

Various Roads-more or less taken! Church Polity --- how do we organize?

'The World-- i.e. The 'church'-- is like a drunken farmer trying to ride home from the pub--always falling off one side of his horse then climbing back up and falling off the other side.' M.L.

Markers for the Churches direction --then (and now?) [A Prayer: "Jesus, keep us sober and on the horse!"]: We'll start at the very beginning ('a very good place to....') and, some day, we'll end looking forward into the glass darkly of the 20th century [It's a mirror, people! All bets are off!]

Let's talk: The 'Church(es) of the New Testament:' The Known knowns and a lot of known unknowns etc. Is there a 'like-minded' congregant 20 centuries ago? Preaching the **Good News!** [Why/How did that keep on 'being the lost Good News'?]

Acts: A top-down hierarchical church: Who's in charge? Peter is: Acts 5 (Ananias and Sapphira) and 6 (Deacons). Notice a change when Paul visits for the 'Jerusalem Council' (15:19): James is! & Paul's return 21:17ff (Oh). [But counter: Philip & the Ethiopian 8:26-40]. How 'much' is 'known known'?

Matthew's hints: Traveling preachers & settled churches: 18:15-17 = lack of a settled hierarchy? Does 'community' rule? We'll talk. Meanwhile, thanks, in part to Jerusalem church and Paul, but also to Matthew (see last week's conversation) the early churches had an ongoing dependence on the Hebrew Bible. Among other things, that means Creation is good. Let's talk Gnosticism--another road more or less travelled.

Letters: From Thessalonians & Galatians & Corinthians to Romans & Philippians: Paul's 'soft' authority ('I planted'); Chloe's People call on Paul (whoa!). Galatians stepping back into...Philippians has bishops (Euodia and Syntyche)! Phoebe sent to the Roman church where...

The Culture around the Mediterranean: From philosophies --Plato revisited/redressed! Epicurus & 'De Rerum Natura'! Stoics! Etc. to religions (hundreds of these) mystery & whacky to official (and whacky!): Montanism captures Tertullian!

More Letters! Pastorals differ from Paul. Ephesians/Colossians! ['Thieves, quit your thieving!' "not quite the disciplined cadres, eh?"] John I. I Peter & James: Discipline?

Church polity by the 2nd century (how do 'we' organize?):

Revelation: Itinerant preachers vs. structure. Clement of Rome & Ignatius ("No bishop = no church!") vs. whoever 'John' and his ilk (see I Clement and Eusebius as well as Ignatius)

Marcion's divergence and the need for scripture. Rise of the Western fathers: Irenaeus and Tertullian: T diverges into the off the rails Montanism--another road! Docetism! Valentians!

Church under sporadic but violent persecution with long lasting responses--

3rd century: Roman Empire in distress. To the rescue: Soldier emperors Aurelian, Claudius Gothicus to Diocletian and Constantine (the 13th Apostle): The Church protected & co-opted.

4th Tightening up the Church: Councils: Nicaea to Chalcedon: Who/Whom: Arians! Nestorians!

Church 'Fathers' Eastern & Western: We'll talk the Cappadocians & Augustine: Roads?

The 'Split' between East & West Churches: Inevitable? Fall of Western Empire means...but Justinian & beyond. Monophysites to Islam to Germans & Huns & Lombards & & &

Rise of the Papacy: Wait, Wait, don't tell me. A path for wealthy 'camels' through the 'eye of the needle.' Leo to Gregory to Innocent (or not so innocent).

Resistance to Papacy: Worldly resistance i.e. 'Holy Roman Emperors' (Pope Gregory vs. Henry but also see Italy's Guelphs vs. Ghibellines) & 'Holy' resistance from Waldensians & left-wing Franciscans then on to Wycliff & Hus and culminating in:

Reformation: We'll talk but....

Wars of Religion from 1546 to St. Bartholomew's massacre to 30 years' war ('cujus regio ejus religio') to Inquisition to State Churches and that brings us to choices: Quietism , perhaps or revolt. The 'conscience' first heard at the Diet of Worms, becomes a 'call' for Pilgrims to the western hemisphere. Meanwhile, it's also the drum beat of the Revolution in England (helped by fugitives from France) and also, years later, the 'heart strangely warmed.' Congregational polity and then Methodism! 'It's complicated!'

Revolution & No state 'established' Church in U.S.A.

Lutherans on the move: Immigrant congregations & colleges & Seminaries! Immigrant church Polity in Immigrant enclaves. The Rise of the Laity in those churches but: Mo. Synod, Ohio & Iowa Synods & Luther College (the 'Old synod') keep laity in the pews. Check it out!

20th Century! The Great Migration! WWI! Long Depression on the Plains! Depression in General! "This Generation of Americans has a rendezvous with Destiny!" **BONHOEFFER!**

HOLOCAUST: WE'VE TO DEAL WITH THIS! [can we ever 'deal'?]

WWII and then: BABY BOOM!

Martin Luther King Viet Nam: how churches navigate the 60s and 70s ("Don't blame me, I was at Holden Village!" [YIKES])

The Long Decline: EARTHQUAKE's aftermath

COVID: The great permission to self-elect to eject.

NOW: 'How shall we, then, live?'