

## Christoformity: All of Life in Reference to Christ

### The Basis of the Culture of Eucharist Church

The motto of Eucharist Church, *all of life in reference to Christ*, carries vital meaning for every aspect of our collective life together. It embodies the goal of our church; it also defines the shape of our journey towards that goal.

#### What do we mean by *all of life in reference to Christ*?

To grasp what is meant by this we need to start in the pages of the Bible itself. In Romans 8:28-30, St. Paul offers insight into the purposes of God - the big picture outcome of God's salvation. In verse 29 he clarifies that the destiny of those He is rescuing is to be "**conformed to the image of His Son.**" In another place (Galatians 4:19), St. Paul writes to a group of Christians who have become confused about the gospel. He says in exasperation, "*my little children... I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is **formed** in you.*" Again, in II Corinthians 3:18 St. Paul offers yet another similar image. "*And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being **transformed** into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.*"

In all three of the passages above the clear call is to be *conformed, formed, and transformed* into the image of Christ. Theologians have coined a word to capture this: **Christoformity**.<sup>1</sup> It's a way of articulating in one word how everything about our destiny is bound up in the person and work of Christ. We are to be incorporated into Him such that our lives are totally reshaped in reference to Him. The shape and trajectory of His life defines our own. We are conformed not only to His death (cruciformity), but to His life, ministry, teachings, and ultimately to His resurrection and glory.<sup>2</sup> This is the goal of discipleship, catechesis, spiritual formation, and sanctification. It's all summed up in one word, Christoformity - or as we say, *all of life in reference to Christ*.

But why does Christoformity matter? It matters because it is the vital *means* by which God's ultimate purposes come to fruition: God wants to include us in His family, His household (Rom. 8:29) at His Table for all eternity (Rev. 19:6-9). The good news is that God has made a way, by grace, for us to become members of his household. The way into that Communion is only through Christ. When we are baptized, we are incorporated into Christ - sharing in His collective identity. When we receive Holy Communion, we are renewing our identity as His Body. From this place in His Body, our existence becomes the means of working out the Christoformity<sup>3</sup> that will one day result in what theologians call theosis<sup>4</sup> - eternal participation in the life of God.

One vital way that thinking about Christoformity helps us is by offering us a clear picture of what it looks like to be a "son" or "daughter" of God. Jesus is the firstborn,<sup>5</sup> and we're supposed to resemble

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<sup>1</sup> Christoformity - being formed into the life and identity of Christ, conformed to His image, formed into His body. The rest of this document gives further definition to this.

<sup>2</sup> "Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Col. 1:27b)

<sup>3</sup> See Philippians 2:12-13

<sup>4</sup> Theosis, deification, and glorification are different ways of expressing the same goal.

<sup>5</sup> Romans 8:29

Him. Any way that our life and, by extension, our church deviates from the pattern and ethos of His life is a way that we can acknowledge God is still at work transforming us.

### **Christoformity - A Worthy Life**

One way we see this concept worked out in the pages of the New Testament is in a repeated exhortation to live a life “worthy” of the Lord.<sup>6</sup> What does it mean to live a life worthy of someone? A life worthy of someone is a life uniquely *measured by or against* that person; it is a life that captures the actions, attitudes, ideals, commitments, and overall ethos of that person. We should be quick to acknowledge that this is a remarkably challenging vision... might we say, “impossible” apart from the work of God in us. The irony of language of “worthiness” is that we’re only able to be “in Christ” by our acknowledgement that we are totally *unworthy* of His Name. There’s a paradox here that we must not allow to collapse. We are totally unworthy of Christ, and that’s precisely the humble posture that allows us to be most like Him - thus *worthy* of bearing His Name.

### **Knowing a Person**

Even though it might be so obvious as to not need stating, in order to experience Christoformity, we must actually know the person of Jesus. Christoformity is not merely a philosophy or a theological construct; it is about Jesus - the person. Christoformity is about intimacy with Jesus, the person.

### **The Old Testament & Christoformity**

To know Jesus we must know His story and understand His identity in light of the story of Israel and God’s covenant with Abraham and his descendents. Jesus is the climax and fulfillment of the Old Testament. He is also the author of the Old Testament and the embodiment of its intentions as the *Word of God made flesh*.<sup>7</sup> Thus, in order to understand Jesus, we must study and meditate on the Old Testament. It provides the necessary foundation and trajectory for Christoformity.

### **The New Testament & Christoformity**

The New Testament is essential in a different way for Christoformity. It provides us primary source material about Jesus and captures the thinking, faith, and practice of His earliest followers. When you stand back, it’s clear that the person of Jesus and the call to Christoformity is the uniting thread of the New Testament. The New Testament is a collection of pastoral documents, each written by writers who intend their audiences to live into a particular way of life (Christoformity). Nowhere do we get a

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<sup>6</sup> “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not **worthy** of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not **worthy** of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not **worthy** of Me.” – Matthew 10:37-38

“I... beg you to lead a life **worthy** of the calling to which you have been called.” – Eph. 4:1

“...that you may lead lives **worthy** of the Lord” – Col. 1:10

“Live your life in a manner **worthy** of the gospel of Christ...” – Phil 1:27

“Lead a life **worthy** of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.” – I Thes. 2:12

“To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you **worthy** of his call and will fulfill by his power every good resolve and work of faith.” – II Thes. 1:11

<sup>7</sup> “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.” (Heb. 1:1-2)

complete, philosophical distillation of Christoformity. Instead, in the New Testament we see snapshots of it in action; we get exhortation and pastoral guidance - celebration and thanksgiving for when things are going well, and correction and clarification when things have gone wrong. But in every case, the church communities or individuals being addressed are being implicitly or explicitly called to Christoformity. This is what Paul, Peter, John, James, Jude, Luke, and the other New Testament writers are doing with their letters. Their writings are profoundly important to shaping our vision of Christoformity and must be studied and meditated upon with reverent humility. While they are not exhaustive<sup>8</sup> in what they say about Christoformity, they are authoritative in that they give us the standard by which to think about Christoformity in our own setting. They establish the trajectory and measure of Christian thought and practice, which can be traced through the centuries of the Church in all its various contexts to our own time and place. To be out of step with the New Testament's teaching and vision of Christoformity is to be out of step with Christ Himself.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Gospels & Christoformity**

Christoformity is most obvious and explicit in the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) in that they focus, each with their own unique emphases and style, on Jesus' teaching, ministry, death, and resurrection. They provide in written form for their various audiences the basic template for Christoformity: Jesus, Himself. Because of this, the Gospels have a unique place in our formation and should be especially treasured. It is clear that these documents, though written to particular communities, were intended to be normative for the Church. For example, Matthew ends his Gospel with Jesus explicitly commissioning his readers to the goal of worldwide Christoformity. Jesus' final words to his disciples are these: *"Go therefore and make disciples<sup>10</sup> of all nations, baptizing<sup>11</sup> them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.<sup>12</sup> And remember, I am with you always to the end of the age."<sup>13</sup>*

### **Christoformity: Calling and Lifestyle**

Our journey toward Christoformity begins when we hear and respond to the call of Christ to us, which comes to us in the power of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God, the proclamation of the gospel. His call to each of us is the loving<sup>14</sup> invitation to come to Him and be joined to Himself and to His people.<sup>15</sup> His call comes in the form of a message of grace and reconciliation, of conviction of sin, and of hope; it corresponds in us to the increasing realization of our own fragility and powerlessness apart from God. This is all encapsulated and brought to fruition in a personal response of humility and faith -

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<sup>8</sup> The New Testament does not address every possible situation or topic that we might face - say, for example, the proper use of technology in the 21st century. But it does provide us the essential pattern of Christoformity and a wide variety of pastoral applications of this pattern.

<sup>9</sup> "Everyone who does not abide in the teaching of Christ, but goes beyond it, does not have God; whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son." (II John 9)

<sup>10</sup> Disciples, not just in the sense of interested followers or fans, but as those who are conformed to the whole of Jesus' life: His teachings, ministry, death, and resurrection... those "worthy" to bear His Name.

<sup>11</sup> It is important to see the communal initiation aspect of baptism. Those baptized are initiated into the Body of Christ (a living community) precisely in a sacramental ritual of being conformed to the pattern of Christ's life - joined to His death and resurrection (Romans 6) via the watery grave and new birth. Those who are baptized then go on to *live and move and have their being* in Christ.

<sup>12</sup> Note the breadth / holistic emphasis of what is to be learned.

<sup>13</sup> This is not just something that people go off and do. Jesus is with us in this via the Holy Spirit He asked the Father to send.

<sup>14</sup> "We love because He first loved us." (I John 4:19)

<sup>15</sup> See Matthew 4:18-22

experienced in the call to entrust ourselves completely to Christ. In the language of the Scriptures we are to *repent, believe the good news, and be baptized*.<sup>16</sup> Christofornity is characterized by a lifestyle of obedience<sup>17</sup> to Jesus as Lord,<sup>18</sup> confession and repentance when we stumble,<sup>19</sup> and constant gratitude.<sup>20</sup>

### **Christofornity: Individual and Community**

Christofornity is, by definition, a communal exercise. Nobody is conformed to Christ merely as an individual, though Christofornity is necessarily personal. To be conformed to Christ is to be joined to a community - His Body,<sup>21</sup> the Church. As St. Paul says in Ephesians, "*we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love*" (Eph. 4:15-16). Christofornity happens as each of us are grafted into the Body of Christ and find our place in His Body. The goal of being formed into the Body of Christ is three-fold: 1) That we might have life - as life is *in* the Son.<sup>22</sup> 2) That we might experience profound joy - the joy of Communion.<sup>23</sup> 3) That the world might know God.<sup>24</sup> The Body of Christ is the continuation of the Incarnation - carrying out the ministry of Jesus and embodying His presence to the world.

At the heart of our journey into ever-increasing Christofornity is the central sacrament of the Church: Eucharist. The Eucharist is what makes us what we are - the Body of Christ. It transforms us personally/individually (heart, soul, mind, body), while simultaneously forming our collective social reality. In the Eucharist we corporately re-enact the pattern of Christofornity and are renewed as the Body of Christ in receiving tangibly Christ's body and blood. We *remember* Christ as we are *re-membered* into His Body. We are made into that which we consume.<sup>25</sup> This mysterious meal given to us by Jesus encapsulates both the means and end of Christofornity. As such, it has been the heartbeat of Christian identity and practice since the earliest days.<sup>26</sup>

### **Evidence of Christofornity - Suffering, Hope, and the Fruit of the Spirit**

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<sup>16</sup> See Mark 1:14-15, Acts 2:37-39

<sup>17</sup> "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love." (John 15:10); "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven." (Matt. 7:21 - see the rest of the chapter as well)

<sup>18</sup> "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:9)

<sup>19</sup> "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:8-9)

<sup>20</sup> "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (Col. 3:17)

<sup>21</sup> This is not merely a clever metaphor; the Church as *the Body of Christ* makes conformity to Christ concrete and embodied rather than ephemeral and abstract. *The Body of Christ* also provides the essential historic, embodied link between Jesus and ourselves. This isn't just a philosophy, it's a living Communion.

<sup>22</sup> "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life." (I John 5:12)

<sup>23</sup> "Abide in my love...I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." (John 15:9b, 11)

<sup>24</sup> "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world... As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." (John 17:18, 21)

<sup>25</sup> "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." (I Cor. 10:16-17)

<sup>26</sup> "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship (koinonia), to the breaking of bread (Communion) and the prayers." (Acts 2:42)

How do we know if Christiformity is actually happening to us? The Scriptures give us a number of metrics - all related to living like Jesus, in the pattern of His life, in a flourishing relationship with Him. One key evidence of Christiformity is the willingness to suffer with and for Jesus.<sup>27</sup> We don't need to go looking for suffering; it will find us.<sup>28</sup> Because we are following the pathway of Jesus, we learn to suffer joyfully<sup>29</sup> for Christ and His Body knowing that what we experience has the power to deepen our sense of intimacy with Him.<sup>30</sup> Our suffering transpires in the context of the certainty of God's love for us and the promise of resurrection and life eternal with Him.<sup>31</sup> Thus, it is characterized by joy<sup>32</sup> and hope.<sup>33</sup> We expect that since Jesus experienced suffering and challenges in this world, we who follow Him will also experience suffering in this world.<sup>34</sup> But we are never alone. We have the Comforter<sup>35</sup> - the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. The presence of the Holy Spirit is essential because it is He who brings about our Christiformity.<sup>36</sup> As the Spirit hovered over the waters in creation and brought about order from chaos,<sup>37</sup> and as the Spirit overshadowed Mary and brought about the conception of Jesus in His incarnation,<sup>38</sup> so He overshadows and indwells us, bringing about our formation, our new birth into the New Creation - leading us and our disordered desires into Christiformity.<sup>39</sup> The tangible evidence that the Spirit dwells within us is what St. Paul refers to as the "fruit" of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.<sup>40</sup> These are key marks of Christiformity.

### **Holiness & Christiformity**

The Scriptures call followers of Jesus to live in a distinctive manner - to be holy.<sup>41</sup> Christiformity cannot be separated from holiness. Holiness is an associative property; it is derived from being connected to God and as such is defined by Him. People, places, objects, times, and behaviors are variously described in the Scriptures as *holy* when they come into contact with God. Because we are called to Christiformity, to union with Christ, nothing about our lives can remain untouched by His call to holiness. As the author of Hebrews says, "*Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no*

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<sup>27</sup> "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Matt. 16:24)

<sup>28</sup> "All who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." (II Tim. 3:12)

<sup>29</sup> "...let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:1b-2)

<sup>30</sup> "I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church." (Col. 1:24)

<sup>31</sup> See Romans 5:1-11

<sup>32</sup> "My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing." (James 1:2-4)

<sup>33</sup> "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us." (Romans 8:18) See all of Romans 8:18-27

<sup>34</sup> "If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you... Remember the word that I said to you, 'Servants are not greater than their master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you." (John 15:18, 20a)

<sup>35</sup> See John 16:4b-15

<sup>36</sup> See II Corinthians 3:17-18

<sup>37</sup> "The earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while the Spirit of God swept over the face of the waters." (Gen. 1:2)

<sup>38</sup> "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God." (Luke 1:35)

<sup>39</sup> "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you." (Romans 8:9b-11)

<sup>40</sup> See Galatians 5:22-23

<sup>41</sup> "As He who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct." (I Peter 1:15)

*one will see the Lord*" (Heb. 12:14). Our words, how we use our money,<sup>42</sup> our bodies and sexuality,<sup>43</sup> our community / relationships<sup>44</sup> - all of these must conform to the holiness of God. This is an essential part of Christoformity.

### **Practical Teaching on Christoformity**

Much of the New Testament is explicitly devoted to practical teaching on Christoformity. But over the centuries, certain passages have emerged as especially important for formation in Christ. Here are a list of vital New Testament<sup>45</sup> passages:

- Matthew chapters 5-7 (*The Sermon on the Mount*)
- John chapters 13-17
- Galatians 5
- Ephesians chapters 4-6
- Colossians 3:1-4:6
- Philippians 2:1-11
- I John 1:5-2:11
- I Peter 1-2
- II Peter 1:3-11
- Romans 12
- Hebrews 12-13
- James (whole book)

### **Maturity: Living Christoformity from within the Living Christian Tradition**

To mature into Christoformity, we must cultivate a posture of humility and reverence toward the Church-historic, learning from those who have gone before us.<sup>46</sup> Our instincts and intuitions are best formed by seeking solidarity with God's people who have worked out what Christoformity looks like in practice in other places and times. We need more than our local, contemporary community; we need the whole Church so that we might measure our understanding and practice by "*what has been believed everywhere, always, and by all.*"<sup>47</sup> We need to be apprenticed by those who have gone before us and who have attained a measure of proficiency in Christoformity so that we might grow deep roots and develop maturity, a maturity that transcends the fleeting fads/blindspots of the day.<sup>48</sup> In this way we will be brought "*to the full measure of the stature of Christ,*" keeping us from being "*children, tossed to and fro and*

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<sup>42</sup> "But fornication and impurity of any kind, or greed, must not even be mentioned among you, as is proper among saints (holy ones)." (Ephesians 5:3)

<sup>43</sup> "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from fornication; that each one of you know how to control your own body in holiness and honor... for God did not call us to impurity but in holiness." (I Thes. 4:3-4, 7)

<sup>44</sup> "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people..." (I Peter 2:9)

<sup>45</sup> The Old Testament was the earliest Scriptures of the Church and should not be ignored in seeking practical guidance on Christoformity. However, it is essential that Christians learn to read the Old Testament Christologically (through Jesus) in order to apply it correctly. See Paul's reading of the OT in I Corinthians 10 as an example of a Christological interpretation of the OT.

<sup>46</sup> We are never actually unconnected to those who have gone before us, nor from those present in other places or believers who will come in the future. We are connected to Christ and thus the whole "Body of Christ" (Church) through the Eucharist.

<sup>47</sup> Vincentian Canon - The famous threefold test of Catholic orthodoxy expressed by St. Vincent of Lérins (5th century AD)

<sup>48</sup> C.S. Lewis writes in the introduction to a 1944 edition of *On the Incarnation* by Athanasius: "Every age has its own outlook. It is especially good at seeing certain truths and specially liable to make certain mistakes. We all, therefore, need the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period. And that means the old books.... Not, of course, that there is any magic about the past. People were no cleverer then than they are now; they made as many mistakes as we. But not the same mistakes. They will not flatter us in the errors we are already committing; and their own errors, being now open and palpable, will not endanger us. Two heads are better than one, not because either is infallible, but because they are unlikely to go wrong in the same direction. To be sure, the books of the future would be just as good a corrective as the books of the past, but unfortunately we cannot get at them."

*blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming"* (Ephesians 4:13b, 14).

Christoformity is nurtured within the *living tradition* of the Church, not accidentally, but by necessity. So it is from this *living tradition* that we go to be catechized and apprenticed - drawing our rituals, practices, and disciplines as vital means of being brought into Christoformity. These include, but are not limited to, the church calendar, fasting & feasting, the practice of confession, the daily office / fixed hour prayer, wisdom about service to others, giving, gathering for fellowship, and more. But above all we are nourished by the ancient practice of the Church in coming together in worship on Sundays for the Divine Liturgy culminating in Eucharist.

### **Threats to Christoformity**

Growth and maturity into Christoformity is not as simple and straightforward as we might hope. There are forces at work within us and outside of us that want to resist this journey. These obstacles to Christoformity are not new in our era. As acknowledged above, the New Testament is, for the most part, a series of pastoral responses to the challenges to Christoformity that emerge in the various contexts of the first-century church. They can be summarized as essentially falling within four categories:

- 1) **False teaching or spiritual confusion** - whether about doctrine (nature of Christ, the meaning of the gospel) or practice (holiness, godly behavior, etc.). False teaching is a serious threat to Christoformity.
- 2) **Division or unreconciled relationships within the Body of Christ** - The Bible includes examples in which individuals are at odds (particularly difficult when leaders are at odds). The main focus of the New Testament around issues of division is the tension that existed in the first-century between Jew and Gentile believers.
- 3) **Distraction, spiritual warfare, and spiritual immaturity** - distraction via the cares and concerns of this world, being overcome by desires and the lusts of the flesh or the temptations that are presented to those who lack discipline and virtue to withstand such.
- 4) **Persecution** - being oppressed, tortured, and threatened for bearing the Name of Christ.

These same threats remain the primary obstacles to our movement toward Christoformity in our time. For this reason we must listen carefully to the Scriptures as they remain relevant to our own experience.

### **Implication | Conclusion**

The life of our church, with its programs, relationships, and experiences comes back to this: when things are operating rightly, the church is a school of formation into greater and greater Christoformity. This is why, ultimately, we measure everything by our motto: *All of life in reference to Christ.*