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## BOOK SECTION

### Recent literature on ecclesiology<sup>1</sup>

THE 'theology of the Church' is an area to which theologians have recently begun to give a concentrated attention which seems to be in some respects without precedent. The great leading ideas about the Church with which the Christian community still lives go back of course to Scripture. From then on the pressure of controversy has sharpened definitions and developed thinking, here as in so many other fields of Christian theology.

That has meant that different aspects of ecclesiology have become prominent at different times. In the first centuries the contrast between 'Church' and 'synagogue' was important, as the young community discovered itself as something quite new in religious experience. Then the question of what it meant to be 'catholic' amidst schisms and heresies presented itself; as splinter-groups formed during the first few centuries, individual groups sometimes sought to return to the fold, and the Church had to think hard about whether they could be readmitted and how. Then, in the Middle Ages in the West, 'mother Church' became 'mother and teacher' (*mater et magistra*), with a new special emphasis on the Church's teaching office. In the same period there was a growing consciousness of issues to do with the polity and governance of the Church. Papal monarchy and episcopal collegiality struggled for supremacy in the late Middle Ages.

Reformers of the sixteenth century tried to take a fresh look at the problems and some argued that it is above all the ministry of Word and Sacrament which is constitutive for the Church. The focus of ecclesial consciousness shifted in some of the resulting sixteenth century and later 'divided communities' from universal to local. Some even went as far as to say that in its visible form the Church had only local existence, indeed existence only within the specific gathered worshipping congregation. In some of these communities 'Church' came to seem less important than the relationship between the individual soul and God.

Early Methodism made a significant contribution of its own with the notion of the *ecclesiola*, and has continued to explore patterns of church governance and structures of ministry which are particularly its own. Useful on this theme is Brian Beck's 'Some reflections on Connexionalism'. *Epworth Review* (1991/2-3), 48-59 and 43-50. He argues that Methodism could do more to develop its thinking on the underlying ecclesiology of connexionalism. David Carter suggests that his article does not fully allow for the work of some later Wesleyan ecclesialogists, or for the importance of Wesleyan hymnody.

Meanwhile in the East, the Orthodox had been developing an ecclesiology of 'microcosm' and 'macrocosm', rather than the one of 'parts' and 'whole' which has been more natural to Western thinking. That is to say, for the Orthodox the Church in each place is fully the Church, but only because it is one with the Church universal. That is supremely realised for the Orthodox in the celebration of the Eucharist. *One in 2000?*, ed. Paul McPartlan (St. Paul's 1993) contains the agreed statements of the Orthodox-Roman Catholic Dialogue from 1982-7, together with an introduction of his own, setting them in context, and a

series of helpful background essays. G. R. Evans looks at 'Orthodox and Roman Catholic Ecclesiology: the recent scene and the residual difficulties', in *One in Christ* (1994/1), 34-49.

What, then, is new now? The answer must be the ecumenical imperative. The death of the great Roman Catholic ecclesiologist Yves Congar in the summer of 1995 will prompt the re-reading of his pioneering ecumenical thinking, and no doubt the publication of stocktaking studies. On his output in the crucial years from 1937-59, which were to lay foundations for the achievement of the Second Vatican Council, there is already a useful survey by J. Famerée, 'L'ecclésiologie d'Yves Congar avant Vatican II', *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium*, cvii (Louvain University Press, 1992). Congar's own ecclesiological studies are numerous and fairly readily accessible in libraries. They remain essential reading for an understanding of the way in which the Roman Catholic Church has moved towards ecumenical commitment.

It is, since Vatican II, no longer possible to think in terms of a 'returning to the fold' of groups which have become 'divided from' the 'parent' Church. The model now must be one of mutual respect and mutual recognition among ecclesial bodies which can recognise the Church in one another where they are. There is an enormous task before us of stocktaking, adjustment, exploring ways in which it can be possible to remain faithful to a continuing reality of 'the Church' in every age.

Some traditions remain a little uncomfortable with concentration on talk of 'Church', because for them the primary Christian relation still seems to be that between the individual person and Christ the Saviour. The *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* ('Lima') text has been important in encouraging communities to be more conscious of the dual role of baptism, in making the Christian a member of Christ's Body the Church as well as marking a new relationship with Christ himself. Such communities have tended to be comfortable with the term 'fellowship'.

One of the most important developments of the last few years has been the work on the related notion of *koinonia*. This New Testament term expresses far more than the word 'fellowship'. It describes the practical and transcendental relationship of the whole people of God, together and individually, with their Lord, encompassing the whole life of the Church, its mission and ministry and the Eucharistic celebration of its relationship with its Saviour. A pioneering text was the Preface to the *Final Report* of the First Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (1981). This was followed by the study of *Communion* by the Second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission. The Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches has since taken up the theme and it was central to the work done at Santiago de Compostela in 1993. Helpful here is Susan H. Moore, 'Theological insights from the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, Santiago. Reflection by the British Methodist Representative', *Ecumenical Review* (1995/1), 3-11. See, too, H. Hutabant, 'Servants and advocates of unity', *Ecumenical Review* (1993/3), 256-60, an exploration of *koinonia* as a matrix for the work of National Councils of Churches. In 'Koinonia ecclesiology - an ecumenical breakthrough?' *One in Christ* (1993/2) G. Vandermele presses the freshness of view the exploration of *koinonia* is making possible; and J. Galvin discusses 'The Church as Communion: comments on a Letter of the

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith', *One in Christ* (1993/4), 310-7. S. Wood's useful comparative exercise is called 'What do we mean by *koinonia*?' *One in Christ* (1994/2), 124-45.

The leading living scholar in this field is undoubtedly Jean Tillard. His *Church of Churches: the ecclesiology of communion* (tr. R. C. de Peaux (The Liturgical Press: Collegeville, Minnesota, 1992) from *Église des Églises*, Éditions du Cerf Paris, 1987) is the definitive study against which all recent contributions to the discussion must be set. The English translation unfortunately – and to Tillard's own great grief – is not good, and in places it is misleading. Tillard writes as a Roman Catholic with an immense experience of ecumenical dialogue not only with Anglicans through his service on ARCIC, but also through his work with the World Council of Churches. The thrust of Tillard's study is the urgent need now for a detailed analysis of the concept and reality of 'communion'. Tillard begins from the documents of Vatican II, where he sees the stirrings of a return to the vision of the early Church, a revival of a vision of the true 'economy' of the Church as communion. So this is a plan for a new ecclesiology which is also very ancient.

A number of his recent articles should be read in conjunction with this study. See J. Tillard, 'Communion-Salvation' in *One in Christ* (1992/1), 1-12. His premiss here is that 'the basic consensus . . . permits divided Christians to understand that it is impossible to receive the Gospel without recognising its call to communion.' In his 'Reception-communion.' *One in Christ* (1992/4), 307-22, Tillard argues that 'unity has to do with faith before it has to do with togetherness'. 'More exactly, it has to do with the togetherness that the recognition of the one and the same faith generates.' This should be read with his 'Faith, the Believer and the Church', *One in Christ* (1994/3), 218-229, and David Carter's reply 'Faith, the believer and the Church – a Methodist reflection', *One in Christ* (1995/1), 63-70. For a further view of Tillard, see M. O'Connor, 'The Holy Spirit and the Church in Catholic Theology: a study in the ecclesiology of J. M.-R. Tillard', *One in Christ* (1992/4), 331-341.

The theme of reception is of immense coming importance in its own right, as churches strive to make their own the findings of the reports and agreed statement, and discover, as they often do, that they have hitherto had no real means of official assimilation, and no thought-out theology of the relationship between the forming of the *consensus fidelium* and the making of 'official' pronouncements. This is particularly evident in the texts of the *Responses to BEM* published by the World Council of Churches in a series of volumes. Many of the respondents were quite frank about this difficulty and described the ways in which they tried to deal with it. A helpful introduction is C. Andrews, 'Reception: a plain person's survey', *One in Christ* (1991/1), 57-76.

Another burning ecclesiological issue of the moment is the problem of legitimate diversity. How far may ecclesial communities differ without being divided? Is confessional identity a good thing, or ought it now to vanish in unity? There is tremendous loyalty to distinctive traditions in the churches, and it is often at this point that unity schemes founder when it comes to making real mutual commitment. René Girault, *One Lord, One Faith, One Church*, St. Paul's, explores the present situation, the achievements, the setbacks, and suggests that each of the separated churches can be seen as having a special character, a 'genius', so that their diversity can be brought together for their mutual enrichment. There are recent perspectives on the problems, as seen from

the vantage-points of different communions. Joseph Ratzinger's *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, St. Paul's, is a collection of essays reflecting his experiences, often in controversial debate, as one of the theologian-experts (*periti*) at the Second Vatican Council, as an academic theologian in several German universities, and, since 1981, as Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Faith. Edward Yarnold's *In Search of Unity*, St. Paul's, explores ecumenical principles and prospects through the insights of a Roman Catholic theologian who has served on ARCIC I and ARCIC II. Henry Chadwick's recent 'Anglican ecclesiology and its challenges', *One in Christ* (1995/1), 32-41, looks at some topical tensions within the Anglican Communion. Across the communions looks C. Hill in 'Récents documents romains et oecuménisme de Vatican II: perspective Anglicane', *Irénikon*, 66 (1993), 52-67. K. Nordstokke looks at 'The ecclesiological self-understanding of the Lutheran World Federation', *Ecumenical Review* (1992/4), 479-90. David Carter's 'A Methodist contribution to ecclesiology', *One in Christ* (1994/2), 161-75, illuminatingly analyses six main themes in the thought of two Wesleyan ecclesologists of the Victorian period, James Rigg and Benjamin Gregory. This is an important reminder of the continuity of heritage in the separated traditions. The scene as a whole is explored by the Lutheran H. Meyer in 'Christian World Communions: identity and ecumenical calling', *Ecumenical Review* (1994/4), 383-93.

It is always important to recall theologians to the dimensions of life in the Spirit which can sometimes become neglected in discussion of the more 'structural' aspects of ecclesiology. Here T. F. Best's 'Papers on Ecclesiology and Ethics', *Ecumenical Review* (1995/2), 127-88 is a useful review of Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Reformed and Free Church perspectives. Brian Beck explores the tension between the tug of conscience and the imperatives of unity, especially in connection with the 'sexuality' debate in Methodism in 'Unity and conscience', *Epworth Review* (1994/1), 12-17. Michael Root looks at 'The unity of the Church as a moral community. Some comments on costly unity' in the *Ecumenical Review* (1994/2), 194-203.

Among more general and wide-ranging recent studies, George H. Tavard, *The Church, Community of Salvation: an Ecumenical Ecclesiology* (The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1992) provides an introductory review of the ways in which the Church has sought to define herself, once it became clear that there was a need to do so. Then he sets out on a journey, from the 'antecedent' ideas about the Church to be found in Scripture, especially in the Old Testament, through an exploration of the Trinitarian basis of the Church as it is set out in the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council. He points out honestly the discrepancy between the ideal and the reality of 'subsequent developments in the Church's life.' He examines the New Testament evidence on which we must base any claim to derive a given structure or conception or image of the Church directly from the teaching of Jesus. There is an important analysis of the theme of *koinonia*. The balance and relationship of local and universal is explored within the framework of a study of conciliarity. Deliberately looking at all this, and at tradition, structures, the processes of dialogue in the context of mission from a Roman Catholic vantage-point, this study is at the same time profoundly ecumenical in its conception and execution.

An unusual *Festschrift* has been published for Hans Küng's sixty-fifth birthday, which its editors call a 'workbook' In it the contributors struggle with issues which have been important in Küng's writing, and try, as he has done, to

press the frontiers forward. A number of the essays in this Hans Küng: *New Horizons for Faith and Thought* (SCM, 1993) are ecclesiological, notably those on catholicity and ecumenicity.

It will be plain from all this that Roman Catholic authors have been in the forefront of ecclesiological discussion. There are historical reasons for this higher consciousness of the importance of the theme in the Roman community. That makes the highly positive and wide-ranging recent Papal Encyclical *Ut unum sint* (1995) of particular importance. It is instructive to read the English translation against the Latin text, which remains the official one. The problems of 'ecumenical language' are sharply pointed up by this exercise. For example, paragraph 65 speaks of 'the Churches and Communities which have their origins in the Reformation'. The Latin is *ex Reformatione exortatum*. If we read that in terms of 'rise' rather than 'origin' we do not have the implication of a break in continuity.

That seems a good place to end, with the reflection that we need to be alert to the words we use ecumenically, to learn from one another's ecclesiological language, and to do so not only within the English-language world, but with a sensitivity to the problems of speaking to one another across linguistic divides. One cannot be too generous or 'think big enough' in ecumenical ecclesiology.

Gillian R. Evans

#### Note

1. I am much indebted to David Carter, who generously gave time to a biographical search.

The reader should also take note of Dr. Gillian Evans' recent *The Church and the Churches: Toward an ecumenical ecclesiology* (Cambridge University Press 1994), reviewed in *Epworth Review* September 1995. (Editor).