

ECUMENICAL ECCLESIOLOGY:

A Challenge to the Churches

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Introduction

- This is an account of the writing of *Christian Community in History, I-III*
- An intellectual history of the development of the work and the questions that drive it.
- A study of the church to follow *Jesus Symbol of God*. How do you go about conceiving and writing a comprehensive understanding of the church? Which church? The one true church? Which one is that and how does one know? Where to begin?

1. Ecclesiology from below

- You have to begin with history: ecclesiology from below
- You have to keep the language of faith in touch with historical realities: one reality in two languages; ideals and actualities
- In a historical account, you have to consider all the data; you can't slant the material in favor of one denomination
- For example, in the Reformation period, you have to understand the church positively as the Reformers understood themselves; a non polemical work
- The object studied is the whole church, the collection of the many churches

2. The principles of genesis, development, and change

- Going back into history and reading the reconstructions of the historians in each age brings revelations about how things originated, developed, and changed. These data and many of the commonly accepted reconstructions of the past are quite different than the general conceptions of things in the churches today.
- Jesus and the founding of the church
- The year 49 a turning point
- The apostles and bishops
- The appearance of a church late in the first century
- Multiple church structures of ministry; multiple influences on its organization
- One bishop for one church congregation standardized during the second century
- The principles of gradual genesis of structure out of need, of development to meet new problems, of change when historical conditions change

3. Some major landmarks in church development before the Reformation

- The fourth century: a) the civil or imperial legitimation of the church, b) the founding of the Greek imperial capital; the gradual separation of Greek and Roman cultures

-The eleventh century Gregorian Reform and the split between the Eastern and Western churches

-The Western Schism of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; weakening of the papacy, and the beginnings of formal ecclesiology

4. The sixteenth century

-The breakup of the one church of Western Europe: was this inevitable?

-Ecclesiology as a discipline: a shift of method to comparative ecclesiology

-My goal in each chapter of CCH, II: to represent each ecclesiology fairly and positively

-Comparing ecclesiologies along a unified matrix of organization theory: previously one

church compared with another across time; now different churches at one time

-For example: comparing principles of a free church and a hierarchical church:

personal faith

institutionalization

voluntary association

universality

spiritual interiority

external sacramentality

existentially holy community

objective holy institution

indifferent to the world

church as part of the world

5. The twentieth century

-An extraordinary century of church development and ecclesiology

-Some landmark movements and events are as follows:

-The ecumenical movement: its motives

-The World Council of Churches (initially inspired by the League of Nations)

-Vatican II: changes in the Catholic church (openness to ecumenism, openness

to

the world, recognition of history and development, updating liturgy, collegiality as an ideal, recognition and encouragement of lay participation, concern the poor and local social conditions, dialogue with other religions)

-Bilateral dialogues among churches; communion among churches

-The pentecostal movement

-The loss of members in the Western churches

-The Faith and Order Commission: BEM and NMC

6. Systematic ecclesiology

-How is one to write a systematic ecclesiology today? Denominational ecclesiologies; more of the same?

-The idea of a transdenominational ecclesiology: to express the apostolic faith as it exists

today in all the churches and with which all can identify

-The method of a transdenominational ecclesiology: constructive comparative ecclesiology: principles from the history of ecclesiology; no one's church; everybody's church

-Ecclesial existence: a spirituality that all Christians share in common

7. Questions a common ecclesial existence leaves us with:

a) What is it that holds Christians together? What do they most importantly share in

common? What things have to be there because without them there would be no church?

- b) What does it take to divide a church from another church? What things separate churches today that should not?
- c) Why would you feel free or not feel free to go to church fairly regularly in a church that is not presently your own?