Recent Directions in Anglican Ecclesiology

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Introduction

What is the church? Most would take it for granted that the church consists of people, but what is it about any group or grouping of people that enables them to be called 'the church' or indeed 'a church'? Recent Anglican ecclesiology has sought to address this and related questions by focusing on the nature or essence of the church. Dr. Miroslav Volf, Professor of Systematic Theology at Yale Divinity School, has designated this domain of inquiry 'ecclesiality'. He explains –

> Exploring the question of ecclesiality means exploring what makes the church the church. On the one hand, this represents a restricted point of inquiry, since it overlooks much of the rich life and multifaceted mission of the church; our interest [in ecclesiality] is directed not toward how the church *ought* to live in the world according to God's will nor how it *can* live successfully in the power of the Spirit, but rather toward the *sine qua non* of what it means for the church to call itself a church in the first place.[1]

In other words, ecclesiality addresses the ontology of 'church'. Is there such a thing as the universal church? If so, how does one recognise it? What about the reality of 'a church'? What is its relationship to the universal church? Is it legitimate for a denomination to be described as 'a church'? These are the types of questions ecclesiality addresses and which have been recently explored by Anglican thinkers.

We will organise the recent Anglican ecclesiology into four groups, paying special attention to the question of how the local church relates to the universal church. First, there are those who define the church in relation to Christ, particularly the believer's union with Christ. They consistently arrive at the view that the church is primarily the totality of the faithful on earth.

1 Volf, M., *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 127; Zizioulas, J., *Being as Communion* (London: DLT, 1985), pp. 253ff.

Various formulations are propounded regarding the place of the local church and its relation to the universal church, leaving unresolved tensions.

The second group is a school of thought who supplement the people of God and christology with eschatology. They understand the dominant church concept as 'gathering', in particular the one, heavenly, eschatological gathering around Christ. *En route* this group seeks to resolve the tensions previously left by the first group to the local–universal church relationship.

A third group explores ecclesiality with an emphasis on trinitarian theology. christology and eschatology are re-interpreted in the light of recent developments in trinitarian thought. This group attempts to explain the ontology of the church as a mirror of God's trinitarian communal being and a rather different ecclesial direction is explicated. We propose to examine the usefulness of this approach, and to what extent trinitarianism enlightens ecclesiality.

Finally, there is a contingent of Anglican thinkers who approach ecclesiality from an entirely different perspective. Their desire is to erect a distinctly Anglican ecclesiology, not an ecclesiology of an Anglican thinker as such. Two of these attempt ecclesiologies for the Anglican communion, and one for the Anglican Church of Australia. Their wish is to construct an ecclesiology (and hence ecclesiality) built on a foundation of what they perceive to be distinct Anglican emphases. We shall examine the merits of such an approach. This will lead us then to draw final conclusions regarding the recent developments in Anglican ecclesiology.

1. God's People in Relation to Christ

What is it about a company of people that makes them the church? Our first group argues that it is their relationship to Christ. Five out of the six thinkers in this group draw on the Pauline notion of being 'in Christ'. By faith one is united to Christ, and hence united with all other believers. This union with Christ automatically makes one a member of 'the church'. Becoming a member of the church is an act of grace. It is not based on what one does but on what God has done in Christ on their behalf. Because there is one Christ with whom believers are united, there can only be one church. These five argue that the notion of all believers being one in Christ is not only to be

found in the Pauline corpus, but elucidated by other biblical writers.

If union with Christ is the conceptual backbone to ecclesiality, then these five argue that the *all believers on earth* without exception constitute the church empirically. This would oppose other popular ecclesiologies that view the church as an institution headed by the papacy (Roman Catholic), or just a local congregation (Free Church), or ones whose focus is the ministry. For these five, to be in the church is to be a member of a worldwide company of people. They acknowledge there is an invisible component to the universal church made up of all who have deceased in Christ, but little or no attention is given to this. Yet, differences begin to emerge among these five when they seek to describe the use of 'church' (*ekklesia*) in the New Testament when it seems to refer to groups of believers smaller than the worldwide company.

The two Irish brothers and theologians A.T. and R.P.C. Hanson give no attention to groupings smaller than the worldwide company. For them, '[t]he church consists of the totality of the denominations'.[2] Denominational divisions are 'man-made barriers which obscure the essential unity of the church from the eyes of the outside world'.[3] The Hansons see the church as one, undivided company in God's eyes, who are called to live out their unity 'in Christ'. Membership in this worldwide company is through Baptism. Those bodies which do not practise the sacrament are not unchurched, rather they are 'in a hidden way dependent on the practise of Baptism by other Christians'.[4]

It would seem that the Hansons' ecclesiality is incomplete because it does not address the issue of how a smaller group than the worldwide company of believers can be called by the New Testament 'a church', and particularly how this localised church relates to the universal church. The notion of 'a church' is a key New Testament concept used by five of the New Testament writers[5] and it cannot be ignored.

Colin Buchanan, Bishop of Woolwich in the diocese of Southwark, argues that, in light of New Testament christology, particularly believers' union with Christ and each other, the basic meaning of the word 'church' must surely be

2 Hanson, A.T. & R.P.C., *The Identity of the Church* (London: SCM, 1987), p. 43.
3 Hanson, 1987, p. 44.
4 Hanson, 1987, p. 46.
5 Matthew, Luke, the early Paulines, James, the Johannine corpus.

'the believers throughout the world'.[6]

Yet he believes there to be a second usage of the word which refers to a local church. A local church is not simply a gathering of Christians, but a local community of believers who are constituted by their rhythm of meeting together.[7] But 'in the New Testament the "catholic" or worldwide Church is logically prior to the local church'.[8] Thus, the local church is a 'manifestation' or 'outcropping' of the one universal church. Hence, the phrase 'the church of Jerusalem' in Acts 8:1 really means, '[t]he church, *i.e.*, that part which was in Jerusalem'.[9]

How can the New Testament speak then of a local church as being 'a church' instead of 'part of the church'? Buchanan argues that this word usage is similar to our own English use of territorial language. He uses an example to make his point. One could arrive in Calais and say, 'Ah, so this is France, and these are the French'. The word 'France' here refers to part of the country and not the whole even though it is not qualified by the words 'part of'. The New Testament usage of the word 'church' is similar. For a local group of believers, the New Testament designates them 'church' but conceptually they are 'part' of the universal church. So when the plural 'churches' is used, what is meant is many manifestations of various parts of the one universal church.

Hence the 'body of Christ' metaphor always refers to the universal church and never a local group alone. So when Paul says of the Corinthian local church 'you are the body of Christ',[10] Buchanan argues that 'it is unlikely that he is saying that you are a complete body or a self-contained body'.[11] This is because earlier in the epistle Paul said, 'we who are many are one body'. The 'we' includes Paul who wrote from thousands of miles away. So Paul had a community in mind that included people outside the Christians at Corinth. Furthermore Paul, one verse after saying 'you are the body of Christ' explains, 'God has placed in the church some as apostles...', which in no way could refer

6 Buchanan, C., *Is the Church of England Biblical? An Anglican Ecclesiology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1998).
Buchanan, 1998, p. 92.
7 Buchanan, 1998, p. 103.
8 Buchanan, 1998, p. 103.
9 Buchanan, 1998, p. 92.
10 1 Corinthians 12:27.
11 Buchanan, 1998, p. 94.

to just the Corinthians. Similar usage of the body of Christ is found in Romans 12 and in the middle-Paulines where the 'body' is unambiguously universal.[12]

Yet Buchanan's formulation of the local–universal church relationship appears to be problematic. First, his explanation that the word usage of 'church' is similar to our territorial language breaks down. It may explain how a group of believers could be called 'church', but it cannot explain how many groups can be called 'churches'. For example, one could arrive in Calais and say, 'Ah, so this is France', 'France' referring to part of France. But one would not say, having been to Calais and Paris, 'ah, so they were the Frances'. If a local church was simply *part* of the universal church, Paul would have written 'to the church in Galatia' or 'to parts of the church in Galatia', rather than 'to the churches of Galatia'.[13]

Furthermore, Buchanan's explanation of the body as always being universal in the early Paulines does not account for the subtlety of Paul's language. It seems that Paul refers to a local congregation of Christians as the entire body of Christ. Take 1 Corinthians 10:17 – because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.[14]

If the 'one body' are all Christians universally how can Paul talk of all Christians partaking of 'one loaf', when in fact all Christians around the world are partaking of many loaves in their many Eucharists? Rather Paul is referring to the unity of the Corinthians as a congregation because *they* partake of one loaf, yet somehow Paul (writing in Ephesus) includes himself (and most likely others) in their celebration of the Eucharist. There is a delicacy in Paul's language that seems to describe the local Corinthian congregation as a self-contained 'church' and 'body'. To consolidate this Paul also uses the 'temple' metaphor in the same way. The Corinthian church are both a self-contained temple, as well as the universal church being an entire temple.[15]

The Australian New Testament scholar and Anglican minister, Kevin Giles, has propounded a very thoughtful solution to local–universal church relationship.[16] In a rigorous inductive study of the New Testament, he

12 Buchanan, 1998, pp. 94-95.
13 Galatians 1:2.
14 *NIV*.
15 O'Brien, P.T., "The Church as a Heavenly and Eschatalogical Entity", D.A.Carson (ed). *The Church in the Bible and the World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), pp. 98-105.
16 Giles, 1995.

concludes that the local–universal distinction is not to be found. So, after expounding Pauline communal theology which is seen in the Adam–Christ communities, Paul's 'in Christ' motif, and the corporate metaphors of body and temple (both always referring to all Christians), Giles asserts –

> ...it is impossible to conceive that Paul thought either that local groups of believers were the primary corporate expression of the Christian faith, or that individual churches were but an aggregate of justified sinners....[17]

For Giles there is an integrating church concept that binds all the images of the church (body, bride, temple, family, etc.) together and explains how *ekklesia* can be used of different groupings within this one universal church. It is the idea of 'community'.[18] Indeed for Giles the best translation of *ekklesia* is 'community'[19] – 'a word that designates people who hold something in common, but not necessarily with the same level of personal involvement, and *ekklesia* seems to parallel this perfectly'.[20]

One can talk of the 'family community', or the 'Kensington community', or of all Australians as the 'Australian community'. The plural is used if several different concrete examples of these communities is in mind. So one can talk of the Italian community in Australia, or the Italian communities in particular locations in Australia.

Giles believes then, that Paul and Luke both use *ekklesia* in three ways: first of a household (Christian) community – *ekklesia*; second of all Christians in one location, namely a geographical (Christian) community – *ekklesia*; or third of all believers on earth as the (Christian) community – *ekklesia*.[21] In each of these options Christians are seen as single items because they compose a community, primarily by virtue of their common relationship with Christ, and secondarily because of their geographical (usage 2) or associational (usage 3) common bonds. Paul even moves beyond the geographical and associational bonds and uses an ethnic qualifier alone.[22] So he can talk of the 'the churches of the gentiles'.[23]

17 Giles, 1995, p. 112.
18 Giles, 1995, pp. 15-19.
19 Giles, 1995, pp. 241-243.
20 Giles, 1995, p. 120.
21 Giles, 1995, p. 205.
22 Giles, 1995, p. 206.
23 Rom. 16:4; 1 Cor. 14:33.

Because the church is the Christian community, Giles concludes that a denomination can rightly be called a 'church'[24] because the denomination is 'a true expression of Christian communal life'.[25] They share Christ, and because they also share a 'common heritage and confession'[26] they can be conceptualised as a single entity, a community, a 'church'. But because a denomination is one historical form of the supra-congregational church, and a form that manifests the division in the church which will not be known at the *parousia*, the denomination can only be given 'provisional theological endorsement'.[27]

Yet it would seem that Giles has not penetrated the local–universal relationship deeply enough for three reasons. First, one wonders if Giles has not provided a solution that is too flexible. If a group of people can be called a 'church' because they have something in common over and above their union with Christ, like geography, personal associations, ethnicity, or even denominationally (in a provisional sense) then a 'church' can be almost anything. For example, all the Greek Christians in Australia could be provisionally called a 'church'. But we could go further and say all Christians with blonde hair in Australia are provisionally a 'church'. Where does this common bond stop?

Second, like Buchanan, Giles has proposed a solution that is not sensitive enough to the way powerful language like 'church', 'body' and 'temple' can be applied to a smaller body of believers than the universal church. This, for example, comes to the fore in Giles' discussion of Paul's exhortation to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28:

> Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God (*ten ekklesian toun theoun*), which he bought with his own blood.

Giles believes that *ten ekklesian toun theoun* must refer to the universal church because it is qualified by 'which he bought with his own blood'. Giles argues that Christ did not just die for the Ephesian Christians alone, but for the

24 Giles, 1995, chapter 9.
25 Giles, 1995, p. 211.
26 Giles, 1995, p. 206.
27 Giles, 1995, p. 211.

universal church. Hence, the universal church is on view here. But Giles ignores the fact that it is the Ephesian elders who are charged to shepherd this *ekklesia*. Surely Paul does not believe that the Ephesian elders are to shepherd the entire church all over the world? Paul had just said (in the previous sentence) that the Holy Spirit has made them overseers over the 'flock', which from the surrounding context would suggest only the Ephesian contingent are on view. This nuance of terminology suggests that the local group whom the Ephesian elders are to shepherd are *the* Church of God, that is, in some sense, the whole church of God. Giles' proposal of 'community' does not allow for this subtlety.

Third, we have reservations with the way Giles has construed the word *ekklesia*. Giles is correct in saying that we cannot construct doctrine on the basis of a word study alone. He is also correct to observe the fact that a word finds ultimate meaning in its context.[28] But he has not observed closely enough how other such New Testament ecclesiological terms have been used. Take for example *soma*.[29] In common usage it referred to a physical fleshly body. When Paul used it of the church it referred to a contingent of Christian people who were in some way to be conceptualised as a 'body' (having unity amidst functional diversity). The same could be said for the other church terms like 'temple', 'bride', 'light', 'family' and so on. So why could the same not be said for *ekklesia* ('gathering')? It may refer to a contingent of people who were in some sense to be conceptualised as a 'gathering', not necessarily a real physical gathering of people.

Giles though, has assumed *ekklesia* to be completely different from all other ecclesiological terminology. He has focused exclusively on those to whom it referred and not on how this group were to be conceptualised perhaps by the use of the word *ekklesia*. It could, for instance, mean 'those whom God has gathered into his presence'. Giles has effectively dispensed with all etymological associations of *ekklesia*. Of course this may be the case, for words can entirely lose their original meaning over time. But both Luke[30] and Paul[31] knew that *ekklesia* still meant 'gathering' in some contexts, just as Paul knew that 'body' in a secular context referred to a fleshly body.

Timothy Bradshaw, Dean of Regents Park College Oxford, has provided a

28 Cotterell and Turner, 1989, pp. 106-128; Barr, J., *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press 1961), pp. 107-160.
29 'body'
30 Acts 19:32, 39, 40.
31 1 Cor. 14:19.

solution that attempts to grapple with the careful nuancing of the New Testament terminology. Bradshaw argues that individual Christians who belong to Christ, inseparably belong also to the universal church. But he acknowledges that in the New Testament 'local groupings' are also called churches. To explain the local–universal relationship Bradshaw uses Buchanan's term 'outcrop' but means something different. By calling a local church the 'outcrop' of the universal he relies on Matthew 18:20 – For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.[32]

When Christians gather (whether two or three) this is *not part* of the universal church, but a manifestation of the *whole* church *spiritually*.[33] When seeking to explain this he uses an analogy drawn from P.T. Forsyth. He wants the reader to imagine they are strangers from another country visiting Cambridge University.

The visitor, after viewing the colleges, then asks to see the University. He is puzzled to be told that it is not the Senate House, not the Library, not the Lecture Halls. Nor is it the collection of the colleges and other offices.

> It has a personality of its own; it is not a mere group, or sum, or amalgam. It has a history, a tradition, a life, a power, a spell, which is not simply the added-up history and influence of the colleges. To the curious stranger you cannot show the University – which yet is Cambridge. Who can deny the University? It is a great reality, a great spiritual reality, in which its colleges inhere. It gives the colleges their true value. It is that which they serve. It is the one spiritual corporation in which the palpable sodalities of the colleges hold together. It dignifies them all. It is the mother of them from above.[34]

It would seem from this illustration, that the whole church as it manifests in a local group of believers, is a 'spiritual reality', a 'spiritual' ethos if you will.

One is then left wondering what Bradshaw actually means by all this. What does he mean when he says that the whole church is present 'spiritually' even when only two or three gather? On the one hand Bradshaw is adamant that

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32 *NIV.*

33 Bradshaw, T., *The Olive Branch* (Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1992), p. 10.

34 Bradshaw, 1992, p. 10. The quote is from P.T. Forsyth, *The Church and the Sacraments* (Independent Press: London, 1917), p. 65.

the universal church is all those united to Christ,[35] yet on the other we are told that the whole church is a 'spiritual' ethos. How can these two different definitions of the whole church be the same thing? The New Testament can point to an identifiable group of persons and call it 'the church', yet in Forsyth's analogy, at Cambridge although the University is everywhere, it is nowhere. It seems that Bradshaw has over-spiritualised the 'church' concept.

Having surveyed these five who have sought to define church in terms of union with Christ, we move to a rather different christological approach. The Cambridge historical theologian, Gillian Evans, has sought to address the issue of a way forward ecumenically amongst the existing denominations. So she has sought in great detail to explain, using historical theology, the relation of Church and churches.[36]

Evans sees 'a church' as a community[37] of people which contains certain constitutive elements that identify it as 'church' and hence make it 'a church'.[38] Primarily it must have Christ in its midst, recognise Christ as Lord, and affirm the presence of the Holy Spirit and his gifts. She then goes on to list what these constitutive elements are.[39] The constitutive elements are not all 'generative' or 'bearers' of Church, rather they 'sustain' the church. This allows for continuity of the church in every age with the apostolic community

35 Bradshaw, 1992, p. 6.

36 In our explication, we shall use Evans' denotation of the 'church' as the one universal catholic church, and 'church' for any other meaning (whether local or denominational).

37 Evans is somewhat ambiguous in her usage of the word 'community'. We assume that when she talks of a 'community' being a church, it may not just mean a local church but it also includes a wider grouping like a denomination.

38 Evans, G.R., 1994. The Church and the Churches, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 20, 48.

39 It must assert apostolic origin, and confess the apostolic faith. It must show salvation at work, announcing and waiting for the Kingdom of God. There must be 'mutual charity' amongst its members. It will proclaim the Word of God in Scripture to insiders and outsiders. The two sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist will be practised. It will have leadership that will conduct sacramental celebration. Furthermore, there must be 'order' recognised by the community, which at its most basic must link communities, although other aspects to the order may vary. There will also be a 'sense of separateness' linked to purity of lifestyle. These elements have differing emphases by different churches over the course of church history. But all these elements must be 'interdependent'. Because some communities (like religious orders) contain the elements hitherto annunciated there must also be 'ecclesial intention', the community must 'mean' to be a church. Furthermore, it must recognise its connection to other local churches, as well as the Church. Hence, a church is both a microcosm and a part of the Church. Evans, 1994, pp. 21-26.

itself.[40] Can a flaw or loss of any of these elements make a community not the church?[41] The Church not only 'has' but 'is' these elements. It is not more the church with an addition to them, but conversely a church will become 'damaged' through the loss of one or more of them.[42]

Evans then explains what makes a church local. There must in some sense be the 'gathering' of the community.[43] Some definitions of church emphasise the preached word and sacraments, but these depend on the 'gathering' of the community in some way. But there must be a continuity in the gathering. For example to meet once for a Eucharist does not make a local church, although it is to be the church.[44] Furthermore, a local church must see itself as a continuance through time of the one church that Christ founded.[45] It is not to see itself as something novel. For example in the case of the reformation churches, their notion of continuity lay in going back to the original gospel that the apostles taught.[46]

Which is conceptually prior, the local or universal church? Evans lists multiform reasons for accepting one over the other,[47] but because there are so many good reasons on either side it leads her to conclude that the local and universal are profoundly complementary.[48] She believes the local and universal are mutually dependent manifestations of the body of Christ. Evans then lists the many ways that the local–universal church relationship has been explained historically, in order to enlighten this mutual dependence.[49] First, catholicity is realised in a local church by its witness and mission. Hence, the catholic church 'happens' in each local church. Second, the local church could be seen to 'represent' the Catholic. Third, it could be proposed that the local church is 'qualitatively' church. Thus the relationship to the church is 'of the same kind'. Finally, it has been suggested that what is found in every local church is found in all. So it is in this way that all local churches are one.

40 Evans, 1994, p. 27.
41 Evans, 1994, pp. 28-46.
42 Evans, 1994, p. 28.
43 Evans, 1994, pp. 48-51.
44 Evans, 1994, p. 50.
45 Evans, 1994, pp. 55-8.
46 Evans, 1994, p. 56
47 Evans, 1994, p. 111-13.
48 Evans, 1994, p. 113.
49 Evans, 1994, pp. 118-120.

She believes none of these proposals misrepresent the complementary local–universal relationship, but also admits none is entirely adequate. Evans frankly confesses that, '[i]t is hard to be conclusive about all of this'.[50] This is because (she believes) the term 'church' is so equivocal (given her definition). A church can be house, parish, diocesan, national, metropolitan, or denominational. She leaves the discussion open there with no clear conclusion.

Evans' reluctance to draw a conclusion regarding the nature of the local–universal church[51] relationship is indicative of the following major difficulty that lies behind an ecclesiality framed solely by past and present believers' relationship with Christ.[52] This difficulty has already manifested itself in the previous five thinkers' presentations. The difficulty is this, Evans rightly argues, that a church can only be 'church' if it is the Church.[53] This seems to be the way (as we have seen) the Pauline and Lucan language construes the local–universal relationship ('you [Corinthians] are the body of Christ').[54] But if a church is the church, how can it really be a church? That is, if a church is identical with the Church, then strictly speaking it cannot be a local church. It is either a manifestation of the Church at a particular locale, or it is part of the Church with which it is not identical, and so therefore is not a church at all. As long as one assumes the categorical pair 'local church–universal church' this difficulty will always arise in an ecclesiality grounded solely in past and present believers' relationship with Christ.

Yet, the christological focus of this group has emphasised rightly Christ's central place in ecclesiality. The universal church is, after all, Christ's church.[55] Christ's pivotal rôle is seen in some of the key New Testament ecclesial images. He, for example, is the foundation stone of the temple,[56] the

50 Evans, 1994, p. 120.

51 Evans' definition of church leaves her open to criticism. Because she believes there are constitutive elements that make up Church, and any of these, if lost, will damage the church, and that these elements contain human action, she is open to the charge of semi-Pelagianism. Rather than define church in the gracious terms of what Christ has done for his people (like the previous five authors), she has defined church in terms which include human works. This would seem to contradict the New Testament emphasis on grace which the other five authors assert.

52 Volf, M., *After Our Likeness*, 1998, p. 141, n. 55.

53 Evans, 1994, p. 21.

54 Emphasis mine, the word order brings this out: ὑμεῖς δέ ἐστε σῶμα Χριστοῦ. 1 Cor. 12:27.

55 Matt: 16:18 '...on this rock I will build *my* church' (emphasis added).

56 1 Peter 2:4-6; Eph. 2:19-20.

head of the body,[57] the husband of the bride,[58] and the stem of the vine.[59] If Christ is central to ecclesiality, then a different christological starting point may resolve the tensions hitherto annunciated. To this we now turn.

2. The Heavenly Eschatological Gathering

A particular contribution to this debate regarding ecclesiality has come through a group of Australian Anglicans centred in or with connections to Sydney. The New Testament scholar Peter O'Brien has reasserted an ecclesiality that was formerly introduced by his teachers Broughton Knox and Donald Robinson earlier this century.[60] His presentation draws on the work of Fuller scholar Robert Banks,[61] and is based on a study of the semantics of *ekklesia*. Unlike Giles, O'Brien wants to read most New Testament occurrences of *ekklesia* as a literal 'gathering'. He argues from the middle Pauline corpus that the one universal church is the 'gathering' or *ekklesia* of believers around Christ in heaven.[62] O'Brien notes that theologically this ecclesiality dovetails with the middle Pauline theme that believers, although members of the earthly realm, are presently seated with Christ in the 'heavenly realms'.[63]

To elucidate this middle-Pauline heavenly church theme theologically, O'Brien makes use of the non-Pauline Hebrews 12:22-24. Here he observes that the '*ekklesia* of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven' is the eschatological entirety of God's people, gathered around Christ in heaven.[64] Thus, O'Brien

57 Col.1:18.
58 Eph. 5:32.
59 John 15:1 ff.
60 O'Brien, 1987.
61 O'Brien draws from Banks' first edition published in 1979. Banks has updated this without changing his basic thesis in Banks, 1993.
62 O'Brien, 1987, pp. 93-94.
63 For example Eph. 2:6. O'Brien, 1987, p. 94.
64 O'Brien, 1987, pp. 94-98. O'Brien argues that the ἐκκλησία of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven' are not elect angels, because enrolment in a heavenly book in Scripture is always associated with humans. Neither can this ἐκκλησία be OT saints for in the previous chapter, Heb. 11:40, 'God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect', (NIV) explained that OT saints are not yet perfected. Furthermore, this ἐκκλησία of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven' cannot be Christians here on earth because it is a heavenly scene. So, these must be the eschatological entirety of God's people, gathered around Christ. The further phrase, 'spirits of just men made perfect', refers to the same group (not pre-Christian believers) because it seems to fulfil Heb. 11:40 so that OT saints and Christians together enjoy the fulfilment of their hopes.

asserts that the one universal heavenly church is also an eschatological entity. To this gathering Christians have already come (the perfect tense of *proselelythate* is noted) at their conversion. O'Brien observes that the eschatological framework coheres with the 'already, not yet' theme of Pauline eschatology.[65] It is this eschatological context of the heavenly church that was never properly addressed by Knox and Robinson in their original expositions of church.[66] Although O'Brien does not mention it, this eschatological setting is commensurate with the Jewish apocalyptic notion of middle Pauline theology, that what lies in the assured future exists in the heavenly realms now.[67] Thus, the starting point for this ecclesiality, is not the present but the eschatological believers' relationship with Christ. It is the end time picture of God's people 'gathered' into the presence of Christ as Miroslav Volf gives extensive support for.[68]

O'Brien then argues that the other occurrences of *ekklesia* in the New Testament always refer to the actual gathering of Christians on earth in the name of Christ.[69] Hence 'church' on earth is intermittent. It is not an aggregation of believers in a particular geographical area or a worldwide company of believers, rather it is a local gathering of believers in the name of Christ. O'Brien acknowledges that there are occurrences of *ekklesia* which don't actually refer to Christians gathered, but to the Christians who compose a gathering.[70] He is cautious not to let these occurrences dominate because (i) the New Testament usage of *ekklesia* as 'gathering' 'predominates overwhelmingly' and (ii) 'no theological constructs are made on the basis of these very few extended uses'.[71] Rather what we have is a typical linguistic extension over time of 'gathering', much like our English word 'team'.[72]

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65 Dunn, J.D.G., *The Theology of Paul the Apostle.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1998), pp. 461-98.

66 Cole, G., 1987. "The Doctrine of the Church", in Webb. B.G., (ed.) *Explorations 2. Church, Worship and the Local Congregtion*, (Homebush West: Lancer, 1987), p. 6.

67 Lincoln, A.T., & Wedderburn, A.J.M., *The Theology of the Later Pauline Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 52-53; Lincoln, A.T., *Paradise Now and Not Yet: Studies in the Role of the Heavenly Dimension in Paul's Theought with Special Reference to his Eschatalogy* (Grand Rapids: Baker 1981), pp. 169-95.

68 Volf, 1998, p. 128.

69 O'Brien, 1987, pp. 91-93.

70 Robinson, 1977, p. 62; O'Brien, 1987, p. 92; O'Brien, 1993, p. 124.

71 O'Brien, 1987, p. 92. Italics are O'Brien's.

72 O'Brien, 1987, p. 92.

A key move O'Brien makes is when he relates the local earthly church to the universal heavenly eschatological church. He argues that even though the New Testament doesn't explicitly discuss this relationship, it is best to understand the earthly gatherings as a 'manifestation' of the heavenly eschatological gathering around Christ. This makes best sense of the New Testament language used of the local church, not as part of the church, but as the church of God (in Thessalonica, Corinth, and so on).

After his discussion of *ekklesia* O'Brien examines the 'temple' and 'body' images as they appear in the New Testament. He concludes that both the heavenly eschatological church and the local church are described as a complete body and a complete temple. He notices that this is exactly how *ekklesia* is used and so the local/universal relationship of the body and the temple coheres with that of *ekklesia*.[73]

By taking the starting point as all believers' relationship to Christ eschatologically, we shall see that much ground is made toward resolving the local–universal church relationship. But O'Brien's use of the term 'manifestation' to explain the nature of the local–universal church relationship seems to be problematic. 'Manifestation' is a correlation between the local and universal that is too exact. 'Manifestation' implies the actual appearance *per se* of an entity. But the local church cannot be an actual appearance of the heavenly eschatological church because it is not the heavenly eschatological gathering in entirety or perfection. Volf suggests what seems to be a better category, namely 'anticipation'.[74] The local church 'anticipates' the heavenly eschatological gathering into Christ's presence of all God's people. Hence, given the universal church as a heavenly eschatological entity, and the category of 'anticipation' this allows one to make the best sense of the New Testament usage of *ekklesia*.

It would appear that O'Brien has made almost the opposite mistake as Giles regarding the use of *ekklesia*. We noted earlier that the ecclesiological terms of the New Testament such as 'body', 'temple', 'bride', etc. refer to a contingent of people that can be conceptualised

73 O'Brien, 1987, pp. 98-114.
74 Volf, 1998, p. 128.

according to the term used to describe them. Giles' mistake was to assert that *ekklesia* only referred to the people and not to how these people were to be conceptualised. O'Brien's mistake is almost the opposite. His focus is too much on *ekklesia* as a literal earthly 'gathering'. More room is needed for conceptualising the people *ekklesia* refers to as some form of gathering even if they are not gathered on earth. This then has led to readings of *ekklesia* that do not fit the context well. Two examples will suffice.

First, O'Brien's construal of *ekklesia* means that he disregards a 'general' church, Christians generally wherever they maybe found, because they could never gather on earth. Three key verses that imply a 'general' church are:

> For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church (*ekklesia*) of God. (1 Cor. 15:9).
>
> For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church (*ekklesia*) of God and tried to destroy it. (Gal. 1:13).
>
> ...as for zeal, persecuting the church (*ekklesia*)...(Phil. 3:6).

O'Brien argues that these verses refer to the local church of Jerusalem before it fractured into many assemblies throughout Judea.[75] Banks goes so far as to say that Paul must have persecuted Christians who were only gathered![76] But in Galatians, Paul some nine verses later, talks of his persecution as encompassing many local churches, not just the Jerusalem church prior to its splintering:[77]

> I was personally unknown to the churches (*ekklesiai*) of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard the report: 'The man who formerly persecuted us (the churches of Judea) is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.' (Gal. 1:22-23).

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75 O'Brien, 1987, p. 307, n. 9.
76 Banks, R., *Paul's Idea of Community* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994^2), p. 30.
77 Giles, 1995, p. 114.

So Paul talks of persecuting the church (general) and churches (local).[78] It thus seems that *ekklesia* in 1 Corinthians 15:9, Galatians 1:13, and Philippians 3:6 more probably refers not to a literal gathering of Christians but rather Christians generally. Why then is *ekklesia* used? It would seem best that Christians generally are to be *conceptualised* as a gathering. The best solution (as we noted earlier) is that the church 'general' should be seen as an 'anticipation' of the heavenly eschatological church. This would fit with O'Brien's thesis that Christians wherever they appear, 'have already come' (*proselelythate*)[79] to the heavenly eschatological church because they are 'seated with Christ in the heavenly realms'.[80]

The second example is O'Brien's assertion that *ekklesia* has an extended use which developed over time to designate 'the persons who compose...[a] gathering whether they are assembled or not'.[81] He believes an example of this usage is Acts 8:3, 'But Saul began to destroy the church (*ekklesia*). Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison'.

The *ekklesia* here is the 'church of Jerusalem' mentioned two verses earlier. But this 'church' (of Jerusalem) cannot mean 'the persons who compose a gathering' because there was no way, as Giles rightly notes, that the Jerusalem 'church' could all gather. Acts 4:4 testifies that the company contained five

78 The church general is especially clear in Galatians 1:13, where Paul places in opposition the 'church of God' with 'Judaism' Giles, 1995, p. 114; Longenecker, 1990, p. 28. Another verse that lends itself to this 'general' usage of ἐκκλησία. is 1 Cor. 10:32, Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God. According to the Knox-Robinson-O'Brien approach, ἐκκλησία refers to the church in Corinth, most likely gathered. But it seems more probable that Paul is talking about a 'general' church as Giles argues. Paul's argument is a universal one. He encourages the Corinthians not to cause *anyone*, to stumble. Three community groups are then identified which elucidate this 'anyone': Jews, Greeks, and the Church of God. Paul talks universally about pleasing everybody in every way. There are no bounds. Thus, when he talks in the previous clause about Jews and Greeks, he means the two communities wherever they may be found. It would then seem likely that the third group, the 'church of God', would simply mean Christians. Indeed, to substitute the word 'Christians' (a word which Paul never uses) for the 'church of God' here would make the same point. So, it seems that there is such a thing as the 'general' church in Pauline thought and that *ekklesia* is used theologically rather than literally. See Giles, 1995, pp. 116-17.

79 Heb. 12:22-3.

80 Eph. 2:6.

81 O'Brien, 1998, p. 91.

thousand men, which would mean there was no place big enough to hold them if they all attempted to gather.[82] We have seen that *ekklesia* can refer to people who could never gather on earth. It would seem best to see this usage as another mode of anticipation of the heavenly eschatological gathering. Here is a community of believers, who by their common life in Christ anticipate the heavenly eschatological gathering. It is not their gathering on earth that constitutes them as a 'church', rather it is their gathering in heaven around Christ that leads them to form local earthly communal associations.[83]

There is no doubt, as O'Brien asserts, that some New Testament occurrences of *ekklesia* do refer to an actual gathering of believers on earth.[84] It is likely that this use is another anticipatory mode of the heavenly eschatological church. Jesus' celebrated words in Matthew 18:20 would appear to make this point – 'For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them'.

Christ's presence is, of course, with believers at all times by his Spirit, not just when they are gathered. But when Jesus talks of gathering in his name, he is speaking of a *different type* of presence. This different type of presence could well be seen as a *different mode of anticipation* of the heavenly eschatological church. What demarcates this earthly gathering of believers from any other gathering is that they gather 'in the name' of Jesus. This is the gathering of believers with a purpose to meet Jesus in word or sacrament through the Holy Spirit.[85] This mode of anticipation is the classic statement of Article XIX – 'The visible church is the congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly administered...'.

Thus there seem to be three earthly church references (general, local community, and gathered) which constitute three modes of anticipation of the one heavenly eschatological church. Therefore, it would seem better not to talk of the local–universal church relationship which we commenced with, but rather the earthly–heavenly church relationship.

82 Giles, 1995, p. 114.
83 Peterson, 1998, p. 205.
84 1 Cor. 11:18; 14:19, 28, 34, 35.
85 So Paul can say, When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and *the power of our Lord Jesus is present* (1 Cor. 5:4, NIV). Our emphasis.

Graham Cole agrees with the general thesis of O'Brien that *ekklesia* refers to a gathering either on earth or in heaven.[86] His burden is to place this conclusion in a wider eschatological framework. From a biblical theological perspective,[87] Cole believes that the destination of Christians is not a participation in the heavenly *ekklesia*, but participation in the city of God on a renewed earth.[88] The presentation of the heavenly assembly in Revelation 4–5 points beyond itself, it is not the end point in God's purposes. Hence, *ekklesia* has been made to do 'too much work'.[89] *Ekklesia* must be placed within the broader category of the more inclusive term the 'people of God'. This term in the New Testament is 'more frequent, more ubiquitous, more evocative of the sense of identity and mission' than *ekklesia*.[90] It is to be the organising concept of many images of God's people including *ekklesia*.[91]

Yet it would appear that Cole's corrective does not suffice. We have already seen that *ekklesia* has been made to do 'too much work' not because of an inadequate eschatological framework, but rather an inadequate interpretation of how the word *ekklesia* is understood to function. Furthermore, we have seen that *ekklesia* is indeed a biblical image for the final state of God's people particularly expounded in Hebrews 12:22-24.[92] Rather than view the eschatological people of God using the image of a city only, it would seem that there are multiple images used, one being that of God's *ekklesia*. Furthermore Cole's proposal that 'people of God' is a wider theme in biblical theology within which *ekklesia* is a subset does not seem to be the case. This is because Scripture appears to suggest that when God 'gathers' people into his presence they become the 'people of God'.[93] Indeed the *entire* biblical

86 Cole, 1987, p. 7.

87 Cole understands biblical theology as 'that attempt to describe the features of God's self-revelation as they unfold over time in the scriptural presentation. Biblical theology provides the raw materials for the systematic theologian. If allowed to do so, biblical dynamism is not lost whereas, in the traditional *loci communes* approach of systematic theology such a loss is more than possible'. Cole, 1987, p. 8.

88 Cole. 1987, p. 8.

89 Cole, 1987, p. 9.

90 Cole, 1987, p. 9.

91 Cole, 1987, p. 10.

92 Dumbrell, W.J., "The Spirits of Just Men Made Perfect", Evangelical Quarterly 48 (1976) 154-159. The middle-Pauline statement of Ephesians 1:22-23 seems to suggest the church is indeed the purpose of God's eschatological rule in Christ: '[22] And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything *for the church*, [23] which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.' (Eph. 1:22-23, NIV), (our emphasis).

93 Doyle, 1987.

narrative of God's dealings with his people from Eden to New Jerusalem can be described in terms of God 'gathering' and 'scattering' his people into, and out of, his presence.[94] This may suggest that 'gathering' is the overarching church theme.

The Principal of Oak Hill Theological College, London, David Peterson, has contributed to this discussion by way of an evaluation of Kevin Giles' work.[95] He notes various weaknesses in Giles' presentation particularly (as we have seen) that Giles has no place for a heavenly eschatological church. He shows the weaknesses (as we also have observed) in O'Brien's thesis, in particular the inadequate interpretation of *ekklesia*. Peterson also believes (although doesn't argue for it in detail) that *ekklesia* in the New Testament refers to four entities, as we concluded above: the heavenly eschatological church; the general church; a local community of Christians; and an actual gathering of believers in Christ's name.[96] He provides no discussion as to the nature of the earthly–heavenly church relationship.

What can we conclude with regard to the progress made in understanding ecclesiality by this school of thought?

First, it has made the best sense of the local–universal church relationship by giving the best integrating explanation of the disparate New Testament use of *ekklesia* and the associated teaching through introducing the notion of the heavenly eschatological church. Yet it needed to be supplemented with the category of 'anticipation' to describe more precisely the earthly–heavenly church relationship.

Second, it has provided a better explanation as to why the word *ekklesia* was chosen and used by the New Testament writers. It was to communicate the way we are to conceptualise God's people on earth as a heavenly eschatological *gathering* around Christ.

Third, *ekklesia* has been made to function like the other church words (body, bride, temple, etc.). Finally, it has preserved the christocentricity that

94 Dumbrell, 1996, pp. 29-30; Clowney, E.P., "The Biblical Theology of the Church", *The Church in the Bible and the World* D.A.Carson (ed.) (Exeter: Paternoster, 1987), 13-87; Clowney, E.P. *The Church*, (Leicester: IVP), 1995.

95 Peterson, 1998.

96 Peterson, 1998, pp. 212-13.

ecclesiality deserves. The church is not any gathering in heaven but specifically the gathering of the church into Christ's presence.

3. Trinitarian Ecclesiology

Another development in ecclesiality has centred on the doctrine of the Trinity. This has sought to ground the being of the church in the trinitarian being of God. The English House of Bishops of the general Synod explicated a trinitarian ecclesiology in their answer to the question of lay presidency.[97] The Bishops speak of *the* Church as 'communion'.[98] For them, the Church is not to be conceived of as an aggregation of individual believers or congregations, but as 'a community of persons'.[99] That is, the church's members have been drawn by the Spirit through the Son into a participation (*koinonia*) of the Triune being and life of God, a life of communion.[100] For the bishops the church then is a 'dynamic reality moving towards fulfilment'.[101] This communion can be described as the participation in the eternal filial relationship of love that operates between the Father and the Son.[102]

The bishops then draw two (amongst other) implications.

(i) the Church requires a relational conception of personhood. Just as the Father, Son and Spirit are what they are because of their relationships with each other, so 'to be a human person is to be-in-relationship'. That is, if the trinitarian persons mutually constitute each other, so believers-in-relationship are to mutually constitute each other.[103]

(ii) by implication, if the essence of God is in the dynamic relatedness of the divine persons, so the essence of the Church is in the dynamic relatedness of its members.[104] The bishops argue that God's unity is the inseparable relations of the Godhead.[105] It is a great mistake to begin with an individual and ask how they relate to others. Likewise one should not begin with a local

97 The House of Bishops, 1997. We will subsequently refer to his document as *EP*.
98 *EP*, 2.15.
99 *EP*, 2.18.
100 *EP*, 2.10-2.11.
101 *EP*, 2.15.
102 *EP*, 2.11.
103 *EP*, 2.18.
104 *EP*, 2.19.
105 *EP*, 2.6.

community (which we presume they mean a local church) and ask how this group is related to other groups. One must begin (as with the Trinity) with the 'intrinsic relatedness of all Christians to each other'[106] and only then seek to understand the identity of individuals and specific communities. Individuals are in a local community who (like the persons of the Trinity) 'mutually constitute' each other by their inter-relatedness. This then leads to an interesting and very different formulation of local–universal church relationship, namely that local communities mutually constitute each other within the universal church. That is –

> ...individual members discover their identity through their membership of one another. This applies not only to members of a particular worshipping community [a local church?] but to the way in which specific communities make up the universal church: to belong to a particular community is to belong to the universal, catholic Church.[107]

Given the fact that God's unity is in his inter-relatedness, or that there is no one 'God' behind the persons of the Father, Son and Spirit in communion, so the Church can never be an institution which exists behind or above its members-in-communion. The Church is 'first and foremost a community of persons-in-relation'[108] and is called to unity in the way that God is one, through persons-in-relationship.[109]

Canon Robin Greenwood, the Ministry Development Officer in the Diocese of Chelmsford, England, has made a similar recent contribution to Anglican ecclesiology.[110] He offers a thesis very similar to the English Bishops, but with a greater emphasis on eschatology and a slightly different formulation of the local–universal church relationship. Greenwood surveys Anglican doctrines of the priesthood from 1900-1970,[111] and concludes that the underlying ecclesiologies were developed predominantly on a christological basis taking their shape from the historical life of Jesus and its causal effect in the history

106 *EP*, 2.18.
107 *EP*, 2.18. Our emphasis added.
108 *EP*, 2.19.
109 *EP*, 2.25.
110 Greenwood, R., *Transforming Priesthood: a New Theology of Mission and Ministry* (London: SPCK, 1994); Greenwood, R., *Practising Community. The Task of the Local Church* (London: SPCK, 1996).
111 Greenwood, 1994, pp. 7-35.

of the church.[112] This has resulted in ecclesiologies that either centre on being 'a community reflecting the new Israel' or in 'a clerically defined church'.[113]

Greenwood believes the way forward is to apply recent trends in trinitarian thought to ecclesiology. He defines the church as a 'sign'[114] of God's being which is fundamentally the *communion* of the three divine persons who mutually constitute each other.[115] The church is not a mere aggregate of individuals but a community 'as interpersonal and greater than the sum of its parts'.[116] The universal church is called to be one as the Trinity is one. Unity of Christians in a local church, between denominations and across the world should be a reflection of trinitarian unity.

Greenwood then supplements this trinitarian base with eschatology. He argues that all relationships in the universe were designed to echo the trinitarian pattern of communion. The church's task is to be an effective sign of the eschatological restoration of all the relationships in the cosmos to what they should be. That is, the Church is to be both a 'foretaste', 'sign' and 'agent' of God's ultimate salvation purposes.[117]

As for the local–universal church relationship, Greenwood argues that the local church community, with the Eucharist at its heart, 'contains in microcosm the entire world Church.'[118] Wherever there is local mission (or communion) and a local Eucharist, 'there also the world Church has a "centre".'[119]

Yet it must be asked how far trinitarian analogies of the church can be pressed. Colin Gunton has given a sober warning about moving too quickly analogically from Trinity to church using abstract logical concepts without any theological control.[120] Greenwood and the Bishops have not clearly addressed how this analogy may be made. Both have attempted to draw a

112 Greenwood, 1994, pp. 86-87.
113 Greenwood, 1994, p. 87.
114 Greenwood, 1994, p. 87; Greenwood, 1996, pp. 48-49.
115 Greenwood, 1994, p. 89.
116 Greenwood, 1994, p. 108.
117 Greenwood, 1994, pp. 91-2, 109.
118 Greenwood, 1996, p. 26.
119 Greenwood, 1996, p. 27.
120 Gunton, C.E., *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), pp. 72ff.

correspondence between the 'unity–plurality' relationship of the Trinity and the 'unity–plurality' relationship of the church. They state that the 'universal–local' church relationship is analogous to the 'one substance– three persons' relationship within the Trinity. Yet how might we understand this, for in both cases the local church cannot correspond to the universal church in the way each divine person corresponds to the one substance of the Trinity?[121]

Anglican creedal orthodoxy confesses each person of the Trinity to be wholly God,[122] but the local church cannot be wholly the universal church in the same sense. Greenwood sees the local church as a 'microcosm' of the universal church. But the divine persons are not a microcosm of the one divine substance however one conceives of trinitarian unity. The bishops say that local churches (what they call communities) constitute each other in the way the trinitarian persons constitute each other. But these local communities are not wholly the universal church, in the way the divine persons are wholly God.

The same problem arises if we attempt to draw an analogy between the 'divine substance–divine persons' relationship and the 'universal Church–ecclesial persons' or 'local Church–ecclesial persons'. Again, both the Bishops and Greenwood make mention of this analogy, but there is no way an ecclesial person can be wholly the universal–local church in the way a divine person can be wholly God. Furthermore, it is unclear how the universal or local church, both seen as a unity, can correspond to the one divine substance.[123] These points of ambiguity leave open the charge of claiming too much perfection for the church on earth.[124] Church life is idealised.

Yet there must be some correspondence between God's unity and the Church's unity as Jesus prayed – 'that they may be one as we are one'.[125]

What does seems possible analogically is the *relations* between ecclesial persons as an echo of the *relations* between the divine persons.[126] Ecclesial persons are to relate in love, as do the divine persons. Neither Greenwood

121 Volf, 1998, p. 202.
122 Particularly the Athanasian Creed.
123 Volf, 1998, p. 204.
124 Gunton, 1991, p. 78.
125 John 17:11.
126 Volf, 1998, p. 203.

nor the Bishops make this point clear. Yet even this analogy must be controlled, because ecclesial persons cannot relate perichoretically in the way the divine persons do.[127]

What can we say in conclusion?

First, if personal relations only are the point at which analogy with the Trinity can be used for the church, this then means that trinitarian analogies cannot help resolve the 'local– universal' church tension as we have seen.

Secondly, one can question whether we are even talking about ecclesiality or church ontology (as Greenwood and the Bishops believe we are) when attention is drawn to the correspondence between ecclesial and trinitarian relations. It would seem that because this analogy centres on *how the church should live*, we are talking about the *mission* or *vocation* of the church, rather than its ecclesiality. If one wishes to say that this analogy is included in the ontology of the church, then it leaves them open to the charge of semi-Pelagianism, for as we have seen[128] the New Testament seems to present church membership as an act of God's grace, not of human achievement. Human actions are the result of church membership (and salvation), rather than its cause.

Finally, if the *sine qua non* of the church is in its relations, then the church must be a wholly earthly entity and have no heavenly or eschatological dimension to it.[129] Yet we have seen that the New Testament appears to give a place to the church as a heavenly eschatological entity.

4. Distinctly Anglican Ecclesiologies

Our final group are theologians who have attempted to construct a distinctly Anglican ecclesiology. This is not an ecclesiology of the universal church by an Anglican theologian, but rather an ecclesiology that is characteristically Anglican. Two have attempted an ecclesiology for the Anglican communion, and one for the Anglican Church in Australia. We shall firstly present their contributions then evaluate them.

127 Volf, 1998, pp. 208-213.
128 Points 1 and 2 above.
129 Gunton, 1991, p. 83.

Ecumenical theologian and parish priest, Paul Avis, has attempted to erect an ecclesiology for the Anglican communion with a critical analysis of the history of Anglican ecclesiology.[130] In it he is able to discern three ecclesiological paradigms that emerge. First, there is what he calls the 'Erastian paradigm'. This was the unity of church and state under one commonwealth where magisterial responsibility in the church was to safeguard against ecclesiastical tyranny. Second, there is what Avis coins the 'Apostolic paradigm'. This was an ecclesiology that vested everything in episcopal succession. It saw the spiritual independence of the church to the state, and the *esse* of the church in the ministry. The Erastian paradigm dominated in the sixteenth century. In the seventeenth and eighteenth it co-existed with the Apostolic paradigm. The nineteenth century saw the collapse of the Erastian paradigm and the domination of the Apostolic paradigm due to the momentum set by Tractarianism. Avis argues that both paradigms are now unworkable. Erastianism is unrealisable within the loosely federated Anglican communion, and the Apostolic paradigm invests too much in the priesthood, and so is ecumenically divisive. It makes the entire church dependent on one particular instrument of that life, the ministry.[131]

So Avis champions a third paradigm. He believes the dominant ecclesiological theme that arises from his rehearsal of the history of Anglicanism is that 'first and foremost she [Anglicanism] knows herself to be a branch of the Christian church'.[132] This is not to be confused with the nineteenth century 'branch theory'. Rather Anglicanism makes no claim to be the only church, or the one true church, but a legitimate part of the universal church. The church certainly existed before the Reformation, the Reformation simply corrected existing abuses. So Avis believes the paradigm to best fit this theological conclusion is what he calls the 'baptismal paradigm', the third paradigm found in Anglican history.[133] This sees Baptism as the fundamental sacrament of Christianity. The Erastian and apostolic paradigms have 'concealed' the true nature of the church, 'that we are one body through our Baptism into Christ'.[134] As 1 Corinthians 12:13 testifies, 'we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body'; hence we are not to deny another person's Baptism. This then

130 Avis, P.D.L. *Anglicanism and the Christian Church*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989).
131 Avis, *Anglicanism and the Christian Church*, p. 303.
132 Avis, 1989, p. 300.
133 Avis, 1989, p. 302.
134 Avis, 1989, p. 304.

must lead to unreserved mutual acceptance of other churches,[135] and Anglicans must seek to be in communion with those whom they are already in communion with. Not only is this paradigm grounded in the consensus of Anglican divines from Hooker onwards,[136] it is commensurate with the teaching of the Lambeth conferences.[137]

Avis then works out the implications of this Anglican ecclesiology in his book *Christians in Communion*.[138] The baptismal basis of the church leads him to argue that the Christian's highest obligation to fellow believers is to be in communion with them.[139] Communion should take precedence over orthodoxy and institutional order. For Avis the fundamental baptismal faith is the only New Testament basis for breaking communion,[140] when someone is preaching 'another gospel'.[141] For Avis, this basic gospel includes justification[142] (over which there is a common Anglican consensus)[143] although he believes that ARCIC II did not settle the issue with Rome.[144]

The former Bishop of Ely, Stephen Sykes, builds on Avis' Baptismal paradigm. For some time now Sykes has sounded a call for Anglican theologians to generate an ecclesiology for Anglicanism[145] and lays important groundwork toward such a proposal.[146] He advances three 'foundations' of an Anglican ecclesiology.

The church is to be understood under the category of 'sign'.[147] Sykes believes the church's visibility is the 'necessary appearance in history of its beyond-historical character, to which it points'.[148] That is, the historical church points beyond itself to its eschatological fullness. So, the Church is both visible and invisible. While the historical church is imperfect, it is necessary and does not

135 By which he means denominations.
136 Avis, 1990, pp. 31-5.
137 Avis, 1989, p. 308.
138 Avis, 1990.
139 Avis, 1990, pp. 51-9.
140 Avis, 1990, p. 60.
141 He cites Gal.1:8.
142 Avis, 1990, p. 61, pp. 98-125.
143 Avis, 1990, pp. 113-124.
144 Avis, 1990, pp. 124-5.
145 His first call is in Sykes, 1978. Specifically ch. 6.
146 Sykes, S.W., *Unashamed Anglicanism* (London: DLT, 1995), chs. 6 and 7 in particular.
147 Sykes, *Unashamed Anglicanism*, pp. 126-8.
148 Sykes, 1995, p. 127.

lack instrumental power. Hence the church of history is an instrumental sign. 'Sign' is the preferred term over 'icon' or 'sacrament' for that is the biblical (especially Johannine) portrayal of Jesus' own earthly ministry.

The second foundation concerns the interpretation of the biblical images of church. The great need is not an overarching church concept, but how to deal with the exalted quality of these images in light of the mundane reality of earthly churches.[149] One must not forget that a 'warts and all' earthly church is allowed the great scriptural affirmations under the category of 'sign'. Sykes inclusion of eschatology in ecclesiology, he believes, restrains triumphalism in the Church.[150]

The third foundation is in regard to Baptism. Sykes' argues; first, that Baptism symbolises the 'totality' of the Christian life (hence it also is an instrumental 'sign'). Therefore, it cannot be a *partial* incorporation into the Church.[151] Second, he argues for a unity of the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist.[152] The Eucharist is for those who are Church members by Baptism. Contrary to Roman Catholicism which denies Eucharistic participation to other denominations, Sykes argues that such a view of Baptism should allow any baptised persons who are good standing members of other denominations and who subscribe to the doctrine of the Trinity to communicate at Anglican Eucharists.[153] Sykes advances (like Avis) that those baptised of other non-episcopal denominations do truly 'participate' in the one Catholic Church (*contra* the 'branch theory').[154] Sykes believes this is a position that has a long and esteemed tradition in Anglicanism. Third, if Baptism and Eucharist are 'theologically inseparable' then it belongs to the church institution 'to constantly make this connection clear'.[155] Hence, this provides rationale for the task of the episcopate to ordain those whose 'principal task' is to baptise and celebrate the Eucharist 'with, for, and in the face of the whole Church'.[156] That is, the priesthood will show to the universal Church the nexus between Baptism and Eucharist and so promote

149 Sykes, 1995, pp. 129-31.
150 Sykes, 1995, p. 190.
151 Sykes, 1995, pp. 134-35, 188-89.
152 Sykes, 1995, p. 134.
153 As taught in Canon B15A[1](b).
154 Sykes, 1995, p. 135.
155 Sykes, 1995, p. 137.
156 Sykes, 1995, p. 137.

unity because the Eucharist is the sacrament of unity. The priesthood's ability to execute this rests on the episcopate, so Sykes propounds that the visible unity of the church is grounded in the episcopate. The episcopate is the 'enabler' of unity.

For Sykes 'in the episcopal Churches the structural unity of the episcopate... contains the promise of a future unity, including the potential of a universal primacy'.[157] This does not mean that non-episcopal bodies have defects that are compensated for by 'mysterious toppings-up' of grace to account for the obvious signs of the Spirit therein. No, Baptism sufficiently accounts for the activity of the Holy Spirit in each denomination.

The Secretary of the Anglican Church of Australia, Bruce Kaye, has advanced an Anglican ecclesiology for the Australian context.[158] Kaye critiques Avis' Baptismal paradigm as being too lean. It does not deal adequately with the three key markers of Anglicanism: the incarnational church in society, the tradition of natural law, and God's providence in society.[159] Furthermore, Kaye believes that Sykes' earlier work places too much emphasis on the liturgy and not enough on the church's life outside it.[160] He believes this could lead to sectarianism.

Kaye firstly expounds the bounds of an Anglican ecclesiality by examining the teaching of the Australian Anglican Symbols, the *Book of Common Prayer* and the Thirty-nine Articles.[161] He argues that Article XIX allows for a local congregation to be called a 'church'. But, the two symbols do not teach a 'congregationalism loosely held together by episcopacy'.[162] Kaye convincingly shows that the Ordinal and various collects[163] make mention of the church general.[164] Therefore, an Anglican ecclesiology cannot be 'congregational' in the later non-conformist sense, but could be designated 'a congregationally structured church'.[165] He believes that 'in Anglicanism the characteristic

157 Sykes, 1995, p. 137.
158 Kaye, B., *A Church Without Walls*, (North Blackburn: Dove 1995).
159 Kaye, *A Church Without Walls*, p. 186.
160 Kaye interacts with Sykes, 1978.
161 Kaye, 1995, pp. 153-164.
162 Kaye, 1995, p. 154.
163 The collects for Good Friday, St. Mark's Day, St. Bartholomew's Day, St. Simon's and St. Jude's Day, and All Saints Day.
164 Kaye, 1995, pp. 154-6.
165 Kaye, 1995, p. 155.

leading focus in theological discussion has been a doctrine of the Incarnation'.[166]

So for Kaye the incarnation is to be the 'central defining mark of Anglican ecclesiology'.[167] How would this shape ecclesiology and ecclesiality? Because the incarnation centres on how God is connected to his world, Kaye advances that incarnation implies the model of a 'church in society'.[168] Church life cannot be private or individual, but encompasses all aspects of human existence. Knowledge then is not simply cognitive but personal and gleaned from life experience in and out of the liturgy. Therefore, the liturgy is not the only or most powerful instrument of 'Christian formation'.[169] Furthermore, Kaye believes the incarnation implies that the church is a 'community' of Christians 'in which the lay–clergy distinction does not belong to the essential character of the church but is of practical benefit for it'.[170]

We began our evaluation of this fourth group with a question concerning the wish to erect an Anglican ecclesiology. If the agreed symbol of the Anglican communion, the Nicene Creed, declares that there is only *one* 'holy catholic and apostolic church', how then can we talk of *an* 'Anglican ecclesiology'? Would this not assume the existence of multiple ecclesiologies and hence imply the existence of multiple churches, not one? A logical corollary of there being one church, is that there *can only be one true ecclesiology*. Because ecclesiality is a subset of ecclesiology what we will proceed to say about an Anglican ecclesiology has ramifications for ecclesiality, and hence it is by definition included in the discussion.

In light of the church's oneness, there are two ways forward for an Anglican ecclesiology.

(a) An Anglican ecclesiology could claim to be a *subset* of the one fundamental ecclesiology. It aims to shed light on a particular aspect of the one catholic ecclesiology. Yet such an ecclesiology would have to be recognised as incomplete. It would have to call itself a 'partial' ecclesiology. If not it is potentially detrimental because it will leave out *fundamental* truths

166 Kaye, 1995, p. 150.
167 Kaye, 1995, p. 189.
168 Kaye, 1995, pp. 100-101, 103-104, 133-4, 146-7.
169 Kaye, 1995, p. 161.
170 Kaye, 1995, p. 162.

which contribute to the church's life and being. For example, if an ecclesiology fails to mention that there is one church, division will not be recognised for what it is.

Against this it may be argued that no ecclesiology is free from error, and so every ecclesiology is incomplete and hence detrimental. Yet the existence of error does not necessarily lead to a detriment of church being and practise, because some errors will have no bearing on the ecclesiological fundamentals.[171]

(b) Thus it would seem a better way forward to see the identification of the church fundamentals themselves as crucial to an Anglican ecclesiology so that error could be identified as detrimental or not. So, a second approach to constructing an Anglican ecclesiology would be a 'complete' ecclesiology which emphasised distinctly Anglican themes. Such an ecclesiology would have to *contain* the fundamental ecclesiological elements in order to be 'complete', and also ensure that its distinctives would not override or nullify those fundamentals. Hence the distinctly Anglican features would have to be matters of ecclesiological indifference or *adiaphora*.

None of the above three theologians have given any discussion to these important implications for an Anglican ecclesiology. They have particularly failed to see the notion of the ecclesiological fundamentals which must exist due to the church's oneness. So none have attempted any discussion on what these may be and whether their Anglican ecclesiological distinctives nullify them. This has led to each of them both *excluding* fundamental ecclesial themes (and hence producing an 'incomplete' ecclesiology) and *including* Anglican *adiaphora* within the fundamentals.

This is seen in Avis' proposal that all who are baptised with orthodox confession are the church. Are we then to unchurch those bodies which do not practise Baptism yet confess trinitarian orthodoxy, like the Salvation Army? It is unlikely. Conversely, are all who have been 'baptised' true church members? It is unlikely. It would seem that true faith rather than Baptism is the more fundamental indicator of church membership. Thus Avis has made Baptism an ecclesial fundamental which some would wish to regard as an *adiaphoron*. Furthermore, Avis' Baptismal ecclesiology focuses exclusively on

171 Calvin, *Institutes* IV.1.12 and IV.2.1.

the church general. It says nothing about the church local or gathered. This is a large ecclesial lacuna because the individual Christian's majority experience of church life is in the church local and gathered. Hence Avis has excluded ecclesial fundamentals.

Stephen Sykes' category of the visible church as a 'sign' is very welcome in light of our above discussions regarding 'anticipation'; indeed 'sign' could be used as effectively as 'anticipation' because it communicates the same idea. But Sykes fails to define what forms this 'sign' takes. There is no mention of the church local or gathered as a sign, both again being the majority means through which Christians experience church being and life. He regularly ascribes to denominations the title 'church' but gives no discussion why the denomination *per se* is such a sign. But as we have seen, the New Testament ecclesial categories do not lend themselves to understand the denomination as a 'church'.[172] Hence Sykes has excluded ecclesial fundamentals.

Sykes' argument that the conjunction between Baptism and Eucharist leads to an episcopate as a sign and enabler of unity is a *non sequitur*. The episcopate may be *a* sign and enabler of unity but Sykes has not shown how it is the *only* sign and enabler of unity. The nexus between Baptism and the Eucharist could be 'made clear' with a variety of institutional structures, not least the teaching function of the ministry. What makes particularly episcopacy *the* 'promise of future unity'? What does seem to call this directly into question is our previous observations that visible unity appears to be focused on *relations* between ecclesial persons.[173] In the light of this, Sykes would have to show how episcopacy is integral to fostering loving relationships over and above other forms of church government if *episcope* is to be a sign and enabler of unity. Thus, Sykes has introduced an Anglican *adiaphoron* (episcopacy) as an ecclesial fundamental.

Kaye's contribution, it would seem, has given the Anglican theme of incarnation a place of too much importance. If the church is incarnational, then Kaye fails to explain how the orthodox incarnationalism[174] of two natures without confusion, change, division or separation in one person can be analogous to the one universal church. The incarnation is much more than

172 In sections 1 and 2 above.
173 In point 3 above, page 27.
174 Of which Kaye appears to approve.

simply God's presence in the world. So why use the incarnation to explain the church's presence in the world? These issues are not addressed and so it is unclear why the incarnation takes the central place Kaye wants. Indeed, most of Kaye's incarnational ecclesial implications could be arrived at without the incarnation being at the centre of ecclesiology. For example the church-in-society as a community of people without the lay–clergy distinction is very similar to the models expounded above which place the Trinity at the centre.

Kaye's emphasis on the centrality of the incarnation seems to betray his own emphases. That is, Kaye wants to propound with Richard Hooker that 'the fundamental purpose of the Incarnation is the salvation of humanity'.[175]

So if the incarnation is itself dependent on a more 'fundamental' soteriology, namely the salvation of humans, then doing incarnational theology means letting soteriology have a more fundamental place. But Kaye allows the incarnation to play the more crucial rôle. If we allow soteriology to have a more fundamental position, then eschatology must be brought into the discussion because it is the goal of soteriology. But eschatology is conspicuously absent from Kaye's presentation, thus leaving his ecclesiology incomplete because we have seen how crucial eschatology is to ecclesiality.[176]

Conclusion

We have examined the four areas treated in recent Anglican ecclesiologies. The first group helped us to see that union with Christ aided ecclesiality by placing Christ in his rightful place at the centre. Yet, it was unable to formulate satisfactorily the relationship between the local and universal church because it could not integrate successfully the New Testament data. It was the second group which introduced the notion of a heavenly eschatological gathering around Christ, that enabled a more integrative reading of the New Testament data and hence gave a more satisfying solution to the local–universal church relationship. The integration of the New Testament data had to be supplemented with the category of 'anticipation' not explicitly mentioned by this group. By placing Christ as the one whom believers are gathered to, the christocentricity of ecclesiality was preserved. Furthermore, by describing the church as a 'gathering', the New Testament

175 Kaye, 1995, p. 138.
176 Particularly section 2 above.

writers' choice of *ekklesia* to describe God's people is clearly explained. The third group who sought to describe the being of the church in terms of Trinity were not sufficiently careful to control the theological correlation between the being of the Trinity and the being of the church. This led them to talk of church 'being' when in fact they were talking about church 'mission' or 'vocation'. It also left no room for the notion of a heavenly church which seems to have a place in the New Testament. Finally, those who wished to construct a specifically Anglican ecclesiology, did not pay attention carefully enough to the implications the church's oneness had in formulating an ecclesiology. This led them to exclude ecclesial fundamentals and designate Anglican *adiaphora* as ecclesial fundamentals. If further work is to be done in the area of Anglican ecclesiology, the issue of ecclesial fundamentals must be directly addressed.

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