

HM 4.1 – Puritan Perspectives on Ministry

Church Government Preliminaries

A. Perspectivalism and church government

James Jordan: The Sociology of the Church – 1986 - some edited extracts from pp.55-59

Wave, Particle, and Field

Modern physics has contributed to linguistics and to philosophy the notion of three basic perspectives available to man as he views existence.

The “Particle” view focuses on a discrete thing, in terms of its identifiable features. The “Particle” view answers the question: What are the characteristics of this thing?

The “Field” view focuses on the interrelationship of the thing with other things. It answers the question: How does this thing relate to other things?

The “Wave” view focuses on how the thing moves and changes in time. It answers the question: How much can this thing change and still remain itself?

There are hierarchies of particles, waves, and fields. That is, large particles may be seen as composed of smaller particles, large waves of smaller waves, and large fields of smaller fields. An important phrase in the preceding paragraph is “seen as .” We are talking about different *perspectives* on a given matter. Each perspective is valid, but needs to be balanced by others. The idea that there is only one valid perspective is an effective denial of the doctrine of the Trinity (denying diversity).

The People of God

Particle

They may be summarized by the moral law and the fruit of the Spirit. The people of God live a holy life in their callings. They show forth visibly that they are God’s people, and not His enemies.

Various particles - considering the church as the people of God, there are various particles that come into view, such as Christian individuals, families, businesses, clubs, schools, states, churches, etc.

Field

The people of God exist in a “Field” with one other group, the enemies of God. That is, in the “Field” of the world there are two groups: God’s people and God’s enemies.

Other fields - the people of God also function in such “Fields” as neighborhoods, businesses, political parties, etc.

Wave

The people of God are more or less faithful at different times. Sometimes they are making progress in subduing all things to Christ. Sometimes they are being driven back because of their own sin or because of persecution. They make mistakes and correct them; they sin and repent; they triumph and go forward.

The Gathered Church

Particle

Certain things, however, that we can expect to see as characteristics of the gathered church. We can expect some reading and/or preaching of the Bible. We can expect to see the sacraments administered (however rarely). We can expect to hear prayers and praise.

There are hierarchies and varieties of such gatherings, such as home Bible studies, Wednesday night prayer meetings, local church meetings, meetings of wider church organizations (presbyteries, councils, etc.), and so forth.

Field

The gathered church is set in a “Field” consisting of itself and the other, cultural activities Christians engage in.

Looking at hierarchies and varieties, we have for instance the Christian family at play over against the family having its devotions, and we have the Christian community doing the same, and the Christian individual.

Wave

The church as a gathered assembly “Waves” through its liturgy, proceeding from confession to consecration to communion. It “Waves” through the Church Year.

There are a hierarchy and variety of such “Waves”, as when the individual “Waves” in and out of his daily private devotions, when the family does the same, when the institutional church does it publicly, and so forth.

The Church as a Government

Particle

We may speak of two: the sacraments (which are her power) and the officers (who administer the sacraments).

Field

The church as a government is set off against other governments. God has set up two other governments: the state and the family. Man has analogously set up others, such as the business firm, or the school.

Since there are various levels in the organization of the institutional church, there are various “Fields” in which she operates. For instance, the National Council of Churches has some interaction with the policies of the Federal Government, while local churches interact with local governments, and so forth.

Wave

The church as an official institution is more or less faithful, and thus more or less visible. This is what the various sectarian groups do not wish to admit. Each sect believes it has encoded and encapsulated the final formulation of the truth, and is therefore in a position to demand that all other Christians get into line, or else be regarded as counterfeits. The fact is, however, that the worship of the church “Waves” in and out of closeness to God’s standard.

B. Some questions / leads

1. can’t prove independency
2. there are wider structures in the OT
- (3. the church is a civilization)
4. hierarchy in jurisdiction is clear
5. we don’t want monarchical episcopacy
6. some things are extra-congregational
 - a) doctrine – when a local congregation says the Apostles Creed does it
 - 1) recognize the authority of it
 - 2) bestow authority on it ?
 - b) discipline – when a local congregation excommunicates someone does it
 - 1) bar that person from the LS in every church of Jesus Christ
 - 2) or just in that congregation?i.e. – is it an act which has authority for whole church?
 - c) and baptism?
 - d) and ordination?
 - who shd do it? where’s the authority?
 - what is it to? – a congregation or *the Church*?
 - e) i.e. – are these acts of the local church or of the worldwide church?
 - f) amounts to “does the local congregation constitute the ultimate jurisdictional unit?”
 - g) are all its engagements beyond the congregation *simply* occasional and voluntary?
 - h) is it desirable / necessary to have supra-congregational bodies wrt discipline and doctrine?
7. sorts of divine right
 - can show it explicitly from Scripture
 - this is what early church did, therefore ... ? (burden of proof or actual command?)
 - this is the best ... must do the best

... / *Grand Debate*