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A RE-SITED ECCLESIOLOGY

JOHN M. TODD

All the theories about the Christian Church, all the ecclesiologies held by the Roman Catholic Church, and to only a slightly lesser extent the Orthodox Church, the Anglican Communion, the Lutheran Churches, the Reformed Church, and virtually all other main line churches though in their case certainly to a lesser extent, all these ecclesiologies imply that it is an established fact that Jesus of Nazareth founded a Church and that our present institutions are something like what he had in mind, or are at any rate in principle authentic developments from that which he began. The sheer absurdity and impertinence of this assumption jumps readily to the mind. These Bishops, that congregation, genuine successors of the dusty dusky Semitic preacher, and of his followers. The Reformers caught well the mis-match. Luther wrote “we old fools march around in bishops’ hats, and with clerical pageantry, and take it not only seriously but as an article of faith”.

But more seriously when we today talk of a Founder, our language normally refers to someone who establishes a constitution and a Trust Fund – or at least writes a Rule. Can the dynamic instructions, paradigms and counsels of the New Testament honestly be seen as the charter of our 20th century churches? Only with qualifications which take shelves full of books to enunciate on account of the relatively exiguous and disparate nature of the theological and historical data of the first three centuries, leaving the theory looking at best only very marginally credible to minds of non-believers, and difficult to cope with for many believers.

The problem is analogous with the problem posed by the tension between the Jesus of Faith and the Jesus of History. Christianity as we have it, and as it is preached, is ineluctably a historical religion, in that it is tied absolutely to particular events and experiences recorded in the New Testament texts by the followers of Jesus of Nazareth in the first century. The Jesus of Faith has to be derived from the Jesus of History, or rather the “Jesus and his first followers of history”, using that phrase to indicate what could be reasonably proposed by a historian as a factual residuum from all the documentary evidence about Jesus and his followers including those who wrote the New Testament texts. But the problem with the Church of History and the Church of Faith has about it a major difference. The Jesus of Faith refers to what Christian communities and individuals claim to experience. But the Church of Faith has to be simply those actual people acting as bodies and institutions calling themselves Churches. Can we believe that they are genuine heirs of the Church of History, of the first century?

The problem can be referred to as the tension between institution and event, between history and present experience. In his book *Being as Communion*, the Eastern Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas presents his understanding of a solution which I suggest points to the direction in which ecclesiology, Church theory, must go in coming years. I hope to show what is needed is a reorientation of all ecclesiology, perhaps something which could properly be called a radical reorientation, and that it also entails a more careful study of certain aspects of the bibli-

cal texts. I quote now a paragraph from the opening pages of Zizioulas’s book in which he attempts a summary of what he is saying. He is talking about the eucharist which is the locus of his solution. He says:

“ . . . the eucharist manifests the Church not simply as something instituted, that is, historically *given*, but also something *con-stituted*, that is constantly realised as an event of free communion, pre-figuring the divine life and the Kingdom to come. In ecclesiology, the polarisation between ‘institution’ and ‘event’ is avoided thanks to a correct understanding of the eucharist: Christ and history give to the Church her being, which becomes *true being* each time that *the Spirit* con-stitutes the eucharistic community as Church . . . it is the eschatologisation of the historical word, the voice of the historical Christ, the voice of the Holy Scripture which comes to us, no longer simply as ‘doctrine’ through history, but as life and *being* through the *eschata* – the risen Body of the Logos”. Well – clearly this is the language of faith, of *fides quaerens intellectum*, and the English mind tends to take a deep breath after even just one paragraph of this kind. But in fact this is serious and rigorous thought and I think appropriate to my topic. On this quotation I have two points to make and a preliminary observation. The observation is simply that what Zizioulas describes is the ideal state of affairs rather than what actually happens. He says “polarisation between ‘institution’ and ‘event’ is avoided thanks to a correct understanding of the eucharist” and then makes clear that this correct understanding implies a recognition that the Spirit constitutes the eucharistic Community as Church. This correct understanding has I think often not been present in eucharists in the West where *institution* is often thought of as the real power behind the event, the eucharist celebrated by a validly ordained priest or minister, the Spirit virtually absent.

The two points I wish to make relate precisely to Institution and to Spirit. Zizioulas’s descriptions of the Church still contain a substantial historical input. Historical institution is not its absolute base, the sole anchorhold, but it is still there as something real. We still need to be able to define the Church as instituted in the first century. We still have to ask: Can what is described there in the first century be understood as related to what we have today through our celebration of the eucharist? The second point is about the emphasis on Spirit. What is this Spirit which constitutes the Church? It sounds suspiciously like something read into the situation, a holy oil which will lubricate anything in need of assistance to make it work. I suggest two tasks then: to try to understand the Churches today as heirs of a first century institution, and to understand references to the Holy Spirit as something biblical and intelligible, which may help to resolve the difficulty about institution. To put it synthetically: Who are the people celebrating this Eucharist at which the Spirit constitutes this eucharistic community as Church and brings it into the Last Days? Are they not already in some sort Church? Before the Spirit constitutes them, they need to have started from some basis to do it, at least a potential Church, with some organisation. And by what right do we speak of this Spirit, *Ruah* or *Pneuma*? Is the resultant community, *koinonia*, something only to be seen with the eye of faith? Are we at a dead end here intellectually, needing simply to accept the statements and the events and the people as self-authenticating and their language as the language of faith, essentially opaque to any outside attempt at understanding it? That would not seem to me to be in harmony with anything human or divine.

Forty-two years ago I was received into the Roman Catholic Church. Is Christianity as a divine Church-founding movement still convincing to me, and if so can the Roman Catholic Church or any Christian Church be a rightful heir of it? To the first question I answer a greatly enriched "yes". I find the existence of the New Testament texts inexplicable other than on the assumption that something entirely exceptional, something unique, happened in Galilee and Jerusalem in the first years of the first century, and that what the texts describe is a reliable description, in the cultural terms of the time and place, of what happened; and I find that my personal experience of life tells me that the message they have and the teaching they propose is authentic and valid for everyone. The human disciplines which sometimes purport to reduce the meaning of the text to a function of sociology, or to find an explanation of the words used through some analytic method, such suggestions I find sometimes interesting and enlightening, but in a sense complementing and not in any way cancelling out, the meaning and message which the texts have, taken at their face value. I do not adhere to any kind of fundamentalism, but consider that the biblical texts should and can be elucidated like any other historical text. Of course as with any text of which, as regards the New Testament, the originals are fourth century Greek parchments, assisted by many earlier papyri fragments, there will always be things to argue about. But the New Testament text as a whole points to oral forms dating from the time soon after the crucifixion itself, and to some kind of written forms within 10 years or so, to enable the statements made by Paul in the early 50s and our first written gospel within 35 years or so. To posit some kind of psycho-social pressures, and/or sev-

eral astoundingly inventive literary geniuses, and/or the influence of literary forms and linguistic structures as sole explanations of the existence of the New Testament texts seems to me unreasonable and incredible. Better to receive the text as principally the witness of a number of people and groups to what happened and what they experienced. There is then some adequate starting point for the swift expansion and spread of Christian Churches, for their deeds and words. The only difference for me between 1944 and 1986 in this respect is that today I can see the possibility of the mutual enrichment between the cosmic vision of the New Testament text and the visions of other spiritual traditions.

So, what of the next step? What are these churches that St Paul wrote to, in relation to the churches we have today? After 1900 years, after Newman, after Vatican II, after the charismatics, after the healing preachers, pentecostalists and 10,000 African sects? What, after the new understanding of the riches of the Vedanta? The development in my own understanding of church is substantial. In a word it is symbolised by a radical movement from exclusive to inclusive. In 1944 when my friends and I were conditionally baptised in the Roman Catholic Church of St George's at Taunton we held a logical, linear, historical view of the Church. Either this one or that was the True Church. The True Church was one that could trace its Bishops and priests back in an unbroken line to the 12 apostles. Churches which could not do this were heretical. The emphasis was on institution and structure. The Church was visible. Easy to caricature it. One example of the absurdities of these days was to come across a priest who regretted that the gospel writers had failed to record

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for us the precise eucharistic rubrics which Jesus had followed at the Last Supper, and the particular type of vestment that he wore. A more serious example is that of the type of studies for which the best Roman Catholic priests were normally sent. It was Canon Law. The assumption was that these men with first rate minds had now in their possession a full understanding of revelation, of faith and morals, and a well based personal discipline. What they needed now was to know how to guide and regulate the lives of individual men and women and of societies. It was all perfectly logical.

However from my point of view from the start there were always a number of loose ends, a number of problems, which I simply put up a siding, expecting to find solutions to them as time went on. One of them of course, relevant to the present discussions, of the linear logical and exclusive, was infallibility. At Cambridge I had read Von Hugel's *Notes on the Petrine Claim*. Although when going back to it many years later I could not quite see how it had come about, that short book had left me with the simple and reasonable idea that if Jesus of Nazareth had founded a Church, he must, if the principal Christian doctrines were true, have intended to provide that Church with inspiration and protection of some kind. Its rightful authorities must benefit from such protection. So they would not fail totally. Infallibility was all right then, understood etymologically, in a negative sense, as a protection from error. Then another comforting thought was that history showed that there had always been moderate voices, from the 14th century onwards, working to confine papal claims, to keep them within reasonable bounds. Then again, some theologians arguing about the Infallibility Decree of the First Vatican Council declared that it was practically speaking impossible to be certain when any particular *ex cathedra* utterance actually fulfilled the necessary conditions to be certainly infallible. Then more recently other theologians began to throw doubt on that Council itself – could it be called an Ecumenical Council when the majority of Christians had not even been invited to it? And in any case were not its decisions so influenced by political and other pressures that its canonical status had been impugned? The vision of a pristine true church was further muddled by the realisation that the Roman Catholic Church had allowed a kind of creeping infallibility to overshadow its entire life, so that a Pope's speech to bee-keepers might seem to be inspired, or more seriously as in *Humanae Vitae*, the Pope could attempt to impose behavioural norms against logical argument and practically unanimous advice. The Vatican was beginning to look altogether too Vatic, Delphic.

The beautiful logical design seemed to be getting muddled over with a lot of unresolved human factors. The Arcic texts and many other ecumenical texts deal with some of these considerations, sometimes in great detail. And a consensus emerges from them that at any rate the Church itself must be indefectible, a belief held for instance by both Luther and Calvin. But then the question gets asked where can we locate this indefectibility. The answer to this question in Arcic includes a sentence about the need for doctrinal statements to be "received" by the whole body of Christians, a sentence which comes very close to being a direct contradiction of a statement to the contrary in the texts of Vatican II. Maybe these things can be ironed out. Maybe in the future the Pope will in fact become a kind of constitu-

tional monarch, as I do indeed fully expect. Maybe at the other end of the spectrum the idea of the Bible as literally inspired and the use of justification by faith as a kind of shibboleth will evolve satisfactorily. Such outcomes would not be out of harmony with the reorientated ecclesiology which I am suggesting must emerge.

And it has been, correctly I believe, suggested that the great text of Vatican II *Lumen Gentium* did mark the beginning of the end of a theology which was always deficient pneumatologically, and as a result always had a bias towards monarchy in its church government, and underplayed the input of its members.

But what really worries me is the whole concept of being able to demonstrate the authenticity of the Church in this kind of way, whether theologically or historically. Let me give you another paragraph of Zizioulas. He refers in this quotation to the Epiclesis, the prayer to the Holy Spirit, normally present as an essential part of ancient eucharistic liturgies:

"The epiclesis means ecclesologically that the Church asks to receive from God what she has already received historically in Christ as if she had not received it at all . . . The epicletic life of the Church shows only one thing: That there is no security for her to be found in any historical guarantee as such – be it ministry or word or sacrament or even the historical Christ Himself. Her constant dependence on the Spirit proves that her history is to be constantly eschatological. At the same time the fact that the Spirit points to Christ shows equally well that history is not to be denied. 'The Spirit blows where he wills', but we know that he wills to blow towards Christ".

At the moment the ecumenical negotiation of verbal counters, the agreeing of ever more carefully ironed texts, tend to imply that such activities can encapsulate the whole nature and purpose of the Church, in spite of disclaimers and the certain belief of participants in the making of such texts that this cannot really be so. But the verbalised doctrines continue to take priority, and they do continue to imply belief in a Church which as a whole can either trace its history continuously back in terms of doctrines and structures to the beginning, or at least knows enough about the primitive and early Church to be able to claim to be the same Church or heir to it. But these claims really do not bear rigorous historical examination. However, there *has* been a continuous Church *life* without doubt. We need to look behind the words to the *life* of Churches and Christians to reach a genuine identity.

The New Testament has many images of The Church: Body of Christ, People of God, Bride of Christ, Household of God, Servant, and many others. These images are not really complementary to one another. They are simply entirely different. They do not carry any doctrinal common factors. They are simply different views of the Church, from within a culture whose language is constantly metaphorical. The evidence is clear enough that the Churches were *there*, bodies of Christian Jews and non-Jews meeting and worshipping and living in a way which others could identify – communities of widely differing natures round the Mediterranean seaboard. The New Testament texts often show writers visibly struggling to find a way of establishing an identity. Until the fourth century the evidence left to historians is relatively exiguous and in many ways disparate, from Syria to

Egypt, from Greece to Rome, France, Spain and North Africa. I suggest that the identity which emerges is much closer to the kind of description provided by John Zizioulas, than to that provided by theologians or historians who locate it exclusively in the area of defined doctrine of the propositional kind or by theories of organisation and structure of a similar kind. The Graeco-Roman doctrinal and disciplinary structures are part of the central history and inheritance of the Church. But they are not any more the only key to its nature, nor the exclusive factor in its identification in the first centuries. The liturgists, by studying early liturgies have given our 20th century church a synthetic text for the eucharist, the so called Lima text, which can be used acceptably by many Churches today, and has its roots stretching satisfyingly back into the Old Testament past. Can we perhaps find then in the New Testament texts on the Church some underlying driving force which will enable us to see beyond or behind the purely verbal structures. Zizioulas's speaks of The Spirit constituting the Church. Perhaps there is a clue here.

I am not a biblical scholar but I dare to put an idea to you. I was encouraged in my idea that somehow the word Spirit, and the very meaning of it as used by St Paul had not been fully grasped by the Church, when I read a footnote in one of Raymond Brown's recent books which said simply that in his view there was no good book on Spirit in the New Testament. It seems to me that when Paul speaks of Spirit, back behind the current ideas of the time embodied in the word Pneuma, it is the Torah that we are hearing, the Torah as interpreted by the Prophets, and it is the Spirit of Yahweh, the driving compelling, inspiring Spirit of God, about which Paul is speaking – already in Greek we have moved a step away from that primeval vision, poetic, but more than poetic, instinctively religious, innocently worshipping; and we read into this Pauline Greek all the following 1,900 years of often merely routine theologising about *Spiritus Sanctus*, by which we have domesticated the great fundamental personal power in all life, and turned the sublime vision of the Holy Trinity into a set of ecclesiastical doctrines. Doubtless in some way or other it had to be. But today it is our task in this and many other areas of life to look back to the primal visions and to grasp again consciously what was then held in a kind of spontaneous innocence. I would like to see an understanding of Spirit, of Ruah-Pneuma analogous perhaps to the way in which Professor Clements has recently suggested we should understand the word Life in the Old Testament – not as a blessed life or a prosperous life, or long, or good life, which is what as we read the Old Testament we tend automatically to read into many uses of the word Life. But Life, he suggests, in the Old Testament commonly refers to simply being “alive”, something neither inert nor dead, but living – and we can then receive the full uncluttered message: yes, of course, the poet (for virtually all ancient texts are in a certain sense poetic) is talking about praising and praying for that whole marvellous reality of something alive, not dead, or inert but living. So we may somehow perhaps strive to get some idea of Spirit, which always refers in some way to the inner driving creative and sustaining and inspiring power in everything. In a mysterious way these early texts have the ability to convey across all the cultural barriers an intuition of meaning here. The ambivalent ikonic words of the Hebrew speak to the whole person. They are self-authenticating. No wonder Luther spoke of trying to

teach the nightingale to sing like the cuckoo when he was translating the prophets into German. The Spirit of Yahweh, The Spirit of the Lord – the mind needs to allow itself to dwell on the New Testament texts: “The Spirit led him . . .” “But always the same Spirit . . .” It is difficult for a modern scholar, used to linguistic analysis, to work out on a logical basis what Paul must mean (as they say) by Spirit – but the confidence with which the word is used bespeaks a certainty on the part of the author or authors in what they were doing. The solution surely lies in the semitic inheritance.

Suppose then that in some way a new understanding of the Spirit might lead to a new orientation for our understanding of the Church. It would not so much contradict or correct as set in a new context all our theories. Perhaps the entire style, the whole Graeco-Roman conceptual language of Western Catholic theology needs to be qualified in some way, not superceded so much as enriched from life and perhaps indeed from the contemplative and apophatic seams of its own tradition. Has anyone tried to see what such a Church might be like? The answer is that serious attempts have been made. One that I find most significant is that of Fr Bede Griffiths writing from within a 35 year experience of attempting to live the Christian monastic life within the deepest authentic heart of the Indian spiritual traditions. At the end of his book *The Marriage of East and West* he sketches out some suggestions. They are vague enough. But the life he lives is far from vague, and he deserves to be heard.

It is not really a matter of trying to envisage how structures might be altered, how disciplines might be changed. Rather, by concentrating on, by attending to, meditating on the revelation of the Spirit in the world, we begin to alter the whole approach. I shall quote a few observations from Fr Bede: “In Christian tradition the figure of the Mother is found in the Church. In an early Christian writing, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, the Church appears in the form of an old woman – and this is said to be so ‘because she was created first of all. On this account is she old, and for her sake was the world made’.” Bede comments “It is necessary to see the Church in this cosmic aspect. The Church as a historical institution has a very recent origin and occupies a very small part of the world. But the Church in herself is the eternal Mother; she is the created aspect of the uncreated Spirit”. There is no space here even to sum up the superb exposition of the Church as man became conscious of his destiny as a son of God, humanity drawn out of sin by the power of the Spirit and responding to the Word of God. In this sense he says the Church is present in humanity from the beginning of history . . . The presence of the Spirit in this sense can be traced in all the religions of mankind. We need to recover this understanding of the Universal Church, the Church which “was created first of all – for whose sake was the world made”. “In Jesus this movement of matter and consciousness towards the life of the Spirit reached its culmination . . . In him the marriage of God and Man, of Nature and Spirit, of Purusha and Prakriti was consummated . . . The Church is the Pleroma, the fullness, the consummation of all things, the term of the whole evolutionary process. The divine *Purusha* has taken possession of Prakriti, Nature and filled her with his presence. At Pentecost a new age begins in which this power of the Spirit is to spread through the world and humanity is to be gathered into the Kingdom of God. Such is the mission of the earthly Church, to be the witness, or

rather the embodiment, of the power of the Spirit, acting as a leaven in creation and bringing it to fulfilment in the Kingdom of God". But of course the Spirit then becomes overshadowed by the human sins and infirmity of the historical church, and this mystic vision of the Church which is and agrees with the Semitic understanding of the holy people, the sacred assembly, also became corrupt. "When we look at the Christian Churches today and recall their history, it often seems more like a record of human sin than of divine grace. If we look deep enough, we shall see that the Spirit of God is always present, changing people's lives, moving them to love and service, often effecting radical changes in society, inspiring people with ideals of sacrifice, with visions of truth, with the fire of mystical experience". But we still find he says that "human limitations, cultural blindness, narrowness of mind and fanaticism are still only too evident. If the Myth of the Church is to be revived today, it must find new forms of expression. Its universal meaning has to be discovered, its relationship to all the religious traditions of mankind. Its relevance to the world in which we live. Such a rebirth of the Myth of the Church is already taking place, but it still has a long way to go. Above all we have to discover the source of those deformations which have afflicted the Churches . . . The Church became dominated by that system of rational thought, which is the cause of the imbalance of the Western world, though the imaginative insight and intuitive wisdom of the biblical tradition was never wholly lost". The Church became obsessed with the need to construct logical formulas and to enforce them in the form of dogmas. Then the Reformers revolting against it, produced a mirror image in a further set of rigorously enforced formulas. Turning to the ecumenical movement for a moment Bede says that "unless it abandons the search for doctrinal formulas and legal systems, and recovers the intuitive wisdom of the Bible and of ancient man, there is little hope of success". We have to go beyond all our present historical structures and recover the original Myth of Christianity, the living truth which was revealed in the New Testament . . . But this cannot be done by the Western mind alone. We have to open ourselves to the revelation of the divine mystery, which took place in Asia, in Hinduism and Buddhism, in Taoism, Confucianism and Shintoism. Nor can we neglect the intuitive wisdom of more primitive peoples, the Australian Aborigines, the Polynesian Islanders, the African Bushmen, the American Indians, the Eskimoes. All over the world the supreme Spirit has left signs of his presence. The Christian mystery is the mystery of God's presence in Man, and we cannot neglect any sign of that presence". He says of course the divine Mystery, ultimate Truth always lies beyond our conception . . . The great Myths are only reflections in the human imagination of that transcendent Mystery. Even the Myth of Christ belongs still to the world of signs, and we have to go beyond the Myth to the Mystery itself, beyond word and thought, beyond life and death".

Coming from Father Bede in his Ashram these are words to be pondered by someone concerned about the problems of the Church as Institution and the Church as constituted by the Spirit. He has a vision of a resolution. The Western theologian and historian may ask: "Can we cash it? Can we verify it?" But of course the point is that a vision is not a cash voucher. At any rate we can ask whether the vision seems to be so far from reality that it cannot be taken seriously. It surely does need to be taken seriously, basing itself as it does on the earliest self-

understanding of the Church. And one has to be clear that the mis-match will always be there.

Asking a recently convinced Christian if he had joined a Church he replied to me, "No, none of them seems to fit". Well, presumably none will ever fit. In that sense we need to cease looking for a fit. The Church institution will in the nature of things look like other institutions in the particular human culture in which one lives. It will carry the values, message and being of the Church in the same styles as those in which its members normally live. It will be recognisable by its reverencing of the texts, notably the biblical texts, its use of symbolical rites, notably the two sacraments to be found in the New Testament, and most notably the eucharistic meal where the eschata can be made present along with the past, under the presidency of the Spirit, and by the practical love for one another and for all people, of its members. The testing of the spirits can be done by no rule of thumb. In the end in a certain sense it will be necessary to accept, and make a virtue of, self-authentication. It may be useful to observe that Christianity is not alone in finding itself in this non-verifiable situation. Those who struggle to understand the values, the message conveyed by works of art are in no different a plight, and again can be seen making a virtue of it. I am thinking of the final passage in the Leslie Stephen Memorial Lecture given by George Steiner delivered on 1st November last year. The passage begins with the feeling of a cul-de-sac about present ways of attempting to analyse art:

Personally, I do not see how a secular, statistically based theory of meaning and of value can, over time, withstand either the deconstructionist challenge or its own fragmentation into liberal eclecticism. I cannot arrive at any rigorous conception of a possible determination of either sense or stature which does not wager on a transcendence, on a real presence, in the act and product of serious art, be it verbal, musical, or that of material forms.

It may be the case that nothing more is available to us than the absence of God. Wholly felt and lived, that absence is an agency and *mysterium tremendum* (without which a Racine, a Dostoyevsky, a Kafka are, indeed, nonsense or food for deconstruction). To infer such terms of reference, to apprehend something of the cost one must be prepared to pay in declaring them, is to be left naked to unknowing. I believe that one must take the risk if one is to have the right to strive towards the perennial, never-fully-to-be-realized ideal of all interpretation and valuation: which is that, one day, Orpheus will not turn around, and that the truth of the poem will return to the light of understanding, whole, inviolate, life-giving, even out of the dark of omission and of death.

In this last passage of course one can substitute Christ for Orpheus, and say "Christ will cease to be crucified and the truth of the religious vision will return to the light of understanding, whole inviolate, life-giving, even out of the dark of omission and of death".

Someone might object that all I have done in this lecture is to transfer the impossibility of believing that these Bishops, that congregation can possibly be authentic heirs to the first century churches to the impossibility of believing that these Bishops, that congregation can possi-

bly be the kind of inspired and inspiring community which I have perhaps shadowed forth. But as I have said in the sense of finding an exact fit, it is useless looking for a verifiable and truly worthy heir to the revelation. What emerges is the need to ask the question at a deeper level and to reorientate the whole approach. It might be objected again that what I have suggested was achieved by the reformation as the reformers returned to a more biblical understanding of the Church and attempted to discern a pattern of primitive observance. But as we know the attempt to a great extent fell victim to the same structuralisation and conceptualism as that which it rebelled against.

Let me make clear again that I do not foresee some kind of renegeing on the whole 1,900 years of conceptualist theologising, on the great doctrines and dogmas which have been thought out, commented on, and handed down to us. But I expect to see a re-siting of them, a fresh context, a less spatial and less temporal insistence on the verbal and behavioural disciplines they may have been seen till now to imply. I think liberalisation would be a wrong description. My major witness comes from an Ashram and the traditional ashram is by no means a liberal place from the point of view of life-style, of the cultural and even liturgical expectations of Europeans. The long hours of meditation and the modest requirements in terms of food, clothing and shelter might even be called the other side of the coin option for the poor. What perhaps needs then to be pressed forward is a further growth, a new and deeper perception that what Jesus of Nazareth instituted or founded was a way of life, a way of responding to the divine Spirit which in its own way is as strict as many of the New Testament counsels imply and which finds its regular apotheosis in the gathering of Christians to listen to the Holy Word and to eat holy food, finding therein the presence of the one who was crucified, who was raised up, who appeared to many, and now lives and rules in ways we shall fathom but which we have already fathomed in that eucharist.

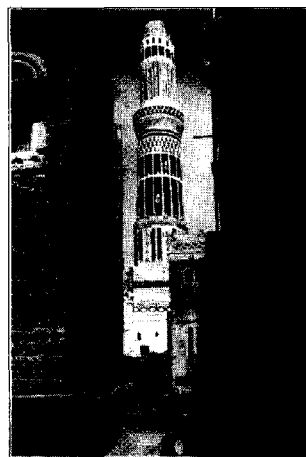
In so far as the linear historical view of the pilgrim Church is retained we must give a serious place to the line which reaches into the future equally with the past. Theologians, like medical doctors, commonly tend to act as if the present moment in time is the pleroma – they think and act as though the complete purpose and fulfilment of revelation on the one hand and all scientific discovery on the other is complete. The information is here, the study has been done and we can give answers. And any kind of admitted agnosticism as an essential part of the system tends to be seen as a weakness, unnecessary weakness. But we have every reason to think that the past of theology and the past of medicine is likely to prove to be a very small fraction of the total time stretch for which these disciplines will be exercised. Changes and discoveries will surely be made at the same rate as in the past. We can say that certain principles will remain but their new application and the discovery of further principles still lies hidden. Great humility is appropriate.

A revived pneumatology and a greater willingness to listen to one another will be part of the new ecclesiology. As Father Bede has pointed out, this is relevant to the present ecumenical discussions.

I share Father Bede's scepticism about the now so

laboured activities of the ecumenical commissions and committees. The idea that it must be years still before, for instance, Anglicans and Roman Catholics may share fully together at the eucharist (although in fact many already do so on a wide range of occasions) and that the problems of reconciliation between for instance the high theories of the Church and an African sect are virtually insurmountable seems to me to mistake our situation. We need a greater realisation that all our arrangements are part of a great provisional, an arrangement for a time and a place and that we are trying to serve a Purpose we can never perfectly discern, which is mirrored in the mystery of life and of the Universe. In particular as a result of a failure at this point, the received version of the theology of Church unity as propounded by Roman Catholic authority is fundamentally over-intellectual in its crude theory that eucharistic sharing is impossible outside organic unity. In effect this phrase "organic unity" has become a kind of chimera and appears to be, I hope perhaps final, manifestation of the moribund idea that on the one hand bureaucratic organisational unity is the proper and exclusive sign of Church unity and on the other hand of the mistake of thinking that Christians in communion with the See of Rome have ever thereby or ever will be agreed on the interpretation of all major doctrines. As Newman pointed out theology itself has to be the ultimate regulator; by its very nature its work is never done.

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