The Thesis:

Is the church-- the organized, institutional, local and visible church-- really necessary, not merely the church as a practical strategic plan, but as a soteriological reality? In Wiki fashion, the emerging ventures of a transmodern answer is NO, YES, Yes & No! Titles the likes of Herbert Hoefer’s Churchless Christianity, Frank Viola and George Barna’s, Pagan Christianity, Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices, Lenard Sweet’s, The Gospel According to Starbucks, Brian Sanders’, Life After Church, and Jim Palmer’s, Divine Nobodies have given expression to sentiments long simmering in our pews if until recently never emboldened enough to voice it—a sentiment that answers the church question with mostly a resounding “NO” if not tempered in “Yes and No!” And when Paul Young’s, The Shack portrays Jesus as saying, I don’t create institutions—never have, never will… that’s an occupation for those who want to play God, there was around the world a collective, if told by the mere number of sales, “Amen!” To be sure, our congregations are confused, and so too an emerging generation of pastors and church leaders. With the growing populist plausibility of alternative Christianities and the rise of glocal hybrids in Christian spirituality ranging from Christian-Buddhism to Catholic-Presbyterians, the church question is clearly before us.

And so the focus of this course will be to tackle head on the “church question.” Into the emerging transmodern mix, our thesis will start with the transcendent and revelatory premise of God speaking through the apostle Paul about Christ as “head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Eph.1:22-23).

That is, In rhetorical response against the “NO’s, Kevin Deyoung asks, “is a head still a head if it doesn’t have a body?” WE will in this course what to match rhetoric with Biblical and Confessional Theology as from a “Reformed and Presbyterian” perspective, albeit if not a perspective accountable to scripture. We will, in short, want to answer the church question with a resounding “YES!” And by “Yes” will not only mean “yes” to the organized church as a pragmatically informed strategic plan for mission and discipleship, but “yes” to the church as an essential element of the gospel, as a category of soteriology even! It’s the “YES” of Augustine’s Total Christ Christianity wherein it can be said “The Word was made flesh, and tabernacled among us; To that flesh is joined the church, and there is made the total Christ, head and body (St. Augustine, On the Epistle of John 1.2.). What did Augustine mean and what are the theological and pastoral implications relative to pastoring a local congregation? If the Word became flesh and “templed” among us” in the miracle of incarnation, what would it mean for this to continue as a miracle of incorporation vis-à-vis the ascension ministry of Christ TODAY? And how might this fit the Reformed vision as once articulated by John Calvin when he taught:

\[
\text{No extent of space interferes with the boundless energy of the Spirit, which transfixes life into us from the flesh of Christ.} \\
\text{John Calvin, Corpus Reformatorum}
\]

Wherein,

\[
\text{Beyond the pale of the Church, no forgiveness of sins, no salvation, can be hoped for... and hence the abandonment of the Church is always fatal?} \\
\text{John Calvin, Institutes (4.1.4)}
\]
It is our great hope to reunite the head with the body as not to decapitate OR decorpulate Christ’s mediatorial presence unto salvation in the midst of us. We will explore the ide of a reunited “high gospel” and “high church” orientations as together essential elements of the gospel, much like was espoused by Lesslie Newbigin:

*Just as we insist that a Church which has ceased to be a mission has lost the essential character of a Church, so must we also say that a mission which is not at the same time truly a Church is not a true expression of the divine apostolate. An unchurchly mission is as much a monstrosity as an unmissionary church.*

Course Description:

Constructed as a hybrid reading-seminar course, we will seek to construct an ecclesial and pastoral theology in conversation with the historic Reformed tradition together with its practical relevance to contemporary ministry. Divided into three general topics related to three weekend Seminars

- 2) March 16-17: A Five Marks Church: The Ministry of the Church
- 3) Pastoral Theology and Practice: The “Priest With No Name”

All three topics will be explored beginning with a redemptive-historical analysis moving to a confessional analysis and then finally to a contemporary analysis. The theological premise reflected throughout the course concerns the mediated presence of God unto salvation, as this then is reflected in a “temple” theology of the church and a “priestly” theology of the pastorate, albeit expressed throughout the classic reformed tradition. Our theological construction will result in both a “High gospel” (gospel centered and missional) and a “High Church” (confessional, sacramental and communal) spirituality relevant to today’s emergent ministry.

Requirements: In addition to the roughly 2500 pages reading assignment (approx. 1500 assigned, 1000 from recommended or approved alternative), you will be asked to prepare 3 assignments due by the end of the course:

1) A two-three page review of a selected reading ecclesiology
2) A brief annotated bibliography of all assigned (required and approved) readings
2) An approx.12-15 page paper (more details forthcoming)

Readings and Course Outline and Bibliography (To be Handed Out in First Class ON Feb. 10th)

Assigned Readings in Preparation for First Weekend Seminar:

1) Read both a “pro” and “con” review (via internet) for THREE of the books listed below and come to the first class prepared to share your personal thoughts/notes: Books:

- William P Young’s *The Shack*
- George Barna’s *Revolution*
- Herbert Hoefer’s *Churchless Christianity*
- Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity*

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1 *Household of God*, P. 147.
2) Read the following:

- Confessional Readings: WCF 25-26, Book of Church Order, Preface
- Essays/Books
  - Preston Graham Jr. The following selections from CPC Website:
  - James Bannerman, The Church of God, ONLY chapters 1-7 for now (93 pages)
  - T. F. Torrance, Royal Priesthood, ONLY Chapter 2, “The Function of the Body of Christ” (approx. 20 pages)
  - John Calvin, Institutes, Book IV, Chapter 2, sections 1-13 (19 pp)
  - George Gillespie, 111 Propositions (on Internet)

Suggested Readings:
- Preston Graham Jr., (all located @ [click here](http://cpcnewhaven.org/cms/index.php?page=reformed-ecclesiology)
  - Totus Christus: Prolegomena Explored
  - High Gospel - Covenant Trajectory in Redemptive History
  - High Church - Temple Trajectory in Redemptive History
- Lesslie Newbigin, The Household of God (175 pages) or Reunion of the Church
- Need to check
- Michael Horton, The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way, Chapter 22 (Or
- Kevin Deyong & Ted Lluck, Why We Love The Church, In Praise of Institutions and Organized Religion. Chapters 1,3,5,7,Epilogue
- PCA Book of Church Order, Preface
- James Farrow, Ascension and Ecclesia, Chapter 1 (13 pages)
• Cyprian, The Treatises of Cyprian, Treatise I, On The Unity Of The Church (approx 30 pages)
• Preston Graham, *In Search of Divine Presence* (DRAFT), Chapter 1, Then and Now: The Emerging Questions in Spirituality and Church Practice, Chapter