance of how God produces existentially and ontologically His life within the believer will define humanity in being, through relationship to Godhead. Likewise, these truths mediate relationship among believers, distinguishing them from all other religions. The ontological significance will also redefine church according to the nature and Person of Godhead, thereby widely reforming structures and functions according to ontological truths and practices.

Significance

This research paper restores the primacy of the existential and ontological to Christianity, whereas since the sixth century, understanding has been religious and institutional, functional and positional. It redresses the imbalance of functional institutionalism whereby adherence and ascent to credence of dogma replaces encounter with a Person, Jesus Christ, in an ontological and existential way, restoring every believer to God’s original intentions.

This thesis will be a resource for those desiring to explore biblical apostolic Christianity and will provide a foundation for those pursing a profound ontological reform both theologically and practically.

There has been a renewed interest in the Trinity in recent years; certain ecclesiastical movements have been looking for fresh expressions of church. This thesis seeks to move beyond a ‘form’ in reform to a theological renewal that connects the Trinitarian reality directly to a renewed understanding of humankind in Christ; revitalizing church. A restoration of ontology reorders function to flow out of ontology, and works to flow out of being in Christ, in Trinity. It connects these three critical spheres to this renewal, in a coherent theological progression.

At the present time, within the sphere of my research there does not seem to be much literature providing an ontological construct as the thesis sets out. My perception is that this subject is key to future theological development and provides a renewal perspective for this and future generations. As such, I do believe it could potentially be a significant transcultural contribution. In its current thesis form, the audience would be: theological training and research centres, church focused missions, church leaders and developers.
Table Contents

Table Contents........................................................................................................................................2

Chapter One: INTRODUCTION ..............................................................................................................9

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM..............................................................................................................9
IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY ...............................................................................................................10
METHODOLOGY .................................................................................................................................11
DELIMITATIONS ....................................................................................................................................12
DEFINITION OF TERMS ......................................................................................................................13

Chapter Two: ONTOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN TRINITY ..........................................................16

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF TRINITY IN TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY .................17
THE ONTOLOGICAL TRINITY IN EXISTENCE, RELATIONSHIP AND FUNCTION ................................54
SIX KEY ONTOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES .................................................................................................102

Chapter Three: ONTOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE BELIEVER ............................................121

RELIGIOUS AND EXISTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS .........................................................................121
BEING HUMAN: IDENTITY AND TEN STATES OF MANKIND ........................................................161
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INCARNATION ..............................................................................................313
UNION IN CHRIST AND “ORDO SALUTIS” .........................................................................................318
CONCLUSIONS .....................................................................................................................................397

Chapter Four: ONTOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE CHURCH ..................................................398

TRADITIONAL THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS .............................................................................399
CRITIQUE OF THE FIRST FIVE CENTURIES ......................................................................................403
SOCIOLOGICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS ..............................417
WHAT GOD SAYS OF HIS CHURCH (NINE IMAGES) ........................................................................431
AN ONTOLOGICAL MODEL ................................................................................................................531

BIBLIOGRAPHY ....................................................................................................................................586

APPENDICES: Table de Figures (I to XIX) ..........................................................................................597

Chapter Two .........................................................................................................................................597
Chapter Three .......................................................................................................................................608
Chapter Four .........................................................................................................................................616

Chapter Two Overview
An overview of the key historical and orthodox developments in Trinitarian understanding enables comprehension of the points of tension, the resolved and unresolved issues relating to a finite perception of an infinite Godhead. The core principles are further developed to demonstrate the primacy and integration of ontology in the Trinity, singularly and particularly. Current trends, such as the subordinate-authority-submission and egalitarian debate that have been preeminent in pursuit of Trinitarian understanding, are examined undergoing a critique of assertions made in the light of the ontological reading of Scripture. The recovery of apostolicity as an ontological attribute of Godhead provides significant insight and cohesion to the ontological Trinitarian proposal. Ontological values are clarified and affirmed throughout, while the chapter concludes by explicating six cohesive principles that define the operational inter-Trinitarian relationship ontologically, thereby establishing the grounds for renewed consideration of the believer and the church.

Chapter Three Overview

This chapter begins by examining criteria for religious belief and life leading to a critical analysis in the light of the ontology of Christ in Trinity. The second section further develops the traditional contrasted with the ontological definitions of humankind in the varied ‘states’ of existence to establish the new order in Christ the ‘τέλος’. The third section considers the significance of incarnation and union in Christ which elucidates human existence in Christ in Trinity. The purpose of the chapter is to define a representation of the ‘πνευματικός’ believer in union in Christ, existing in Trinity.

This chapter develops characteristics and problematics of the religious person in the light of ontological developments in the biblical metanarrative. Religious practices both biblical and extra-biblical are examined and considered to better understand the extent of the paradigmatic shift that occurs in the person of Jesus Christ. Part of that shift is founded upon the revelation of an existential reality, where belief in Godhead purports intrinsically to an ontological understanding of the believer in Christ. The ensuing chapter addresses the definition of humankind, examining the historical, theological and biblical evidence to clarify and establish the nature of mankind, existentially and ontologically. This proposal develops a fuller understanding of the composition of a human being in the image of God in ontological terms in contrast to the orthodoxy’s dichotomist, trichotomist assertions. Upon this perspective the states in which a human being exists, from a biblical perspective, culminate after examination, in the identification of the ‘πνευματικός’ believer as the sole form of legitimate existence that is biblically normalized and warranted. The final chapter considers the ontological and theological ramifications for the ontological believer, founded upon the principle of incarnation, in union in Christ and in Godhead in the light of orthodoxy’s ‘Ordo Salutis’. The nature of that relationship is developed as essential to a renewed theology that provides an opportunity for restoration of the Christian to an ontological understanding of existence in Christ, and restores reflective perceptions and practices.

Chapter Four Overview

The purpose of chapter four is to develop an ontological perspective of church. It is suggested that the ontological truths revealed through Scripture have been at best assumed, relegated, or at worst deformed or
superseded by historical and cultural constructs. This section seeks to restore the importance and primacy of an ontological understanding of church. If church is to be the extension of the Trinitarian community, as scripture suggests, then ontology of being takes ascendancy over the functional, structural or organizational, as is demonstrated in the Godhead. This return to the original source offers a profound renewal of church in theology and in expression. This chapter responds to the question “What does God say about His Church?” by examining the nine images in Scripture that reveal the nature, substance and expression of Church of His eternal purpose. That analysis has permitted the development of an ontological conception of Church in the light of history, sociological, psychological and philosophical influences that have conformed Church.

This argumentation has reconnected Church to the Trinity ontologically and demonstrated that Church utterly depends upon Trinitarian substance and operation to exist according to divine intentions. Christ as ‘τέλος’ restores Christo-centricity to the originality of the New Man and the incarnate manifestation of the new Household, characterized by the realization of Christ in her. Where Trinity are one in substance and in operation, the Church reflects the oneness of utter dependency as in the Vine; the indwelling of divine presence and encounter, where Christo-centricity defines all relationships of the Temple; defines and operates all gifts, ministries and operations of the Body, being built through Trinity, upon Christ Foundation, Source and Head as the Building. Where God labours his Field through the indwelling and enabling of Godhead that reproductive growth be reflected in the superabundant measure of Christ incarnate; where Church recovers the passionate uncompromising radicality of intimate attachment of the Bride in the world; a Witness to the reality of Godhead, to which she is united in heaven as on earth, a demonstration of Trinitarian existence on earth.

Emerging from this exegesis is a model of church: ontological and apostolic, originated, [re]sourced, and incarnate from the nature of Trinity, demonstrating undeniably that it is impossible for the Church of divine intent to exist outside of the three persons of the Godhead. Impregnated with the Divine nature and means, She has no life of her own. Church is this incarnation because her origins, means, and object are of Godhead’s nature, intra-relationship, and operation; whether microcosm or macrocosm, her ontological existence in Godhead is the defining criterion. ἀποστέλλω is significant ontologically for church because of the apostolic Trinity rather than the Patristic period where apostolicity underwent a significant transformation. The foundational ministries of church manifest the apostolicity of the Trinity and are an extension of Godhead, and as such are impregnated with the same apostolic nature. This chapter concludes with an ontological construct based on this exegesis.

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