

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH IN CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY

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CHAPTER I.

PROTESTANT AND CATHOLIC CONCEPTION OF THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

The English word «Church» is used by Protestants today in a wide variety of ways. Some recognize the validity of only a part of these uses; others would accept all.¹

1. The Church is *the people of God* in all ages who have been called by Him into His fellowship; this includes those called under the Old as well as the New Covenant.

2. It is a *congregation* of believers in Christ in a local community. Akin to this usage is the assembling of these members for worship and the building in which they meet.

3. It is an organized *communion* represented in a group of local parishes, which has a common doctrine and polity; some of these groupings strictly follow national or territorial lines; others are bodies which are international in character.

4. It is the total of all such organizations of local, visible communities regarded as the *Church Militant*.

5. Since these bodies comprise both members who are worthy and others who give little evidence of either faith or love, many would distinguish within and beyond the entire body of organized Christianity those who are *the true disciples*. To these, the invisible Church known only to God, they would restrict such designations as «the body of Christ».

6. Finally, there is *the Church Triumphant*: the faithful in all

1. *The Nature of the Church*: A Report of the American Theological Committee, New York, 1945, pp. 7-8.

ages who have passed to the eternal world and have entered into the communion of saints.

According to the American Protestant theologians¹ the problem of unity concerns the various *communions* and *the Church Militant*.

Thus, generally, some use the word «Church» inclusively so as to embrace all who believe in Christ, others exclusively, as embracing only those who belong to a particular Church. In the Official Report of Lausanne² it is declared that the common Christian Faith «is witnessed to and safeguarded in the Ecumenical Creed, commonly called the Nicene, and in the Apostles' Creed.» Yet there is no indication here that the members of the Conference agreed to recommend these Creeds for use in their respective communions. On the contrary, the Notes say that some of the Churches «make no use of Creeds», and that «it is understood that the use of these Creeds will be determined by the competent authority in each Church».

The general conviction about the nature of the Church through the Conferences of the World Council of Churches is that the Church is basically a *community* (i. e., a structured life or a body with an immanent spirit) rather than simply an organization. That in proportion as the community or Church grows in cohesiveness and in awareness of its mission, it will put forth the organization and the activities proper to its developing common life: formulae for expressing the common faith, forms of worship, constitutional and governmental structure, boards of missions, education, social service, finance, and so forth.

This conviction is clearly expressed in the Toronto Statement on *The Church, the Churches and the World Council of Churches* (1950).³

In the Report of the Lund Conference, (1952), submitted to the Churches for consideration, it is repeated; «Membership in the World Council of Churches implies a measure of recognition in that the Churches recognize one another as serving one Lord. But differences of faith and others still exist and membership in the Council does not imply that one Church must regard all other members as *Churches in the full sense*».⁴

These two documents underline the Ecclesiological Significance of the World Council of Churches.

1. Report. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

2. L. Hodgson, *Convictions*, New York, 1934, p. 240.

3. In *Evanston to New Delhi*, Geneva, 1961, pp. 245-250.

4. *The Third World Conference on Faith and Order*, Lund, 1952, ed. Oliver S. Tomkins, London, 1953, p. 33.

Now, Protestants, and even Catholics, are interested more in the laity. There are five factors in the Protestant role of the Church for faith. This is coming to a foreground in the ecumenical movement:

1. *Biblical teaching* — Protestants recognize New Testament religious community as one of corporate, not individualistic life. This individualism is foreign to their present mind.

2. *Reformers were not individualists* — Calvin speaks of the Church as *mother* — hence *family*: *Priesthood of all believers* — *each man is a priest to his neighbor*.

3. *With the liberals, the Kingdom of God* was a most important social symbol — it was an expected occurrence in this world in the future. Then this was blasted. The Kingdom of God is not of this world. In this point, the Church becomes important. The Church provides some structure for the city of God on earth.

4. *Renewal of Religion and theology* is also one present heritage. A common understanding of Christian heritage enables one to see the responsibility in modern society. In the *liberal period*, the Church was seen as an instrument for social reform.

5. *The Church represents a link between us and revelation events*. *Realized eschatology* and *New Being* are ways of emphasizing new reality.

A general collectivist trend in society also shows up in church life.

The result of all this in the last *fifty* years is *the sense of a Christian community*. All forms of Catholicism absolutize this structure. It identifies the Church with a particular structure and institution. *The Protestant Church* accepts *continuity in community*, not in hierarchy.¹ Brunner has fear of an ecclesiastical structure; Barth — not quite so much.

New Protestant view in the last decades: It accepts the Church as a gift of God, not just as a human organization:

1. Given element — Word and community

2. Divine initiation — religious phenomenon

3. Human community — hence sinful, open to criticism of the

Word

4. Whole people — not clergy only

5. Role of clergy worked out in various ways — teaching, etc.

They represent the larger church to the local church; it avoids provincialism

6. Boundaries of the Church — not clearly known

1. Cf. Robert Nelson, *The Realm of Redemption*, London, 1951.

7. Responsibility for the world — no separate sect
8. Responsibility for Christian unity.

Anglo-Catholic View:

1. It *combines* Protestant and Catholic elements.
2. *One order*, but *no central* form of administration. Britain appoints bishops via the government. America elects them by diocesan convention and laity has veto power.
3. *It has vast variations within*. It is a spirit, a trend. Yet it claims the Church is located where there is a bishop.
4. *Sacramental life is the heart* of the Church. It makes the mediation of grace an objective and dependable event. An Episcopate is indispensable.
5. *The major problem of reunion lies here*. The Church of South India uses an episcopate, ordination. Some will accept episcopate ordination but others reject it as a danger of Catholicism.

Concerning the origin and foundation of the Church, today, there is also a modified view among many Protestants.

«The denial that Jesus had anything at all to do with the idea of a community of believers», says Robert Nelson, «or a Church is an extreme one; and not many persons hold this position in the present. A somewhat modified view, which has gained considerable currency, is that, although Jesus did not actually found or establish the Church, the idea of the *ekklesia* was really present in His teaching and work».¹

There is today «the plausible and widely accepted conviction, not that Jesus founded the Church, less that He ignored the Church, but that *He redeemed* the *already* existing Church».²

Those who are convinced of the Church's vital connexions with Jesus and His ministry represent the great majority of scholars who interest themselves in this problem, and their positive position has enjoyed, and still enjoys, the widest acceptance. On certain points, their opinions diverge and clash, such as on the interpretation of Matthew 16,17-19, where the use of the word *ekklesia* is first ascribed to Jesus, or on the question of the exact time when the Christian Church, as distinguished but not divorced from the old Israel, took form. Even though such particular disputes are unavoidable, because of diverse

1. R. Nelson, *The Realm of Redemption*, London, 1951, p. 23.

2. Nelson *m. w.*, p. 25. cf. C. T. Graig, in *The Universal Church in God's Design* (W.C.C.), London, 1948, p. 33.

types of exegetical thought, there is a growing feeling of certainty among Protestant theologians with regard to Jesus' desire to have a community of believers following Him.¹

«The problems connected with the origin of the Church have commanded the attention and labour of some of the most prominent biblical authorities and theologians of the past three decades. With regard to the Church's inheriting the characteristics of the pre-Christian Israel and appropriating the heritage as the faithful *Remnant*, the agreement has been nearly unanimous. As to the eschatological role of the *ekklesia* with respect to the preaching of Jesus, there have been various interpretations, but with few sharp or absolutely exclusive differences. A greater variance can be seen among those who believe that Jesus did have a definite intention for the Church and those who believe He did not; but their differences are traceable in a large part to the differing concepts of the meaning of the *ekklesia* as either a people called by God to be His own, or as an institutionalized religious cult.

Moreover, there are advanced at least *four* theories as to the *time* when the Church was actually constituted, or refounded, as some prefer to say. While some see the real start of the Church within the historic life of Jesus, many others are convinced that there was no real Church until after the concomitant events of the resurrection and Pentecost.²

The Church and the Holy Spirit: «In some of the most influential theological works of the present time, the reality and centrality of the Spirit have been treated with very deep earnestness. Whereas most theologians who followed the tradition of Ritschl's liberalism have been satisfied with a concept of the Spirit which makes little distinction between the Holy Spirit and the spirit of man, the trend in more recent years has been leading toward a sober recognition of the Third Person of the Trinity in terms of New Testament faith».³

«The Holy Spirit is a correlate of the Church: this is the teaching of the New Testament», writes J. E. L. Newbigin, «and yet it is too often overlooked in modern discussion about the nature of the Church».⁴

Most scholars are agreed that the fundamental idea which *koi-*

1. Nelson, *m. w.*, p. 26.

2. Nelson, *m. w.*, p. 36.

3. Nelson, *m. w.*, p. 36.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 47. Cf. Newbigin, *The Reunion of the Church*, London, 1948, p. 99f; cf. P. H. Menoud, *L'Église et les ministères selon le Nouveau Testament*, Neuchatel, 1949, p. 11.

nonia conveys is that «participation is something in which others also participate».¹

According to the thought of L. S. Thornton, «*koinonia* surely conveys the meaning of 'sharing', and not simply the fellowship of persons. But what do the Christians share? Not goods, he maintains, but the *Spirit*».²

Today there is a growing consciousness among theologians, and Christians in general, that the Church must discover once more the meaning of the Spirit for its corporate life. «It is of little use to describe the activities of the Spirit in former ages, if it is impossible to believe that He operates in the same way today».³

«Members of the Protestant denominations are learning that historic Protestantism, so much as it speaks the minds of the reformers, is not the champion of purely individual religion, but even more community-minded than Roman Catholicism.... This contemporary phenomenon ought to be regarded... as a positive demonstration of the basic nature of the Church's existence. 'For the fellowship of faith is the Church', asserts Brunner, and: 'Where the empirical Church does not exhibit this spirit of fellowship, it merely shows to how slight an extent it is a real Church.»⁴ «The *koinonia* belongs integrally and indispensably to the very essence of the Church».⁵

«But can this *koinonia* not be known outside the Church? Many theologians of dissimilar tradition and persuasion, without daring to suggest that the work of the Spirit can be circumscribed or bounded by humanly conceived definitions, still testify to the *inseparability* of the Spirit and the Church».⁶

Today the leaders of Congregationalism speak also with more insight and conviction about the Gospel and the *Church* than was customary, say, a quarter of a century ago. The programme of the Saint Andrews International Congregational Council of 1953 is clear proof of this.

1. Nelson, *m. w.*, p. 53.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 56; cf. Thornton, *The Common Life in the Body of Christ*, London, 1942, pp. 72-76.

3. Nelson, *m. w.*, p. 58; cf. F. W. Dillstone, *The Holy Spirit in the Life of Today*, London, 1946, p. 102.

4. Nelson, *m. w.*, p. 64; cf. Brunner, *The Mediator*, Philadelphia, 1947, p. 615.

5. Nelson, *m. w.*, p. 64.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

Congregationalists have strongly emphasized the freedom of the Spirit in ruling and guiding the Church. On the other hand, most of the leading Congregational theologians, from the great John Owen onward, have insisted that the *Church has a definite faith which can be defined* in precise terms and a definite order which can be justified from Scripture.¹ Despite their emphasis on freedom of interpretation, there has, in fact, been a very large degree of unity of belief and practice on their part throughout their history.²

The Congregational conception of the *Church* is «of a gathered community of believers who have been called out of the world by Christ and who have responded to that call with a deliberate act of committal of themselves to Him. Congregationalists give concrete expression to the priesthood of all believers by insisting on the right and duty of all members of the church in good standing to share in its government. Congregationalism differs from the Calvinist sects in having a *much more developed and conscious sense of the Church as the Body of Christ*. And while it is at one with the other Reformed churches in its resistance to Erastianism and Prelacy and its insistence upon 'the crown rights of the Redeemer' in His Church, its clear recognition of the primacy of the Gospel over the Church has given it a less rigid and more flexible conception of church organization than that often evinced by Presbyterian bodies. If a slogan were required to pick out what is distinctive of Congregationalism among the churches with which it has most kinship, that which would probably receive the most widespread approval would be the word 'Freedom'. But, in order to see that in its proper context, most Congregationalists would want to add, as they frequently do, the words 'Faith' and 'Fellowship' as expressing realities equally fundamental in their conception of their church... There have been, and on many points there still are, sharp disagreements between Congregationalists about how these words should be interpreted».³

Regarding the Pauline name of the Church: *Body of Christ* (σῶμα Χριστοῦ) «there is still no consensus, to be sure. The language of the Ephesians is mystical and poetic, rather than prosaic, observes G. Johnston, and he warns that «there is no need to look for literal realities in the presentation of the doctrine». Likewise, Brunner says of the Body of Christ, though not in respect to scriptural exposition, that it «is only a simile,

1. D. Jenkins, *Congregationalism: A Restatement*, London, 1954, pp. 31-32.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

3. D. Jenkins, *m. w.*, pp. 39-40.

it is not an organic principle». But the majority of New Testament scholars concur in regarding the Body in Ephesians and probably in Colossians, as the literal Body of Jesus Christ.»¹

One of the major accomplishments of recent scholarship has been the rediscovery of the nature of the pagan soil on which Christianity had to grow. Much of the thought behind the word «mystery» in Ephesians can be appreciated in the light of this paganism. For the concept of the Church as the actual Body of the Lord was a mystery indeed.

But what is specifically involved in taking the Body of Christ «seriously» in the present time? The problems which come to the fore may be clarified in the course of the discussion of the following subjects: 1) The meaning of being «in Christ» as related to being «in the Church»; 2) the relation of Jesus Christ, the Head, to the Body; 3) the idea of the Church as the «extension of the Incarnation»; and 4) the consequences of conceiving of the Church as a true organism.²

The doctrine of the *Body of Christ*: «in Christ» — «in Church»,, «is very uncongenial to the faith of many Protestants, of course, for ostensibly it would make the names 'Christ' and 'Church' interchangeable, thereby depriving Christ of the uniqueness He possesses as Son of the Father, and exalting the Church in a way which seems to them unwarranted, or even undesirable.»³ Most theologians will subscribe to the ancient Ignatian formula «ubi Christus, ibi ecclesia», but only a few will invert the phrases, as Aulén does, and says, «ubi ecclesia, ibi Christus», thereby exceeding even the New Testament teaching, which goes very far in the direction of identification but not all the way.⁴

Any who adhere to the «Catholic ecclesiology, in which there is little reluctance to equate the Church with Christ, can speak of the Incarnation» with no breach of consistency.⁵ The reader is justifiably astonished, however, to find the same words used by theologians who otherwise have little inclination to make the identification between Christ and the Church in so thoroughgoing a way (R. Will, W. M. Horton, H. W. Robinson, J. Know, and W. Robinson).

1. Nelson, *m. w.*, p. 83; cf. Johnston, *The Doctrine of the Church in the New Testament*, Cambridge, 1943, p. 93; Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, Philadelphia, 1947, p. 300.

2. Nelson, *m. w.*, pp. 84-85.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 90; cf. Aulén, in *The Universal Church in God's Design* (W.C.C.), p. 19.

5. Gregg, Chavasse, Quick, Thornton, etc.

«What does this catalogue of names indicate?» asks R. Nelson. «It would seem that the very number of theologians agreeing upon this idea is ample testimony to its validity as a theological concept. However, arrayed against them is a considerable number of theologians, who are generally of the same or similar tradition and viewpoint held by the last men named above; but they are very suspicious, or very critical, of the idea that the Incarnation is extended in the Church. Some simply propose moderation or restraint in the use of the phrase, e.g., T. W. Manson.»¹

The Norm of Authority for the Church: The membership of the American Theological Committee² and the Churches which they represent fall into *two* very distinct groups. Each group is very diverse in its complexion, but on the issue of norm or authority the watershed between them is definite.

a) The representatives of this agree at one crucial point: Somewhere in the historic tradition is something normative for the constitution and practice of the Church. To enter into any union which did not make this particular requirement would be a denial of the authority of God in the channel through which it is recognized.

b) The second group is also united by a common conviction. They recognize the authority of God in church organization and practice, but do not believe that this is expressed in norms that have been communicated in specific and unchanging patterns. From their study of history, these find no divinely authorized pattern of the Church.

«The present differences concerning the norm or standard of the Church reflect the fact that there has been much lack of uniformity throughout Christian history. The pioneering spirit, which has been an American characteristic since Colonial days, has created a tendency toward non-conformity rather than conformity. Yet it must be insisted that American dissent does not deny the fact of continuity in Christian history nor the existence of deep-lying unities amid all the diversities of the Christian movement.»³

In relation with the Word of God as the *Church's authority*, R. Nelson makes this observation: «Not since the sixteenth century has the concept of the Word of God received so much serious attention in

1. Nelson, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

2. *The Nature of the Church:* A Report of the American Theological Committee, New York, 1945, pp. 16-17.

3. *The Nature of the Church,* A Report of the American Theological Committee, New York, 1945, p. 49.

Protestant theology as it has during the past thirty years... To a large extent the theology of the Reformation was based upon the recovery of the full meaning of the concept of the word of God, not only for the individual's faith, but very decidedly for the Church as a whole. That a great many Protestants, representing various denominations and types of theology, have lately come to a new appreciation of the importance, indeed the primary importance, of the Word of God for the Church, is a vivid sign of the current trend toward the rediscovery of the genius of the Reformation. A survey of recent thought on the subject of the Word of God reveals that no really significant advance has been made over the interpretations of the reformers themselves. But the amount of serious re-thinking about the meaning and centrality of the Word in the life of the Church is clearly discernible in contemporary theological writing.»¹

The problem of the Church's authority is truly the central one for modern theology.

«The classic Congregational objection to the use of the *creeds* in worship or as tests of membership was not that their acceptance presented the believer with intellectual difficulties but that they could not claim the *same* measure of authority as *Scripture* and that it was wrong to impose tests on men which were other than those given by God Himself... Although there is probably less Fundamentalism in Congregationalism than in any other major Protestant church, Congregationalists are 'people of the book' no less than Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists.»²

«Christian scholars today are indeed seeking an authority in the primitive Church, but it is not an authority of, for, or organization so much», according to Nelson, «as an authority on which to rest their belief about the divinely-appointed role of the Church in the world.»³

For Protestant thought, the Word and the Sacraments are always considered in the closest possible connexion.⁴

The Sacraments and the Ministry in respect to the nature of the Church: «During the past thirty years», says Nelson, «largely due to the revival of interest in Reformation theology, but also because of the significant attention given to problems of Church reunion, the theo-

1. Nelson, *m. w.*, p. 106.

2. Jenkins, *m. w.*, p. 41.

3. R. Nelson, *The Realm of Redemption*, London, 1951, p. 3.

4. Nelson, *m. w.*, p. 120.

gians of Protestantism have been deeply concerned with the nature and meaning of the Word of God and *the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion*. Their concern has been an impetus to extensive and profound study, which has not yet effected a consensus of belief nor a reconciliation of half-forgotten doctrinal differences, but which has brought into the full light of day the facts which, to a large degree, divide and estrange Christians from one another.¹

It is well known that there are many conflicting doctrines of the Sacraments within the Church. Some of these differences relate only to the outward forms of ritual observance and emphasis; others concern the basic purpose and effect of the Sacraments, the exact number of them, and the necessity for observing them; others centre on the problem of the necessity of faith on the part of the individual participant; still others hinge on the meaning of God's grace, the efficacy and validity of administration, and the requirement of a proper ordination for the officiating minister. The scope of this present paper is to discover how recent thought on the Sacraments has tended to create a higher degree of agreement among Christians, and also to shed more light upon our understanding of the essential nature of the Church.

Far better than a survey of the independent writing which has been done on this problem is the book entitled, *The Ministry and the Sacraments* (Prepared in 1937 for the Faith and Order Movement by the appointed Theological Commission, R. Dunkerley, etc.), which collects and compares the theological convictions of representatives of all the major Christian denominations. The most striking feature of this comprehensive book is the great extent of honest agreement to be found with regard to the nature of the Sacraments: «an unfailing characteristic of all Sacraments is an external action dealing with material things to which a spiritual significance is attached by Divine institution.»²

The question of the true *number* of Sacraments does not seem to be a serious one for Protestants: except for members of the very «Catholic» wing of Anglicanism, the two recognized Sacraments are Baptism and the Holy Communion. A very definite problem persists with regard to the *validity* of Sacraments, however, illustrating a sharp cleavage between the «Evangelical» Protestant doctrine and that of the «Catholic» Protestants. The key word of the problem is *validity*.

The present quest for a theological understanding of the Church

1. *Ibid.*, p. 141.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

has to be made largely by way of thought on the meaning of the Sacraments.

The general conviction is that God does act and confirm through the Sacraments of the Church; but concerning the necessary conditions through which this action and confirmation take place there is still divergence of opinion and belief.

There are, among the participants of the Lausanne Conference, divergent views concerning the Sacrament of Holy Communion, as to 1) the mode and manner of the presence of our Lord; 2) the conception of the commemoration and the sacrifice; 3) the relation of the elements to the grace conveyed; and 4) the relation between the minister of this Sacrament and the validity and efficacy of the rite.

They recognize, however, that «the Sacraments have special reference to the corporate life and fellowship of the Church and that the grace is conveyed by the Holy Spirit, taking of the things of Christ and applying them to the soul through faith.»

They agree that «Sacraments are of divine appointment and that the Church ought thankfully to observe them as divine gifts; that in the Sacraments there is an outward sign and an inward grace, and that the Sacraments are means of grace through which God works invisibly in us. They recognize also that in the gifts of His grace God is not limited by His own Sacraments.»¹

The general understanding of the nature and effects of the Sacraments at the Edinburgh Conference was expressed as follows: «The Sacraments are not to be considered merely in themselves, but always as sacraments of the Church, which is the Body of Christ. They have their significance in the continual working of the Holy Spirit, which is the life of the Church. Through the sacraments God develops in all its members a life of perpetual communion lived with its fellowship, and thus enables them to embody His will in the life of the world; but the loving-kindness of God is not to be conceived as limited by His Sacraments.»²

Orthodox delegates and some others desire to exclude from the reference of this proposition cases in which failure to receive the sacraments is due to contempt or culpable negligence, since sacraments are divinely instituted means of grace generally necessary for salvation.»³

1. L. H o d g s o n, *Convictions*, New York, 1934, p. 236.

2. *Faith and Order*, Edinburgh, 1937, p. 226.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 240.

Almost all at Edinburgh agreed that in all sacramental doctrine and practice the supreme authority is Jesus Christ Himself, and that Sacramental teaching and practice are rightly founded upon the record of the New Testament.¹

Concerning the *nature of the Sacraments*, particularly, there is a general agreement on the following points:

1. The sacraments are given by Christ to the Church as outward and visible signs of His invisible grace. They are not bare symbols, but pledges and seals of grace, and means whereby it is received.

2. Grace is bestowed in the sacraments within the fellowship of the Church by the personal action of Christ upon the believer. Faith is therefore a necessary condition for the effectual reception of grace.

3. It is our Lord Jesus Christ who through the Holy Spirit accomplishes every sacrament, and the action of the minister of the Church is only instrumental.

4. The sacraments are celebrated by the minister, not in virtue of any personal right of his own, but as minister of the Church.

5. Regarding the obligation of the sacraments and the questions whether and in what way they are to be deemed necessary to salvation there is divergence of doctrine among the different Churches at Edinburgh.²

As to the *validity* of the Sacraments, confusion has sometimes been introduced by the use of the term «valid» in the two following senses: a) It is sometimes used synonymously with «efficacious», so that the term «invalid» would imply that a sacrament has no spiritual value and is not a means of grace. b) It is sometimes used to imply that the sacrament has been correctly performed.

Many of the participants of the Edinburgh Conference are of the opinion that, «although it is the duty of a Church to secure that sacraments should be performed regularly and canonically, yet no judgment should be pronounced by any Church denying the 'validity' of the sacraments performed by any Christian Church which believes itself to be observing what Christ appointed for His Church.»³

To those Churches which adhere to the doctrine of the Church from the age of the Great Councils to the Reformation and to the Orthodox, particularly, the validity of Holy Order and the right performance

1. *Ibid.*, p. 239. Report, Ch. V.

2. *Faith and Order*, Edinburgh, 1937, p. 240.

3. Report, Ch. V (IV). *Faith and Order*, Edinburgh, 1937, Cp. 242.

according to the sacramental order of the Church are the indispensable conditions of the validity of other sacraments.

The Orthodox Point of View on the Sacraments: Number: «It is true that no enumeration whatever (two or seven) is mentioned in the New Testament, and on this ground the justification of the two Sacraments (as accepted by the Protestant Churches) would be as unsound as the justification of the seven. It is not, therefore, the number mentioned which justifies their recognition, but their use and existence in the Apostolic Church and the reference and records we find in the New Testament as to their existence and meaning.

The number of the Sacraments was fixed at seven in the Orthodox Church in comparatively later times (the fourteenth century and onwards) by theologians who were influenced by the processes of systematization and fixation which had taken place in the Roman Church. But the Orthodox Church maintains that all these Sacraments were already spoken of as Sacraments even in patristic times, although the actual number was not fixed (the Fathers speak of two, three, four, seven or even more Sacraments), and that they all have roots and foundation in the New Testament — in the teaching and practice of the Lord Himself or of His apostles.»¹

«Of course the lack of mention of the technical details of *the administering of the Sacraments* in the time of the Apostles and of the Primitive Church has no significance whatever, because the Sacraments, as liturgical actions, as well as all the rites of the Church, from their simplest form in the beginning to the most complicated form they have reached to-day, were subject to an easily understood evolution, in which it is sufficient that the essential parts of their performance are preserved.»²

The baptism of infants shows us how our membership *in the Church* has its basis not in our own endeavours, and efforts, but solely in the divine Love and grace... At the same time this kind of baptism acts, and must act, as a living conscience in the *Church*, impressing upon her her duty to take care of the baptized and to give them a Christian education.»³ «The complementary factor to divine grace is not the faith

1. From the Orthodox Statement at Edinburgh, 1937, by Prof. HAMILCAR ALIVISATOS, in *The Ministry and the Sacraments*, 1937, pp. 6-17, 68.

2. From the Orthodox Statement at Edinburgh, 1937, by Prof. HAMILCAR ALIVISATOS, in *The Ministry and the Sacraments*, 1937, p. 70:

3. AULÉN, in *The Universal Church in God's Design* (W.C.C.) p. 25.

of the child, which is impossible, but the duty and responsibility of the family and the Church.»¹

Not far from the above opinion is the view of P. T. Forsyth, who declares that «Baptism is something that *happens* to the man (or child) at the Church's hand...»²

Certainly none of the theologians who have thus supported the practice of baptizing infants could be accused on theological grounds of having insufficient regard for the necessity of faith in the Christian life. In their understanding of Baptism, however, they recognize no obstacle to the baptizing of infants, for they cannot ascribe to God an indifference toward the little children He has created, as though He maintained a neutral attitude toward them until they could respond to Him in faith. In their view, then, Baptism is still considered a «sealing» of the promises of God.³

Few Protestants, although most of the Catholic Anglicans, would subscribe to the doctrine that «valid» Sacraments (i. e., performed by the ministry of the historic episcopate) are what give the Church visible character, and are therefore pre-eminent in the *esse* of the Church.⁴ This is identical with the view expressed by Fr. G. Florovsky to the effect that «the sacraments constitute the Church.»⁵

According to Nelson, there is an «extreme emphasis upon the Sacraments in Anglican theology and extreme devotion to the Word of God in Lutheran theology», which «would surely not be fruitful for a better understanding of the nature of the Church... and if there should arise the question of pre-eminence between these two. as rarely happens, the greater weight by far of Protestant belief would favour the Word...»⁶

A great many Protestants today however would subscribe their names to the Calvinistic doctrine of Auguste Lecerf that: «the sacraments are necessary, not for the *esse* but for the *bene esse* of faith... for the normal life of the Church.»⁷

1. Nelson, *m. w.*, p. 131.

2. Forsyth, *The Church and the Sacraments*, London, 1917, p. 194.

3. Nelson, *m. w.*, pp. 131-132.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 133-134; cf. O. C. Quick, *The Christian Sacraments*, London, 1932, p. 138.

5. In *The Universal Church in God's Design* (W.C.C.), p. 47.

6. Nelson, *m. w.*, pp. 134-135.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 139-140; cf. Lecerf, *An Introduction to Reformed Dogmatics*, London, p. 364.

Now, the most perplexing problem in the current study of the Church's nature is that of the meaning and *authority* of the Church's *ministry*.

Inasmuch as the many denominational representatives at Edinburgh could agree that «the ministry was instituted by Jesus Christ... and is a gift of God to the Church in the service of the Word and Sacraments»,¹ it is clear that those who consider it to be no more than a convenient means of administrating the affairs of a Church are in a minority.

It is impossible to catalogue, here, the views of the ministry which are held by Protestant theologians into such well defined categories that each would appear to be wholly distinct from the others. There is a great deal of overlapping opinion. In our treatment of the subject, therefore, we shall simply confine ourselves to a general and synoptic view of the problem.

Basic to the distinctively Protestant idea of the Church's ministry is the idea that all true believers in Jesus Christ are priests in their own right, independent of the sacerdotal mediacy of an established priesthood. According to Nelson, «the priesthood of all believers means that each Christian is a priest *for others*, not for himself. Rather than expressing a radical individualism for Christians, this doctrine is a most emphatic testimony to the communal unity, the independence, of all Christians, and the *koinonia* of the Church... In the Church all persons are indeed priests, but they are to be distinguished by 'gifts' (charisma) and functions rather than by hierarchical stations. And even these marks of functional distinction do not involve any differences of worth or eminence in the sight of God.»²

Concerning *ordination* Nelson states the Protestant view clearly thus: «Inasmuch as the reformers refuted the doctrine that ordination is a true Sacrament, it is not inconsistent to assert that, in general, ordination is an act in which the Church accepts and gives approval to a man who has been personally called by God to the ministry. This is the fundamental idea which is held by the various Reformed and Evangelical Churches.»³

The Protestant minister rejects the claim of the Roman priest, that he is in a full sense an *alter Christus*. «It is right, therefore, to speak

1. *Faith and Order*, Edinburgh, 1937 (L. Hodgson, ed.), p. 356.

2. Nelson, *m. w.*, pp. 144-45.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

of the minister as representing Christ to his people, but only in Christ's way, in the form of a servant», concludes Daniel Jenkins.¹

Commenting on this conclusion of Jenkins, Nelson says: «While the minister in principle must conform to Jesus' pattern of service, he must also in practice know what his position in the Church is; and there should be a clear understanding on the part of the Church as well with respect to his position. It is just this understanding that is often not clear, and the problem of clarification of the minister's status and identity is a difficult one.»²

Many would agree with the conclusion of A. C. Headlam, himself an Anglican bishop, when he wrote: «It is, then, not because I believe that the historical episcopacy is necessary for valid orders, but because I believe that it is necessary to secure Christian unity, that I hold that it must be the rule of a reunited Church.»³ The claims of the Anglo-Catholics really involve deeper theological questions of divine grace and justification, as well as of the nature of the Church itself.

In explaining the true Protestant view on the *Episcopacy* and the *Apostolic Succession* in the Church Nelson writes: «Apostolicity is really an essential mark of the Church, as traditional Catholic thought has always maintained. But wherein does this apostolicity lie? In the testimony of the Apostles, to be sure. However, the division between Catholic and Protestant doctrine now appears: «for the testimony does not draw its authority from the fact that it is the Apostles who bear it, as traditional Catholic teaching seems to suggest, but the Apostles have authority only in so far as they forget themselves in being faithful witness to Jesus Christ.»⁴ And he concludes: «It is not the desire of Protestant theologians to belittle the order of episcopacy, therefore, but to insist stoutly that it is not the episcopacy which makes the Church to be what it is.»⁵

That which Protestants oppose is «to regard ministerial office as higher than the Word of God, which remains for all time the ultimate authority of the Church.»⁶

1. D. Jenkins, *The Gift of the Ministry*, London, 1947, p. 39.

2. Nelson, *m. w.*, p. 148f.

3. Headlam, *The Doctrine of the Church and Christian Reunion*, London, 1920, p. 269.

4. Nelson, *m. w.*, pp. 156-57; cf. D. Jenkins, *The Nature of Catholicity*, London, 1942, p. 24.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

6. Nelson, *m. w.*, p. 159.

Nelson, in conclusion, is against the uniformity of ministerial order or of sacramental doctrine and practice in the Church Universal. Because «such uniformity could, in fact, stifle the vitality of the Church», according to him, «and bring about an even greater measure of spiritual debilitation than presently exists in our divided denominations.»¹

«It is the Word and Sacraments which constitute the Church», says Jenkins, «not the ministry... Congregationalists, for example, can contemplate the possibility of the Word sometimes being preached and the Sacraments administered by someone who is not ordained to lifelong service in the office of ministry.»²

As to the character of the Church «visible» and «invisible», the great majority of Protestants recognize that the Church is characterized by both one and the other. The two aspects constitute the wholeness of the Church, just as the corporal and the spiritual constitute the wholeness of a man.³ The Lutheran can describe the Church simply as the «community of the faithful» (*Gemeinde der Gläubigen*) and the Reformed can say with Barth that the Church is the fellowship of sinful men who are bound in living faith and obedience to His Word.⁴

Protestants have a different conception from many Catholics of *how* the Church becomes visible, but they would insist as strongly as Catholics that *visibility* is an obvious characteristic of the Church in its earthly existence. It is their insistence upon this which led Congregationalists to lay such emphasis on the importance of the local church, as being the Church in its most immediate and palpable and inescapable form. What has been at fault in Congregationalism has been not so much its conception of visibility as its conception of *locality*.

In Congregationalism there must be agreement as to what constitutes a Congregational church, and whether any particular church shall be admitted to its communion. Also, there must be agreement as to what constitutes a Congregational minister and as to who is to be admitted to or expelled from the Congregational ministry.

It has been, and still is, characteristic of a large share of Protestant theology to reject any idea that the Church might be integral and necessary in the saving action of God. It should be recognized «that this view is one to be seriously reckoned with, for it is sincerely embraced by literally millions of members of the Church... It is taken for granted

1. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

2. D. Jenkins, *Congregationalism: A Restatement*, 1954, p. 79.

3. Nelson, *m. w.*, p. 168.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 172.

even by some leading theologians that this individualism is firmly rooted in the Reformation and is an integral part of the Protestant faith.»¹ The several theologians who wrote the pamphlet, *Catholicity*, thus observed that «Lutheranism and Calvinism imply a doctrine of the union of individual souls in the way of salvation prior to their incorporation into the visible Church. Whereas in Catholic Christianity the order is: Christ — the visible Church — the individual Christian; Protestantism is unable to avoid the notion that the right order is: Christ — the individual Christian — the Church; as if entry into the Church were a secondary stage that follows and seals a salvation already bestowed upon individuals by virtue of 'faith alone.»²

Passing a similar judgment upon the Reformation, as well as upon Protestant theology, C. C. Morrison asserts that the whole habit of Protestant thinking is dominated by the concept of Christianity as a *private experience*, in the light of which it has built its theology, evangelism, missionary enterprise, and ecclesiology.³

Nelson, however, stresses the combination of this individualism and the communal life of the Church. He writes: «However enthusiastic one may be in setting forth the idea that the communal (*koinonia*) life of the Church is essential and indispensable, he must not allow himself to forget that the life of the *invididual* is also indispensable.»⁴

Although the Christian faith is a personal faith, calling for the decision of the individual to believe in Christ and placing upon each one the responsibility of loving obedience, and although evangelical pietism has magnified the individual concern for salvation until it has become the dominant principle for many Protestants today, theologians in increasingly greater numbers are coming to the rediscovery of the fact that God saves men and women in community rather than in solitariness.

According to F. J. Taylor «the centre is Christ, but a Christ who can never be separated from His redeemed people, so that personal salvation means incorporation into the new community of which Christ is the very life. All subsequent Christian experience is corporate experience.»⁵

1. Nelson, *m. w.*, p. 173.

2. Nelson, *m. w.*, p. 173; cf. G. Aulén in *Theology*, March 1949, p. 82f.

3. *Ibid.*, cf. Morrison, in *Christendom*, 11.2 (1937), 274-77.

4. Nelson, *m. w.*, p. 174.

5. F. J. Taylor, *The Church of God*, London, 1946, p. 17.

A dependable expression of this rediscovered belief is to be found in the Report of Section 1 (on the Church) to the Amsterdam Assembly of 1948: «We all believe that the Church is God's gift to men for the salvation of the world.»¹ Among the representatives in this section there were differences of opinion as to how to understand salvation in this way, but the general degree of unanimity is still very significant.

Jenkins writes: «The primary need of Congregationalism in relation to worship today is to understand anew *the doctrine of the Church* in its fullness and from that to derive a clear conception of what Dom Gregory Dix has taught us to call 'the shape of the liturgy'.

It is to understand how the parts of the Church's worship are related to each other and how what happens in worship is related, in its turn, to the rest of the life of the Church as a whole.»²

According to Jenkins, «Congregationalists... should frankly recognize the spiritual value of *set prayers*... in the form of a *printed liturgy*... The Spirit does not require us to offer freshly minted words when we approach the throne of grace every Sunday morning and it is an exercise of proper piety and humility to use forms familiar to long generations of believers and truly sanctified by usage.»³

Another aspect of the Nature of the Church, elaborated by contemporary Protestant Theology is that of the *realized eschatology*.

The conviction that eschatology has already been realized in Jesus Christ and no longer need be the object of Christian expectation has been articulated and defended most completely by Dodd.

«The presence of the Kingdom in Jesus Christ is not limited to those who knew him in the flesh, but is known and experienced equally in the lives of all who constitute the *ekklesia*. Although he seems to come very close to it, Dodd does not fall into the Roman Catholic position of identifying the hierarchical Church with the Kingdom of God.»⁴

In this idea of the Kingdom and the Church, Dodd is in agreement with some other Protestant theologians who have been dissatisfied with the doctrine that the Kingdom is wholly in the future and has no present reality in the Church (i.e. Paul Tillich, E. Somerlath).

English-speaking Protestants in particular have given a warm

1. *The Universal Church in God's Design* (W.C.C.), p. 213.

2. Jenkins, *m. w.*, pp. 93-94.

3. Jenkins, *m. w.*, p. 101.

4. Nelson, *m. w.*, p. 219; cf. Dodd, *The Bible Today*, Cambridge, 1946, pp. 71f.

reception to Dodd's interpretation of eschatology, and especially John Knox.¹

This *realized eschatology* is related to another school of interpretation which stresses only the present aspect of the Kingdom as a *social reality* on earth: the Church is the vehicle by which God wills the message of social renewal to be proclaimed and exemplified among men. This is the view of the Kingdom of God which is presently dominant among liberal Christians, especially in England and America, and unquestionably it can lay claim to responsibility for much vigorous life in the Church and reform in society.²

A most singular contribution to current thought on the problem of eschatology has been made by R. Bultmann. He does not recognize any real presence of the Kingdom in the literal sense, but he still stresses the *effect* of the wholly transcendent Kingdom upon the individual person, who at every hour of life must make a decision for or against the holy will of God.

On the contrary, Karl Barth's eschatology is an eschatology in terms of absolute transcendence. Here we find the exclusive distinction between the time of history and calendar, in which man is confined, and the time which is the province of revelation, fulfilment, and God. According to Barth, time is not dissolved by eternity, but it is *marked* by it as finite, and this is a great difference.³ The «time» toward which the eschatological hope points, then, is not that of finiteness, but of the eternity of God, which is not a continuation of historical time, but a wholly other dimension. To this other dimension belong the Incarnation and the ultimate fulfilment. Barth himself has more recently modified his extreme position because of a sharp criticism by many theologians. Thus Barth speaks of a *waiting basileia* within history and a *consummated* one outside history. Cullmann's eschatology also from the theological point of view is perfectly consonant with the thought of Barth, who once wrote: «I know that we must bear it in mind that the Church is the existential form of the Kingdom of Christ in the interim between the Ascension and His second coming.»⁴

In summary, we find in the contemporary Protestant thought on

1. Nelson, *m. w.*, 221.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 222.

3. K. Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, London, 1933, p. 112.

4. Nelson, *m. w.*, p. 233; cf. K. Barth, *The Church and the Churches*, London, 1937, p. 33.

eschatology no uniformity of interpretation, either of the New Testament evidences or of the theological speculations which are based upon them. The differences stand out sharply: *thoroughgoing* and *apocalyptic eschatology*, *realized eschatology*, and eschatology of the kind which grapples with the problem of *present and future, temporal and eternal*.

According to Nelson's conclusion «perhaps the one real point in which a consensus may be found is the negative one, that the Church is not the complete Kingdom of God. If it were the Kingdom in its perfection, it is impossible to see how eschatology could play any part at all in the Christian faith.»¹

We would like to conclude this chapter by mentioning the representative views of Prof. Emil Brunner discussed especially in his book, *The Misunderstanding of the Church* (London, 1952), which is written «to discover the ground of the (ecclesiological) disharmony by systematically turning to account the conclusions of New Testament research in their bearing upon the problem of the Church as it confronts us to-day.»²

The governing opinion of the author through the whole content of this book is «that the Church itself, in so far as it identifies itself with the *Ecclesia* of the New Testament, rests upon a misunderstanding.»³

This book is a significant contribution to the ecumenical discussion, and has sprung from Brunner's desire to discover the reason why, since the Reformation epoch, a real solution to the problem of the Church has not been found.

Brunner builds a bridge between Protestant individualism and Catholic collectivism by stating: «The Church is neither a *numerus electorum*, a totality of believers, nor is it a sacred institution, but it is the Body of Christ, consisting of nothing but persons: of Him who is the Head and of those who are members of His Body.»⁴

Brunner's opinion is that «the Church is only a means to an end, a means of salvation, but not the reality of salvation itself.» He considers both Catholic and Protestant conception of the New Testament *Ecclesia*: the Church is an end in itself and not a means to an end (Catholics); because the Church is an external institution and not the movement of salvation itself, it cannot be an end in itself but only a means to an end (Protestants) as wrong, since «both parties err in that they

1. Nelson, *m. w.*, p. 234.

2. *Ibid.*, Preface.

3. E. Brunner, *The Misunderstanding of the Church*, London, 1952, p. 6.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

understand the *Ecclesia* of the New Testament to be the historical Church».¹

The question whether Jesus «founded the *Ecclesia*» is seen to be of small moment: «the *Ecclesia* is an event rooted in Him and interpenetrated by Him, since He is the head of the body which is the *Ecclesia*..., the people of God dwelling in the Spirit, the living body of the living head.»²

Among Christian theologians today there is an increasing agreement, almost amounting to a consensus, that the Church cannot be understood without an appreciation of the belief of the Jews that they were the people of God.

To underestimate the importance of the early Church's consciousness of being in the full sense the Israel of God inevitably means to eliminate one of the basic elements of Christian belief about the nature of the Church. Therefore, as Emil Brunner declares, when «we no longer take seriously the idea of a people of God, chosen by Him», we miss the whole point of Paul's theology. «Paul takes this idea absolutely seriously», Brunner continues, «and he was able to carry out his idea. But he takes it seriously in the idea of the universal Church... The *ekklesia* is the people of God... exactly like the people of Israel in the Old Testament, the object of the Divine Will of revelation.»³

1. E. Brunner, *m. w.*, pp. 14-15.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

3. E. Brunner, *The Mediator*, Philadelphia, 1947, p. 587.

CHAPTER II

ORTHODOX ECCLESIOLOGY

From the Orthodox point of view, «the Church is an *organism* rather than an organization, a *mystical unity* rather than a juridical institution...»¹.

According to Fr. Florovsky, «the Church is a Divine Society and Community, the *ekklesia*, is a *sacramental community: communio in sacris*, a «fellowship in Holy things», i.e., in the Holy Spirit, or even *communio sanctorum*. The unity of the Church is effected through the sacraments: Baptism and the Eucharist are the two «social sacraments» of the Church, and in them the true meaning of Christian «togetherness» is continually revealed and sealed. Or even more emphatically, the sacraments constitute the Church. Only in the sacrament does the Christian Community pass beyond the purely human measure and become the Church. Therefore «the right administration of the sacraments» belongs to the essence of the Church (to her *esse*).²

«Sacraments are not merely signs of a professed faith, but rather effective signs of the saving Grace.»³ «The sacramental life of the Church is the continuation of Pentecost. The descent of the Spirit was a supreme revelation... The Kingdom comes, for the Holy Spirit is the Kingdom.⁴ Pentecost was the mystical consecration, the baptism of the whole Church (Acts 1,5)... The Church of Christ is one in the Eucharist, for the Eucharist is Christ Himself, and He *sacramentally* abides in the Church, which is His Body. The Church is a body indeed, an *organism*, much more than a society or a corporation. And perhaps an «organism» is the best modern rendering of the term *to soma*, as used by St. Paul.⁵

The Church is the unity of charismatic life. «The idea of the *organism* must be supplemented by the idea of a symphony of personali-

1. Prof. S. Bulgakow, in *Faith and Order*, Lausanne, 1927, p. 258.

2. G. Florovsky, *Man's Disorder in God's Design*, p. 47.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

4. Cf. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De oratione Dominica*, 3, MG, xlv, 115f. - 1160.

5. *Man's Disorder in God's Design*, p. 49.

ties, in which the mystery of the Holy Trinity is reflected (cf. John 1 21 and 23), and this is the core of the conception of «catholicity.»¹ This is the chief reason why we should prefer a christological orientation in the theology of the Church rather than a pneumatological. For, on the other hand, the Church as a whole, has her *personal centre* only in Christ; she is not an incarnation of the Holy Ghost, nor is she merely a Spirit-bearing community, but precisely the Body of Christ, the Incarnate Lord. This saves us from impersonalism without committing us to any humanistic personification.»² «One last distinction is to be made. The Church is still in *statu viae* and yet it is already in *statu patriae*. The Church is a visible historical society, and the same is the Body of Christ. It is both the Church of the redeemed, and the Church of the miserable sinners—both at once... This constitutes the mystery of the Church: a visible «society» of frail men is an organism of the Divine Grace.»³

«The Church is a sacramental society. *Sacramental* means no less than «eschatological». *To eshaton* does not mean primarily *final*, in the temporal series of events; it means rather *ultimate* (decisive); and the ultimate is being realized within the stress of historical happenings and events. What is 'not of this world' is here 'in this world', not abolishing this world, but giving to it a new meaning and a new value, 'transvaluating' the world, as it were. Surely this is still only an anticipation, a «token» of the final consummation. Yet the Spirit abides in the Church.»⁴

«Orthodox theology would hesitate to make the distinction between the visible and invisible Church; a separation between two qualitatively different situations. The Church is one as a body, whose head is Christ.»⁵

Orthodox tradition is unanimous in its affirmation of the Church as an *organism*. The Church is *organic unity*. In a series of articles the contemporary Russian theologian and canonist, Fr. N. Afanasieff⁶, shows that there existed (and still exist) two ecclesiological «ela-

1. «Sobornost», *Man's Disorder in God's Design*, p. 53. Cf. G. Florovsky, «Sobornost, The Catholicity of the Church», in *The Church of God*, ed. by E.L. Mascoll, London, 1935.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

3. *Man's Disorder in God's Design*, p. 54. Cf. Khomiakov's essay On the Church; Engl. transl. by W. J. Birckbeck, *Russia and the English Church* (first published 1895), ch. XXIII, pp. 193-222.

4. G. Florovsky, in *Man's Disorder in God's Design*, p. 54.

5. N. Nissiotis, in *The Ecumenical Review*, Oct. 1961, p. 12.

6. Cf. *Primacy and Primacies in the Orthodox Church*, ed. by St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1960, p. 53.

borations» or interpretations of this organic unity: the *universal* and the *eucharistic*.

The universal ecclesiology finds its fullest expression in Roman Catholic theology, crowned by the Vatican dogma of 1870.

The essence of the Orthodox ecclesiology is, above all, that it applies the categories of *organism* and *organic unity* to «the Church of God abiding...» in every place: to the local church, to the community led by a bishop and having, in communion with him, the fulness of the Church. Fr. Afanassieff terms it «eucharistic ecclesiology». And, indeed, it is rooted in the Eucharist as the Sacrament of the Church, an Act which ever actualized the Church as the *Body of Christ*. A similar view is expressed by Fr. George Florovsky.¹

Concerning now the approach of eucharistic ecclesiology towards the Church universal it must be stated emphatically that this type of ecclesiology does not transform the local Church into a self sufficient monad, without any «organic» link with other similar monads. There is no «congregationalism» here. The organic unity of the Church universal is not less real than the organic unity of the local Church. But if universal ecclesiology interprets it in terms of «parts» and «whole», for eucharistic ecclesiology the adequate term is that of *identity*: «the Church of God abiding in...» The Church of God is the one and indivisible Body of Christ, wholly and indivisibly present in each Church, i. e., in the visible unity of the people of God, the Bishop and the Eucharist. And if universal unity is indeed *unity of the Church* and not merely *unity of Churches*, its essence is not that all churches together constitute one vast, unique organism, but that each Church — in the identity of order, faith and the gifts of the Holy Spirit — is the *same* Church, the same Body of Christ, indivisibly present wherever the «ecclesia» is. It is thus the same organic unity of the church herself, the «Churches» being not complementary to each other, as parts or members; but each one and all of them together being nothing else, but the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

In Orthodoxy the *synod of bishops* is usually given an exceptional importance. The Church is often described as the Church of the Councils and her government as «conciliary». But very little has been done to define the nature and function of synods in theological terms. Canonically the synod is interpreted as the «supreme authority» in the Church.

However, this idea does not correspond to the original function

1. In *Man's Disorder in God's Design*, p. 49.

of the synod in the Church. The Synod is not «power» in the juridical sense of this word, for there can exist no power over the Church Body of Christ. The Synod is, rather, a *witness* to the identity of all Churches as the Church of God in faith, life and «agape». If in his own Church the Bishop is priest, teacher, and pastor, the divinely appointed witness and keeper of the catholic faith, it is through the agreement of all Bishops, as revealed in the Synod, that all Churches both manifest and maintain the ontological unity of Tradition, «for languages differ in the world, but the force of Tradition is the same.»¹ The Synod of Bishops is not an organ of power over the Church, nor is it «greater» or «fuller» than the fullness of any local Church, but in and through it all Churches acknowledge and realize their ontological unity as the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

But how strange was the fate of the idea of the Church in history! It can be summarized in this simple proposition: by the greatest of all misfortunes the Church was overestimated in Roman Catholicism and underestimated by the Protestants; and that without anyone on either side having succeeded up to the present in restoring that fine balance of forces which, in the earliest Christian society, had made of the Church the body of the Spirit of Christ, at once one and multiple.

In the Roman Catholic conception the Church in fact ceases to be a means, and becomes an end in itself. Protestants, in opposition to this exaggeration, concentrated their attention more and more on individual personal certainty of salvation, acquired by free pardon, in the experience of a direct contact with Christ. Now, ceasing to be the «Body of Christ» in the form of a spiritual and concrete community, the Church was only either the ideal and «invisible» Society of true believers, spread everywhere throughout the world, and which nowhere localized itself in time or space, or the «visible», but entirely human, entirely profane, and entirely bureaucratic organization of a religious life, which, according to the needs of the moment, gave itself an administrative form which was always variable.

According to Rev. Hodgson² «the fact is that in Protestant society in general the idea of the «Church» no longer enjoys great favour. In any case, in Protestantism the «Church » remains a problem, and a problem which neither the Ausburg Confession not the Calvinistic theocracy has solved...»

1. St. Irenaeus.

2. *Convictions*, New York, 1934, p. 14.

The preliminary Conference on Faith and Order which met at Geneva in 1920 was dominated by a great difficulty and two types of religious thought: the «institutionalist» Christians of Roman Catholic mentality, and the «spiritualist» Christians, that is to say, Christians of Protestant mentality.

It was just the conversations on the Sacraments which might be called the «temptation» of the Lausanne World Conference in 1927. Fortunately, just at the hour of «temptation», it became conscious of its real «duty». And this duty was the abandonment of every idea of compromise, and the recourse to a new and better method, that of building, humbly and soberly, on prosaic reality. No one at Lausanne thought the hoped-for union would be equivalent to a lapse into a «relativism», which would present the different Christian communities as equally near or equally distant from the one and immortal divine Truth. The very fact that the Conference of Lausanne dissociated the examination of the *Message of the Church to the World* from the study of the *Church's Common Confession of Faith* deserves attention.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSIONS

Summarizing all these conceptions of the Nature of the Church we may say that the unity the Ecumenical movement seeks is not simple but complex. It has two aspects: a) the inner spiritual unity known in its completeness to God alone; and b) the outward unity which expresses itself in mutual recognition, co-operative action and corporate or institutional unity.

In spite of this complexity and these obstacles, however, the representatives at the Edinburgh Conference express their deep faith and convictions as follows: «...We are thankful that during recent years we have been drawn together; prejudices have been overcome, misunderstandings removed, and real, if limited, progress has been made towards our goal of a common mind... We recognize in one another, across the barriers of our separation, a common Christian outlook and a common standard of values. *We are therefore assured of a unity deeper than our divisions.*»¹

According to Stephen Neill² «far and wide throughout the earth, Christians who too long have acquiesced in the existence of divisions have come to realize afresh or for the first time that *visible unity* is part of the will of Christ for His Church on earth, and have set themselves, partially and imperfectly, yet humbly and sincerely, to seek to bring that visible unity into effect.»

The above statements, I think, speak very strongly by themselves. Of course, it is true that the doctrine of the Church and the nature and authority of Christian Ministry constitute, today, the basic problems and questions of Church Union.

However, seen from within, as matter of fact, if we ignore the more extreme forms of sectarianism, the Churches of Christendom present far more resemblances of structure than differences. Each maintains the dominical Sacraments. Each has liturgical forms of worship,

1. «Affirmation» in *Faith and Order*, Edinburgh, 1937, p. 275-76.

2. *Towards Church Union*, 1937-1952, pp. 2-3.

the so-called free churches maintaining their ascetic worship rubrics with little less strictness than do those of the Catholic tradition. Even the ministry is maintained in each church in similar fashion. Each is a little catholicism, succession and continuity carefully preserved. The differences lie in the answers to «succeeding whom?» and «continuing what?» This matter of *succession* and *continuity* is a crucial issue in contemporary ecumenical debate.

A further fact should be noted. The chief symbol of disunity in the Body of Christ has been a break in a ministerial succession.

The Reformers defined the Church primarily by reference to grace and faith, not (as «catholicism» did) by reference to institutional continuity. «The Church in its deepest sense is the community of the elect or of those who have saving faith in Christ. ... The necessary marks of the true visible Church are the means of grace, the ministry of word and sacraments.»¹ It is a personal relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ, in the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit. A substitution of a sacramental system or hierarchically ruled institution for this personal relationship the Reformers called idolatry.

The emphasis placed in Protestant apologetic upon the doctrine of «the priesthood of all believers» contributed to a deep-going misconception. The fundamental priesthood of the Church is, in the New Testament, clearly the priesthood of the whole Body, or as Christ Himself in the Body. The doctrine of the priesthood of the laity «does not mean that laymen are individually priests, but that the laity are, as such, members of that Body which is in its entirety priestly.»² «As representative of the Body, the individual layman, like the individual priest, each in his special vocation, exercises of course, a priestly ministry.»³

According to the Episcopal Church a common view of the *ministry* can be achieved, if at all, only by a common experience within the one community.⁴

«It is not liberty which is the way to truth, but truth which is the way to liberty.» And we might also note that discipleship, life within the covenanted community, precedes the knowing of the truth.

The norm or ultimate standard is found by appeal to *Scripture* and *tradition*. This is not an appeal to Scripture *and* an appeal to

1. *The Fulness of Christ* - A Report presented to the Archbishop of Canterbury. London, S.P.C.K., 1950, pp. 30-32.

2. *Doctrine in the Church of England*, New York, 1938, p. 157.

3. *Approaches Toward Unity*, p. 137.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

tradition since the two are one, because Scripture, both the Old Testament and the writings which became known as the New Testament, were part of the tradition of the early Church. The Fathers are expositors of Scripture and *not* originators or maintainers of some tradition apart from Scripture.

«The Scriptures and the Creed cannot be regarded as a manual of public worship, ecclesiastical discipline, and other necessary elements in the life of the Church; these things belong to the sphere of tradition.»¹

«As life and thought cannot be separated except by an arbitrary and artificial act of the intellect, so, too, community of life and unity of belief.»²

«Protestantism suffers», declares Emil Brunner, «from a failure to acknowledge or appreciate the *administrative* or *authoritative* aspect of the apostolate and of the Church generally.»³

Concluding this paper, I do agree with Dr. Van Dusen that «Christian unity consists in a personal fellowship in Christ, organic union is secondary. First comes the mutual recognition and equality in prayer and common council. But not only in common council, in common action too. (Conciliar Ecumenicity). The view of the New Testament is not in accordance with the Roman Catholic conception of an organic, structural or institutional union. The idea of Christian unity is 'unity in the spirit with the bound of peace'. This unity of fellowship and mutual recognition or common action goes back to early Church life and centuries. The Bishops of all Churches were spiritually equal. The Bishop of Rome was 'primus inter pares' (Irenaeus).

The Orthodox Church never agrees with the Roman Catholic conception of structural union. In Orthodoxy the unity is manifest in the Ecumenical Council, when autonomous or autocephalous Churches come together in Council with mutual recognition. From this point of view the Panorthodox Synod in Rhodes (1961) was «an anticipation of Union» (Dr. Van Dusen).

Totally the members of the World Council of Churches reject the idea of structural, institutional and organic union of the Church. Some Protestants (=Lutherans, Calvinists and Anglicans) follow Catholics, in this point. In the Evanston Assembly, 46 rejected the idea of the

1. *Approaches Toward Unity*, p. 30.

2. Episcopal view, *Ibid.*, p. 32.

3. E. Brunner, *The Misunderstanding of the Church*, London, 1952, p. 31.

structural Union. In New Delhi, the Orthodox also rejected the idea of the organic or structural Union.

Christian unity, now so earnestly sought, can be restored only by the return of all Christian communions to the *principles* of unity exemplified by the undivided Catholic Church during the first ages of her existence.

Moreover, unity must begin and be worked out on «the level» of local churches; it will not be achieved by discussion on «the top policy-making level» but by «the common Christian experience in worship, not in a single Church. This union is the only way to overcome all modern crises and papal hierarchy» (Dr. Van Dusen).

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