

For reasons I don't quite understand this whole concept of integrated community is very much present to me now. I cannot escape or dismiss it in my own thinking about the role of the church. A question I must step back and answer for myself: why community? This is far from an adequate apologetic, but this is the gist of my thought at the moment.

I instantly responded to Scot McKnight's ([The Whole Gospel](#)) definition of the church as an alternative society where justice and equity prevail. If the church is to live that out, we cannot but be involved in the practice of such in an intimate ongoing manner in our own lives.

I have been in one non-denominational church where that was actually well practiced, but the larger theology didn't quite see to the formation of an eschatological, intertwined community as is being discussed today. All other churches with which I have ever been associated have had their share of problems with insider power trading. That begins at the top and filters down. Transparency at the top does not preclude that there may be hidden, unaccountable power brokers in the organization, but certainly if it does not begin at the top it cannot survive in the larger organization. When transparency does begin at the top, unless the power brokers are confronted the community cannot thrive, certainly not reach its highest potential.

Ultimately the purpose of community is mission. That includes preparation of those in the community for increasing intimacy with God; it also includes bringing others in as a setting in which the (trans)formation of the whole person can happen for the purpose of a life committed to the coming Kingdom.

There is a recurring word in the new monasticism book that I note: 'mess'. Trying to set up a community polity cannot but be messy. It is relatively much easier to focus on doctrine than on the transformation of the intimate details of our thoughts and motives; that is why the traditional church cannot well approach community without profound transformation of those involved.

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